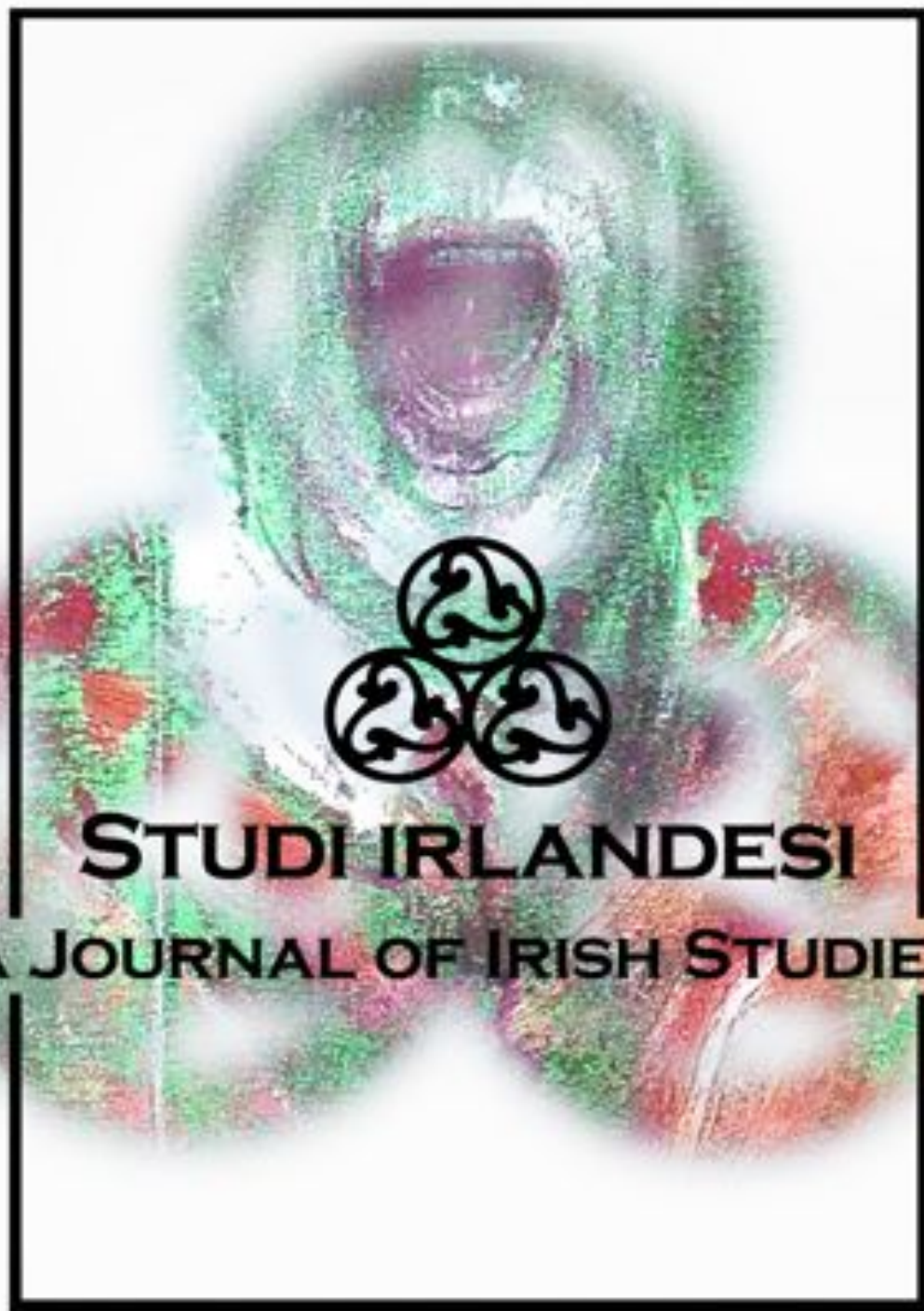


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Fiorenzo Fantaccini

Ex-Centric Ireland

edited by

Samuele Grassi, Fiorenzo Fantaccini

Introduction

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Dal centro al cerchio, e sì dal cerchio al centro
movesi l'acqua in un ritondo vaso,
secondo ch'è percosso fuori o dentro.
Dante, *Paradiso*, iv, 1-3

From centre to the circle, and so back
From circle to the centre, water moves
In the round chalice, even as the blow
Impels it, inwardly, or from without.
Trans. by Henry F. Cary (1814)

Wir durchlaufen alle eine exzentrische Bahn.
J.C.F. Hölderlin, *Hyperion* (1797)

We all travel an eccentric path.
Trans. by Charles Larmore (2006)

Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make
eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through
that tyranny, that people should be eccentric.
Eccentricity has always abounded when and where
strength of character has abounded;
and the amount of eccentricity in a society
has generally been proportional to the amount of genius,
mental vigour, and moral courage it contained.
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)

In an article in *Vogue* in 1963, the art critic Lawrence Alloway referred to Francis Bacon as “a great, shocking, eccentric painter”. His “eccentricity” was attributed to the terrifying figures in his paintings and the exacting, distorted vision of the human body. Bacon was born in Dublin in 1909, yet his relationship with Ireland was “somewhat problematic”, due to his “Anglo-Irish origins, homosexuality and a reputation for challenging paintings” (Barber

2008, 125). He moved to London in 1922 and never returned to Ireland. His inclusion in the Canon of Irish Art has been gradual and difficult to accept, culminating in 1998 with Bacon's London studio presented to the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. It was then removed with all its contents and reconstructed in Ireland, where it opened to the public in 2001.

Like Samuel Beckett's, Bacon's "Irishness" has long been considered eccentric. His relationship with Ireland suffered all the consequences of his being, to borrow Teresa de Lauretis's definition, an "eccentric subject": that is to say, a subject included in a system and yet resisting the system itself, exceeding the rigidity of limits/borders that traditionally compel one to be either inside or outside it, contradicting and erasing the peripherality of dominant positions, deconstructing conventional notions of "margin(s)" and "centre(s)". This is why we chose one of Bacon's provocative "screaming Pope" series of works for the cover of this issue.

When we first thought about this collection of essays, we had all this in mind, even though, as Peter Somerville-Large states, "eccentricity is a stiffen word to define" (1990, xi). We also had in mind the definitions of "eccentric" in the Oxford English Dictionary – "not placed centrally or arranged symmetrically about a centre" –, and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary – "1. *a*: deviating from an established or usual pattern or style; *b*: deviating from conventional or accepted usage or conduct especially in odd or whimsical ways. 2. *a*: deviating from a circular path; elliptical; *b*: located elsewhere than at the geometrical center; *also*: having the axis or support so located" –, as well as the idea of something irregular, erratic, peculiar, unstable, unfocused – not in the commonly pejorative sense generally attributed to this protean, elusive, often disharmonious term.

We ultimately opted for the hyphenated spelling "ex-centric" (inspired by the Greek etymology ἔκκεντρος: ἔκ, "out of" + κέντρον, "centre") as an invitation to foreground the word "centre", which is obviously crucial to the concept of eccentricity. Western thought rests on the idea of classification, hierarchy, and consequently of an archetypal fixed centre, irradiating/reproducing other, similar centres around the main one. The hyphenated spelling thus reaffirms the idea of circularity included in the concept, and at the same time rethink the centre as a non-static, mobile, fluid, permeable, non-hierarchical notion. When thinking of how to conceive of the "centre" as subtext informing the essays collected in this issue, especially in its relation to what exceeds its limit(s), we were inevitably also inspired by Jacques Derrida's much exploited reading of the centre as something "other" than losing the centre, that is, something crucially occupying a position inside the centre, yet at the same time standing outside it (1966: 292). For Derrida, this necessary act of resistance to the founding binary oppositions of Western thought relates to the creation of a radical "outside" in the "inside" – of structures, politics, thinking, and philosophy as much as in life in general (see Newman 2001).

Ex-Centric Ireland therefore gathers diverse contributions addressing issues of marginality, liminality, border-crossing, periphery, migration, fringe and their implications for the study of Irish society and culture. It considers ex-centricity as a heterogeneous series of complex positionings outside a centre that is conventionally identified with normativity, identity, and regimes of truth. The position of Ireland – historical, as well as geographical and cultural – is addressed by this special issue against the backdrop of the current drive towards a seemingly suicidal global capitalist market and, conversely, the attempts to shape alternative forms of non-normative locations of resistance. The essays collected here deal with different areas of the Humanities and Social, Philosophical, and Political Studies. Their authors present challenging views questioning the stability of approaches, methods, and techniques in favour of dynamic, plural, and multiple perspectives.

A group of contributions centre around representations of ex-centricity on the Irish stage. Richard Allen Cave looks at the recent dramatic adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2012) by Neil Bartlett, staged at Dublin's Abbey Theatre. Bartlett has twice attempted such a dramatic staging (the first was in 1994), and Cave discusses the major differences between his two versions. The recent one is more directly a dramatization of the novel, and is characterized by the use of a chorus, whose presence in the play creates a post-modern framework that offers audiences multiple perspectives – political, social, moral, aesthetic – from which to experience and critique the novel, this particular adaptation, and Bartlett's staging of it. As a result an audience becomes attuned to modes of theatrical reception and the particular subtleties of the central actors' performances. Alexandra Poulain argues that the ex-centric mystic Matt Talbot, the protagonist of Tom Kilroy's play *Talbot Box* (1977) exposes the homogenising and exploitative efforts of the Catholic Church by resorting to the tropes of the Passion narrative. For Poulain, Kilroy's grotesque representation of the joint attempts of ecclesiastical and temporal powers aims to appropriate Matt Talbot's private performance of the Christian Passion for their own purposes, submitting himself to a radical form of bodily exposure. Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987), Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989), as well as Gary Mitchell's *Loyal Women* (2003) are the subject of Megan W. Minogue's paper. In the four plays, home and nation are closely interconnected, as one serves as a microcosm for the other; this is especially true for the female characters inhabiting these spaces, where they find comfort, and the possibility for their voices, conventionally silenced by the predominantly male presence in Northern Irish politics, to be heard. Yet despite their power over the domestic sphere, their dominance is continually subverted, due to economic, sexual, and political oppression. Virginie Privas-Bréauté's essay deals with Owen McCafferty's *Mojo Mickybo* (2002) set in 1970 Belfast. Drawing extensively on Brechtian dramatic devices and strategies, including an unconventional use of typographical elements,

McCafferty's play emerges as an ex-centric act of resistance to the endless violence of the Troubles. The Brechtian influences embedded in the play are also evidenced by *Mojo Mickybo*'s didactic stance, in that it underlines its post-colonial dimension and the need to leave sectarianism behind.

Two essays focus more closely on issues of sexuality and gender. Drawing on Roger Casement's controversial *Black Diaries*, Jeffrey Dudgeon offers a reading of the debate surrounding the Irish nationalist hero. In spite of the cult developed by Irish Catholic nationalists in his home country, in which he is figured as fundamentally sexless, Dudgeon provocatively demonstrates that he had a very active sexual life as a gay man. This he does by examining Mario Vargas Llosa's view of Casement's sexuality in his *Dream of the Celt* (2010), and providing extensive documentation of the controversy itself. In Éibhear Walshe's "Introduction" to the three short writings by Kate O'Brien on Italy and Rome, he sheds some light on her lesbianism following this Irish literary icon through her journeys across Italy, which influenced her imagination. Walshe contextualises O'Brien's travel writings published in the late 1950s and early 1960s in journals and magazines, suggesting that Rome provided O'Brien with a vital source of inspiration as well as infusing new energies in her career as a novelist. In Walshe's own assertion, "[t]hese writings are the clue as to the Rome Kate O'Brien invented for herself, her ideal city" (64).

In her essay, Antonella Trombatore applies ecocriticism and mathematics to the study of ex-centric identities, both natural and human, in Edna O'Brien's 2002 novel *In the Forest*. Focusing on the ex-centricity of the forest, the murderer, and the female (as) victim, Trombatore shows that in O'Brien's novel a displacement is taking place, whereby the identities of the three elements are moved "from the border to the centre", thus reasserting their own essential ex-centricity. Edna O'Brien is also the subject of the essay by Marisol Morales Ladrón, whose analysis takes its lead from Irish post-famine female migration to the US and investigates unsuccessful stories from the Irish diaspora in O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* (2006), which Ladrón discusses in tandem with Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* (2009). Drawing on the topical connection of the (Irish) mother and the motherland, Ladrón exposes the conflicts at the heart of the characters' relationship with their mother/land, at the same time showing two complementary views of female migration from Ireland – an aspect that, in her opinion, has been almost totally ignored by O'Brien's and Tóibín's contemporary critics and reviewers. Terry Phillip's study of two different groups of novels authored by Sebastian Barry attempts to trace the histories of characters who have been relegated to the margins of Irish historical narrative(s). As Phillips herself claims, instead of revisiting national history, Barry is trying "to present the plight of often isolated individuals and to reveal the complexity of the situations in which they find themselves" (235). This Phillips shows with her reading influenced by theories on collective memory and history. The post-2005 poems of Derek

Mahon are the subject of Mélanie White's paper. In it, she discusses in detail Mahon's own reflections on global changes and their effects on Irish society – including the economic crisis, immigration, and global climate change. Mahon's recent investment in "the global" is seen through the lens of three different tropes that White aptly locates in marginal, peripheral sites from where to remap alternatives to the present. The section "Notes in Dis-Order" closes with Giovanna Tallone's reading of Clare Boylan's short-story "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester", in which Boylan rewrites Charlotte Brontë's classic *Jane Eyre* (1847) by speculating on the heroine's married life. Boylan's is no doubt a substantially ex-centric text, as demonstrated by her parody of Victorian narrative conventions dealt with by Tallone. Writing her diary from the enclosed space of her own claustrophobic red room, Boylan's "Jane" shares much with the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). The two stories help Tallone discuss the nature of elusive personal stories written by the two women from their secluded spaces, cast as powerful examples of intertextuality and metanarrative.

Another group of essays deals with the Celtic Tiger "myth" from different perspectives. Timothy J. White maintains that in the 1990s Ireland's long struggle for economic autonomy and independence was compromised by the attempt to integrate the Irish economy in the world market to satisfy the demand for short-sighted materialism. This dependence on international markets led to a financial crisis and a final crash: materialism was the cause of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger. According to White, the Irish have successfully developed policies that have attracted foreign investment and are aware that these policies should continue to provide economic growth in the future, but "correct or wise economic policies need to be accompanied by a new value system that corrects the excesses of individual greed and the material expression of one's worth". What Ireland needs is perhaps a "set of goals and policies that may not yield massive short-term gains but are more effective in the long run" (106). For Susan Nitzsche the periphery (and core) model, and the discussion about Ireland's position in the world economy, have been at the centre of social debate for decades, a debate that was most heated during the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger years. Whereas Ireland has universally been perceived as being at the core of the European integration project, there is no consensus whether Celtic Tiger-Ireland eventually managed to leave the economic periphery or semi-periphery. Furthermore, the Celtic Tiger did not succeed in reducing regional disparity within the Republic, and this provoked an increased focus on the internal periphery and core. The perceptions of Ireland's economic development and its role in the European Union are now negatively influenced by the present recession. Nitzsche's conclusion is that "transforming the economy of the western periphery towards a so-called smart economy and sustainable growth could lead Ireland on the track towards becoming a core economy" (133). In Jason Matthew Buchanan's opinion, in

Ireland, throughout the Celtic Tiger years, the ideas of what constituted the “home” were transformed by a speculative form of capitalism that recreated domestic space as a fluctuating and valuable commodity. By centralizing the connection of urban space to capitalism, speculation opened the domestic spaces of the home to the processes of speculation and devaluation. Buchanan’s essay analyses how changing the economic parameters of domestic space created a concomitant change in how homes are figured in the Irish cultural lexicon. Through the connection of spatial and cultural transformation, Buchanan’s contribution analyses Deidre Madden and Anne Haverty’s fictions, frames speculation as a parody of communal life that eliminates any real interpersonal relationships, and articulates how the lasting damage that followed the collapse of the Tiger altered the way the Irish understood the concepts and realities of the “home”.

Jerusha McCormack’s essay is devoted to Irish Studies in China, where over the last few years, they have emerged as an acknowledged academic field in several important Chinese universities, and enquires about the obstacles to Irish Studies in China as well as Ireland’s importance, after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, in stimulating a debate on the role of literature in building up a new national identity. The many affinities between Irish and Chinese culture have ensured that translations of Irish writers – Wilde, Yeats, Shaw, Beckett and notably Joyce – have played an important role in affirming “China’s newly rising status, giving evidence of how literary revolution can inspire political action – as well as ushering the new China into its own version of modernity and so into the myriad possibilities of its future” (178).

Our journey across ex-centricity ends with two unpublished poems by Frank McGuinness, “Aeneas” (357) and “Other Men” (359). Their ex-centricity is revealed from the start, since McGuinness’s poetry has often been erroneously overlooked due to his successful and longstanding career as an international playwright. This is partly the reason why, in the interview that follows the two poems, McGuinness delves into key themes of his writing, not only for the stage – and which include his perceptions on the idea of Irishness, and its relation to the role played by women in particular, queerness, and the power of love seen and experienced as something fundamentally exceeding rigid definitions and conventional performances of gender, class, sexuality, and the Nation.

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Prelude

The Abbey Theatre Stages Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Keywords: Neil Bartlett, dramatisation, post-modern, staging, Oscar Wilde

How might one set about adapting Oscar Wilde's novel for the stage? This is a pertinent question on two counts. First, surprisingly for Wilde, long sections of his novel are not consciously theatrical. There are the opening chapters that centre on dialogue while the basic premise is established and then there are passages of dialogue before Basil's murder and *passim* with Lord Henry, but a long and crucial stage of the narrative that is concerned with Dorian's moral collapse is conveyed by description rather than enactment, and in a manner that is closely modelled on Joris-Karl Huysmans' novels, *À rebours* (1884) and, to a lesser degree, *Là-Bas* (1891). The myth that underpins *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is that of Faust who makes a pact with the devil for a prolonged life in exchange for his soul. The problem facing playwrights working with that myth is how to dramatise the period intervening between the commitment to the pact and the devil's ultimate pursuit of his reward. Christopher Marlowe (c. 1588) turned to satirical comedy to show how his Faust frittered away his gift of youth before meeting death and damnation; Goethe (in a two-part drama worked on extensively between 1772 and 1832) showed both the destructive and constructive potential in the gift of prolonged life as his Faust strives ever onward in the pursuit of knowledge and philosophical understanding of the nature of being. Dorian Gray's pact is with an unspecified figure of Fate and it is made without conscious awareness but rather as an idle whim; and he has to learn the dangers of acting on impulse. The novel intimates through rumours voiced by his critics that he has destroyed the reputation of numerous men and women but the narrative dwells in detail only on his callous treatment of Sybil Vane. There are scandalised whispers too about his low-life associations and his drug-taking. But they remain intimations, suggesting a dark undertow to Dorian's charm. Only the murder of Basil Hallward reveals how deeply Dorian's inner desperation and anguish run. Chiefly his moral

collapse is shown through Dorian's engagement in turn with all the interests that at the time of the writing of the novel characterised a decadent sensibility, as defined most exhaustively by Huysmans' novels. The cataloguing of aesthetic interests indiscriminately pursued to escape a prevailing ennui may carry conviction as a mode of characterisation in a novel (if the prose style is sufficiently compelling), but it totally resists dramatisation.

The second reason for questioning how one might dramatise *Dorian Gray* is that Neil Bartlett, the playwright and director of the newly staged version at Dublin's Abbey Theatre (first performed on September 27, 2012), has twice made the attempt (the first was staged at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1994)¹. The major difference between the versions relates to how that middle section of the novel, which by symbolist means portrays the nature of Dorian's inner self (the spiritual decline of which his remarkable physical appearance gives no intimation), is rendered in theatrical terms. In his first attempt at a dramatisation, Bartlett envisaged less a performance than a reading of Wilde's novel: some years after Wilde's death, his "sphinx", Ada Levenson, rents a room in the Savoy Hotel that Wilde once favoured for his liaisons, and calls together a group of his one-time friends and acquaintances to read the novel in the author's memory. The story-telling progresses haphazardly, since the focus is less on Dorian (a bored and boorish guardsman whom Robbie Ross has "rented" for the occasion) than on the dejection of those friends. The meeting suggests both a therapy session and a séance: "When we've all remembered [Ada advises the group], perhaps we'll be able to forget". Without Wilde's charisma and vitality, they have become frightened, isolated, fearful of intimidation by the police or the authorities, depressed and depressingly out-moded, as they sit in their uniformly shabby black clothes. Ada waspishly reminds Sidney "Jenny" Mavor, one of Wilde's boys who testified against him, of his life's history: "For a few red lampshades, a few scarlet sins and a supporting role at the Old Bailey, three decades of living alone in Croydon"². These friends, lost in their own misery, are the image of all the individuals in the novel, who, deprived of, or casually dropped from, Dorian's presence in their lives, have become dead things. They have become representative of all the tedious, lacklustre monotony that lies at the heart of conventional living, that grim *angst* which Dorian like his tutor, Wotton, seeks to escape in Wilde's fantasy fiction by creating an alternative, private and pleasure-centred world about himself. We are continually reminded how Wilde's own dream world disintegrated in a London dock, Reading Gaol, Naples and a bleak hotel room in Paris. The Sphinx's attempts to jolly the proceedings along fall increasingly flat, since Ada is no Wilde for all her wit and generosity. It is hardly surprising that the guardsman, distinctively different from the gathering in his scarlet, gold and black uniform, his youth and beauty, should so fear being trapped in this environment that he makes a violent bid for freedom, turning his pent-up desperation against Ross (who significantly in the reading is playing Basil Hallward).

Bartlett in this adaptation of Wilde has produced less a dramatisation of the novel than a sustained commentary on, and penetrating critique of its stated or implied themes: the profound futility that underpins the narrative; the lack of any spiritual basis for the alternative lifestyle that Wotton and Dorian pursue; the pointlessness of a solipsistic world view and its dangerous amorality that shades subtly but inexorably into immorality. But the novel is also, as the play implies, critical of a moneyed society that offers no viable outlet for creativity or intellectual brilliance and that consequently fosters the likes of Wotton and Gray, unwilling to commit themselves to the restricted and restricting habits of the upper-class tribe into which tragically they have been born. Wilde's novel, then, was in this dramatisation viewed through the distorting lens of history, social and private; the spectator was invited to engage with the performance on a multitude of levels (confusing perhaps to someone not well versed in the original fiction or in the lives of Wilde's circle), but there was no denying its cumulative theatrical power. Bartlett was offering a post-modernist interrogation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that suggested the novel offers through fantasy the realisation of a grimly petty hell on earth³. Where Huysmans took two novels to trace the path through decadence to hell, Wilde on Bartlett's showing managed the feat in one work of fiction: the relentless degeneration of the portrait is the hidden truth of the condition of Dorian's sensibility and of the society which shaped it.

The Abbey staging is more directly a dramatisation of the novel than that seen two decades ago at the Lyric, which means that the long section of Dorian's inner disintegration has to be represented onstage by some means; and Bartlett has found a challenging way in which to achieve this, but one that requires consummate skill in his actors and especially the two men playing Lord Henry Wotton (Jasper Britton) and Dorian (Tom Canton). Bartlett has appreciated the extent to which the novel is obsessed with time and its passing: Dorian seemingly (at least to everyone else's perceptions) has eluded the depredations of time, retaining his brilliantly youthful features. On the surface he is an ageless Adonis; and surfaces, as virtually all Wilde's writings testify, are what the fashionably-minded of his or any age are most preoccupied with. Bartlett's major insight into the novel is the realisation, which no one else attempting a dramatisation has appreciated, that, though the novel is set initially in the year in which it was written, the action develops over some thirty years into what would have been a future of Wilde's imagining. Bartlett's dramatic action moves steadily from the 1890s to the 1920s and the world of Noel Coward's society comedies, which the changing musical accompaniment over the two acts makes clear⁴. Of course one constant among the upper classes in their search for entertainment remained over that thirty-year period traditional evening dress (black tie and dress suits for the men and fancy, décolleté ball gowns for the women); worn by the chorus of aristocrats surrounding Gray in the play, that constant only emphasized the ageing physiques of the wearers

and their increasingly jaded faces⁵. Bartlett solved the problem of whether or not to deploy onstage an actual portrait, the dilemma which confronts any director of *Dorian Gray*, by showing audiences only a huge but empty frame; instead the decline into middle or old age of everyone onstage except Dorian was its representation and particularly so in the case of Sir Henry. As spry and dandified as Dorian at the time of their first meeting, Wotton grew with the passing years into an emphysema-ridden old duffer, raddled and gross. He, living the lifestyle in which he tutored the young Gray, embodied its tragic consequences; his visible deterioration made the need for an actual picture in the attic quite redundant. (It required a tour de force from Jasper Britton in the role subtly to catch the stages of Wotton's decline by a close attention to details, physical and vocal; he became rougher and gruffer on each appearance in the second act). It is characteristic of Bartlett's alert reading of Wilde's text to note how repeatedly Wotton lights a fresh cigarette on first encountering Dorian in the opening chapter of the novel and to make it a kind of *leitmotiv* throughout his production: the harmless pleasure that transformed into a crippling addiction. His first gift to Dorian in the play as in the novel is a gold cigarette case: its acceptance, emphasized in the production by a prolonged kiss between the two men, is the mark of Dorian's commitment to Wotton's philosophy of life and a token that in their relationship Sir Henry is the Mephistopheles to Gray's Faust⁶. Their relationship is symbiotic: they are almost (but not quite) mirror-images of each other at the start with their identically curled and flowing locks and their spirited carriage of the body, despite the one being all-knowing and the other a dewy-eyed innocent; but as Dorian grows in experience, it is Wotton who visibly pays the penalty. How fitting it is then that a proffered cigarette from the gold case is the last thing an audience sees as the lights dim: a temptation, glittering in the half-light, seductive but lethal! Dorian has been as much Sir Henry's undoing as Wotton has been Gray's. Wotton's transformation onstage from a dandy into a living embodiment of what the hidden picture depicts was how Bartlett in this second dramatisation negotiated the challenge of representing the growth of Dorian's inner paralysis and soullessness.

It would be wrong to give the impression that Britton alone shouldered the burden of communicating the symbolic structuring of the production: Tom Canton as Dorian also faced considerable demands on his technical expertise to parallel what Britton was achieving. It is all too easy in reading the novel to view Dorian as being as beautiful and feckless as Bosie in time was to prove to be in Wilde's life especially after his arrest and until his death⁷. But, if that portrait in the attic emblematises Dorian's conscience, are we to suppose it has no impact on him whatever, simply because it in no way disturbs his physical beauty with signs of corruption? If that were so, then why is Dorian overwhelmed with bouts of ennui alternating with bursts of frantic desperation in the final stages of Wilde's narrative? Bartlett asks for a

more subtly insidious decline than Wotton's to overtake Dorian: he requires his actor to show a man corroding from within while never ceasing to be an object of attraction to others. Canton's was a bravura performance: he contrived to suggest that his own good looks had become a mask through which only the eyes (by turns furtive, wild, coldly withdrawn, empty, dead) invited a different interpretation of the sensibility within; and, though his body with its long limbs and balanced proportions was that of a man the actor's own age, its movements increasingly lacked either grace or the purposive energy that had once stirred it into motion. When he reclined (lolloped would be a more accurate description), he looked like an exquisitely fashioned doll that had been tossed idly aside by a thoughtless child. At times he is suddenly galvanised into frenetic activity: "He is sweaty, jumpy, messy; busy, aggressive, off-hand, snappy. An addict who needs his next fix" (Wilde 2012, 69)⁸. In him a body and a mind were in total opposition; the voice became steadily colder, harsher, devoid of sympathetic tonalities; and only the beauty lived on in this cipher of a man, as he came to know the precise extent of the hell he had all too casually willed into being in his youth ("If only it were I who was always to be young, and your picture that was to grow old. For that – for that I would give everything. Everything in the world. I think I would give my soul", 16). The initial conception on Bartlett's part and the creative invention on Canton's that went into realising this break-up of an individuality into this shocking dissonance was remarkable and powerfully underscored the moral vision that shapes Bartlett's adaptation. What impressed in viewing the production was Bartlett's ability to shape that vision by exploiting the arts of the theatre, above all through the virtuosity of his players. The production was played out on a virtually bare stage reaching right to the exposed back wall of the theatre; there were only absolutely necessary properties; atmosphere, period detail had to be created by the performers (though, as Bartlett prescribes in the final words of his *Introduction* to the published text, the costumes were "sensational", and there was a sound score)⁹.

This emphasis on the relationship between Dorian and Sir Henry inevitably detracted from that between Dorian and Basil, much as in the novel, a situation not entirely helped by Frank McCusker's decision to underplay the role of Hallward. In a world where everyone else is acting a role, except perhaps the luckless Alan Campbell, one can see why McCusker might be disposed to make this decision, since Basil is the one individual with an exacting degree of personal integrity and clearly should be performed with a marked difference in acting style from the rest of the cast. He is the voice of rectitude in novel and play, but to underplay the role is to risk undermining Hallward's moral status within the narrative. It is a difficult challenge facing the actor: how to avoid rant or melodrama yet establish a meaningful presence onstage, especially given Wilde's detestation of earnestness. The decision McCusker chose, however, made the role appear lacklustre in performance: it was to play Basil much as

Dorian must see him, as an irritating man whose moralising is so devoid of a sense of fashionable propriety that he and it are best ignored or systematically avoided as utterly *de trop*. What one lost was the sense (strong in Marlowe and Goethe's versions of the Faust myth, of Dorian's soul being fought for by a Good Angel [Basil] and a Bad [Sir Henry]). But that could be seen as a weakness in the novel: one perhaps explained, if not justified by Wilde's eagerness to eschew writing a novel with a message in the high Victorian manner, as the Preface to the original edition of 1891 makes abundantly clear. But this does not help the adaptor, director or actor to make something dramatically significant of Basil's role. McCusker may have aimed for a quiet, contained sincerity as the token of that significance but, given the technical brilliance of Britton and Canton's performances, his understated efforts appeared rather amateur, simplistic; his attempted naturalism seemed misjudged and out of place¹⁰.

This effect was augmented in the production by the one element where Bartlett as adaptor and director had radically departed from the novel: his use of a chorus. Any absolutely faithful dramatisation of the novel would require a huge cast: servants, aristocratic observers, Dorian's lovers and casual acquaintances, his fellow addicts, theatre personnel, prostitutes (male and female) and so forth, of whom at least fifteen have named identities. Doubling is possible in the theatre; but, if all these individuals and the countless unnamed persons briefly appearing in the narrative were impersonated in a production, most would have a ridiculously short time onstage. The appearance and rapid disappearance of such presences in the novel is Wilde's way of intimating Dorian's thoughtless indifference to others, whom he casually picks up for his own ends and then as casually discards; Basil too is so treated and, in time, even Lord Henry. (When they both die in the production, the actors join the chorus but stay in character, the first appeasing, the second always seductively tempting). Bartlett populates his stage with some fourteen black-garbed actors, seven men and seven women, who emerge from the group to take on brief roles before returning to the ensemble; sometimes the women appear as a group in ostentatious gowns to create a suitable ambience of aristocratic indolence, hauteur, disdain (they are reminiscent of the bored assemblage of house-guests in *A Woman Of No Importance* of 1893); some appear for the Sybil Vane episodes in fustian motley appropriate for the backstage of a Victorian theatre; the men are generally in understated black uniforms as servants of various ranks or in dark shabby suits when playing working-class characters or East End down-and-outs. Appearing and disappearing is easily effected by them all stepping in and out of pools of focused light; but they never quite disappear entirely: however bright the lighting on the central trio of characters (Dorian, Basil and Lord Henry), there are always dimly perceived faces hovering in the gloom, watching, expectant, judgemental, always at hand, like the most exemplary of servants, to come into the light when the situation suddenly requires them. They are like the audience in the theatre, sitting in

darkness, watching but always outside the charmed, illumined life that Lord Henry tempts Dorian to create out of his deepest longings and urges, because he has unparalleled wealth to buy himself anything and anyone he covets and to buy himself out of any threatened scandal that might ensue. (This is seen at its worst in Dorian's manipulation of Alan Campbell's fear of sexual exposure to make him dispose of Basil's corpse).

Outsiders in Dorian's story these people might be, peopling the margins of his awareness, but they have all been touched and marked by him in some way and, like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, they wait for his demise. At moments of high tension and crucial change in Dorian's fortunes, they severally or in unison speak Wilde's descriptions of Gray's inner responses as an accompaniment to Dorian's silent movements. When, for example, Dorian first sees Basil's painting, it is the servants who speak from the shadows:

DORIAN looks at the picture; he recoils in shock. The Chorus amplifies his breath –

PARKER, FRANCIS, MRS. LEAF: *Ah!*

FRANCIS: *He had never really felt it before. His beauty – but now...*

MRS. LEAF: *Ah! Now...*

PARKER: *– His amethyst eyes deepened in a mist of tears.*

MRS. LEAF: *(Viciously) As if he recognised himself for the very first time... (15)*

Later and again in Wilde's phrases they describe the changes that come over the picture. The male chorus give voice to the furious outpouring of sentiment in the letter Dorian writes when he decides to offer to marry Sybil, which the female chorus disrupt with cries of derision: "Beautiful, of course, but – / [...] Warped / [...] Corrupted" (41). After Basil's murder, the chorus picks up the Lord's Prayer, the opening phrases of which are his final words and they continue the prayer "*(Sotto voce)*" until his body ceases to writhe (59). When James Vane hesitates over killing Dorian in revenge for the death of his sister, since Dorian has asked him whether his face could be that of a man Vane has been seeking for twenty-five years, the Female Chorus urge him: "Do it now!" (74). Becoming the conscience Dorian has suppressed over the years, the Chorus hound him to the attic to attack the picture and meet his death; they urge him on by again reciting the Lord's Prayer as if in revenge for the innocent Basil. The term, chorus, may imply a somewhat restrained, even static grouping of individuals; but this chorus is active, malevolent and increasingly vicious in the tone it adopts towards Dorian once he begins to listen to and not ignore their utterances. Mrs. Leaf's tone, implied by the adverb "viciously" in the first passage quoted above, begins to infiltrate the group till it predominates.

This tone and the mounting crescendo of choric sound is complex in its effect in performance. As audience, we appear to be witnessing a rebellion as the figures traditionally compelled by the narrative to inhabit the margins seem to be taking over the stage, but the antagonism also has a class motiva-

tion, the tone is that of the angry underdogs protesting against their self-styled masters. Bartlett is perhaps suggesting through the chorus that there is a place within the novel and his adaptation for the Wilde who wrote *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (the essay was published the same year as the novel) and who penned subtle but trenchant critiques of the English upper classes in his *Society Comedies*¹¹. But might that vicious tone also be interpreted as akin to the heterosexist hysteria meted out to Wilde after his trial and on his journey to Reading Gaol, the decrying like the baying of wolves of the majority against the lifestyle of a homosexual minority, whatever its class status? By drawing the parallels with the legend of Faust, which exist in the novel but which are strengthened in the adaptation, Bartlett is also defining how profound though unassertive a morality underlies the structure of the narrative. (On this reading *The Picture of Dorian Gray* should decidedly not have been admissible evidence such as the book became in Wilde's second trial, where it was used to exemplify the insidious corrupting influence he had over Lord Alfred Douglas to whom he had given a copy). The mounting excitement of the chorus as Dorian's demise approaches may be paralleling a spectator's response to the production to the experience of any reader embarked on a tense novel, that of willing a particular ending into being, once a sense of its imminence becomes apparent. Whether viewed together or singly, these possibilities show diverse ways of interpreting the role of the chorus in the production: political, social, moral, aesthetic, engaged in the analysis of modes of literary and theatrical reception. Bartlett in other words has shaped through his deployment of the chorus a post-modern framework around his staging of Wilde's period piece that offers spectators multiple perspectives from which to enter, experience and critique both the novel and his adaptation. Wilde's words and his narrative structure are a literary constant; what has changed over the passage of time are the cultural constructs underpinning readers' (and in the theatre spectators') modes of reception that determine interpretation. Bartlett has found a theatrical means of freeing audiences from their habitual manner of judging by showing the wealth of ways in which his central narrative and its dominant icon (the picture that is the novel's title) may be approached and interrogated. Consequently the strength of the adaptation as a *Wildean* experience in the theatre is that Bartlett has no insistent design upon us. It is a theatre piece, but it is far more than an entertainment.

Notes

¹¹ There is no printed text of Bartlett's first dramatisation of Wilde's novel. The second version staged at the Abbey was printed and sold in the theatre as part of the programme for the production. Bibliographical details of this publication are given below in relation to the citing of quotations from it. This second adaptation took virtually all its text from Wilde's own prose, deploying not only the first book-formatted edition of 1891 but also the version that had appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890 and the typed manuscript, now

in the public domain, that preceded it, which was cut and to some extent bowdlerised by the editor of *Lippincott's* before he would consider publishing the novel.

² Given the lack of a printed text of Bartlett's first dramatisation of Wilde's novel, these quotations are from the author's notes made during two viewings of the production at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in 1994. Interestingly this adaptation and staging seem to have been expunged in recent years from the canon of Bartlett's works: there is but one mention of it currently in Bartlett's online *curriculum vitae*, where it is pointedly described as "After Wilde" (see <<http://www.neil-bartlett.com/cv.php>>, 10/13).

³ Bartlett's last production in November 2005 before leaving his post as Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, was a production of Molière's *Don Juan*, the poster for which carried an image of the open-shirted torso of a young man over the injunction, "Go to Hell". There was an unmistakable resonance here of his work on Oscar Wilde.

⁴ This time-scheme is apt: thirty years is the duration of the term that Mephistopheles pledges himself to answer Faustus's every desire in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1588). For Bartlett's explanation for this scheme, see his *Introduction* to the published text: N. Bartlett, *Introduction*, in O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, adapted with an introduction by N. Bartlett, London, Oberon Books, 2012, unpaginated preliminary.

⁵ The elaborate frocks designed for the production by Kandis Cook caught the changing lines of women's fashion from the 1890s to the 1920s but the sense of evening dress as theatricalised wear, a kind of fancy dress that rendered the wearers somewhat grotesque (particularly since, as they aged, the women wore heavier and more elaborate make-up that made them look increasingly garish), was sustained throughout.

⁶ Jasper Britton has had a distinguished career in classical theatre. Notably in the context of Bartlett's production was Britton's recent casting as Satan in a dramatisation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, directed by Rupert Goold for Headlong Theatre Company in 2006.

⁷ This is in part the burden of accusation against Bosie that Wilde voices in *De Profundis* (written during his imprisonment in Reading Gaol 1895-97, but published posthumously and in a shortened form in 1905; a full edition containing the previously suppressed parts was published by Robert Ross in 1913).

⁸ O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2012) adapted with an introduction by N. Bartlett; subsequent references are in brackets.

⁹ *Ibidem*, unpaginated preliminary. The sound score was by Ivan Birthistle and Vincent Doherty.

¹⁰ The only other weakness in the production was the staging of Dorian's eventual death on mutilating the painting, when Bartlett's exuberant creativity seemed to fail him. Gothick sensationalism took over, as Dorian was replaced by a double, impersonating the "monster" the stage directions describe, with a hideous mask on his face; he struggled bloodily to wrench it off, as he collapsed to die by the footlights (88-91).

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of this critical aspect of Wilde's creativity in his comedies, see Cave 2006, 213-224.

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Cult of the Sexless Casement
with Special Reference to the Novel
The Dream of the Celt by Mario Vargas Llosa
(Nobel Prize Winner for Literature 2010)

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Abstract:

The Irish revolutionary Roger Casement, executed in 1916, has spawned an army of books, articles, and news stories, more about his diaries and the authenticity controversy that still surrounds them than about his seminal work encouraging and arming Irish separatism or his humanitarian investigations in the Congo and the Peruvian Amazon. His aura and image in life, and more so in death, was Christ-like. A cult developed that required him to be sexless. The more he was said to be an active homosexual, as graphically revealed in his journals, ironically, the more he was revered as an icon by his Catholic nationalist supporters. The entry of Nobel prizewinning novelist Mario Vargas Llosa to the field and his adoption of a mixed, even contradictory, view of Casement's sexuality in his *Dream of the Celt* (2010) has sparked a new round of disputation particularly from Angus Mitchell, the foremost proponent of the diary forgery theory. This emerges in his extensive *Field Day Review* articles, one of which provides a full history of the controversy.

Keywords: Black Diaries, Roger Casement, gay Irish revolutionaries, Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Dream of the Celt*

It remains unquestionable and remarkable – and maybe it tells you something – that the two best-known, and most written about gay characters in the last 150 years were both Irish, and both went to jail, although only one to the gallows.

My intention here is to reclaim Roger Casement, not as a gay icon or gay role model, but as a gay Irishman of consequence. As the centenary of 1916 approaches, it will become ever plainer that he was of great significance to, and in the creation of, an independent Ireland and particularly its foreign policy. He was an early and indefatigable Irish separatist. Even though the founding

fathers (and now their children) have died, the creation myths have receded, and the country's once dominant founding political party, Fianna Fáil, has been broken, Casement's legacy to the Irish Free State has not diminished.

The basic story of his Black Diaries is well known, although every single fact about them has or will be disputed or challenged. Belief in their authenticity to many once, and some still, is heresy.

Briefly, after Casement's capture in Co. Kerry in April 1916 coming off a German submarine, the diaries were handed in to Scotland Yard by a Mr Germain who stored his luggage in Ebury Street, London. Casement never had a dwelling of his own so his life's work and voluminous papers were scattered over many addresses. Accompanying a large arms shipment in the German steamer *Aud* for the Irish Volunteers, the precursor of the IRA, he was none the less intent on getting the Rising called off for what he felt was inadequate German support.

The three diaries, a ledger and a notebook cover four separate years: 1901, 1903, 1910 and 1911. That of 1901 is of no import being little more than a jotter. There are two 1911 items, one a cashbook or ledger with frequent personal entries, and the second, a flowing or discursive diary, with substantive sexual descriptions. It has only ever been published in my 2002 book. The ledger was last published in 1959 by Maurice Girodias.

In the appendices there is evidence of Casement's mode and modus operandi, his cruising and musing. He was no shrinking violet either in sexual manners or manly achievement, similar to many contemporary gay men. However he had little or no chance – and may well not have wanted any form of substantive or long-term relationship. That opportunity has come to many only recently. Instead, he successfully compartmentalised his sexual life.

Two boyfriends did however cross-over and one, the Norwegian Adler Christensen, was to betray him, twice. The Ulsterman Millar Gordon did not. A small number of more worldly friends worked it out, for example the historian Alice Stopford Green, of whom more later. Some others like his lawyer George Gavan Duffy probably knew but avoided expressing his understanding.

None of this calls into question Casement's effective humanitarian work on the Amazon or Congo rivers, or requires one to let his political work in Ireland and Germany pass without question. In the Irish department, Casement succeeded beyond his wilder dreams in the creation of a separate state yet failed dismally in his chosen province of Ulster. And it matters that Casement was gay, not least because it is unlikely otherwise he would have been such a rebel or devoted so much time to both humanitarian and revolutionary activity.

One of the complaints of the forgery school is that homosexuals are trying to turn Casement into a gay icon. This unwarranted assertion infers that gay men are, as a class, historically minded – which has a grain of truth. The notion however that Casement has a cult following like Marilyn Monroe, James Dean or Lady Gaga is laughable.

Up close, everyone is human so it is unwise to admire too much – Oscar Wilde, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, James Baldwin, Harvey Milk, Peter Tatchell might be or become gay icons. But they are, or were, all flawed, and at times horrible. A personal icon would be the 1950s law reformer and author of *The Other Love* (1970), Montgomery Hyde, who wasn't gay but did more for gay people than most, and paid the price in career terms. But he was a terrible snob and something of a chancer. No cult likely there, not least because he was the Unionist MP for North Belfast.

With this article's title, two things have to be explained or proved: how and why did the cult of Casement come about? And why had he to be sexless for it? First was he sexless? If the diaries are entirely fraudulent then he was, which in itself is a bit unusual. Women gathered around him in numbers, most noticeably at his London trial where the audience included Lady Lavery, Eva Gore Booth and Alice Milligan, and of course his faithful and devoted Liverpool cousins Gertrude and Elizabeth Bannister. Also earlier, when a number of aristocratic Ulster women from the Caledon and Norbury families, Margaret Dobbs of Castle Dobbs, Rose Young (Rois Ni Ogain) of Galgorm Castle, Ada McNeill cousin of Lord Cushendun, and other titled Englishwomen such as Lady Constance Emmott and the Duchess of Hamilton befriended him. And that is not to mention literary giants who were friends or supporters like Arthur Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad (but not in 1916), Rider Haggard and of course W.B. Yeats. But there was never a hint of amorous activity with these women, some quite attractive and several of the marrying kind – rather the opposite. He even pleaded with his cousin Gertrude to get Ada McNeill to cool her interest, writing, "I wish poor old soul she would leave me alone. These repeated invitations to go to meet her are a bit out of place. I have very strong feelings of friendship for her, and good will, and brotherly Irish affection, but I wish she would leave other things out of the reckoning" (NLI MS 13074/8).

He had a number of gay male friends or people that it is reasonable to assume were gay, notably Sidney Parry who was to chastely marry Casement's cousin Gertrude in 1916 after the execution, and the Belfast solicitor and antiquarian Francis Joseph Bigger. Bigger was someone who cultivated boys and young men, particularly *Fianna* and Protestant rebels, about which stories were exchanged although none revealed impropriety in today's terms. There is no evidence that they discussed such matters, while Bigger was sufficiently naïve only to discover the raw truth when he went through Casement's correspondence and other diaries stored at his house, Ardrigh, after the outbreak of war. And unfortunately burnt the lot, including probably his cache of boyfriend letters plus many interesting and unconnected items. Two such are the incoming E.D. Morel and Gertrude Parry correspondence, both almost entirely missing.

The evidence that Casement was a busy homosexual is in his own words and handwriting in the diaries, and is colossally convincing because of its detail and extent. You could hardly ask for more. There is also some corroboration

from Norwegian interviews with friends and colleagues of Adler Christensen who was however also the marrying sort, managing three wives simultaneously. He was last heard of in Canada in 1928 abandoning the third.

Was a cult developed around Casement, one that required him to be without the stain of sex and which would not have got under way otherwise? It is that peculiar yet fascinating intense Irish Catholicism, one which took over the Irish Free State for fifty years, which Casement was able in death to evoke. A couple of recently released letters exemplify the cult that was developing. A nun at the Convent of the Holy Faith, Glasnevin, Dublin wrote to Gertrude:

Words fail to express the depth of my feeling for you in this most bitter sorrow. I had hoped to the last that the united prayers of so many would be granted [...] What a glorious death – he was perfectly resigned to Almighty God’s appointment – he bore no ill-will to his murderers – he loved God, he loved his fellow men and he died for his country. (NLI MS 49,154/16/4)

And Lily O’Farrelly said:

We are heart-broken and can’t realise as yet the awful tragedy. I never imagined they would carry out their awful sentence. Thank God they can’t touch his pure soul. His death was glorious and his memory will ever be enshrined in Irish hearts. (NLI MS 49,154/16/5).

His own defence counsel, Serjeant Sullivan, spoke later of “Casement worshippers”, warning cultists that “Casement was a megalomaniac” (1956). They were not likely to listen to the lawyer, as he was a known enemy of Irish separatism, illustrated by a serious assassination attempt on him in Kerry in 1920. Casement however left a clue to his own thinking on the matter when in his last days he wrote asking his friends to “roll away the stone from my grave” (The National Archives, HO 144/1637/182). Truly a demi-God.

Later in 1976, Roger McHugh¹ at a Dublin meeting said the diaries “show a pathological condition and wildly promiscuous behaviour while what is known of Casement at the same time establishes his moral integrity and common sense”. This remains the forgery formulation of today. He was too good to have written the diaries.

The historian and biographer, Angus Mitchell, currently the doyen of the forgery school, says:

If he did write the documents, then we must contend that he deliberately authored diaries that executed him, dramatically compromised his work as an investigator of atrocities and betrayed himself as ‘a man of no mind’ [...] if the Black Diaries Casement is the one true Casement, it is right that gay history should claim him as their own for Casement was the true martyr of the gay rights cause more than Oscar Wilde. (Quoted from Daly 2005, 117)

This is dangerous territory for the forgery theorists, if Casement did write the diaries; he is in their words a truly awful person, worthy of jail if not the gallows.

Mitchell is by no means alone. He has worked in concert with the old-fashioned Roger Casement Foundation, the now former Fianna Fáil TD Martin Mansergh and the swelling ranks of anti-revisionists in the British & Irish Communist Organisation/Irish Political Review/Athol Books nexus which had so much hidden influence in and on the north in the 1970s and 1980s. And, as discussed later, Mitchell left an early and substantive impression on Mario Vargas Llosa, the Nobel prize winning novelist and author of *El sueño del celta* (2010; *The Dream of the Celt*, 2012). So much so that Vargas Llosa effectively wrote a history not a novel. His attempt at fictionalised history being described by one American reviewer, Richard Eder, as “more a matter of embroidery” (2012). *The Sunday Times* cruelly called it “an exercise in anaesthesia” (Kemp 2012) with too many lists.

Casement’s martyr status was only accentuated by the extra trial he experienced, after execution, when his reputation was sullied by publicity about his diaries. Adding to the whole overheated atmosphere by becoming a Roman Catholic in the death cell, he was further guaranteed saintly status. His Jesus-like looks, as in much popular Catholic iconography, brought a dramatically visual aspect to the whole confection. Being seriously handsome (with a permanent beard) added to the potential for the creation of a hero-martyr – one whose public life had been dedicated to the poor and oppressed. Ironically, the Black Diaries were to end up while unseen, only convincing people more of his virtue.

That extreme version of faith had its origin in the peculiar combination of myth and religiosity which was to revolutionise Ireland. The Catholic nation, numerically devastated by famine, but strengthened by a vastly extended land ownership and a modernisation that had required seeing off the Gaelic language, was, in 1916, seriously out of step with its power potential. The English-speaking Catholic majority in the south had now been denied achievable Home Rule in their area for two generations. And they acted in a revolutionary manner from 1916 on, easily obtaining the Free State. The Protestant ruling caste was seen off having been in retreat for nearly a century.

Casement however presented both a problem and a challenge. As part of that sacrifice, and singled out to be judicially executed – hanged, not shot, months after the other leaders faced their firing squads or were reprieved – his death hurt Ireland and his leadership friends. As that new elite took power, his role was amplified and it could be seen how critical he had been for a number of reasons, not least his involvement in the founding of the Irish Volunteers and their initial arming, but also in his laying out of a foreign policy and *raison d’être* for the new state. But he was not just a party to the founding of the state, he was himself a saintly martyred figure, a humanitarian who sacrificed himself for others, both in Ireland and beyond. It was not and could not be conceivable to believers that he was a moral degenerate guilty of sex crimes

that were once so awful Christians could not name them; “*Inter Christianos non nominandum*”, as Sir Robert Peel stated when introducing the Offences Against the Person Bill in 1828. Consequently the unseen diaries were specious and could only have been concocted – another crime to lay at England’s door. No matter the evidence, that will remain the view of a critical number of old believers. They must not contemplate anything else or their faith dies; nor can they ever be convinced to let up their campaign. And they are joined by new recruits from abroad.

Even if Casement was homosexual, several hurdles remain for Irish nationalists. He often did it with young teenage boys (see appendices below for relevant diary extracts), frequently out of doors and also wrote down the details. These issues, however need not be addressed, indeed can be avoided, if the forgery question stays centre stage. Just as is the case with a fellow Irishman and Protestant nationalist, Oscar Wilde whose penchant for young rent boys would land him in gaol then and could today, the prosecution itself became the issue, not the crime.

Casement, the Irish separatist ideologue, was more important than Casement, the British government’s humanitarian trouble shooter. He nurtured (in the early years), financed, and armed (twice) those Irish Volunteers who went out in 1916. But his diaries also give an amazing, almost unique, insight into a homosexual life lived hard and largely well over 100 years ago – gay history, in other words, not just something for antagonists to deny and redact.

The extensive articles by Angus Mitchell in Notre Dame University’s *Field Day Review* (2012) revive much of the debate. He had been largely silent since 2000 when, as he writes, “acting on the advice of several senior Irish academics I had decided to remove myself from the [diary] controversy rather than engage with every new polemical development”. This self-denying ordinance came shortly after he reviewed my book in a highly dismissive manner, describing it as a “queer reading [...] serving the cause of gay unionism” (2012, 110). Mitchell is consumed by a mammoth sense of what Italians call *dietrologia* – that what matters is under the surface. So no government employee and no academic apparently does anything except consciously yet secretly, to serve the interests of their masters. This is how he can seriously suggest the shadowy forces around British Intelligence and in key universities didn’t just forge the diaries in 1916 but worked at them for a further “43 years to perfect the look” (120) until they were suitable to be made available in the Public Record Office in 1959! The only problem is that no written trace of this colossal operation has survived or ever surfaced.

We are first required to believe that one or more forgers went to Naval Intelligence in 1916 and reported in as highly experienced, open homosexuals ready to do their duty for King and Country (against a fellow gay) by writing and researching more than a thousand diary entries. These had to detail a great deal of rampant sexual activity, alongside innumerable characters, many

famous, plus a host of daily incidents and meetings, mostly in South America, not to mention the weather on particular days over a decade.

Angus Mitchell wrote earlier:

In the run of recent work analysing the interface between sexuality, empire, race and gender, the Black Diaries have been treated with some level of caution and circumspection. Casement's 'gay' status has been invoked more often as a symbol of Irish 'modernity', or as a means of humiliating intolerant attitudes amongst Irish nationalists, than as a blueprint for 'gay' lifestyles [...] To argue, therefore, that the diaries are essentially homophobic may be unfashionable, but it is not unreasonable. They impose various homophobic stereotypes of the 'diseased mind' type and situate sexual difference in a marginal and alienated world bereft of either love or sympathy. Equally problematic is the treatment of the willing 'native' as silent and willing victim of the diarist's predatory instincts. (2009a)

In the *Field Day Review* (2012) he writes at length, running over and annotating the whole diaries' controversy (and Casement's time in Germany). Throughout he acts like a defence lawyer not an historian, omission being his mode of avoiding key evidence. The piece was precursor to the big international conference on Casement in Tralee in October 2013 run by Notre Dame University. He points out that my book initially

[...] gained academic approval, following a launch by Professor Lord Bew of Queen's University, Belfast. This somewhat eccentric publication which included extensive passages from all the disputed diaries, along with fresh interpolations, and thoughtful omissions amounted to little more than an updated and camped-up version of the 1959 edition², with a few original insights into Casement's early years in Antrim. Dudgeon upheld the diaries as the heart and soul of Casement's biography³ and used them provocatively as a means of destabilising (or queering) the martial spirit of Northern Irish Protestant nationalism and representing it as some deviant youth movement. The book baffled academics, and was as unashamedly political as it was scholastically unsound. (2012, 110)

This deviancy refers to The Neophytes, a pre-Boy Scout group of young intellectuals formed by Francis Bigger that included the musician Herbert Hughes who wrote the memorable songs *My Lagan Love* (1904) and *She Moves Through the Fair* (1909). Other in his circle included the poet Joseph Campbell who wrote the lyrics for the latter song and the singer Cathal O'Byrne, both Republican activists. Mitchell obligingly mentioned that,

The most searing critique of Dudgeon's book appeared in the ACIS *Irish Literary Review Supplement* (March 2004). The reviewer Cólín Owen [...] found disturbing contradictions with a Casement who on one hand was excoriating Belgians, British and Peruvians for colonial looting while, on the other, taking advantage of local men and boys. In Owens view the Diaries condemn Casement as a pioneer of sex tourism. He also dismisses the diaries as 'repetitive, dull, almost entirely without originality [...] boring, tasteless, pathetic, pathological' [...] Owens also criticised Dudgeon's publication for 'reinforcing the very stereotypes of the gay lifestyle what has been with

us for so long: of the emotionally unstable, predatory, sadomasochistic, and promiscuous homosexual'. More problematically he condemned Dudgeon for throwing 'a mantle of righteousness over pederasty and the sexual abuse of minors'. (2012, 110)

I actually replied to Owens at the time, saying:

I am not a Catholic and am an ethnic, not a religious, (Ulster) Protestant, so I did not concern myself with my subject's spiritual hopes as C oil n would wish. It was also not possible for me, in the case of Casement's youthful sexual partners, to 'obtain records of the damage done to their lives, their psyches or their souls.' [...] If they had been available, I would have quoted them but I suspect the damage, in most cases, was negligible or non-existent. (2004)

Most, as stated, were urbanised, consenting, indeed enthusiastic, young men. Later in *History Ireland*, Mitchell wrote that the then phase

of the Casement controversy unleashed the argument that Dudgeon has yet to either recognise or address: the separation of the issue of sexuality from the textual. In case he still hasn't yet grasped the subtleties of the position, let me remind him once more. The argument is no longer about Casement's status as a homosexual. (2009b, 12)

None the less he is again, and still, querying the evidence of his homosexual status. Casement's most recent biographer, S emas   S och ain, wrote: "When old 'discrepancies' or 'contradictions' have been found to be no longer sustainable, the forgery school has continued to reinvent itself by discovering new ones" (2008, 493). He also said that the few contradictions and inconsistencies within the diaries are paradoxically a sign of authenticity, when he dealt in an appendix with the small number that Mitchell has ever drawn attention to.

Mitchell has described me as homophobic. Another (gay) writer also described my book as prurient. I argued I was, to some degree, trying to put the sex back into homosexual. Some critics suggest I may be using Casement's sexuality against his causes, thereby trying to diminish them, much like those progressives and nationalists who taunt Orangemen with the doubtful story that King William was gay⁴. These charges are taken seriously: it may be true that I have provocatively told some people they can't have a hero who they also say is a gay villain (if the diarist), and if that is what they believe, and their hero is proved gay in their eye (which is unlikely given the belief aspect) so be it. It is their choice to risk diminishing their cause, be it Republicanism or an old-fashioned Catholicism with a lay martyr-saint, should it be proved that Casement was the diarist, someone they have labelled an exploiting sexual monster.

Mario Vargas Llosa is described as "a recognised master story teller" (2012, 117) and he truly is, particularly in his masterpiece novel *La fiesta del chivo* (2000; *Feast of the Goat*, 2001) about the assassination of Generalissimo Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. But Mitchell seems to feel betrayed and turns on the

master, pointing up the novel's poor reviews outside Spain. Vargas Llosa, he says sadly, offered "some passing credence to the forgery theory" but "the Casement described is not merely sexually deviant but prone to bouts of psychosis and delusional dreaming" (2012, 119). In truth, he got to the writer first and neutered a good novel. Few other Casement authors escape harsh treatment in the piece.

It is a false notion to think the authenticity question was resolved by the forensic tests arranged with support and funding from the Irish government by RTE and the BBC. It is impossible for evidence to prove to such people that Casement wrote the diaries, or wrote the sexual parts of the diaries, or, if he wrote them, meant what he wrote, and if he did mean what he had written, never did what he said he did. It is impossible to prove a negative but the forgery theorists have a jolly good try, now ably aided by Derridean deconstructionism.

Vargas Llosa won the Nobel Prize for Literature just months before he published his novel. There could be no more prestigious writer, with a number of superb novels under his belt, to take on the task of Casement. Not an easy subject, but made more difficult as his homosexual life was almost entirely out of sight and disconnected from his career and political work. The story is difficult to integrate in any art form, film, TV programme, or novel. His life is so complex and dramatic as to make a single product impossible, although Vargas Llosa tried. The exhaustive biography by Séamas Ó Síocháin of National University of Ireland, Maynooth, remains the best and most definitive attempt to date.

My book, diaries aside, concentrated on only three parts: his family and background in Antrim, his early life mostly spent in England in genteel poverty – recently digitised newspaper reports of Roger and his brother Tom, being convicted of stealing in a London court reveal more of his dysfunctional childhood – and his Irish political life. I would argue psychologically that his outlook was deeply shaped by being an ersatz Irishman brought up in England. His Ulster Protestant family back in Ballymena and Ballycastle provided a degree of financial assistance but would not go the extra mile and put the bright boy through university, rather obliging him to leave school at 16 and migrate to his uncle's shipping world in Liverpool to make a living.

Vargas Llosa has adopted the view of some diary forgery theorists that the sexual passages in the Black Diaries were largely a work of fantasy. This colours his whole novel and makes Casement out to be more saintly than anything else. Someone riven with guilt about his activities as well as a sexual incompetent. He has even spoken of the diaries "with all their noxious obscenities" (2012, 399). It only occurred to me while researching and writing this article, that Vargas Llosa had been so influenced by Angus Mitchell that he had adopted a postmodern approach to Casement and his sex life. But the clues were visible all along. Alice Stopford Green, the historian who, along with her relatives, colonised Irish Secretary, Augustine Birrell and his deputy Sir Matthew Nathan, and whose biography Mitchell is presently researching, is given undue prominence in the novel, in a clunky fashion, and way beyond

her role. She was always “Mrs Green” to him. Others noted just how odd and tedious the repeated mentions of her were. Obviously a woman was needed, over and above Casement’s mother, Anne Jephson⁵, who in real life probably failed her children (if so, ably assisted by a feckless and over-opinionated father), but others were better choices like Gertrude Parry, his loving cousin, portrayed as “knowing” by Patrick Mason in his recent Radio Éireann play (2012). Yet Mrs Green was given pre-eminence.

Carol Taaffe in the *Dublin Review of Books* (2012) was canny enough to say the novel “reads like a tedious history primer [...] that it is a means of exculpating Casement for the diaries’ contents [...] an approach that hints – in a faintly postmodern fashion – at the unreliability of documents, the pitfalls of interpretation and the inherent falsity of historical narratives”.

Roy Foster, described by Mitchell as “the doyen of the Irish revisionist agenda” (2012, 114), said in his *Times* review that the novel was “wooden, creaky and unrelievedly dull”, also pointing out that Alice Stopford Green is introduced “with the same information in almost the same words on three occasions within 80 pages” (2012). Since Foster had previously reviewed (2008) Séamas Ó Síocháin’s definitive biography, as had this author (2008), Mitchell kindly added in the *Field Day Review*:

Both O Síocháin and Foster made clear their reliance and support for the work of Jeff Dudgeon, whose perplexing edition of the Black Diaries did much to reinstate belief in their authenticity, at a moment when their legitimacy was starting to collapse under the weight of unsustainable internal contradictions. (2012, 115)⁶

I know Vargas Llosa bought my book and listened intently to what I told him on our couple of days together in Belfast and Co. Antrim, but was aware he had already written much of the novel in his mind, if not on paper, before he read it or indeed saw me. His first and primary influence seems indeed to have been Mitchell who sewed the seed in his head that there was great doubt in Ireland about the authenticity of the diaries and perhaps, even if Casement wrote them, he could never have lived them.

The *Irish Times* reviewer, Alison Ribeiro de Menezes (2012), spotted that Vargas Llosa’s “reiteration of the heroic nationalist vision of the 1916 rebels [was] curious given the author’s strident criticism of nationalism in other writings”. He is a noted anglophile but perhaps where Spain and its empire is concerned, England’s piratical role is not appreciated. (Vargas Llosa is actually a Peruvian, very much of the white Criollo caste and brought up in Bolivia by his mother and her family). She also quotes him saying, “Casement wrote the famous diaries but did not live them, at least not integrally, there is in them a good deal of exaggeration and fiction” (2012, 399).

Another reading of Vargas Llosa is that he is a straight guy, and one brought up in the 1940s with a strong sense of his mother. Square even in 1960s terms. His family background is itself interesting and has occasional whiffs of Case-

ment. He seems to transfer some of it to Roger who in the novel is for ever dreaming about his mother and suggesting that had she lived he would have gone on to a better job, and indeed a wife and family. None of this seems to have concerned Casement in the slightest and of course was never going to happen if one believes that sexual orientation for most gay men is set in perhaps the first four years of life and that an influential aspect to homosexuality is desynchronisation from standard surroundings as happened in his case. But that may be an unfashionable analysis and certainly another matter.

Colm Tóibín in the *London Review of Books* wrote:

Vargas Llosa's efforts to evoke Casement's childhood in Ireland are at the sugary end of historical novel writing. There are moments where it is hard not to feel that Jean Plaidy and Georgette Heyer had a hand in the book's creation. [e.g.] The young Casement at Galgorm Castle 'heard for the first time the epic battles of Irish mythology. The castle of black stone, with its fortified towers, coats of arms, chimneys, and cathedral-like façade, had been built in the 17th century by Alexander Colville, a theologian with an ill-favoured face – according to his portrait in the foyer – who, they said in Ballymena, had made a pact with the devil, and whose ghost walked the castle. On certain moonlit nights, a trembling Roger dared to search for him in passageways and empty rooms but never found him'. (2012, 12)

I have to say my heart sank when the novelist whom I took to Galgorm in Ballymena, saw the Colville portrait and homed in on it at speed. We heard the story from Christopher Brooke who was showing us his decaying castle. He told us of the BBC filming an episode of their *Ghost Busters* programme there. I later heard that the mysterious sounds being investigated had been traced to a Ballymena taxi firm's radio.

Vargas Llosa depicts a sexual Casement on only a small number of occasions and none convince. Indeed that below from the longest episode is exceptionally clumsy and I hope badly translated. Given that Casement does not record having sex with natives, let alone native boys, as opposed to urban or Europeanised individuals, it goes against the man in the diaries. However one can see the reason for Mitchell's horror as it highlights and makes concrete a paedophile, or more accurately pederastic aspect to Casement.

Forgery theorists, Mitchell and Martin Mansergh in particular, can be hoist with their own petards as they claim the diarist was "a psychopathic predator" and a "pederastic exploiter" (quoted in Dudgeon 2002, 515), or someone who "had absolutely no conscience in regard to his own sexual life" (Mansergh 2005, 193). It is one thing to argue forgery but another to regard the diarist as a sexual monster; indeed it is quite perilous if that person is proven to be one and the same man whom Dr Mansergh has also stated it was "legitimate to co-opt him as a forerunner of Ireland's independent foreign policy" (2005, 192). Which is not to say Casement did not on occasions groom teenagers. Unsurprisingly, Mansergh has not endorsed the results of

the forensic tests on the diaries (encouraged by his own government) which in 2001 found them to be written by Casement.

The sexual encounters are characterised by those Vargas Llosa themes, where same sex sex is concerned, of shame followed by thoughts about mother and sadness over the lack of a family life (2010, 264-265), while this (African) event seems also to be more a description of inter-adolescent activity than anything else:

Two young Bakongos were swimming there naked as he was [...] One of the two boys was very beautiful, He had a long blue-black well-proportioned body, deep eyes with a lively light in them, and he moved in the water like a fish... Roger feeling a kind of fever swam towards them... He felt shame, discomfort, and at the same time unlimited joy [...] then Roger felt someone else's hands searching out his belly, touching and caressing his sex, which had been erect for a while [...] his body embracing the boy's whose stiff penis he could also feel rubbing against his legs and belly. It was the first time Roger made love, if he could call it making love when he became excited and ejaculated in the water against the body of the boy who masturbated him and undoubtedly also ejaculated, though Roger didn't notice that [...] What shame he felt afterwards. (247-248)

Compare this with Casement's nostalgic and cheerful diarying (with my commentary), on 10 May 1911 when he wrote of returning to his home town:

Glorious day. May day. Season surpassing! ... To Ballymena and back 4/-... Millar [his Belfast boyfriend] Postages 6d. Telegrams 8d... To B'mena demesne 3d. Beggar 3d. To Ballymena to Comptons. [his tailors] Very hot indeed. To old Turnpool by Braid and Devenagh Burn of Nov. 1877 !!! Rippling in brown and swift, and there too when I plunged across in Mch 1879! Glorious boys of Erin, big and fair. [This entry is very revealing as Casement is reminded of events and boys, out swimming in 1877, when he was thirteen, and later in 1879, when fourteen. It seems he was observing other males sexually as a young teenager and that his desires and sexual orientation were already fixed. It also appears he was not, even at that early stage, riven by guilt. This (deep) turnpool in the Braid river is on the Galgorm Castle demesne, the home of the Young family where the boy Casement often stayed]. (Dudgeon 2002, 280)

In conclusion, Casement was plainly not sexless nor has the cult gone away. It continues and is now cloaked in an anti-revisionist form. Nor should it go away, as Mario Vargas Llosa said: "The diary controversy did not end. Probably it will go on for a long time. Which isn't a bad thing. It's not a bad thing that a climate of uncertainty hovers over Casement, as proof that it is impossible to know definitively a human being" (2012, 399).

However it has to be said Casement gives us more information than most to make a good assessment. Perhaps because I know his flaws and failings and share only a number of his enthusiasms – but much of his background – I can't find my way into his heart. I see no real warmth in his character except his capacity for pity and love of nature, and wonder if he was not overly self-regarding and

obsessive, shallow despite his intellectual strengths, or in Conrad's much quoted words, "a man properly speaking of no mind... all emotion"⁷ (The New York Public Library, John Quinn Papers, Conrad's letter to Quinn, 24 May 1916).

His ability to run a busy gay life effectively and without guilt in the 19th and early 20th century does remain a remarkable achievement. His lack of curiosity about the matter given his radical and enquiring mind equally remarkable.

Notes

¹ Senator Roger McHugh, an academic and active Republican, wrote *Dublin 1916*, Arlington Books, London 1966, which carries extracts from Casement's German diary. He worked assiduously to prove the diaries were not Casement's rather the work of a degenerate obtaining the opinion of a famous Belfast psychiatrist, Pearse O'Malley, to confirm this.

² That Olympia Press edition published in Paris by Maurice Girodias was followed by Roger Sawyer with the 1910 Putumayo report and black diary, Ó Síocháin with the 1903 Congo report and black diary, and Mitchell's 1910 'Amazon Journal' or white diary and 1911 correspondence (but no Black Diaries).

³ Exactly not. I gave equal space to his family and upbringing and his role in Irish and Ulster politics, which aspect Angus Mitchell is unwilling or incapable of engaging with. My book's title tells it precisely: *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries – With a Study of his Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life*.

⁴ Evidence, I think, against, comes when William Bentinck (1st Earl of Portland) wrote to William III in 1697 saying "the kindness which your Majesty has for a young man, and the way in which you seem to authorise his liberties... make the world say things I am ashamed to hear." This, he added was "tarnishing a reputation which has never before been subject to such accusations." The King replied, "It seems to me very extraordinary that it should be impossible to have esteem and regard for a young man without it being criminal" (Robb 1966, 399).

⁵ Contrary to most writers' belief, Casement's mother was an (Anglican) Protestant from Portland Street, Dublin who, sometime after her marriage, converted to Roman Catholicism. Her son shared her view of the Church of Ireland as cold and stony.

⁶ One significant internal contradiction has been raised and that concerns Casement describing himself as a celibate. The meaning of the word is actually either sexually chaste or unmarried. Casement was certainly the latter.

⁷ Joseph Conrad writing to John Quinn: "He was a good companion but already in Africa I judged that he was a man, properly speaking, of no mind at all. I don't mean stupid. I mean that he was all emotion. By emotional force (Congo report, Putumayo – etc) he made his way, and sheer emotionalism has undone him. A creature of sheer temperament – a truly tragic personality, all but the greatness of which he had not a trace. Only vanity. But in the Congo it was not visible yet" (The New York Public Library, John Quinn Papers, Conrad's letter to Quinn, 24 May 1916).

⁸ Mrs Green may have been a comrade of Casement but she could be quite acid in her attitude to him. In 1913, she is to be found, after listening to "a particularly vehement Irish tirade," once he had left, exclaiming "Sometimes when I listen to that man I feel I never want to hear the subject of Ireland mentioned again" (McDowell 1967, 94).

⁹ I would dispute just one part of Tóibín's view, and that concerns the erotic effect of the diary entries. Given the recognised difficulty in good sex writing, this diarist, who was plainly not writing with a view to publication, by the very terse and direct nature of the words, is successful where others who try are not.

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Appendices I – V

- I. 1911 Cash Ledger 29 August – 4 September
- II. 1911 Black Diary samples
- III. “Dream of the Celt” – extracts from reviews and interviews with its author
- IV. Description of Casement as demi-god

I. *Extract from the 1911 Cash Ledger for 29 August – 4 September telling of Teddy Biddy [Teddy (Edward Kay) Biddy, according to recently available US ship passenger lists on the internet, was 13 or 14 years old in 1908 when Casement met him in Barbados, and 16 or 17 during the 1911 visit], with this author’s commentary in square brackets (below are the same dates in the Black Diary telling of Stanley Weeks, an older boy, in Barbados).*

Tuesday 29th August At Barbados. At Sea View Hotel... Boy to bathe 6d. [in margin] X 6d. ...2 boys to swim today. Expect Teddy at 4. At 4 he has not come so I fear he is away in St. Vincent.

Boys R. and O. for spending 3.0.

Teddy came, met on bicycle and back to room and dinner. After dinner to room and he looked and looked. I saw his big huge and felt mine and he looked all the time and back on bicycle... Teddy to come tomorrow at 5 to bath. Then will see and feel. [This day’s entry is marked on the government’s typed copy with a forest of crosses. Teddy Biddy, a previous acquaintance, must have been summoned immediately on arrival. The youth has a never-before noticed, or revealed history, dating three years back to the two month convalescence Casement spent, in 1908, in Barbados, when suffering terrible gastritis. In another

cash ledger now in the NLI, a *Cyclopean Exercise Book*, inscribed “Notes at Barbadoes” he merited his own entry headed “Teddy a/c.” Casement carefully recorded eight different items in it amounting to “1.3.0”. They included “4.2” for a “Ticket” which from the price of four shillings for his own “Bath Ticket” suggests it too was a season entry to a swimming pool. This item is compelling, corroborative evidence of the authenticity of the Black Diaries].

Wednesday 30 August To Hastings Bath 7.50 and several and then nice fair haired boy, blue pants and thick and stiff. To bath together 11.30. Bath 3 Cg'ttes 1/-. Bath (11.30) 5d. He then glorious form and limbs and it... Teddy and “Budds” at 5.30. Latter lovely and huge one too. Only 11 years old on 17th July. Bath Budds present 5/-...

Seen to-day	1 oldish man huge one
	2 clergyman small
	3 lovely youth thick fine one
	4 big youth nice clean one
	5 lover, only top stiff and lovely
	6 Budds beauty

[The ten days on board ship crossing the Atlantic were followed, as on other occasions, by an explosion of sexual activity with frequent visits to a local seaside park, Hastings Rocks, to scrutinise boys – some of them disturbingly young, if apparently sexually mature].

Thursday 31 August To Hastings Bath 5d, clergyman there told me was father of beauty. Returned 11 and beauty came glorious limbs but did not show it alas I love him...Walked to Father Smith and the Convent and then to Club.

September 1911 Begins at Barbados in Seaview Hotel. Friday September 1st. My 47th Birthday!

To Bath at Hastings to meet Beauty for last time. Bath 5d. His name is Hughes. Born March 16. (Did not come) Stamps 1/- Cg'ttes 1/10 Sweets 2/9. 5 7 Trams 8d. – Lunch with Crawford. Then shortly Meztise boy of 16 or 17 in blue at Church Sq. Longed for & talked to & asked to come to bath Sunday & was most willing. The Biddys at 6. Teddy looking often – They went 6.40. [The reference to “The Biddys” is explained by inspection of the ledger’s inside cover. Alongside addresses for other sexual partners such as “Jean of Algiers” and “Amron Kali” is one for “Master E.K. Bidy”. These Biddys were a local family he had befriended, possibly to gain access to Teddy, who when met three years earlier in 1908 must hardly have been pubescent.

From Casement's scornful remark, the Biddys appear to be poor whites]. To Hastings Rocks & then to town. Club 1/-. Darkie guide 1/-. Trams 2d. 2 2 £0 8 2 [From recently available Ellis Island records on the internet it seems the Biddys (mother and children) migrated in June 1912 to Hartford, Connecticut. Edward Kay Bidy was then 16].

Saturday 2 Sept. 1911

Trams 6d. Paper 1d. Cgttes 3/8 Club waiter 4/- Cotton wool 1/. Beads for Nina 3/-.

Passage to Pará by Bonif	16.13.4
X St. John's poor white boys X	6.10
Clothes for Ricudo and Omarino	1.17.6
...Coleridge King. [a line with an X connects his name to the above "poor white boys"].	

£23. 9. 2

6.10

23.16. 0 X Coleridge King [37th sex costs accumulation].

Sunday 3 Sept 1911 Spent in Barbados...Still at Barbados. "Boniface" not in during night. Hair cut 1/6 Cocktail 6d. Bathed at Light House. Fine big Darkie 1/-. Trams 6d. Club 1/6. Saw several beauties...

Monday 4 Sept Out to Light House & saw a nice boy. Asked him to bath & he came on bone. Stanley Weeks 20. Stripped. Huge one – circumcised – swelled & hung 9" quite & wanted it awfully – asked come at 11.30. Boniface arr. & out at 12 & Stanley again & wanted it fearfully. His stiff & mine stiff. Then had to leave. Farewell to Stanley!

I.I Extract with this author's commentary in square brackets from the Black Diary 29 August – 4 September (and 9th) telling of Stanley Weeks (above the same dates in the 1911 Cash Ledger and Teddy Bidy).

29 TUESDAY In Barbados. Wrote Spicer about O'Donnell.

30 WEDNESDAY Do.

31 THURSDAY Called at Ursuline Convent on nuns and Father Smith.

SEPTEMBER

1 FRIDAY My Birthday 47 today. Nina is over 55! At Barbados. The Biddys came at 6. Very sick at sight of them. They are beggars like all here.

2 SATURDAY In Barbados. Tried to get Dudley Stanson by telephone from Bathsheba. Poor boy could hear nothing of him. Saw Coleridge King & the other poor white boys.

3 SUNDAY Bathed & read novels.

4 MONDAY [At top of page:] 4 Sept. Met Stanley Weeks at Barbados. Came back from Trinidad by "Voltavia" on 28 August & is looking for work at the electric. 20 years old. Out at 8.30. Met Coleridge King & took his a/c at Mrs Seon's. [She ran the Sea View Hotel in Hastings. Her letterhead read "Proprietress Mrs I. Seon. Cuisine properly attended to. A well stocked Bar."] Gave him 5/-. [in margin, twice: X 5]. Then to Bath & met Stanley Weeks 20 years. Has certificate from Trinidad Electrical concern – trying to get work here at the Electrical. Bathed together first 9 a.m. Huge one & then 12.45 – Huger still. Hung down curved & swollen & wanted awfully. Poor boy. Wished I had taken him. Will try & get him to Iquitos. Was waiter once in a B'bados Hotel. Two scars on face from fall. One on thigh too – set off in Boniface for Pará with Ricudo & Omarino.

[...] 9 SATURDAY Steaming in Amazon water some time now. Since 7th really – but did not see the line of division. Thinking much of poor young Stanley Weeks at Bridgetown and his beautiful specimen and his gladness in showing it and youth and joy. His glorious limb of Antinous! [The Emperor Hadrian's much sculpted boyfriend Antinous drowned in 120 AD while swimming in the Nile at Alexandria].

II. 1911 *Black Diary samples, terse or extended, which tell of Casement's cruising (and musing), his sexual enthusiasms and in particular his seduction in Iquitos of one José.*

[5 March 1911 in Dublin]: "How"? 2/6 X. Trams 1/- "How"? 2/6 X 3.6 Enormous 19 - about 7" and 4" thick. X [...] Supper at Jury's [...] Enormous Dublin under 19. Very fair, thin leg knickers & coat, white scarf. Blue eyes & huge huge stiff, long & thick - a limb.

[11 May 1911 in Belfast]: Glorious day [...] Swimming bath 3d [...] Saw the man, a glorious type get in Belfast. Fair hair and blue eyes and tall strong, well dressed at [Castle] "Junction." He looked and smiled and felt again and again. To Swimming Bath and four Beauties [...] Harry 10/- X [...] at Northern Railway Company.

[15 September 1911 in Pará, Brazil]: Bad headache Did not go out to João at 7 a.m. as was too seedy. Poor boy – will try & see him later. To Val de Caens at 10.30 to lunch with Harveys and then they brought me back in Lotus. Jigsaw at 7 to 8 p.m. with Ricudo & Dickey. Then out to Palace Square & at once

entered Kiosque & huge long one (about 7½” lying), tried to get me. Man of 27 or 28, like Barber wanted awfully. Saw “*Passear*” too, after at 8.30, so left to B. Campos – Whisky – None & then Paz none & Nazareth (twice) none & Theatre Square & round & round several times. None at all. Saw caboclo Indian at Paz who looked lovely but still at 12 none after another wait at Palace Square.

[17 September 1911 in Pará, Brazil]: To Sacramento with Andrews at 9 after many types & there after 6 for it then to zoo – & Huge ones on several & so home at 4.45. to beer & then my diary. In evg after rest, out at 7 to Palace Square & almost at once a beautiful moço in white looked & entered Kiosque. Met outside & invited to *passear* and away we went. Felt in darkness big head – & then to B. Campos & on by Souza tram to Marco where in dark travessa [lane] he stripped almost & went in furiously – awfully hard thrusts & turns & kisses too & biting on ears & neck. Never more force shown. From Rio. Returned 10 changed & out till 11.30. Huge one in café on moço.

[On blotter:] X “Rio” entered huge thrust.

[18 September 1911 in Pará, Brazil]: I waited for two trams to pass and then walked along and was looking back at a lovely caboclo sailor when a moço hurried over and held out his hand and it was this boy. He had followed – at once took my arm and squeezed and led away side – and arranged meet at Nazareth Square at 8. To Dickey, ill, and then to Nazareth & at 8.15 he came and at once led me off. Felt, huge – thick as wrist – only 17 or 18. From Lisbon. 4 years in Pará. Walked to Sao Braz he squeezing hand and wrist all time and then “*assenta!*” [sat down] on grass in dark lane he admitted his wish at once and so I took it. First spittle but so big could not get in – then glycerine honey and in it went with huge thrust and he sunk on me and worked hard.

[25 November 1911 in Iquitos, Peru]: José came at 8.10 – sat down beside me with coat off and we started Spanish exercises – my hand on “muscles” and I felt it often. Then got him to stand against wall and to measure, and it was up, and I put my hand on it often and felt it swelling and stiff. He wanted awfully – blushing and loving and gleaming eyes. Sitting again – it up huge and I played with it. (quoted in Dudgeon 2002)

III. ‘*Dream of the Celt*’ – extracts from reviews and interviews with its author

Colm Tóibín in the *London Review of Books* (2012):

Ireland, in the meantime, remains on Casement’s mind. This is partly thanks to the Irish historian Alice Stopford Green, who is the occasion of one of the worst sentences [...] in the entire novel: ‘In those early months of 1904, Alice Stopford Green⁸ was his friend, his teacher, the woman who introduced him to an ancient

past where history, myth, and legend – reality, religion, and fiction – blended together to create the tradition of a people who continued to maintain, in spite of the denationalising drive of the Empire, their language, their way of being, their customs, something which any Irish man or woman, Protestant or Catholic, believer or doubter, liberal or conservative, had to feel proud and obliged to defend’.

Were the diary entries written about things that didn’t happen, but belonged instead in the realm of the wishful, then they would surely have a much greater erotic charge⁹ than the scribbled notes that Casement wrote. Most of the entries merely record the transaction, sometimes with a reference to the size of the companion’s penis, the amount of money paid and the location where the sex took place. Sometimes there is another cryptic comment; occasionally an entry is entirely cryptic. Vargas Llosa’s question in his epilogue about the possibility of these notes having been ‘falsified’ is hardly worth asking. O Síocháin, having considered all the evidence, concludes that ‘the various pieces of evidence, positive and negative, suggest that the Black Diaries are the work of Roger Casement’ and could not have been forged.

John Banville in the *New York Review of Books* (2012):

In pursuit of this goal, the contents of secret diaries he had kept in the Congo and in Peru, detailing promiscuous sexual activity with young native men, which had been discovered in Casement’s London flat after his arrest, were circulated widely among the clubs and pubs of London, causing general shock and outrage. For many years Irish republicans and others regarded the so-called Black Diaries as forgeries concocted by British intelligence to destroy Casement’s reputation and ensure there would be no commutation of the death sentence that had been passed on him. It has since been shown that the diaries were not forged, although that is not to say that what is contained in them is entirely factual.

Mario Vargas Llosa seems to regard the sexual adventures recorded in the diaries as for the most part fantastical, as romantic daydreams to aid in masturbation, or as wishful attempts at self-consolation. There is little doubt, however, that Casement was an active homosexual; whether he was criminally culpable in his exploitation of the boys and young man whom he paid to engage in sex with him is for the reader, and the historian, to decide. These sordid matters, even when they were considered the result of mischief-making by perfidious Albion, cast a shadow over Casement’s memory among Irish nationalists and made them wary of admitting him into what the historian Tim Pat Coogan used drily to refer to as the ‘pantehnicon of Irish heroes’.

David Gallagher in the *Times Literary Supplement* (2010):

Vargas Llosa holds – it is, he believes, his ‘right as a novelist’ to do so – that the diaries were written by Casement, but that he did not do all that he

described in them; he was promiscuous, and had a compulsive need to pick up young men, though not with the frequency recorded in the diaries. So Vargas Llosa's Casement sometimes records a recent sexual exploit, and sometimes a fantasy of what might have taken place. We see him trying to fight his compulsions, feeling disgust after a night out and embarking on long periods of abstinence. But we also see him happy when the sight of some athletic young man re-awakens his yearning. These are moments when Vargas Llosa is at his best; sexual duplicity is a recurring subject in his work.

Vargas Llosa comes to his conclusion about the Black Diaries slowly. At first, his Casement is ambivalent about them. When asked about them by his prison visitors, he changes the subject or claims he does not know what they are talking about. He thanks Fr Casey for not asking about 'those filthy things which, apparently, they are saying about me.' He tells the priest that he will not heed Cardinal Bourne's outrageous request that, before he becomes a Catholic, he should repent of all those 'vile things the press is accusing me of.' But we also see Casement reminiscing – alone in his prison cell – about his first homosexual awakenings; how in Africa he felt free of the constraints of Victorian society; how that boy in Boma, with whom he went fishing, suddenly closed up on him. 'Shutting his eyes, he tried to resurrect that scene of so many years ago: the surprise, the indescribable excitement . . . ' Little by little, over the course of the novel, we see Casement picking up more and more boys. Towards the end, he falls in love with Eivind Adler Christensen, a Norwegian he picks up in New York in 1914, who travels with him to Germany. Christiansen [sic] was later to denounce him to the British – one instance where sex does real damage to Casement. Despite the betrayal, Vargas Llosa's Casement has erotic dreams about Christensen at Pentonville.

Extract from Eileen Battersby interview with Mario Vargas Llosa (2012):

The Casement who emerges in *The Dream of the Celt* echoes Parnell and Wilde. Vargas Llosa looks thoughtful at the mention of Wilde and admits he has not considered the parallels. The explicit homosexual content of his personal diaries effectively destroyed Casement. Although there had been suggestions that they were forgeries, Vargas Llosa feels Casement did write them. But I believe that they belonged to a fantasy life, he imagined these happenings, but he didn't live them. I see him as a lonely person, very gentle, too shy to have acted in such a brutal way.

Extract from Angus Mitchell (AM) interview with Mario Vargas Llosa (MVL) (2009b):

AM: The question of sexuality has played a disproportionate role in the discussion on Casement. Would it be wrong to guess that the so-called Black

Diaries are central to the shaping of your own historical novel? In a recent interview in *The Guardian* you were quoted as saying that “There is a great debate about his [Casement’s] homosexuality and paedophilia that has never been resolved and probably never will be”.

MVL: Let me correct this a little bit. I don’t think that there is a possible doubt about Roger Casement’s homosexuality. I think he was a homosexual, but what I think is still, particularly after reading what you have done in *The Amazon Journal*, that it is still possible to discuss the authenticity of the Black Diaries. You give very strong perceptions of all the contradictions between the Black Diaries and the report. But I think he was a homosexual. This is another very dramatic, tragic aspect of his life if you place homosexuality in the context of the prejudices and persecution of homosexuals.

AM: I would say that the issue of authenticity is now more about the textual rather than the sexual.

MVL: That’s right, absolutely. Exactly. It is the textual which is controversial. It is very strange all these contradictions in very concrete facts in texts written almost simultaneously. I was in Oxford very recently with John Hemming and we were discussing this and he was saying “No, no, no the diaries are authentic. I assure you that they are authentic. There was no time for British Intelligence to fabricate them, there was no time”. But I answered: “How can you explain the inaccuracies in the Black Diaries if he was writing both things at the same time”. So I think this is something that can be discussed and still considered controversial. But not his homosexuality. The homosexuality was something which was another very personal element of the tragedy he lived all his life. No?

AM: Very interesting. A few years ago there was a brief exchange between two figures involved in the controversy about who could legitimately speak for Casement. The suggestion was put that only a gay man could really understand and speak for Casement. How would you respond to this point of view?

MVL: (Laughing) That is a terrible prejudice. If that was so a man couldn’t write about women or Peruvians couldn’t write about Europeans. No, no, I think literature is a demonstration of how this is all absolutely ridiculous prejudice. A writer can write about every type of human and character, because there is a common denominator which is more important behind the sexual orientation, the cultural tradition, the language, the races. No, I believe in the unity of the human kind, I think literature is the best demonstration of the universal experiences that can be understood and shared among people of very different extractions, very different identities and other levels of life including, of course, sex.

IV. *Descriptions of Casement as demi-god*

E.D. Morel: “I saw before me a man, my own height, very lithe and sinewy, chest thrown out, head held high – suggestive of one who had lived in the vast open spaces. Black hair and beard covering cheeks hollowed by the

tropical sun. Strongly marked features. A dark blue penetrating eye sunken in the socket. A long, lean, swarthy Vandyck type of face, graven with power and withal of great gentleness. An extraordinarily handsome and arresting face”.

Darrell Figgis [an Englishman living in Ireland who assisted in the first gun running episode and whose love life was to end in a messy court case and his own suicide]: “His face was in profile to me, his handsome head and noble outline cut out against the lattice-work of the curtain and the grey sky. His height seemed more than usually commanding, his black hair and beard longer than usual [...] as I spoke he left his place by the window and came forward towards me, his face alight with battle. ‘That’s talking’, he said [...] Language had wandered far from its meanings when one man could say to another that he was talking, when his appreciation and brevity betokened an end of talking”. (both quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, 144, 419)



Roger Casement in New York in 1890 aged 26 (Courtesy of Patrick Casement)



Mario Vargas Llosa and Jeffrey Dudgeon in Belfast in 2009 (Courtesy of Jeffrey Dudgeon)

An Ideal City. Kate O'Brien and Rome

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“We come to Rome less to see a real city than to verify an ideal one”
(Sean O’Faolain 1951, 132)

What was Kate O’Brien’s ideal of Rome and how did the eternal city influence her imagination? In this essay I want to provide a context for the Italian travel writings of the Irish novelist Kate O’Brien, published in the late 1950s and early 1960s in various journals and magazines and reproduced here. I suggest that context by arguing that Rome provided O’Brien with a vital source of inspiration and a new departure as a novelist at a time of some difficulty in her writing life. Born in Limerick in 1897, Kate O’Brien spent most of her writing career in London from the early 1930s onwards, publishing popular novels and working as a reviewer, broadcaster and travel writer. After a brief marriage, she lived the rest of her life in relationships with other women. Her novels, although accessible and widely read, also featured radical and subversive representations of lesbian and gay sexuality at a time of criminalisation and marginality for the sexually other. For this reason, two of her novels, *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *The Land of Spices* (1941), were banned in Ireland for obscenity. Despite this banning and subsequent negative public discussion of her work, O’Brien left London and returned to live in Ireland in the early 1950s. She settled in Roundstone, Co. Galway where she bought a large house and continued to write her novels and essays. However, by the mid 1950s, her inspiration appeared to be flagging as she struggled to complete what was to be her final novel, *As Music and Splendour* (1958). The expense of maintaining a large house on her free-lance earnings also became a problem for her and a trip to Italy was a solution, as a place to escape her money problems and to try and locate a new source of inspiration for her novel. As a young woman, she had lived in Spain and two of her novels had Spanish settings but, now for the first time, in the late 1950s, Italy became the location for her imaginative and critical writings and with fruitful results. Rome was to aid her in the creation of her most radical and progressive novel.

Kate O’Brien was not alone in her new-found interest in Italy. At this time in the 1950s, a number of other Irish writers had been attracted to Rome as a place to reflect and to create their fictions. They all travelled there and then wrote from this new experience. Rome was the city of the Vatican, the centre of power and

influence for the Catholic, and Ireland was deeply influenced by Catholicism at this time but many of these writers were at a distance from the Catholic faith. Kate O'Brien had been educated in a convent school in Limerick but she was now very far from her faith, calling herself a collapsed Catholic! In fact Rome gave her a permission to undermine Catholic teaching on sexuality and on sexual roles.

I take my title for this essay from the quote above, a line from a travel book called *A Summer in Italy*, published by the Irish short story writer and historian, Sean O'Faolain in 1950. O'Faolain was, like Kate O'Brien, a critic of Irish censorship and a free-thinking and liberal ex-Catholic, and Rome gave him a way back to his faith. Apart from O'Faolain, the dramatist Teresa Deevy wrote a radio play called *Supreme Dominion*, broadcasted in 1957 by Radio Eireann and set in Rome in the seventeenth century, during the lifetime of Luke Wadding, the founder of the Irish College. Another contemporary of Kate O'Brien, the Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen was also a frequent visitor to Rome and in the autumn of 1959 Bowen taught a term at the American School. The result of this stay is her only travel book, *A Time in Rome*, published in 1960. Bowen's book is a fascinating one, centred on her vain search for meaning, belonging and solidity in this bewildering, multi-layered and elusive city. Bowen's writings on Rome echo O'Brien's sense of the city itself as a lived experience and throughout *A Time in Rome* Bowen charts her futile but rewarding attempts to know and understand the city. As Bowen remarks at one point, "I was looking for splinters of actuality in the shifting mass of experience other than my own" (11). All of these Irish writers came to Rome to understand it and to reflect on their own creativity and, like O'Faolain, Bowen and Deevy, Kate O'Brien was also to find stimulating inspiration from her own "time in Rome" and a parallel sense of enchanting disorientation.

What did these Irish writers see in the eternal city? Sean O'Faolain quoted this old Irish verse in his travel book which goes as follows "To go to Rome may little profit / the king you seek you will not find, unless you bring him with you" (1951, 143). I would argue that O'Brien herself, a little stifled and isolated in her Irish home, sought a new "King", not a religious or political figure, but instead a new aesthetic liberation. She was looking for a fresh point of imaginative departure for her fictions when she decided to spend some time in Italy in 1954, to research for this final novel *As Music and Splendour*.

This decision to travel was made partly because she could let her house in Ireland to a tenant while she was away. In addition her publishers allowed her an advance of £4000, despite the fact that her previous novel had earned little more than that. She moved to Rome, her first time visiting the Italian capital, at the beginning of March 1954, travelling down from Paris by train and joining her close friend, the academic Lorna Reynolds¹, who was alrea-

dy there on study leave from her university teaching post. While staying in Rome, Kate lived in an apartment on the Via di Ripetta, an address that she would give to her fictional Irish heroines in *As Music and Splendour*. Much to her delight she discovered that she was living in the house where Pope Pius the twelfth was born. Her Roman friends during this time included the novelist Ignazio Silone and his Irish wife Darina, Jenny Nicholson, Robert Graves' daughter and others, and Kate used this time to gather all necessary background material for her next novel, set around the world of Italian opera.

It is clear from a talk she gave on Rome when she returned to Ireland that Kate read widely in the vast corpus of travel writing on Rome and on Roman church history before she travelled and thus made herself expert in the area². When she settles in, although she writes about how much the city overwhelms her, "Rome engulfs, defeats, overwhelms [...] this immortal, insolent city" (71), at the same time, she is enraptured with the city. She spent a great deal of time wandering around the city alone and fearless, forming opinions and impressions on its churches, gardens and squares and picking up a great deal of knowledge of the everyday workings of the city. All of this experience provided her with materials and texture for her Roman novel.

Soon after her arrival, she set off on a research trip on Italian opera with Lorna Reynolds that took in Naples, Milan and then Ferrara and Ravenna. In Naples, she heard Maria Callas sing and from Ferrara in April, she wrote the first instalment of a travel journal, published in the literary journal *Irish Writing*, part of a series called "Andantino" (1954, 46-50). In it, she recorded her love for Naples, her admiration for Rome and her indifference to Ferrara. "A flat, dull town" (68) where she finds the horned twists of bread served with her breakfast to be inedible and unattractive. Ravenna, despite its being "a reliquary, a chalice, a holy container", is also, yet again, "a dull place" (70), and O'Brien is fearless in her own judgements, and her original and pithy comments and her opinions are well-informed, articulated and merciless.

Her next piece, entitled "Rome:—June" (71) focuses on her sufferings in the middle of the Roman summer: again, "Rome engulfs, defeats, overwhelms" (71) and she tells of her attempts to escape "the heat-maddened tiger" (73) by taking bus journeys outside Rome. Rome is clearly her first love and she finds ways to escape the powerful summer heat and remain happily and comfortably within the city, even at the height of summer. "One can rest and learn and contemplate in any of the Basilicas and with exquisite pleasure, from the high leafy garden of the Palatine" (74). O'Brien presents very little sense of the history or the art of Rome, rather in these pieces, she writes about daily life, moments of contemplation, the shopping, the food and the life at night.

However there is one work of art which is an exception to this absence of monuments and churches. Of great interest and insight is O'Brien's reaction to the Bernini statue of Saint Teresa of Avila in Santa Maria della Vittoria. It is, she admits herself, an uneasy response to the erotic frankness of the statue and

the fact that Bernini has captured the moment of the saint's ecstatic experience of the presence of God as a moment of transcendence. Given her great interest in Spain, O'Brien had already published a short biography of Teresa in 1950. In this, she was at pains to stress the political and intellectual qualities of the Spanish saint and downplayed her religious and mystic nature. O'Brien saw her in the light of twentieth-century rational disbelief in religious excess, preferring to reclaim her as a symbol of feminist achievement rather than a woman who experienced visions and ecstasies. "One cannot expect anyone resistant of the mysticism of the great Spaniards to accept this dating sculpture" (75), yet it is worth noting that in her time in Rome, O'Brien comes to love the statue when she goes to visit and to accept that "his sculptured saint in her exaggerated beauty, alike with her alert and exquisite angel, says in all her lines that, as she knew, the vision of God cannot be retold" (*ibidem*).

As she describes it, she spent much of this summer in flight from the heat of the city in the hills outside Rome, in Tivoli, under the cool shades around Hadrian's Villa and from this time comes a short story called "A Bus From Tivoli", published in 1957 (6-11). O'Brien published very few short stories and those she did were of a lesser quality than her novels but this story is some of an exception. In this slightly unsettling story, reminiscent of an E.M. Forster novel, a middle-aged Irish writer called Marian, who is spending the summer in Rome, finds herself in a café near Hadrian's Villa late one evening, waiting for a bus back to Rome. "Marian was in her fifties and a heavy woman, one easily tired and who found life in Rome somewhat a physical ordeal" (78). In this café, a young Italian waiter serves her: "He was a large and powerfully built young man, handsome in the Roman fashion, he looked to be twenty-four or five [...] 'He's curiously like me', she thought. 'He could be my son'. For she had, as she knew with dislike, a heavy Roman look. In youth she had been normally slender and beautiful of face; but middle age had taken the beauty away, and left her fleshy and Roman-looking [...] Marian did not at all admire the Roman physical type, and very much disliked her own undeniable relation to it" (*ibidem*). Marian is clearly a physical representation of Kate herself, who disliked her own looks in middle-age and the loss of her slim good looks in youth. To Marian's horror, the young man takes an instant fancy to her and insists that she stay with him, even inveigling his young sister to plead with Marian. She refuses him and leaves the café in a panic, appalled at the incongruity of this young man paying court to her. On her return to Rome, she is careful not to tell the story to the Italians amongst her acquaintances: "[...] sure that no Italian would believe her, and would gently dismiss her as another dreaming old lady from the queer, northern lands" (80). Later in the summer, Marian returns to Hadrian's Villa with a friend, Elizabeth: "an English painter, a woman much younger than herself" – clearly her partner Mary O'Neill, who did visit Kate in Rome at that time. When Marian and her friend find themselves in the same café, the young man and his sister instantly renew their pleas for Marian to stay and, again, with some difficulty, Marian

escapes. "A Bus From Tivoli" is an unpleasant story, with much detail to suggest that it may have been based on a real incident but with the aura of incongruous sexual attraction and with a hint of incestuous attraction. (At one point Marian even compares the young man to Nero, thus casting herself as Agrippina). She submitted "A Bus From Tivoli" to BBC Radio for possible broadcasting but, not surprisingly, it was turned down because the subject matter was considered to be "depressing and subjective in an embarrassing way"³.

All this time in Italy, Kate was gathering material for her novel. A crucial metaphor in this new novel was to be Gluck's opera, *Orfeo et Eurydice*, where two women singers can play the part of devoted husband and wife and O'Brien was interested in deploying this transgressive regendering in her novel. Kate and Lorna Reynolds heard Maria Callas sing the opera in Milan around this time and the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice also provided Lorna Reynolds with her own creative inspiration, a poem called "Euridyce" (1963): "Cowslip-sweet the breath / Blown down the dazzling south-facing shaft, / As we climbed and wound from dusty underground, / Up far on the way, you leading me, / You Orpheus, me Euridyce" (104). In her final piece, "Rome Relaxed"⁸ published on her return in 1963 during the second Vatican council, a time of great change in the Catholic church, she portrays herself as a fond and familiar admirer of Rome, devoted and at ease and somewhat indifferent to the momentous decisions that are being made in the Vatican, eagerly watched by the many faithful Catholics in Ireland and in England.

Kate returned to Ireland in September 1954, working slowly on her new novel. In fact, it would take her six years to finish, one of the longest periods of writing of any of her novels and it takes Rome as the central setting, where two young Irish women are training to become opera singers. In the novel, Rose and Clare are taken from their homes in Ireland, trained to become opera singers with a great intensity and then launched into the dizzy, intoxicating world of art and of fame and wealth. This is, by large, a successful transformation for both women and they come to love Rome and the freedom it brings, a freedom unavailable back in Ireland if they had remained there. In fulfilling their artistic destinies, the young woman Rose and Clare also find personal happiness, Rose as the lover of Antonio and Clare as the lover of Luisa. The successful realisation of their sexuality comes about because of the bohemian freedom that life in Rome has given them. This sense of equality between heterosexual and lesbian identity is the most radical element in the novel, ironic, given that Rome is the centre of power for the Catholic Church, still the most conservative and powerful social influence in Ireland, where such sexual independence would have been unknown.

After the book was published, Kate lamented to John Jordan about the bad press that *As Music and Splendour* received, and declared that she had been so wounded and beaten by critics this time. Yet most of the reviews of the novel were respectful, even positive and the book was never banned. *As Music and Splendour* has found interest from modern critics, and admiration for the directness of

her representation of same-sex love. Emma Donoghue writes that the novel is: “more celebratory in its account of a relationship between two women. Instead of playing a supporting role, the lesbian is one of the two heroines, whose stories are presented equally and in parallel. Set at a safe distance in place (Paris and Rome) and time (the 1880s), *As Music and Splendour* nonetheless manages to create a modern Irish lesbian and give her a startling voice” (Donoghue 1993, 50). This voice has found echoes in contemporary Irish writing and another critic, Anne Fogarty, argues that: “for the first time in O’Brien’s oeuvre, lesbian love is moved literally and metaphorically centre stage” (1997, 175).

To conclude, O’Brien’s last novel would not have been possible without the enabling sense of liberation that Rome provided for her characters and these writings give us a sense of what attracted her most to the city, its openness, the hint of pagan freedom, the cosmopolitan life of the artist, the bohemian milieu. Ireland, the novel tells us clearly, would never have allowed these two young singers to blossom quite in the way in which Rome does and they could never have become independent, self-assertive and liberated into the realm of art and of love. *As Music and Splendour*, neglected within her life, has now become one of her most critically acclaimed novels and Rome gave her the inspiration and the breathing space in which to create it. These writings are the clue as to the Rome Kate O’Brien invented for herself, her ideal city.

Notes

¹ Lorna Reynolds (1987) was later to publish *Kate O’Brien, A Literary Portrait*, Gerrard Cross, Colin Smythe.

² “Italy”, unpublished lecture to the Italian Society of Limerick, November 1955, Kate O’Brien papers, Northwestern University, USA.

³ See letter dated 25th October 1956, Kate O’Brien File, BBC Archives, Reading UK.

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Andantino

Kate O'Brien

FERRARA. APRIL 14. ON THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, GOOD FRIDAY, it will have been five weeks since I came to Italy, five weeks since I descended into the wonderful, new Termini Station at Rome. And to Rome I came then for the first time in a too deferring, too off-putting life. A belated discoverer, indeed, of so exacting a city.

I have never been a note-taker or a jotter-down. Notes, indeed, one has had to take when seeking facts in libraries, museums, and such places of assembled and catalogued information. But personal notes, of the passing day, of the winged, immediate impression—when, rarely, I have attempted them—have always upon later reference offended me, seemed ridiculous, and have jangled tediously against my memory.

But memory, long-trusted ally, is not equal now to the overwork of ten or twenty years ago; and its retina, the hitherto reliable mind's eye, grows not only dim but positively contrary—not call it, ungratefully, a cheat. So at last, for purposes of work foreshadowed, I become in a some sort a note-taker. Reluctantly. Distrustfully. It was always better to remember, and set nothing down until the under-process of remembering moved to express itself and to be concluded. But the careless days of the long reach and the bright chance are gone. And, for instance, here I sit in Ferrara, somewhat to my surprise, and where, God willing, I shall never sit again; so, it may be that a few years on, trying to remember something or other by my study fire in Roundstone, I shall wonder why I was so much bored in April '54 in the once-glorious Renaissance city of the Este princes. And then, perhaps, perhaps these notes will be at hand—and, perhaps, if I trouble to read them, they will seem, alas, as false to me as have all notes of the immediate which I have ever taken. So let me not be too immediate about this city. Tomorrow I shall be in Ravenna. Let me consider Ferrara from there, or from San Marino—or, more magisterially, from Rome, where I shall be again before the end of the month.

I fled Rome after ten days, not in entire willingness—although indeed that first impact was inexpressibly exhausting to one who came there already tired—but because work in progress made it advisable for me to visit Naples and Milan during this month.

Henry James was in his twenty-fourth year, I think, when he first looked at Rome. He had fallen in love with Venice—as who would not? In Florence he had been uneasy and unwell. But then he came to Rome, and in his first

days there it seemed to him sometimes as if reason might forsake him, under the stress and pressure of its content. Yet he was a young man, well-off, and nourished in leisure; and however immense the combined assault of all the Romes upon his open and nervous imagination, the city which he met in everyday business, in street and café, park and pizza, was of the late 1870's, a city of horse-carriages and gaslight, wherein bells and human voices and the clop of hooves were the loudest parts of the noise. He did not have added to all the Romes his knowledge and his dreaming showed him the Rome of the machine age, the Rome of Mussolini and post-Mussolini, of war, of invasion, of international "spivvery"—in short, of the chaotic 1950's. Eighty years, a short span, has actually been, on the evidence, a very long time in Rome's long history—and this would surprise Henry James, one of whose necessities was always to take the longest and the slowest view.

Myself also favouring the slow view, I consciously sought to take as nearly as possible no view at all of Rome in those first ten days. Yet when they were over and I was in Naples, I knew very quickly, from the effect of that city upon me, that Rome had indeed made some strong impressions.

But I must let precision wait—or rather, precision still asks me to wait. Rome and Naples—how absurd the English word, Naples!—Rome and Napoli have already packed me up with arbitrary, hasty notions—vivid and unexpected. But all of that confusion must whirl a while and then grow cool before it serves me. That Napoli was restful let me say—yes, restful. After the Roman thunder, the sea-blown sweetness of the scrambling town seduced me into an unfair, unbalanced fit of love. I was to demur, heel back, as from all sudden and unnecessary loves. But, Lord, the soft voices of the Napolitani after the uniform Roman shout; the varied physical beauties of people—Greek, Norman, Celtic, Jewish, Arab, Sicilian, American—after the too-strong Roman face and bust; the soft amoral charm of the begging children, the coaxing silliness of the street watch-sellers and the would-be pick-pockets; the naked crumbling beauty of the hilly slum-streets, the gallant *pathétique* of the hung-out washing everywhere; the good manners, the good salt air, the unashamed carelessness, laziness and poverty—ah, I shall write more of Naples when I get further back from my first and already exhausted fit of love.

Easter Saturday, April 17.

I hate this note-taking. All the more, perhaps, because it isn't note-taking, and because I began it dutifully in Ferrara. I'm in Ravenna now.

It's odd about Ferrara.

I came there from Milan. Milan is a more interesting place than those who don't know it know. I left it on the day the International Fair began, because I am not interested in such fairs, and because the big city was going to be overcrowded and extremely expensive for the *Fiera* period. Milan is normally expensive, more expensive than Napoli, about the same as Rome. But is it,

despite its plain face, an interesting and agreeable city. It has no surrounding beauty, no atmosphere of Italian glamour, and a century of solid success and good citizenship had overlaid its long history. It is grey and orderly, and its most easily assessed possession, after *La Scala* and *Il Duomo*, is its uniform and intelligent good manners. I was glad when I was in Milan to reflect that Manzoni was its great man; the Milanese deserve him, and he is, it seems to me, exactly right as their immortal.

Of *La Scala*—another day, much later—much to say, much to remember.

Ferrara was not picked for me out of a box by a trained canary. I wanted a really quiet town after weeks of movement between three large cities; my travelling companion, who knows Italy well and who is at present in pursuit of the High-Renaissance, quoted Yeats who "...might have lived where falls The green shadow of Ferrara walls...". She also quoted from a d'Annunzio sonnet to the town which she had translated. The name Ferrara has always rung musically for me, and, loving my own Shannon at Limerick, I have had a lifelong curiosity about the formidable river Po. So I was well content to depart from Milan for the old, exhausted city of the Princes of Este and of Lucrezia Borgia. Of Ariosto too, and where—I discovered—Savonarola was born and lived his first twenty years. We travelled there, through Bologna, on a lovely day of Spring.

Wherever one travels in Italy one is amazed and edified by the cultivation of the land, and by the quality and skill of that cultivation. Indeed, the uniform aspect of fertility intelligently and industriously forced to man's use and good which the Italian landscape presents leaves one marvelling that there can be any real misery, real poverty in a country at once so passionately blessed by the sun and so gratefully used under that blessing. Yet poverty and misery are here and visible. Napoli is very poor, and so are all its ambient communes of the Campagna; yet the variegated and lovely husbandry of all those lands about Salerno, behind Amalfi, all the cherished fields and orchards fed by Vesuvius and south from there, the roofed-in lemons shelved on crags, the burning oranges, the vines everywhere married to elm and willow and poplar, the apple-trees, the pears, the cherries, the ordered fields of artichokes and onions and *pinocchio*, the sunshine, the flowering varied promise, the resolute industry—all these may puzzle us who find Italy, nevertheless, so poor—but all the way up from the south to Rome, fierce though the contours of the plain and the mountains may be, these carefully won fruits of labour cannot fail to attract and enchant the foreigner's eyes; and from Rome to Florence and Bologna, where Tuscan sweetness and green and blue undulations add to all of this a subtle tenderness, and disarm the foreigner in some measure of his foreignness—then the burgeoning, yielding, multi-coloured and multi-shadowed spring, every inch of it promise and love, holds us in wonder, so that we forget the economic puzzle, and rejoice in the sun's love of Italy, and Italy's fervent and grateful response to that love.

But, coming south from Milan with spring further advanced, and turning eastward after Bologna, with the Apennines disappearing, a blue smudge, to the south; facing ahead the Adrian marshes and the complicated branchings and estuaries of the Po, one finds a plain-faced, dowdy Italy—industrious, still, indeed, and drilled and drained, but definitely home-spun. Excepting only the ubiquitous vine, this middle-eastern plain of Emilia and Romagna cares only for dull-looking cereal crops, and cabbages, onions, mangolds. All useful things, but hardly speaking of the Italian *primavera*, everywhere else on the peninsula now flaunting her short-lived, exquisite and various garlands.

No garlands on the straight line to Ferrara. And Ferrara, forgetful of Isabella d'Este, forgetful of Lucrezia Borgia and of Ariosto, has no taste for such, it seems. A flat, dull town—if ever, disappointedly, I trudged about one. And inhabited now, one is compelled to think, by a flat, dull people.

It is among Italy's happy gifts to her visitors that we *look* at Italians, because beauty has been more generously lavished on them than on most races. In childhood and youth, the foreigner judges, Italians are more likely than not to be beautiful. Middle-age and the rough and tumble of maturity seem to be as hard on them as on the rest of us; but very many of them advance into life as if, like Botticelli's 'Primavera', asserting the innocent principle of physical beauty. So—for good cause—we look at them, in Venice, in proud Rome, in crazy, tattered, elegant Napoli.

But in Ferrara, no.

The first night there, disappointed already by the size, noise, and commonplace aspect of the town as we drove from the station, we set out in search of dinner, and halted indeed, awestruck, under the moated towers or the Castello—huge fortress of the Este princes, which still, as it is suitably still seat of all kinds of civic authority, dominates and bullies in silence from its stony, central position. At first, made to pause by it when hungry and uncertain of one's way, and when the night is cold and starry, one takes the Castello seriously; but after a day or two of strolling round and past it one sees it for the huge expression of dull arrogance that it was and is. It was austere and cleanly built and the colour of its brick is lovely—but it is, nevertheless, a tedious expression of Ferrara's former power, and one which the Renaissance artists and humanists—however the house of Este patronised them—can only have deplored.

Leaving it, we went down a noisy street, seeking a *ristorante* or a *trattoria*. And suddenly in a little square we found the Cathedral, the facade of the Cathedral. Ferrara's jewel, Ferrara's manifest, lonely proof that she once exacted beauty and achieved it. The exquisite exterior of this church suffered injury, especially on the lovely south cloister, during the war; but the great campanile went unharmed, and so did the front, this western facade that we came on, so little expecting it that we both cried out, astounded. Broad, flat, quite *romanico*, pink and grey, set easy to the wide base, and gently, peaceably, deeply embellished; this melting upward into the subtler and more holy early Gothic, dove-grey,

gentle, yet packed with eternally-fixed expressions of faith; faith still tender, still almost deprecating for all its strength; and Our Lady, exquisite, at the centre; bending in grace, sheltered by Gothic skill and device. Ferrara's jewel still indeed.

But do not trust poets. Yeats, after all, never set foot in Ferrara, where there is no "green shadow", and where the "walls" are only, here and there, a bit of grassy dyke—on which relievedly indeed one can walk at evening, and breathe some thin refreshment from a few plantations of poplar trees; looking eastward to Dante's Ravenna, and promising oneself that one will be there to-morrow. And so homeward, through long, plain streets of the most exemplary sixteenth and seventeenth century domestic architecture, let it be said; but also through exemplary groups of short, plain citizens, to a plain dinner, difficult to find. Our hotel had no restaurant, and that can be a very fatiguing lack, even though it is in general economical and satisfactory to eat elsewhere than in one's hotel. But in a place like Ferrara, where the ordinary life of the town is almost curiously empty of charm, and where the few restaurants are dull, it would be a relief to be able to stay where one was, after the long, exemplary streets, and eat never mind what without having to traipse past the Castello and over and back.

The bread in Ferrara is a curiosity. There is no getting, in that city, an eatable piece of bread. I tried every way and everywhere, and studied the bakeries with attention. No good. All the bread, all white, the whiteness of numbed fingers, is kneaded and twisted to the consistency of thin serge. This cheap serge is then whirled into "amusing" tight shapes; the favourite design being a pair of horns. A pair of small serge horns baked hard and brought to a fine polish is not easy to tackle with morning tea. I have eaten many kinds of bad bread—during the war; and in France after the war, I was in Avignon when a decent woman there committed suicide because she could no longer face the fearful yellow, dusty bread of that fearful year. But the bread which contents the Ferrarese—well, more of this bread business in Ravenna. But a prosperous city which has no music, no theatre, no trees worth talking about, no pictures, no scenery, no air, no gardens, deserves to eat serge horns.

Ravenna. April 24.

Now, this morning, having business in the telegraph office, we spoke with the friendly fat man there who knows that "O" means that one is Irish and who has a brother in Glasgow and he thrust at us his copy of the local morning paper, *Il Resto de Carlino*, which contained a long and rapturously proud account of the opening in *Dublino* of an exhibition of mosaics of Ravenna. This was indeed surprising and sweet news from home, and we bought the paper and read the article with full attention in the nearest *caffè*. P. J. Little, Mr. Aiken, Tom McGreevy, The College of Surgeons, the *bellissimo palazzo* of the eighteenth century—how delicious to read of all these homely symbols here in a little small-town paper, and on the lost edge of the Adriatic!

One can only wonder what they *are* exhibiting in Stephen's Green. The article told us that a lady of Ravenna is giving demonstrations in the craft of producing copies of the old mosaics, and that a professor explains the processes necessary to such work. Excellent. And if the exhibited reproductions are good they may well suggest something of the treasure deposited here by young Christianity, by Arian Christianity. But that, forever with the dew of morning on it, as pure and narrative of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, that is fixed here forever on the walls of a few basilicas. Only here, in Sant Apollinare Nuovo, can we see the procession of the Virgin Martyrs, led by the Magi, to Our Lady and the angel-guarded child; only here, in San Vitali, where fabric and light visible form and essential ideas, are one in Christian expression—only here, in one small, pure temple which is in its entirety a just and right tribute to the God of all the Testaments—only here can we see the Lamb of God protected by the four angels; only here can we see Abraham entertaining angels, and Abel and Melchisedech offering their sacrifices—here and elsewhere in Ravenna are forever fixed, in detail and in large, the first, fresh, lovely, formal visions of the Testament stories, set down with care and skill and with every decoration of symbolic love, in generations when the story was radiantly new, and a resounding answer to the creative and the passionate heart.

Ravenna contains, immovably, save by destructive modern war, an unparalleled exposition of what the Gospels meant to their first readers and believers. These glorious, formal and innocent illustrations of the great news of the first new century are immured in temples mostly in structure faithful to them, though some indeed, have suffered overhaul across the centuries. They are Ravenna's splendour—and studying them over many days one keeps on understanding more and more that no town could hold in charge a greater treasure. There was no need of Dante's bones. Yet he must have understood these exquisite mosaics, and even smiled at them, while he worked out *Il Paradiso* and prepared to die.

Ravenna is a reliquary, a chalice, a holy container. Not for anything could one regret being in the place where San Vitali is, or the Duomo Baptistery, or either of the Sant'Appolinarie. Nevertheless, the present-day town is itself a bore. The Adriatic receded from it long ago, and it is many a long day since its harbour, Classe, was vitally important to Rome's imperial plans; it is a long time since the Flaminian Way, which begins at the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, ended—having dodged the Apennines south of Rimini—at Ravenna, leaving the Cisalpine Plain open to the legions. It is a long time indeed since Caesar crossed the Rubicon a few kilometres south of where I at this moment sit.

Well, to look about, to walk about this flat and noisy town, you would need no stressing of all that. Ravenna, save on the great walls of a few churches, has lost its history as it has lost its washing sea. Like Ferrara, it possesses, unaware, some lovely streets. But like Ferrara and with less excuse it is a dull place, inhabited by dull and plainfaced people. And like Ferrara, it bakes

appalling bread, the same cheap serge, tailored into the same fearful horns. Nevertheless, leaving it to-morrow, turning for sweet Tuscany and for the fierce exactions of Rome. I shall not remember the dull, modern features of Ravenna and its citizens. I shall think of walking into San Vitali for the first time, when the light was thinning. The surprise of that first entry and of the architectural vision of grace—let alone what came afterwards on the walls—that would be memory enough. So I shall not catalogue boringly. Ravenna is not Moscow—it is get-at-able. It is indeed at this very moment crazy-packed with earnest tourists, all speaking German so far. So, it occurs to me, to go on about San Vitali, or the Mausoleum of Calla Placidia, may by now be as silly as to describe the Eiffel Tower for the folks at home. And also I remind myself that *Dublino* is at present under instruction! So—goodbye to the processing Virgin Martyrs, goodbye to Dante's *ossa gloriosa*, and to the now dreary, slummy Marina di Ravenna where Byron rode in fury by the waves. Could he see those sands and pinewoods now! Ah—if there was ever piety, in the Latin sense, the twentieth century either denies or has not felt it!

I turn back to a great city, where against and also in consort with forces, history has enforced its piety. I return to Rome, forgetting the boring shabbiness and dullness of modern Ravenna, and secure in memory of true life shining on the walls of her basilicas.



Rome:—June

Only trivialities can I record. I have too much to learn and carry round. Rome engulfs, defeats, overwhelms. To be bright, to make passing witticisms or chancy comments in the face of the immeasurable is not possible. I cannot even attempt reflection yet, at its crudest. I walk, and talk, and stare about, and read good books and bad. But I know that this immortal, insolent city cannot suffer jottings. Nor can I even imagine how to jot. (Is there a verb “to jot?”).

Last evening as I waited for a bus in the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele a young priest passed me, and I said to my companion: ‘Funny thing, that is the fourth time today that I have seen that young priest’. He smiled; he has lived six years in Rome, and knows many people. ‘I know him,’ he said, ‘this is his beat. Funny you should notice him.’ ‘I notice him,’ I said, ‘because the first time I saw him was early this morning when without ruth or grace he snatched a seat from me in a crowded bus.’ My companion smiled. ‘He is an important member of the Vatican Secretariat,’ he said. ‘He’ll be a Cardinal some day.’ ‘When I am dead,’ I said, ‘so he might have let me have that seat.’

But the Romans rarely consider ‘letting’ one have anything. The citizens here are marked forever—distinctively from all other Italians—by what once made them great, cold, reasonable ruthlessness. And that attribute is apparent

still in this violent city. Its life roars too loudly indeed; many of its people live in conditions which disgrace the State; the *borgate*, 'shanty-towns,' are appalling; the new workers' flats are ghastly pieces of jobbery; the Civil Service outflows in badly-paid idleness; and waiting one's turn in the markets and the shops (I have been housekeeping in Roma now for some months) one learns how pitifully, how exaggeratedly carefully one's Roman neighbours manage. Little crusts of cheese are weighed out and bought, of a kind and size that one would not put down at home to catch a mouse; a sliver of fat bacon will be weighed and neatly wrapped; one tomato; half a pound of the soggiest kind of household bread. The Roman people are very poor—indeed one marvels, realizing that, at how the young men and women buy (I suppose on long-term purchase?) the thousands of diabolical *Vespe*, which make life for them, clearly—but which so painfully insult it for the rest of us.

However, the Roman mania for everything on wheels or dependant on the combustion engine is a fact against which only a fool would argue. Allied to that is their mania for football; also they are going mad, difficultly, about Television, and they like noise, simply because it is noise, I think. One goes up into any village of the Alban hills any evening. The air is exquisite; far off one sees the shining sea, and nearer, nearer than the gentle grouping cloud of Rome, lie all the vine-wrapped undulations, blue and fragrant, shadowed by ancient olive-trees and singing ilexes. The lungs are filled, delighted, all senses answer to the sweet gifts of the fields, and to the sunken, shabby grace of the villages. But silence? Ah God, could there but be silence in these lovely places! Over Lake Nemi—Nemi, whence came lately all the exquisite wood strawberries we all devoured—Nemi, cold, dark green, wide water, or above Albano, the lake which reflects the Pope's summer villa—one might hope for silence. But the Romans are pursuers of the beauties that lie about them; they are out-door people. So in the evening all Rome will be with you in any Alban village that you chase to; and all engines will be at the roar, and all the children will be screaming; and no matter how simple and romantically flung the *trattoria* you choose, no matter how gentle—and gentle they are—your waiters, some other party will require to have Radio Roma on at full blast. So you will sip your beautiful, dry Frascati and eat your trout brought as you waited from the lake; you will watch the lights of Rome come pricking up in the valley, and above you the high lights of Rocca di Papa; you will see still the mirror-flat, sinister lake below you, and you will toast your companions and observe and savour and enjoy. But you will be maddened nevertheless by noise—the noise in which the Romans live.

I write this, yet at this hour, three a.m., the great city lies as quiet as a homely cat about me. I am lucky in Rome, and in this large, old palazzo have a lovely, bare and cool apartment. Indeed, I feel superstitious about my luck in this lodging, for in this house was born in 1876 Eugenio Pacelli, Pius XII. I hope that he was born on this third floor, in this apartment. But anyhow

I feel proud and lucky to be in the house where he ran in and out as a little boy; and whenever our eccentric lift doesn't work—and it certainly wasn't there in the 1870's and '80—I say to myself, as I climb the worn, stone staircase: 'Pius XII ran up and down here like a feather once.' Certainly, even if it is accidental, it is a vast honour to live in the palazzo which proudly in the courtyard proclaims in cut marble its happy distinction.

Over to me at this desk, in through the great drawing-room windows, blow, morning, evening and night, sweet winds from Ostia and the sea. They come to me across the Janiculum—from here I can see the *Faro*, and, *almost*, the peak of Garibaldi's marble cap. Certainly I can see the pediment of the Fontana Paola, though not quite into the windows of the Villa Spada, where lives our Irish Ambassador to the Holy See. Still, I flatter myself that on an especially sweet-scented evening I benefit here of the jasmine, and the roses that flourish up there, a stone's throw away, for His Excellency Joseph Walsh.

The nearer you live to the Tiber, in Rome, the better the air you breathe. This is odd, because it is impossible to be impressed by the Tiber—that is, if you are native of a country of clean, fast rivers and crystalline lakes, as I am. The Tiber is an ugly streak of yellow-brown water, never clear, always indeed as dense as pea-soup. Yet it flows vigorously, to my surprise—and there is no sweeter pleasure in the Roman evenings than to walk beside it, past its bridges, down from ancient Ripetta along by the Acquasparta to the Aventino—under the plane-trees, observant of the shadows, and aware of the piled-up history, conflicting, emphatic, re-inforcing, on both sides, as you stroll in relative peace.

Peace can be always no more than relative in Rome. One learns to be grateful then for the hours of one and two and three a.m., when for the most part the *Vespe* have reached home and been switched off. Those little roaring demon bikes attack one's spirit (and one's poor body) all day. They are atrocious. Yet they are an unanswerable expression of Rome, and of youth. One feels old and even a bit silly protesting one's loathing for them. Such vigour as their riders assert is indeed Roman and the boys and girls astride them are demonstrating a Roman thing which all Roman history expresses. And we who are old enough to be unnerved by their pace in the streets, or by the noise they make, have only to make ourselves understand that this—with its nonstop noises—is not our day. Presumably we have had and enjoyed our own young time which was a *taedium* to our elders. Now young Rome seems to an old one like me too much. But old Rome, Rome itself, let us say remains. And in and about and through it I weave let the motor-cyclists chug and roar as they choose.

July:

About three weeks ago the Roman summer leapt upon us like a heat-maddened tiger. Very frightening her scorching breath, her merciless, powerful, airless heat. An antagonist indeed, and one could only lie still and hope to escape her final blow, and somehow, when an air stirred again, crawl home.

But the air stirred, and instead of crawling home one moved in joy to his airy and vast old apartment. Thereafter, encouraged, the cautious examination of Rome began again and goes forward, 95 in the shade or not. I am hardened to it now. Besides, I have discovered how easy it is to get out by bus to the shores of Albano or Nemi. Also, one can rest and learn and contemplate in any of the Basilicas—and, with exquisite pleasure, from the high, leafy garden of the Palatine. There indeed, sweetly grounded above the great house of Augustus, and with a map spread upon the cool, stone parapet, one can look down and get the major edifices of the Forum clearly identified, with a minimum of error and only a modest expenditure of energy—in conditions which in the early summer evening are truly exquisite. All round the smell of sweet bay, of myrtle, of carnation; overhead the blessed shadow of ilex and acacia; the past in grave salute from every piece of stone—and below us history laid out quiet, touching peace. The Via Sacra, the fountain where Castor and Pollux watered their horses after the battle of Lake Regillus, the resurrected Vestal Virgins, the Arch of Titus, Constantine's Basilica; left and northward Saturn's lovely fragment; Vespasian's too, and the Arch of Septimus Severus. Further East Caesar's Forum; quite near, near the Vestal Virgins, the great portico of Antoninus and Faustina. But crowded it was in its days, that Forum, that clustering of Fori; badly planned, I dare to say all those dead, efficient Romans. Wise were the great and rich who could buy building sites up here on the Palatine. And I wish I could find here Cicero's house, which he cherished so much. Wiser still I think would have been the man who, in the Forum's busy days, chose to live on the Aventine Hill (risking the chance of being called a Pleb), or if not there, on the Quirinale. The Janiculum, best place of all for a Roman villa, was perhaps, too far out of town for those distinguished Forum gossips. Anyhow, looking down from the Palatine and over to the Capitol, one is amused to notice that, granted the crowding for place and the importance of place in the close area of the Via Sacra, the Vestal Virgins did very well indeed. Assuredly they got themselves established in a valuable site.

One could linger all night on the fragrant Palatine. But they ring a bell to clear and lock the Forum, and although I am confident one could scramble out somehow on the other side, towards the Tiber and the Aventine: in Rome it seems necessary still—all the Caesars gone—to obey the bells, etc., in fact, to do as Rome does. And Rome, for all its wild noisiness, is a curiously conventional city. Its temperament is coldly impatient—you either do what it does, or take a lot of nonsensical consequences.

Yesterday I went to Santa Maria della Vittoria, to see Bernini's famed Teresa of Avila. It was a pilgrimage of devotion, yet I went anxiously. In Rome I have become fond of Bernini—who would not, among his generously flung, lovely fountains? But I have always demurred from his ecstatic Teresa, in reproduction. It seemed theatrical to me, over-sympathetic, to the point where emotional sympathy misleads itself. However, the sculpture arrested and impressed me.

Allowed the baroque and temperamental approach, allowed the exclusive conception of the *illuminata* (I know that word is heretical, but I used it because I am not sure that Bernini's Teresa is a mystic in Teresa's pure and purely stated terms)—I found the work much more touching, much more tender and expressive of sheer holiness than I had expected it to be. I grant, regretfully, the theatrical background, the sunrays, the too slick cunning of the composition; but the living, tender, vulnerable, willing quality in every feature and muscle of the saint, and the alert sweetness of the angel; withal, the surprising, modest life-sizeness of the pair won me. One cannot expect anyone resistant of the mysticism of the great Spaniards to accept this dating sculpture; but I was touched by the passion and penetrative truth which the gay Bernini brought to it—also by the humanness, the tenderness of treatment. Bernini's work is all over Rome, his eternal glory—and mostly—except for the immeasurable nobility of his colonnades in the Piazza of St. Peter's, what he has given Rome is pure 17th century gaiety. But before Teresa of Avila he paused; he was moved and puzzled, did his best to express what she, great purist, could not express. And if he has failed, as she failed, in capture of the ineffable, it is clear that he failed generously, gracefully, and that his sculptured saint in her exaggerated beauty, alike with her alert and exquisite angel, says in all her lines that, as she knew, the vision of God cannot be retold. For all its set flamboyance, this group of two figures does say this. And so I think Teresa, though regarding the whole set-up as unnecessary, would have forgiven the great and gay Bernini.

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A bus from Tivoli¹

Kate O'Brien

IN the hot weather Miriam liked to take, at random, one or other of the many buses that left the Piazza Termini for the villages called Castelli, in the Alban hills; or sometimes she would choose to go to Tivoli in the Sabines. Eventually she grew to like best to go to Hadrian's Villa, and to loaf about in that extraordinary estate through silent evenings. It was a place of sweet smells and lovely shades; she did not trouble overmuch to trace Hadrian's grandiose plans, under the grass; she felt sufficiently aware of the place and sufficiently aware of Rome in general to be content to walk about in peace, and to accept what the map at the gate said, and what the occasional signposts said. What she went to Hadrian's Villa for was profound silence, and the surprising richness of green and leaf. Rome, so near, was also far in summer evenings from this sad, grassed-over place of pride and sorrow.

They locked the entrance gate at seven o'clock; the man in charge got to know her, and gave her a few minutes grace as she hurried down under the acacia trees and past the little Greek Theatre. And when she was turned out she always crossed the lane to the *trattoria* opposite.

This was a pleasant restaurant. She sat in the garden, under vines that trailed from elm-tree to apple-tree; fireflies dashed about and late birds fussed and fluttered; strong light from indoors threw shadows about the grass, and also allowed her to read at ease. Cats, Roman and self-confident, sat at her feet, and shared her supper. By Roman standards, food was cheap in this place, and it was good. Trout, omelettes, strawberries, and peaches, and sharp wine of the Castelli. She sat in the silent dark as long as she liked. The bus descending from Tivoli for Rome passed the crossroads—a kilometer away, up the lane, every half-hour until eleven o'clock—and she was never in hurry. About half-past nine or so she would walk up the lane to catch say, the ten o'clock bus. One night she fell in, on this walk, with an elderly gardener who mistook her for Spanish—he said her Italian had a Spanish inflection. He knew Spain and had lived in a town of Northern Spain that she knew well. So they found much to talk about, and as he was old and rheumatic, by the time she parted from him at his house near the crossroads, she saw the ten o'clock bus dash past for Rome.

It was no matter; there would be ten-thirty. The only disadvantage was that in the evening as at all hours the high road from Tivoli to Rome is noisy and dusty, and there is nothing to sit on by the bus-stops.

Marian was in her fifties, and a heavy woman, one easily tired and who found life in Rome somewhat a physical ordeal. So, although she disliked the appearance of the little, brand-new café on the corner, disliked its shape, its white neon lights and its juke-box noises, she went into it, and to her surprise found a seat and a table vacant, crammed though the small interior was with lively, shouting Romans, crowded about the terrible music in the box.

"Could I have a glass of dry vermouth?" she said, in anxious, bad Italian.

A young man in spotless white coat beamed, bowed and went to get her a glass of dry vermouth. She looked around her, feeling sad. Always she left Hadrian's Villa and the embowered, quiet *trattoria* feeling sad. But the high road, the noise, the scooters, and the public lavatory style of this as of all cheap places of refreshment set up by the Romans—saddened her unreasonably.

Unreasonable indeed she told herself she was, and looked about and lighted a cigarette. The young man came and placed a glass of vermouth before her. Also he brought olives and potato crisps. He stood and smiled on her. She thanked him, and as he did not move she thought she should pay at once. She opened her purse. He waved the money aside.

"No, no," he said. "Merely I wonder where you are going?"

"I'm going to Rome. I missed the ten o'clock bus."

"You are foreign, lady. But you are not English?"

"I am Irish."

"Ah! Irish! And why do you go to Rome?"

"Because I'm living there."

"I see," he said. "You are living there. Rome is quite near us, here."

He was large and powerfully-built young man. Very clean; scrubbed and square and fresh-skinned; handsome in the Roman fashion, heavily muscular, with firmly, marked features. His eyes were intelligently bright—small and green-grey. He looked to be twenty-four or five.

As he stood and stared upon her, smiling kindly, Marian considered him with amusement.

"He's curiously like me," she thought. "He could be my son."

For she had, as she knew with dislike, a heavy Roman look. In youth she had been normally slender, and beautiful of face; but middle age had taken the beauty away, and left her fleshy and Roman looking—Roman emperors she suggested to herself, when she contemplated her ageing head in the mirror; but Nero or Heliogabaus rather than Marcus Aurelius or Hadrian.

"And this boy is like Nero, I'd say," she thought. "Indeed—I'm sorry too think it—but this strong young Roman could easily be my son—in looks."

This reflection, though amusing, did not please her, because Marian did not at all admire the Roman physical type, and very much disliked her own undeniable relation to it.

She ran her hands through her untidy hair.

"You feel too warm?"

"Yes; it's hot here. But it's always hot in Rome."

"We have a beautiful bathroom here—with a beautiful shower."

"Oh yes—we have all those beautiful things in my flat in Rome—your plumbing is very good—"

"Very good here. You must meet my sister. A moment, please!"

The young man bowed.

Relieved that he had left her, Marian shut her eyes and sipped vermouth. But within a minute a hand touched her gently. A young, small, pretty girl was sitting beside her.

"My brother says that you are going to Rome. Why are you going to Rome?"

Amazed, Marian answered.

"I live in Rome."

"But why do you live there?"

"I come often to Tivoli and to Hadrian's Villa."

"Of course. Many people come to Hadrian's Villa. You love it?"

"I like to walk there."

"Then why don't you stay here?"

"But—I don't want to. I live in Rome."

"My brother wants you to stay here. Will you not?"

"Stay here? But how—what do you mean?"

"My brother—he has begged me to ask you. We have every comfort here—bath, all conveniences. We will be good to you. My brother is good. He entreats that you stay with us."

"But—what on earth do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. My brother wants you. Could you not stay with him? He is kind."

Marian stood up.

"Please, I beg you—let me pay now—I must go—"

The young man came forward and took her two hands.

"Will you not stay? Please, lady—my sister has told you, surely? I entreat you—"

"I am old! I'm an old woman!" He smiled and touched her shoulder. "I know. I see that. It doesn't matter. Stay!"

Marian put some *lire* on the table. He gathered them up and put them into her hand.

"Please, please—stay here a little while—"

"Oh heavens, goodnight! You're a crazy child! Why, you could both be my children!"

She ran down the steps, and in a minute the bus for Rome drew up. As it swept her away they stood and waved to her under their neon lights.

The curious, comic episode slid out of mind. Amused and puzzled by it for a day or so, she did narrate it to some friends, writers, painters, film actors—English and American—with whom she, a writer, associated in Rome.

But she told the ridiculous little story to no Italian acquaintance, because she felt that it would be impolite to do so. Also, she was sure that no Italian would believe her, and would gently dismiss her as another dreaming old lady from the queer, northern lands. Her English, Irish and American friends, however, knew her well enough to know that odd little story was true; they theorised gaily over the eccentric young Roman café-keeper; and one or two of them went so far in affection for her as to say that they saw his point—that definitely they saw his point.

Marian, however, did not see his point; and accepting that any youth who could rush such improbable fences within five minutes was in some unfixable way insane, she still wondered how he was empowered in the same five minutes of his lunatic appeal, to engage his young and sensitive-faced sister as his procuress. Nevertheless, she was a novelist and had been on earth for fifty-five years; she had encountered knottier questions than this accidental one of the café-keeper at the Tivoli bus stop. She let it slide. But she did not go to Hadrian's Villa again; and this was a deprivation.

In August, however, she had staying with her in Rome an English painter, a woman much younger than herself, to whom the Roman scene was new. She decided that she must take this friend to Tivoli and Hadrian's Villa. So they went. As they were late in leaving Tivoli after luncheon they took a taxi thence to Hadrian's Villa. In the *trattoria* they ate at leisure and fed the cats, and Marian amused Elizabeth with the story of the young café-keeper at the crossroads.

Politely, affectionately, Elizabeth said that she saw the young man's point. Marian laughed.

"Diana and Robert said that too," she said. "But it was a madman's point. He's only a big, fat boy. And all in five minutes! And dragging his little sister into it!"

They stayed a long time in the *trattoria* garden, aromatic and quiet. And when at last they reached the cross-roads they had barely missed the ten-thirty bus to Rome and had twenty-nine minutes to wait for the next, the last one. It was a *fiesta* night, dusty, and intolerably noisy by the roadside.

"We'll sit in the café," said Elizabeth. "What harm if the poor boy sees you again?"

"What harm indeed? He'll have forgotten the whole thing anyway—it's more than two months ago."

The café had grown smarter with summer expansion, and had tin tables set now in a narrow little terrace, above the shops under the neon lights. One of these tables, in a corner, was vacant, and Marian and Elizabeth went and sat there.

Like a shot from a gun the young café-keeper was with them. His face shone with joy.

"You have come back at last! I knew you would! Dry Vermouth—I remember! or would you not have a brandy?"

Marian asked Elizabeth what she would like to drink—Vermouth—dry Italian. He was enchanted. He must tell his sister. He would be with them

in a moment. He had wished always for her to come back. She must believe him, excuse him—he would return in a moment.

And in a moment he did return—with his sister, and with bottle and glasses. Radiant, happy, sketchily asking permission, he and his sister sat down and he filled the glasses with Asti Spumante. Marian smiled. She detested the wine.

“Lady—you have come again. I have watched for you—I and my sister. Where do you live in Rome? We have searched and asked—oh, we drink now! You have returned! You will stay here now—please? Yes? You, her friend—you too? You will stay here now, as I desire—in this fine, clean house I have—?”

“It is good and clean; my brother is a good boy—and he desires this lady,” said her sister to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth had no Italian, but she understood what the girl said, and she smiled.

“I have watched, I have waited. I have not for a day forgotten you, Irish lady—is that true?” he turned to his sister.

“It is true. He loves you, signora—signorina? There is no peace. Stay with him a little, please. He is a good boy—he his kind.”

“We have all modern comforts. We will consider you and be careful. Oh, you are near Rome here; you can do as you please! Only stay with us, a little time, lady! I knew I must see you again!”

The young man’s strong, clean hands was laid, hard and flat on Marian’s. His bright eyes blazed on her.

“Answer him. Speak to him,” said Elizabeth.

Marian knew she must do so. Grotesque as the comedy made her feel, it also quite absurdly honoured her. And ludicrous insane as it might be, it was—take it or leave it, an actuality. This cracked young man was as he was and taken and held to this impossible and grotesque idea.

“I don’t know your name, or your sister’s,” she said. “I am fifty-five years old: I take you to be about twenty-five, your sister not yet. I’d say, twenty-one. It is impossible for me to thank you or be gracious about your insane idea. I have to speak in English—I have no Italian to say what I mean—but in English I will tell you to stop talking nonsense, and that I’ll be gone on the bus in a minute”

Marian stood up. The young man rose with her, holding her two hands.

“Do not go! Oh, do not go—now you have returned! We have here every kindness, every comfort—”

“I am going! Oh please be sane!”

“I am not concerned to be sane! Where are you—in Rome? I will visit you! I will behave well, I have a beautiful summer suit, of light grey—let me come! Where are you?”

“He is good, lady. He will bring you flowers, he will bring you wine. Tell him where to find you in Rome! He is good. He loves you—he talks about you always.”

“I will come. I will visit—in my good new suit. I insist I will visit. You have returned—and you must tell me who you are—I have searched—”

“Good-bye, good-bye.”

The last bus from Tivoli came roaring down and Marian and Elizabeth fought their way on to it.

They dismounted in the Piazza Termini.

"I think you should have let him visit you," said Elizabeth. "His good, new suit."

They found their bus to the *Chiesa Nuova*.

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Rome Relaxed

Kate O'Brien

The word "Rome" will never imaginably disappear from travel dreams or tourists' schedules. There will always be first-timers to stand on the Capitol and gasp; there are infatuates who would give their lives to the place; and cooler old hands who can return there again and again in constant anticipation. The city is perhaps a special taste, but for those who have cultivated it it is not possible to enter it without a particular sense of excitement. First, second, third, tenth time—the excitements may differ, but in my experience only to grow sharper.

I last arrived there on All Saints' Day, 1962, into brilliant summer noon—not Roman, but what we up here would call perfect summer—and, excited as I was, was not altogether surprised, therefore, upon arrival at my hotel to find that my overcoat had been stolen in the Termini Station. What *had* surprised me, having gone through the usual pleasure of wondering at the aged little Minerva temple in the middle of the railway tracks, was to find the marble platform so remarkably quiet in the sunshine. My train had indeed been far less than full, but still, bemused by the very novel peace of arrival, the almost silence, I had strolled in contented wonder the long stretch to the taxis. I had a charming porter—but somehow, between train and taxi, he or another got away with my perfectly good topcoat. And when I noticed the loss, I hardly troubled—so irrelevant had all coats suddenly become in this November radiance and sweet warmth.

It was a great feast day and the citizens were pouring out of church as I crossed town; children running and shouting, as always for Sunday magnificently dressed; balloon-sellers and their high-blown wares obstructing one's view of Rome ubiquitous and glorious flower-stalls; ladies were gloved and veiled, stepping out to call on each other with bouquets of carnations or little golden boxes of confectionery. No sign anywhere of the everyday rough roar of the city, or at all of *Dolce Vita* characters. Hardly a fluttering cleric to be seen, moreover—Ecumenical Council or not. It was a Rome come as near as ever I shall see it to provincial Sunday peace.

I was there to attend, for Ireland, a Council meeting of the *Comunità Europea Degli Scrittori*—and that for the next few days I happily did. But I had my hours of flight back into ordinary Rome. (Silly adjective, perhaps, to use for an always extraordinary city. Yet I know what I mean, and Rome has its ways of being ordinary.) I was this time, I admit, under the impression of being in the city at a time that would have to be a part of Church History, and upon which the world had fixed an alerted eye. Three thousand bishops may seem

just three thousand bishops, three thousand anybodies; but massed together under one impressive roof a one anciently impressive place, massed together to speak for, say, five hundred million fellow-creatures of one faith and some two hundred million more uncertain sympathizers—such a three thousand, of all tongues and colours, is surely isolated in history, and must raise something like three thousand questions in any imagination, sympathetic or averse?

I desired to overhear some of the other murmurs from this curious event, to get into the margins at least of its overflow, in a Rome which I knew to be resonantly responsive to the dramatic and the exceptional. And so Rome was to this vast occasion, I have no doubt. But certainly in my few days, among my friends, and in the general talk of the streets and of the newspapers, what I found was a peaceful, benevolent hush. So uncharacteristic as to be in itself dramatic, or at least mysterious. But the citizens were quite simple and open in their calm.

"We understand that they are discussing the language of the liturgy. That will take a very long time." But this report was contradicted. "They have begun with the source of revelation—they need never come to agreement about that. This will be a long Council."

Press reports were sketchy and filled in with surmise. It seem that the directors of the Council, permitting of course, no journalists into hearing of the debates, were exasperated in the first week by the too-near-the-knuckle reportings of *Il Messaggero*, so Rome said that now, when after the celebration of Mass which opened every session the ushers cleared St. Peter's of all save members of Council with loud cries of "*Exeunt Omnes...*", they added: "*Exeat* especially the correspondent of *Il Messaggero*!"

The mood in Rome towards the Council was almost totally affectionate, interested and of good will. Intellectuals and anti-Vaticans were perhaps surprised by their own concern and attention.

Nina Ruffini, of *Il Mondo*, told me that she and other editors talking together in the rooms of that distinguished anti-clerical and liberal organ one day were amused when one of their most impressive elder-directors, a proud witness to everything *Il Mondo* stands for, having strolled in, said suddenly: "That I should live to hear all this! Tolerant words for the Vatican! All-but-admiration for a Pope! Under the roof of *Il Mondo*!" Then he got up to leave and, turning at the door, said: "The devil of it is that I agree with every word!"

But in the streets, the lovely, cobbled, sunlit streets, the mode of Rome was quieter than I have ever known it. The traffic, indeed, as fierce as ever, and they said that between clerics, journalists and tourists there was not a spare bed ever—but my impression was of a curious peacefulness. Uncharacteristic and magical.

I went by myself one evening on a pilgrimage of revisitation. And I began this in the Piazza of St. Peter. The great church was closed, as I had known it would be—and anyhow I had no especial wish to go inside. Simply I wanted to see the Piazza as they light it, and when it was all but empty. And there it was—its expression of power and glory rendered touching and apprehensible

under the gentle night sky and through the exquisite tact of the lighting—the two fountains playing lazily against the quietest possible illumination, the steps and portico pale and shadowed—not diminished, but made to seem indeed the work of man, as were the dream-touched colonnades. There were some boys twirling about on bicycles, a lonely American with his burden of cameras, a pair of chattering nuns, and I. The lights were on in two windows of the Pope's apartment; the quiet was profound. Indeed, for Rome it puzzled me—yet it seemed natural, too, almost homely.

I walked back through the Borgo di San Spirito to the bridge beside Sant'Angelo. There I crossed back into Vecchia Roma, through the winding, crumbling streets I used to know when I lived in Piazza del Orologio behind Chiesa Nuova. I made my slow way to the Piazza Navona, and on a November night, unusually indeed for Rome, I ate supper at ten o'clock on the outside terrace of Maestro Stefano's. They did not remember me there, to my chagrin, but I remembered them. And I ate such grapes from the Castelli as I have never eaten, wild and almost too large and of burning colours, black and gold.

But colours—colour in Rome! That is what memory takes safest away, I think—not just colours of fruit and wine and flowers, but the majestic, streaked rose and gold and honey and saffron and grey of all the ancient and the newer walls, and the encircling white of outflung suburbs. Colours—I bore them off with me in a vast, clear confusion, to remember until the next time. Yet never a Cardinal's red did I glimpse or a bishop's purple, or even the proud flash of a Monsignor's *biretta*. The Council was very quiet, and seemed even to have quieted Rome.

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Notes in dis-Order

Materialism and the Loss of Sovereignty: Ireland in the Celtic Tiger and After

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Abstract:

Ireland's status as one of the most materialist states in Europe in the 1980s helped motivate the need for economic growth. Ireland's export oriented policies emphasized foreign direct investment. Thus, Irish growth in the 1990s was based on integrating the Irish economy in the world market to satisfy the demand for a higher quality of life even if this compromised Ireland's long struggle for independence and autonomy. Ireland's dependence on international markets became even clearer after the financial crash. The Irish government required a bailout from the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund to cover the huge debt exposure the Irish government had assumed after guaranteeing bank debt. Hence, materialism served to motivate the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger.

Keywords: austerity, Celtic Tiger, export-oriented growth, financial crisis, materialism

Ireland's eccentric place in the context of European development can be explained by a number of factors. Its peripheral geographic location contributes to understanding Ireland's historical development in the European context. Besides one notable exception most scholars believe Ireland was relatively untouched by the Roman Empire and its Celtic civilization continued with minimal interruption or external contact¹. The Celts in Ireland were able to incorporate the founding of Christianity and survive a series of invasions by the Vikings. They were even to adapt initially after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. This settlement or invasion, however, ultimately led to an effort by English kings to bring Ireland under their domain and control. Not only did this bring Ireland into greater contact with others in Western Europe, but it also began the Irish effort to resist English imperial power. Thus, Ireland's integration into Europe emerges from this colonial and anti-colonial struggle. Despite great efforts and sacrifice to achieve independence from Britain, Ireland has always had to seek to accommodate its much larger and more powerful neighbor. Continental Europe offers the Irish a means of going beyond this relationship which has so dominated its history.

1. Irish Economic Development after Independence

Thus, Irish economic development was built upon the fundamental reality that Ireland was an internal colony within the British Empire (Hechter 1975; McDonough 2005; Cleary 2006, 22-35; White 2007). Because of the role Ireland played as an internal colony, its economy was oriented to produce agricultural products for the English market. Though Ireland's economic underdevelopment in the nineteenth century was due to a complex set of circumstances (Cullen 2012, 18), the Irish lacked the ability to govern themselves and develop their own economic policies after the Act of Union. According to Munck (1985) and Crotty (1986; 2011), British exploitation repressed and frustrated Irish economic development even after independence.

While some may employ Marxist-inspired analysis to explain Ireland's historic poor economy, Ireland's economic development is better explained by focusing on the political culture that emerged in the postcolonial period. The Irish from the 1920s through the 1950s were happy enough with the "frugal comfort" that the politicians of the era offered. An autarkic or self-sufficient economic policy was intended to sever the historical economic relationship with Britain, thereby demonstrating Ireland's independence, sovereignty, and autonomy. This economic policy coincided with the effort to rediscover if not reinvent a pre-modern mythical Gaelic world that inspired Irish nationalism since the late nineteenth century (White 2004). As a result, after independence the Irish Free State experienced little economic growth, and the Irish economy remained primarily agricultural with few exports outside of this traditional sector². The Irish sought industrialization following an import substitution strategy, minimizing their dependence on Britain for the import of industrial goods. The political dominance of de Valera in this era provided the Irish with a consistent set of nationalistic economic policies including protectionism and an economic war with Britain (Power 2009, 13-15). State resources were used to promote those values associated with de Valera's exclusive conception of Irish nationalism. Economic policies reflected this nationalist vision and ultimately served to reinforce this postcolonial conception of identity (Daly 1992; Girvin 1997; Garvin 2004). Hence, this article builds upon Casey's (2010, 8-9) suggestion that the best way to understand Irish economic development is to appreciate the cultural forces that first shaped Ireland in the postcolonial period and which ultimately drove it from its poverty to unprecedented growth, collapse, and the contemporary effort to overcome the financial crisis.

2. Irish Economic Policies from the 1960s through the 1980s

When Lemass succeeded de Valera as Taoiseach in 1959, the Irish government embarked on a new program of industrialization and economic development

that unraveled the nationalist consensus in Ireland. Ultimately, de Valera failed to insulate Ireland from the Western liberal world. As first Irish elites and later the Irish masses became preoccupied with increased materialist demands, the traditional nationalism of de Valera lost its capacity to shape national economic policy. The Irish, like other postcolonial peoples, sought economic modernity. De Valera's policies resulted in sluggish economic growth, the lack of industrialization, and high rates of emigration in the 1950s. The need to abandon these unpopular policies meant that more cosmopolitan values associated with globalization and rapid economic development became ascendant (Delanty 1994, 192-197; Kinsella, Lyons 2011, 66, 69; McCabe 2011, 192)³. Revisionist historians often accentuate the tension between traditional Irish nationalist policies and contemporary material aspirations. Their tendency to discount the nationalist ideal and forsake it minimizes the attractiveness of this ideal to a postcolonial people in the immediate aftermath of a long struggle to achieve independence. This does not mean that the initial appeal of postcolonial nationalism is likely to survive after the generation who fought for independence fades away. Nationalists who critique revisionism deny or overlook those aspects of traditional Irish nationalism that marginalized groups in society and prevented economic modernization. Nationalists need to confront the reality that liberalism has supplanted nationalism and is increasingly attractive to the Irish public (White 2002).

After de Valera's departure as Taoiseach, Seán Lemass attempted to modernize the Irish economy and recognized that the state needed to coordinate and promote economic development in an increasingly interdependent world economy⁴. Lemass realized that it was the state's responsibility to satisfy the economic needs of citizens. By integrating the Irish economy with the others in Europe and the rest of the world, he necessarily unleashed forces that would change not only the standard of living of the Irish but also their priorities and values in life. As a late developer Ireland had to seek access to foreign investment because there were not adequate domestic sources of capital to develop the economy. This strategy required effective use of foreign capital to propel economic growth and integrate foreign investment with local entrepreneurs and workers. The new strategy has been hailed by some because it took advantage of Ireland's entrance into the European Economic Community in the 1970s and its small domestic market (Jacobsen 1994; Sachs 1997; Barry 1999). The entrance into what we now call the European Union brought not only access to large new consumer markets, initially for its agricultural products, but also subsidies that lasted for two decades that assisted Ireland in developing its infrastructure (MacSharry, White 2000, 39).

In the 1960s the Irish economy grew quite rapidly, but the 1970s and 1980s saw the Irish economy stagnate with high unemployment, fiscal deficits, a lack of investment, and resulting emigration (Power 2009, 28-56). The oil shocks in 1973 and 1979 caused an inflationary ripple throughout the Irish

economy just as it did many other economies. This led to many other economic problems such as high interest rates, slower growth, and the resulting stagflation. Meanwhile, the materialistic mentality of the Irish proliferated as the material conditions in Ireland dramatically improved in the 1960s. Even though Irish economic performance stagnated in much of the 1970s and 1980s, values and attitudes continued to change. By the 1980s, the Irish had become one of the most materialistic national groups in surveys taken of member states in the European Union (Inglehart 1990, 91). The Irish public was no longer satisfied with the frugal comfort that de Valera had offered. They expected politicians to be able to deliver policies that raised their material standard of living, and there was great frustration with the Irish government's inability to improve economic conditions. This explains the electoral volatility and frequent elections and transitions between governments in Ireland in the early 1980s.

3. Changed Fiscal Policies and the Rise of the Celtic Tiger

By 1987 the problems of chronic high levels of unemployment, low growth, and high fiscal deficits reached a crisis in which Irish economic policy changed significantly incorporating neo-corporatist strategies of the social partnership, a renewed effort to bring fiscal health to government finances, and encouraging growth through a new surge of foreign investment (Taylor 2005, 6-9, 12-14; Hardiman 2006; O'Donnell 2008; Sweeney 2008, 8-9; Murphy, Devlin 2009, 19-20). Irish governments in the 1980s had come under increasing pressure as high unemployment and emigration undermined support for parties in power. Rising levels of consumption had lowered domestic savings (Arrow 1997, 5). This meant that foreign investment was increasingly critical to provide the capital necessary for economic growth and satisfying the growing demand for growth in the economy. The necessity to develop policies to match the material expectations of voters led the Irish government to combine fiscal discipline with a strategy to attract tourism and investment in pharmaceuticals and software. This policy took advantage of dramatically increasing flows of foreign capital that were emerging (Deeg, O'Sullivan 2009, 731). In this era, policy makers increasingly came to see the liberal world of growing trade and financial flows as the solution for growth and prosperity. The combination of a demonstrated government commitment and open market policies was critical to attracting foreign investment⁵. By the mid 1990s, these policies began to pay off with dramatic increases in Irish productivity, economic output, and material standard of living. Thus, it was the combination of globalization and policies that took advantage of the opportunities that globalization provided that best explains the economic success Ireland experienced in the 1990s (O'Sullivan 2010, 9). Ireland's success demonstrates that states can develop national policies that take advantage of unique comparative advantages (Caporaso, Madeira 2012, 49).

Ireland's economic performance was nothing short of a miracle in historical perspective (O'Sullivan, Miller 2010). There are many measures of the success of the Irish economy in the 1990s and continuing in the early 2000s. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) nearly doubled between 1995 and 2000. While Irish economic growth was not been as strong in the early 2000s as it was in the 1990s, annual real GDP growth continued to average more than six percent through 2007 (See Figure 1).



Figure 1

Ireland's growth came about because of rapid increases in productivity that far outstripped labor costs or wages (Krugman 1997, 42). This allowed Ireland to become a very appealing location for investment. Even with Ireland's rapidly increasing population, this economic growth provided for significantly higher incomes in Ireland. The number employed in Ireland nearly doubled from 1985 to 2007 from less than 1.1 million to more than 2.1 million (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

The effect of this rapid job growth included increasing labor force participation, especially among women, and a replacement of the historic pattern of emigration with immigration (Walsh 2004)⁶.

The rapid expansion of exports accounts for much of the growth of the Irish economy in the 1990s. From 1991 through 2000 exports grew from just over €21 billion to more than €103 billion, almost quintupling in just one decade (see Figure 3).



Figure 3

There have been several reasons given for the growth of exports. Low corporate tax rates attracted foreign investment in export industries. A growing market in Europe meant products exported from Ireland would not face tariffs or other trade restrictions from fellow EU states. Irish government policy expanded education, especially in new sectors that were targeted to become part of the export sector like pharmaceuticals and Information Communications Technology (ICT), and the fact that Ireland is a predominantly English speaking country which made it attractive to US investors⁷. Exports continued to grow throughout the first seven years of the 2000s, but the pace of annual growth of exports slowed to less than 7% annually (see Figure 3). By the early 2000s, the Irish government had increasingly come to rely on a construction boom to spur economic growth to supplement the slower expansion of exports.

Some have been critical of the export-driven growth model the Irish government used to bring prosperity to Ireland. O'Hearn (1998; 2003), Fink (2004), Allen (2007), and Kirby (2010) have doubted this model's capacity to provide long-term prosperity due to its excessive reliance of foreign

capital which might be fleeting, and they criticized the Irish government's deference to foreign corporate interests. Others have critiqued this model of economic modernization because of its reliance on tax breaks and incentives to attract foreign investment while neglecting to develop local industry and indigenous exports (McCabe 2011, 193). There have been other critiques of Ireland's export-led model of economic growth. Kirby (2005), for example, has argued that because of the economic inequalities and the lack of revenue due to low taxes, especially corporate taxes, Ireland does not have an adequate social policy⁸. Given the recent budget cuts in social services and forecasts of continuing tight fiscal conditions in Ireland for the next several years, critics contend that Ireland has squandered an opportunity to create an adequate safety net for its population. Thus, Ireland has become what Kirby identifies as a competitive state that has forsaken its social security rather than a developmental state that is seen as more successful in terms of not only economic growth but generally higher living standards (Kirby 2005; Kirby, Murphy 2008). Murphy (2009) has argued that Irish economic and social policies that have allowed the government to seek global capital and integrate Ireland with the global economy has weakened civil society. The social partnership has meant the weakening of civil society and the capacity for groups in society to organize for their own interests against the interest of the state.

Other critics focus more exclusively on the perceived growing income inequality (Kuhling, Keohane 2000; Tallon 2000; O'Hearn 2003; Hardiman 2004; McVerry 2006; Nolan, Maître 2007; Kirby 2009). While not all shared equally in Irish economic success, income inequality has not changed significantly since the 1990s. Though the top one-half of one percent of the population saw significant gains in their share of national income, almost all income groups saw little if any change in their share of the national income. Historically, Ireland has always had slightly higher levels of income inequality than others in Europe. The new wealth created during the Celtic Tiger was widely shared in society. Nevertheless, the persistence of one of the highest poverty rates in the European Union suggests that the Celtic Tiger did not ameliorate all of Ireland's economic problems (Phádraig, Hilliard 2007).

Despite these criticisms, many continue to see Ireland as a state that succeeded based on a strategy of attracting foreign capital and embedding it with local firms. The critical industry that has more than any other been responsible for the Celtic Tiger phenomenon has been pharmaceuticals and chemicals (White 2008). The Irish government has developed a strategy of attracting pharmaceutical companies to Ireland based on low taxes, a skilled and educated workforce with low labor costs, and market access to the rest of Europe (Van Egeraat, Breathnach, 2007; Glavanis-Grantham 2008; O'Hearn, McCloskey 2008). The chemical and pharmaceutical sector of the Irish economy has grown rapidly since the late 1990s. In relation to the nation's total exports in 2011,

chemical and related products (including medicinal and pharmaceutical products) accounted for more than 60% of all Irish exports (CSO 2012, 226-227).

The other major sector of the Irish economy that has promoted rapid economic growth in the new global high tech economy has been Information Communications Technology (ICT) (Bradley 2002). This industry, like pharmaceuticals, takes advantage of low corporate taxes and a skilled and efficient workforce to attract foreign investment (Trauth 2000). The Irish government has played a key role in promoting this sector by seeking to attract investment, promote Irish companies, and invest in the education and training of its workforce. The result has been that Irish companies and facilities have been critical in developing a variety of specialized software. The importance of government policy to attract and develop this sector has been widely studied. The existing scholarship emphasizes the specific role government needs to play to not only attract foreign investment but link the foreign multinational with incipient local companies to provide industrial upgrading, innovation, and the creation of networks of technology development (O'Malley, O'Gorman 2001; Ó Riain 2004; Breznitz 2007).

In addition, tourism has been a sector in which the state has invested and has been critical to economic growth in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period (Clancy 2009; Zuelow 2009). The number of overseas tourists to Ireland grew steadily from 2002 through 2007 but has been declining each year since then through at least 2010, the last year for which we have data (CSO 2012, 246). Expenditures by tourists also grew from 2002 through 2007, peaking that year at almost €4 billion. By 2010, spending by visitors had declined to less than €3 billion, almost a 25% decline in visitor revenue from its peak just three years earlier (CSO 2012, 247). The importance of tourism and other spillover sectors like construction is that they have offered employment opportunities to those in Ireland who do not possess the training and skills associated with the high tech sectors of pharmaceuticals and ICT. In the years just before the collapse the financial sector also became an important element of Irish economic growth (White 2005; Reddan 2008; Power 2009, 200-207). Taken together, the Irish took advantage of the growing globalization in world markets, especially capital and trade and to a lesser extent labor, to propel their economy forward and experience unprecedented growth. Beyond specific policies, some argue that Irish culture provides a critical asset in Irish economic growth (Bradley, Kennelly 2008). When one sees the excesses that developed in terms of the building boom and bust, however, one must recognize that the Irish entrepreneurial spirit became obsessed with consuming wealth more than just creating new products and services.

The surge in economic growth that occurred after 1995 as part of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon added new momentum to value change in Ireland. Increased female participation in the workforce, growing criticism of the Catholic Church and the loss of its moral monopoly⁹, a new era of immigration, and dramatically higher standards of living for many challenged much of the inherited value

structure of previous generations. What does it mean to be Irish and what do the Irish want were the questions that confronted a society amidst the challenge of liberalism and its meaning for the inherited national identity (White 2002). Thus, rapid social and economic change challenged a static or backward conception of identity and required the Irish nation to redefine itself (Mays 2005). While some had critiqued the form modernity took in Ireland and advocated for a culture that respected its past and heritage (Fennell 1993; Moriarty 2005), most were so focused on achieving, building, and buying that effective critiques of the materialism that had come to Ireland would have to wait.

4. Materialist Excesses and the Celtic Tiger

The prosperity of the Celtic Tiger period meant that the Irish had unprecedented disposable income. While some of the higher family incomes were used to purchase basic goods and helped many in Ireland achieve a higher material standard of living, much of the wealth of the Celtic Tiger was used for conspicuous consumption on items like big cars, electronic goods, and even helicopters. Some of this new wealth was also invested in land and construction (Coleman 2009, 76-78; Murphy, Devlin 2009, 32; Ó Dálaigh 2009, 45-46). This resulted in a rapid acceleration of home prices, and building, especially in the residential sector, boomed. Developers built homes and used the initial payments for these homes to purchase more land and built even more homes. The leveraging in this process meant that the value of the developers' properties far exceeded the cash that they used to secure loans for future developments. Because of the rapid process by which developers were buying land, selling houses, and reinvesting their profits, many of the developers were able to avoid taxation on their profits and emerge as an elite class with unparalleled wealth (O'Toole 2009, 82-89). Cooper (2009, 238) identifies the investment in property and wealth built in the construction sector as the "development disease" of Ireland (Cooper 2009, 238).

Banks played an important part in the promotion of the construction sector by facilitating the credit developers and consumers needed even if they did not have as much collateral as had historically been required. The rise of Anglo Irish Bank, based primarily on loans to developers, put pressure on the long established Allied Irish Bank and the Bank of Ireland to liberalize their credit policies (Cooper 2009, 166). Irish banks became reckless in providing loans when the value of the collateralized property was so inflated based on the property bubble. The "profits" banks reported on debt that was increasingly leveraged provided for outrageous salaries, bonuses, and lifestyles for the executives of the major Irish financial institutions (Ó Dálaigh 2009, 73; Murphy, Devlin 2009, 167).

Typically, blame for the financial crisis has been attributed to bankers and developers and their coziness with corrupt or inept politicians (Chari, Bernhagen 2011), but corruption is not just caused by the actions of business and political elites but by a more general political culture which fails to place

normative restraints on corrupt political practices (Mungiu-Pippidi 2013)¹⁰. Irish politicians, especially Bertie Ahern, may have been more preoccupied with the next election or dealing with his own personal financial crisis than creating sustainable economic growth policies for the long-term (Leahy 2009, 254-256; Keena 2011), but the property bubble would not have happened if the Irish public had not encouraged politicians to pursue policies that were meant to satisfy their ever-increasing material aspirations¹¹. By 2006, many in Ireland came to believe that investment in land, development, and property were the signs of personal success. Many in Ireland participated in the building boom by purchasing most, if not all, of the houses built by the developers. In order to afford the rapidly escalating housing prices, consumers often purchased multiple homes increasingly borrowing with thirty-five year zero percent down mortgages (Ross 2009, 141). Mortgage debt grew by 24% annually from 1996-2006, and the total debt the Irish owned on home loans grew by 760% in this decade (Murphy, Devlin 2009, 40).

Hence, banks experienced exorbitant profits based on the highly inflated values of very questionable assets, both overvalued mortgages and loans to developers (Allen 2009, 8-14; Ó Dálaigh 2009, 19-28, 63-108). By 2007 banks began trading these bad debts among each other to hide the reality that they were losing money on mortgages rather than making spectacular profits (Murphy, Devlin 2009, 53, 146). Not only did this delay the awareness of the scale and nature of the financial problem, but it allowed bankers time to contrive means of securing their own personal assets amidst the rapid deterioration of the financial balance sheets of their institutions.

What role did government play in regulating and preventing or ameliorating the financial collapse of the banks in Ireland? Instead of regulating and attempting to thwart the property bubble, government policy actually accentuated the problem. The government came to see the construction sector as a key elixir of growth necessary to sustain the Celtic Tiger. The continued growth of the construction sector was especially important to Bertie Ahern who needed the Irish economy to continue booming so that he could win a third term when the general election was to be held in 2007. When some economists such as Morgan Kelly at Trinity College voiced concerns regarding the escalating prices of property and the high probability that Ireland was entering a property bubble, Ahern dismissed these warnings as coming from those who challenged the new realities that the Celtic Tiger had created¹². To be fair, few economists or commentators in the media dared to question Ahern's assertions, not just because they feared Ahern's wrath but the vast majority of the public in Ireland had bought into the speculation frenzy of the property bubble. Ahern and other politicians had convinced almost everyone that Ireland lived under a new kind of economy where one need not worry about property bubbles or even consider the possibility of an end to the Celtic Tiger. In this political and economic environment, the government

continued to provide tax breaks and expand social welfare believing these were good policies and also good politics¹³.

Construction had become increasingly important as those employed in this sector grew rapidly. By 2006, one of four males was now employed in the construction sector (Murphy, Devlin 2009, 33; Ó Dálaigh 2009, 56-58), and the government increasingly relied on stamp duty revenue that grew rapidly due to the rapid escalation of property prices and their sale (Ó Dálaigh 2009, 58; O'Toole 2009, 120-121). Thus, construction had become the sector critical to continued economic growth in Ireland, supplanting the role that had been played by pharmaceuticals and information technology. Government had become excessively reliant on revenue from the sale of escalating valued property and become accustomed to low social welfare costs due to high employment. Moreover, the government's policies of maximizing home-building as the means to solve the problem of rapidly escalating home prices resulted in government policy expanding the building boom. The government had hoped that when supply outstripped demand the cost of housing would finally become more affordable for middle and lower income Irish citizens. Unfortunately, their policy only served to increase the size of the housing bubble which finally burst in 2008.

Problems in the construction sector actually began in 2007 when housing prices dropped by 7.3%, but the government and many refused to confront the reality of dropping property values (Ross 2009, 173-174). In 2007 the construction sector began to shrink at an annual rate of 13.5%. In 2008 the decline in construction had reached a rate of -29.1%. In 2009, construction declined by another 36.9%. In 2010, construction declined by another 36.9%. In 2010 the collapse of this sector continued shrinking further by 29.9%, and the collapse began to slow somewhat in 2011 when construction contracted by just 16.7% (see Figure 4).

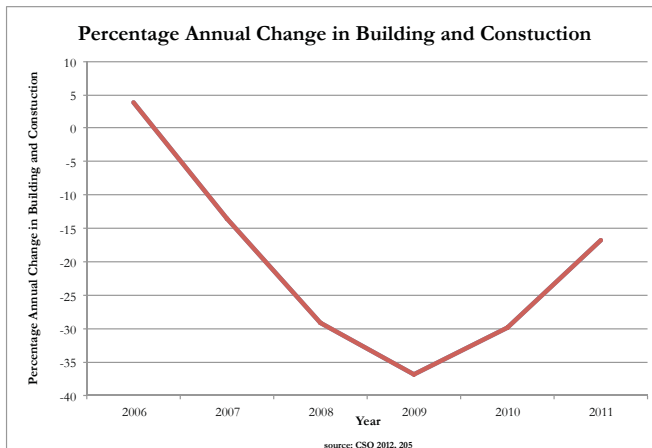


Figure 4

The number of newly built houses peaked in 2005 at 75,650 and had shrunk to only 9,075 by 2011 (see Figure 5).

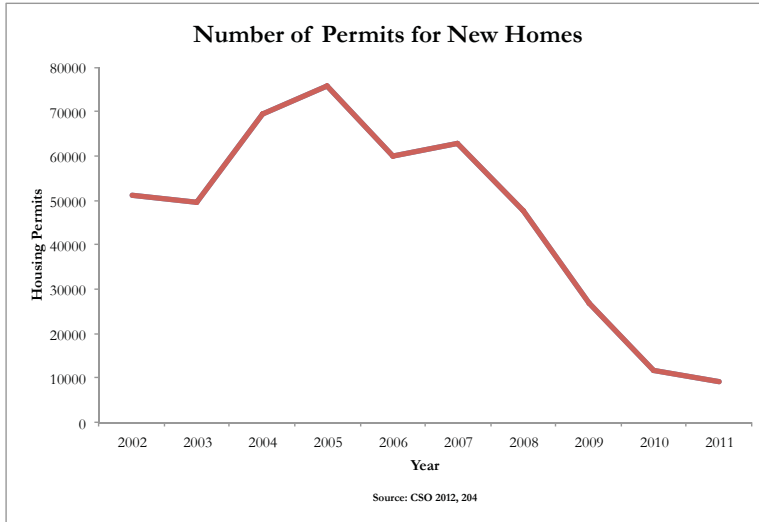


Figure 5

Moreover, the number employed in construction has dropped from 269,900 in 2007 to only 105,700 in 2011. Since the beginning of the current recession in 2007, there has been a total net job loss of 292,600 through 2011 (CSO 2012, 29). As a result, unemployment has skyrocketed from 4.7% to 14.3% in this time period (CSO 2012, 31), and job losses in the construction sector account for 56% of the reduced employment in Ireland (CSO 2012, 33). Construction has been the critical sector that has caused the recession in Ireland, and the economy of Ireland has shrunk by nearly 4% a year from 2007-2011 (CSO 2012, 130).

5. Responding to the Financial Crisis and Recession

Even if we can identify a real estate bubble in the mid-2000s built on greed as the initial cause of Ireland's economic problems, this does not directly help to explain how the government reacted to the threatened collapse of the Irish banking system in the fall of 2008. Clearly, the goal of the Irish government was to first deny and then minimize the fundamental problems that the Irish economy faced due to a run on the banks and a lack of enough assets to support the Irish financial system. Thus, the financial crisis is now at the heart of Ireland's current economic and fiscal crisis (Dellepiane, Hardiman 2012, 83). The tendency to not see warning signs and unacceptable risks before impending financial crisis was not unique to the Irish case (Hindmoor, McConnell forthcoming). This failure

did not just make the banks look poorly managed and irresponsible, but it was clear that the government, while not fully aware of the economic consequences of the financial crisis and their decisions in this crisis, was well aware of what this crisis would mean politically. Both Fianna Fáil and the Greens, who were in a coalition government, had to know that this kind of bad economic news would cost them at the polls. When the election came in February 2011, the Greens lost all six of their seats in the Dáil and Fianna Fáil lost nearly 75% of their seats. Voters clearly based their election decision on the failure of these parties in the financial crisis and punished them at the polls (White 2011).

But if we look back to the fall of 2008 when the Irish government made the decision to provide a blanket guarantee for the debt carried by the banks, the politicians in power could not have foreseen the disastrous economic and ultimately political decision they had made. The government believed that Ireland's economy required a stable financial system and that if the government did not bail out the banks, many other sectors of the economy would collapse as well (Cooper 2009, xi-xvii; Murphy, Devlin 2009, 4; Leahy 2009, 331-334; Ross 2009, 193). While the excesses and questionable practices of Irish bankers could have been prevented by better regulation in the preceding decade, the global financial crisis exacerbated the banking crisis in Ireland by limiting the availability of credit on global markets and isolating the problem to Irish banks. The problem was that the debt that the Irish banks had accumulated was highly linked to debt held by banks in several other European states. The failure to hold Irish banks responsible for the debts they had accumulated could trigger a much wider financial crisis in Europe. That is why other European states, especially France and Germany, have been insistent that the debt accumulated by Irish banks must be repaid. In this way, one can see that the Irish financial crisis was linked to a global financial crisis, one which the Irish alone could not control¹⁴.

As a result of the collapse of the banks and the government takeover, the Irish government has taken control of the bad debts of the Irish banks and placed them under the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA). In order to prevent the collapse of the Irish financial system, the government (in reality the taxpaying public) has taken responsibility for the banks' bad debts. NAMA has the unenviable job of liquidating the bad debt accumulated by Irish banks. This process will inevitably be painful for the taxpayer who will have to pay for the risks and in some cases outright corruption of Irish banks and their lending practices (Allen 2009, 140-145). A bigger problem for NAMA is that its policies and transactions are cloaked in secrecy. Rather than allowing real estate transactions to be open and transparent, NAMA's sale of assets is not public. This prevents the public from learning the price of assets and has contributed to the slow and continuing decline of real estate prices. Until the potential buyers know the true value of an asset, they continue to delay purchases and bottom out the real estate market. Prices continue to

drop. Thus, transparency and openness are critical to the revival of the real estate market in Ireland (Lyons 2010).

The most important impact of the financial crisis in Ireland and the government's commitment to support the Irish banking sector has been a dramatic and sudden increase in the debt of the Irish government as well as a rise in the annual deficit. This dramatic increase placed increasing pressure on the value of Irish government bonds. By the fall of 2010, the markets showed little confidence in the Irish ability to pay their financial obligations, and the interest rates on Irish bonds soared. It became obvious that the Irish had lost their ability to finance their debt in the private market. As a result, the Irish government finally conceded to a bailout program for Ireland in December 2010 from the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (The Troika).

This bailout was intended to lower the Irish government's annual budget deficit to 3% of GDP. This is the maximum allowable annual deficit in Eurozone states. Immediately after the bailout, the Irish government developed a budget plan to meet this target. In the initial year of the budget, 2011, the government cut spending and raised taxes by €6 billion to trim the deficit. Overall, the government expected to enact a total of €15 billion in spending reductions and tax increases from 2011-2015 with twice as many spending cuts as increased revenues (The National Recovery Plan 2010, 5, 9). After the first three government budgets have implemented these austerity policies, Ireland's annual budget deficit is estimated to still be more than €15 billion in 2013 (Department of Finance 2012, 5). Thus, austerity has not worked as of yet to eliminate or dramatically curtail Ireland's seemingly perennial large budget deficits and accumulating national debt. To further decrease future deficits, the Irish government faces continuing budget cuts and tax increases, at least for the next two years. Some of these cuts inevitably have come and will come from the social services the Irish government provides its citizens. Many have criticized the tendency for the costs of austerity to be borne by the marginalized in society who have seen government services reduced while the speculators, bond holders, and bankers have not had to pay their fair share for the damage they did to the economy (Habermas 2012, 102-103). The strain of reduced social welfare spending may undermine the social partnership process, especially for groups who were already relatively weak in this process (Ó Broin 2009). Other budget cuts in the pay of public sector workers are likely in the future as well. Many who work for the Irish government continue to have wages significantly higher than many of their counterparts in other European states (Reidy 2012). These reductions would come after earlier pay cuts have already been taken. The effect of these wage cuts among public sector employees means that in addition to austerity causing a difficult burden for the poor it is preventing an economic recovery. Reduced government spending is reducing demand and providing further

downward pressure on the Irish economy, lowering projected future growth and extending the recession.

Based on being a poster-child of austerity in the EU as well as the Irish government's relentless effort to renegotiate the terms of its bailout (Kinsella 2012), the government has been able to improve the terms of financing its long-term debt in a deal reached with the European Central Bank in early February 2013. The corporation which had been created to liquidate the Anglo-Irish bank debt that the Irish government had taken on with its promise in 2008 was itself dissolved. As a result, NAMA will have an expanded role in getting rid of debts, including those of Anglo. In addition, the short-term promissory notes the Irish government had used to finance some of the bank debt are being replaced by long-term sovereign bonds (Lane 2013). While this debt refinancing package will improve the ability of Ireland to manage its debt, it does little in the short-run to reduce the continuing need for austerity with promises of continued spending cuts and increased tax revenues in the next two budgets. Estimates are that of the €5.1 billion in cuts and tax increases due to come in the next two years, the restructuring of existing debt will save only about €1 billion in cuts or tax hikes. Nevertheless, there are clear long-term benefits to the recent deal reached by the Irish government and the European Central bank. By stretching out repayment of existing debt, the deal is likely to save the Irish government another €20 billion over the next decade (Beesley 2013). This will make it easier for the government to convince investors to purchase Irish bonds and make the repayment of Irish debt more credible and with reduced interest payments. This will lower the long-term cost of financing and paying off the debt for future Irish governments and tax payers.

6. Putting the Irish Financial Crisis in Perspective

Much has been written about the recent financial crisis in Ireland, the bailout, and austerity policies. Most accounts of Ireland's current economic challenges focus on the failure and questionable practices of banks, the decision by the Irish government to guarantee the debt accumulated by the Irish banks, the financial collapse, the international intervention to help the Irish manage this debt, and the austerity policies that have been put in place to try to get Ireland's fiscal house in order. These recent economic developments need to be placed into a larger historical cultural and political context. The building boom was at least partially the result of a culture that had historically been preoccupied with property as a symbol of wealth. As the value of property accelerated in the early years of the new millennium, a frenzy of buying, building, and selling created a property bubble built on greed and materialist excess (O'Sullivan 2010, 11-12). The values associated with the crisis were incubated in the 1980s as Irish young adults in this era became preoccupied with their material existence increasingly removed other worldly concerns that

had historically motivated a very Catholic Ireland. This has led Inglis (2006) to contend that Irish culture moved “from self-denial to self-indulgence.” Elliott (2009, 9) has argued that while the loss of old-style Catholicism is not widely lamented in Ireland many are worried about the crude materialism and loss of values associated with the decline of the Catholic Church. Thus, the historic political culture that had promised frugal comfort has been replaced by a desire to define the ideal based on land, property, and material possessions.

In addition to this transformation of cultural values that were historically religiously defined or informed to social goods being defined in increasingly secular and materialist terms, there has also been a changed conception of the role of the individual in a political context. Cronin (2004, 211) has posited that once individuals are defined as consumers rather than citizens they lose their identity in the wake of globalization. Touraine (2013) contends that the economic crisis has further separated the economic life from the cultural and social experience. Kissane (2011, 136) argues that the financial crisis has triggered a second crisis of liberalism in Irish history. Vast social and economic changes have disconnected people from their government resulting in disillusionment with party politics, anger at corruption, and calls for major reform to the Irish political system. Increasingly, the state’s legitimacy itself is linked to the performance of the economy. Hence, the cultural changes that have come to Ireland best explain the economic outcomes we have witnessed¹⁵.

Politically, Fianna Fáil paid a great price in the general election of 2011 as the public blamed it as the party in power before and during the financial crisis. Fine Gael has fared little better since assuming power with Labour in early 2011. What is most surprising is that no new party has emerged to replace the dominant parties in Irish politics. This may suggest that the Irish political system has changed less due to the financial crisis than many had predicted and continues to be characterized by remarkable stability (White 2011; McGraw 2012). As Fine Gael and Labour have faithfully implemented most of the previously agreed-upon austerity policies, these parties have seen their support dissipate. Recent opinion polls show that Fianna Fáil has once again emerged as the single most popular party in Ireland. While it is too early to tell the political fate of the party most hold responsible for the financial debacle in Ireland, it is obvious that no new force has emerged to offer a different vision for Ireland in the twenty-first century. There is no party or political leader offering a vision to transform Irish policies with values that are in concert with the modern realities of Ireland and in concert with values the Irish seek to maintain or preserve from their heritage and traditions. The only exception to this may be President Michael D. Higgins who when campaigning for the Presidency in 2011 spoke of the need to renew the Republic (Higgins 2011).

Thus, the problems the Irish confront today are not just technical economic ones. The property bubble that led developers and mortgage holders to take on too much debt, financed by questionable loans made by Irish financial

institutions, and supported by Irish government policy resulted from a value system that motivated the hysteria for wealth and accumulation of property. Most popular accounts focus on the failures of economic and political policies resulting in the financial and fiscal crisis in Ireland (Allen 2009; McDonald, Sheridan, 2009; Murphy, Devlin 2009; Ó Dálaigh, 2009; O'Toole, 2009; Ross 2009; O'Toole 2010; Soden 2010; Carswell 2011; Cooper 2011). Despite the recession, bailout, and austerity, it would be unwise to dismiss the economic policies that proved successful in creating much of the growth in Ireland of the past two decades but became threatened in the 2000s by a refusal to focus on innovation and instead rely on speculation in land and housing (Ó Riain 2008). Notwithstanding the debt and continuing budget crisis, Ireland's long-term economic prognosis is not as bad as it might now appear because it has sought to take advantage of opportunities in the era of globalization. Instead of perceiving global capitalism as a threat, the developmental network approach to Irish economic policy has allowed the Irish to take advantage of the growing fluidity of capital and the ability to produce for global markets. This is the means by which the Irish have been able to embed liberal economic policies and make globalization work for them¹⁶. Moreover, Irish economic policies have connected domestic firms with foreign multinationals, deepening capitalist growth and preventing Ireland from becoming an export platform. Foreign investment has tended to provide jobs in the high tech sectors disproportionately benefiting highly skilled workers¹⁷. This may account for the perceived inequality associated with globalization as those who work in high tech export sectors have been seen their jobs and incomes much more stable than those in the public and construction sectors of the Irish economy¹⁸.

Despite pressure from European governments (Basinger, Hallerberg 2004), the Irish government remains committed to a low corporate tax rate of 12.5% and has refused to budge on this issue because this low tax rate is believed to be a major incentive for international investment that fuels long-term economic growth. Foreign investment has been critical to providing the capital necessary for economic growth in Ireland. In 2008 and 2009, Ireland's exports decreased, but large trade surpluses continued because imports fell more sharply than exports. Exports rebounded in 2010 and 2011 so that exports are now more than 9% higher than when the recession began in 2007 (see Figure 3). Thus, exports continue to be a successful means of promoting economic growth in Ireland which might help finance the burden of debt created by the property bubble and the government takeover of the banks. In sum, the Irish have successfully developed policies that have attracted foreign investment and are aware that these policies should continue to provide economic growth in the future. But correct or wise economic policies need to be accompanied by a new value system that corrects the excesses of individual greed and the material expression of one's worth.

This article has argued that the Irish recession and fiscal crisis can best be explained not just by the collapse of the construction and financial sectors of the Irish economy but by appreciating what brought about the building boom and bust. One must appreciate the materialist excesses of the Celtic Tiger. Few, if any, advocate a return to this period of crass consumerism. While most appreciate the problems that created the downfall of the Celtic Tiger, few have offered a coherent vision of an Irish nation in the XXI century that lives up to its obligations but does not do so without considering what culture or ideology should drive national politics in the future. If one looks too critically at the Irish elites and mass public in the most recent past, one can be left with a cynicism that paralyzes one's ability to see beyond the present challenges and difficulties (Boland 2012). Perhaps what is needed in Ireland is a modest but achievable set of goals and policies that may not yield massive short-term gains but are more effective in the long run (Kinsella, Lyons 2011, 66). This will require a patience and discipline that is fundamentally different from the materialism and short-sightedness that characterized Irish culture and policy-making in the later years of the Celtic Tiger.

Notes

¹ The standard view of Ireland's peripheral development in Europe is found in Cunliffe (2001). Di Martino (2003) contends that the Roman Empire did incorporate Ireland and therefore Ireland was influenced significantly by Roman civilization.

² One economic historian characterizes the performance of the Irish economy after independence as a "rocky road"; see Ó Gráda (1997).

³ Cowen (2002) refers to this general process as "creative destruction" as globalization impacts local cultures. Cerny, Menz, Soederberg (2005) claim that globalization inevitably integrates peoples in a world quite distinct from the more parochial environment that preceded it.

⁴ This state's role in leading and directing economic development among those states who have historically "backward" economies or who are classified as late developers is stressed by Gerschenkron (1962). For a more recent analysis of the importance of the state in the economic development of states, see Schmidt (2009).

⁵ The Irish experience conforms to the general finding that the political capacity of the state interacts with the open market policies of the state to determine the level of foreign direct investment (Coan, Kugler 2008).

⁶ The importance of women in the labor force in Ireland has been emphasized by Arrow (1997, 2-3) in his analysis of the Irish economy.

⁷ Suárez (2005) argues that while government policy has promoted the Irish language Ireland has remained an overwhelmingly English speaking nation.

⁸ Millar (2008) makes a similar argument.

⁹ This concept of moral monopoly is borrowed from Inglis (1998).

¹⁰ Ross and Webb (2012) claim that the cronyism and corruption in Ireland goes far beyond a few developers and Fianna Fáil politicians but is embedded in Irish culture. Their earlier work (Ross, Webb 2010) highlighted how a lack of transparency and accountability allowed economic and political elites get away with wasteful spending and projects. Solutions to Ireland's difficulties are often linked to the need to overcome public sector inefficiency and corruption (Campbell 2010, 8-9; Collins 2013).

¹¹ It has long been recognized that the major incentive for politicians is reelection, and they pursue policies in government to achieve that goal. See Mayhew (2004). This meant that as government revenue increased so did government spending. Thus, much like the rest of society the government came to believe that its revenues were likely to continue increase rapidly and it could afford ever expansive social welfare and other commitments (Kinsella, Lyons 2011, 72-73).

¹² See Kelly (2010) for a recent analysis of the credit bubble.

¹³ Moene (2011) has argued that sometimes political elites, motivated by satisfying the public good, choose policies that may maximize their popularity or survival but are not in the long-term public good, even in open competitive polities. One should not assume the crony capitalism or a process whereby politicians made policies that benefitted special or certain groups in society is unique to Ireland. The challenge of effective corporate governance is perennial for all states. See Gourevitch, Shinn (2005).

¹⁴ Globalization's tendency to create processes that are not held accountable by existing levels of regional and global governance is explained in Keohane (2003).

¹⁵ This argument is built on the contention of Eckstein (1988) that cultural changes are the source of political change.

¹⁶ The challenge is to make globalization work and not undermine social traditions and civil society. For this argument see Ruggie (2003).

¹⁷ This reality is that Ireland conforms to research in the labor markets in other national contexts. See Pandyi (2010). This tendency contradicts the more general argument that globalization and the flow of capital internationally undermines incomes while providing for growth. See Spence (2011).

¹⁸ For the general argument that globalization increases wealth but it is unequally shared by different sectors of the society, see Wade (2003, 32-39) and Muller (2013).

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From Periphery to Core (and Back)? Political, Journalistic, and Academic Perceptions of Celtic Tiger- and post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland

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Abstract:

Since the Celtic Tiger, the concept of periphery has been an integral part of the debates on Ireland's role in the world economy, on its position in the European Union, on its relationship with Great Britain and on internal regional disparities. Whereas Ireland has universally been perceived as being at the core of the European integration project, there is no consensus whether Celtic Tiger-Ireland eventually managed to leave the economic periphery or semi-periphery as defined in the World-Systems Analysis. Additionally, the Celtic Tiger did not manage to reduce regional disparity within Ireland – a fact that resulted in an increased focus on the internal periphery and core. The current recession negatively influences the perceptions of Ireland's economic development and of its role in the European Union.

Keywords: Celtic Tiger, periphery and core, public perception, recession, regional disparities

1. *Introduction*

Even though the periphery (and core) model has been part of the political, academic and journalistic debate on the state of Irish economy and society for decades, it has most frequently entered these discourses during the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger periods. It was especially the boom years and the following severe economic downturn, which have stimulated a heated debate on Ireland's position in the world economy. On the one hand, Celtic Tiger-Ireland was widely perceived as a shining example of the successful economic development of a small (peripheral) nation. This perception was closely linked with the question of whether the Republic of Ireland was upwardly mobile in

the core and periphery classification, or to be more precise, whether it managed to leave the periphery and join the core countries. On the other hand, the fiscal crisis, bailout and recession are an enormous setback for Irish economic development and represent a major threat to the ideal of an economically upward Ireland. The economic boom and crisis have also boosted questions on the entire meaning of periphery. Does it exclusively refer to economic status or does it also include further spheres?

Furthermore, Ireland also has a well-established internal periphery. So it is characterised by a permanent east/west divide with the Greater Dublin area as the core and the west/the western coastline as the archetypical periphery. The effects of the boom and bust years on the internal periphery and on the development of regional disparities have been a central issue in recent Irish regional planning.

The essay starts with an introduction to the traditional core and periphery concept and its more recent modifications/specifications, which are, in terms of the intermediate semi-periphery, of particular importance for the classification of the Republic of Ireland. Elaborating on the public discourse on Celtic Tiger- and post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland in the world system furthermore requires to elaborate on the economic development of independent Ireland until the advent of the economic boom, since industrialisation strategies (and membership of the European Economic Community) had already started to transform the peripheral Irish economy and eventually initiated a discussion on an economic upward mobility. The main parts of the article then turn to the perceptions of Celtic Tiger- and post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland in the world economy by the Irish political sphere and compare them with academic and journalistic evaluations. It illustrates the main contexts in which the periphery (and core) concept was used in Ireland, the varying meanings of the term periphery and whether the country has been seen as upwardly or downwardly mobile in economic (and other) terms. Last but not least, the focus is also directed to the internal core and periphery in the debates on regional policy.

2. The Core and Periphery Model

The terminology of core and periphery was introduced by John Friedmann in the early 1970s to illustrate the concentration of resources in certain countries/regions and the dependence of less developed countries (Breathnach 2007, 73). Shortly after, the core and periphery concept became the central element of the World-Systems Analysis that goes back to Immanuel Wallerstein (Chase-Dunn, Grimes 1995, 389). Both, Friedmann's Dependency Theory and the World-Systems Theory can be described as models of the global (economic) power structure.

The core refers to the group of wealthy advanced countries, whereas developing or weakly industrialised countries are the periphery. The characteristic feature of the power relationship between core and periphery is the dominance of the core industries and the dependency of peripheral countries (Chase-Dunn,

Grimes 1995, 389; Breathnach 2007, 73). This is for example reflected in core-based ownership of peripheral industries, trading relations mainly feeding the demands of the core countries or by a brain drain from the periphery to the core (Brookfield, Munck, in Breathnach 2007, 73). Several economic variables can be used to place a country in this world system. The central ones are the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, the level of profits and wages, the diversity in production, the technological know-how, the level of innovation and the level of inequality and poverty (Wallerstein 1976, 462; Chase-Dunn, Grimes 1995, 397; O'Hearn 2001, 202-203; Kirby 2004, 320).

However, there are also countries that do not really fit into that rather clear-cut system of core and periphery. The World-Systems Analysis has found a solution to that problem by defining a further category, or rather a sub-category: the semi-periphery. Immanuel Wallerstein describes the intermediate position of semi-peripheral countries as follows: "In part they act as a peripheral zone for core countries and in part they act as a core country for some peripheral areas" (1976, 463). Some World-Systems analysts have even gone further as they have developed the category of the European semi-periphery, since it seems to differ substantially from their counterparts on other continents in terms of their developmental status. The European semi-periphery – can be defined by additional economic *and/or* political/societal features. These additional factors include a massive state intervention in the economy, very high rates of public sector employment (as indicator of a very big state apparatus), the enormous expansion of the welfare state, the weakness of the civil society or high unemployment and emigration rates (Peillon 1994, 185, 188, 189, 193). Michel Peillon, therefore, concludes that it has to be differentiated between semi-peripheral economy and semi-peripheral society in some cases (193). This illustrates that the term periphery may sometimes go beyond the admittedly crucial economic indicators.

The pattern of core, semi-periphery and periphery is traditionally perceived as comparatively stable by world-systems World-Systems analysts, which also means that upward mobility from the periphery to the core has been regarded as a relatively rare phenomenon (Chase-Dunn, Grimes 1995, 389)¹. However, in the course of globalisation and the recent restructuring of the world economy there seems to be a tendency towards more (upward) mobility.

With regard to economic development, the role of foreign direct investment (FDI), which has been central to Irish economy growth, is widely discussed. Pessimists only see negative effects of high FDI levels on factors such as the GDP or Gross National Product (GNP)². The more optimistic view values FDI not as a negative force for economic growth and upward mobility, but as one that is less positive than domestic investment (Chase-Dunn, Grimes 1995, 398).

Below the global level, the core and periphery model – with its mechanisms explained above – can furthermore be used to explain uneven development and regional disparities within a country (Breathnach 2007, 73). This

has also be the case in Ireland, where the periphery and core terminology has entered the discourses on regional development and planning.

3. From Periphery to Semi-Periphery: The Irish Economy until the late 1980s

Before extensively elaborating on Celtic Tiger- and post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland and its perception by politicians, academics and journalists, it is essential to look at Irish economic (and societal) development and its position in the world system until 1990. Due to its weak economic performance, it was universally acknowledged that independent Ireland represented a peripheral nation. Nevertheless, there had also been agreement on the changing nature of Irish peripherality during that period.

Ireland's peripheral status can be traced back to the seventeenth century, since the establishment of Protestant/English landlords laid the foundation of Ireland's agrarian-based economy and of its dependence on England/Britain (Sturm 1998, 73-74). During the eighteenth century Ireland then fully functioned as a British colony that mainly had to produce agricultural goods for the British market (74).

With Ireland's incorporation into the United Kingdom in 1801 its status switched from an external periphery to an internal one, but the basic structure of economic relations with Britain did not change. Ireland – except the northeast – remained an agrarian economy exporting its goods to the other parts of the UK (Breathnach 2007, 76). Besides economic dependence (and exploitation), large-scale emigration represents another characteristic feature of the periphery. This criterion was also fulfilled by nineteenth and early twentieth century-Ireland.

Independent Ireland inherited this 'classical' periphery structures and until the early 1930s the Cumann na nGhaedheal government made no strong attempts to change them. Pronnsias Breathnach, therefore, summarizes "that there was to be no change in the South's developmental status as a primary exporting peripheral economy, except that it was now [and again] an external rather than an internal periphery of the British core" (2007, 79).

The laissez-faire period ended with Fianna Fáil's economic nationalism, which was to end the dependence on Britain and to establish a self-sufficient Irish economy. In order to reach that aim the Irish market was now heavily protected, industrialisation was promoted and the economic war with Britain was fought. However, economic nationalism did not manage to lead Ireland on the road to long-term economic success and sustainable growth. Rather, 'protected' Ireland fell even further behind the booming European economies in the 1950s. The GDP, wages and living standards did not substantially grow, whereas unemployment and emigration rates skyrocketed (Murphy 2005, 29). "Ultimately Ireland was still on Europe's periphery in both an economic and political sense" (29-30).

As a reaction to the crisis the Fianna Fáil government under Seán Lemass abandoned protectionism and turned to the strategy of modernisation and industrialisation at the end of the 1950s. Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to stimulate the Irish industry was at the core of the new strategy. In the early 1980s more than one third of manufacturing jobs had been created in non-Irish firms, particularly American ones, and Ireland's entry to the European Economic Community had decisively supported this development (Breathnach 2007, 80-81). Those foreign-based firms concentrated on trade with continental Europe so that Irish economic dependency on Britain now substantially declined (81). Breathnach points out that Ireland had transformed from the classical to a new form of periphery by 1980. This new type was defined by the export of manufacturing rather than agricultural goods (*ibidem*), and by a dependency on foreign firms rather than the British market. However, compared with the European and American core, the Irish GDP per capita, income and living standards still remained low (Smith 2005, 37; Breathnach 2007, 81) and mass unemployment and emigration returned in the 1980s. Denis O'Hearn refers to a number of analysts who all "agreed that Ireland was still stuck in a [semi-]peripheral developmental path" (2001, 204).

4. *Celtic Tiger- and post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland*

Since the early 1990s the economic situation in the Republic of Ireland completely changed. In contrast to former decades, the new peak in foreign direct investment now generated a very large number of high skills or professional occupations rather than low-skilled manufacturing jobs in the industrial sector. This trend was accompanied by a blossoming financial, insurance and software sector (Breathnach 2007, 85). Between 1990 and 2000 Ireland had a remarkable average growth of the GDP of more than 7 per cent (Smith 2005, 38-39). The Irish employment rate rose from 51.7 per cent of the population to a total of 66.3 per cent in 2004 (O'Connell, Russell 2007, 44) and living standards increased substantially from 60% of the EU average to slightly above it (Clinch *et al.* 2002, 26-27). Unemployment declined by 11.4 per cent between 1993 and 2000 (Smith 2005, 40). The Irish labour market had become extremely attractive to people in and outside Europe so that the Republic of Ireland also changed from being a country of emigration to one of immigration. Peter Clinch *et al.* illustrate the outstanding character of the Irish experience since the 1990s: "The boom was exceptional, not just by historical Irish standards but also in an international perspective. Apart from the 'Asian Tigers' between 1960 and 1990, and China since 1978, no other countries have sustained such rapid growth for a comparable length of time" (2002, 28).

After the year 2000 the first dark clouds appeared on Ireland's blue economic sky when the so-called "dot.com bubble" (Breathnach 2007, 85)

collapsed and heavily hit the Irish information technology branch, which was confronted with plant closures and relocations to Eastern Europe (*ibidem*). More severe economic problems, however, just occurred with the fiscal crisis, recession, bailout and austerity policy. Between 2008 and 2010, Ireland experienced a constant decline of the GDP, which peaked in 2010 with a minus of over 5 per cent. Since 2011, however, the Irish economy and the GDP have slightly grown again (CSO 2013a). The unemployment rate dramatically increased from 4.9 per cent in early 2008 to 15 per cent in early 2012. Since then, the situation has slightly improved with currently 14.1 per cent being unemployed (CSO 2013b). The recession and high unemployment have also brought back mass emigration. Since 2010 there is a huge rise in Irish people emigrating. Between April 2011 and April 2012 more than 46,000 Irish nationals left the country (Sheehan 2012) so that Adrian Sheenhan spoke of “emigration ‘at famine levels’” (2012) in the *Irish Independent*.

5. (Semi-)Periphery or Core?: Irish Perceptions of Celtic Tiger- and Post-Celtic Tiger-Ireland

The boom and bust years since the 1990s have had a tremendous impact on Ireland’s perception at home and abroad. This holds particularly true for the Celtic Tiger period. Formerly being characterised as a weak (semi-)peripheral country in economic terms, the Republic of Ireland was now widely “hailed as a miracle economy” (Smith 2005, 36) and soon called the “Celtic Tiger”³. However, there were also critical voices arguing that Ireland was only a “Celtic kitten” or a “paper tiger” rather than a real Tiger (38). Especially the domestic debate on Ireland and its economy also included the aspect of a possibly new status in the world economy, or to be more precise, whether Ireland was upwardly mobile or still a peripheral/semi-peripheral nation.

The concept of periphery (and core) has been used for decades in Irish political, academic and journalist discourses, but since the advent of the Celtic Tiger an increased frequency is recognisable. Having a closer look at the political debate, one can identify both a number of key contexts in which the concept of periphery has been used and a variety of meanings of the term itself when it is referred to Ireland.

To those key contexts belong economic policy (development of the Irish economy, globalisation, foreign direct investment etc.), European affairs (integration process, impact of the EU on Ireland) and foreign relations (especially the relationship with Britain). Quite often these contexts are interwoven.

The parliamentary protocols, furthermore, reveal that the Dáil deputies and senators attribute different meanings to periphery. It must be emphasized, however, that the varying interpretations of it are often not clear-cut, but that the boundaries are rather fluent.

5.1 *Geographical Periphery*

One frequent usage of the term periphery is a sole geographical one. Parliamentarians have repeatedly referred to Ireland's geographical location at the edge of the European continent. So did Senator Fiona O'Malley (Progressive Democrats) in a debate on the Irish economy in a globalised world: "Ireland is on the periphery of Europe and we cannot forget that. Doing business from a peripheral island location is not the same as from mainland Europe" (Seanad Debates, Vol. 187, 21.11.2007, col. 1580). Ireland's geographical periphery is not only perceived with regard to the European continent as whole, but also in the context of the (changing) geographical boundaries of the political and economic entity of the European Union. A prime example of that is a comment by Joe McHugh (Fine Gael) on EU enlargement:

Regarding enlargement, there is a serious issue in terms of our peripherality. We are moving further away from the centre of Europe. With the eastern European bloc we are more on the periphery now than ever before from a geographical point of view. That is something that is settling into the psyche of the Irish electorate. They can feel that distancing and that we are further on the periphery [...]. (Dáil Debates, Vol. 652, 23.04.2008, col. 808)

A characteristic of the sole geographical interpretation of the term periphery is the fact that it does not include any reference to economic and political influence or power structures. The two statements mentioned above, however, illustrate that the geographical periphery is seen as a factor that has explicit implications for Ireland's (economic) development and for its relations with the European and global partners. As already emphasized, Senator Fiona O'Malley referred to the differences between Ireland and continental Europe and continued to argue that the geographical periphery was not naturally the preferred location for foreign investors and, therefore, had to offer particularly attractive conditions (Seanad Debates, Vol. 187, 21.11.2007, col. 1580).

5.2 *Role in the European Union*

That Ireland represents the European western periphery is a given geographical fact. With regard to the EU or European integration matters, however, Irish deputies beyond party lines have perceived the Republic of Ireland as being "at the heart of the EU" (Dáil Debates, Vol. 652, 23.04.2006, col. 827) or as being "a key player in Brussels" (Dáil Debates, Vol. 639, 16.10.2007, col. 1080). Ireland is commonly portrayed as a European country that has managed to compensate its location on the geographical fringe – or periphery – by joining the European Economic Community in 1973 and since then being strongly committed to European integration (Dáil Debates, Vol. 651, 09.04.2008, col. 626). Especially the participation in the monetary union

and the introduction of the Euro during the Celtic Tiger has been regarded as a very strong indicator that Ireland belongs to the “inner circle” (Dáil Debates, Vol. 578, 20.01.2004, col. 45) of EU countries (Dáil Debates, Vol. 578, 20.01.2004, col. 45). The rhetoric pattern of the “heart of the EU” or of the “key player” illustrates that Ireland has been widely perceived as some kind of core country in European matters, even though the term core itself has not been used. There had been critical voices what the current nature of European integration is concerned (e.g. Sinn Féin or the Green Party until the 2008 referendum on the Lisbon Treaty), but the basic perception of Ireland being a core player with regard to the European project and, therefore, being “at the heart of Europe” was not really challenged during the Celtic Tiger.

The current bailout of the Republic of Ireland under the direction of the so-called troika – consisting of the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the EU – has an enormous potential to change or negatively influence the EU’s perception by the Irish and Ireland’s self-perception of its role in the EU. Indeed, there is currently a debate on Ireland’s position in the EU going on. The political leader of it is the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs which recently had a detailed discussion on Ireland’s future role in Europe in February and March 2013. To support and enrich the debate, the committee had also invited Irish Members of the European parliament, leading economists, a representative of the TASC think tank, commentators of leading newspapers and of RTÉ as well as scholars working on EU matters.

Gay Mitchell, MEP, insisted on Ireland still being at the heart of the EU and did not see an Ireland dominated by EU decisions. Rather, he referred to Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the fair share of commissioners to negate any subordinate role of Ireland among the member states:

Since 1973, Ireland has always been at the heart of the European project. This January we commenced our seventh Presidency of the European Union in 40 years. [...] We have access to 500 million consumers as part of the Single Market. We have one Commissioner, just like Germany has, and one Minister at the Council of Ministers, as do all the other member states. The Secretary General of the Commission is Irish, as was the Secretary General before her. (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013c)

Irish Examiner commentator Ann Cahill, however, shared the view that Ireland’s current economic crisis and the economic and fiscal policies of the last decades will undermine its reputation and influence within the EU:

Ireland will be an increasingly small voice in the new Europe. The Irish have long known that if we are not strong, we must be clever. Up to now that cleverness has been concentrated on big business and big money. Like mercenaries, we hope to take part of the spoils. We are not universally admired for this. We are castigated for allowing companies use our tax system to evade tax while we look for cheap loans from the EU. They wonder why we refuse to adopt the financial transactions

tax, FTT, which would extend our tax on share dealings to derivatives. They do not buy the job loss argument. Now with our economic miracle a thing of the past, our recklessness a given and our scrambling back up the credit rating ladder a wonder, we need to look at how we will exercise power in an EU that is hands-on with our budget. We will be forced to change our business taxation system. Members can read the OECD reports and other reports building the pressure as the IMF shies away from bailing out Cyprus and its money-laundering banks. (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013b)

Dan O'Brien from the *Irish Times* directed his attention to public attitudes towards the EU and referred to a 32 per cent decline in those who regard the EU a good thing between 2007 and 2012 (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013b). Seán Whelan (RTÉ) joined in here and reported of a widespread view that "Ireland is being bossed around and forced to do things [...]" (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013b). This perception goes mainly back to the control of the Irish budget and orders to cut down public expenditure by the troika (including the EU and the European Central Bank). Whelan then continued to argue that Ireland had to prepare against the possible situation of being too much "bossed" by non-Irish forces. His suggestions even included the worst-case scenario of leaving the Euro/the EU:

Defensive strategies can help ensure that [this] perception is minimised by ensuring we are not in a situation in which we can be bossed around in the first place. However, in cases in which one is being bossed and booted around by other countries, one needs to be able to switch into an offensive strategy and go on the offence against it or even think about getting out altogether. [...] We need to be hard-nosed in Ireland, particularly in our political and parliamentary system, and most especially about money in all its manifestations, protecting the wealth of the nation from all enemies, internal as well as external. (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013b)

Whereas Irish politicians of the governing parties Fine Gael and Labour as well as of Fianna Fáil basically seem to avoid any rhetoric of Ireland being "bossed" by the EU, Richard Boyd Barrett of the People Before Profit Alliance did not hesitate to explicitly speak of "EU masters" (Dail Debates, 09.11.2011, Vol. 746, col. 35) in a parliamentary debate.

The statements above reveal that the very positive interpretations of Ireland's role in the EU have waned during the bailout, even though they have not completely disappeared. The hard regulations initiated by the troika have definitely had an impact on the perception of the relationship between Ireland and the EU. It can be argued that there is at least a tendency that Ireland is nowadays more frequently seen as a second-class member of the Euro group and of the EU in general due to its heavy dependence on EU financial support and regulations. Within parts of Irish society, Ireland is perceived as having more or less moved from the heart of the EU to its periphery again.

5.3 *Relationship with Britain*

When European issues were discussed, Irish deputies have also repeatedly compared the Republic of Ireland with Great Britain. Firstly, it is common sense that the traditional core and periphery relation of both countries has been reversed when it comes to European integration and the role within the European Union. So Bernard Durkan (Fine Gael) explicitly called Britain the European periphery, especially because it did not say yes to the single currency:

It is unfortunate that our next door neighbour, Britain, has remained on the periphery, especially on the currency issue. Other countries are in the same position. It would be hugely beneficial if the Irish Presidency could use its influence to encourage our next door neighbour into the inner circle, making it that much more effective. (Dáil Debates, Vol. 578, 20.01.2004, col. 45)

Ireland was not just portrayed as integral part of the “inner circle” of committed Europeans – and therefore as a member of the integrationist core of the EU by Durkan, but as a force that might be able to ‘positively’ influence Britain to join the Euro group.

Secondly, Irish politicians, such as Charles Flanagan (Fine Gael) have widely emphasized the fact that Ireland’s former massive dependence on Britain has rapidly declined since becoming a member state of the European Economic Community and introducing the Euro:

Since joining the European Community, as it was then known, in 1973, Ireland has benefited greatly. With EU help and support, the economy has been transformed. All decent infrastructural programmes in Ireland are thanks to the Union. We have embraced and benefited from European monetary union and, most importantly, progressed from being an inconsequential island on the periphery of Europe, overly dependent on the United Kingdom, to being a key player in Brussels at the heart of EU affairs. (Dáil Debates, Vol. 639, 16.10.2007, col. 1080)

Britain is also perceived as a decisive factor in Ireland’s role and importance within the European Union since it is widely portrayed as a kind of a broker between Britain and other member states in Brussels (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013a). Such a broker position which might help to find compromises between Britain, as the ‘reluctant European’, and other member states has significantly upgraded Ireland’s role at European level.

The still strong ties between Ireland and its direct neighbour Britain (as well as Britain’s functions of Ireland’s importance at EU level) results in strong Irish fears that Britain may decide to leave the EU in the near future. Irish parliamentarians repeatedly highlighted the negative effects of a ‘Brit-less’ European Union on the Republic of Ireland. Media representatives and scholars joined in it. In this context, Nat O’Connor from TASC explicitly linked a British withdrawal from the European Union with some kind of

Irish peripheralisation in geographic *and* economic terms, since Britain would function as a barrier or bulwark between Ireland and the EU:

Of course, Ireland, being geographically on the other side of the United Kingdom, will find itself in a difficult position. We would be in a very bad position if the United Kingdom leaves the European Union or pulls away because we trade so much with the United Kingdom, and yet we have growing trade over the recent decades with the European Union. It would be a bad position for Ireland if the United Kingdom pulled away. (Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, 2013a)

5.4 *Economic Development*

As already indicated, Irish membership in the EU and its predecessor organisations is also inextricably linked with Ireland's economic development, which is the main criterion used by world-systems World-Systems analysts to classify a country as core, semi-periphery or periphery. Irish parliamentarians generally perceived Ireland's economic development from its entry to the European Economic Community in 1973 to the Celtic Tiger as a success story that consequently had a positive impact on Ireland's status in the world economy. By joining the EEC, numerous deputies, such as Noel Flynn and Bobby Aylward (both Fianna Fáil), argued, that Ireland eventually even managed to leave the (economic) periphery (*Dáil Debates*, Vol. 651, 09.04.2008, col. 620, 626):

The days before our EU membership were bleak, inward-looking days when we had no prospects and were ravaged by unemployment and economic stagnation. We witnessed the awful haemorrhaging of Irish people from these shores because there were no opportunities of any description at home and the outlook was exceedingly grim. Those were sad days when we sat on the periphery. We endured unemployment, poor infrastructure, high borrowings, lack of foreign investment and high foreign debt. It is almost impossible to believe that those conditions were endemic here less than 35 years ago. [...] In just 35 years, we have completely reversed our position. Gone are the days of our insular existence. Ireland has embraced the European ideal with great gusto and our commitment to the great European project has transformed this island beyond measure. Nobody could have imagined that we would be transformed from a hopeless case to one of the most dynamic members of the EU. The figures in support of our membership speak for themselves. Our openness and connection to Europe have provided the foundation for the extraordinary prosperity we enjoy today. (*Dáil Debates*, Vol. 651, 09.04.2008, col. 620)

It must be emphasized that the deputies once again avoided speaking of a "core" country. So Ireland was illustrated as an upwardly mobile nation that was able to overcome its peripheral status (*Dáil Debates*, Vol. 651, 09.04.2008, col. 626). That Noel O'Flynn nevertheless regarded Ireland as a core (rather than a semi-peripheral) nation is evident from his list of economic key factors:

How far we have come in the past 35 years is evident from the following statistics. In 1973 our GDP at current market prices per head of population equalled 60% of the average of our Community partners. In 2007 our GDP equalled 146% of the EU average. In 1973, Ireland had a trade deficit of £341.5 million. We had a huge trade surplus in 2007. Since 1973 our total trade in goods and services has increased from €1.7 billion to €88.8 billion in 2007. This has made Ireland one of the most open trading economies in the world relative to population and economic size. (Dáil Debates, Vol. 651, 09.04.2008, col. 626)

Among the political parties represented in Irish parliament during the boom only Sinn Féin offered a much more negative or pessimistic interpretation of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon. Martyn Frampton points out that Sinn Féin was highly critical of the neo-liberal approach to economic development and growth applied in Ireland. Privatization and the focus on foreign direct investment – as the corner stones of Irish economic policy – were seen as a wrong economic strategy (2009, 137). Especially the huge amount of foreign direct investment during the Celtic Tiger was heavily criticised for transferring an unfair share of wealth produced in Ireland outside the country (mainly to the US):

There is no strategy to reduce this overdependence by developing our indigenous industries. [...] Our economic future cannot be dependent on maintaining our status as a tax haven for multinationals. [...] we face the precarious situation of having no control whatsoever over the factors which may influence a multinational to physically relocate to a low-wage economy or to repatriate its profits to another jurisdiction. (ní Dhonnabháin, 2006)

Therefore, Sinn Féin did not join in labelling Celtic Tiger-Ireland as some sort of core.

Whereas among the governing parties and large parts of the opposition there was some consensus that Celtic Tiger Ireland was no part of the economic periphery anymore (and instead reached some core status), journalistic and academic interpretations of the boom are much more divided. When the Celtic Tiger economy had taken up pace, wide parts of the Irish (and foreign) press as well as of the research community praised Ireland's economic performance and development (Smith 2005, 37-38).

However, a rising number of media commentators and scholars then started to question the substance of the Celtic Tiger economy and focussed on its structural weaknesses. As Sinn Féin, they mainly concentrated on the negative effects of the enormous dependence on (predominantly American) foreign direct investment and declared it the major threat to sustainable growth in Ireland. So Antoin Murphy of the *Irish Times* described the Celtic Tiger as a "franchised US baseball team" (Murphy, quoted in Smith 2005, 38) to refer to the American roots of the boom and to the dependency on the decisions by American firms.

Even though the interpretations of the Celtic Tiger in the academic sphere range from very positive to highly critical there seems to be some kind of consensus concerning Ireland's classification in the world system. Whereas Irish politicians have repeatedly spoken of Celtic Tiger Ireland having left the periphery, many economic and social scientists have doubted that the booming Republic of Ireland managed to become a core country. Rather, they classify it as intermediate semi-periphery or some other new form of periphery in economic terms – a specification that cannot be found among politicians.

Among the scholars who shared the view that Celtic Tiger-Ireland was some kind of core was Frances Ruane, director of the Dublin-based and highly influential Economic and Social Research Institute: "In that period we have effectively moved from being a semi-developed to being a developed economy" (2007, xi). Even though she avoided to use the term "core" it is quite obvious that she referred to the classification of the World-Systems Analysis and located Celtic Tiger-Ireland among the economic core states. Denis O'Hearn also had the impression that IMF and OECD representatives tended to classify the booming Republic of Ireland as a new core country (2001, 205).

The heavy dependence on mainly American foreign direct investment and trans-national companies is the main criteria why Irish and foreign economic scientists widely share a more sceptical view than Frances Ruane. In the theoretical part it was illustrated that foreign direct investment is seen as less positive for a country's economic development compared to investment by indigenous industries. O'Hearn, who is one of the most proponent critics of the Celtic Tiger economy, illustrates why this is particularly true of the Republic of Ireland in the 1990s. He refers to the extraordinarily high extend of profit/value produced by the Irish workforce which has been repatriated by transnational corporations during that period. The growing gap between the Irish GDP and GNP is a clear marker for that phenomenon. Whereas there was hardly any difference in the GDP and GNP in 1980, the GNP lagged behind the GDP by roughly 20 per cent in the year 2000 (O'Hearn 2003, 40).

Two further factors are also rather essential for the developmental status of a country/economy: (1) the level of inequality and (2) the generation of innovations. In both cases the Celtic Tiger seems to have failed the standards of core economies. With regard to inequality, Peadar Kirby emphasizes that the economic growth of the 1990s had been accompanied by an increasing relative poverty and by a rapidly widening income gap which is seen as atypical for a higher developmental status (2004, 320).

Furthermore, the Irish economy and society lag behind core countries in terms of generating innovations (Paus 2012, 164-165.; O'Hearn 2001, 204-205). An indicator of that is the fact that foreign-based and indigenous companies alike have invested a comparatively low share of their profits in research and development (Paus 2012, 164-165). According to O'Hearn, upward mobility in the world system is inextricably linked with innovation (2001, 205). Due

to the “weaknesses” of the Celtic Tiger, Kirby – as other analysts – summarizes that it did not manage to enhance Ireland’s development status:

[I]t can be concluded that Ireland’s ‘miracle’ resulted from prioritising economic growth over social development, and that the benefits were reaped mostly by an elite. The failure of the Celtic Tiger to foster an endogenous dynamic of innovation, the growing social polarisation that has accompanied it and the reconfiguration of the Irish state in a decisive manner so that it attends to the needs of corporate capital over those of its own citizens, have all served to camouflage rather than resolve Ireland’s long-standing development problems. (2004, 324)

Celtic Tiger-Ireland has, therefore, not been classified as a new part of the core by most economists and social scientists due to its specific structural features and dependence pattern. So O’Hearn still prefers the category of semi-periphery (2001, 205) and Breathnach still regards the Republic of Ireland as periphery, but as a new or modified form of it (2007, 85-86).

Celtic Tiger-Ireland is classified as semi-periphery by most economic (and social) scientists, so it is quite clear that their evaluation also accounts for the post-Celtic Tiger or recession period. Currently the academic community is debating whether the Republic of Ireland can be brought back on the right developmental track. As highlighted by O’Hearn, an innovative economy is essential for a future upgrade of the country’s development status. Already in 2006, the Fianna Fáil-led coalition government launched the *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation* (2006-2013) and saw in “the transition to a knowledge-economy” (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2009, 3) the cure to Ireland’s economic problems (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2009). The subsequent Fine Gael/Labour coalition has kept this economic strategy and Taoiseach Enda Kenny spoke of “real progress on our task of transforming the economy from one based on property speculation to one based on enterprise, exports and innovation” (Kenny, quoted in Burke-Kennedy 2013). Eva Paus values the efforts of the Kenny government to stimulate innovation, but doubts whether it will be successful in an age of austerity:

The economic crisis motivated an extensive reassessment of the innovation strategy, which has led to a better structure of coordination among relevant institutions going forward and a shift in emphasis away from basic science research to more applied research with greater input from the private sector. While the Kenny government has made radical cuts to social spending, it is trying to hold the line on support for moving the economy toward innovation. But the realization of that goal will be enormously difficult as funding for infrastructure and the expansion of social capabilities is lacking, social well-being is declining, and the government is managing a crisis and not a developmentalist strategy. (Paus 2012, 181)

Whereas the perception of Ireland having managed to leave the economic periphery with the Celtic Tiger was very widespread among Irish politicians, this

interpretation seems to have dramatically waned during the economic crisis and bailout. Rather, parliamentarians across party lines do now much more regularly speak of the Republic of Ireland as a peripheral economy again (Dáil Debates, Vol. 730, 20.04.2011, col. 682; Vol. 752, 18.01.2012, col. 90). In many cases, however, the usage of the term periphery must be interpreted as a combination of its economic and geographical meaning. So the deputies often seem to use periphery to refer to both, the economic development status of the Irish economy and the geographical periphery at the edge of Europe (with its specific economic needs) (Dáil Debates, Vol. 731, 05.05.2011, col. 620; Vol. 741, 21.09.2011, col. 85).

There is also another trend as to what the perception of the Irish economy under the conditions of the recession and bailout is concerned. With increasing frequency, Ireland is also portrayed as a being in a special position compared to the other struggling European economies of the periphery or having distanced itself from the southern peripheral countries. The prime representative using this strain of argumentation is the Taoiseach Enda Kenny who does not get tired of presenting Ireland as *the* country of the bailed-out periphery with the most ambitious efforts to fulfil the requirements of the troika and with the most positive fiscal and economic development. *The Economist* illustrates Kenny's position and also refers to the purpose of his strategy:

The former schoolteacher [Enda Kenny] prefers to capitalise on his image as the good pupil of the euro-zone periphery to secure better terms for Ireland's bail-out. The country, he says, is a 'unique and special case'. This is not to draw a parallel with the euro zone's other unique case, Greece, but to stand as its antithesis. If the obstreperous Greeks recently got a softening of their bail-out terms [...] to avert the threat of 'Grexit' from the euro, surely the Irish deserve help to secure their exit from the bail-out and return to markets on schedule at the end of the year. (*The Economist*, 2013)

That Enda Kenny's evaluation of Ireland as "special case" is not just one of an all too optimistic Prime Minister is illustrated by John Corrigan, chief executive officer of the National Treasury Management Agency⁴. According to Corrigan, internal business and potential investors also see Ireland in a much more positive light compared to the other (bailed-out) peripheral countries of the euro zone:

Investors we have met are mostly of the view that Ireland is the best positioned of the eurozone periphery countries to deal successfully with the crisis as it has a more flexible open economy and is recognising and taking action to deal with its problems on the basis of the measures set out in the troika programme. (Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, 2011)

6. *The Internal Core and Periphery*

As highlighted in the theoretical part, the core and periphery model may also be applied to the national level. Even though the Republic of Ireland is a compara-

tively small country, its socio-geographic structure is determined by a deep east/west divide. The east – and the Greater Dublin area in particular – represents the internal core, whereas the western parts must be characterised as the internal periphery. Economic development in the Republic has always been uneven and has mainly concentrated on the eastern (and southern) core. Economic disadvantage of the periphery also resulted in a massive brain drain – as another feature of peripheral areas – which has meant a permanent loss of highly-educated young people who migrated to the Irish core (or to international core regions) (Western Development Commission 2001, 19). Further effects of economic regional disparities in Ireland are persistently lower incomes and living standards in the western periphery compared to the eastern core (O’Leary 2001, 201).

Even during the Celtic Tiger, which had come along with a positive development in all parts of Ireland, the core and the periphery of the country did not narrow in terms of industrial development or living standards, because the highest growth rates in industrial output and employment could again be found in the east and south (Western Development Commission 2001, 12, 24). The following numbers illustrate this fact: in the eastern core the average annual growth rate in net industrial output was 17.5%, whereas it just reached 4.5% in the west (24). The current recession, together with the policy of austerity, has the clear potential to boost regional disparities and to further weaken the periphery.

Whereas the development of disadvantaged areas had almost been neglected during the economic crisis of the 1980s, this changed a decade later. The economic boom of the 1990s has played its part in boosting questions on the internal core and periphery, but John A. Walsh emphasizes that “[t]he transition to the Celtic Tiger era was not immediately accompanied by a revival of interest in regional planning or spatial development strategies. Rather a number of factors combined in the early 1990s which led to a new approach” (2007, 46). Nevertheless, uneven development of the Irish regions during the Celtic Tiger must be regarded as a decisive stimulus for a surge of interest in regional development and in promoting the periphery that is reflected in increased governmental efforts to stimulate growth in the western periphery and to reach a more even national growth pattern⁵. So the Irish government was confronted with claims from the western periphery as well as from the eastern core to intensify regional planning, since the boom had generated problems in both parts of the country (47-48).

In the political debate on the east-west-divide and regional development deputies have not hesitated to explicitly speak of an internal periphery. So did David Andrews (Fianna Fáil), Minister for the Marine, when referring to the possibilities and prospects of western/rural development in the discussion about the National Development Plan 1994-2000:

I wish to deal specifically with the marine sector which is ready to play its part in two main ways – by creating jobs and increasing prosperity through the exploita-

tion of natural resources, often in the most peripheral regions of the country [...]. I have a strong philosophical view of the need to locate jobs on the periphery of this island – in other words, in the remote rural parts which have been neglected for so long. (Dáil Debates, Vol. 434, 14.10.1993, col.1326-27)

Parts of the north-west sub-region (or, to be more precise, parts of the counties of Sligo and Donegal) have even repeatedly been perceived as some kind of ‘double periphery’ or ‘periphery within the periphery’ since they are not just part of the disadvantaged west but also of the border region – an ‘artificial’ periphery that was created with the partition of Ireland in 1922. As the western seaboard, the border region “suffer[s] [from] considerable social and economic disadvantage” (Dáil Debates, Vol. 432, 17.06.1993, col. 1333). Peripheral disadvantage of the north-west seems to have doubled and is regarded as particularly severe by north-western TDs (Dáil Debates, Vol. 432, 17.06.1993, col. 1333; Vol. 482, 05.11.1997, col. 803). Therefore, John Perry (Fine Gael) – as others – referred to the north-west as “the extreme periphery of the EU” (Dáil Debates, Vol. 482, 05.11.1997, col. 803). Brendan Smith (Fianna Fáil) pressured the Irish state and the EU to particularly assist and support the region (Dáil Debates, Vol. 432, 17.06.1993, col. 1333).

The *Northern Periphery Programme, 2007-2013*⁶, which is run by the European Union, has represented a major chance for the Irish western periphery to gain financial support for development projects. The programme “aims to help peripheral and remote communities on the northern margins of Europe to develop their economic, social and environmental potential” (Northern Periphery Programme 2011, 1). Northern Periphery regions are defined by the following features: “sparseness of population, rurality, insularity, harsh climate and peripherality” (2011, 15). The whole western part of Ireland – including the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Mayo, Cork and Kerry – may take part in the programme and is eligible for funding (5). Therefore, the listed counties are officially recognized and termed as (northern, European) periphery.

As already mentioned, there is the danger that the peripheral west will be further marginalised in the Ireland of recession and austerity. So the debate on the internal core and periphery structure currently seems to reach a new height. In 2009, Adrian O’Donoghue of the Border, Midland and Western Assembly already emphasized that the economic downturn affected some Irish regions more severely than others, depending on their economic structure. This is particularly true of the West and Border regions (as well as of the Midlands) with their heavy dependence on the construction, manufacturing and agricultural sectors (O’Donoghue 2009, 14). O’Donoghue, therefore, calls for a “structural shift away from primary production to higher value sectors and activities” (15), and rejects proposals of a concentration of development efforts in the core regions, since this “would further weaken Ireland’s economic competitive position and exacerbate regional disparities with high economic and social costs” (*ibidem*).

Paddy McGuinness, the then designated Chairman of the Western Development Commission, was invited to the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in November 2012 and urged the parliamentarians to continue in their efforts to promote western development under the conditions of recession and austerity:

The employment and population gains of the past decade on the potential to build on what has been achieved will be undermined unless there is a continued strategic focus on the region. In recent times substantial infrastructural improvements have been made, for example, the M6 to Galway, the strengthening of the electricity grid, greater access to broadband in rural areas [...]. However, a great deal more needs to be done if enterprises in the western region are to operate on a level playing field with enterprises in other regions and if the region is to be attractive to investors and highly skilled workers. This is the key to the region realising its full potential to achieve growth and job creation. In this, the commission has strived to identify the western region not only as a key resource for Ireland but also a critical asset as a bountiful region on the periphery of Europe [...]. (Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht, 2012)

7. Conclusion

The paper shows that the Celtic Tiger and the following recession have had a strong impact on the perception of Ireland's developmental status. In the 1980s it was still universally acknowledged that the country represented the semi-periphery (or some new type of periphery). This consensus ended with the Celtic Tiger when the majority of Irish politicians did not regard the Republic of Ireland as economic periphery anymore, but numerous economic and social scientists still rejected the notion that the Irish economy had reached core status. The current economic downturn has resulted in new national consensus that Ireland is still part of the (semi-)periphery and that a transformation of the economy towards a less dependent and more innovative economy is necessary. Nevertheless, there is a clear trend towards differentiation between the struggling peripheral economies, and Ireland is repeatedly presented in a much better light compared to Greece, Portugal or Cyprus, and regarded as being in a special position.

Furthermore, the paper emphasizes that the concept of periphery is not just used in economic terms in Ireland. So it can have a sole geographical meaning and is used to refer to Ireland's location at the edge of the European continent. From an Irish perspective, this geographical isolation could be successfully compensated by joining the European Economic Community and the Monetary Union. With regard to European integration, Ireland has traditionally been seen as a core player on the European stage by all parts of Irish society. The bailout and the EU's role in it currently endangers this positive self-perception, since more and more people regard Ireland as too much dependent on and dominated by the EU.

Besides the European level, the term periphery has also entered the context of Anglo-Irish relationship. Here, the dominant discursive pattern is the reduction of economic dependency on Britain and even the reversal of the core and periphery structure, at least as far as European integration is concerned.

Last but not least, the periphery within Ireland received much more public and political attention during the boom and bust years. Transforming the economy of the western periphery towards a so-called smart economy and sustainable growth represents an integral part of the current economic planning which aims at leading Ireland on the track towards becoming a core economy.

Notes

¹ The United States of America are the most prominent example of long-term upward mobility, since they did not only manage to leave the periphery but have reached a hegemonic position among the core countries, even though this hegemony is recently waning (Chase-Dunn, Grimes 1995, 396-397).

² The GDP refers to the total amount of value generated by an economy within a certain period. This also includes profits/incomes which do not remain in the country, but are transferred to other jurisdictions. The GNP just measures that share of the value which is not transferred outside the country (CSO, n.y.).

³ The term “Celtic Tiger” goes back to the Morgan Stanley investment banker Kevin Gardiner, who compared Ireland with the Asian Tiger states (Smith 2005, 37).

⁴ The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) is a state body which is responsible for the management of the “public assets and liabilities” (National Treasury Management Agency, n.y.) of the Republic of Ireland such as the National Debt or the National Pensions Reserve Fund (National Treasury Managements Agency, n.y.).

⁵ The establishment of the statutory Western Development Commission as well as the *National Development Programmes* 1994-2000, 2000-2006 and the National Spatial Strategy represent the prime examples in the strive for peripheral development.

⁶ The predecessor programme *IIIB Northern Periphery Programme 2000-2006* did not cover Irish regions.

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The Home of the Tiger: Economic Speculation and the Ethics of Habitation

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Abstract:

In Ireland, the “home” has a long tradition as a powerful spatial signifier, capable of expressing a range of social, aesthetic, and political interactions. Historically, home ownership in Ireland was not only a measure of working-and-middle-class respectability, but also a symbol of national independence that stood in opposition to a colonial history of dispossession. Throughout the Celtic Tiger, however, the ideas of what constituted the ‘home’ were transformed by a speculative form of capitalism that recreated domestic space as a fluctuating (and valuable) commodity. By centralizing the connection of urban space to capitalism, speculation opens the domestic spaces of the home to the processes of speculation and devaluation. Essentially, my argument analyzes how changing the economic parameters of domestic space creates a concomitant change in how homes are figured in the Irish cultural lexicon. This change represents a cognitive speculation where the speculative value of a home, as a commodity is what confers an authentic social status on the homeowner. Any ethical concerns related to domestic space, both its use and value, are superseded by its ability to generate capital via a speculative evaluation. Through the connection of spatial and cultural transformation, my paper furthers current discussions in Irish studies that analyze the dramatic impact, and aftermath, of the Tiger. The literary response to speculation, found in analyses of Deidre Madden and Anne Haverty, frame speculation as a parody of communal life that eliminates any real interpersonal relationships in a wave of postmodern alienation. Finally, my paper articulates how the lasting damage that followed the collapse of the Tiger altered the way the Irish understood the concepts and realities of the “home”.

Keywords: commodification, economics, home, literature, speculation

The Celtic Tiger – a period of roughly fifteen years – is one of the most important eras in Irish history. During the 1990s, the Tiger was thoroughly drenched in a discourse fascinated by ideas of total transformation that promised a complete metamorphosis of the country. Historian J.J. Lee, for

instance, described the Tiger as a driving force that changed Ireland from Europe's "carthorse" to Europe's "thoroughbred" (Lee 1996). Other prominent politicians pushed the importance of the Tiger beyond Lee's terms, describing Ireland's economic success as "a shining light and a beacon to the world" (Mac Sharry, White, O'Malley 2000, 360). Roy Foster claimed the "prosperity" of post-Tiger Irish life not only recognizes an economic transformation but also is paralleled by "metamorphoses in spheres of national life that transcend the economic sphere" (2008, 36).

At its core, the Tiger was born from a neoliberal emphasis on deregulated markets helped drive an influx of foreign investment that refashioned the economic and cultural landscape of Ireland; in addition, it also influenced a Tiger-era cultural identity that was attracted to risk and the idea of an unfettered global world¹. This debate over the proper relationship of risk and security is inextricably tied to a form of global capitalism centered on speculation². One of the key elements of this "culture of speculation" was a reorganization, both economically and socially, of the home and its relationship to communal space. In a country with a history that strongly connected wealth to property, it is not surprising that much of the cash created by the Tiger went into investments in land, development, and construction (White 2010, 36). This investment in property was also a cultural investment in how shared and familial spaces fit into the overall fabric of Irish life.

The home is a central location for the creation of a spatial politics as it is a key area in which individuals develop a relationship to wider cultural and social spheres. The question, "Where do you live?" figures amongst the essential questions that form our place within a grid of coordinates that plot social subjectivity" (Alcobia-Murphy 2004, 103). In Ireland, the "home" has a long tradition as a powerful spatial signifier capable of expressing a range of social, aesthetic, and political interactions. The home represents a psychological shell that contains both "past memory" and "future possibility", which enhances feelings of authenticity or, when lacking, feelings of rootlessness (Bertha 2006, 64). Throughout the Tiger, however, cultural formations of the home were transformed by a speculative capitalism that recreated domestic space into a fluctuating commodity. Speculation made the home mirror capital's rootless nature as a force that can move around the globe. Fundamentally, speculation restructures space, both urban and rural, to make it more accommodating to the flows of global capital. By centralizing the connection of communal and domestic spaces to capitalism, speculation opens the spaces of the home to processes of risk and devaluation.

What changed the national discourse on the home was the speculative nature of Tiger Ireland. The processes forming communal space became speculative endeavors; namely, they consisted of an overarching reliance on ideas of euphoria, collapse, and debt that commingled with the everyday rituals surrounding the home. My use of the term "speculative" does not merely posit the term as synonymous with a philosophic inquiry or an act of

spurious guessing, but draws on the economic understanding of the concept as manufactured risk. Speculation, in this sense, is an outlay of capital in an endeavor that guarantees neither a profit on the initial investment nor even the return of the initial capital. The speculative act subordinates any “qualitative and quantitative” grounds of inquiry in favor of taking a massive risk geared toward producing immediate returns (Graham, Dodd 2002, 64)³. Risk is the essential component of speculation.

Yet, speculative risk is different from normal conceptions of risk because “built into the situation is the eventual and inevitable fall [...] the speculative episode always ends not with a whimper but with a bang” (Galbraith 1990, 4). The eventual and inevitable fall of speculation is debt. The debt created by speculative endeavors – like the property bubble – leaves the individual (or nation) materially bankrupt and psychologically damaged (Graham, Dodd 2002, 687). Speculation, and its consequence of massive debt, is more than just a description of the reality of Irish economic policy during the Tiger as it also played an overarching part in a Tiger identity through which individuals related ideas about their home to their nationality.

I apply this analysis of speculation to the fictions of Deidre Madden and Anne Haverty. Both authors are intensely focused on how the rituals and symbols of the home develop and provide a sense of cultural authenticity. Yet for both authors there is a noticeable shift in the depiction of Irish cultural rituals in post-Tiger Ireland; essentially, the notions of collapse, openness, and debt threaten to dismantle the experiences of understanding the home as a shared communal space.

1. *Life in an Era of Boom and Bust: The Economic Division of Social Space*

Similar to many other parts of the world, during the 1990s and early 2000s, Ireland’s housing boom was a “local variant of a wider international phenomenon” (Fahey, Duffy 2007, 123). Throughout the majority of the Tiger, construction boomed at a staggering pace. Developers built homes and then used the initial payments to purchase more land and build even more homes (White 2010, 36). When the bubble started showing signs of slowing down, the government doubled-down on policies that maximized home building as a method to reduce the escalating prices that were endemic to the property bubble. However, these policies only exacerbated the boom and accelerated its ultimate collapse in 2008 (White 2010, 38). Along with these policies, the Irish banking sector followed the “international phenomenon” of the era and failed to curb imprudent lending, especially when it came mortgage lending (Bielenburg, Ryan 2012, 162).

As a result of Ireland’s boom/bust housing period, the cultural understanding of how a “house” relates to ideas of the “home” underwent a radical change. According to Shane Alcobia-Murphy, “negative equity and unaffordable housing prices brought a new dimension to spatial politics and the question

of plotting one's 'social subjectivity'" (2004, 105). The negative equity and unaffordable housing prices subverted an ethics of habitation – an ethics that focuses on how space should be shared – with an over reliance on property value as the defining element of what space means to a culture. This change represents a cognitive speculation – to borrow from Allen J. Scott's idea of cognitive gentrification – where the value of a home as a commodity is what confers an authentic social status on the homeowner. Any ethical concerns related to domestic space, both its use and non-material values, are superseded by its ability to generate (or lose) capital via a speculative evaluation.

As a critic of Irish culture, Madden is a writer whose texts are critical of how economics affect the individual contours of communal and domestic spaces. In *Remembering Light and Stone*, Aisling is a young Irish exile that has left Ireland in order to better realize her "true" personality⁴. Madden's book, despite brief forays into Paris and New York, focuses mainly on Aisling's experiences in Italy and, consequently, the country becomes a cipher for understanding Ireland. As Aisling states, "more than learning anything about Italy, I had found out more about my own country" (Madden 1992, 2). The position of the exile allows her to "forget all about home for a while, forget all about Ireland, and then remember it" (1992, 2). One of the central aspects of Italian life, which the text applies in its Ireland-Italy connection, is how economics separate the areas of the city into incommensurate zones designed to improve the circulation of capital at the expense of a coherent identity that connects ideas of the home to specific cultural spaces.

Aisling describes S. Giorgio, the Italian town that acts as the setting for the majority of the book, as a "deceptive village" for the tourists who "think they've seen S. Giorgio" (1992, 11)⁵. The village is deceptive because its spatial politics separate the town into three distinct manifestations. These manifestations all represent a particular relationship to an economic organization of space. The first S. Giorgio is "the pretty medieval hill town that people visit", and is a place where tourists can purchase "photographs" or "postcards" from various little shops (1992, 11). The second S. Giorgio is populated by "German and English people" who have purchased vacation homes in the Italian countryside and often live there only seasonally (1992, 12). And the final S. Giorgio is the "modern part", which is "the least considered" manifestation because "people don't want to see it" (1992, 12). The economic elements of the first two parts of S. Giorgio are fairly straightforward as they present the town as a visual commodity. As a result of this need to maintain this visual space, the real, lived existence of the locales in the modern part is obscured from both the tourists and the vacation home owners who don't want the "illusion of summer" to be destroyed.

In these S. Giorgios, the separation between economic activity (the act of tourism or the act of vacationing) and everyday existence (the lives of the locales) is purely visual. The tourists or vacation-home owners purchase a visual commodity, S. Giorgio as the "pretty medieval hill town", that they can take

back to their real homes in the form of photographs or postcards. The tourist and vacation S. Giorgios are objects of consumption that can never escape from a systematization of consumerism that creates a “discourse directed to oneself” – a ready-made town that speaks only to the tourists – providing them with the only vision they want to see (Baudrillard 1996, 111). From an economic perspective, the cultural history of S. Giorgio is abstracted into a commodity; namely, its ability to attract tourist money. This manipulation of signs is designed purely for the immediate visual consumption by the consumer, a visual overcoding of experience that is blank, lifeless, and manufactured.

The branding of S. Giorgio as a tourist area does not only affect the culture of the town, but also it affects the people who live in or visit the city. Aisling views the visitors as a “tide of passionless life [...] crowds of people looking through each other, bored and listless, gazing at the identical shop windows” (1992, 36). The bored and listless people are caught within the visual economy of tourism, a hyperreal consumer society where interpersonal communication is thwarted (the people look through, not at each other). Throughout the book, Aisling is concerned with how the economics of rapidly globalizing communities (like Ireland or Italy) disrupt the historical relationship to places. The moments of tourism represent the “easy nostalgia” of a hyperreal consumerism that attempts to hold on to notions of the past that are simple in order to maintain a streamlined consumerism. The problem with this type of easy nostalgia is that it leads to a delusion, which then leads to a form of intellectual and spiritual helplessness: “And the punishment is that you don’t have any life as an adult and you find out too late that you can’t hold on to your childhood either, and so you’re left with nothing” (1992, 103). Madden’s idea of being left with nothing references an imaginary system of signs that “is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real” (1984, 25)⁶. For both Madden and Baudrillard, the concept “childhood” diminishes the agency or activity of the individual because consumerism relies on a failed form of adulthood. The deterrence found in Madden’s “bored” and “sterile” tourists is a communal kind (1992, 36). The people are deterred from having a relationship with each other in a communal space by the “infantile degeneration” found in the bland, visual commodity of a branded Italy that overcodes the meaning of the town (1984, 25). Throughout much of *Remembering*, Madden makes tourism symbolic of a visual economic commodity that transforms places into abstract images designed only for consumption.

Madden’s text does not just stay in this world of tourism. She extends her analysis of a decisive split between economics and reality into the third, “modern” part of S. Giorgio. The modern part of the town begins “outside the town walls” and is just “as brash and vulgar and unattractive as modern provincial towns anywhere in Europe” (1992, 11-12). The houses of the modern part are “generally blocks of apartments made of cement” and are surrounded by “‘big warehouses or factories’ and ‘a big wide autostrada’”

(1992, 12). Spatially, Madden demarcates the real part of S. Giorgio, the part where “most everyone” lives, with the part most associated with its “oldness” and culture (1992, 12). Not only does the visual consumption of the tourists obscure the reality of everyday Italian life, but also it obscures the spatial markers of capitalism that create physical boundaries between Italian citizens and Italian culture. In relation to the hyperreal space of the tourist, the modern, or real, Italy is a non-place, a place drained of its relational, historical, and even symbolic value. The non-place is an area “surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral” (Augé 2008, 63)⁷. Madden, quite literally, presents the medieval S. Giorgio and the modern non-place as two separate areas: the modern part is outside the town walls and blocked-off by warehouses, factories, and an automobile overpass. The houses of the community are constructed closest to the means of production, such as the warehouses and factories. By separating the shared space of the town, an ethics of habitation is subordinated to a system that maximizes the production of capital from both a manufacturing and tourist perspective. Madden’s text presents the houses of a globalizing community as forming a spatial partition between the place and the non-place, separating the local community from the historical attributes that define a home.

For Madden, the spatial divisions of S. Giorgio create alienation and anxiety. Aisling describes the lives of the inhabitants of the modern S. Giorgio as one of feckless motion: “Whatever they do, it’s done with a sense of restlessness, a lack of repose, wandering in and out of the bar or flicking the remote of the television from one channel to another” (1992, 14). The banality and sterility of the tourists is paralleled by a local ‘restlessness’ in which the citizens are in a constant state of motion that doesn’t provide any actual movement toward a destination. The townsfolk are caught in a cycle between work and consumption, a mindless activity separated from the town’s history and culture. The living conditions of the town are separated from any of the qualities of culture and history that help define a place as a secure home.

2. *Rural Gentrification: Exhaustion and Alienation in the Countryside*

Similar to Madden’s work, Anne Haverty’s 1997 novel *One Day as a Tiger* is both a nuanced piece of fiction and an aggressive critique of the Celtic Tiger. Haverty critiques what could be called a Tiger consciousness. Haverty’s critique of a Tiger consciousness is a reaction to the influence of globalization that makes the individual feel like an essential component in a miraculous moment of unexplainable prosperity while being trapped in an existential void of never being able to catch up with the benefits of that prosperity. Her text follows the life of Marty Hawkins who leaves his graduate program in history and returns to the family farm where he develops an infatuation with his brother’s wife, Etti. Haverty uses the trope of a family love triangle to stage

an investigation into the changed identities of her characters and the altered temporality of the country in which they live.

Haverty fashions the Tipperary countryside as caught between two conflicting desires: first, a desire for the validation (and the cash) promised by a globalized economic boom; the second is a desire for time (the good old days). At the local pub, for instance, the men of the village re-watch the same old hurling matches, reveling in historical victories and past accomplishments (Haverty 1997, 88, 126); yet, some of the small, independent farmers – the idylls of the agrarian component found in many historical conceptions of Irish identity – are modernizing their farms by buying genetically bred livestock or transforming their pastures into service-dependent B&Bs and guesthouses (1997, 155). Marty notes the flux and change of post-Tiger Ireland: “The Gillespies’ new bungalow, McCarthy’s neo-Edwardian monstrosity that’s the envy of the neighbors [...] It’s always changing, this place ... old landmarks have gone, new ones sprung up” (1997, 18). The very nature of what home means for both Marty and Tipperary is rapidly changing as old homes are becoming gentrified. The disjunct between Ireland’s changing rural landscape and its citizens’ desires for historical certainty makes Marty incredibly restless. Marty’s restlessness is not caused by a desire for a previous version of Irish identity like the townsfolk because, during his time as a history graduate student, Marty learned the importance of “the revisionists stuff” and that “an uncritical devotion to one’s forebears’ untutored beliefs is not [...] correct, historian-wise” (1997, 30). Yet Marty still retains a desire for some form of home, even though he rationally knows no such place exists. He cannot settle into either the new globalized consumer-service orientated Ireland, nor can he simply relent to a desire for a historical bubble that could protect him from the flux of globalization⁸.

This tension reflects a strain in contemporary Irish fiction about how the desire for locality – for a home – conflicts with a concomitant desire for economic freedom. During the Tiger, Michael Cronin argued that the conflation of global and local space created a type of detached and emotionless subjectivity where personal identity, as grounded in the home, is overtaken by a distanced subject position of global citizenship (2009, 12). As the Irish tried to balance these global and local identities, they encountered a global temporalization that distorted “our relationship to our physical and cultural environment by continually situating us at a distance, by abstracting and subtracting us from our local attachments and responsibilities” (2009, 12). An element of Marty’s restlessness with his home is produced by a growing separation from the landmarks that helped create his local identity. He sees the changes to rural Tipperary and feels its becoming “neither here nor there, with confusing landmarks [...] and little to feel safe by” (1997, 126). All the old landmarks are losing their coherency because Ireland is “all leisure activities now” (1997, 168). Marty’s inability to feel nostalgic about his childhood home is disrupted by the forces of capital that are changing the physical markers that have historically defined the rural community.

Marty's position between a globalized and localized subjectivity also inflects the love triangle at the center of the plot. Marty's restlessness makes his desire for Etti not only an example of a torrid assemblage of sexual and familial desires, but also a symptom of the need for an "escape", a need to transgress what he calls "borders which had urgently to be crossed" (1997, 229). As the love affair between Marty and Etti intensifies, they decide to escape and flee to France. Marty and Etti's official reason for leaving the village is to help Marty's sickly pet sheep, Missy, avoid being slaughtered by finding her a wildlife shelter. This official reason, however, is just a cover that allows them to escape Tipperary and culminate their growing desire for each other and something new. Their "escape" to France is a voyage that is coded in the language and experience of the Tiger, despite occurring on the continent. There are several clues in the text that allow the reader to see how Haverty frames Marty and Etti's escape as a metaphorical experience of life during the Tiger.

In a very Tigerish style, Marty and Etti's trip is funded by Marty's "pristine and unused" credit cards (1997, 221). An over reliance on personal credit was a hallmark of the Tiger⁹. Credit almost always relates to the idea of discounting the future evaluation of goods, services, and cash in order to acquire them in the present. Credit gives the individual an object or lifestyle immediately while displacing the cost onto some vague, future time. Credit use is a highly speculative form of consumption because the immediate purchasing power hides the risk of future debt (which is compounded by interest). And finally, Marty and Etti's trip is a voyage into a world of global consumerism, complete with "honking be vies of the latest BMWs. Over chic, over-brash and hysterically bourgeoisie, stuffy and glittering and pretentious" (1997, 238). For Marty, however, the crass consumerism of a boom-time Europe could be ignored if "you had money to throw around", which in his case he can purchase via his "assortment of relatively virginal credit cards" (1997, 238). Within this buoyant bubble of credit and consumerism, Marty and Etti's affair becomes "new", and Marty feels "admired" and "delirious with triumph" (1997, 248).

Another important element of Haverty's text – one it shares with Madden's – is her critical interest in the changing lifestyles of Ireland. For instance, Marty and Etti's escape relies on his denial that credit use produces consequences (debt). Marty feels that his affair with his brother's wife is protected from consequence, in part, due to the cocoon of credit that protects him from "the perils of knowledge and confrontation" (1997, 250). Marty's willful ignorance during his "day as a Tiger" represents a type of ignorance that was pervasive and led Ireland to become, in 2008, the nation with the highest average level of household debt in the developed world (Allen 2000, 67). Similar to the naïve understanding of credit, Marty believes both his material and familial transgressions will not have to be paid off in the future. This turns out not to be true on both accounts: Marty's brother dies in a car accident and both the lovers feel compelled to return to Tipperary, to return home.

As a result of his brother's car crash – an event that the text suggests was indirectly caused by Marty and Etti's affair – Marty must return to the family farm, accept full ownership of the property, and become more enmeshed in the very paradoxical tensions that caused him to want to “escape” in the first place. In Haverty's text, this return is bleak as Ireland is described as a nation covered by a “grey coat of wet fog” (1997, 263), and Marty's hands are thin and “wintry white” (1997, 262). In ending her narrative by having the emotional debt of the affair pushed to the foreground of Marty's home, Haverty critiques the mindset that believed a cocoon of credit and consumerism could protect Ireland from the consequences of Tiger-era gentrification and consumption¹⁰. In Haverty's text, the connection of debt, both financial and psychological, to Marty's ownership of his childhood home ends with a depiction of rural Ireland that is depleted by the pressures of a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Madden's and Haverty's texts are influenced by, and react against, the dominant mode of capitalism that defined Irish economic policy in the 1990s. The motivations of their characters, and the larger critiques of their texts, form a critical reaction to an abstract universalism that seeks to equate everything to its value as a commodity. Essentially, they critique how the material conditions of Tiger Ireland, created to conform to a speculative economic program, produce physical and psychological damages that make creating a stable home a problematic endeavor.

3. *A Speculative Economics of the Home*

Speculation is defined by its character of risk and collapse; namely, the trend toward speculation invites a collapse, a disaster of the markets in which the commodity (either goods or services) that drove the speculative boom becomes devalued and worthless. Two of the founders of the research on speculation, Benjamin Graham and David Dodd, note the danger inherent in speculation when they define the operation as a perverted form of investment: “An investment operation is one which, upon thorough analysis, promises safety of principal and satisfactory return. Operations not meeting these requirements are speculative” (2002, 106). For Graham and Dodd, an investment is not solely reliant on the commodity itself, but is an act of research and “diversification” that promises a successful “purchase and sale” of goods. This emphasis on investment as an operation is designed to dampen speculation by forcing the investor to always contextualize the commodity in the wider social range of wants and needs. Although Graham and Dodd recognize that any investment carries some aspect of risk, good investments offer “protection against loss under normal or reasonably likely conditions or variations” (2002, 107)¹¹. The rub, however, occurs when the notion of risk is obscured by the normal functioning of a market that purports to diminish risk but creates a system of exchange that actually increases it¹².

Peadar Kirby's analysis of globalized development in Ireland denotes that "on closer examination" the Tiger was a speculative phenomenon that turned "out not to be a model of successful development, but a model of capital accumulation" (Kirby 2004, 205). Although Ireland was considered "one of the great economic success cases of this more globalized era", Kirby believes the nation's neoliberal development raises "questions about the impact of this economic success on people's livelihoods" (2004, 217). If the Tiger was only a model of capital accumulation, then the boom becomes less a success story for globalization and more an incorporation of risk as a way of life.

The collapse of the Irish economy in 2008 has caused the debt obscured by the euphoric boom to become apparent as Ireland accrued, in no small part due the collapse of the housing bubble, €440 billion in bad debt (White 2010, 40). The dramatic gulf between spending and revenue lead many workers to feel betrayed by a political and economic system that created such a substantial amount of debt (O'Clery 2009)¹³. The collapse Ireland's speculative economy would be damaging to Ireland on both a material and psychological level, since it was considered one of the major elements of Ireland's success in a "more globalized era". But the economic collapse does not solely remain in the economic sphere. It is also present in the everyday rituals and experiences of contemporary Irish life.

Basically, "everyday life" is a site of active construction where ideologies take shape as constitutive forces of our day-to-day existence. Joe Moran identifies the everyday "as a category that brings together lived culture and representation in a way that makes sense of, but also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference" (2005, 13). The everyday is a center of ideology, a place where society enacts, codifies, and practices its identity. For Moran, especially, the everyday is a primary locale for the diffusion of political ideals. The persuasiveness of politics "relies not on a specific political agenda or even the sense of an imagined community but on the tacit acceptance of a certain notion of ordinary life" (2005, 21). Speculation, as an economic practice, gets replicated in Ireland's tacit ignorance of a total collapse hiding behind the material and cultural productions of ordinary life during the Tiger.

Anne Haverty's *The Free and Easy* continues her exploration of how the Tiger altered conceptions of the home and communal space. The story follows Tom Blessman through post-Tiger Ireland as he attempts to restore his wealthy uncle's spiritual connection to the homeland. While Tom tries to "get a handle on the place, culturally, politically, historically", he is told, by a Dubliner, that "the Ireland you came here probably hoping to find is obsolete [...] It's a fantasy" (2006, 111-112). The Ireland in which Tom finds himself is presented as a country completely changed after the speculative boom of the Tiger. "Ireland as we know it", he is told, "was born sometime around nineteen ninety-four. Or ninety-six" (2006, 112). This new Ireland is populated by wealthy financiers who are quickly going bankrupt, politicians who are facing legal tribunals for corruption, and exhausted Dubliners who are

ready “for this whole fucking property racket to collapse” (2006, 93). Similar to Marty’s return to a rural Ireland, Tom’s return to his ancestral homeland is marked by a restless wandering because he cannot find any connection to the local space of Dublin.

As Tom walks the streets of Dublin, his inner restlessness is mirrored by an architectural confusion. Underneath a “mesh of construction cranes”, he feels “a sense of lives lived up, passed away” as the older architecture of Dublin is being replaced by the “modern intent on looking like somewhere else or of some other time” (2006, 76-77). The physical memory of Ireland that should be encoded in its buildings is disseminated in a mish-mash of temporal and aesthetic styles. Tom quickly learns that Dublin’s transformation was driven by a boom in property development that promises “speculative returns” on the many new buildings populating Dublin’s skyline (2006, 58). Part of this property development has made Dublin a global city by “exporting” unique cultural buildings and replacing them with generic substitutes, like replacing Irish pubs with “tapas bars” (2006, 59). The exportation of Irish pubs – Tom is told there is a “good one” in Spain – reflects the privileging of capital as the key element in the spatial politics of Dublin. The city becomes a giant investment where aesthetics and the use-value of space are evaluated only by their ability to provide speculative returns.

The various strains of Haverty’s surreal and speculative Dublin all come together in an art installation developed by Tom’s friends, Frog and Aaron. The installation, called “Home”, recreates a working-class living room in an art museum. This artistic home consists of a “small shabby pea-green sofa”, a “small kitchen table”, and a constantly running TV (2006, 201). The two artists inhabit the space in a way that mirrors real life by being “oblivious” of their audience (2006, 201). The staging of a “home”, with all the lived-in details that make the space “profoundly homely”, presents a more authentic presentation of a livable space than all the expensive new buildings Tom notices during his walks around Dublin. The markers of a working-class lifestyle are important as they represent a literary tradition of symbols that were strongly connected to a post-World War II version of Irishness. The artists’ decision to present a version of the home that would not be out of place in a play by Brian Friel strongly outlines a different understanding of Irishness that conflicts with the postmodern and speculative architecture taking over Dublin.

Eventually, the art piece becomes a political statement as the artists refuse to leave the museum even though the exhibition concludes its run. Despite the artists continued silence toward the audience, a crowd develops around the piece to protest “home prices and the whole cabal” (2006, 226). As the furor around the piece grows, Tom begins to understand the installation as a critique of the entire speculative environment of Tiger Ireland: “Poverty and wealth, power and impotence, the homeless and the housed, the fusion of art and reality—miraculously ‘Home’ embodied them all” (2006, 231).

The importance of “Home” is its attempt to posit an authentic moment of domestic space that escapes the speculative property boom that is de-valuing, on both an economic and cultural level, the rest of Dublin. Since the installation piece is directly tied to the artists performing the rituals of the home, the piece cannot be sold to speculative art investors. Its mundane representation of a home rejects any attempt to evaluate it as a sellable commodity. The art installation draws attention to the qualities of domestic life that cannot be easily reduced to the value of a home as a piece of property.

The final moments of the text harken back to “Home” with another artistic performance that critiques the speculative property bubble. The last moments of the text recount Tom witnessing a famine recreation. The recreation takes place in “one of the recent developments of swish commercial and residential” buildings (2006, 279). The juxtaposition of the famine imagery with the new building developments underscores the inherent risk hidden, or ignored, during speculative property booms. The text codes the property boom as hiding another famine. These key moments of Haverty’s text directly represent the damage done by speculative property development: “Home” articulates the inability of a speculative value of space to provide a livable, domestic space and the famine recreation hints at the economic collapse that would severely damage the material condition of life in Dublin. These two artistic critiques of speculation force Haverty’s reader to think about how the economic restructuring of space to privilege “speculative returns” harms the effectiveness of the idea of a home to provide a coherent and stable local identity.

4. *Provisional Authenticity: Art as a Reclamation of Communal Space*

Madden’s *Authenticity* begins with a breakdown to once again show how a speculative ideology causes anxiety in individuals. William, a frustrated lawyer, “cracks up” in response to a lifetime surrounded by the “signifiers of a conformity against which he increasingly chafed” (2002, 13). Similar to Haverty’s Marty and Tom, William is suffering a speculative collapse where he has supposedly achieved everything desirable by the standards of his community, yet has a mental and physical collapse (he later does commit suicide [2002, 376]). William’s anxiety is not turned toward the objects that stand as markers of his success but is turned inward toward his sense of value. Despite his beautiful home and comfortable lifestyle, William feels he has no place in Irish society. The daily routines of his life don’t have, for him, any value because he sees them solely as extensions of his business career. He finds Dublin, and his life, as inauthentic.

The theme of authenticity is the core interest of Madden’s text and activates the desires of her main characters. *Authenticity*’s main characters are all in search of an authentic home that escapes the commoditization of a capital-driven society. The bulk of the text follows William’s post-breakdown

life and his relationship with a couple of Dublin painters, the young Julia (who finds William during his breakdown) and the famous Roderic, who is in a relationship with Julia. Although the narrative has a mostly linear plot that stretches from William's breakdown to his eventual suicide, Madden's text flows backward and forward through time, providing the reader glimpses of the past lives of the characters. For all the characters, the concept of being authentic is, as one reviewer puts it, "a moral as well as social concept". *Authenticity* is "about seeing, and grapples with questions of artistic and everyday integrity" (Craig 2002). For Madden, authenticity is not associated with purity or individualism but with a mode of ethics, of living with oneself and with others. In Madden's text, social authenticity responds to a spatial politics that delinks value from an economic sphere of production and consumption. This process of partial authenticity, which is similar to the abstract painting that Roderic practices, embraces, unlike speculation, loss as a constitutive and freeing notion. In Madden's text, the escape from totality is achieved by realizing that identity is always entropic – a realization that recodifies the notion of loss away from the total collapse of speculation. When one is partly authentic, one avoids the emotional collapse found in characters like William.

The anxiety William experiences is directly connected to a global environment in which the individual is stretched between the need to be adaptable to the demands of capital and the desire to remain a unique and localized individual. William is caught in this very bind that is endemic to the globalized world in which mass commodification "creates new forms of anxiety about the authenticity of things or persons...one no longer knows if they are 'authentic' or 'inauthentic,' spontaneous or re-engineered" (Boltanski, Chiapello 2005, 447). The anxiety stems from the individual's paradoxical need to be both totally incorporated into the changing forms of global capital and the need to think of themselves as a unique, culturally specific person. People and things are recuperated into a system of production by the process of "codification [that], element by element, makes it possible [...] to introduce variations in such a way as to obtain products that are relatively different, but of the same style" (445). Codification is directly tied to the universalization because it finds what, in a commodity, makes it a "truly authentic characteristic that accounts for its value, [then] select certain of its qualities – the most significant or the most transposable – and ignore others, deemed secondary" (*ibidem*). This codification was found in Haverty's postmodern and "swish" Dublin. In Madden (2002), however, this codification occurs at a personal level by creating alienation and anxiety.

After Julia "rescues" William from his breakdown, the two begin a tentative friendship. William's anxiety and depression stems from his desire to be a painter: "his real life was an illusion, all a thing in his head, and that he built himself an impregnable reality, which was not compatible with the fantasy" (Madden 2002, 60). The mutual exclusivity between William's reality and his

fantasy is a direct product of the disjunction between his feelings of individual worth and the adaptability of his life to make the most money. His desire to be a painter is not acceptable to the coded parts of his reality, the part of his identity that is reduced down to “a man in a suit” (61). His breakdown and desire to be an artist is an attempt to reclaim a “personality” that is unique in the face of his exchangeability and “flexibility” found in being a corporate “suit”.

William’s breakdown drives him to dedicate himself to art full time, taking a leave of absence from his job and building an art studio in his house (241). The change to William’s house is an attempt to alter the domestic space of his house to create a personal authentic space – a studio – that directly makes the building a more personal “home”. Yet despite his new studio, William still cannot shake the feeling of being inauthentic: “He stared at the blank sheet of paper [...] as a deep sense of anxiety unfolded within him, immobilising him and putting paid to whatever last few shreds of his self-belief remained” (257). What frustrates William, and drives his anxiety, is not his believed lack of artistry. In fact, the best of William’s pieces are described as “eloquent expression[s] of his current insecurity” (293). This expression of insecurity is not enough for William as his art must express his idea of himself as a unique individual. His inability to find, within the artist persona, a “combination of freedom and control” (257) makes it impossible for him to de-link from his adaptable persona as a suit. He thinks “it simply wasn’t in him to be what he wanted to be” (261). The sense of artistic authenticity – a field of being separated from what Madden, later in the text, calls “a straight-down-the-line middle-class existence” (288) – eludes William.

Yet for all his troubles, William’s quest for authenticity is not a sympathetic one because Madden makes it clear that he has not escaped an ideology of speculation. As William progresses further in his artist persona, it becomes apparent that his failings are not technical but ideological. He understands art like he understands economics; namely, good or bad art is defined only by its value as a social commodity that provides a return on an investment. When he eventually gives up his art and returns to his day job, he laments that his artistic failure did not allow him have “a reputation, critical attention, exhibitions and so on” (360). William’s idea of authenticity is a speculative investment in the artist as a commodity-persona capable of bringing returns in the form of critical and economic success. Even in his friendship with Julia, William equates their everyday interactions (having coffee, dinner, or discussing art) with a sense of investment, of seeking a substantial return on his time. His idea of value can only be expressed in economic terms on a scale of profit and expenditure. He thinks he “would have liked to be able to count Roderic Kennedy amongst his friends”, but feels knowing Julia has “no real cachet” (297). William’s value-driven worldview is the last thing the reader gets from the character before his off-the-page suicide. One of his final thoughts about Julia is how her value as an artist is directly connected to the economic

value of her house. Julia's flat strikes him "as merely the shabby, dusty flat of a young woman without a proper job and with no money. Knowing her had opened no doors for him" (364). William's economic coding of Julia rests solely on her economic value (her lack of prospects, connections, and money) and metaphorically codes her as "worthless" as her bohemian flat. He ignores the qualities of her character that make her a unique person in favor of the base economic value of her home, which then corresponds to her value as a person and artist. Everything of import for William is reduced to one value system: what can be translated into a commodity on the global market.

Nicholas Lezard has called William's failure to achieve a sense of personal authenticity indicative of how Madden views the value of art. Art cannot be justified in terms of economic value, but is an "internal gift" that makes a productive distinction "between art-as-self expression, not the real thing, and art detached from any ulterior concern" (Lezard 2003). Lezard is correct in noting that Madden's art is not a form of self expression, but his analysis misses Madden's critique of value in the era of late-capital globalization. Without the wider context of the Tiger, Madden's staging of the debate over what is authentic loses some of its potency as a diagnosis of Irish culture. In essence, Madden is critiquing the speculative boom of the Tiger as hiding an inner psychological collapse, an implosion of value that threatens to commoditize the entire artistic process. The risk of the authentic artist, like Julia and Roderic, confronts the economic risk of the Tiger by not being totally authentic, which keeps them somewhat detached from the realm of the market. William's foray into art, however, only repeats the speculative trajectory of his life; it has an investment that leads to a total collapse in his suicide. In this way his risk is similar to economic speculation because "the damage is hidden" beneath the veneer of his inauthentic artist persona (2002, 378). He has internalized the logic of speculation in all facets of his life, a total immersion in the speculative ethos of the Tiger.

Madden's text presents William's inevitable failure as an example of the insidious nature of a speculative ideology. Madden underlines William's speculative collapse, along with the struggles of other characters, as caused by the interpellation of a Tiger influenced ideology. To punctuate this connection, she stages direct examinations of the Tiger to link the characters and the Tiger together in the mind of the reader. Coming toward the end of the novel, a discussion occurs among Roderic, Julia, and Julia's father Dan about the realities of living in a globalized Ireland that has an omnipresent drive for global adaptability. It is almost as if Madden could not finish her novel without directly addressing the impact of the Tiger on the notion of the nation as a home.

Essentially, Madden's characters engage in a discussion of the Tiger and how it imposes a sense of sameness under the guise of false freedoms. Dan asserts: "They'd have us believe that we're all on the pig's back now. And they're always going on about choice [...] About freedom". Dan's comments about freedom are a direct confrontation with the mythos of the Tiger as Ireland's

coming-of-age into a new, freer existence. Yet Dan sees the realities of the Tiger through the living conditions of the individual people he encounters everyday – from a young man handing out promotional leaflets to Dublin’s immigrant class – who he believes “are having a hard time of it” (335)¹⁴.

Along with his critique of working conditions, Dan also brings up the idea of standardized time and the synchronization of clocks as exemplary of the looming presence of a global sameness. He opens “an encyclopedia of Irish history” to its section about the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time in Ireland: “‘Time,’ he read. ‘In Ireland, as elsewhere, the standardisation of time was primarily a response to the exigencies of the railway timetable. Before that nearly every community had its own time. Clocks in Cork were eleven minutes behind those in Dublin [...] It was not until Greenwich Mean Time was extended to the whole of Ireland, in 1916, that the Albert Clock stopped showing Belfast time’” (338-339). Dan’s anecdote is pertinent to Madden’s text as it represents a moment, similar to the Tiger, when Ireland was made more adaptable to a unified global system. The “exigency” for the adoption of standardized time is primarily economic; it makes a unified Ireland more acceptable to the speedy transfer of capital and goods. The impact of a global time represents an imposition of economic value on the nation; consequently, the relationship to the nation as a home gets transformed into economic terms.

Madden’s deft use of place names stresses the unification of Ireland into a global order, as the time differences between Cork, Dublin, and Belfast become unified in relation to a global temporal order, but not to a unified home. The date marker of 1916 makes this clear, as the moment when Belfast and Dublin are united temporally marks a key moment when they begin to split into different nations. Yet this marker of difference is only superficial as the populations of Dublin and Belfast, the ratio of Protestants to Catholics or Ulster to Irish, does not change on the dawning of 1916. This superficial difference reshapes the dates to focus on how each place – Cork, Dublin, Belfast – loses its sense of authenticity, its uniqueness as a temporal city, in the adoption of a commerce driven time clock.

Madden’s response to the global universalization of time is an aesthetic of abstraction. Similar to Haverty in *The Free and Easy*, Madden turns to art as a method to reclaim the spaces of the home from the economic ideology of the Tiger. Instead of abstracting the local particularity into a coded global commodity, Madden’s assertion of an aesthetic abstraction maintains the unique essence of the particular. For the artist, the abstraction of formal techniques makes each form distinct, and in doing so makes art resistant and opposed to the codification of it as a valuable art-commodity. Opposed to William’s desire to become a value-driven artist, Roderic’s and Julia’s artworks eschew not only economic value but also the idea of universality. They abstract the qualities of artistic composition to keep each element unique and authentic in a type of composition that is organized but not unified. They embrace an

element of loss in the artwork, a move that keeps the direction of the work open. Roderic describes this process when he rejects the popular notion of his work as abstract: “Well for a start, I would resist any discussion of my work that *begins* with a definition rather than working towards one [...] it isn’t a case of understanding something but of *experiencing* it” (287). This focus on “experiencing” directly refutes a speculative ideology where value is only transferred via buyable and sellable commodities.

Julia’s installation project focuses on “experiencing” space and mirrors Haverty’s reclamation of domestic space in the art project “Home”. She rejects the idea of a universal understanding and presents her art as always particular, always having a kernel of difference separated from the visual logic of the viewer. After completing her first exhibition, which focused on a series of objects suspended in clear glass boxes, Julia takes up an idea that she had let “lie fallow for some months”. She collects individual stories from random people along with a list of scents they associate with their memories. She hopes to recreate the person’s experience in a gallery setting, but questions the validity of such an approach: “She turned it over in her mind and decided it couldn’t be done, because people were too unlike. What to one person would be soothing or pleasurable [...] would be to another neutral or even unpleasant. Each experience would have to be geared to each person. *It was too particular*” (219; emphasis added). Although Julia rejects this project, the idea of particularness – of being too particular – becomes more important in her work as she merges the collected stories with another set of glass boxes (320). The particular qualities of each box are enhanced by the individuals’ stories, which are about them experiencing certain elements of their homes and personal spaces. Despite the risk of being too particular to be a piece of valuable, economically speaking, art, Julia’s focus on intimate moments, most of which resist complete translation into a wider cultural sphere, represents a strong critique of the Tiger’s drive toward a speculative adaptability. Through her art installation, Julia presents an intimate – though not totalized – picture of personal and domestic spaces that reject being abstracted into sellable items on a global market.

5. Conclusion: Misused Capital and a Disappearing Home

In *Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sunk the Celtic Tiger*, Fintan O’Toole acerbically attacks the managers and politicians who misused the capital of the boom. After attacking politicians (mainly Fianna Fáil), businessmen (mainly real estate speculators), and the Anglo-Irish Bank, O’Toole tries to think about how Ireland can survive in post-Tiger, post-collapse world. He distrusts the contemporary desire for small government, despite the fact that “cutting the wages of civil and public servants paid very high political dividends”. He rightly notes that this political maneuver is just an extension of the very neoliberal attitudes that caused the economic collapse. Smaller

government allows for less regulation and consents to the continued freedoms the wealth Irish elite “who corrupted politics and abased the state before the interests of a small minority”. For O’Toole, any continuance of Tiger attitudes only creates a “disengagement and disillusion” that fosters, in the Irish, a dangerous “sense of impotence” (2010, 239). In Haverty’s and Madden’s fictions, we see characters that represent O’Toole diagnosis that Ireland has become disengaged from ideas of home and nationality.

O’Toole ends his book with a call for a new fidelity to a post-Tiger Ireland. He asserts, “sooner or later, the Irish people themselves will have to reinvent politics, civic morality and the public realm. No one else is going to do that for them” (2010, 240). Writers of Tiger, like Madden and Haverty, reinscribe the many signifiers, images, and rituals of Irish culture in new ways that reject the speculative economy of the Tiger. Madden’s and Haverty’s critiques of a speculative economy point toward developing, however piecemeal, a new post-Tiger definition of home that relies on aesthetic interpretations that reject economic evaluations.

At their core, Haverty’s and Madden’s texts use aesthetic rejections of speculative investment that reassert private space as having a unique quality that defies commodification and abstraction. In Haverty’s “Home” and Madden’s abstract artists, the authors attempt to recode ideas of the home to focus on how the micro-actions of individuals create an everyday politics that argues for the home as a space for living. Art represents a way in which individuals and authors can reorganize shared communal spaces away from a dangerous association of property value as social value that typified the speculative culture of the Celtic Tiger.

Notes

¹ One of the main elements that expressed this “Irish turn” toward a global identity was the importance exports played in the success of the Tiger. Despite the economic downturn, Irish exports still play a strong role in the Irish economy (White 2010, 31).

² The intense contemporary debate about the validity of native and non-native cultural influences in Ireland is mirrored by the growing distrust (evident as early as the late 1990s) of the multinational corporations whose capital funded the Tiger (Edwards, Hourican 2005, 207).

³ For Graham and Dodd, the key difference between investment and speculation is the reliability and safety of returns on the initial outlay. As Thomas P. Au notes, it is characteristic of Graham and Dodd’s economic approach to stress “the safety or sustainability of the dividend” as much as “its size or any other consideration” (Au 2004, 119).

⁴ Aisling proclaims her desire to be an exile as stemming from her early childhood in which “she knew [she] wanted to leave, but [...] didn’t know where [she] would go” (Madden 1992, 59).

⁵ Tourism plays an important part in Madden’s Italy-Ireland connection as both countries have historically been very dependent on tourism as a pillar of their economies. It is not difficult to imagine many of the statements Aisling makes about the tourists’ perceptions of Italy referring to Ireland’s many tourist destinations.

⁶ In *Simulations*, Baudrillard reads Disneyland as a type of fantasy-world designed to be an imaginary system of signs presented “to make us believe that the rest is real, when in

fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but are of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation". By creating a fantasy-land designed for children, Disneyland creates a brand-imaginary space that makes "us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly amongst those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness" (ed. 1983, 25, 25-26). The produced childishness, the product Disney sells with its massive system of branding, is a product of inactivity. Childishness is a realm of political inactivity in which the individual relinquishes a claim to civic action or political discourse.

⁷ Auge juxtaposes the non-place to the anthropological place, which is a site grounded in the historical and cultural relations of a community (2008, 8). The non-place, however, is drained of the everyday interactions found in the anthropological place.

⁸ Marty's restlessness is a physical and mental reaction to life in Tipperary. His mind wanders as he picks up one task after the other, such as painting his small bungalow, working the fields, drinking, and caring for a pet sheep. He takes up one of these tasks only to drop it before he can complete it.

⁹ The historical period that constitutes Haverly's text saw a dramatic rise in personal sector credit use in Ireland, rising from forty-two per cent in 1992 to seventy-one per cent in 2001 (Allen 2000, 67).

¹⁰ During and after the Tiger, rural areas were at the highest risk of poverty (Cawley 2005, 240).

¹¹ In Graham and Dodd's analysis, a good investment is "justified on both qualitative and quantitative grounds" (2002, 107).

¹² For example, pyramid scams or junk-bond investments portray themselves as legitimate investment opportunities, but in fact are speculative disasters waiting to happen.

¹³ Much of the anger surrounding the issue of social partnership concerns the wage reductions agreed on by Irish workers in order to lure foreign investment. When the Tiger-boom was in full force, this was not much of an issue (though some did argue against it) because it was believed that the influx of foreign cash would help balance the reduction in wages with new jobs. Yet after the crash, the budget deficit has led Ireland into a vicious circle of total risk in which fiscal austerity constrict the ability of political leaders to maintain social services because they are unable to borrow money.

¹⁴ Dan has his own version of authenticity in relation to work, which is comparable to the ideas of art expressed by Julia and Roderic. In Dan's perspective, jobs like "fixing a washing machine" or "rewir[ing] a house" allow for the individual to feel like they have accomplished "something" in a concrete and lasting manner. The individual can "point to it and [...] can say, I did that" (2002, 337).

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Irish Studies in China: The Widening Gyre

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Abstract:

At the furthest reach from Ireland – whether in terms of size or geography or culture – China seems an unlikely place for Irish Studies. Yet over the last few years, Irish Studies has emerged as an acknowledged academic field in several key Chinese universities. This essay looks at the obstacles to Irish Studies in China as well as Ireland's importance, after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, in opening up discussion of such domestic issues as the role of literature in establishing a new national identity. The many unexpected similarities between Irish and Chinese culture have ensured that translations of Irish writers such as Wilde, Yeats, Shaw, Beckett and especially Joyce have played a distinctive role in ushering a newly emerging Chinese nation into its own version of global modernity.

Keywords: China, comparative perspective, identity politics, Irish Studies, translation

At the furthest reach from Ireland – whether in terms of size or geography or culture – China seems an unlikely place for Irish Studies. Yet over the last few years, Irish Studies has emerged as an acknowledged academic field in several key Chinese universities.

These initiatives in Irish Studies may be listed briefly. Beijing Foreign Studies University launched the first (and so far, only) multidisciplinary Irish Studies program in 2007. As a small, elite university originally designed to train diplomats and foreign service personnel, BFSU added the Irish Centre to its other programmes teaching American, Australian, British, and Canadian Studies. Unique to China, however, is this Centre's broad approach to Irish issues as well as its investment in a one-year course in the Irish language. As such, the BFSU Irish Studies Centre has made a significant contribution to Ireland's visibility in China. Two years later, in 2009, Shanghai Normal launched its Irish Literature Research Centre, which includes both undergraduate and graduate courses. A startling part of the program involves an annual two-month festival of Irish culture as well as the production of an entire Irish play: in English. About the same time, a small Centre for Irish Studies emerged in Shanghai Institute for Foreign Trade.

Clearly, what a “Centre for Irish Studies” may mean in a Chinese context differs from university to university. It may mean a real hub of student activities (degrees, diplomas, graduate study, or a journal). Or it may mean – as in the case of the more prestigious universities such as Peking or Fudan – just one or two professors who have an interest in teaching some aspect of Irish Studies. As the experience of Irish Studies in the West demonstrates, such uneven development is often normal for the evolution of what is, after all, a relatively new field in the People’s Republic of China (PRC)¹.

Meanwhile, many other universities routinely teach courses in such authors as Oscar Wilde, W.B. Yeats and James Joyce without assigning them specifically to an Irish Studies program; even though it quickly becomes apparent that such authors cannot be well understood separated from their context. Hence these literature courses often come to include some basic Irish historical and cultural background, although “Irish” tends to be defined within the wider context of the United Kingdom. To reclaim any of these figures as Irish within an Irish context is still a fairly radical act in China. For, up to recently, the only exposure Chinese people have had to Ireland has been through the performances of *Riverdance* (a huge success there) or those of U2 or Roy Keane.

1. *Difficulties of Cultural Recognition*

Other than these international media celebrities, Ireland has suffered a distinct recognition-deficit in China. In part this has to do with the fact that many Chinese people, even those with a university education, simply do not know that “Ireland” exists as a sovereign nation with its own distinctive history. Either they do not know about Ireland at all, or they confuse it with Northern Ireland; with the result that they will then nod knowledgeable with, “Oh yes, I know; part of the U.K.” (a response that tends to infuriate). If one counters that Ireland is in fact an independent republic, Chinese people are apt to become genuinely puzzled. How can “Ireland” be at once an island – and at the same time, only part of an island? Once, in frustration, I explained that Irish diplomats often play on this ambiguity. When they want Ireland to appear large, they play the “all Ireland” (island) card. When they wish to emphasize its independence, they play the “sovereign (but divided) nation” card. In such circumstances, ambiguity can be useful – and no Irish diplomat worth his salt is going to pay the price for sacrificing such enabling double-think.

But not even clever diplomats can overcome the ultimate problem of size. As a nation, the Republic of Ireland is undeniably tiny: with a population about that of a modest Chinese city (e.g. Harbin). Chinese audiences cannot quite grasp the disparity of scale and, when they do, are amazed. “So small, so small”, one woman professor cooed to me, cradling her arms and rocking them back and forth, as if with a tiny baby. “Couldn’t have many big problems”. I tried not to look bemused. Following what had been almost thirty years of the Troubles, the problems of Ire-

land had become global. Although this professor clearly knew something about the Troubles, she had again delegated them to the U.K., without any suspicion of how not only the politics and the economy but the entire social and cultural fabric of the Republic had been nearly torn apart by what was, in effect, an implicit civil war.

Thus the all-Ireland/Republic interrelationship becomes a vital part of explaining Ireland to the Chinese. This made sense to them when presented under the aspect of colonial rule. China too had become colonized by the British, so they related to that part of Irish history with some fervour. Also, from their own experience with the treaty ports such as Shanghai or the British colony of Hong Kong (which emerged as a result of the two Opium Wars of the mid-19th century) they could easily understand how one part of the island had become more aggressively colonized than the rest. As a relatively new republic themselves, the Chinese also proved sympathetic to the bid for independence which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Ireland. And it became possible to explain the tensions within a divided Ireland by pointing to some of the same tensions between Hong Kong and the mainland – although these have become more complicated since the “two countries, one system” governing a newly reintegrated Hong Kong have now been put in place.

Beyond explanation, however, is the concept of Irish ethnicity or race. “Ethnicity” as a category exists in name only in China. The 55 “official” ethnic minorities within mainland China are designated as “national minorities”. What such a category does is bleed the concept of ethnicity of any *ethos* – in the sense of a whole way of life. A “nation” is a matter of bureaucratic administration defined by certain, usually arbitrary, geographical boundaries. An *ethos*, particularly one which has evolved over millennia through the lives of nomadic herders, such as those found in Mongolia or Tibet, involves a particular language, customs, and spiritual beliefs which have become part of their cultural DNA. The fact that Chinese people do not acknowledge such a category goes a long way to clarifying their attitudes towards western regions, for instance. It also goes a long way to explaining their fascination with the concept of the “Irish race”.

2. *Identity Politics, China and Ireland*

However debunked by scholars, the concept of an Irish race as the transmitters of a distinctly Irish *ethos* still haunts most Irish Studies courses – and, frankly, constitutes much of their appeal. The appeal is that of a porous, eclectic identity in a world increasingly obsessed with identity politics. But perhaps these are a reverse side of the same issue: the world seems obsessed precisely because it is going global, with a peaceful displacement of populations never before witnessed in its history. It is estimated that more than 215 million people worldwide now live in a country other than that in which they were born; this population has tripled in 25 years. If this were the population of a country it would be the fifth largest in the world. The Irish diaspora alone is of the order of 70 million and rising².

For the first time, in this generation, the Chinese too are traveling: it is now becoming almost mandatory to send one's only child to the West to be educated, even among families with middling incomes. It is also becoming almost routine for members of the newly wealthy classes to travel to Europe or America for holidays. And Chinese government enterprises are carrying out what has been described as a new kind of capitalist colonialism, in not only financing but providing large teams of their own workers to undertake projects in such places as the Middle East and Africa, thus providing long-term exposure to a very different culture.

As a generalization, the Chinese are very attached to their home-place. They will always tell you where they are from and then launch into praise of it, urging you to visit. But now that internal migration is also a huge factor in the China of today (particularly among the migrant workers, estimated at nearly 300 million or about a fifth of the entire population), people need to evolve some concept of "being Chinese" that will travel. So much more so if one is an overseas student or guest-worker or one of the many Chinese who lives permanently abroad. Thus the concept of a kind of portable identity such as "being Irish" that one can bring along with one is very attractive. And of course the Irish, with their long history of emigration and adaptation, have become pretty much world experts on this issue.

How is it done? An example might be drawn from the career of Robert Hart (1806-1875), a man considered the most powerful foreigner in late nineteenth-century China. According to the editors of his *Journals*, no other outsider during that period "had more sustained influence than Hart, and none enjoyed a greater measure of Chinese confidence" (Bruner, Fairbank, Smith, eds, 1986, 325). Arriving in China in 1854 to work for the British Foreign Service at the age of nineteen, within nine years Hart was then recruited by the Qing Dynasty to become its Inspector General for Maritime Customs. Working from this position (which he was to hold for over forty years) Hart was able to negotiate crucial international agreements between China and the West – precisely because he had become equally at home in both worlds. But what characteristics enabled Hart to work so successfully with both Chinese and Western officials?

First of all, Robert Hart remained in touch with his Irish origins (O'Leary 2009, 26-39). Although Hart's obituary described him as English, Hart was actually born in Ulster and spent his first 18 years in Ireland. Throughout his life, he remained loyal to Queen's College, Belfast, from which he had graduated. Moreover, as Inspector General, he actively sought recruits to the Chinese Maritime Customs Service from his own university and its affiliated institutions, which were then designated as the Queen's Colleges of Cork and Galway. His robust sense of the importance of *guanxi* or "connection" (a marked Irish characteristic to which Hart gave full play in China) led him to make offers of employment to members of his own extended family. Defending his methods, Hart declared that "I have never advanced a worse man over a better; yet, if promotion is due

to one of two men of equal deserts, and one of them is my own flesh and blood, it would simply be unnatural to pass him over" (Wright 1950, 859).

But being loyal to his Irish roots was not always simple. Most colonial administrators had links to the British aristocracy, were members of the established (Anglican) Church, and graduated from Oxford or Cambridge. By way of contrast, Hart was born into a middle-class (dissenting) Methodist family and graduated from a provincial Northern Ireland university. Consequently, from the very first, Hart lived at something of an oblique angle to the heart of the Anglican and Oxbridge landed-gentry Establishment which dominated the British Foreign Service.

On the other hand, as an Ulsterman born and bred, Hart arrived in China with the advantage of already being an outsider at home. As the editors of his journals observe, from the first Hart tended to be a sharp observer of cultural difference, paying great attention to Chinese rules of protocol and courtesy. Central to all was his sense of being Irish. In his first year in China he wrote: "I'm an Irishman – a Paddy in heart and soul" (Bruner, Fairbank, Smith, eds 1986, October 1854). Certainly Hart's sense of his own roots often led him to a certain detachment concerning "the English" – particularly when it came to recruiting officials for the Maritime Customs Service. Writing to his friend Campbell (another Briton) in 1893, he confessed: "I am not in favour of bringing out [to China] any experienced English hand: English are not properly accommodating and they have not enough India-rubber in their composition, and – for success – native wants and native conditions must be studied and allowed for – too parishional, too provincial, too insular are our countrymen!" (*ibidem*, Letter 913, 13 December 1893) In plain language, Hart is complaining that English recruits to China were simply not flexible enough to accommodate to "native wants and native conditions".

In his own position, Hart deployed precisely this kind of flexibility, working deftly between his several avowed identities. Of course, for his public, there were the predictable consequences. As sinologist Jonathan Spence points out, Hart was constantly involved in fending off criticisms of merchants and even British consuls that he favoured Chinese over British interests while enduring the opposite suspicion from the Chinese (Spence 2002 [1969], 120). In fact, the British public were uneasy with what they saw as Hart's tendency to "go native" (as reflected in the *Vanity Fair* cartoon of 1894 which shows him in the robes of a Mandarin high official). Yet Hart himself seemed to sense little conflict between his multiple identities – now including that of being, at least culturally, assimilated to the Chinese (Wright 1950, 173)³.

In one sense, such freedom to create one's own identity is the freedom of exile. Evidence of that freedom may be found in his journals, kept scrupulously during his forty years in China. Both these and his personal letters reveal a singular (perhaps even shocking) ability to assume multiple identities. Hart clearly did not feel that he had to choose among his several identities as British, English,

Irish or Ulsterman. His work in China led him to develop an almost entirely pragmatic view of identity politics, in which his experience as an Irish person proved to be particularly valuable, as in his deployment of the politics of *guanxi*: the way most things traditionally work in Ireland as well. In this ability to work his own personal (and often Irish) networks to mutual benefit, lay the key to much of Hart's success in China (Horowitz 2006, 558; O'Leary 2006, 583-604).

What Hart's career provides is a key to the value both of Irish Studies in China and Chinese Studies in Ireland. For, despite the disparities in size, Ireland and China have multiple issues in common, all of which might be said to revolve around issues of identity. Both are traditional agricultural societies only recently, and rapidly, modernized. Both have suffered under British colonial rule. Both have had devastating famines still held in collective memory (although the most recent, a direct result of Mao's "Great Leap Forward" policies of the 1950s, is still officially suppressed in China). Both Ireland and China are new nations but old civilizations, coping with the disjunctions that that generates. No surprise, then, that identity politics is now central to the new China as well. Precisely for that reason, Irish Studies can help to examine its own concern with "Who is China?"⁴

In other ways, this preoccupation allows Irish Studies within Chinese universities to examine cognate issues otherwise difficult to discuss within the current official constraints. For instance: What does it mean now to be "Chinese" after the many revolutions of the last century? What is the relation of today's China to its own ancient traditions? How can one understand China's relationship with the "Overseas Chinese" – a vast, worldwide diaspora? Or what about the many different cultures (say, between north and south, eastern and western China) which resist the easy homogenization of the "one China" mandate? How can one work around the official fiction that nearly all Chinese (some 93%) belong to something called the "Han" race – clearly a concept worth deconstructing in light of the clear differences of dialect and even language as well as a distinctive *ethos* or way of life between different regions in China.

3. *Looking at China from Ireland*

Looking at China from Ireland can also offer new perspectives on how we in Ireland view ourselves. While Robert Hart constitutes only one example of the many actual historical ties between Ireland and China, his career also provides a valuable lesson in how the notion of "being Irish" was actually deployed within the context of the British Empire.

Careers such as Hart's also help to answer the question: How, if Ireland is so small, does it manage to appear so big? That is, big in its influence, big through its expansion into the world far beyond its actual geographical borders. In part the answer is: through colonization – one that allowed the Irish access across the globe in terms of careers and travel as well as through

emigration. If only for this reason, much more attention should be paid to those Irish who entered the bureaucratic machinery of the Empire, because the British Empire, even in its declining years, has fostered a far larger outreach for Ireland than it could ever expect through efforts of its own.

Secondly, in responding to the question of how Ireland has managed to exert an influence far beyond its borders, it is helpful to point out that, for centuries, Ireland has identified its core culture as being Roman Catholic. Being a member of a world church with a strong central – and ultramontane – control, has also offered Ireland access to many far-flung places in the world, including China. There its missionaries have been active for several hundred years (and particularly in the first part of the last century) before they were banned under Mao's new republic in 1949. Although investigating missionary activity in China has not been encouraged until recently in the PRC, it is clear that Ireland's engagement with the larger world through the Roman Catholic Church has played a significant role in framing Irish global consciousness; as big a role, perhaps, as the Ireland's involvement with the British army or colonial service.

Thus looking at Ireland's relation to China has thrown up entirely new perspectives from which to regard Ireland itself and, with them, new opportunities for research. Several of these were initiated by a book of essays edited to mark Ireland's thirty years of diplomatic relations with China. Under the title of *China and the Irish*, it includes short essays on historical, literary, and cultural issues (McCormack, ed. 2009). One asks, for instance, how was it possible for a traditional music group such as The Chieftains to jam with their counterparts on their historic visit to China in 1983? Another looks at the effect of the writings of an ancient Daoist sage called Zhuangzi (or Chuang Tsü in the old Wade-Giles romanization) on the thinking of Oscar Wilde. A third offers cautionary tales about doing business in China. These are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to exploring the many bypaths of these extraordinary relations.

4. *Looking at Ireland from China*

Even more off-centre perspectives are gained by looking at Ireland from China. After teaching Irish Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University on and off for eight years, one gains very different angles on Ireland's own obsessions. Two instances may suffice.

The first, not surprisingly perhaps, is our Irish entanglement with sectarian divisions. Except for a tiny proportion, Chinese people are not Christian. Most have no concept of "one God" let alone the complexities of a Christian God who sacrificed his only son to redeem mankind from something called "sin" (another concept missing completely from the Chinese vocabulary). Although, under such circumstances, explaining the doctrinal differences

between Catholic and Protestant is pretty futile, the Chinese do understand political differences. So the fruitful approach (as I discovered) is to explain all the sectarian differences under the heading of colonization.

Once back in Ireland and eager to unearth China/Ireland historical connections, I tried to commission a short essay on Irish missionaries in China for the Irish national broadcasting authority (RTE) radio series that was to become the book, *China and the Irish*. It quickly became a nightmare. No one was prepared to do the research and writing about *both* Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries to China. In the end, I had to commission two separate essays (one Catholic, one Protestant) and forcibly marry them. In doing so, what I discovered was that each Church pursued its missionary initiatives in its own idiosyncratic way. The Roman Catholic missionaries were sent out in groups, worked to keep in touch with each other while in China (insofar as that was possible), and reported back directly to their superior at home and eventually to Rome itself. In other words, their organization was highly centralized. The Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, came from many sects – Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian. They went out to China one by one, often did not know what the other missionaries were doing (even within their own districts) and thus were sometimes duplicating efforts. They reported back to their immediate authorities at home, but otherwise were not coordinated. Moreover (and this is the most startling part) each Church exported their own sectarian differences, resulting, within China itself, in two different and distinct terms in Chinese for “the Christian Church”⁵.

Despite such obstacles, a great deal more needs still to be done in this field. Missionaries were often the first point of contact for Chinese people with Westerners. Many of the first initiatives to interpret Chinese culture to the larger world arose from this source.

A second unexpected angle comes from actually teaching Irish Studies in China. As already instanced, teaching effectively about Ireland requires (at least in part) placing its history within that of the British Empire. Yet the impact of the British Empire and its importance for Ireland is one that appears to be neglected in Irish Studies – and only now is beginning to be fully acknowledged in historical studies carried out in Ireland itself⁶.

Considering that Ireland has to date about 700 years as a British colony, to neglect the ongoing effects of their long-standing relationship tends to date a programme in Irish Studies. Perhaps after the first heady eighty or so years of Irish nationalism, Irish Studies could concentrate on the things that make Ireland distinctly “Irish” by opposing these to what seems particularly “British”. But that stage should be long past – or so I thought until I tried to commission a radio piece on the Chinese botanical connection from Lord Rosse of Birr Castle for the RTE as part of its “China and the Irish” series⁷. “The Earl of Rosse?” the head editor queried sharply. “Oh, you can’t invite *him*”. Then, with emphasis: “He’s not Irish!”

“And when did you come to Ireland?” I responded; knowing full well it was in the early 1970s. “The Earl of Rosse’s family came here in 1602. If he’s not Irish, then none of us are”.

After this exchange, I was no longer surprised by stories from the Vice-President of the Royal Irish Academy about the flack she routinely receives about being part of something “Royal” – even though fellow institutions such as the “Royal College of Surgeons,” the “Royal Dublin Society” not to mention the “Royal Hospital at Donnybrook” all share the same designation. But what this all points up – reinforced by the perspective from China – is that we in Ireland are still very adolescent in admitting our debt to our step-parents, even if we chose to think of them as “evil”. Certainly one must ask of current Irish Studies programmes: How many routinely talk (now largely in retrospect) about the damage done by colonization – whether in terms of the Famine or the Troubles – but are reluctant to examine or even speak of the benefits that Ireland has reaped from being a member of the British Empire? Or about the generations of Irish who have worked in the British armed forces or civil or foreign service? Or about the significance of the “London Irish” who, in the late 19th century, launched the cultural initiatives which were to invent an Ireland for the future?

And how many of us who teach Irish Studies are eager to admit how being British as well as Irish enabled our finest writers to enter a long tradition – so as to build on it? Had Oscar Wilde not been British as well as Irish, he would not have had a splendid education at the then centre of British imperialism in Ireland: Trinity College, Dublin. Nor later at Oxford. Nor would he have made the inevitable move to London to make his career as a writer. Nor would he have ever been asked to write a review of a recent translation (from a British civil servant working in China) of an ancient Chinese sage called Zhuangzi (or Chuang Tsü). Without reading Zhuangzi, would Wilde ever have himself written “The Soul of Man under Socialism” (1891)? Or refined his aesthetic theories of dandyism to such a pitch? (McCormack 2009, 302-321) These are the kind of questions that looking at Ireland through the lens of China may provoke.

5. Translating Ireland to China

Once again, teaching Irish literature in China impresses one with Ireland’s widening cultural impact. In the new China emerging after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Irish writers were among those first to be translated. The role of the translator at this time (and in many ways still in today’s China) is not the humble supporting part of those in the West. For hundreds of years before the collapse of the Qing dynasty, literacy was obtained through literature. The imperial exam system, in place for about 1,300 years, guaranteed a lifetime government post for those who succeeded. After the abolition of the imperial exams in 1905, this connection was disrupted, leaving the literate

few of the Mandarin/scholar class without any automatic access to political or cultural influence. By assuming the role of translators, this class managed to retain their lingering monopoly over literacy and, with it, the social and moral leadership now denied them. Hence control over literature became part of an evolving strategy for intellectuals to establish themselves as a new social class during times of drastic political and social upheaval (McDougall 2003, 2).

Translators thus became gatekeepers for the new China of the new twentieth century. But whom, in a world in which there was about 80% illiteracy, were they translating for? For each other, of course (and there remains keen competition still to be the first translator of a key Western opus – as the translation history of *Ulysses* makes clear). Also for the “literary intellectuals” such as editors, critics, and academics as well (after 1942) as for those politicians and bureaucrats with responsibility for cultural affairs. But most of all, they were translating for the educated youth of the next generation – along with a few elders eager to stay abreast of writing outside China (McDougall 2003, 5).

In analysing the situation in the first few decades of the new China, the translations of Oscar Wilde may be seen as particularly significant⁸. Of course, at the time Wilde was classed as British – therefore eliminating him from the discourse that regarded Irish literature as a distinctive and emerging genre. Despite the fact that copies of his “Soul of Man under Socialism” appear to have been translated into Chinese early⁹, he is not always regarded as politically relevant during the first three decades of the new China. Part of the difficulty is that, as a champion of “art-for-art’s sake”, Wilde was not regarded as a reformer. In the puritanical atmosphere of the New Culture Movement, Wilde’s reputation as a “decadent” (confirmed by the details of his personal life) tended to damage his reputation as a thinker. The exceptions were his plays – and his fairy stories. A translation of *An Ideal Husband* appeared in 1905; Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* in March 1918; *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *Salomé* were rendered into Mandarin in 1921 (McDougall 2003, 82). Wilde’s fairy stories proved even more popular. Famous for their simplicity and moral exactness, especially in championing the poor and the outcast and translated as early as 1909, they are still assigned in school textbooks today.

What did Wilde offer creators and critics of China’s new literature? They welcomed his defence of individualism and feminism: *Salomé*, weirdly enough, being regarded as a model for the liberated woman (Wong 2002, 118). They admired the sharp satires on political corruption; above all, Wilde’s exposure of the hypocrisies of a barren conventional morality, and commitment to socialist thinking. But what might be most striking is (according to one scholar) that none of critics “seems to have said that he liked Oscar Wilde’s plays simply because they were funny” (McDougall 2003, 88).

What attracted Chinese translators to writers such as Wilde? In a word – Revolution – not for its own sake, but a revolution which would give birth to

a new nation. In 1915, in a famous article, “On a Revolution in Literature”, the critic Chen Duxiu includes Wilde in his list of literary heroes (McDougall 2003, 77). For him, as for other intellectuals, Ireland’s poetry and drama offered a model for how a literary could lead to an actual revolution. In China what was known as the “New Culture Movement” was crystallized by student demonstrations in Beijing on 4 May, 1919, protesting the Chinese government’s weak response to the Treaty of Versailles. It sought to mark the cultural demise of thousands of years of Chinese imperial rule through an intellectual initiative that was both cultural and political. Its leaders, believing that traditional Confucian values had been responsible for the political weakness of China (which in turn led it to be colonized by foreigners before its eventual collapse), called for their rejection together with a selective adoption of Western ideals of science and democracy. To this day, these same views are still powerful in shaping China’s politics and culture. Given this agenda, it was natural for China’s writers to look for inspiration to those writers shaping the new Ireland.

From the avant-garde of the new cultural movement, Mao Dun (1896-1981) was one of the first to draw public attention to the new literary movement in Ireland (Chen 2009, 3). In a 1920 essay entitled “New Writings in Ireland,” he wrote that “while [the Chinese] people were questioning the future and favouring cosmopolitanism, the Irish were paying particular attention to their own history and national traits. The new Irish literature [has] formed a unique school of its own” (*ibidem*). Having acquired a first-hand knowledge of Irish literature, Mao Dun was then able to give a succinct account of plays by W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge, pointing out the ways in which Irish plays differed from those of the English. By blending realism with romanticism, he argued, the new Irish literature created a genre quite distinct from mere realism, already on the decline (Chen 2009, 4). Yeats’s plays, in particular, Mao wrote “crystallize in their performance all the thoughts and feelings of the nation of Ireland; Yeats does not pay attention to the surface life of the contemporary Irish. The description is of a spiritual life; using ancient legends and ancient heroic deeds as the material of a script which describes not an ancient, but a contemporary spirit” (Pu 2009, 85). In these aspects, Mao Dun hailed the Irish literary movement as a counter-current against contemporary trends in China.

Other key critical essays were written in this period by Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958), a founder with Mao Dun and others of the Literary Study Society (文學研究會). These pioneers believed that opening up China to the world meant paying keen attention to translating foreign literature. Zheng’s real preference was for the literature of India and Russia, feeling that their national conditions were similar to those of China. But (having good English) he also noted the impact of the work of Yeats, translated in China since the late 1910s. The granting of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 provided him with the right opportunity. Two essays on Yeats were published in quick succession, in

November and then December of 1923. But he did not stop there. In his own series of essays published in 1927, Zheng introduced Yeats through a discussion of Ireland's long history and current campaign for independence as a context for his writing. In the course of these essays, Zheng evaluates Yeats as "the most powerful figure in the Irish Renaissance" (Pu 2009, 88). That power was exercised not through direct involvement in the [Irish] Renaissance and the National Theatre, but through his poetry – for it was Yeats's poetry that proved a newly-freed Ireland could find a voice of its own. Given his achievements, Zheng names Yeats as "not only the greatest poet of modern Ireland, [...but] one of the greatest surviving poets of the world" (Pu 2009, 89).

Another colleague from the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun (1881-1936) – famous today as the leading figure in the struggle to modernize China – was as keenly aware of contemporary Irish writers and tended to think of them in the same terms. Writing "A Retrospect of Irish Literature" for *The Torrent* in 1929, Lu Xun argued that, under British rule, Ireland had no way to develop its national identity. Hence Irish writers had to create their literature anew, resulting in writing of a unique beauty and militancy (Chen 2009, 4).

By the time that this essay appeared in 1929, many of the alert reading public would already have become aware of new Irish writing. Guo Moruo (1892-1978) for instance, had already translated a collection of Synge's plays which came out in 1926 under the title *Dramatic Works of J. M. Synge*. But Guo Moruo was more than a translator; he was also a poet heavily influenced by Western literature who believed in its political efficacy. In an opening poem ("The Good Morning") of his first book of poetry, *The Goddesses* in 1921, Guo greets "Ireland, the poets of Ireland" (Reed 2009, 92). He follows with a fervent requiem for the death of the hunger striker, Terence McSwiney, in October 1920. Constructed from the newspaper telegrams arriving daily (in Japan, where Guo lived at the time), the poem "Victorious Death" depicts McSwiney as a great martyr of the Irish revolution: "Honoured MacSwiney! / Dear sons of Ireland, / the spirit of freedom will ever stand by you, / for you stand by one another, you are the incarnation of freedom!" (99). It closes with a passionate elegy:

The mighty ocean is sobbing its sad lament,
 the boundless abyss of the sky is red with weeping,
 far, far away the sun has sunk in the west.
 Brave, tragic death! Death in a blaze of glory! Triumphant death!*
 Victorious death!
 Impartial God of Death! I am grateful to you! You have saved
 MacSwiney, for whom my love and reverence know no bounds!
 MacSwiney, fighter for freedom, you have shown how great can be the power of
 the human will!
 I am grateful to you! I extol you! Freedom can henceforth never die!
 The night has closed down on us, but how bright is the moon. (100)

Guo here represents, if at one extreme, the stance of many of China's leading intellectuals at the time. They were aware of the events of Easter 1916 and its aftermath. They also understood the role of literature as a political force shaping these events, referring particularly to certain plays by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, giving impetus to their translation. *The Rising of the Moon* (1907) was to become widely popular in China during the 1930s, performed then both on university campuses as well as in theatres. During this period when the Chinese too saw themselves as fighting for independence, Yeats's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) was also received with enthusiasm. Perhaps for the same reasons, Sean O'Casey's *Juno and Paycock* (1924) was adapted for the Chinese stage by Zhang Min, a director of note at the time. Under the Chinese title *Zui Sheng Meng Si* [*Intoxicated and Day-dreaming*], it played to packed houses in Shanghai in 1936 (Chen 2009, 5). After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, O'Casey's plays became even more ideologically fashionable. Always alert to the wider world, O'Casey reciprocated Chinese admiration, on one occasion in 1958 even writing a letter to the Chinese *Literary Gazette* (*Wen Yi Bao*). In it he praised a Chinese play which depicted the Chinese Red Army's heroism during the Long March – which, he declared, he had followed very closely “so far as Western newspaper reporting could furnish him with any information” (Chen 2009, 5-6)¹⁰.

But during this period only one Irish writer actually arrived in China: Bernard Shaw. As part of a round-the-world trip with his wife, Shaw visited three Chinese cities in February 1933: Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing. Chinese audiences already knew of Shaw. Not only had his plays been translated into Chinese from the 1920s onwards, he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925, obtaining world recognition. So the Chinese expected a “great man” – but one who was British, not Irish. As such, they welcomed him as a critic of colonial imperialism (at the time, both Shanghai and Hong Kong were under British control). In fact, the audience was torn by conflicting impulses. One faction welcomed that Western influence which they felt would help modernize China. Others remained hostile to their own colonization under the British in particular.

Shaw, for his part, remained himself. He was ironic and amusing, full of opinions but not well informed. On 13th February at Hong Kong University, he advised the students to read “revolutionary books”. At the moment when Shanghai was under Nationalist rule (fighting the Communists), he urged them to “Go up to your neck in communism” (Li 2002, 158). Even the audience's puzzled and angry response did not alert Shaw to how out of tune he was with his surroundings or with the fraught political situation. Worse was to come in Shanghai four days later. There he was greeted by “Hallo Shaw” – a blast from the writer Yang Xing-zhi, who began:

Dear Shaw, why do you come to Shanghai?
To visit us slaves of colonialism?

I tell you: Shanghai is not London, New York or Paris:
 Nor is it a red city like Leningrad.
 The British, American, Japanese, French flags fly proudly in the sky,
 Clearly saying that China is only a colony.
 Do you feel that this is a tragedy?
 I tell you also:
 Your words in Hong Kong are preposterous!
 Youths listening to it will pull their tongues,
 Old people hearing will say “fart”.
 Maybe some will even be rude to you.
 Don't say anything foolish when you arrive in Shanghai,
 This is because we do not know humour,
 And you cannot say anything you like,
 We warn you to keep your mouth shut here, [...]. (Li 2002, 158-159)

Ignoring the advice, Shaw continued to litter his lectures with his own impolitic opinions. In regard to Chinese civilization, for instance, he declared flatly that China and the East do not have a culture, as “culture” refers to human behaviour that can increase happiness. (Even now, nothing is better calculated to infuriate a Chinese audience than a slight on their civilization – the oldest and most continuous in the world today). On the subject of China's future (from 1933 onwards), Shaw was right to prophesy that there was no safe answer as to what lay ahead. Speaking in favour of the collapse of capitalism, he commended the spirit of Marxism as well as the Soviet revolutionary method, finally predicting that China's future would lie under Communism (Li 2002, 167-168).

Despite the prescience of the last remarks, his speech provoked a furore. It fell to that leading light of the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun, to spring to his defence. Editing *Bernard Shaw in Shanghai* (1933), a book composed of a retrospective collection of views on Shaw from both foreign and Chinese newspapers, Lu Xun aimed at “presenting a true picture of Shaw and also a picture of the various critics each in his own posture”. “Shaw's arrival has been a disaster,” he began. Yet “Shaw was a great exclamation point” (Lu Xun 1992, 72, 75). For, in provoking controversy in the course of advancing many contradictory views, Shaw's visit did encourage open debate on large ideas. In another essay written in the wake of the visit, Lu Xun states his own fervent admiration of the Shaw who

[...] puts the upper-class folks on stage, but [...] tears off their masks and their finery, and then [...] grabs one by the ear and points him out to the audience saying, “Look, here is a maggot!” He does not give them the chance to evade or cover up. (Lu Xun 1992, 76)

While Shaw may have been exact on the hypocrisies of his own society, he was almost completely blind to the actualities before him in China; proclaiming, for instance, that the China he saw was, despite being at war, a place of peace. No wonder Shaw was disconcerted, while on a brief airplane trip

over the Great Wall, to see a skirmish between Chinese and Japanese soldiers taking place almost directly beneath him.

In sum (as phrased by the scholar who has examined the occasion in detail) Shaw's visit to China revealed two processes. The first set in motion by a Chinese attempt to construe him within their own nationalist and global rhetoric. The second by Shaw's conscious as well as unconscious efforts to evade this construction. The clash resulted from the native ideological construction of his visit set side-by-side with the amorphous "reality" of Chinese life (Li 2002, 158). Its outcome might itself have made a fine Shavian comedy.

6. *Celebrity Writers*

It was Shaw's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925 that helped pave his way to a celebrity reception in the British-controlled ports of China, like Hong Kong and Shanghai. It is true that it was also helped by his reputation as a "socialist" – although, as Lu Xun pointed out, Shaw lived as a wealthy man (Lu Xun 1992, 63). Paradoxically, had he not done so (as Lu Xun also observed), Shaw would not have received the celebrity welcome accorded to him. Still, like Oscar Wilde and Sean O'Casey before him, Shaw rode on a current of that socialist fervour which was shaping the new China – even though, to this day, students often wonder just what "socialism" really means to such Irish writers.

In the case of Yeats, the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 also led to celebrity, as well as to further Chinese translations both of his poems and his prose. His most famous advocate during this period, Wang Tongzha, was the first to translate Yeats's short stories as well as to give an overview of the entire corpus of Yeats's poetry to date in the 1924 essay entitled "Yeats's Life and Works". Addressing the personal life of Yeats in detail, his distinctive mode of creation, his character and ideas, this essay enshrining Yeats as a "World Poet" is still regarded as the high water mark for Yeats studies in China (Pu 2009, 86).

As, in China's eyes, the Nobel Prize for Literature trumps every other qualification, the Chinese often wonder aloud how Ireland could have produced four such winners from its tiny population – when they have, from one exponentially larger, produced so far only two. As today's China is obsessed with brand-names, the Nobel Prize for Literature has been the major means by which Ireland's cultural reputation has been enlarged. In fact, literature remains Ireland's most prestigious export – and, of course, a way of fostering the always implicit project of Irish nationalism.

While world-domination is hardly on the cards, Ireland's literature – particularly as it plays out in China – offers some measure of its influence in, culturally, one of the furthest reaches of the world. For instance, one of the current exports from the Dublin's Gate Theatre has been Samuel Beckett. Up until recently, the only play of Beckett's known in the PRC has been *Waiting for Godot* (1953). It had apparent misfortune of being translated into Chinese

in 1965, just a year before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution¹¹. During that time, as a banned book, it spread like wildfire among the besieged intellectuals (especially after Beckett won the Nobel Prize in 1969). But in the 1980s, following the death of Mao, Beckett's play reemerged, as Chinese dramatists consciously turned to Western models to revive a theatre stagnating under the previous regime's insistence on "socialist-realism".

The event that crystallized Beckett's reputation was the staging of an experimental play by Gao Xingjian – himself later to also win the Nobel Prize – *The Bus Stop* (Lie, Ingham 2009, 132). Loosely based on *Godot*, when the play premiered in Beijing in 1983, it also provided (for those in the know) a kind of shadow premier of *Godot* as well. But, as several critics noted, there were significant differences. Gao's play depicts a cross-section of Chinese citizens waiting at a bus stop to go into the city. While the bus comes, it never stops. During this time, each rationalizes his desire to go into the city – but, at the very end, only one enterprising citizen determines that he will simply walk into town, leaving the rest behind. While their situation might be read as a political reaction to the Cultural Revolution – as reducing China to paralysis – the kind of existential anxieties induced by *Godot* are missing. After all, the citizens of *Bus Stop* all have a stated purpose. One citizen even tries to achieve it. But the two tramps of *Godot* seem purposeless – as *Godot*, unlike the bus, never comes and may probably not even exist.

However, the net effect of *Bus Stop* was to prepare the Chinese audience for the eventual premiere of *Godot*. When it did at last appear on the Chinese stage in 1987 – and subsequently in performances from 2003-2009, perhaps the most memorable being the production by The Gate Theatre from Dublin in 2004 – the response has been (perhaps predictably) mystified. The students to whom I tried to teach *Godot* could not cope (any more than the Chinese translator) with the multiple puns, Hiberno-English idioms, and manifold cultural allusions of Beckett's in English. Particularly disastrous was Lucky's speech, as Chinese students simply had no context (in anything from Aquinas to Synge) to cope with Beckett's parody of Western intellectual discourse. In the end, as I discovered, they coped with it by simply boxing it as "absurd" – which then absolved them of any responsibility of making sense of it. Their sense of frustration was perhaps relieved by the translation of a large number of Beckett plays to mark his centenary in 2006; but, as with the earliest reception of Wilde, few of his Chinese audience found him funny.

7. *The Case of James Joyce*

But of all the Irish writers, the one today most celebrated in China is James Joyce. As a writer, Joyce offers a perfect example of how an Irish writer may use the particular to become universal. First of all, Joyce engages with the English language in a novel way: notoriously, in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode

of *Ulysses* (1922), by tracking its linguistic evolution from its earliest literary sources up to the present. But Joyce's engagement comes from a distinctive angle, through that English emerging in a new dialect within a new world, that of modern Ireland. Being educated through English, he enters the grand tradition of the English novel, but consciously distorts it for his own uses. Once again, the British Empire asserts its imperial force, allowing Joyce to intervene in it as part of his own heritage.

The second way that Joyce extends his reach as a novelist is through his enculturation as a Roman Catholic. Again, as a Catholic, Joyce is able to appropriate the legacy of the shadow Roman Empire. As a world church, Catholicism takes its central administration as well as its traditional language (Latin) from Rome. Although this legacy grants Joyce a philosophy as well as a whole new vocabulary (such as the word "epiphany") for his aesthetic strategies, this is almost totally opaque in China. China is not a Christian nation; it has in fact little or no notion of the transcendental at all. Even more disconcerting is that Christian doctrines such as original sin are simply nonsense for the majority of Chinese. I still recall the shock of a question from a distinguished audience of Chinese Joyce scholars. At the end of the conference, one of the most prominent asked me directly: "Professor McCormack: you talked a great deal about something called 'sin' in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Would you please explain to the audience here – *what is this 'sin'?*"

It is possible that this aspect of Joyce, being so culturally incommensurate, is simply not transmittable. But omitting the most Catholic of Joyce's references only makes more clear what is most transmissible – and this in today's China is not only powerful but cognate. There is first of all, the record of the birth agony of a new, modern state as it moves from the paralysis of *Dubliners* (1914) to the soul-searching of the young Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Both of these texts speak vividly to today's Chinese students, who observe the same suffering and confusion among the writers of the 1920s New Culture Movement, particularly in the work of Lu Xun. In common with these writers, Joyce rejected the stilted formal prose of his English inheritance for the vernacular of this native Dublin. Instead of tales of aristocrats or nobles, he made a hero of a common man who goes about a common life, ennobling the vulgar through mythic echoes. By these means, Joyce charts the emergence of new nation through a new kind of writing, one concentrating on modern urban man, through whom one is meant to read "mankind".

Given the events of these last two decades in the PRC, it is in fact fortuitous that Joyce's writing is emerging only now. 2012 (for instance) marked the first time that more Chinese lived in cities than in the rural countryside. For a novel such as *Ulysses*, an audience of recently urbanized people constitutes in many ways an ideal readership. Just as Joyce's audience would have been, in Ireland anyway, one generation away from their country origins and hence still making their way through the new life of the city, the story of Bloom, as

an ordinary but displaced man making his way through what was once the third city of the British Empire would be immediately recognizable. As would the oral styles of the novel, familiar to readers both in Ireland and China as the style normal for a nation the majority of whom were only recently moving from an oral to a literate or written culture.

If Joyce's writing has emerged comparatively late in China, it is for historically fraught reasons. The record of the last century (at least until the 1980s and "opening up" of China) has been one of invasions, warlords, lawlessness and revolution. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, there followed a devastating famine, in turn followed by the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution – ended only after Mao's death in 1976. Take the following false starts to Joyce translation as exemplary:

First Case: In the early 1940s Wang Zuoliang, a young instructor at the Southwest Associated University in Kunming, discovered Joyce's *Dubliners*. Finding it fascinating, he translated the stories immediately into Chinese and sent them on to a publisher. But before publication could take place, the manuscript was lost in the Japanese bombing of the city of Guilin (Chen 2009, 7). It was not until 1982 that a special issue of *Foreign Literature* devoted to Anglo-Irish Literature included translations of Joyce's short stories "Araby" and "A Little Cloud". Although *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was eventually translated into Chinese in 1975, a year before Mao's death, the first complete translation of *Dubliners* did not appear until 1984 (*ibidem*).

Second Case: Professor Jin Di of Tianjin Foreign Languages Institute first encountered *Ulysses* in 1945 as a young academic (Jin 2001, 22-23). Given only a week to read the copy borrowed from a friend, even without understanding all that he was reading, he recognized it as a masterpiece, particularly in its use of stream of consciousness and internal monologue. Following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, there began a period of strict censorship of liberal ideas, perceived by the authorities as intrinsically bourgeois and thus against the interests of the proletariat. *Ulysses* in particular was singled out for its "nihilist, philistine and pornographic tendencies" (Jin 2001, 25). Even reading the book clandestinely would have had to be confessed at the weekly meetings in which everyone had to review all their private activities – both physical and mental – which they had been engaged in over the previous seven days. "It would indeed take a determined rebel against the newly established regime", Jin confessed, "to hide such a serious activity as devoting a large portion of one's spare time to reading a bourgeois novel in private" (Jin 2001, 24). Not until the opening up of China after 1978, having been challenged by a friend, did Jin Di actually begin translating. At that time, the only books available to him were a paperback copy of *Ulysses*, a pamphlet of selected readings edited by T.S. Eliot, and a couple of introductory booklets for students¹². The post-war surge of Joyce studies in the West was still unavailable to any scholar in the PRC (Jin 2001, 29).

After the publication of his one translated chapter of *Ulysses*, Jin was reluctant to continue such exhausting work. Not until he came to the United States as a visiting scholar at Yale University in 1982 did it seem feasible, particularly given the encouragement of Professor Mary Reynolds, who gave him 30 books on the author and his oeuvre. “My eyes were opened”, he remarked (*ibidem*). By 1986, Jin felt confident enough to publish a few translated chapters from *Ulysses* (Chapters 2, 6, 10 and part of Chapter 18) for the prestigious journal, *World Literature*, accompanying them with a critical appreciation of the novel together with an extensive study of the author for its first issue (Chen 2009, 7). These proved crucial to an understanding of *Ulysses* for its new Chinese audience.

Yet just as prospects for a publication of the entire book began to appear more realistic, a major blow was dealt by the events of Tiananmen Square in June, 1989. China’s opening up, which had progressed gradually throughout the 1980s, came to an abrupt halt; and with it, hopes for the *Ulysses* project. But a new opportunity emerged from Taiwan, relatively unaffected by the ideological upheavals in mainland China, when the Taiwanese literary publishing house Chiu Ko Publishing Co. offered Jin a contract to complete his translation of *Ulysses*. In October 1993, the first full translation of Volume 1 of *Ulysses* appeared. As Jin Di notes, “It was hailed by the media in Taiwan as ‘the greatest event since the publication of Shakespeare’s works translated by Liang Shiqiu 20 years ago’” (Jin 2001, 54). Received warmly by Chinese critics, the translation’s first printing sold out in one month in Taiwan and to date has sold over 40,000 copies in mainland China.

In 1996, the second volume appeared. But not before another complete text of *Ulysses* was published – in 1995, a year earlier than its competitor – translated by a married couple, Xiao Qian and Wen Jieruo.

Third case: Xiao Qian, born and educated in Beijing, was a journalist as well as a university lecturer who in 1944 became a war correspondent based in England during World War II. With the founding of the Republic of China in 1949, rejecting an invitation of King’s College, Oxford to serve on its faculty, Xiao returned to China. There he was almost immediately condemned by the Communist Party of China and consequently (in his wife’s words) “left out in the cold” from 1949 to 1957 (Wen 2009, 33).

Worse was to follow. In the late 50s, Xiao was denounced as a political “rightist”. “With that label attached to him, [according to Wen Jieruo], he was humiliated for the following 22 years” (*ibidem*); the worst time being during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when he was banished to the countryside. In 1968 Xiao tried to commit suicide. Eventually, through redress as one of the “mishandled cases”, in 1979 Xiao was declared officially rehabilitated. In 1990, although nearly 70 years old, Xiao was approached by a Chinese publisher suggesting that he undertake a translation of *Ulysses*. “For four years”, his wife wrote, “he worked as the driving force and I served as his assistant. We worked like crazy, getting the whole novel translated ahead of Jin Di in the end [...] During those

four years, I worked 15 or 16 hours a day, sometimes shutting myself up in my study for several months running” (*ibidem*). There were other obstacles as well: for, during the early months of the Cultural Revolution, as his wife confesses, “I was caught completely unprepared [...] and [therefore] I failed to preserve Xiao Qian’s large number of notes, commentaries and letters, especially the valuable letters, over one hundred of them, from the English writer E.M. Forster [whom Xiao had befriended in 1941]” (Wen 2009, 34).

Such stories! Such obstacles! And such persistence. Behind every one of the Joyce translations that made it to press are the dramas of China’s turbulent history. These include not only such obstacles as the Cultural Revolution and poverty of reference material (not to say, of encouragement) but a culture of endemic censorship, far worse than that in contemporaneous Ireland. Joyce, in particular, was demonized as pornographic, decadent or nihilistic. Because Marxist thought targets literature as a carrier of cultural values, foreign literature in particular has always to a certain degree been suspect since the founding of the PRC in 1949. Political views also tended to regard Western literature as alien to “true” Chinese culture – or the ideology of the moment. In comparison, the sheer difficulty of translating Joyce’s virtuoso performances of different Englishes proved less daunting than overcoming official opposition to their task.

And politics, as ever in China, was also to play a large part in the reception of Joyce. Knowing this, the translators of *Ulysses* were careful to prepare the political ground beforehand. Jin Di’s 1986 essay for *World Literature*, for example, praises Joyce for creating “an all-round modern man capable of freeing himself from spiritual shackles of all descriptions, daring to oppose external domination and, at the same time, opposing a parochial national hatred directed towards the English as well as towards Jews. Joyce made Bloom a Jew in order to show that, although he was oppressed, he was indomitable” (Chen 2009, 8). Finally, Jin Di extolled *Ulysses* as one of the greatest works of the literary world, as it demonstrated “the selfless love of the common people” and “confirmed the spirit of humanity” (*ibidem*). Similar precautions were undertaken by Xiao Qian (who, after all, trained as a journalist), writing a series of articles describing in detail the 1933 American trial of *Ulysses* which ruled that it was not obscene. If in 1995 China were to ban or censor this book more than six decades later, Xiao argued, China would be looking backward (Murphy 1995). In common with Jin Di, Xiao Qian also contended that the book fitted in with the PRC’s Marxist “progressive” ideals, being both anti-anti-Semitic and anti-imperialistic.

The strategy worked, although the publishers were still nervous. Literature is still regarded as political in China, and censorship over many decades has a chilling effect: not necessarily because of official action (although writers have been persecuted, even executed, under previous regimes) but because official censorship leads inevitably to self-censorship, which tends to paralyze

any impulse towards engaging in innovative and/or ideologically suspect ventures¹³. Translating is perhaps safer than other kinds of writing but it still can be dangerous, as the history of the translation of *Ulysses* vividly illustrates. “We publishers had to be brave to take this kind of risk”, says Li Jingdian, the editor of Yilin Publishing House, in Nanjing. “I never imagined this book would be so welcomed by the Chinese reader” (Murphy 1995). The initial three-volume print run sold out its initial 85,000 copies, to be followed by a second and then a third edition. “I feel that this translation of *Ulysses* signifies that China at last has opened herself not only in technology and science but also in literature”, Xiao declared at the time (*ibidem*).

More than a decade later, in 2011, the translation of the untranslatable *Finnegans Wake* (1939) confirms a new openness in China. Although essays on the *Wake* had been published by Chinese scholars since 1991, no one had dared to take up the challenge of translating it until a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, Dai Congrong, decided to make it serious project. As she points out, this was a risk, as translating now no longer is as prestigious as it once was; and, more seriously, a translated work does not automatically count for academic promotion (Dai 2010, 584). Despite the grave difficulties of translating such a mind-bending text, after eight years Dai succeeded in publishing what she regards as a simplified first version – of the first third of the work – to great acclaim. She was incredulous when the translation became a surprise bestseller in China, its first run of 8,000 copies in one month, reaching number two on a prestigious bestseller list in Shanghai. “At first I felt very surprised, and I feel very surprised now still”, says Dai, “I thought my readers would be scholars and writers, and it wouldn’t be so popular”¹⁴.

8. *The Role of Irish Studies in Today’s China*

The growing prestige of Joyce studies in China as well as an elaborate billboard campaign may have helped. Dai ventures that Chinese readers may appreciate Joyce’s rumination on the cyclical nature of history, the relationships between his male and female characters, and the sheer challenge of interpreting his prose. But the growing popularity of Joyce’s work also signals a new openness to the West and Ireland in particular. As its literary works have become more available to the reading public, Irish Studies is acquiring growing momentum. If, in their first reception of Irish writing, Chinese intellectuals welcomed it as providing models for how a literary revolution could provoke a literal one, the context has now changed. Today, such texts are looked at as examples of how a new nation has found a new voice and, with it, a renewed national pride.

In its present phase, Irish Studies also serves to import a discourse which allows students and scholars to discuss China’s own predicaments. Through indirection, they are exposed to issues such as those surrounding nationalism, censorship, sexuality, gender, colonization, and ethnicity. Thus Irish

writing, and its own history, has been forged into a gateway to the outside world, opening up issues surrounding modernity itself at a moment when, historically, the “modern” is the new universal through which today’s generation aspires to enter the developed world. Having entered that world only in recent generations, Ireland may be seen as providing a map for that journey.

Thus, as more and more translations of Irish writers appear in the PRC, they create their own gyre, widening out across its most literate society. Should we ask: will the widening end in “mere anarchy”? Or, as Yeats predicted in *A Vision* (1925; 1937), will it prove the beginning of a new cycle of world history: one in which the East (including China) emerges as a growing power, both politically and culturally? Should Yeats prove prescient, Ireland and its writers may be seen as playing a distinctive role in China’s newly rising status, giving evidence of how literary revolution can inspire political action – as well as ushering the new China into its own version of modernity and so into the myriad possibilities of its future.

Notes

¹ Following are the current list for Irish Studies Programmes and their professors in the PRC and Taiwan today: Beijing Foreign Studies University, Irish Studies Centre (director Prof. Wang Zhanpeng; Prof. Li Yuan, plus three other faculty members). Peking University (Prof. Zhao Baisheng, Institute for World and Comparative Literatures; Prof. Zhou Xiaoyi, Department of English). Beijing International Studies University, Prof. Liu Yan teaches Irish literature. CASS, Beijing (Prof. Fu Hao, translator of W.B. Yeats at the Institute for Foreign Literatures; Prof. Li Jingkun, a political scientist at the Institute for European Studies). Shanghai Normal, Centre for Irish Literature (director Prof. Pu Durong, undergraduate and graduate students; it specializes in three research fields: Anglo-Irish Literature, Gaelic Literature, and Irish Literature translation and research in China). Fudan University, Shanghai (Prof. Chu Xiaoquan is the Director of the Faculty of Foreign Literature, which includes a detailed Irish Studies module focusing on George Bernard Shaw; Prof. Dai Congrong published the first translation into Chinese of the first third of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* in 2011). Nanjing University (a small centre headed by Prof. Yang Jinzai, Vice-Dean of the Foreign Languages School and editor of the *Foreign Literature Journal*). Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade (Dr Feng Jianming (Séamus), Associate Professor at SIFT and Director of a small Irish Studies Centre; he teaches a masterclass on James Joyce). University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Chengdu, Sichuan (Prof. Li Chengjian teaches a module on Irish Culture and History). National Taiwan Normal University, Irish studies programme in the department of English (Prof. Zhuang Kunliang, editor for *James Joyce in Taiwan*).

² Cf. *The Irish Times* (2013), “Global Diaspora Forum in Dublin looks at creating opportunities at home and abroad” (May 13).

³ Hart not only spoke fluent Chinese (although it was said, with an Irish accent), but he also had a long-term relationship with a Chinese woman which resulted in three sons. Cf. Li, in Wildy 2003, 43, 84.

⁴ For further elaboration of this issue, see William A. Callahan, chps. 5 and 6 in *China: the Pessoptomist Nation*, New York, Oxford UP, 2010.

⁵ Today Roman Catholicism in China is called *Tiānzūjiào*, 天主教, literally, “Religion of the Lord of Heaven”. The Protestants, arriving later, were called *Jīdūjiào* 基督教, literally “Jesus Religion”, a name they still retain.

⁶ See, for instance, Jane Olymeyer, *How the Irish Became British*, New Haven, Yale UP, 2012.

⁷ Broadcast July – August, 2008. Podcast to be found at: <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/podcast/podcast_chinaandtheirish.xml>. Written version as Brendan Parsons, “Transplanting China to Ireland: Three Generations of the Earls of Rosse”, McCormack 2009, 62-72.

⁸ Following details are taken from “The Importance of Being Earnest in China: Early Chinese Attitudes towards Oscar Wilde”, in McDougall 2003, 75-94.

⁹ W.B. Yeats comments (in 1925) on its popularity with the Young China party; see Beckson, ed. (1970), 396. Montgomery Hyde reports that Robert Ross saw copies of the essay, translated into Chinese and Russian, on sale in the bazaars of Nijni Novgorod in 1908; see Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, London, Eyre Methuen, 1976, 381.

¹⁰ Had he lived longer, however, O’Casey might have been painfully surprised by the Mandarin version of his *Playboy of the Western World*. Set in a massage parlour in Beijing, the 2006 production proved controversial when a member of the audience complained about the shortness of the skirt worn by Sha Sha, playing the Sarah Tansey character. Following the complaint, the play was attended by two policemen. A very mild replay of the riots that broke out in the original production.

¹¹ *Dengdai Geduo (Waiting for Godot)* (1965), trans. by Shi Xiangrong, Beijing, Zhongguo xiju chubanshe. The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 and ended with the death of Mao in 1976. A new edition was issued in 1983.

¹² Cf. Jane Ford (1996), “The Odyssey of ‘Ulysses’ into China: Shannon Center Fellow Publishes Translation of Joyce’s Masterpiece”, <<http://www.virginia.edu/insideuva/textonl-yarchive/96-05-31/6.txt>> (04/13).

¹³ For further analysis, see “Censorship and Self-censorship in Chinese Poetry and Fiction”, in McDougall 2003, 205-224.

¹⁴ “Finnegans Wake becomes a hit book in China”, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 5 February 2013. Dai’s opinion as to its popularity also from this source.

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A Body that Matters: Tom Kilroy's *Talbot's Box*

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Abstract:

This paper looks at Tom Kilroy's play *Talbot Box*, and argues that it resorts to the tropes of the Passion narrative, revisited by ex-centric mystic Matt Talbot, to expose the homogenising, normalising and exploitative efforts of the Catholic Church, a powerful institution which is shown to work in collusion with the forces of capitalism. Using a grotesque, often farcical dramaturgy, the play displays the joint attempts of ecclesiastical and temporal powers to appropriate Matt Talbot's private performance of the Christian Passion for their own purposes, as well as the ways in which he resists instrumentalization by submitting himself to a radical form of bodily exposure. The play thus invents its own version of a theatre of cruelty in order to accommodate a mystical experience which lies beyond the reach of realistic representation.

Keywords: object, Catholic Church, Thomas Kilroy, Matt Talbot, Passion play

This paper is part of a broader project which looks at the traces of the Passion Play in modern Irish drama from the Revival onwards. I use the term "Passion Play" in a very loose sense: what I am interested in are the ways in which Irish plays recycle the tropes, images and dramaturgy of the Passion of Christ, often in secularized contexts, and the ideological and aesthetic implications of such recycling. In particular, I am interested in uses of the climactic moment of the Christian narrative, that of the Crucifixion, in which the exposure of the dying body on the cross, endlessly rehearsed in Christian iconography and dramaturgy, endows the male victim with the status of speaking subject, and paradoxically enables him to utter a radical critique of the structure of power which is destroying him. Thus modern Irish theatre often turns to the dramaturgy of the Passion to challenge existing power structures as well as to promote an anti-conformist or rebellious character, a minor voice or a subversive discourse.

In *Talbot's Box* (1979 [1977]), Tom Kilroy resorts to the tropes of the Passion Play to expose the homogenising, normalising and exploitative efforts

of the Catholic Church, a powerful institution which is shown to work in collusion with the forces of capitalism. While Matt Talbot has no message for the world and shuns publicity, his private performance of the Passion nevertheless constitutes a critique of the power structure and its ideology. Yet the play does not just use Talbot's Passion as a critical idiom, but explores it on its own terms as a genuinely mystical, ritualistic experience which cannot be contained, let alone explained, within the secular framework of the play. Kilroy's play suggests that this mystical experience can be adumbrated and gestured towards, but not fully described. The play chronicles the life and death of Matt Talbot, a Dublin working-man who was born in dire poverty in 1856 and initially took after his alcoholic father, before experiencing a religious crisis at 28: he then took the pledge of total abstinence from drink and, while carrying on his life as an unskilled worker in a timber-yard, secretly led a severely ascetic life, practising various forms of mortification of the flesh, including the carrying of heavy cords and chains. These were discovered by the doctors who examined his body in the morgue after he died of heart failure in the street in 1925. This revelation triggered a popular cult of Matt Talbot, and the movement towards his canonization, which started in 1931, achieved its first success when he was made Venerable in 1975, two years before the first production of *Talbot's Box*. Kilroy says that he had first intended the play essentially as a critique of Irish Catholicism, but that things did not quite go according to plan: "I began *Talbot's Box* as an angry anti-Catholic, anti-Talbot satire but the figure of Talbot defied me as I wrote! I was unable to dismiss him outright with the result that I had to find my own version of mysticism to write the play" (message to the author, 07 July 2012). Using a grotesque, often farcical dramaturgy, the play displays the joint attempts of ecclesiastical and temporal powers to appropriate Matt Talbot's performance of his faith, as well as the ways in which he resists instrumentalization by submitting himself to a radical form of bodily exposure. The play thus invents its own version of a theatre of cruelty in order to accommodate a mystical experience which lies beyond the reach of realistic representation.

At one level, the play is about the Catholic Church's attempts to appropriate Matt Talbot's private performance of his faith for ideological purposes, and use him as an exemplar of submissiveness and endurance in order to neutralise contestations of the status quo in Irish society. The play moves freely between different time-periods as it revisits episodes of Talbot's life, and explores the ways in which these episodes are rehearsed and reinterpreted in retrospect, after Talbot's death. The Ireland staged here is shown to be superficially bigoted, yet in the process of becoming profoundly secularised. Rituals are performed perfunctorily and drained of any spiritual content (see the high-speed confession scene in the opening sequence), and the dialogue is punctuated with an endless list of religious phrases which have congealed into entirely profane expletives, as in this early exchange in the morgue:

Second man. What've you got there, sister?

Woman. Chains.

Second man. Chains?

Woman. And cords.

Second man. Begod.

Woman. Removed by me at an earlier moment from that holy man lying there before us. [...] He had lived with them for the better part of his life so that the chains, though rusted, had sank into the flesh...

Second man. Mother of Jesus! (16)

Seeking to comment on Talbot's extraordinary behaviour, the secularized clichés paradoxically capture the failure of ordinary language to make any sense of his faith and religious practise. From this dialogue, the audience realises that Talbot's mystical experience exceeds the boundaries of the reality that such language constructs. Even the ubiquitous, changeable "priest figure" has lost all trace of spirituality; her language is a collage of hollow-sounding clichés and bungled slogans, as when she encourages the hesitant confessant to "trust in Divine Providence, our Blessed Mother Mary, St. Patrick our national saint, St. Brigid and also several others" (16), or admonishes whoever might be listening to "Return to the bosom of Mother Church, all you that labour etcetera, etcetera" (15). The choice of a female actress to play the "priest figure" literalises the catachresis "Mother Church" and thus exposes the manipulative rhetoric of a patriarchal institution which bars actual women from any position of responsibility, yet masquerades as a reassuring maternal figure to conceal its exploitative agenda as the instrument of capitalism.

The Church colludes with Ireland's rising capitalistic elite in a joint attempt to appropriate Matt Talbot as an emblem of the submissive, compliant worker, which can be used to deflect the claims of the working-classes. One grey area of Talbot's life concerns the part he played during the Dublin lock-out in 1913, when he was accused of betraying his fellow-workers by refusing to go on strike. In the lock-out sequence of the play, Talbot takes no part in the ideological debate between the protesting worker and the foreman, and his reason for continuing work has nothing to do with politics; rather, the exhausting carrying of timber is an intrinsic part of the ritualised physical penances which he imposes on himself daily, and constitutes a private performance of the bearing of the Cross. Yet the foreman exploits Talbot's religious practise by calling him "a walking saint" (27) and holding him up as "a model for all Christian workers" (31). After Talbot's death, the campaign for canonisation is carried out in the name of the status quo. The priest figure's passionate speech in the opening sequence reveals the extent to which the Church has become the voice of social orthodoxy: "Let us pray for the Beatification and Canonisation of this holy Dublin working man, that in these troubled times the people might have a model of Christian loyalty and obedience, to fight off the false doctrines, subversive influences, dangerous and foreign practises,

that threaten our faith...” (18). The primary targets, of course, are socialism and trade unionism, the “false doctrines” which challenge the hegemony of the emerging class of Catholic capitalist magnates. Perched on a recalcitrant “horse” (the First man), the Second man embodies the *nouveau riche*, self-proclaimed “crame of the crame”, who conspire with the Irish clergy to have Talbot declared “a real, certified Irish saint, at last” in the hope of containing all subversive energies – the “mischief-makers” hilariously metaphorized by the “horse” who ends up throwing his rider in a farcical rendition of proletarian revolution (53-54). The play thus revolves around a central paradox: Matt Talbot the egotist eccentric is appropriated by a homogenising, normalising power structure to fend off subversion and enforce conformity. This is done by turning his life, post-mortem, into the edifying spectacle of a Passion.

The incipit of the play dramatizes the making of a naturalistic stage. A huge box appears on the stage, the front of which is then opened from within so that “*the audience now sees inside*” (11), in a literal enactment of the removal of the fourth wall. Exposing the construction of the naturalistic stage, the play’s opening deconstructs naturalism itself and, in a typically Brechtian gesture, invites the audience to view whatever is presented on this stage critically, as spectacle rather than reality. Indeed the object of the play is not so much Matt Talbot’s life, but the dramatization of his life by those who campaign for his canonisation. The opening of the box thus also suggests a gesture of violent exposure, the turning of an intensely intimate, private experience into a public show. The opening sequence in the morgue constantly gestures towards its own theatricality, as the actors prepare to act out a pre-written script under the authority of the priest. A woman impersonating a statue of the Virgin Mary steps out of character complaining of cramps; the two men speculate about the genre of the play which is to be played out (“a sorta trial”, “an entertainment”, “a kind of temptation of the saint”, “a sorta quiz but without the hand-outs”, 12-13); the woman again disrupt the performance by entering at the wrong moment speaking a stage direction:

Woman (*high*). Enter, attractive nursing sister, carrying chains...
 Second man. It’s not your turn yet, for Christ’s sake! (15)

The sequence culminates with the two men introducing Talbot with a flourish in the style of a master of ceremonies at the music-hall: “Ladies and Gentlemen! We give you... Matt Talbot! Servant of God!” (18). The rest of the play, which reconstructs selected events in the life of Matt Talbot, is really a show within the show, framed by the joint powers of the Church and big business – though at times the show threatens to escape their control. The explicit staginess of the beginning is taken up again at the end in an obvious reprise when Talbot’s exhausting daily round of several churches in his final days is grotesquely reduced to a sporting event, with Talbot miming and

First man commenting through a loudhailer: "Yes! Ladies and gentlemen, at great expense to the management we give you the greatest athletical... theological... metaphysical performance of all time!" (59). Again, the focus is on the spectacularization of Talbot's life, and on the violent distortion imposed upon it in the process.

At one level, then, *Talbot's Box* offers the spectacle of a Passion staged by power: yet it also shows that Matt Talbot resists appropriation and imposes his own dramaturgy. I quoted earlier Kilroy saying that Talbot had "defied" him and subverted his original plan for the play, and I would suggest that this writing experience of Talbot's defiance is somehow incorporated into the play itself, as Talbot consistently refuses to be contained within the framework of the play staged by the conservative forces who try to exploit his life-story. The autopsy scene at the morgue in the beginning of the play dramatizes a collective attempt to read Talbot's enigmatically encumbered body. Although authoritative discourses proliferate in this scene (a sermon, a medical expertise, a police report), all fail to capture what Talbot's body testifies to, i.e. the mystery of his faith. His dead body remains a scandalous physical entity which defeats interpretation and categorisation; as one of the medical assistants puts it, "if we don't have instructions we can't put a label on him like a normal corpse. If we can't put a label on him we can't shove him in one of the drawers" (14). During the rest of the play, many "labels" will be unsuccessfully suggested for Talbot, who simply refuses to be shoved in a drawer. Take the following exchange, at the end of the 1913 sequence:

Woman. He was a tool of the Church against the workers!

Second man. He was a scab! He was a scab!

First man. He was irrelevant!

Priest figure. He was a saint! (36)

Each speaker has a specific ideological agenda and is trying to fit Talbot in a pre-existing category, but none is ready to take him on his own terms – nor does he ever offer an explanation. Indeed one aspect of Talbot's resistance strategy is that he hardly ever engages in dialogue, and has no message for the world. While the foreman is desperate for him to commit himself politically ("Couldn't you get him to say a few words? Off the cuff. Y'know. Danger of syndicalism. Rights of private property. [...] Can he be quoted?", 33-34), Talbot reserves words for a higher usage: "St. Teresa", he prays, "help me to silence me tongue, except when it tries to speak to Almighty God" (19). Abstracting himself from linguistic exchange Talbot effectively withdraws from the communal sphere, and experiences his faith as a form of radical aloneness with God. To the priest's orthodox reminder that "We are each in the other and all in Christ", he replies "Then I'll be alone with Gawd" (48), in a non-sequitur which borders on the sacrilegious. This aloneness, which

makes him fundamentally incapable of sharing his experience, is suggested by the box itself, which points metonymically to Talbot's room but is also partly reminiscent of the skull-shaped "refuge" in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957)¹. Just as *Endgame* can be read as the play which Hamm creates for his own diversion, the stage in *Talbot's Box* is partly a projection of Talbot's mind². I suggested earlier that the play was a dramatization of Talbot's life orchestrated by the joint forces of temporal and ecclesiastical powers – but it also fleetingly attempts to represent Talbot's experience from his point of view. The stage, in other words, is the site of a conflict of discourses – or rather, a conflict between the discourses of Church and capital, and Talbot's individual experience, which refuses to be contained within this discursive framework and interferes with the smooth unfolding of the show, as when the priest's edifying sermon on the virtue of the Christian family in Act 2 is counterpointed and grotesquely undermined by Talbot's traumatic childhood memory of his alcoholic father beating up his mother.

Another, more radical form of resistance to power has to do with Talbot's handling of his own body – paradoxically just that for which he is recognised as "a saint". An early episode shows Talbot being examined by a doctor, who reports to Talbot's sister:

Second man. [...] The human body, Madam, is a machine, madam, albeit the most remarkable engine ever constructed. Like every machine it has precise, limited functions. It may be repaired. It certainly needs frequent oil and fueling. Certain parts respond to greasing, oiling, liquidity. Other parts, like the remarkable Voltaic Dry Battery, cease to function in water. In short, madam, your brother's engine, Madam, is deplorably run-down. That will be one guinea, please. (21)

The doctor's description of the human body as machine and engine belongs to a tradition of thought which originates in the Enlightenment philosophy of La Mettrie and Descartes, and was modified with the advent of the industrial revolution: "The nineteenth century reconceptualized the body as a motor rather than simply a machine; its energy levels and the capacity for work conceived in electro-chemical and thermodynamic terms. Late nineteenth-century studies of motion and performance by Muybridge, Murray, Taylor and others were carried out within this paradigm, equalizing the energies of the body in relation to industrial apparatus" (Armstrong 1998, 78-79). The doctor's extended metaphor does not only function as a smokescreen to cover his incapacity to provide medical help; it also constructs a highly ideological version of the human body as geared towards maximum efficiency and performance, within its "precise, limited functions" in the context of industrial labour. By exhausting his own body, Talbot subverts this ideology of performance: collapsing repeatedly under the weight of the plank which he carries with a fellow-worker, he effectively sabotages the smooth running of the work in the timber-yard.

Although he refuses to go on strike and refrains from taking a political stance, his archaic system of physical penance and fast is, in fact, a deeply subversive critique of the modernist ideal of the Taylorized body.

Because he resists assimilation within the systems of production (both discursive and industrial) controlled by power, Talbot emerges as a complete non-conformist in a society obsessed with conformity. For this failure to conform he is both worshipped and violently rejected, two attitudes expressed graphically in the opening sequence in the morgue, when the dead body is first slapped by the “existentialist” assistant (15), then kissed “passionately” by an exalted nurse (17). After a scene in which Talbot is persuaded to drink by his father and brother and “collapses in a drunken heap”, the Second man, impersonating an advocate of the Temperance movement, expresses equal abhorrence for alcoholics and ascetics, arguing that “dipsomania and religious mania are two sides of the same coin”, and insisting that “true humanity resides in the middle.” “Keep out the freaks!” (45) he concludes, thus implicitly casting Talbot out of the human community in both his capacities. Talbot’s most radical challenge to the normalising social body which tries to absorb him is in fact his dogged cultivation of abjection. The abject, Julia Kristeva has taught us, is that which cannot be assimilated, the repulsive wastes (bodily fluids, shit, ordure) which threaten the living body’s identity, and from which it must extricate itself in order to survive. “The corpse”, she argues, “seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (Kristeva 1982, 4). The complex system of mortification of the flesh which Talbot imposes upon himself – literally, the putting to death of flesh, in accordance to St Paul’s maxim that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (*Galatians* 5:24) – allows Talbot to become “infected by death” in his lifetime, until the process of becoming abject culminates in death itself. In the beginning and end of the play, the actors are disturbed by a repellent smell which they finally identify as issuing from Talbot’s body:

First man. It’s... it’s his... his body.
 Woman. Well I never! Body odour!
 Second man. So that’s it!
 First man. It’s how he... smells himself. It’s how he... wishes to smell. It’s how he wishes... to be.
 Woman. Oh, course.
 Second man. It’s disgustin’, so it is.
 Woman. Some people!
 Second man. I get it now (*Sniff.*)
 Woman. A bit like... perspiration (*Sniff.*)
 Second man. Sweat. (*Sniff.*) Definitely sweat.
 Woman. It’s like... must.
 First man. It’s like dust.
 Woman. Dying.

First man. Ordure.

Second man. Defney Shit.

First man. (*Scream*) Can't you see, can't you, that he defiles us! Don't you understand that he put himself in our place? That he assumes us in himself? That he would reduce us to his... his... smell?

Woman. The nerve!

Second man. That yoke! (60-61)

The smell of the corpse interrupts the performance, derails communication by generating a frantic chain of signifiers which are so many attempts to cast out what they are naming (perspiration/sweat/must/dust/dying/ordure/shit), and threatens the very identity of the group: "he would reduce us to his... his... smell". Constituting himself as abject, Talbot is an unbearable, inassimilable reminder of humanity's mortality who cannot be suffered to dwell within the social body: "he cannot be us", the First man concludes. Metaphorically, the stench of the decomposing body can be read as the "bad smell" which radical artistic work exhales when it confronts society with those unpalatable truths which it is most eager to disregard, and at one level, the uncompromising Talbot is a figure of the artist – a performing artist whose embodied critique of society's assimilative, normalising power is played out to the death. The theme of the stench of the abject human body has an august tradition in the Anglophone theatre: we are reminded of Lear who, when Gloucester asks to kiss his hand, answers: "Let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality" (Shakespeare 1997 [1608, 1623], 336), and of Hamm, retorting to Clov's remark that his body will stink when he dies, "You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses" (Beckett 2009, 29). *Talbot's Box* too is a dramatic exploration of the scandal of mortality as a condition of the living flesh; yet where *King Lear* and *Endgame* reveal the tragic collapse of the Christian "promised end" (Shakespeare 1997, 386) and the ambiguous defection of transcendence ("The bastard! He doesn't exist!"; Beckett 2009, 34), *Talbot's Box* takes the mystical experience seriously and invents a dramaturgy to accommodate something which lies beyond understanding.

The play has no sympathy for Talbot, who is pictured as a morbid, obsessive egotist, with no consideration for the legitimate claims that others (family, acquaintances, fellow-workers) lay on him. Yet it does not question the authenticity of his faith, and creates a ritualistic drama to give shape to an experience which remains mysterious to the end. While the play shows the attempts of the various instances of power to impose their own staging of Talbot's life-story, it also allows Talbot to perform his Passion on his own terms, and invents a dramatic language not unrelated to Antonin Artaud's notion of the Theatre of Cruelty. Here is an extract from a text Artaud wrote in 1947, "Theatre and Science":

True theatre has always seemed to me the exercise of a
dangerous and terrible act
where the idea of theatre and spectacle is done away with

as well as the ideal of all science, all religion and all art.
The act I'm talking about aims for a true organic and physical
transformation of the human body.

Why?

Because theatre is not that scenic parade where one develops
virtually and symbolically – a myth: theatre is rather
this crucible of fire and real meat where
by an anatomical trampling of bones, limbs and syllables
bodies are renewed
and the mythical act of making a body presents itself
physically and plainly. (Artaud 1965, 169)

Despite the enigmatic quality of Artaud's theatrical utopia, it is easy to see how this text resonates in relation to *Talbot's Box*. Attempts to comprehend Talbot's pursuit rationally are repeatedly defeated, leaving both doctors and priests nonplussed. Talbot claims repeatedly that in withdrawing from the world he sees "the world made whole" (24), "the world made right and straight" (62), but theatrically we are granted no representation of that vision. What is offered instead is Talbot's suffering body as the very site of his encounter with God. Talbot deliberately inflicts upon himself the sufferings endured by Christ – bearing his cords and chains as Christ bore the cross, following an elaborate fasting routine and claiming that: "Me work makes me see the eternal in every hour. 'Cause it sickens me. That's work" (22). The actor's body is on permanent display, first almost naked and covered in garish painting to evoke the scars, then effectively laden with chains, and repeatedly collapsing under their weight. Despite the cynical efforts of power to turn this into a "scenic parade" that might suit their ideological agenda, the "anatomical trampling of bones limbs and syllables" which is Talbot's performance exceeds their attempt at myth-making, and in the process, mysteriously, a body is "renewed".

In the opening scene at the morgue, one medical assistant rebukes his colleague for discussing soccer because, he says, "we could be on the brink of an apotheosis" (14), and though this remark is met with scepticism it is a fairly accurate description of what happens in what Nicholas Grene has called "a *coup de théâtre* of total transfiguration" (Grene 2002, 72): as Talbot, having risen painfully from his deathbed to bind himself with chains, suddenly "*flings both arms out in the shape of crucifixion*", "*blinding beams of light shoot through the walls of the box*" while a deafening wail rises, "*scarcely human but representing human beings in great agony*" (19). In a re-enactment of Christ's resurrection the limitations of Talbot's exhausted body are transcended, and some sort of presence is manifested. Talbot's entire performance of cruelty is made meaningful by this experience, this act of body-making which cannot be explained or even sustained on the stage for more than a few seconds. As the rest of the cast block out the light beams, the wailing cry stops, Talbot collapses again, and the stage is restored to normality. Poignantly, this happens at the beginning of the play,

and the rest of it charts the cruel protocol which Talbot follows to his death: the emphasis is on the painful quest, not the fleeting moment of ecstasy. Yet Talbot imposes a new theatrical idiom on the stage, in which the exposed body testifies to a reality that cannot be contained within the dramaturgy of power.

Although Talbot himself consistently refuses to take a stand and deliver a message to the world, political, religious or otherwise, the eccentric's embodied performance of the Passion constitutes a powerful critique of the normalising force of the conservative pillars of Irish society – the Catholic Church and the capitalist ruling class which it sustains – but also challenges the very secularism from which Kilroy is writing. One is reminded of Foucault's remark that he conceived all his books "as direct experiences to 'tear' me from myself, to prevent me from always being the same" (Foucault 1991, 32). Like other Irish plays written around the same time – Tom Murphy's *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975) and *The Gigli Concert* (1983), Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979) –, *Talbot's Box* explores the possibility of a dimension of human experience outside the reach of representational aesthetics – call it presence, or magic, or "Gawd" – and invents a theatrical idiom which promotes the body as the privileged site of that experience.

Notes

¹ Indeed the construction of the set at the beginning of the play is reminiscent of Clov's delimitation of the acting space in the prologue of *Endgame*.

² Anthony Roche suggests that it is structured like a Yeatsian "dreaming back" (1994, 202).

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Home-Grown Politics: The Politicization of the Parlour Room in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama

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Abstract:

In Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987), Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989), and Gary Mitchell's *Loyal Women* (2003), the home and nation become inextricably linked, as one serves as a microcosm for the other. Within the volatile political landscape of Northern Ireland, the private space of the home becomes a public forum for the characters in these plays, almost all of whom are women. Often unheard by the predominantly male presence in Northern Irish politics, these women find their voice in the domestic comfort of their homes, with the support and encouragement of other women. Yet despite this reign over the domestic sphere, the women's perceived power and dominance is continually subverted, through economic, sexual, and political means.

Keywords: Loyalism, Northern Ireland, Protestantism, theatre, women

The parlour room has long been seen on the Irish stage, a physical space that acts as more than a living and dining area for characters: it is a place for political debate, violent confrontation, and familial falling-outs. Plays such as Gregory's and Yeats's *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902) and St. John Ervine's *Mixed Marriage* (1911) are early examples of such drama, and tackle political issues still relevant today: religion, nationalism, and the armed struggle. While it is ultimately the men in these two plays who are called to action, whether it be as soldiers or strike leaders, the women also have definite influence over the lives of their men, and add valuable contributions to the parlour room debates. These women, however, are ultimately negatively affected by the men's choices: in *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, a bride is suddenly left at the altar, while in *Mixed Marriage*, another fiancée is shot and killed during a riot¹.

What I would like to examine in this article is the continuation of such parlour room drama in four Troubles-era plays: Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987); Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the*

Belfast City (1989); and Gary Mitchell's *Loyal Women* (2003). I contend that the highly-charged political atmosphere of Northern Ireland has further encouraged the breakdown between public and private, which, I argue, has had a greater impact on women than men: this is evident both in the political realities of Northern Ireland, as well as in the theatre of the province. In Parker's play *Pentecost*, the parlour room of a typical "two-up, two-down" terraced house in east Belfast hosts the characters' debate over the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike, though the female voices are often occluded by those of the males; Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* examines the effects of war on three generations of the Bell family, while *The Belle of the Belfast City* appraises the impact of politics, police, and paramilitaries on domestic life in 1980s Belfast; and in Mitchell's *Loyal Women*, there is no divide between the public and private life of the protagonist, Brenda, as her home serves as a meeting place, interrogation cell, and punishment room for the local Women's Ulster Defense Association (WUDA). Within the plays examined, all three playwrights depict what Melissa Sihra has noted, how "'home' in Irish drama has remained a precarious space, denoting a lack of security and prone to invasion and penetration. Within this site of instability, women seek agency and subjective accommodation" (2007, 2-3). While the women of these plays certainly "seek agency", they are not always successful in finding it.

Parker's play *Pentecost*², first performed in 1987 as a part of Field Day, examines the emotional and actual ghosts faced by five accidental roommates: Marian, who is coming to terms with the death of her five-month-old son; her soon-to-be-ex-husband Lenny; Marian's friend Ruth, a victim of spousal abuse; Lenny's friend Peter, a native of Belfast who has been living abroad for a number of years; and Lily, the house's recently deceased resident who intermittently appears to Marian throughout the play. *Pentecost* is set during the Ulster Workers' Council strike, in part organized and run by the UDA, which lasted for two weeks in May 1974. The strike eventually shut down the Stormont government, which had only recently entered into power-sharing as a result of the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973. This chaotic series of events serves as an apt backdrop for *Pentecost*, as the tumultuous personal lives of the characters come into focus during the course of Parker's play.

The breakdown of public and private, and the impact of this on women, is apparent almost immediately. While the audience does not witness any of the violence or upheaval taking place during the strike, we do see Ruth's battered and bloodied face, which she painfully reveals to Marian and the audience simultaneously. Ruth has found herself in a cycle of abuse as the frequent victim of her husband David's violent outbursts. Like many women in Northern Ireland, and all over the world, she is unsure of what to do in the situation. While Ruth is frustrated with her marriage and afraid of her husband, she is unwilling to admit defeat, perhaps in part due to her own evangelical beliefs. Her husband's abusive nature has been evident from the beginning of their

relationship, but seems to intensify after he joins the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). As a police officer during the height of the Troubles, David has found himself under constant pressure and stress, as Ruth recounts how “he’s had three good mates killed in his own station, and a fourth one blinded” (Parker 2000, 188). Though this is never an excuse for domestic violence, it is a good enough excuse for Ruth, as she uses her husband’s job to rationalize his treatment of her: “You can’t even begin to imagine the pressure the police are under [...] all the threats and the hatred and no outlet, he comes home coiled up like a spring, he’s frightened of his life, it’s all pent up inside him...” (*ibidem*). Here, Ruth places a national issue (the role of the RUC) above her own personal safety and well-being, as well as that of her unborn children, for David’s violence has caused Ruth to have several miscarriages. The continued occurrence of such private, as opposed to public, violence during the Troubles, is, according to Monica McWilliams, because of a “traditional link between nationalism (both Orange and Green) and their respective Churches [which] has ensured that the ultra-conservative view of women as both property of, and inferior to, men remains strongly entrenched in Irish society” (84). Thus, Ruth’s continued defence of her husband is, to her, an expression of loyalty to both her Protestant faith and Ulster.

Ruth’s loyalty to Ulster is also evident in her personal politics. While listening to Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s radio broadcast on Day 11 of the strike, she becomes visually agitated and upset. As he closes with comments deriding both the strike and the people of Northern Ireland, accusing the province to be overrun with “people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy”, “Ruth *springs up in a fury and switches the radio off*” (214). She does not mince her own words concerning the IRA and nationalists, whom she believes to be the true enemies of democracy, declaring that “[e]verything we have and hold, for five long years now we’ve watched it rent asunder, pulverized into rubble by the real spongers, cruel and murderous bastards...” (214). Ruth is clearly passionate about her views, but only expresses them behind the closed doors of the parlour room. Her sparring partner, Peter, is another Protestant from Belfast, but has been away from Northern Ireland, and its politics, for several years: he is more egalitarian than sectarian. He views the strike organizers as “pigbrain mobsters and thugs”, inciting Ruth’s anger even more and livening up their debate (215). But when he is unable to convince Ruth of his politics, Peter unabashedly seduces her, asking, “Supposing we really were to kiss and make up?” (221). In a somewhat predictable plot-twist, their argument ends in sex, creating a patent link between sexual and political domination. Though Ruth may have proved a worthy opponent in their political debate, Peter’s apparent need for control leads him to gain the upper-hand through sex. Thus, while women do attempt to claim the parlour room as a space for equal debate, it is men who still dominate and control.

Ruth's loyalty to her husband and to Ulster is echoed in the ghostly reminiscences of Lily, the deceased former tenant who appears sporadically to Marian throughout the play. Born in 1900, Lily recounts how her husband went off to fight in World War I soon after their marriage. When he returns home impotent due to his injuries, her society and religion expect her to remain married and faithful to him, though the possibility of a sexually fulfilling relationship and producing children is no longer possible. Lily takes pride in her marital fidelity, but sexually and emotionally alone, the temptation of an airman lodging in their home becomes too great: Lily begins an affair with the airman and secretly bears his child while her husband is working in England. Her lover soon abandons her, however, and Lily leaves the baby outside of a church. She contemplates suicide by the Belfast blitz, but her survival through this event makes Lily resigned to "[a] life sentence" (237). She takes the secrets of her affair and illegitimate child to the grave, conflating her loyalty to her husband with her loyalty to Ulster: "At least I never let myself down – never cracked. Never surrendered. Not one inch. I went to my grave a respectable woman...never betrayed him" (231). Unable, or unwilling, to come to terms with her transgression, Lily's public loyalty to Ulster masks her private disloyalty to her husband. Thus, though of very different generations, both Ruth and Lily find it hard to distinguish between their public and private loyalties, conflating their marital unions with the union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain: both must be preserved at all costs.

While Parker peoples his stage with equal numbers of men and women, Catholics and Protestants, it is nevertheless the Protestant women in *Pentecost* who find their private lives most impacted by outside, public forces. Though Marian, a Catholic, does seek a divorce from Lenny, also a Catholic, there is the possibility of a reconciliation at the end of the play. In addition, their child, Christopher, died accidentally as a result of sudden infant death syndrome, while Ruth's unborn children were miscarried as a result of her husband's violence, and Lily's son was abandoned. The public nature of Ruth's and Lily's husbands also leads to external pressure being put on the private lives of their wives: while their marital fidelity definitely has religious undertones, both women are also well aware of their husbands' role in upholding Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom, whether it be through wartime service or as a police officer. Thus, the play demonstrates the problematic nature of Protestant, loyalist women in Northern Ireland. While often seen as a damaging tendency in nationalist culture, the conflation of women and nation leads to a demise in the private, personal lives of unionist women as well.

As indicated in *Pentecost*, men were the main actors in the public arenas of politics, policing, and paramilitarism during the Troubles. The long hours involved in the life of a politician or policeman, or the very likely possibility of extensive periods spent in jail for the UDA or IRA man, meant that women often had a significant degree of independence within the home. As one Belfast

woman states, “this is the change I think there has been with women. [The Troubles have] made them more aware of themselves, that if they’re going to be left alone they’re going to have to be able to fend for themselves, and defend themselves against whoever or whatever comes into their homes or accosts them on the street” (McNamee, Lovett, eds, 1987, 266). Although women may have gained a greater sense of self, this was not necessarily recognized by higher political and social powers; women were still confined to the home, and if they did become political actors, many women felt it was “better to be invisible and making a contribution than to be in the limelight and take the glory along with possible vilification” (Ward 2006, 139). This tendency towards domesticity is echoed in a theatrical context as well: Lisa Fitzpatrick notes how “[i]ncreasingly in the decades after independence, female characters in Irish plays are confined to the domestic space”, a phenomenon that has continued throughout the twentieth century (2007, 84). Of the three playwrights examined here, Christina Reid’s work comes closest to reversing this; indeed, her work exemplifies a potential for feminist theatre which, according to Lizbeth Goodman’s definition, “aims to achieve positive re-evaluation of women’s roles and/or to effect social change, and which is informed in this project by broadly feminist ideas” (1998, 199). Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* and *The Belle of the Belfast City* work in tandem to expose the hypocrisy in both religious traditions’ use of domesticity as a feminine ideal, and demonstrate the damaging effects of masculinist institutions on women.

As Mary Trotter has pointed out, though Irish theatre often sees “the real attention in the family memory drama center[ed] on the patrilineal relationships”, Christina Reid is one of the notable playwrights who has subverted this convention, instead “plac[ing] women’s experience in the narrative foreground” (2000, 165). This is certainly the case in Reid’s first stage play *Tea in a China Cup*³, which explores the traditional gender roles of Northern Irish society in the context of the changing and highly volatile socio-political landscape of 1970s Belfast through the lens of three generations of the staunchly Protestant Bell family. These successive generations are often shown simultaneously onstage, as the audience witnesses the experiences of the Grandmother, daughter (Sarah), and granddaughter (Beth), from the beginning of World War II in 1939 through to 1972, one of the worst years of the Troubles. Though these women are of three very different generations, their individual lives remain nearly indistinguishable, especially when it comes to their relationships with men: all three generations of women find themselves coping with emotionally distant husbands who cannot keep a paycheck in their pockets. Society’s gendered double standard is clearly present in the drama, for while these women are expected to support their men in any and all manners, the men would prefer to dismiss women and their problems, before escaping to the bookmakers or down the pub.

The religious nature of Northern Irish social mores presented in *Tea in a China Cup* demonstrates the influence of both traditions on the restriction

of sexual knowledge and understanding amongst women. The play depicts Beth's and her Catholic best friend Theresa's adolescence in the 1950s, and the outcomes of this experience in the early 1970s. Theresa recounts how "that big lad down the street says those sort of knickers are called [...p]assion killers", but she and Beth are left wondering about what the term actually means (Reid 1997, 27). Reflecting on the incident as an adult, Beth admits that "[w]e knew nothing" (28). An awkward and evasive talk from her mother is Beth's only lesson on puberty and sex, while Theresa's questions are answered with slaps from her mother and orders to go to confession. This sexual ignorance was not, and perhaps still is not, uncommon in Northern Ireland, where the religious nature of education⁴ has meant that sex education is not widely taught in schools. One woman from Derry, speaking in the 1980s, recounts how childbirth was a complete mystery to her, even as it was happening: "I didn't know where I was going to get it out of me. [...] I didn't realise, and after that I just took it all for granted, and out it came – the biggest surprise to me you know. I didn't even stop to think where it was going to come from" (McNamee, Lovett, eds, 1987, 223). A similar account relates how one woman, also speaking in the 1980s, "found out that a sperm gave you a baby [...] when the *Sunday People* did this series, on 'the facts of sex'. [...] For a long time, I'd thought it was *wanting* sex that made you get a baby" (Fairweather, McDonough, McFadyean 1984, 115). The lack of any sexual education, formal or informal, present in this Northern Irish society thus fostered a culture of sexual ignorance, leaving women in confusion over the facts and functions of their own bodies.

The masculinist nature of many Northern Irish social, religious, and political institutions perhaps indicates that it is only "the big lad", or the male contingent of society, who are allowed a working knowledge of sex and sexuality. Though the Grandmother, Sarah, and Beth have strong, close relationships with one another, sex is not discussed: it is the sole piece of feminine knowledge that is not handed down through the generations. Only the youngest women, Beth and Theresa, look to question and challenge the information, or lack thereof, provided to them, signaling a new outlook and more inspired way forward for women of their generation. Theresa especially has a more open and modern outlook concerning sex. She refuses to remain in Belfast under the watchful eye of her mother, where she feels she can only experience sex once married, and goes to London instead: "I'd like to sample it first before I commit myself, just in case it really is a fate worse than death" (Reid 1997, 42). While women in Belfast do – and did – have sex before marriage, the societal, familial, and religious pressure not to do so was keenly felt by Theresa and Beth as they came of age in the 1950s and 1960s.

Men's general control over religious, political, and social institutions thus pigeon-holes women into supportive roles within marriage, allowing them little personal freedom or independence while expecting them to fully support their husbands and children in most aspects. The three generations

of Bell women receive negligible support from their husbands, whether it be financial, emotional, or domestic. When her son is killed on the battlefields of Dunkirk during World War II, Grandmother is left to grieve with her daughter Sarah, while Grandfather tactlessly remarks that "There'll be money to come, you know...". Unwilling to listen to this, "Grandmother *takes some money from her purse and hands it to*" her husband, ordering him "away down to the pub and give my head peace" (20). The women's husbands' obsession with money, and spending it, continues when Sarah, going into labor with Beth, reveals that she cannot even afford a taxi to the hospital: her husband "hasn't been home for two days...not since he lifted his wages..." (22). When Beth herself gets married, she finds that she has "faithfully repeated all her [Sarah's] mistakes": "[m]y father gambled in half-crowns and ten-shilling notes. Stephen [her husband] gambles in thousands of pounds and bits of paper called stocks and shares. [...] if you take away the velvet sofas and the china cabinets... there's nothing there... it's all a lie" (60).

This financial irresponsibility and impropriety is symptomatic of the overall neglect these women have suffered in their relationships with men. Sarah attempts to defend her husband after his death, finding a hollow silver lining in their marriage: "he could have been worse", she tells Beth, "he never lifted a finger to any of us in his life, he just had a weakness for the drink and the bettin'...he couldn't help it, he was only a man, God help him" (38). While this view of her husband as being "only a man" denotes an acceptance of human weakness, it is also a sign of women's collusion with their own oppression: while men are allowed to be weak, women are not. Instead, they continue to support such irresolute men as dutiful wives and mothers, perpetuating the roles assigned to them by men, with the support of Northern Ireland's conservative political, social, and religious ideologies.

This conservatism does not improve with time, as the youngest generation of women in the play face similar male neglect. Their response to this neglect, however, does signal a potential generational shift in acceptance of traditional gender roles. On her wedding night, Beth sits alone in a hotel room as her husband enjoys drinks with clients in the hotel bar, while Theresa must come to terms with an unexpected pregnancy and subsequent abandonment by the father of her child: "I told him I was pregnant on a Tuesday, by Thursday he was gone" (51). But the women of this youngest generation are determined to change their lives, without the assistance or involvement of men: no longer willing to accept the faults and weaknesses of men, Beth and Theresa engage in a definite questioning of previously accepted social and familial norms. Beth furiously questions her mother's coddling: "No matter what a man does wrong, it's always some woman's fault, isn't it?", to which Sarah can only reply that "[m]en need lookin's after, like children, sure they never grow up" (38). Theresa acknowledges that her decision to leave Belfast in search of sexual freedom and experimentation had an unexpected result, but

she does not regret the outcome. She speaks lovingly of her daughter Shauna, and does not mind that “the sight of her scares off prospective husbands” (51). Theresa is content with her life as it is, and sees no need to chase after a man in order to improve it. Reid thus introduces a family unit that is unplanned, unconventional, and unapologetic, yet is arguably the most successful family in the play – there is no drunk or gambling father, and no neglectful husband; in short, it is strengthened, not weakened, by a lack of men and masculinity. While her friend Beth might view marriage, and the Beleek tea set that comes with it, as “a fall-back option [...] a lifeline which is perceived as a conduit to economic security”, Theresa demonstrates that marriage and men are not necessary for a family, and encourages Beth to follow in her footsteps (McNamee, Lovett, eds, 1987, 214). The end of the play shows Beth taking the first steps towards independence, as she leaves her and Stephen’s home and is freed from the societal pressures of marriage when Sarah passes away.

Thus, *Tea in a China Cup* demonstrates a gendered generational shift, as the younger generation ultimately chooses to operate on their own, without the partnership of men. Though Sarah contends that “[i]t’s not natural for a woman to stay single”, especially in the Northern Irish society depicted in Reid’s play, where marriage and children are perceived as the natural outcomes of a woman’s life, Beth and Theresa demonstrate that emotional, financial, and sexual independence are what is right and best for women (Reid 1997, 52). As Reid and her play suggest, the youngest generation’s choices are all the more radical *because* of the conservative attitudes within Northern Ireland, where a child born out of wedlock and a wife abandoning her neglectful husband were circumstances that came with societal, as well as personal, consequences: Theresa is forced to lie, at her mother’s request, about her circumstances while in Belfast, while Beth finds herself leaving a marriage that her whole family and neighborhood had pressured and encouraged. The public nature of their private lives signifies the breakdown between the domestic and the political arenas: social and religious policies, regardless of their legality, have clearly impacted the private lives of women and the choices available to them.

The tension between women’s public and private lives is also evident in Reid’s *The Belle of the Belfast City*⁵. As with *Tea in a China Cup*, three generations of women are featured onstage: Dolly Dunbar, the family matriarch; her two daughters, Rose and Violet (Vi), and Rose’s daughter, Belle. Though Dolly is a feisty and independent woman throughout her entire life, we are told that when she married “she gave up the stage and did all her dressing-up and singing and dancing just for” her husband Joe (180). In essence, Dolly’s marriage removed her from any public life she may have had, and instead placed her firmly within the confines of the home. Another version of events, given by Dolly’s older daughter Vi, is that Joe took Dolly away from a life of “draughty halls [...] and waited on her hand and foot for the rest of his life” (181). In either scenario, it is apparent that the man is making the decision;

it is not Dolly who runs away with Joe, but Joe who takes her. Yet Joe's true love for his wife is clear, potent, and wholeheartedly returned by Dolly; they are affectionate, caring, and absolutely dedicated to each other throughout their lives. In addition, though Joe may have taken his wife out of the public eye, he was not intent on having a traditional marital relationship. "I was never a housewife", Dolly recounts. "My Joe never wanted that. He was a rare bird. An Ulsterman who could cook" (195). Judging by the interviews and home visits documented by Susan McKay in *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (2005), Joe Dunbar is indeed a rare bird. McKay relates how one woman's twenty-seven year-old son "had to leave soon and needed his sandwiches" (46). Yet instead of making one himself, he "was pacing about in motorbike gear, looking at his watch", waiting for his mother to make a sandwich for him, which she did before "she cut the sandwich in two, and put it in a plastic supermarket bag" for him, as though for a child's school lunch (*ibidem*). Similarly, McKay meets with a man who "was sorry he couldn't offer any hospitality, his wife was away" (140). Though Joe Dunbar may indeed be a "rare bird", Dolly's transfer from public to private life still indicates that the confining of women to the domestic continues in Northern Ireland.

This confinement to the domestic makes it unsurprising that it is two men, Jack and Davy, who are the most politically active in the play, which is set in 1986, around the events of the "Ulster Says No" rally. Jack, the nephew of the family matriarch, Dolly Dunbar, is a unionist politician set to speak at the Anti-Agreement rally, and is also active in National Front activities. Davy, a local teenager, is an enthusiastic follower of Jack's and keeps up with the political and paramilitary activity in the neighborhood. Unlike these politically active men, the women of the Dunbar family only air their political opinions and grievances in the home, which also serves as their place of work and source of income. In the course of a debate between the two Dunbar sisters, Vi and Rose, the playwright Reid succeeds in condemning the entire political system, at least when it comes to women's rights and issues. Vi explains that she votes for unionist candidates because she fears a government run by the Catholic Church, "[w]here things like contraception and divorce are a legal and a mortal sin. It's written into their Catholic Constitution. [...] We wouldn't have many rights in a United Ireland!" (Reid 1997, 221). But Rose points out Vi's error in relying on Protestant political parties to protect her rights as a woman. The connection between the Protestant church and unionist leaders means that their political platform "is in total agreement with the right-wing Catholic Church on issues like divorce and abortion, on a woman's right to be anything but a mother or a daughter or a sister or a wife. Any woman outside that set of rules is the Great Whore of Babylon" (*ibidem*).

Rose is indeed correct when it comes to the politics of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Protestantism and Catholicism. Within the legal and political spheres, both religions (and governments) find common ground on issues such as abortion and contraception, which is evidenced in

the tight restrictions on abortion in Northern Ireland (the only region in the UK to have such) and the late arrival of legal contraception in the Republic of Ireland, where abortion legislation remains a contentious, and confusing, issue for doctors and patients alike. In essence, such laws place a woman's bodily and reproductive rights second to men's, a legal status that is echoed in the portrayal of Northern Irish domestic life within Reid's plays. The use of politics and legislation to further promote second-class citizenship for women is thus doubly frustrating, as the enduring connection between the two religions and their affiliated political parties and representatives creates further roadblocks to legislation concerning women's rights and issues: one must convince both Church *and* State to evolve their attitudes before being able to move forward.

This conflation of religion and politics is espoused in the character Jack, who views women as "the instruments of the devil! The root of all evil!" (205). This distrust of the feminine noticeably filters into his politics, as his anti-Agreement speech warns men to "Guard our women [...]est they succumb to the insidious evil that festers and grows in our land. The phallic worship of priests in scarlet and gold. The pagan rites of black nuns. Sisters of satan. Sisters of sin" (242). His connection with the National Front also display his conservative ideology, this time of a racist bent, which is all the more offensive considering that the father of Rose's daughter Belle is African-American. Indeed, Jack's political machinations seem to have no limit, as he uses the disabilities of a local boy, Davy, who underwent torture and humiliation after his arrest at the anti-Agreement rally, in order to further his campaign against RUC reform. In Reid's play, therefore, Jack is perhaps an indictment of the possible political future, in which the continuation of male-dominated conservative politics could lead to further division and disagreement within the province.

Considering the nature of Northern Irish politics and society, therefore, it is thus not surprising that the men in *The Belle of the Belfast City* have made themselves active in the politics of the province, while the intelligent, able, and equally enthusiastic women are left to debate their views in the private arena of the home. Even this domestic space ultimately comes to be controlled by conservative politicians: after Dolly has a stroke, her daughters are forced to sell the house so that Dolly may live out her final days by the sea. Their family home eventually ends up in the hands of a National Front politician, who plans to use the space for his Northern Ireland headquarters and thus strengthen the organization's bond with Jack and other unionist political leaders. Ultimately, then, though the Dunbar women are seemingly in control of the parlour room throughout the play, this female-dominated space is finally surrendered to the conservative masculinist institutions of Northern Ireland.

As the Troubles were brought to a political "end" with the advent of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, women again remained on the sidelines of politics, though women had been at the forefront of peace movements in Northern Ireland since the 1970s. Although the Northern Ireland Women's

Coalition (NIWC) earned a seat at the discussions table, which was also open to other smaller political parties such as the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP, linked to the Ulster Volunteer Force) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP, linked to the UDA), the NIWC was unable to achieve any long term electoral success⁶. The Agreement itself impacted women in several, albeit often tangential, ways. One of the more contentious articles of the Agreement called for the early release of political prisoners, many of whom had been in jail for several years, if not decades. One woman states that her husband “always expected me to be perfect, I think all men do, but I’ve had to learn to be independent. [...] He still thinks he’s the boss, the domineering one, but he’s in for a shock, we’ve changed that much” (Fairweather, McDonough, McFadyean 1984, 301). The impact of (male) prisoners’ release on their wives, partners, and families is an issue raised in much of Gary Mitchell’s drama, which is overtly focused on the everyday experience of loyalist paramilitaries in their homes and communities. When considering the majority of female characters in Mitchell’s plays, it is hard to imagine that he “found it hard to take women seriously. [...] I took years fighting against it in my own psyche, this thing of not respecting women” (quoted in McKay 2005, 117). If anything, the women in Mitchell’s plays are *more* deserving of respect than the men, as they constitute some of the strongest characters in his oeuvre.

Like the plays of Parker and Reid, Mitchell’s *Loyal Women*⁷ demonstrates the breakdown between the public and private lives of women in Northern Ireland. The play’s protagonist, Brenda, upholds many Protestant values and is a proud loyalist, to the extent that she is an active member of the WUDA. She is a caring and selfless mother and grandmother, and is loyal to her husband, Terry, throughout his prolonged time in prison. This spousal loyalty, however, is not reciprocated: at a party celebrating his release from prison, Terry cheats on Brenda with a fellow WUDA member, Heather. The reactions to Terry’s infidelity points out a gendered double-standard: for men, marital fidelity does not hold the same societal importance as it might for women, and is even considered unnatural. Terry justifies his infidelity by explaining that, “After sixteen years in prison a man has needs... those needs can get out of control and make a man do things” (Mitchell 2009, 32). Yet for a woman on the outside, such “needs” are expected to be repressed and controlled: women’s private affairs become very public knowledge. For women, cheating on their imprisoned husbands or partners signified a betrayal of their entire community and “the cause”, and was also considered sexually deviant. When considering the WUDA itself, this charge holds particular significance: while *Loyal Women* is set in the present (i.e.: the late 90s or early 2000s), the actual WUDA “was disbanded in 1974 following the murder by some of its members of fellow member Ann Ogilby, a married Protestant woman who took parcels to an unmarried prisoner” (Sales 1997, 148).

Though Brenda remains sexually loyal to her husband and thus loyalism itself, another woman, Adele, calls her loyalism into question when she begins

a relationship with a Catholic man, who is suspected of being in the IRA. Be-goña Aretxaga notes that if women transgressed expectations of sexual fidelity to their own, whether they be Protestant or Catholic, these women could be “shamed publicly by tarring and feathering or by shaving off all hair” (1997, 152)⁸. This was almost exclusively a punishment for women, often enacted by women, perhaps proving Eileen MacDonald’s point that “there is no level of violence that a woman will not commit” (1991, 231). In the play, Adele is questioned by the WUDA about her relationship with the Catholic man, and threatened with this punishment should she not stop seeing him. Though Adele finally cooperates with the women and promises to end the relationship, she is nevertheless subjected to tar-and-feathering. The loyalist punishment for her transgression is shown to shocking effect in the play, perhaps all the more alarming because it takes place in the parlour room, which is decorated for the upcoming Christmas holiday. Instead of such drastic consequences being acted offstage, Mitchell insists that the audience witness Adele’s torture. The assault on the audience is both visual and auditory – not only do we witness as “HEATHER and JENNY pour the tar over ADELE” and watch as it “burns into her hair, head and skin”, we also witness Adele’s prolonged screaming as she struggles to escape this onslaught (2003, 101-102).

Though the women of the WUDA seem to be in control of the parlour room space, the audience learns that Adele’s punishment has come at the behest of the male UDA leaders. Indeed, the UDA men enact control over the women’s whole organization, from its choice of leadership to its punishment squads. When Maureen expresses her desire to retire from her commanding position in the WUDA, her replacement choice, Gail, is vehemently rejected by the men. Maureen remarks how this is because Gail is “not the friendly, sociable, politically-correct face that they want. She scares people. She scares most men for flip sake” (79). Though Brenda believes these qualities should work in Gail’s favor, “[y]ou always need a strong leader, especially one who could stand up to the men”, Maureen again emphasizes that “they won’t let it happen”; clearly the men do not want the possibility of being overruled, or for the WUDA to be run by a woman who may not heed their orders (79).

Though the women are in charge of Adele’s punishment in the parlour room, the UDA men continue to linger in the background of the women’s activities. Brenda warns Adele that if she does not stop seeing her Catholic boyfriend “[t]he men will take over. And they will do really, really bad things to you” (97). Indeed, when Maureen and Brenda first discussed the need to bring Adele in or questioning, it is evident that her punishment could have been much worse, and even of a sexual nature: Maureen recounts how “[t]hey wanted to send her [Adele] up to one of their punishment squads. That wouldn’t be right. [...] Some of the men wanted to do worse than that. There are many ways a woman can be marked. Brenda, they could ruin that wee girl’s life” (90). Within Northern Irish, and in this case specifically loyalist, society, women thus colluded with men in

their own repression. Again, however, this repression is linked to an expression of loyalty, for by turning against other women, these women become the *most* loyal to their men, church, and nation. Thus, even though the women of the WUDA are powerful and in control, this dominance is still largely restricted to the parlour room and, not unlike *The Belle of the Belfast City*, this domestic control is ultimately wrested from the women, as it is the men of the UDA who are truly in charge of what happens within this space.

Brenda, however, does ultimately rebel against the omnipresence of masculinity. Though she has been loyal to her marriage and to Ulster, she plans to divorce Terry and is intent on leaving the WUDA, thus cutting all ties with paramilitaries and paramilitary organizations. Her experience as a single mother and new grandmother has led Brenda to change her priorities: "I used to have a list it read like this: protestants, Ulster, the Queen, Britain and fuck everything else but I changed that list to me, my mum, my daughter and her daughter and that's the way it will stay" (85). This second list is significant in its gendered make-up, as it is clear that men are thoroughly excluded from her new list of priorities. While Brenda's immediate future is unclear (the play ends after she stabs a fellow WUDA member, Heather), the audience can be certain that she is determined to be independent of the conservative masculinist institutions of Northern Irish society.

As explored in these plays, Northern Ireland's deep-seated religious traditions, Catholic and Protestant alike, have shaped the roles and structures of both the public and private lives of men and women. In *The Belle of the Belfast City*, the character Janet summarizes the place of women in Northern Ireland: men are "[a]fraid of women. Afraid we'll tempt you. Afraid we won't. They say there are no women in Ireland. Only mothers and sisters and wives" (Reid 1997, 209-210). This pigeon-holing of women into domestic roles can be attributed to the prevalent male attitudes listed by Janet: women are often seen exclusively in terms of sexuality, which both entices men and encourages them to repress the female contingent of society in all its forms. Within the public sphere, the sectarian nature of the Troubles meant that "legislation in the field of employment rights has shifted the emphasis to tackling religious and political discrimination", rather than gender discrimination (Mahon, Morgan 1991, 61). Such legislation perhaps further discouraged working-class women especially from speaking out for their own rights, as it would have significantly affected their working-class male counterparts. Thus, the struggle simply to gain an active role in the male-dominated political process has meant that raising women's concerns is often postponed or avoided: for example, the NIWC put such issues as abortion on the back burner, seeing their priority as solely "woman's participation, and campaigning on reproductive choice would not have contributed strategically to that end" (Fearon 1999, 27).

The struggle for women to resist being pigeon-holed into the domestic, and to be regarded as individuals in their own right, is still an ongoing one in

the Northern Irish working-class community explored and written by Stewart Parker, Christina Reid, and Gary Mitchell, and a struggle these playwrights were forced to acknowledge and write in order to engage with the issues facing their society. Their plays demonstrate how the home and nation have become inextricably linked, as one serves as a microcosm for the other. Often unheard by the predominantly male presence in Northern Irish politics, the women in *Pentecost*, *Tea in a China Cup*, *The Belle of the Belfast City*, and *Loyal Women* find their voice in the domestic comfort of their homes, rather than the public arenas of politics and paramilitarism. Against the changing landscape of Northern Ireland, the plays thus highlight the relatively silenced position of women within the province: as men became involved in the “active” roles the Troubles provided, namely as politicians, paramilitaries, and police, women retained the parlour room as their personal debating space, a segregation of space which reflects the gender imbalance within Northern Irish politics and society. Yet despite this reign over the domestic sphere, the women’s perceived power and dominance is continually subverted, through economic, sexual, and political means.

Following from this, it is evident that Parker, Reid, and Mitchell ultimately reflect distinct and separate debating spheres for men and women in their drama. In *Pentecost*, men are active and involved – Ruth’s husband David is an RUC officer and Peter has been involved in the Civil Rights movement in America – while the women are confined, emotionally, physically, and even spiritually to the home. The youngest generation of women of Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* seek to challenge the domestic and marital roles assigned to them by their conservative society, while the female characters in *The Belle of the Belfast City* seek to reclaim the political power of the parlour room as they actively debate with one another, and occasionally the male politico Jack, though this space is ultimately wrested from them. Gendered space continues to play a role in Mitchell’s *Loyal Women* – while the women take control of the political possibilities within the parlour room, making it the setting for WUDA meetings and punishment squads, we learn that it is ultimately the men of the UDA who are behind many of their actions and decisions. Within these four plays, then, is a reflection of the continued male dominance of public space, but also the encroachment by men into the traditionally ‘feminine’ space of the home. Even though this private sphere is a space of debate and action for the women, it is still limited and confining, and thus echoes of the general place of women in Northern Irish politics and society over the past forty years.

Notes

¹ Jimmy Fay’s 2013 production of *Mixed Marriage* at the Lyric Theatre Belfast altered this ending, with Ma Rainey, the hopeful mother-in-law, also falling victim to the rioters’ violence.

² *Pentecost*, in Parker 2000, 169-245; subsequent references are quoted in brackets.

³ *Tea in a China Cup*, in Reid 1997, 1-66; subsequent references are in brackets.

⁴The majority of schools in Northern Ireland are either “controlled” (run by the state education board, and therefore reflecting a Protestant ethos) or “maintained” (run by the Council for Catholic Maintained schools).

⁵*The Belle of Belfast City*, in Reid 1997, 177-250; subsequent references are in brackets.

⁶The PUP is the only party of the three to still have any real electoral impact, though this is still quite limited.

⁷Mitchell 2003; subsequent references are in brackets.

⁸This punishment technique is still in effect today: in March 2012 a young mother’s grave was tarred and feathered, and in August 2007 a man was tarred, feathered, and tied to a lamppost with a placard around his neck describing his offence: “I’m a drug dealing scumbag” (Peterkin 2007).

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Ex-centric Didactic Drama: Owen McCafferty's *Mojo Mickybo*

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Abstract:

Protestant Mojo remembers his teens in 1970 Belfast when he made friends with Catholic Mickybo. Yet their friendship was brought to an end after the murder of Mickybo's father by UDA men, which shows that sectarianism does not spare children. This play borrows many techniques from Brechtian epic drama that the playwright transposes to a new context. In the written version of the play, this neo-Brechtian use of dramatic devices is also conveyed through the absence of some typographical elements which particularly stands out in the dialogues. McCafferty obviously rejects the typographical norm that should be abided by when writing. We consider this overt ex-centricity on McCafferty's part as an aesthetic act of resistance to denounce the Troubles, violence and its cycle of repetition. The playwright aims to use neo-Brechtian techniques so as to underline the post-colonial dimension of his play and the need to get away from sectarianism. In this respect, the play becomes didactic.

Keywords: didacticism, Owen McCafferty, neo-Brechtian drama, Northern Ireland, typography

In this Northern Irish play, Mojo remembers his early teens in Belfast, in the summer of 1970, a time when he crossed the divide and made friends with Catholic 10 year-old Mickybo. Even if the two kids spent long days playing together, their friendship was brought to an end after the murder of Mickybo's father by UDA men. Mojo's story highlights the cycle of violence and sectarianism in Northern Ireland affecting both adults and children, even though the latter should be spared.

In addition to the narrative technique, this play borrows a lot of devices from Brechtian epic drama. Yet, McCafferty transposes them to a new context: 1970s Belfast. In the written version of the play, this neo-Brechtian use of dramatic devices is also conveyed through the absence of typographical elements which particularly stands out in the dialogues. Typography shall be

closely analyzed since William Worthen explains in *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* that it defines the literary quality of a play text:

[...] the materials and design of the book (size, binding, covers, paper, typeface) and even the “accidentals” of the printed page (spacing, punctuation, capitalization, orthography) – matter once taken as external to the authorial work’s perdurable identity – don’t merely mark the work’s material passage through history: they are the condition of the work’s meaning in literature. (Worthen 2005, 11)

Yet, Owen McCafferty rejects some elements of these institutionalized norms which Worthen calls “the drama’s ‘accessories’” (29) and which should be abided by when writing.

Typographical rules are elaborated so as to help any reader understand a text immediately. This typographical code combines two elements: firstly, all the signs that make up the text (including the letters and the spaces between and around them); secondly, the writing rules, the aspect of the signs assembled in words, sentences, paragraphs. Punctuation naturally belongs to this typographical code: it is part of the language structure in so far as it introduces the articulations, the breaks, the breaths, within a text. With typography, the text is given a voice and the message delivered can be harder-hitting, fiercer, or softer. The tone of this meta-language is further given by the font. The choice of Belfast playwright McCafferty not to stick to all the rules of this particular code in *Mojo Mickybo* shows his desire to resist what is imposed to him: bad typography resists good typography. This also means that through his style, McCafferty subtly aims at showing his resistance to sectarianism in Northern Ireland. Our focus will thus be on the absence of some typographical rules, which mainly have to do with punctuation and capitalization, and their meanings in the context of “performative writing” (14). This, added to other devices borrowed from Brechtian theory, takes a neo-Brechtian dimension and reinforces the idea that *Mojo Mickybo* (2002) exemplifies Brecht’s epic drama. The playwright’s overt ex-centricity is an aesthetic act of resistance to denounce the Troubles, violence and its cycle of repetition. McCafferty uses neo-Brechtian techniques so as to point out the post-colonial dimension of his play and the need to get away from sectarianism.

In this article, we shall study the neo-Brechtian redefinition of Northern Irish drama through McCafferty’s ex-centricity in *Mojo Mickybo*’s text and performance. This study sheds light to the reasons why the missing typographical elements add to the realistic representation of the Troubles on stage and illustrate Brecht’s epic theory. The play’s neo-Brechtian quality, conveyed through fragmentation, juxtaposition, alienation and historicisation in particular, indeed strengthens its post-colonial message. This present analysis will demonstrate that examining both the performance and the play text from a neo-Brechtian perspective allows for their complementary nature, the neo-Brechtian apparatus being possibly used to explore both a script and a performance.

Henceforth, McCafferty's goal is not only overtly aesthetic; it is also covertly political and didactic.

1. *Fragmenting the world*

Brecht's theory about epic drama was based on the idea that the world was fragmented. Reality should be represented as such in drama; as if it were possible to "take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces which remain fully capable of life" (Brecht 1964, 70). In McCafferty's play, fragmentation, which is found in the contents since it deals with topics such as the religious divide and the Troubles inextricably linked to that religious divide, is also exemplified by the form.

On the first pages preceding the play text, McCafferty warns the readers that *Mojo Mickybo* is a "play for two actors" who "should divide the characters" (McCafferty 2002, 8). Both actors should be in their late thirties/early forties, but they also play the roles of ten year-olds and elderly persons. The actor embodying Mojo is also the narrator, and thus narrates the story as he lived through it. Brecht's theory put forward the idea that Man should be presented as fragmented. The German playwright noted that "the continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew" (1964, 15). Similarly, post-colonial theories consider the body of the actor as a site for "resistant inscription" since it "disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers" (Gilbert, Tompkins 2006, 204). Deciding that one actor will play the role of many characters including a narrator, McCafferty demonstrates the possible sites of resistance and shows the fragmentation within a character, the "multiple entities that constitute a social subject" (232). Hence the combination of these devices hindering the unitary view that one could have on a character.

Besides, the narrative technique chosen by the playwright to tackle the subject of childhood during the Troubles is also one of the devices creating fragmentation within the play. At its very beginning, the two characters, Mojo and Mickybo represented in their teens, open the play. Their dialogue is immediately followed by the comment of the narrator, who is in fact Mojo once he is an adult:

MOJO. mojo
 MICKYBO. mickybo
 MOJO. mickybo mojo
 MICKYBO. mojo mickybo
Mickybo is heading a football against the wall.

NARRATOR. belfast – the summer of 1970 – the heat's meltin the tarmac on the street the buses are burnin bright an punters are drinkin petrol outta milk bottles – this is where mojo an mickybo used to play. (McCafferty 2002, 9)

The narrator's comments on the past of both children, his numerous flashbacks and flash forwards give time a fragmented aspect.

Similarly, space is submitted to fragmentation. The place of the narrator (which could be anywhere in Belfast) and the space of his story (the streets of east Belfast) are not the same, and the places within the story of the narrator, back in the 1970s, also differ. Sometimes readers are warned in the stage directions of their changes, but most of the time they are not told anything and it is up to the actors and their performance on the stage to show them when the play is staged.

If the fragmented contents of this piece is meant to echo the fragmented situation of Belfast during the Troubles, then its structure also reflects it. The dialogues are often interrupted by either the intervention of the narrator or songs that can be sung by all the characters, including the narrator, like on this occasion:

NARRATOR. *mojo galloped back up the road thinkin mickybo was a geg (Sings.) rain drops keep fallin on my head – because i'm free nothin worrin me [...]. (20)*

As a matter of fact, songs were part of a series of tools advocated by Brecht in epic drama. In *Mojo Mickybo*, they are always referred to as sections which are sung. We know when they start, which is written in the stage directions. Yet nothing is said about their ending as we can see in this excerpt when Mojo remembers Mickybo's mother:

MICKYBO'S MA. *would you like to hear my plan son – i was sittin on top of a mountain of dishes the other night listening to elvis on the radio and thinking of the time when the man that i love header and all that he is used to take me dancing – (Sings.) oh how we danced on the night we were wed we danced and we danced cause the room had no bed – there was this strange noise come out of the radio it sounded like the king had eaten something very large that didn't agree with him and was choking on his own own boke – then a voice said we come in peace earth people if you lose your head you lose your money – things may be getting a bit hairy but we're here to save you all especially wee mickybo [...]. (31)*

In Brechtian theory, "songs", in addition to being an aesthetic innovation which fragments the play, are meant to criticize the external contemporary world. So when Mickybo's mother mentions the words "peace", "money" and uses the verb "save", we cannot but understand the poor economic situation of the Catholics (and Protestants alike) beset by violence at that period of the Troubles.

Since the "*mise-en-page* [is also] a site of performance" (Worthen 2005, 11), any playwright should aim at getting the contents and the form to coincide. In *Mojo Mickybo*, fragmentation equally pervades the form visually. The reader of the play cannot but be struck by the numerous dashes which do not give the text a flowing, homogeneous aspect like in the following lines:

MICKYBO. *Everybody knows rip the balls – he puts black boot polish in his hair an doesn't wear no socks – an my da says he pisses in the sink cause he couldn't*

be fucked to go out to the yard – nobody's ever saw im but me – I saw im buryin dead rats over the timbers – wanna dig with the stick? (12)

These dashes are here meant to reflect the unstable situation of Northern Ireland as experienced by the two communities all the more so as each clause separated by a dash puts to the fore the idea that there is not only one perspective, there are several viewpoints. In the case of the above example – and this is a recurring device – we get the standpoint of Mickybo, his father, and eventually the narrator since he filters the whole stories retrospectively. For Brecht, reality did not have any centre of action but many, independent the ones of the others, yet they made up a unity in the end. Throughout this play, this idea is highlighted with these numerous markers, separating the sentences and playing their roles of inserting precisions within a sentence as well as contrasting values, opposing opinions.

The dashes, replacing all other signs of punctuation, give the text a fragmented aspect and break the dramatic illusion of reality as first put forward by Brecht. Not only are they meant to reproduce reality on the stage but they also entice the audience to realize that this reality is precisely performed. This is here an attempt on the author's part to redefine Northern Irish drama about the Troubles. Having the play performed for five years in a row (from 1998 to 2003) by the Northern Irish theatre company Kabosh, renowned for pushing the limits of performance in an innovative visual and physical way, enhances this experimental quality. Fragmentation is indeed part of a broader project which Brecht longed for. Throughout his work the German playwright wanted to “show things as they are” (Brecht 1964, 15) but not in a mimetic way. He introduced distance so that spectators had a better and impartial vision of reality. This is also what McCafferty requires from his audiences.

2. *Taking some distance*

To create distance, Brecht used the techniques of juxtaposition and montage in his plays, so does McCafferty.

The juxtaposition of sentences is particularly relevant in the dialogues of *Mojo Mickybo* where parataxis is omnipresent. There is no precise outlining of syntactic patterns, particularly in embedded free indirect speech.

This is the case in the quote mentioned above by Mickybo's mother when she was reported to have said: “then a voice said we come in peace earth people if you lose your head you lose your money” (McCafferty 2002, 31). The juxtaposition of the grammatical subjects and more particularly of the pronouns “we” and “you” hampers the fluidity of the sentence, which arouses the attention of the public.

McCafferty also juxtaposes different layers of reality. We first know the narrator's situation (1998 Belfast) than that of the children (1970 Belfast). Within this particular reality, we get the viewpoints of different people all

embodied by the two actors on stage. These worlds are different from that of the spectators (no matter the time, no matter the place of the performance) and that of the readers (since reading it could occur at any time in any place).

Juxtaposition is also present in the structure of the play since the public is never warned of the changes of time and place. Speech switches from the children and the various characters to the narrator and it is up to the performers to indicate it through their performance:

MICKYBO. you shit yourself

MOJO. you do

MICKYBO. you do

MOJO. kack the breeks

MICKYBO. shit the trunks

NARRATOR. mojo mickybo – thick as two small thieves– the greatest lads god ever pumped breath into – the day they met was the hottest ever in the whole christendom [...] the world draggin itself along like it was out of breath – a belter

MOJO. many ya done now mickybo?

MICKYBO. three hundred an twenty-four – twenty-five – twenty-six [...]. (10)

The climax of this juxtaposition of space and time emerges when Mojo narrator asks a question to which Mickybo as a child answers:

NARRATOR (*sings.*). don't ever hit your granny with a shovel, it leaves a dull impression on her mind – what happens mickybo when ya hit your granny with a shovel?

MICKYBO. her eyes pop out an her face goes like that (*Grimace*). (17)

This example, linking the time and space of the narrator (1998) to those of the children (1970), proportionally sheds light on the violent environment that surrounds the children. Yet, this conversation is not real and could never have happened since the public is told that Mojo and Mickybo did not see each other anymore in the 1990s:

NARRATOR. love many trust few and learn to paddle your own canoe – years later i was walking through the town – this town – belfast – a town with memories – i saw mickybo across the street – mojo mickybo

MICKYBO. mickybo mojo

NARRATOR. we both pretended we didn' t know each other and walked on – mojo mickybo. (49)

This device on McCafferty's part further breaks the illusion of realism and affects both the actor and the spectator as the analysis of the articulation of the play text and the performance confirms.

Worthen writes that “attending to the material form of plays in print may also provide a means to ‘alienate’ and so to observe, other aspects of our

understanding of dramatic performance, the interplay between the text and the naturalized strategies of its production onstage.” (Worthen 2005, 61-62). One of the processes creating distanciation is alienation, a key-notion of Brechtian theory according to Elin Diamond. In an article entitled “Brechtian theory/Feminist theory”, she explains that “the cornerstone of Brecht’s theory is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the technique of defamiliarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh.” (Diamond 1988, 84). Thanks to Brechtian distanciation, the spectator and the reader become aware of the nature of this relation, of this alienation, this alienating environment, which “allow[s] [them] to criticize [it] constructively from a social point of view” (Brecht 1964, 125). In fact, with this piece, McCafferty offers the public a new perspective on the Troubles through the friendship of two working-class children, whose relationship is solidified by a movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. This film, which they keep on going and watching, puts the stress on their desire but impossibility to escape their environment. It enables them to get away from the real world, but only for a short time, as the narrator observes:

NARRATOR. half time – back to the real world – decisions have to be made – important decisions that would give a book a headache – who’s who an what’s what. (McCafferty 2002, 17)

Readers do not know if the movie can be broadcast on the stage; yet, if it is possible in some performances, then this montage creates even more distance and alienation.

The A-effect in the performance does not only concern the distance set up between the spectators and the play; it is also found in the relationship between the actors and their own roles. From the beginning, we are told that the two actors embody all the characters, be they adults or children. For practical reasons, the actor incarnating Mojo plays the role of Mickybo’s parents, and that embodying Mickybo plays the roles of Mojo’s parents. Therefore the actors cannot possibly identify with their characters since it would be difficult to share the viewpoints of Protestants and Catholics at the same time. This distance the performers must dramatize is also echoed by the numerous dashes that fragment the play. They materialize the possible slippages from one performer to one character, from one character to another performer and thus participate to creating a neo-Brechtian A-effect.

The A-effect is thus further found in the written version of a play and specifically suggested by typography. If Worthen observes that “the materiality of the poem on the page alienates language from its typical, commodified usage” (Worthen 2005, 135), it is first the absence of capitals in *Mojo Mickybo* that catches the reader’s attention. In *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Randolph Quirk (*et al.*) reminds us of the use of capitals as

follows: “in addition to marking the beginning of a sentence, initial capitals are used for specifying proper nouns for example, persons, places, works of literature, days of the week, months of the year [...]” (1985, 1638). Yet, in the dialogues, McCafferty omits the capital letters on the names of people. Readers can immediately detect it when the two main characters introduce each other at the very beginning of the play:

MOJO. mojo
 MICKYBO. mickybo
 MOJO. mickybo mojo
 MICKYBO. mojo mickybo. (McCafferty 2002, 9)

Right from the start, the narrator aims to consider the two boys as one entity and juxtaposes their Christian names. Likewise, geographical names, such as “belfast” (9) or “australia” (12), do not have any capital letters.

They are all treated as if they were common names. Furthermore, there is no capital letter on the religious denominations “catholic” and “protestant” when there should be. Through this absence of capitalization, the author seems to disclose his desire to forget the notion of hierarchy, the difference between the two religious communities that faced each other in the 1970s in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, he seems to be lauding equality. From a Brechtian perspective, these missing capital letters give the text a strange aspect. It is as if the text was alienated along the Brechtian definition of alienation, as “allow[ing] us to recognize [a] subject, but at the same time mak[ing] it unfamiliar.” (Brecht quoted in Diamond 1988, 84). In fact, readers are not used to reading a text completely devoid of capital letters.

McCafferty confides that one of his objectives was to have all his characters speak in a “heightened Belfast dialect” so as to “try to create a new Belfast theatrical speech” (Culture Northern Ireland 2008) but he had to set aside a lot of linguistic rules to reach his aim. His choice is an act of resistance to specific imposed and institutionalized codes like grammar, punctuation, syntax. That is why, McCafferty’s public can read and hear sentences such as “that’s borin – yer da’s borin mojo – mon we’ll go over the timbers an burn wood” (McCafferty 2002, 30) which convey a realistic impression of spoken vernacular. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, “post-colonial stages are particularly resonant spaces from which to articulate linguistic resistant to imperialism” (Gilbert, Tompkins 2006, 166).

Therefore, the dialect spoken by the two children acts as a political medium with a meaning in itself. It is strengthened by the lack of punctuation to orient the performance. Worthen calls this style the “performative print style” and gives the example of George Bernard Shaw:

A play’s language does not only live in the mind’s eye, it also lives in the ear and on the tongue. Shaw’s consistently rhetorical use of punctuation – using punctuation to mark the rhythms of speech rather than the logic of syntax – and his celebrated use of dialect

might well be read as traces of the stage, or as places where Shaw uses the accessories of the page actually to direct the performance. The tension between rhetorical and syntactic pointing is one of the places where the text's representation of the dramatic fiction joins its implication of performance, its way of specifying action on stage. (Worthen 2005, 56)

On the one hand, for Worthen, "language writing alienates language because it is an alternative language system" (126). On the other hand, Brecht saw language as possibly "alienated by translation into the actor's native dialect" (Brecht 1964, 139). Confronted to this, the audience become estranged, unfamiliar to McCafferty's alienated rhetoricity; their comprehension of the text is sometimes inhibited and they might even be misled. To give a precise example, "wecker" (McCafferty 2002, 13), which sounds like the comparative form of the adjective "wick", meaning "mean" in Northern Irish slang, expresses the exact opposite in the mouth of the two boys. The words of the narrator are thus both alienating and alienated.

The author effectively empowers his narrator. The latter relates all the stories of the two boys and twelve other people without ever quoting them with inverted commas in the written text. This device appears to be close to the epic process of historicisation, another technique to create distance. Indeed, historicisation in Brechtian drama was used so that the playwright might point out to the spectators the place of Man in History, how He transforms the world, how He determines History and how History may determine Him. In this play, the narrator is in charge of articulating public History and private stories, time, place and space to the detriment of the protagonists. This is the reason why there is no capital on the subject pronoun "i" whenever a character speaks, as illustrated in the following quote:

MICKYBO. wanna know what i heard?

MOJO. wha?

MICKYBO. the whole a belfast is goin mad an we're all gonna get murdered in our beds. (30)

In post-colonial theories, histories compete and confront one another and enhance the permeability of space, time and content. The narrator crystallizes all these elements, which create distanciation in so far as the audience become confronted to two or three tenses and places: their own (past, present, future) and that of History, or, as it were, the history of Northern Ireland in the 1970s. When a text is historicised, it is naturally distanced in so far as it shows the various possibilities, which is the case in *Mojo Mickybo* with the backward glance of Mojo narrator, thirty years after the episodes he is narrating took place.

This study lays emphasis on "the semantic value of the accessories of print" (Worthen 2005, 58) since both the text and the performance participate to the good understanding of the message of the author: the post-colonial redefinition of Northern Irish drama thanks to neo-Brechtian devices. However, it

is up to the audience to decipher the clues left throughout the play text by McCafferty and meant to be staged. That is why *Mojo Mickybo* can be seen as a neo-Brechtian Lehrstück, or didactic play.

3. *Teaching audiences*

Brecht wanted his theatre to “increase its ability to amuse, and [...] to raise its value as education” (Brecht 1964, 130). These two values, entertaining and instructing, were meant to encourage “the spectator to draw conclusions about how the world works” (150). Like Brecht, McCafferty specifically makes use of dialectics and a direct address to the public to entertain and instruct his audiences.

The German playwright saw in dialectics a means to bring out the truth about social realism. He recommended to confront ideas in an artistic way to lead to debates that should point out the power of Man.

McCafferty, proposing a text alienated, a man (or a child in this case) dominated, changed and divided because of his environment, calls upon his audience’s capacity to reflect upon freedom. He starts from his own, giving himself the liberty not to comply with some rules of typography, grammar and syntax in the dialogues, for, effectively, the stage directions, expressing his voice, are not concerned by the absence of any linguistic rule. They indicate that the playwright is still in charge, that he can always control the world he is creating and that he is delivering a message. Through his style, the playwright puts forward the idea of an ideology of freedom in possible reaction against a given political economic and social system. The neo-Brechtian epic style, which *Mojo Mickybo* illustrates, relies on the double movement of alienation and freedom, of giving up and choosing, of accepting and refusing, which are also encoded in the text through the use of dashes. If the latter reflect fragmentation, they might also give an impression of continuity, of connection between the various characters. Quirk (*et al.*) calls them “correlative punctuation marks” (1985, 1629). They echo McCafferty’s goal to build a bridge between the two boys and their environment despite the external tensions; tensions that are also encoded in the text by the author. Worthen effectively writes that “modern drama in print typically frames a dialectical tension between the proprieties of the page and the identities of drama” (Worthen 2005, 62). In McCafferty’s piece, tensions can be found between the page and the stage, notably as far as punctuation is concerned: the question arises so as to represent the dashes on the stage. If the actors might embody the tensions, and so enable them to emerge, the audiences are encouraged to find some appeasement and, most importantly, uncover the coherence of all the stories filtered by the narrator.

For Gilbert and Tompkins, histories in post-colonial drama “compete with each other to form a complex dialectic which is always subject to change as new players enter the fields of representation” (Gilbert, Tompkins 2006, 110). They particularly shed light on the tensions arising from their evolution between past

and present and their differences between public and private receptions. Hence the power of the audience. In her book, *Bertolt Brecht*, Francine Maier-Schaeffer notes that the epic form of drama gives us the formal means likely to re-centre observable facts which are not natural phenomena and can eventually be changed by Man.

Brecht's conception of Man and of the world was philosophical; for him, Man had to be changing. He noted that "changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling" (Brecht 1964, 15). So the world had to be completed and the role of drama was to show this possible transformation. The dialectical method was a tool that Brecht could think about when it came to grabbing reality so as to change it thereafter. McCafferty shares the German playwright's opinion. He sheds light on the changing nature of a child, in this case, Mickybo, who first went beyond the divide and then got closer to children from his "tribe" – Gank and Fuckface, his previous enemies – after his father died. The narrator explains:

NARRATOR. *mojo mickybo – great lads – mickybo's in the hut along with gank and fuckface – they're smoking fags an talking the talk of men – it's showtime.* (McCafferty 200, 48)

Mickybo even accuses Mojo of stealing his bike. Nevertheless, Mickybo could have resisted it. In his play, McCafferty suggests that one's future has alternatives. Indeed, if we adopt a Brechtian perspective, McCafferty here presents the audience with past facts and their outcome, so that, after taking them into account, they may learn that the future could have been different, and that the cycle of endless violence could have been broken back then. The personal futures of the children could have changed had Mickybo acted differently at his father's death, or even later. As a matter of fact, between then (the time when the children met) and now (the time it is narrated), there have been many changes in Northern Ireland. The peace process had already started.

Yet, Mojo has still been considered as an enemy and has been left on his own. The narrator advises him to: "love many trust few and learn to paddle your own canoe" (49). Mickybo's decision could also have influenced the future of their communities if we consider Mojo and Mickybo to be allegorical characters speaking for their respective community. For Brecht, epic drama triggers off the morale of History, but does not speak for History, rather for the victims. In McCafferty's play, both Mojo and Mickybo, representing their communities, can be held as victims of History and place.

Gilbert and Tompkins explain that "post-colonial spatial histories dramatize the dialectic of place and displacement" (Gilbert, Tompkins 2006, 156). In the play under scrutiny here, the movie the two children are keen on watching becomes a parable of their relationship to their environment. The lives of the cow boys appeal to the children as the narrator says:

NARRATOR. butch cassidy an the sundance kid – a fine feelin it must be to be a cowboy – money in yer pocket a horse on yer arse an a gun in yer holster – but times are hard – there’s no ham for the sandwiches an torch woman is in the box office paying her dues. (16)

Similarly, the countries that attract them most, Bolivia and Australia, represent places where life seems to be better. Francine Maier-Schaeffer explains that parables are at the heart of the dialectical relationship between the general and the particular – which is a basic principle in Brechtian theory. In McCafferty’s play, the parable forges a relationship between the Northern Irish communities (the general) and the two boys (the particular).

If the audience is never warned of the shift from one situation to another, from one character to another, from one episode to another, because of the little information they are given and the lack of any institutionalized norm that could orient their thoughts, it is up to them to follow the play with careful attention and bridge all the gaps. This process on McCafferty’s part, as well as the intervention of a narrator commenting upon the story of two children years later, echo the abolition of the fourth wall that Brecht advocated and which is another image for getting people closer in a post-colonial context. As a matter of fact, in focusing their attention on what is said by whom, the readers and the spectators are fully implicated in the action and are asked to react. The narrator helps the audience understand their participation. He directly asks them : “know what a mean” (10). For Brecht, the audience must learn by themselves. This is what the German playwright called the play’s didactic quality. In a book entitled *Lectures de Brecht*, Bernard Dort specifies the idea that the strongest ideological message is delivered through didactic plays which are indeed the most perfect realizations of epic plays. When didactic plays are performed, the gap between the playwright and its readers, the actors and the spectators of drama, the actors and the spectators of life, between drama, fiction and reality, between philosophy and politics is filled. Positioned against capitalism, Brecht’s aim was to prevent drama lovers from being mere consumers. Similarly, McCafferty invites his audience to meditate upon humanity through this play.

Readers and spectators must understand and learn some information by themselves, for, it goes without saying that teaching is closely linked to learning.

When the narrator addresses the public directly, he entices them to question themselves. As a matter of fact, the interrogation mark is the other punctuation mark that we come across in *Mojo Mickybo*’s dialogues. It is also used by the author to enhance the innocence of the two boys, a virtue to which McCafferty pays careful attention. In a private interview, McCafferty confided that it was crucial for him to see the Troubles through the prism of childhood since there is an articulation between segregation and the innocence of the children.

He explains: “The reason the play is seen through the eyes of children is that I wanted to show the absurdity of sectarianism. And I thought the best

way to do that was through the innocence of children.” Both children are indeed eager to have all their questions answered. Some questions even startle the audience because they seem to have nothing to do with the main action. For instance, when Mojo keeps on asking “are wasps bees?” (37), the audience is expected to react. And so are the actors. Indeed, Maier-Schaeffer explains that didactic plays are revolutionary plays in so far as they also instruct the performers. The play is thus peppered with numerous questions some of which remain unanswered so that audiences and actors might find their own answers.

The study of the absence of typographical rules, notably punctuation, their impact on syntax and grammar, as well as other devices borrowed from Brechtian theory, invites the readers and spectators of the play to understand the message the author delivers. McCafferty's overt ex-centricity, meant to reshape the play aesthetically, strengthens his covert political message: denouncing the conflict. He stages the impossible friendship of two innocent children who managed to go beyond the divide and keep themselves at a distance of the atrocities of the adults' world, that is to say sectarianism and the Troubles. They were caught up by reality but it could have been different. The playwright's ambition is to put forward the mighty power of Man in changing, transforming the world and being transformed. Therefore, the playwright devises new means to reshape the contours of Northern Irish drama, and his use of neo-Brechtian techniques in a post-colonial fashion sheds light on the possible emancipation of Northern Ireland from Great-Britain in the context of the peace process. If having this play printed allows it to be part of literature since “the power of print [is a way] to secure the literary identity of writing” (Worthen 2005, 26), it also guarantees its access across the world over the years. Yet, modifying the rules of print through punctuation and capitalization is a device McCafferty resorted to so as to show the ultimate power of the artist over History and place.

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Ex-centric Human and Natural Identities in Edna O'Brien's *In the Forest*

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Abstract:

Drawing on ecocriticism and mathematics, this essay investigates ex-centric natural and human identities in Edna O'Brien's *In the Forest* (2002). The first part focuses on the ex-centricity of the three main characters – the forest, the murderer, and the female victim. They are depicted as being on the borderline of many disparaging identities. The second part deals with the two central episodes of the novel: a carnivalesque feast and the account of the murder taking place in the forest. The disorder caused by the suspension of reality in these two chapters not only displaces the three ex-centric identities from the borderline to the centre of the novel, but also maintains and reasserts their ex-centricity.

Keywords: carnivalesque, ecocriticism, ex-centricity, identity, Edna O'Brien

This essay proposes an ecocritical framework for reading issues of ex-centricity, in particular human and natural ex-centricities, in Edna O'Brien's novel *In the Forest* (2002). Ecocriticism fosters a rethinking of the hegemonic relationship between humanity and nature – the latter is considered to be inferior to the former. Additionally, it aims at finding a balance in the interaction of forces between human beings and their surrounding environment by means of an interdisciplinary cooperation of science and arts. Specifically, a mathematical theory will be used to support the literary analysis of the novel. In mathematics, eccentricity is a parameter that defines circularity in conic sections. The eccentricity of a circle – regarded as the perfect form – is zero, thus implying that there is no deviation from the centre. The value of this parameter progressively increases in ellipses, parabolae, and hyperbolae so that the distance of the points from the centre deviates from the circular path. Therefore, if the circle denotes perfection, which may in turn be associated with normative behaviours commonly established by culture, any eccentric human being or natural space departing from these rules necessitates, according to society, to

be brought back to the centre. Under these circumstances, divergent identities acquire a “hybridity” that renders them “subject[s] that inhabit the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha 1994, 13). This essay argues that it is precisely through their hybridity and ex-centricity that human and natural protagonists become central in *In the Forest*. This centrality, however, is not attained by forcing them into conformity, but by displacing their marginality to the thematic and narrative centre of the novel. In fact, as if paraphrasing Irish poet Seamus Heaney’s words, “I am interested [...] in how writers from the margins [...] avoid becoming marginal, in the literary and cultural sense” (Heaney 2000, 26), O’Brien is interested in translating borderline characters to the centre of her novel. In other words, the marginal states of nature and human beings are rehabilitated within the mainstream culture even though they maintain their ex-centricity. To this end, O’Brien adopts suspension of reality and carnivalesque as fundamental literary devices.

In the Forest, much discussed by critics in terms of its violent tones and alleged infringement of the victims’ privacy¹, fictionalises the real murders of young artist Imelda Riney, her three-year-old son Liam, and Father Joe Walsh at the hands of Brendan O’Donnell in April 1994. The young murderer, apparently affected by schizophrenia, killed and left the three victims in Cregg Wood in the west of Ireland. The close connection between this crime and contemporary history is underlined by Shirley Peterson who has claimed that O’Brien’s novel represents the “product of [Ireland’s] geopolitical moment” (2009, 45). In fact, by means of a tragic and apprehensive tone, O’Brien shows scepticism towards the rapid economic improvements and cultural changes of the Celtic Tiger. Indeed, an increasing pursuit of wealth, which began in the sixties, pushed many Irish to leave the countryside and settle in big cities such as Dublin and Belfast. Consequently, they threw themselves into a completely new society and post-modern lifestyle without taking the time to fully understand what was happening – this process reached its utmost peak during the years of the Celtic Tiger between 1995 and 2008. Accordingly, Fintan O’Toole has remarked that Ireland passed from being an almost pre-modern to a post-modern country without experiencing the fundamental phase of industrialisation (2009, 100). As a result, Irish society modified its conception of nature and rural space into something which, seen from an urban perspective, acquired stoic and idyllic nuances. Nevertheless, those Irish who did not leave the countryside and still regarded it as the embodiment of hard work, experienced, even more than the others, the bewilderment and the paradox of hanging in the balance between pre-modern and post-modern society. Irish attitude towards nature shifted from pleasurable to disagreeable feelings, and *vice versa*. Hence, it may be assumed that, on the one hand, the socio-economic change fostered new cultural behaviours and attitudes; on the other hand, the old patriarchal and catholic Ireland – the outcome of, among other things, Eamon de Valera’s conservative policy – with all its gender mod-

els, stereotypes, and essentialist values still underlay the Irish social order. It is precisely within this context that the real triple murder of Imelda, her son, and Father Joe is correspondingly described in *In the Forest* as taking place in the interstitial suspension between two historical moments.

The novel opens in *medias res* by depicting villagers searching for the missing people in Cloosh Wood. The *incipit* introduces readers to a world of suspended reality, imagination, and dream. The first scene, in fact, is a dream-like episode in which a widow, who decides not to take part in the searches, dreams of a dangerous forest where “tall trees [are] no longer static but moving like giants, giants on their grotesque and shaggy roots” (O’Brien 2002, 1)². Nonetheless, once awake, the widow is not yet in the real world since she sees “Eily, the dead woman, with her long hair” (2). Henceforth, after the establishment of a dream-like reality, the narrative examines all the events prior to the murders starting with the life of Michen O’Kane, the fictional killer. Rejected by his family and abused by priests after his mother’s death, the boy develops a mental disorder and a violent personality that lead him to spend his childhood and adolescence in several prisons. Once back to his native village near the woods, the twenty-year-old Michen enjoys frightening everybody around him with his aggressive behaviours until Eily and her son Maddie, newly arrived in the neighbourhood, attract his attention. From Michen’s point of view, the mother and son have contrasting characteristics. On the one hand, they are a reminder of the lost relationship with his beloved mother; on the other, they are regarded as usurpers insofar as they live in his former house at the edge of the village. This traumatic combination appears to be what pushes Michen to kill the pair. Nonetheless, the novel implicitly conveys the idea that the reasons lying behind this horrible insane act are to be found not only in the murderer’s mental illness, but also in the generally dysfunctional Irish society – a society that, heavily traumatised by colonisation and rapid change, is unable to cope with a new lifestyle. As a matter of fact, the forest – which is conceived of as a real character – Michen, and Eily are firstly described, according to the mainstream culture, as marginal nature and human beings. This marginality is the result of a deviation from the conventional roles they are supposed to play, namely those of wild place, heroic man, and Virgin Mother. The three characters are, in fact, depicted at the margins of different allegedly good or bad identities with the aim of showing the disparaging villagers’ opinions as well as the protagonists’ unconventionality. Therefore, in order to illustrate how these three ex-centric identities are made centric by means of chaos and disorder during the carnival, this essay will mainly focus on the three hybrid characters – the forest, the murder, and the female victim – and on the two central chapters of the novel, “Fiesta” and “In the Forest”³.

The first important marginal identity presented in the *incipit* is the forest in which Eily, Maddie, and Father John are killed. At the edge of the village, Cloosh Wood is thus an ex-centric place. Its liminality resides not only in its

physical position in the Irish countryside, but also in the conventional conceptualisation of wild places in Western cultures. In fact, the ex-centricity of the wilderness is portrayed in the tension between, on the one hand, unfriendliness to and dark influences on human beings and, on the other, by its status as uncontaminated nature. This tension exemplifies how the particularly human conception of the wilderness has been stereotyped by culture down through the centuries. For instance, the Judeo-Christian tradition has played a major role in conveying a fixed idea of the wilderness since, as William Cronon has claimed, we invest wild places with our own “moral imperatives” (Cronon 1996, 39). The result is a well-established categorisation in good and bad nature, respectively represented by beautiful gardens and dangerous wilderness. The former is imbued with positive connotations due to its association with the Christian Eden; the latter, Satan’s kingdom, is permeated by sin and disorder and often described as a desert. Consequently, biblical images of the desert, the place in which Jesus suffered the Devil’s temptations for forty days, show strong connotations of bewilderment and terror. Under such circumstances, the wilderness comes to represent a wasteland where no morality reigns and where human beings can be turned into Satan’s sons and daughters. This implies that those people who are willing to live in wild places risk losing their humanity and becoming more animal-like or savage. In fact, in *In the Forest*, a priest advises Michen, who is willing to live in the woods, to avoid such a wild place otherwise he will be transformed into an evil creature. This advice makes Michen think of the prophet Jeremiah’s words: “*A curse on the man who puts his trust in man / [...] He is like dry scrub in the wastelands / He settles in the parched places of the wilderness, / A salt land, uninhabited*” (O’Brien 2002, 43; italics in the original). Therefore, as the quotation suggests, Michen firstly assimilates the essentialist conception of the wilderness and then applies it to the woods.

Nevertheless, this stereotypical concept begins to change during the nineteenth century under the drive of English Romantic poetry and American Transcendentalism with writers like H.D. Thoreau. In their hands, the wilderness ceases to be only dangerous and also becomes a genuine and innocent place in contrast to the fabricated nature of human civilisation. Accordingly, it becomes an astonishingly beautiful landscape where humanity can restore its original closeness to nature; it is an exemplary space inspiring human beings to build a new and genuine society. As Thoreau famously wrote, “In wildness is the preservation of the world” (quoted in Cronon 1996, 69); it is a place where one can experience beauty and pleasurable feelings as well as terrifying sensations. As a matter of fact, the very first description of Cloosh Wood portrays the forest as a dark and deadly place: “spindly, freakish, [...] the trapped wind gives off the rustle of a distant sea [...] the light becoming darker and darker into the chamber of non-light” (O’Brien 2002, 1). Nonetheless, at the same time, because of the violent crime the woods have just witnessed “during those frantic, suspended and sorrowing days”, they also

conform to the stereotype of beautiful nature being contaminated and even destroyed by human beings: "It was then the wood lost its old name and its old innocence" (1).

With regard to Michen's hybrid identities, they are rendered through the various names that highlight the discrepancy between his views and those of the other characters. In the collective perspective, he is either "the Kinderschreck" (the bogeyman), because of his violent and twisted behaviours, or nameless – he does not even deserve a name – thus becoming "the Boy", the "Child", "K, short for O'Kane" (3). Moreover, the villagers scorn Michen by calling him "dog" (8), "[r]at" (98), and "animal" (229). The insulting purpose of these names exemplifies a specific cultural stereotype which establishes that the human species is superior to all the other living creatures on the planet. Therefore, Michen, who is considered to be at the edge of humanity and animality, becomes an inferior human being. Conversely, the protagonist, before committing the murders, prefers to call himself "Caolite, the name of the forest" (19). With the aim of contrasting the villagers' perspective, Michen's assertion of his identity is highlighted by the use of a proper noun, Caolite, since, as it has been remarked, he is deprived of a name. In addition, in order to define his identity more clearly, he puts it into written words in his school notebook, "*I am a true son of the forest*" (6; italics in the original). He seals his closeness to the woods through both verbal and written words in order to show the others the identity with which he wishes to be recognised. Nonetheless, the affirmation of such a clear and defined identity does not prevent Michen from assuming other borderline personalities. He also claims, for example, an evil individuality by referring to himself as "the devil's favourite son" (65); if he is the forest's son, then he is implying that the forest is an evil place. Michen also states his multiple identities when he denies to have killed some kittens in one of his foster houses – "it was someone else" (20). He is actually declaring his own dissociation into several persons and further pushing himself to the margins. In particular, through his syllogistic statement, "God hates me, Father hates me, I am hated" (4), Michen realises his liminality. If "God" and "Father" metonymically refer to the Church and the family, two of the most powerful institutions in Ireland, then he means that both the Church, personified by all the priests who were supposed to take care of him, and his family have abandoned him. Hence, the conclusion of the syllogism, "I am hated", generalises the feeling of hatred: he is marginalised by everybody else in the world.

Michen's liminality is repeatedly asserted by references to his suspended life between reality and imagination. His sister Aileen, maybe the only person who cares about him, highlights his borderline position by saying that "This world is not his world" (45). As a result, although he may not be in the actual world mentally, he inhabits it physically; he is in two worlds simultaneously. This liminality is perceived not only by the other characters, but also by Michen himself. He hears and talks to voices coming either from the real world or from the underworld. In particular, he is addressed by the woods

that congratulate him, “Welcome home son... you did us proud... didn’t let the bastards [*gardai*] get to you” (65), and also by his dead mother who promises to come back and rescue him (4). Therefore, Michen turns out to be inhuman, and thus ex-centric, due to his physical closeness to nature, his talking to unreal voices, and his moving from one world to another. In fact, if humanity, with all its alleged qualities that firmly distinguish and separate it from nature, represents the central rule, Michen results in being far from the centre; in other words, the villagers see him as a bad and deviate young man. Indeed, by virtue of the stereotype which regards human beings as intellectually superior to any other natural creature, the villagers cannot accept within their community – or within their “circle” – somebody who talks to nature; consequently, they keep Michen at the margins.

Eily, the third marginal character analysed in this essay, is a beautiful young woman who, attracted by the primeval and mystical nature of East Clare, decides to move with her little son near Cloosh Wood. She is a divorced and independent single mother who, consequently, does not fit the iconic image of the Virgin Mary – the highest model of womanhood and motherhood to which all the Irish women were once supposed to conform. Perfectly aware of her unconventionality, the female protagonist expects to hear different types of rumours about her – “I wonder what they make of me” (25). The others, for example, regard her as a “dipso” (85) because she wants to go to pubs, or as almost inhuman, like Michen, insofar as “her feet are not on the ground” (107); in short, since she deviates from the cultural norm, Eily does not belong to the human world. The woman recognises her liminality and plays with her different identities as witnessed in the episode in which she admits to having “an army of spirits protecting [her]” (28) or when she compares the suffering of her solitude to the hungry cry of cormorants in the far sea (63). However, before the carnival chapter, Michen’s point of view on Eily’s marginal identities prevails over the villagers. While spying on her at Maddie’s school, Michen thinks that she cannot be a mother – a conventional mother – since she not only looks “too young” but she is also “smoking and laughing” (71). These words conventionally imply that a woman who smokes and laughs is neither ready to be a mother nor good enough to raise children. Nevertheless, once Michen finds out that she does have a child, he finally recognises her motherhood and begins to develop an emotional interest in her. His feelings for her are conflicting because, although he likes Eily, at the same time, he demonises her with the aim of underlining her monstrous and seductive aspects: she is a “madwoman” or a Medusa whose hair is “like snakes” (79). Mythology, which is a great source of images for Eily’s identities, confers on her a kind of cosmic allure. Since Michen thinks of her as “ocean, deity, water, fire” (79), the woman acquires clearly inhuman nuances that push her far from centric human nature. Nonetheless, although assuming multiple identities, Eily also attempts to state her motherhood: “Eily’s a mummy” (100). This direct speech

in the third person may suggest that, even though she is a mother by virtue of having given birth to a child, she distances herself from all the mainstream implications conveyed by the term “mummy”. She remains on the borderline between conventional and unconventional womanhood.

“Fiesta”, an almost central chapter which narrates of a local folkloric carnival, represents a crucial stage in the displacing of the aforementioned ex-centric identities from their marginal positions to the centre of the novel. This chapter will be examined in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque. According to Bakhtin, the comic discourse of the carnivalesque has developed through four historical stages during which it has been defined by its relationship with official culture. Except for the first (pre-class society) and the third stage (the Renaissance with François Rabelais’s work), during the Middle Ages and the twentieth century – respectively the second and the fourth stage – the carnivalesque has been downgraded to the lowest levels of the cultural hierarchy and relegated to the realm of unofficial culture. In fact, there has always been a contrast between the seriousness of the mainstream culture, which proposes its univocal truths, and the comic aspects of the carnivalesque that portray, instead, an ambivalent and alternative world view. In essence, Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as the combination of folkloric feasts with the comic discourse of the Middle Ages, specifically “Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace”, “Comic verbal compositions”, and “Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons” (1984, 5). In a broad sense, all the local feasts that enter the world of the carnivalesque bear “the common traits of popular merriment” (218). Accordingly, common laughter and corporeal images are conceived of as the main characteristics of the comic discourse. The former offers people the possibility to momentarily break with the strictures of official life; the latter proposes a grotesque and ambivalent body – the simultaneous representation of birth and death through the depiction of its organic functions – in order to celebrate “the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities” (11). Both the laughter and the grotesque body hold a “regenerating power” (39) that, however, is lost in favour of gloomier and darker nuances during Romanticism. The carnival episode in Edna O’Brien’s novel is characterised by merry and dark features simultaneously.

An earlier introduction to the carnivalesque is to be found in a preceding chapter of *In the Forest* in which “Elmer the elephant”, a soft toy in his “harlequin suit”, nearly causes Maddie to be involved in a car accident. Elmer is a sinister presence “who doesn’t miss a trick, making sure that they don’t go without him. Elmer is no fool. His droopy ears are all agog” (O’Brien 2002, 101). The linkage between the elephant and Harlequin, the comic servant in the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte* who is conceived of as an emissary of the devil, suggests a comparison to Michen who is repeatedly described as devilish. As a result, Elmer’s sardonic attitude after the accident – “and there in the middle

of the road is Elmer, unscathed, strangely comic and plucky in his harlequin outfit" (104) – may be implying that he is not giving up his main purpose, but that he will try again to kill the child. In contrast to the frightening impact of this episode, the proper carnivalesque chapter, "Fiesta", appears less sinister. In addition, its nearness to the centre of the book, together with its representation of a marginal reality, makes this chapter a crucial ex-centric as well as centric scene. In fact, in line with Bakhtin's conception of the carnivalesque as the construction of "a second world and a second life outside officialdom" (1984, 6), the pagan feast in *In the Forest* focuses on an in-between reality suspended among different worlds and different perspectives.

Set above the mountain near the woods, the feast takes place in the perfect natural environment to express "old lust, debauchery and division between men and women" (O'Brien 2002, 108). Therefore, this cheerful moment is marked by a chance to give vent to repressed feelings and lust while the usual social order is temporarily suspended; the crowd's "pagan impulses [are] brought to life in this heady carnival" (112). Consequently, the pagan feast is characterised by some of the main features of the carnivalesque; namely, collective gaiety, ambivalence, chaos, liminal identities, and a movement backwards and forwards among the different perspectives. There is a "Ruling Queen – Queen Euvul" who, with her "gaudy girls", seems to symbolise the regeneration of the old world by virtue of her name that is a reminder of female ova. As seventeenth-century Irish poet Eogan O'Rahilly wrote in "The Reverie" (O'Beirne Ranelagh 2012, 88), Queen Euvul is a woman with "a throng of magical girls" waiting for their King to come "and make [them] happy and reign in a fortunate land". Since the Irish poets of the seventeenth century were closely linked to their Gaelic ancestors who celebrated the feminine qualities of the land, this reference to Queen Euvul may be read as an allegory of the oppressed, personified Ireland waiting for somebody to rescue her. Therefore, if the Queen in "Fiesta" is Euvul, and consequently Ireland, it may be assumed that she is a representation of the forest; in other words, she embodies that part of the Irish soil that is given paramount importance in the novel. If, on the one hand, Euvul suggests life, on the other, she is also "draped with dead squirrels, leaves and the accoutrements of the forest" (O'Brien 2002, 108). Through the use of ambivalence, the association of death and life makes this wild place an encompassing space in which opposite elements coexist.

Among the Ruling Queen's girls there is "Winnie in harlequin suit" – a woman interpreting a male mask of the *Commedia dell'Arte* implies that there is a gender role inversion, thus an undermining of social rules – and "Eily the Princess" (108-109). It is at this point that the comic atmosphere is abruptly interrupted by a parallel, though different, perspective. Michen, in fact, seems to be gloomier and more sinister than the general merry crowd. He is "at one with the dark, squatting outside" (109) and focuses on the lascivious symbols qualifying Eily's mask, the "purple dress and purple gloves" (109). Afterwards, the narrative voice goes back to the villagers who are intent on

using an abusive language. Harry, the Master of Ceremonies, puts Eily at the centre of the scene and asks the audience to look at “her tearful eyes red and hot, her passions burning as in a pot” (109). Lusting for a man, Eily the Princess turns her attention onto her own body:

*Couldn't some man love me as well
Aren't I plump and sound as a bell
Lips for kissing and teeth for smiling
Blossomy skin and forehead shining
Look at my waist. My legs are long
Limber as willows and light and strong
There's bottom and belly that claim attention
And the best concealed that I needn't mention.* (110; italics in the original)

As the carnivalesque prescribes, the public showing of Eily's wanton body aims at abolishing the boundary between public and private and, as a consequence, at creating a universal body that is in constant relation with the external world. In fact, although she finally seems to hide some of her body parts, “the best concealed”, everybody knows what she is referring to; hence, it is indeed public and not well-hidden. She continues reciting: “*Every night when I went to bed [...] Burnt bits of my frock, my nails, my hair [...] And night and day on the proper occasions I Invoked Old Nick and all his legions*” (110-111; italics in the original). Eily's closeness to the devil, a relationship that is implicit in the first part of the novel since her unconventionality makes her evil in society's eyes, is here overtly declared on the occasion of a liberating feast. It follows a passage in which the collective perspective, fictional reality, and Michen's point of view are juxtaposed in order to create a universal whole which is made of interstitial spaces and marginal identities. Michen seems to “lose contact with the earth” while Harry is questioning Eily; in fact, with his “Are you a witch, Eileen Ryan?” (111), Harry is not addressing Eily the Princess of the feast, but Eily Ryan the young artist. Therefore, the question asked in the three different worlds finds a unifying answer in the princess' “Maybe” (111). Hence, by neither denying nor affirming her affiliation to dark magic, Eily remains on the borderline. Furthermore, the overlap between Michen's and the villagers' views continues with the centralisation of Eily's body:

She drew her stole down and Harry gasped in mock terror and marched her around for everyone to see and be horrified by the devil's hoof marks on her breast bone, skewered in a vivid indigo colour. To the crowd it was all fun, make-believe, but to O'Kane it was real, she had stepped out of her own world into his, into his transmogrified dream of her, all-mothering, all-sinning. She-devil. (111)

Accordingly, reality comes to be defined as the simultaneous presence of ex-centric and centric perspectives. Nonetheless, within this organic whole, each

perspective maintains its peculiarities. The difference between Michen's and the community's world is distinctly highlighted. While Eily's association to the devil is "all fun" for the crowd, it is "real" to Michen who conceives of her as the expression of apparently contrasting identities: mother, sinner, and devil. Therefore, unlike the usual social order, this specific carnivalesque disorder is ex-centric as well as centric. It is ex-centric because it involves numerous levels of reality, including marginal realities; it is centric because it finally represents "life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (Bakhtin 1984, 7). Indeed, this play attains its climax when the last outburst of freedom and carnivalesque merriment dissolves into disorder and ambivalence: "The nun came on stage, riding a donkey, whacking it with her rosary beads and when it lifted its tail, misbehaved and brayed, the crowd laughed until they cried, tears and laughter all one" (O'Brien 2002, 112). In this last quotation, the conventional order is undermined by the nun giving vent to her passions on a donkey and by the ambivalent co-presence of laughs and tears that characterise the concluding scene of the feast as universal. And, when celebrations are over, the carnival spirit still affects the villagers who plunge in the lake with Eily in "the orgies of the deep" (113).

So what, then, is the role of the carnivalesque in *In the Forest*? In order to answer this question, a list of the main purposes of the carnival according to Bakhtin may be helpful. Its functions are:

[T]o consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (Bakhtin 1984, 34)

As analysed, the carnivalesque in O'Brien's work celebrates creativity and combines opposite and ambivalent elements, but it does not achieve a complete liberation from mainstream culture and gender stereotypes. In fact, despite the pervasive cheerfulness and the disruption of the conventional social order, Eily the Princess always remains a lascivious, seductive, and devilish woman – as she is regarded in the fictional reality. Therefore, in line with the general relativity of the whole novel, it may be assumed that "Fiesta" works as yet another suspended chapter; a realistic narrative moving between the carnivalesque stylistic requirements and the author's intentions. O'Brien is neither completely following the features of the carnivalesque nor entirely undermining them thus proposing an ex-centric and suspended world which aims at suggesting the relativity of human perspectives on people, nature, and events.

After the gay tones of the carnival, the narrative shifts to the darker and more frightening "In the Forest". This is exactly the central part of the book in which Michen abducts Eily and Maddie, brings them into the woods, and finally kills them. In this chapter, the forest, Michen, and Eily do not

lose their marginal identities but, through the narrative, are brought to the core of the novel insofar as, from this point onwards, they will be the central focus in the villagers' views. When Michen enters Eily's house, he is depicted with distinctly evil features, "bubbles of foam on his lips and his eyes rolling" (O'Brien 2002, 115), and tells the woman about his frequent conversations with the devil, the "Big tall man with horns" (128). Despite his narrative centrality, Michen maintains his twisted and mad personality when simulating a phone call about his childhood: "Reported on sick parade... metal in Vomitus. Released from medical centre. Reunited with family at front gates. Energy level terrific. Chlorophyll feed. C and D not necessary. Proceeding north west as per coda. Over. Over" (126). The fragmented prose of this quotation signals the fragmentation of Michen's inner self that comes to be defined as a hybrid of different, sometimes opposite, identities. Indeed, in contrast to this satanic nuance, Michen also calls himself "Iggy, short for Ignatius" (115). The association to the founder of the Jesuits brings him closer to Jesus, and consequently, to God. As a result, he is not only relegated to the margins of the society but also omnipresent, "here, there, everywhere" (115). Therefore, in his pervasiveness, he remains ex-centric.

Inside his forest, Michen is able to feel the power he has been denied his whole life. As a consequence, he now expresses his opinion on the external world and makes the woods centric by means of his own persona. If he is Jesus, God's son, then his house becomes "God's country" (119) – God is central in Catholic Ireland – and not the borderline place of the *incipit*. Moreover, eager to exert his power, Michen invests Eily with mythological as well as disparaging identities. On the one hand, she becomes Thetis, a sea goddess and Achilles' mother, "*an ocean deity. Reluctant to marry a mortal Peleus she changed her form to a wave, then a fish, then a burning flame*" (117; italics in the original); thus, she is imbued with cosmic importance while yet maintaining her capacity to change "form" and remain liminal. On the other hand, Michen calls her "Goatgirl" (121) with the aim of showing that he has the power, that he is superior to her. Therefore, rather than suggesting an intersection between the woman and the goat, Michen is qualifying Eily as a sacrificial victim. Consequently, she becomes centric by virtue of her sacrifice for traumatised Ireland; she is "the instrument of something outside of herself, iconic, picked from a thousand faces for wanton ritual" (140). In fact, if Michen is the victim of a society that has neglected and abused him during his childhood, he is now taking revenge on a member of this society. Nevertheless, although exerting his power and thinking of Eily as the embodiment of multiple identities, Michen is forced to recognise her motherhood since, in this very same chapter, she affirms exactly what the others believe she is not: a mother – "I'm a mother first and foremost" (132). Therefore, even though she does not conform to the iconic mother, she claims her right to be a mother under her own rules. She finally becomes an alternative model of motherhood.

With reference to the centralisation of the forest's identity, it is interesting to notice that while it pervades the chapter – it is mentioned in the title and represents the main setting of the narrative – it is often described as an empty place; it is qualified by “an emptiness that is ghastly” (119). The “ghastly” clarification, as in the aforementioned quotation about Eily's destiny as a sacrificial victim, foreshadows the deaths of the mother and her son – as ghosts, they will hunt Michen during his imprisonment. Kieran Keohane has pointed out that the empty houses in the Irish countryside in the nineties represent “cultural trauma and tragedy; the destruction of the collective household of society” (2012, 69). Therefore, by metonymically referring to Ireland in general, the forest comes to represent the emptiness, the difficulties, and the mutability of post-modern Ireland. Furthermore, it acquires the conventional characteristics of a desolate land through the many occurrences of the word “wasteland” (O'Brien 20002, 120, 121, 136) which cannot but make the reader recall T.S. Eliot's poem. As a result, both nature and society are ruined by human beings. Hence, not only the Irish are suffering because of the rapid socio-economic changes of the late twentieth century, but nature too, as evidenced in its woodland, is showing emotional and physical wounds. It is precisely by looking at these wounds, a “wasteland of tree stumps and charred branches”, that Eily realises “that something drastic ha[s] commenced” (136). She is implying that there is not a positive perspective on the future; this is a tragedy and she is doomed to epitomise a collective sacrifice. From an ecocritical point of view, it may be argued that such a description of the woods as wasteland and wilderness conforms to the conventional connotations of wild places, but O'Brien's novel is actually conveying the idea according to which contemporary Ireland is injured both culturally and physically in its own soil. The wilderness stereotypes are only deployed to show how human beings can damage nature:

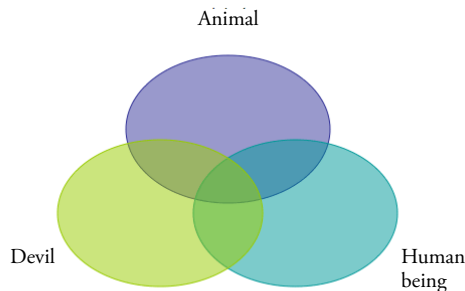
How engulfing the darkness, how useless their tracks in the rust brown carnage of old dead leaves. Pines and spruces all together, their tall solid trunks like an army going on and on, in unending sequence, furrows of muddy brown water and no birds and no sound other than that of a wind, unceasing, like the sound of a distant sea. But it is not sea, it is Cloosh Wood and they are being marched through it. The ground is soggy under foot, with here and there shelving rock sheathed in slippery moss. Not even an empty cigarette carton or a trodden plastic bottle, nothing: emptiness, him, them, insects. (122)

The sense of inevitability is as “engulfing” as the darkness. Although it may seem that this is an inimical place for human beings, as the Judeo-Christian tradition declares, the woods themselves are caught within this “darkness” which is an external and superior force and not one of its features. Furthermore, the adjectives “unending” and “unceasing” may convey scepticism towards a possible happy ending either for the victims or for the Irish in general. In fact, there is also a sense of powerlessness which does not allow Eily and her child to change their future in a place, a country, where “emptiness” reigns.

In conclusion, through this development from ex-centricity to centrality, Edna O'Brien transforms her specific characters into universal protagonists in Irish history. The individual traumas of Michen, Eily, and the forest are brought into a collective dimension by means of interstitial and hybrid identities. The rendering of Cloosh Wood as a universal place is expressed in the last pages of the central chapter:

All earth, all air, all forest is filled with Maddie's cries [...] their desperate cries as one, going up to the trees and down to the wisps of dew that have outlived the morning, rising and expiring, dying and perpetuated in that catacomb of green, up there at the edge of the world, on the point of sacrifice. (140-141)

Therefore, by making universal not only the forest but also Eily's and Maddie's tragic deaths, "the edge of the world" becomes the *omphalos* of a collective trauma and sacrifice. In addition, by individually analysing the ex-centric identities of the forest, Michen, and Eily as if they were sets in mathematics, the common element of the sets turns out to be the character itself/himself/herself. For instance, Michen is depicted as an animal, a devil, and a human being, as shown in the following figure:



The interstitial space among these three identities, which is also the central part of the sets, is occupied by Michen himself. To put it another way, all the three ex-centric identities are simultaneously rendered central by virtue of their very marginality.

Notes

¹ Fintan O'Toole addresses O'Brien's violation of the boundary between public and private life in his article "A Fiction Too Far" (2002).

² Subsequent references are cited in brackets.

³In the Forest is made of fifty-two chapters. “Fiesta” is the twenty-fourth, while the twenty-fifth chapter, the central and the longest in the whole novel, is “In the Forest”.

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Sebastian Barry's Portrayal of History's Marginalised People

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Abstract:

This paper addresses two groups of novels by Sebastian Barry and discusses his treatment of characters who have been marginalized by the dominant Irish historical narrative, based on the stories of members of his own family and argues that Barry's aim is not to produce a revisionist account of Irish history or justify minority positions. It is rather to present the plight of often isolated individuals and to reveal the complexity of the situations in which they find themselves. The paper uses recent theoretical writing on individual and collective memory and the relationship between memory and history.

Keywords: Sebastian Barry, history, Ireland, memory, war

This paper will explore the way in which the novels of Sebastian Barry published over the last fifteen years address the stories of people whose personal histories place them outside what has become Ireland's agreed national narrative. The paper focuses on two groups of novels: *Annie Dunne* (2002), *A Long Long Way* (2005) and *On Canaan's Side* (2011) which each recount the experiences of a member of the family of Thomas Dunne, Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police in the years immediately prior to independence; and *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (1998) and *The Secret Scripture* (2008) which follow the individual careers of two people connected with the old-established Sligo family of the McNultys. The central argument of this contribution is that Barry's work privileges the individual over political affiliation: the novels all concern the plight of characters whose story has been marginalised by the dominant narrative of Irish history, but the essay argues that they are not concerned with the re-assertion of a marginalised political narrative. Their importance lies in Barry's central characters, successfully portrayed, in his rich and layered style as unique individuals with their own flaws but with a very human need for love and affection, whose experiences are occasionally illuminated by friendships formed across political boundaries.

The two groups of novels examine both the political implications of collective memory and the related issue of the fate of the individual whose personal or autobiographical memory is at odds with the collective version. As is fairly well-known Barry's own family connections and stories took him into the neglected byways of Ireland's hidden history. In an interview in 2004 he explained, "Most of the adjectives that traditionally make up a definition of Irishness I can lay scant claim to" (Kurdi, Barry 2004, 46) although he does in the same interview comment that such families are "not as rare as one might think", (42) all of which points to the tendency of what many would describe as a postcolonial nation, but indeed of any nation, to assert a dominant national narrative at the expense of those which tell a different story.

The relationship of collective and individual memory has been the subject of much recent writing by both psychologists and cultural historians. Scholars such as James Fentress and Chris Wickham (1992) and Barbara Misztal (2003) have discussed the process of social remembering, structured by our interactions with others, an ongoing work bound up with social processes for which they use the term social memory. The historian, Jay Winter, considering the relationship between memory and history writes, "Historical remembrance is a discursive field, extending from ritual to cultural work of many different kinds. It differs from family remembrance by its capacity to unite people who have no other bonds drawing them together" (2006, 11).

Particular kinds of collective memory are given a particular authority when they become parts of acts of public remembrance, often though not always sponsored by the political establishment. As Ireland approaches what has been termed a "decade of commemorations" (Dorney 2013), or "a decade of centenaries" ("Century Ireland" 2013), dated respectively from 1912 to 1922 or from 1913 to 1923, the significance of its past is very much in the public consciousness¹. Indeed aspects of collective memory in Ireland, particularly surrounding the First World War, have been revisited with some frequency since 1998, a year which also saw a public debate about marking the bicentenary of the rebellion of 1798. After the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, President Mary Robinson, alongside the heads of state of the UK and Belgium, unveiled the Peace Tower at the Island of Ireland Peace Park commemorating Irish soldiers from the 16th Irish and 36th Ulster Divisions who fought at the Battle of Messines Ridge in 1917. This renewed interest in Irish participation in the international conflict has been taken up by historians such as Keith Jeffery (2000) and Adrian Gregory, (Gregory and Paseta 2002) while possibly its most well-known literary representation is Barry's *A Long Long Way*². A further example of a willingness to revisit public collective memory came recently with the passing of legislation apologising for the treatment of members of the Defence Forces who deserted to join the armies of various countries fighting Nazi Germany in World War II (O'Brien 2013).

James Wertsch comments that performances of public remembrance have a “tendency to eschew ambiguity and to present the past from a single committed perspective” (2002, 42). This kind of publicly sanctioned collective memory, as well as legislation such as that referred to above carries with it something of a sense of a narrative which cannot be dissented from. Hence Barry’s comment that “such families are not as rare as one might think” (Kurdi, Barry 2004, 42) suggests that in fact the simplified version of collective recollection which grows out of the mediation of the analytic work of historians by a variety of cultural tools, such as commemorative ritual, special editions of magazines, novels, plays and films is unrepresentative of the family stories of a considerable number of people.

In the Irish context it can be assumed that memories of the First World War, the Easter Rising, The War of Independence and the Civil War will be influenced by the difficulties encountered by the postcolonial state, and that both collective and individual memory as part of an ongoing social process will be altered by them. To further complicate the issue one might propose that the difficulties of the postcolonial state are in turn in part created by the influence of the stories of individuals and groups, although of course there are other, (notably economic) difficulties. These are all issues which Barry confronts, particularly in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *The Secret Scripture*. The latter novel in particular also confronts the related issue of individual memory, that, according to Fentress and Wickham is a process of “recognition, recall and articulation” (1992, 26) and this is examined in particular detail in *The Secret Scripture*. The boundary between what Fentress and Wickham term “social” memory and that of the individual is inevitably porous.

The current debate about memory includes debate about its terms. In what follows that of an individual either directly represented by a character’s thoughts or words or indirectly by their thoughts or words recounted or remembered by another, will be termed autobiographical. The memory of a particular group formed from the interactions of autobiographical memories will be termed social. That of a larger group, comprising individuals who do not come into direct intercourse with one another, mediated by cultural tools such as magazines, films and novels will be termed collective and when appropriate popular. It follows from this that the term collective memory will embrace but not be confined to national memory.

The novels written around the story of Thomas Dunne, Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and based on Barry’s own great grandfather, focus on the family of a man who has played a not insignificant part in early twentieth-century Irish history. Wertsch comments on the importance of narrative as a cultural tool in the formation of what he terms collective memory, and I have termed popular memory (2002, 4-9). Barry’s blurring of the boundaries between fiction and fact by the construction of narratives around actual characters in his own family history may be seen as a way of us-

ing narrative to suggest alternative representations of memory, though without suggesting that these are better or more accurate than existing versions. The character of Dunne himself had already made a notable appearance in Barry's work as the subject of *The Steward of Christendom*. Dunne is held responsible for the suppression of protesters during the 1913 lock-out and his position places him close to the front line in the 1916 Rising. The novels written around the fate of his son and two of his daughters address the issues of collective, social and autobiographical memory with varying degrees of emphasis.

The importance of the public and political dimension of "collective memory", its relationship to national identity and its importance in Barry's writing, should not be allowed to obscure other dimensions of collective or social memory. Theorists of social and collective memory follow Halbwachs in arguing that it is structured by group identities such as the family, the neighbourhood, or one's workplace (1980). The interaction of these groups with a wider collective memory as a site of contestation is seen very clearly in the first of the "Dunne" novels *Annie Dunne*, which was published in 2002.

The creation of Annie, a flawed and not very appealing character is a tribute to Barry's ability to create unique individuals with a very human need for love and affection. *Annie Dunne* is narrated in the present tense and the first person, and in terms of the function of memory within its formal structure marks a half way stage towards the retrospective narrative of some of the other novels under consideration here. It is set in 1959 and recounts the events of a few weeks in the life of Annie while she has the temporary guardianship of her great niece and nephew, the grandchildren of her now dead sister, Maude, based according to the author on himself and his sister who spent a holiday with their great-aunt at her Wicklow home in 1959. According to Nicholas Grene, many of the incidents in the novel, which also appear sometimes in a different version in *The Steward of Christendom*, were based on Barry's own very distant memories of this period (2006, 171ff.). This fact in itself is a further illustration of the way in which the boundary between fact and fiction in the subject matter of Barry's writing is consistently porous.

There is much bitterness in Annie's character and she demonstrates none of the ability to hear across the political divide which will be later suggested in the story of her long-dead brother, Willie. Indeed it is worth reflecting that had the group with which she identifies become the victors in that troubled period of Irish history, the intolerance of people like her would have been likely to have created victims like herself on the other side, another set of outsiders. Reminiscing about her father's collapse into insanity after independence, she reflects "he could not give his loyalty to common gunmen, the sort that came in after and called themselves leaders" (Barry 2002, 181). When Maude's widower, the children's grandfather Matt visits them she makes no secret of her hostility to him and his admiration for De Valera. A vicious argument

breaks out over the Irish language which she describes as “that old language of gobdaws and cottagers” (156). It suggests the way in which the inevitable mediation of language and the role it plays as a cultural tool in the formation of memory produces two views of the same fact. Annie’s “gunmen” would undoubtedly be for Matt ‘heroes’, and while she speaks with contempt of the “language of gobdaws and cottagers” for him the Irish language is “a holy thing” (156). The argument between the two is set in oppositional terms, reminding us of Wertsch’s idea of the “usable past” (Zamora 1998) as a site of contestation (Wertsch 2002, 35).

As Annie shops in the village shop her mind wanders back to her father and his views on the shared history of Ireland and England, “the hatred between the islands had no sound base, he said. More to-ing and fro-ing than anyone knew, marrying, melding. We were the one people, secretly, he said. It was the fact of the secret that was killing the country, he said, in his later days” (103). On one level this points to a feature in the formation of the collective memory of the postcolonial nation, the repression of those parts of the history of England and Ireland which are shared. At another level there is a profound irony in that Annie fails to apply his ideas of what is shared between two apparently opposed groups to her own family’s history, to what is shared between her own family and the family of people like Matt.

She is nevertheless capable of redeeming moments of self-knowledge demonstrated for example when, after indulging as she often does in bitter thoughts, she says, using one of those wonderful images which is typical of Barry’s writing, “Oh, what a mix of things the world is, what a flood of cream, turning and turning in the butter churn of things, but never comes to butter” (99). John Wilson Foster describes this feature of Barry’s writing as his “most characteristic idiom [...] a gravid lyricism” (2006, 99). For Annie, this is a rare acknowledgement of ambiguity and complexity, an element in her world view, dependent as it is on the myth-making proclivities of memory which is often absent.

Matt, in the course of his argument with Annie about the Irish language, comments, “I’m sorry, Annie. I wasn’t being rude. I was being blunt, like yourself. You are one of that class of persons that can dish it out, but you can’t receive it” (156). And at various points in the story the reader becomes aware of how readily this woman, embittered by both history and her own fate as a woman excluded from marriage and therefore from economic self-sufficiency, puts barriers up between herself and her neighbours. Her hard-won independence is in reality no such thing since it is in fact dependent on finding a home with her cousin Sarah Cullen.

The proposal of marriage to Sarah by Billy Kerr who works for the two women threatens even that independence. Annie is presented as a woman disinherited by history. She reflects:

The world of my youth is wiped away, as if it were only a stain on a more permanent fabric. I do not know where this Ireland is now. I hardly know where I am. My father's country had first a queen to rule it, and then a king, and then another king. It was a more scholarly, a more Shakespearean world, it was more like a story. (95)

The passage exposes very clearly the myth-making elements of collective memory. Returning again to the idea of memory as the creation of a "usable past" (Wertsch 2002, 31) which becomes a site of contestation, we may see Annie's narrative of the past as an alternative version which like all narratives of the past has a tendency to be configured into story, to construct "meaningful totalities out of scattered events" (Ricoeur 1981, 278). Further she is isolated from those who might have shared in this minority narrative, not so much by her physical deformity as by the patriarchal nature of the society which has meant that her deformity has had such devastating effects on her existence. Her consequent isolation manifests itself in her barely concealed hostility to most of her Wicklow neighbours. The climax of the story is reached when the little boy she is looking after, whom she loves in her own selfish way, goes missing after an outburst of anger by Annie in which "my words strike harsh clouds across his eyes, I dim his lights for him" (176). In a moment of revelation, Annie, undergoing fear and despair that her anger may have resulted in harm to the child, sees help coming:

For it is Billy Kerr with the leading torch. And that is Mary Callan at this side, heaving with a lack of breath. And there surely is Mrs Nicodemus. And those faces are the faces of men I see as I pass, but do not greet, labourers of the O'Tooles and the more stately O'Tooles themselves. (210)

Mrs Nicodemus is the woman from the village shop and Mary Callan has been dismissed as "a dirty old woman that lives in filth" much earlier in the novel (28). The key point is the revelation which comes to Annie immediately after the sight of the search party, "So there is a district. It is myself that has no district, no sense of it, but it is there, despite me" (210). Wertsch in his discussion of social memory distinguishes implicit from imagined communities, pointing out that implicit communities can become imagined communities and this is what happens for Annie here (2002, 63–65). While she has felt excluded from a collective and popular memory which has transformed the imagined community of the nation into one which in her view is peopled by gunmen and glorifies the "language of gobbaws and cottagers", there remains the community of the district, a community she has failed to recognize. Barry's novels often argue against the inhumanity of too much loyalty to a political cause, a loyalty which causes suffering to the individual but this is not to suppose that they are a celebration of individualism. Community still matters, but it is community created out of living in a shared space, not out of devotion to an abstract ideal.

Annie is portrayed as dwelling within what might be termed a minority collective memory, that of Catholic unionists, loyal to British rule. Annie's isolation from others who might think like her, means that she carries the memory of that minority collective within her own head, and in her case, she does not question it. Nevertheless, even for this isolated woman there is a community which in turn has its own social memory built out of the events which happen within the neighbourhood and from time to time impinge on Annie, and which by the end of the novel she is able to imagine.

The best known of the Dunne novels, *A Long Long Way* published in 2005, differs from the others discussed in this article in that it is not written from the perspective of an older person whose past, and its relationship to the past of the nation, has a particular significance for his or her present life. Its relating of past to present is of a different order, and connects with its readership within Ireland and the Irish diaspora in that it challenges the popular memory of the nation by introducing complexity into a collective memory which like all popular and collective memory is inevitably simplified. *A Long Long Way* is the story of Thomas Dunne's son, Annie's brother Willie who enlists in the army in 1914 and meets his death towards the end of the conflict.

Since 1998, numerous contributions, mainly historical have been published on the involvement of Irishmen in the First World War, and literary studies are also emerging, including two full length studies (Brearton 2000; Haughey 2002). The idea that the newly independent Irish state was complicit in repressing memory of the involvement of Irish soldiers in the conflict out of what Declan Kiberd called an anxiety "to repudiate its own origins" (1996, 240) has more recently been challenged by Keith Jeffery who has disputed Kiberd's use of the term "extirpate" in relation to public memory, "a strong word and clearly inappropriate" and argued against the "myth of 'national amnesia'" suggesting that the reality was more complex (2011, 255-257). According to Jeffery the period of amnesia occurred later, from the 1940s to the 1950s. Nevertheless the involvement of an estimated 210,000 Irishmen in the conflict was not a matter of national celebration and Barry's family shared with a great many other families a member who was involved in the conflict, and such men may be included among history's forgotten people. The novel does serve to represent their stories via the portrayal of Willie Dunne and his fellow Irish soldiers, and speaks most powerfully for the individual caught up in conflict, and in the case of the central character in an ideological divide.

While the novel may be seen as contesting the absence of the First World War from Irish popular memory, there are other ways in which it does not dissent from a more transnational popular one. It shares with much fiction written both immediately after the war and later, a sense of disillusion, which has survived as the predominant, though not exclusive popular memory of the war despite the efforts of some historians to revise popular understanding of the conflict. Several incidents in the novel suggest the unremitting horrors of life on

the Western Front. Witnessing the wounding of a private from Aughrim, who is left screaming on the floor of the trench, before being taken to what Willie considers his ultimate death either at a casualty clearing station or in hospital, he reflects that a horse would be treated better by being shot to put it out of its misery (Barry 2005, 67-68). By 1917 he has ceased to believe in the war:

It was that Death himself had made those things ridiculous. Death was the King of England, Scotland and Ireland. The King of France. Of India, Germany, Italy, Russia [...]

You couldn't blame King George, God knew. You couldn't even hardly blame the fucking Kaiser. Not any more. Death now had a hold on the whole matter.

And his loyalty, his old faith in the cause, as a man might say, a dozen times so sorely tested, was dying in Willie Dunne. An ember maybe only remaining, for his father's sake. (279)

One of the features of popular memory of the First World War when it is remembered is the exaggerated perception of the 'lost generation' and there is a way in which *A Long Long Way* for all Barry's resistance to popular memory reinforces this. By the time of his death which occurs with that "terrible irony" which Paul Fussell points to as the prevailing mode of literature about the war (1977, 3-35), in late 1918, Willie is totally disillusioned with the conflict. The narrator represents him as seeing four angels at his death, one of whom has the face of the first German he killed. There follows what can only be read as an expression of the futility of all violent conflict, although it is specifically focused on Ireland:

A soul in the upshot must be a little thing, since so many were expended freely, and as if weightless. For a king, an empire and a promised country. It must be that that country was in itself a worthless spot, for all the dreams and the convictions of that place were discounted. There was nothing of it that did not pass quickly away. Nothing of worth to keep. Some thirty thousand souls of that fell country did not register in the scales of God. (Barry 2005, 290)

For all that it conforms to one aspect of popular memory of the First World War, its destructive effects, this passage challenges other aspects. It confronts the element of amnesia which has surrounded the memory of Irishmen who fought and who died in the conflict but it confronts also, as indeed does the novel as a whole, the simply binary of the nationalist who refused to fight for the Empire on the one hand and the opponent of nationalism who fought loyally for the Empire on the other. Willie is no nationalist but by the end of the novel he has no loyalty to the Empire or to any cause.

The novel indeed subtly undermines the linguistic representation which is one of the cultural tools contributing to collective memory. Fentress and Wickham point to the fact that memory is in part structured by language (1992, 7) while Wertsch alludes to the role of "textual mediation" in the formation of collective memory (2002, 26). The narrator comments on the

way in which Willie and his comrades heartily sing “Tipperary” “as if most of them weren’t city-boys but hailed from the verdant fields of that county”, commenting that “Even the coolies sang ‘Tipperary’ while they dug” and in spite of the fact that they all are Irish they sing “Take me back to Dear Old Blighty”, “even though none of them were from dear old Blighty” (Barry 20005, 57). This is important as, certainly in English war memory, particularly after the stage musical *O What A Lovely War* of 1963 and its successful film adaptation in 1969, such songs contributed to the image of the typical Tommy as a cheerful cockney, no more true than the pastoral exile portrayed by Rupert Brooke which formed a key component of an earlier generation’s memory. Barry’s readers in the twenty-first century whether Irish, English or American cannot but be aware of such stereotypes.

On a later occasion, crouched in his trench and experiencing a gas attack, Willie reflects:

It was the thing before a joke was fashioned about it, before an anecdote was conjured up to make it safe, before a proper story in the newspaper, before some fellow with the wits would make a history of it. In the bleakness of its birth there was an unsullied truth, this tiny event that might make a corpse of him and his proper dreams. (111)

This is a profound reflection on the evolution of human social memory, from the joke and the anecdote through the newspaper report until it becomes the subject of historical analysis. The first two stages reflect autobiographical memory, and the phrase “make it safe” highlights the psychological motivation of what human beings do with their experience in this instance to make it something they can live with. Only in “the bleakness of its birth”, in direct experience, not remembered experience is there “unsullied truth”.

The novel’s particularly Irish dimension is provided by Willie’s encounter with the Easter Rising. He meets two men who have a strong influence on him: a new recruit from Cork, Jesse Kirwan who has just enlisted and a young rebel whose death he witnesses on the streets of Dublin. Willie is politically naive, indeed ignorant, one of what Christina Mahony describes as Barry’s naïfs (2006, 83-4) and when Kirwan explains to him what is happening, his first response is anger, having witnessed the death of so many of his fellow Irishmen in the war. Nevertheless, the experience leads him to write a fatal letter to his father in which he says in relation to the execution of the rebels, “I wish they had not seen fit to shoot them. It doesn’t feel right somehow” (Barry 2005, 139). From this springs the personal dimension which exacerbates the tragedy of Willie’s ultimate death. His father makes his displeasure clear and Willie meets his death before he receives his father’s letter of reconciliation. Not for the only time in Barry’s writing the political and the personal are brought into conflict. The divisions which are emerging in Ireland increase the suffering of one individual caught up in a different horrific conflict, who did not want to be bound by political affiliation but who reflects

when he first hears Jesse's arguments, "a person should listen to another person first, and be sure of what was being said" (96). This is a key comment. It is the not-listening of political ideologues on various sides, and in turn their role in the creation of memory which constitutes tragedy for Barry's individuals.

A Long Long Way challenges popular and collective memory, or rather forgetting, by its very existence, providing a cultural tool which becomes a reminder of the involvement of large numbers of Irishmen in the First World War. Within the account are reminders of the way in which memory is mediated by language. Like *Annie Dunne*, the novel while it sustains imaginative sympathy with one of history's outsiders, demonstrates intransigence by some characters who support the unionist position. The novel's hero however displays the reverse of such intransigence, his ability to listen to others may be compared to Annie's discovery of "the district".

The third of Willie's sisters, the child Lilly, nicknamed Dolly in *A Long Long Way*, is the subject of Barry's recent novel, *On Canaan's Side*, published in 2011. The story is set towards the end of the century and is the account, written in the first person, of the seventeen days between the suicide of Lilly's grandson, Bill, as a consequence of his involvement in the Iraq war and her own intended suicide. It interweaves the story of Lilly's last days with the memories of her youth, her enforced flight from Ireland with Tadg Bere, under sentence of death as a soldier implicated in a Black and Tan attack on a group of IRA men, and eventually killed by an avenging gunman in Chicago. If the closing scenes of *A Long Long Way* suggested an Ireland which was in some sense cursed, "a worthless spot" since "Some thirty thousand souls of that fell country did not register in the scales of God" (290), Ireland's curse, if such it may be called is revealed in *On Canaan's Side*, to be in fact the world's curse. The significance of the novel in Barry's oeuvre is that it takes us beyond Ireland, although Ireland's shadow remains until the end when Lilly's dying friend Mr Nolan confesses that he is the murderer of Tadg. Early in her account, Lilly reflects, "The one thread maybe, from Bill to my brother Willie, all the way back, through how many wars is that, it must be at least three? No, it is four. Four killing wars, with all those sons milled into them, and daughters these times too" (Barry 2011, 28-9).

She might have added a fifth war, the Korean War. Her doctor tells her, "We were obliged in my generation to go to Korea, that was my war, Mrs Bere. I was eighteen in 1950", emphasizing both his youth and his lack of choice (87). As her narrative comes to an end, the link with Willie is made again, "He knows nothing about the desert where he is going, to fight for his country. He has used that exact phrase, just seconds before, putting me back to my father's old sitting-room in Dublin Castle and Willie making the same fateful declaration" (232). It is not just in Ireland where bonds of loyalty to the abstract concept called nation have been the cause of so much suffering as the novel's reference to death and destruction in places as far apart as South-East Asia and the Middle East makes clear.

As reminiscence, the story combines autobiographical memory with collective memory. Lilly's memories are vivid and indeed sometimes border on direct re-experiencing (Wertsch 2002, 46-8), rather than semantically mediated memory. In the final chapter as she moves towards her last act she thinks of her sisters Maud and Annie, her brother Willie and her father. "There is never a day goes by that we don't drink a strange cup of tea together, in some peculiar parlour-room at the back of my mind" (Barry 2011, 251). Her memory of the death of Tadg includes a memory of a moment of experiencing through the senses rather than language, when the sight of his blood on her clothes recalls the sight of blood on her aunt's apron after the slaughtering of a pig on her aunt's farm in Wicklow. Re-experiencing through the senses is an element in recall which Fentress and Wickham highlight (1992, 31-32). In turn she recalls this occurrence of sensual memory through the language of the reminiscence, eight decades later.

Her autobiographical memories are unusually closely bound up with the narrative of collective memory which she terms history, and thinking of her son Ed who after serving in Vietnam withdrew from ordinary life to live out in the wild in the mountains of North Carolina, she wonders how much of her own inner sadness she has communicated to him. Comparing herself to Typhoid Mary, she says, "The poison, the extract of deadly nightshade in me, was history" (206). This acceptance of responsibility for what happens to her son, is typical of Lilly's attitude to the past which contrasts profoundly with that of her sister Annie, in *Annie Dunne*. Where Annie appropriates certain right to what she sees as her own side, Lilly is less sure when considering her father's role in the War of Independence, and wonders if he has had some role in the ill-treatment of the rebels which she has read about. Then she reflects, "I do not know how much such histories are weighted against the losers, in this case men like my father, loyal to kings and the dead queen, but I am sure there was evil and cruelty on both sides" (41). The old woman expresses an undoubted truth about the emergence of a dominant collective memory, of which so many of her own family have been the victim but her knowledge of human nature leads her to acknowledge that neither one side nor the other is likely to have monopolised right, and that in relation to the kind of man her father was, she herself "perhaps invented him as a child" (42), thus drawing out the subjectivity of autobiographical memory. This thought demonstrates the way in which autobiographical memory interacts with collective memory, as the father created by her own act of remembering influences her judgement of the actors who form part of the wider collective memory. During her early days in Chicago, before the murder of Tadg she rejoices in a place where "there was no history", reflecting:

[...] as my father's daughter, unthinkingly, I had lived as a little girl and young woman through a certain kind of grievous history, where one thing is always being knocked against another thing. Where my father's respect for the King was knocked

against Tadg's father being in the Irish Volunteers, where Willie's going out to war was knocked against his dying, [...] Where the very fact of my being alive was knocked against the fact that my mother had died in giving me that life. (71-2)

It is a testament to the complications of personal and political history. Loyalty to the King, membership of the Volunteers and enrolment in the army are actions of individuals, and their consequences are curiously mixed of good and bad just as the birth of Lilly was.

Lilly is more directly affected than Annie by the political actions of those around her. While Annie endures an unfulfilled life which though embittered by remembrance is caused by very different factors, Lilly endures something different, the implacable personal hatred of those on the other side which results in the death of Tadg and threats to herself, "they wouldn't allow us to cross into Canaan, but would follow over us over the river, and kill him on Canaan's side" (82). Added to this is the fate of her son and grandson. Lilly, like Willie learns a lesson which Annie fails to learn. Having been given a pot of Greek honey by the local chemist, Mr Eugenides, she reflects, "Greece, America, Arabia, Ireland. Home places. Nowhere on earth not a home place [...] Everywhere a home place for someone, and therefore for us all" (58). It is an acceptance of diversity, a recognition of each individual's right to their own feelings of loyalty. However, there are limits to Lilly's generosity, and the implacable hatred of at least one enemy proves less implacable than might have been supposed. Mr Nolan, having been the agent who killed Tadg and might possibly have killed Lilly too if he had had the chance, later befriends the lonely woman, though he knows full well who she is. Lilly herself for once is less generous and when he has confessed his past she cannot forgive him.

On Canaan's Side is the only one of the Dunne group of novels considered here to be in the form of a formal reminiscence. It asks important questions of how autobiographical as well as collective memory is informed, for example the role of language and sensory perception in autobiographical recall, and the relationship of autobiographical and collective memory. While recognising the diversity of loyalty to one's home place, it challenges the notion of patriotism which results in bloodshed. Unlike Annie, Lilly is capable of questioning her own version of the past.

These three novels demonstrate in varying degrees the price paid by members of the Dunne family for being on the wrong side, for being what Lilly terms history's "losers". The accounts privilege the individual and the personal over the collective, as well as challenging the simplicity of popular and collective memory. Each includes a significant moment if not always of friendship across divides at least of a sense of a common humanity: Willie's connection with Jesse Kirwan, Billy Kerr's support for Annie, and Mr Nolan's friendship to Lilly. Only in the last novel discussed does autobiographical as opposed to collective memory play a really significant role.

The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty and *The Secret Scripture*, are linked narratives of two members of the McNulty family. In contrast to the Dunnes with their significant role in the capital city, the McNultys are a very ordinary family, although they do claim a descent from more affluent ancestors. Where these novels focus on memory it is the social memory of a small town community although this in turn is influenced and interacts with a wider collective memory. *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* deals with the effect of this social memory on one individual whereas *The Secret Scripture* is much more about the process of remembering and the interaction of autobiographical memory with collective and social memory.

The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty, published in 1998 is the life story of the McNultys' eldest son Eneas, based on the story of Barry's great uncle, told not through Eneas's recollections but in the immediacy of a third person present tense narration. We learn of Eneas at the beginning of the story: "All about him the century has just begun, a century some of which he will endure but none of which will belong to him" (Barry 1998, 3). This statement might have been made of the Dunne family and could stand collectively for the group of history's outsiders which forms the subject matter of so much of Barry's work. Eneas is indeed represented almost from the start as an exile, not unlike his classical namesake, who flees from Troy in Virgil's epic. His troubles begin at the age of five when three siblings appear in rapid succession, so that having been the centre of his family's life he is at the age of eight the eldest of four children, "Driven from his little kingdom, an exiled being, shorn of his mighty privileges" (14).

Like Willie Dunne, Eneas makes the decision, during the First World War to enlist. His reasons are loss of the companionship of a childhood friend and lack of achievement compared to other members of his family. Trivial reasons perhaps to make such a life changing, indeed life threatening decision, but not dissimilar from Willie, another of Barry's naifs, and of course mirroring those made across Europe, for a whole range of inconsequential reasons that often had little to do with king, country or empire, however they might be viewed in a retrospective and collectivised memory. For Eneas it proves utterly life-changing. On his return home, as an ex-soldier he can find no work and joins the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). The key moment in his story, the moment which renders him an exile, whose whereabouts, fore grounded in the novel's title must be forever hidden occurs when after his return to Sligo he is visited by his old and much-loved childhood friend Jonno Lynch, now an IRA man. Lynch represents his leader O'Dowd and offers him the opportunity to have his name removed from the blacklist and perhaps even more importantly to Eneas the promise of "you and me going round again, like the old days" in return for one simple act- the killing of the Reprisal Man. Eneas's response is simple "I couldn't do that" (82-3). He struggles to explain that having witnessed the cold-blooded murder of his sergeant he couldn't do likewise, but Jonno's reply is devastatingly simple, "you're dead" (84).

Doomed to permanent exile, Eneas never loses his love for home. Having once more enlisted in the British army, he is stranded at Dunkirk, and after the supply of rescue boats appears to have failed, finds himself working on the land of Jean, a French farmer whose sons have been killed by the advancing German army. There is an unstated suggestion that here he has usurped the place of Jean's sons which in turn is a haunting reminder of his own long lost place on his father's hearth. It prompts memories of his lost homeland, "He would like to describe that home place, but the words for it have begun to desert him [...] He is a vine uprooted, and the cold white roots are tarnishing in the swimming air" (151). Fentress and Wickham discuss the way in which the act of remembering has a social dimension and it is the fate of the exile not to have the community which can confirm and reinforce his memories via the process of recognition, recall and articulation (1992, 26). It is a very powerful image expressing a profound sense of loss and which represents the underlying theme of the novel- the unnatural and destructive effect of Eneas's exile. Not long after, discharged from the army after a mental breakdown he does return and in spite of finding a very imperfect world, from which once more threats drive him away, he reflects on "the world he prefers for all its maggots and mysteries" (Barry 1998, 200).

The alliterative pairing provides a good enough description of what he finds in the Sligo of The Emergency. He returns to Ireland full of hope that at last his past will be forgotten, but as he embarks on the train journey out of Dublin:

He smells Ireland outside the window of the train, and she smells very much the same as always, as twenty years ago she smelled. Trouble, trouble [...] in all these things he senses as he sits in the knocking train the old strains and presences of trouble, even there, four hundred miles from Sligo. (166)

The reader here might justifiably object that nothing as yet has happened to him to account for the sudden destruction of his optimism, but what the passage does very effectively is to analyse the operation of autobiographical remembering. A romantic longing for his lost Eden has taken him from the shores of England but in a way which recalls Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, once his senses have been awakened by the smells of his homeland, the memories, not all of them good, which he struggled to recall semiotically in France come flooding back via sensual re-experiencing. His premonitions prove all too sound and the following fifteen pages or so present an anything but flattering version of small town life in independent Ireland.

In an interview, questioned about a postcolonial analysis of his dramatic writing Barry responded somewhat enigmatically, "I must confess I have no real relationship with the adjective "postcolonial or "postmodern" for that matter. Maybe this is truly postcolonial and postmodern" (Kurdi, Barry 2004, 43). It is however difficult to avoid a postcolonial analysis of this part of the novel. It begins with his welcome by his parents into their new bungalow

which abounds in those “maggots and mysteries”. His father is revealed as the marginal figure he has probably always been, and his mother is represented as desirous of advancing her family in very traditional rather than radical ways, “His mother has sewn flowers into cloths and draped them over the set of seats, a sofa and these stiff, clerical chairs. It all looks like a priest’s parlour. His father is maybe afeared of the great cleanliness, of the great strangeness of it all” (Barry 1998, 170). This is consistent with Eneas’s observation of the town’s matrons at the celebration of the signing of the treaty twenty years earlier “who now consider themselves as good as their Protestant neighbours” and recalls Frantz Fanon’s postcolonial analysis of a class who keep intact “the manners and forms of thought of the colonial era” (1973, 37).

Tom is now mayor of the town and has taken an all too familiar route to power, taking full advantage of the opportunities created by wartime shortages:

It might be wartime for Joe Soap, but for Young Tom it’s harvest time. Petrol, oil, chocolate, sugar, soap even - all legal and above board, of course. Nothing ever passes through his hands. It’s just- he accommodates the free flow of goods. In the interests of the town, the corporation. These are hard times for everyone. (Barry 1998, 175)

The link of political and economic power and the failure of the new state to offer any radical response to the deeply embedded inequalities left over from colonial rule are all too apparent, and again recall Fanon’s comments about the new bourgeoisie who find a means of “getting on through scheming and legal robbery” (Fanon 1973, 37). The erstwhile revolutionaries have benefited from the new dispensation, new only in that the power structures have different occupants. The old Republican leader, O’Dowd now lives in a big house and Eneas’s old friend, turned enemy Jonno Lynch is to be the next mayor. Eneas leaves once more after receiving a threatening letter and makes one final visit to Sligo in the late 1950s, where he finds things little changed with Jonno and O’Dowd now into beef, “the coming thing [...] We never touch a bullock but we’re in the beef business. Paperwork. Mighty” (Barry 1998, 260). In post-Celtic Tiger Ireland these words carry even more significance for the reader than they carried in 1998.

The dominance of his mother in the family home is symptomatic of a patriarchal society in which the home is the only place where women can wield influence. There are mysteries surrounding both his brothers’ wives which, once again, are never fully resolved in the pages of this novel. Eneas’s visit home has shown him a society in which he and his like are the new oppressed and marginalised figures, in which power and material advantage are the preserve of those whom the complex process of social remembering has privileged in this small community. In the interests of social cohesion, uncomfortable facts concerning Eneas’s brothers’ wives are not talked about, memories and histories are suppressed.

For all that Eneas's story is largely that of a lonely exile, as in all these novels there is a reaching out to others, and as in the much later *On Canaan's Side* there is a dimension which takes us well beyond the shores of Ireland. After his second expulsion from Sligo in the 1940s, Eneas encounters Harcourt, a Nigerian and the two of them spend several years working on an engineering project in Nigeria. Harcourt is the only person in the course of Eneas's wanderings who succeeds Jonno Lynch to the title friend. He eventually suffers a fate remarkably similar to that of Eneas when Nigerian patriots come looking for him, as they see him as an imperialist collaborator. The similarity of their fates underlines once more the way in which any cause both unites and divides, the tyranny one might say of ideology over the individual human being, "there is freedom for Nigeria [... but] Eneas and Harcourt are scraps of people both, blown off the road of life by history's hungry breezes" (284).

And yet again there is the recognition just as in *Annie Dunne* of the importance of community. On that final visit to Sligo in 1959, Eneas leaves not because he is threatened but in response to a letter from Harcourt. He uses his new found wealth – many years of an uncollected war pension – to set up with Harcourt the Northern Lights Hotel in the Isle of Dogs. Here on the Isle of Dogs, if not a literal island, a name suggestive of the despised and the marginal there are hints of another kind of non-political community, a bit like Annie Dunne's "district", though more deliberately brought into existence and imagined. It is the possibility of an alternative utopia. For these two exiles it is their "homeland and home, though homeland and home have but two citizens" (284). Here they "receive the battered wanderers, the weary sailors, the refugees from ferocious lives, the distressed alcoholics," and when anyone dies they observe "the proper obsequies of their inmates whether Methodist, Jewish, Baptist or renegade" (285). There is a strong moral message here, if perhaps a little sentimentalised.

It ends with the return of Jonno Lynch and another man to carry out the long postponed death sentence, but the manner of the ending is not what the reader expects. Jonno is apparently killed in the fight which ensues and Eneas and Harcourt set the hotel on fire to avoid the consequences. As they escape the flames, Eneas hears a groan from Jonno emerging into consciousness and at the door of the Northern Lights hotel he makes a choice between his new friend and that old childhood friend whom he has always regretted. In a doomed attempt at rescue he meets his own death. The figure from that Sligo childhood from which he has never managed to detach himself has drawn him back.

The end is therefore personal, not political. Barry has been criticised for a somewhat idealistic portrayal of the policeman Eneas and men like him (Cullingford 2006) but Eneas is, like most of Barry's protagonists, a flawed central character, in his case a man who does not make friends easily and who has never quite recovered from the childhood sense of rejection he experienced between the ages of five and eight. The novel deals with history's outsiders but most importantly evokes pity for the exile – an exile forced from a social group which

maintains divisive power structures of which he is the new victim. The new society demonstrates the power of memory. Eneas is never to be allowed to forget his past. In the process of demonstrating this, the novel does make important political points about the Ireland of the decades which follow Eneas's original exile.

An element of this is the treatment of women. This has even more relevance to *The Secret Scripture* as does the role of the church touched on only slightly in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*. This novel, more than any of the others considered here highlights the elaborate processes which together constitute autobiographical, social and collective memory. The narrative method of *The Secret Scripture*, set in the early years of the present century foregrounds the issue of memory, and of memory's relation to history in that it takes the form of two written accounts, the diary of the psychiatrist Dr Grene who looks after inmates who include Roseanne Clear, and which is in turn informed by the other documents which come into his possession, and Roseanne's written account of her past life. In this novel, the postcolonial analysis of the new Ireland in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* is supplemented by the treatment of the Catholic church and of the position of women. The novel lays bare the tragedy of Roseanne Clear, the wife of Tom McNulty, Eneas's brother. One of the chief architects of that tragedy is Father Gaunt, whom with one of those wonderful poetic passages which characterise Barry's writing, Roseanne early in her account characterises thus:

Fr Gaunt was young and might have been expected to feel a special kinship for the slain. But Fr Gaunt was so clipped and trim he had no antennae at all for grief. He was like a singer who knows the words and can sing but cannot sing the song as conceived in the heart of the composer. (Barry 2008, 36-37)

It is a powerful metaphor for the religious person who has imbibed all the rules but lacks any element of spirituality. Gaunt thus becomes the agent without feeling of the power of the church. Much later, when reading Fr Gaunt's deposition, Grene reflects on De Valera's privileging of the church and wonders if "such all-knowing, stem-minded and entirely unforgiving priests still exist" (227). After a lengthy reflection on some of De Valera's subsequent actions, including acting against some of his erstwhile allies, he concludes that "De Valera is greatly to be pitied that he was met with these necessary horrors" (228). And goes on to reflect:

Perhaps here we can trace the origin of the strange criminality of the last generation of politicians in Ireland, not to mention so many priests being found to have moved across the innocence of our children with the harrows and ploughshares of abuse. The absolute power of such as Fr Gaunt leading as day does to night to absolute corruption. (228)

Grene, the fictional psychiatrist's analysis of the effects of the circumstances of the foundation of the state find an interesting echo in the words of the hi-

storian Kevin Whelan commenting recently on the issue of memory, “Violence then becomes the originating moment in the mobilisation of collective identity, where cultural memory becomes a storage system of violence, wounds, scars, anger, where the past bleeds uncontrollably into the present” (Whelan 2005, 4).

Roseanne’s story is a story of a victim of absolute power, directed as so often against women. After her father’s death, Gaunt sees her as a threat “a mournful temptation, not only to the boys of Sligo but also, the men” (Barry 2008, 94). Gaunt is central to the two key events which dictate Roseanne’s destiny. The first is the annulment of her marriage to Tom McNulty on the evidence of Fr Gaunt witnessing her meeting with a certain John Lavelle on Knocknarea, by the tomb of Queen Maeve, a location suggesting a time when women had much greater power. The meeting results in her isolation for several years in her former marital home. When Gaunt returns after several years he tells her that her marriage has been annulled on the grounds of nymphomania, “Something like this is never granted lightly. Deep deep thought at Rome, and my own bishop of course. Weighing everything, sifting through everything” (223). “Everything” includes everyone’s evidence except the voiceless Roseanne’s. This is on the grounds of one single indiscretion. To say his account leaves the reader somewhat sceptical is an understatement.

His second intervention in her life comes when alone and helpless, having been turned from the elder Mrs McNulty’s door, she gives birth on the beach near Strandhill to the child whom no-one but herself knows is the child of Eneas. The child is taken from her while she is unconscious and Fr Gaunt has it removed and sent for adoption to England. Apparently on his evidence she is then institutionalised.

It is at the end of this long period of institutionalisation now a very old woman and a patient in a Roscommon hospital for the treatment of psychological disorders that she begins her written account. This is presented alongside the diary of her psychiatrist Dr Grene. Dr Grene’s attempt to construct Roseanne’s history from her verbal answers to his questions is informed by the deposition of Father Gaunt recovered from the original institution in Sligo in which she was confined and supplemented at the end by further investigations. Only near the end of the novel does he discover Roseanne’s written account. A consideration of some recent theories of memory, particularly the importance of articulation in the process of remembering (Fentress, Wickham 1992, 7) sheds light on why this very old woman might be represented as having undertaken this act. If we cannot remember without recourse to information from the world we inhabit, since memory is an inherently socially constructed act, then memory in isolation is all but impossible. Roseanne’s narrative may be seen as a process of remembering, committed to paper in a desperate effort to give her almost impossibly maintained memory in isolation the authority of the written word. This is given additional pathos by the consideration that Roseanne’s memories will inevitably run counter to the social memory of the

district. The spurious authority of the written word is recognised by Dr Grene when he receives a copy of Father Gaunt's deposition from the Sligo mental hospital and struggles to contain his excitement, reminding himself that "the written word assumes authority but it may not have it" (135).

The need to find authority, to find the final arbiter who can order memories, in Grene's case springs from his professional experience of the fallibility of memory, which on one occasion he describes as "the absolute fascist certainty of memory, the bullying oppression of memory" (178).

Struggling to make sense of her own memories, Roseanne writes, in less abstract language using another of those wonderful homely images Barry creates for his characters:

Memory, I must suppose, if it is neglected becomes like a box room, or a lumber room in an old house, the contents jumbled about, maybe not only from neglect but also from too much haphazard searching in them, and things to boot thrown in that don't belong there. (201)

This articulates not merely the plight in which Roseanne finds herself but the conscious reflections of Lilly about the reliability of memory, as well as Eneas's struggles to recall his lost homeland. Roseanne, at the beginning of her account of her life recognises that history is a narrative in that it inevitably includes elements of selection and organisation as it seeks order in the lumber room of memories and records. She writes that certain aspects of her father "embarrassed history" because he was not clearly on one side or another and therefore his life did not fit with any predominant narrative. She suggests that human beings depend on a heroic version of events, and that facts are often distorted to fit such a version, "History needs to be mightily inventive about human life [...] My own story, anyone's own story is always told against me, even what I myself am writing here, because I have no heroic history to offer" (55).

History's impulse to turn events into story and into founding heroic myth too easily becomes an impulse to oversimplification. The link between history and memory is summed up by Grene himself when he has learned what one hesitates to call the truth, that he himself is in fact Roseanne's long lost son, and speculates on the motivations of the man who brought them together, "Well, I supposed all these things. It is not history. But I am beginning to wonder strongly what is the nature of history. Is it only memory in decent sentences, and if so, how reliable is it? I would suggest, not very" (293). This might be seen as a partial view since academic history which Grene dismisses as "memory in decent sentences" will also include painstaking research in archives. Nevertheless the role of memory, certainly in the selection of historical narrative cannot be too lightly dismissed.

The events of the novel, which may be summed up as two individuals' encounter with the past, have prompted this final declaration of uncertainty from a man so desirous of obtaining written records. The stories of Roseanne's

past, compiled from her own memories, from Father Gaunt's deposition and from unspecified "official records" are confusing and contradictory. What may be ascertained with certainty is that Roseanne's father died a violent death when she was a young woman. In Roseanne's version he died by his own hand, after a series of personal misfortunes consequent on having lost his job at the town's cemetery, after an incident in the Civil War in which he was asked to bury a Republican who has been killed by Free State soldiers, Willie Lavelle, the brother of John Lavelle. Roseanne, then aged fourteen, was sent to fetch Father Gaunt to give the last rites, and subsequently held to have informed on the men, when the Free State soldiers arrived and arrested them. In Father Gaunt's version Roseanne's father was a member of the RIC, killed by rebels for his part in the death of Willie Lavelle, killed "evading capture" by RIC men after Roseanne had witnessed the hiding of guns and information in a grave in the cemetery where she often played. The cemetery and Roseanne's role as well as the identity of the dead man point to a common source for the story. Roseanne insists throughout that her father was never a member of the RIC, but official records, eventually discovered by Grene say that he was. Roseanne's story is the one the reader encounters first and the detail gives it a ring of authenticity.

This credibility is however balanced by the curious tale of the hammers and feathers. Roseanne recounts an earlier incident, when she was ten, and her father sought to conduct an experiment to prove that everything fell at the same rate. He took her to the long thin tower in the graveyard and bade her watch while he threw hammers and feathers out of the window. At the end of the novel, having read Father Gaunt's account, Grene tells us that he was murdered by the rebels in the tower using hammers and stuffing his mouth with feathers. Grene opts for this as more likely, after a lengthy speculation on the effects of trauma on Roseanne's memory. However the reader is not allowed too easy a resolution – Grene checks Gaunt's account and finds it mentions only hammers and not feathers. Grene's memory has cheated him. Yet, he says he read it before he found Roseanne's manuscript. He then decides, having toyed with all kinds of interpretations that Roseanne must have told him of the incident at some time in the past. The only tenable conclusion is that we will never know. There is however a key political consideration. Roseanne's account has her father unwillingly and unwittingly involved in an incident in the Civil War. In what might almost be regarded as the officially sanctioned account by Father Grene he is killed in the War of Independence. Barry himself has commented:

The civil war was a time of exceptional savagery, and our history books at school didn't dwell on this less admirable period. To erase the memory of the civil war was also an erasure of part of oneself, and again of nation. A real nation has to acknowledge also the section of itself that is murderous and dangerous and deeply uncivil. (Barry 2013)

Barry has been accused by some critics of collaborating with what they see as a programme of historical revisionism. (Kenny 2005; Cullingford 2006) Part

of his project is certainly the recovery of characters written out of history. But it is these characters themselves, characters such as Annie, Eneas and Roseanne, flawed and often inarticulate characters who are the real and very powerful subject of his novels. His novels do problematise history and memory but the problematising includes Lilly's questioning of the minority version of history to which she subscribes, and *The Secret Scripture* highlights the ambiguity and complexity of memory, rather than privileging any one version. If the novels have any political project it is a project to place humanity before issues of allegiance, whether it be to nation, or political grouping. What might be termed a postcolonial analysis of Irish society, seen particularly in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *The Secret Scripture* embraces a condemnation of the power of the church and of certain kinds of economic exploitation which would be shared by many commentators writing from a nationalist perspective. The condemnation of certain kinds of patriotic fervour and blind allegiance has a significance not just for Ireland but, as we see in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *On Canaan's Side* in places far beyond Ireland's shores.

Notes

¹The appearance of an RTE website, *Century Ireland*, and last year's conference in Dublin hosted by the Institute for Cross Border Studies are only two examples of current concern with commemoration.

²Other well-known literary works include two plays: Frank McGuinness's play, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1986) and more recently Dermot Bolger's *Walking the Road* (2007) and one novel, Jennifer Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1974).

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Toying with Alternatives: Off-Center Resistance as Creation in the Poetry of Derek Mahon

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Abstract:

Since 2005, in the collections of the Northern Irish poet Derek Mahon, ex-centricity and resistance have played a central role in his depiction of contemporary world changes affecting Ireland. Dealing with globalization, the economic crisis, increased immigration and climate change, Mahon tackles the major challenges of our day while defining a framework to his own agenda as poet and inhabitant of the earth. As these concerns appear very explicitly in the poems, three main tropes shape his poetic response: resistance and flight, migration, and the constant search for alternative modes of creation and living. He achieves these through the delimitation of unmapped spaces or abandoned sites, usually on the periphery.

Keywords: Derek Mahon, margin, migration, periphery, resistance

The poetry of Derek Mahon is international in its scope and local in the minute observation of its surroundings. Mahon's scrutinizing poetic eye bears testimony not only to the beauty and calamity of the natural world, but also to the seismic changes faced by the societies of today. As Mahon witnesses the crumbling of the world economic systems as well as the destruction of the environment, he explores the causes and consequences of both on humanity as a whole and on his own poetic stance. It is particularly striking that throughout his career, Mahon's poetry has often been deemed to be, to use an expression from the poem "First Love", "at one remove" (1999, 18) from the political turmoil of Northern Ireland because of his refusal to comment on it. Detachment and distantiation, both intellectual and geographical, have been indeed at the centre of his poetic programme for many years. In recent collections, it seems that a more politically engaged voice is to be heard, or at least one more explicitly concerned with the ills of current society, in what Mahon calls in the poem "Insomnia" from *Life on Earth* these "interesting times" (2008, 23). Recent collections such as *Harbour Lights* (2005), *Life on*

Earth (2008) and *An Autumn Wind* (2010) thus focus on the financial crisis and on the urgency of facing the challenge of pollution and climate change.

Such topical concerns may seem surprising coming from a poet whose ironical take on social questions has been frequent. This change of perspective in Mahon's writing is a fascinating reminder of the relevance of poetry as a commentary on the present. Moreover, the opening of new trajectories nourishes and renews the interest Mahon has always had for place. The poet's concern for cartography, displacement, home, and his own quest for the "right place" all participate in a mapping of extraordinary spaces: transit vistas, abandoned sites, peripheral areas, marginal locations. The originality of the geography Mahon thus delineates lies in the nature of these spaces, as they function as places where one can hide or escape from globalization. Fleeing from the standardization, uniformity and ultimately sterility of a globalized world triggers a poetry which favours the ex-centric. In exploring the possibilities of ex-centricity, Mahon also develops alternative modes of creation, through resistance and flight. Mahon's poetry is first and foremost persistently concerned with disclosing the real in all its authenticity and fugitive apparitions. Such a programme encapsulates a form of resistance to the corporate world of globalization, since Mahon is in search of the real and not its fake marketable representation promoted by consumer society. Looking for the real means uncovering the traces of the present as well as re-reading historical or mythical narratives, in search of a reality of truth which is both ephemeral and atemporal. Mahon's work on margins and peripheries eventually leads him to the very core of the creative matrix, where ex-centricity disappears in favour of a complete alignment of generative forces as in the poem "A Building Site". What we will study in this paper is how ex-centricity is a poetic method in Mahon's recent collections. First of all, different forms of resistance will be brought to light. Then, I will analyse the very spaces of ex-centricity, through movements of displacement, migration and flight, and through the staging of unmapped spaces on the periphery. Finally, Mahon's search for alternative modalities of creation, as well as his invention of temporal, fictional or even historical alternatives will be explored.

1. *Resistance*

In recent collections, the theme of resistance is central and consists in remaining on the margin of a homogenized world. Mahon illustrates diverse types of resistance, to globalization and to the corporate world. Ultimately, it becomes the only means of accessing the real and not its fake marketable ersatz. Resisting to the world's mainstream capitalist values triggers the definition of places and times of creation on the periphery, out and away from a standardized society. Before analyzing these very places, we shall study how resistance literally becomes a creative stance.

1.1 "Resistance Days"

The first pages of *Harbour Lights* are composed of the 169 lines of the aptly named "Resistance Days" (Mahon 2005, 13-18). Dedicated to the photographer John Minihan, these lines are a celebration of resistance as creation, in a form and tone that recall some of Mahon's previous epistolary poems such as "The Yaddo Letter" or "The Hudson Letter" (1999, 182, 186). The poet first hints at his resistance to modern means of communication, as he prefers to use traditional postal services to email: "The sort of snail-mail that can take a week / but suits my method, pre-*informatique*, / I write this from the St. Louis, rm. 14". Using the notion of "method" in the second line of the poem makes of resistance a system. Writing from Paris, the poet's *persona* is presented as being on the move, coming back from Tangier, Morocco.

A few stanzas are devoted to the poet's recollections of his trip to Morocco. He there refers to Wyndham Lewis's work *Journey into Barbary: Travels Across Morocco* published after his visit to the country in 1931. Even if Mahon presents Wyndham Lewis as also being "in flight" from his life in London, "from daily mail" and "tube station", he deplores that the authenticity that Lewis must have encountered has now disappeared: "of course, most things are different since his day". In Mahon's portrait of that part of Northern Africa, local populations are shown resisting the tourists' intrusion: "but the proud Berbers of the west resist / the soul-stealing gaze of the 'western' tourist". In spite of their resistance, the real has been replaced by its marketable reproduction. Mahon thus expresses this standardisation: "as everywhere the filmable populations / have now been framed in shinier compositions, / the open prison of the corporate whole, / for even dissent has long been marketable".

The specific example of Morocco leads the poet to a more general denunciation of globalization. Stanza six opens on a direct statement of what the poem's title "Resistance" was alluding to: "Now our resistance is to co-optation, / the 'global' project of world domination". Mahon also deplores the overwhelming signs of capitalism through "crap advertising" and "the damned logo everywhere you look" or the "corporate space" which annihilates dusk in "During the War" (Mahon 2005, 32).

Representing the real and defining it has been a constant and fruitful trope throughout Mahon's career. Within the context of the poet's condemnation of the devastating effects of a money-driven civilization, the real has become a dead artifact: "No art without the resistance of the medium': / our own resistance to the murderous tedium / of business culture lays claim to the real / as product, no, but as its own ideal".

Mahon's incessant focus on the instant when the real is perceived and recreated in a moment out of time and chronology is linked here to the art of photography. As I have mentioned before, Mahon's friend the photographer

John Minihan is the addressee of the epistolary poem “Resistance Days”. Throughout, Mahon intertwines his own perception of localities he travels to with other previous visions of these places, then juxtaposed to some of Minihan’s iconic photographs. Morocco is thus compared to Wyndham Lewis’s account of the local population and landscape from the 1930s and put into parallel to Minihan’s series on Athy, his hometown in County Kildare: “Of course, most things are different since his day: / looking like Katie Tyrrell and the old folks / in your own ‘sublimely gloomy’ Athy pix”. Amid representations of the landscapes and cityscapes he encounters, Mahon repeatedly alludes to Minihan’s photographer’s eye: “you with your Nikon would go crazy there”; “I wish you good light or a light in a mist”. He seems to assume that Minihan’s art is an exemplary resistance to a merchandised world utterly devoid of authenticity. Mahon defines his art in such terms: “live seizures in the flux, fortuitous archetypes, / an art as fugitive as the life it snaps / [...] / yourself a snapper of immortal souls, / resist commodity, the *ersatz*, the cold”.

This fugitive art is a stronghold against a functionalized world. Beyond that, it also represents the possibility of a frozen instant out of time in a world where no such space is available. Mahon’s preference for the slowness of snail-mail announced at the beginning of the poem is reinforced by his criticism of other aspects of modernity.

1.2 *From resistance to denunciation*

As never so explicitly before, Mahon criticizes various aspects of contemporary society. In the collection *An Autumn Wind*, a few poems are devoted to a denunciation of the causes and consequences of the economic crisis. As Mahon puts forward a relentlessly resistant poetic front, he also points the finger at the actors and the mechanisms which might have led to the economic downfall.

In “Blueprint” (Mahon 2010, 15), he deals fairly straightforwardly with the economic crash of 2008. The poem opens on the description of the early hours of a Manhattan day, defined as “shark time in the market” for the so-called “corporate buzzards”. The first stanzas clearly blame greedy capitalism for the financial crisis and its dire consequences – the disintegration of a culture, people losing their jobs and homes:

Trucks from New Jersey (fruit and veg),
 panting beneath the window ledge
 and drowning out the twitter-cheep
 of sparrows on the fire escape,
 start up the mad Manhattan day.
 The sun, coming the other way,
 glitters on offices and planes,
 on Jeep, Dodge and commuter trains

streaming from bridge and tunnel mouth,
 from out of town, from north and south.
 At shark time in the market, though,
 some slacker on the Hudson piers
 or quiet, tree-lined avenue
 inactive at mid-morning, hears
 a different music of the spheres
 from what the corporate buzzards know.

There was a *blueprint* from the past
 but scribbled on by guilty pens
 till it was virtually effaced.
 Now, slowly running down despite
 what the best economic brains
 devise, the culture's clinging tight
 to its 'full-spectrum dominance' –
 friend and destroyer, both at once.

'Clearance Sale', 'Everything Must Go':
 with homeless folks and unemployed
 growing in number day and night,
 the gritty streets begin to look
 as they did eighty years ago
 in the old pictures;

The image of a blueprint from the past being slowly erased conveys a representation of an old order disappearing. In these first stanzas, the contrast between the hyperactivity of the market and the more tranquil rhythm of those left out of the capitalist system seems to highlight the value of a slower and more contemplative pace of life. Hence, the "inactive" "slacker"'s apathy and aimlessness are not necessarily pejorative, but seem on the contrary to allow the authentic sound of life to be heard – what Mahon calls "a different music of the spheres".

In the last stanza quoted above, Mahon draws a comparison between the current crisis and the 1929 crash. Juxtaposing different historical periods and drawing parallels in their representations, as he does with the old pictures and their similarity with the present, is one of his frequent tropes. Such oppositions, which also illustrate an aspect of his heritage from MacNeice, create a sense of history repeating itself, not of historical advance. Even in the last stanza, as a great sense of change is announced – "a leaf unfolds the rolling news / mutation writes" – it is only to go back to a simpler civilization, and the poem ends on a call to re-enchant the world: "and watch them re-enchant the world".

This poem actually functions as a blueprint for the rest of the collection. The collapse of the world's most powerful economic systems is but a sign of disenchantment and finds an echo in later poems, as for instance in "The Thunder Shower" (Mahon 2010, 18). The poem is a description of all the

noises, sounds and music created by thundery rain. As the first stanzas dwell on the varying volumes, textures and chants to be heard in the pounding rain, slowly including city noises and human voices, in stanza 6 the downpour becomes the embodiment of the economic crash, which is literally echoed in the storm: “Squalor and decadence, / the rackety global-franchise rush, / oil wars and water wars, the diatonic / crescendo of a cascading world economy / are audible in the hectic thrash / of this luxurious cadence”.

A similar parallel between a natural phenomenon such as a storm and the financial crisis is to be found in another poem with a very explicit title, “World Trade Talks” (Mahon 2010, 23). It explores the concept of growth both in economics and nature. As in previous poems and specifically in “Blueprint”, Mahon exposes here the decline and fall of financial doctrines while calling for a return to the old ways of treating the environment. The subtitle to the poem – “*Downturn Means CO2 Targets Now Achievable*” – points at the urgent need to slow down the economy if any progressive environmental changes are to be envisioned.

The poem firstly tackles the concept of the “Hindu growth rate” and takes it as a positive example. This derogatory expression refers to the low annual growth rate of the socialist economy of India before 1991 and appears in this poem as a possible way out of the destructive rush of capitalist systems. Mahon chooses to put “Hindu” in inverted commas, thus possibly emphasizing, as many political commentators have, that this slow growth rate was the result of socialist policies but had nothing to do with Hinduism. However, in “World Trade Talks” it is presented as a possible form of resistance against economic systems that encourage high growth rates at the price of environmental and social damage. The poet seems to express his own belief that a slowing down of the economy could in fact be beneficial. The expression of an opinion, even implicitly, is a rare occurrence in Mahon’s poetry. It is also striking that most poems dealing with the crisis approach it from afar, through examples in India or the USA, but rarely concentrate on Ireland. No mention is thus made of how hard the country was hit by the crisis.

Mahon seems to keep a global and somewhat distant outlook on the matter, as the poem later names major financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The second stanza is in fact a summary of the doctrines that the famous social activist Naomi Klein developed in her book *The Shock Doctrine* (2007): “The great Naomi Klein / condemns, in *The Shock Doctrine*, / the Chicago Boys, the World Bank and the IMF, / the dirty tricks and the genocidal mischief / inflicted upon the weak / who now fight back”.

Mahon recalls the Chicago Boys, a group of Chilean economists of the 1970s. Trained at the University of Chicago, some have been accused of having played an important role in the implementation of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Mahon makes in the last lines of this stanza a reference to the gist of Klein’s shock doctrine. In short, he exemplifies the idea that those who wish to implement unpopular free market policies now do so as a matter of

fact by taking advantage of certain characteristics of the aftermath of major disasters, be they economic, political, military or natural: “the dirty tricks and genocidal mischief / inflicted upon the weak”. The weak are later represented by the figure of the hare in the last two stanzas.

In the image of a hare frightened off by a combine-harvester here called a “war machine”, the animal becomes the symbol of any victim of intensive and destructive agriculture, and is given a sacred aura (“A hare in the corn / scared by the war machine / [...] / a sacred thing projected on the moon”). The last stanza also hints at a criticism of GMOs and calls for a return to more respectful ways of producing crops: “Next spring, when a new crop begins to grow, / let it not be genetically modified / but such as the ancient sowed / in the old days”. This line is a reminder of the last stanza of “Blueprint”, where the ancients had already represented a counter example to the current destruction of our environment and culture: “... and the wind sighs / secrets the ancients understood”. As the poem opened on the concept of the Hindu growth rate, it ends on a hope for a more natural growth in agriculture.

This insistence on the concept of growth finds another illustration in a poem simply entitled “Growth” (Mahon 2010, 25). In five stanzas of 6 lines each, the poet presents the coming of spring and its promise of renewal. The image of a tree is given as a symbol of persistence – “The tree stands as it always stood” – while “The global oil-price crisis bites” in the background. This short mention of the fuel crisis does not destroy the representation of an otherwise preserved world, where the threat of pollution is nonetheless mentioned: “The secret source still running clean / of brick and dust and detergent froth / that wither so much natural growth”.

2. *Ex-centric displacement*

As we have seen, resistance and persistence are the main modalities staged by Mahon to preserve and find the real while denouncing and fighting the ills of capitalism. Such denunciation is what triggers the possibility of disclosing the real. In Mahon’s poetry, resistance also means off-centre displacement and flight. Mahon is well-known for his international stance; throughout his career, the themes of dislocation and distantiation have nourished his interrogations on the concept of home and place. In recent collections since the mid-2000s, his previously detached perspective, of a poet both tourist and outsider, looking towards the island of Ireland from elsewhere, has shifted. By choosing to set his home in Country Cork, Mahon has developed in his poetry an insider’s perspective which has nonetheless remained international in scope and scale, since the poet remains an insatiable traveler. This sort of settling down in one place has also influenced his perception of place. What is particularly interesting is that in spite of having declared in some poems, as in “A Quiet Spot” from *An Autumn Wind*, that he has found “the right place” (Mahon 2010, 17), Mahon’s

poetry is still mostly concerned with marginal spaces, unmapped territories and figures of displacement and migration. We will first of all analyse his representation of movements of population and their significance in his poetry, before focusing on the ex-centric spaces he favours.

2.1 *Migration and flight*

In the poem “Resistance Days” we analyzed before, the poet’s *persona* is a seasonal migrant, all in the name of resistance and flight from corporate values associated to Christmas. These travels read as a form of necessary migration: “when I migrate / in the ‘run-up to Christmas’”; “In flight from corporate Christendom, this year / I spent the frightful season in Tangier / with spaced-out ‘fiscal nomads’ and ex-pats”. The *persona* is associated here to two other categories of migrants, those whose tourism apparently amounts to tax evasion, and the ones who have decided to leave their own country for good. Mahon’s choice of “spaced-out” to characterize them is significant. The usual meaning of this expression, which is to be euphoric or disoriented, especially from taking drugs according to the Oxford dictionary, also conveys a sense of psychological dislocation. These “spaced-out” characters are unaware of their surroundings and could in fact be anywhere. What is important here is that they are displaced, or out of place. Similarly, Mahon’s decision to add a dash in the word “ex-pats” underlines that these expatriates are ex-inhabitants of their native land. This seems to imply both that they are never to return but that they do not belong to any other place.

The type of migration that Mahon delineates here also represents a more general contemporary mode of inhabiting the world, since other types are mentioned throughout the poem. Bird migration – “for even here the birds migrate” – and human migration are juxtaposed to underline the world population movements as he pictures a group of illegal immigrants – “a lost tribe of Nigerian *sans-papiers*, / bright migrants from hot Sahara to cold EU”. By using the nearly politically incorrect word “tribe” to describe the group of illegal immigrants, Mahon implicitly hints at conflicting images of migrants arriving in the EU. Furthermore, the choice of the French word “*sans-papiers*”, which literally means “without papers”, to specify that these migrants are illegally trying to cross from Tangier to the European Union, adds both to the foreignness and the transnational nature of contemporary world population movements. As a counterpart to this portrait of present-day migration, Mahon further recalls in the following stanza relatives who, as Merchant Navy engineers, had gone to the Northern coast of Africa during the war: “I’d uncles down that way in the war years, / a whole raft of Merchant Navy engineers”. He then mentions a time of “transit visas”, thus representing a different type of temporary migration and crossing of borders.

Mahon’s interest in displaced populations also extends to the depiction of diverse types of new migrants choosing the island of Ireland as their destination.

As already mentioned, Mahon more regularly adopts Ireland and Northern Ireland as his spatial positioning than ever before in his career (but not necessarily always as his viewpoint). Such a shift in his perspective also allows him to comment fairly explicitly on some changes in the contemporary societies of both countries. These comments are generally introduced in passing, in poems with a biographical content. “Art and Reality” (Mahon 2010, 43) for example, a poem dedicated to fellow Northern Irish poet and founder of the Honest Ulsterman James Simmons (1933–2001), is a biographical homage, summarizing in 11 stanzas his life and creations. Mahon takes this opportunity to reiterate the difficulty of finding an appropriate stance, as a poet from Northern Ireland during the Troubles, before commenting on the current situation of the country. He speaks in the past, in his and Simmons’ name, to express his ambiguous feelings towards his native land: “We two / both wanted to help dissipate / the ‘guilt and infantile self-hate’, / each in his way, and find a voice / for the strange place bequeathed to us”. This presentation of Ulster as an inherited place rather than a chosen one highlights again Mahon’s tentative posture and refusal to be held as a spokesman for society as a whole. The further commentary he proposes about the contemporary situation of Northern Ireland after the advent of the Peace Process adorns the informal style of a conversation amongst friends. He talks as if he were keeping his now deceased friend up-to-date with current events:

The hard men have renounced the gun
 on *both* sides, you’d be pleased to hear.
 Two kinds of gullibles have begun,
 hundreds of years too late, to share
 the benefits; though, still unbowed,
 we get around our psychic pain
 by picking on the immigrant crowd:
 we have disgraced ourselves again.

The poet remains very skeptical about the benefits and actuality of bilateral disarmament, using italics to emphasize the word “both” in “*both sides*”. Further, he points at the persistence of violence in another realm, under the guise of racism and xenophobia turned against new immigrants. This stanza provides a quick and very ironical portrait of Northern Irish and Irish societies. According to Mahon, these may not yet have found an adequate balance in spite of the enduring ceasefire. The “immigrant crowd” as it is called here resurfaces in other poems by the recurring use of the term the “blow-ins”. This phrase, referring to newcomers or recent arrivals, can have derogatory overtones. It is firstly used between inverted commas in the poem “Insomnia” from *Life on Earth* (Mahon 2008, 22). Mahon there harps on the term and proposes some interpretations as to the origins of the woman concerned: “That woman from / the Seaview, a ‘blow-in’ / of some kind from a foreign shore,

/ seems out of her element and far from home, / the once perhaps humorous eyes grown vague out here. / What is she? A Lithuanian, or a Finn?"

The uncertainty regarding her nationality clearly underlines the diversity of incoming migrants to the island of Ireland, while also hinting at the generic categorization and stigma migrants suffer from as "foreigners". Thus, the mention of an indeterminate "foreign shore" destroys any individuality or personal data that could make her a real person rather than a mere "blow-in". In "The Seasons" from *An Autumn Wind* (Mahon 2010, 26), the blow-ins are casually mentioned in the last stanza as part of the regular inhabitants of the coast: "a yawl, Bermuda-rigged, shakes out its linen / watched by the yachties, blow-ins, quiet drunks / and the new girls with parasols in their drinks".

Between the two collections separated only by two years (2008-2010), new immigrants are no longer a source of interrogation but have become part of the normal human landscape, even if they might still be made to feel unwelcome.

2.2 *Unmapped spaces on the periphery*

The theme of dislocation also extends to Mahon's perception of space. Throughout his career, Mahon has often devoted poems to abandoned sites, no-man's-lands where life has stopped and where nature, or left-over objects and rubbish, have overtaken unwanted territories. While these spaces already propose a mapping of the periphery, of off-centre and ex-centric areas, Mahon's recent concern with migration and globalization has also triggered the apparition of new marginal spaces. We will analyse how, from abandoned locations of quiet persistence, Mahon has moved to hiding places which allow an escape from a globalized world.

In the often quoted poem "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" (Mahon 1999, 89-90), the poet begins by delineating a series of abandoned sites which can still be places of creative thinking – "Even now there are places where a thought might grow": "Peruvian mines, worked out and abandoned", "Indian compounds where the wind dances / And a door bangs with diminished confidence". In the disused shed per se, which appears at the end of the first stanza, tenacious mushrooms fight for light: "And in a disused shed in Co. Wexford, / Deep in the grounds of a burnt-out hotel, / Among the bathtubs and the washbasins / A thousand mushrooms crowd to a keyhole".

At the end of the poem, they come to embody the unheard voices of History and its victims:

They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,
To do something, to speak on their behalf
Or at least not to close the door again.
Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!
'Save us, save us,' they seem to say,

'Let the god not abandon us
 Who have come so far in darkness and in pain.
 We too had our lives to live.
 You with your light meter and relaxed itinerary,
 Let not our naïve labours have been in vain!'

The poem recalls the mushrooms' long wait for discovery and their persistence in the dark, during years of anguished solitude and abandonment. The personification of their "feverish forms" among the residues of discarded objects – "Utensils and broken pitchers" – underlines the possibility of life in places of dereliction. Throughout his collections, Mahon thus creates a cartography of cast-off territories, scattered with neglected functional items deprived of their use, but that still somehow echo with life. In poems that usually bear a clear location, such as "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford" or "A Garage in Co. Cork", these sites whose former inhabitants have left are ex-centric areas on the margin of conventional life.

In "A Garage in Co. Cork", the place is thus first of all compared to "a frontier store-front in an old western" before being situated "Here in this quiet corner of Co. Cork". What the *persona* witnesses to start with is a series of aborted signs of life: "the mound / Of never-used cement", "Building materials, fruit boxes, scrap iron", "Silence of an untended kitchen garden". It resembles a fake cinema set: "Like a frontier store-front in an old western / It might have nothing behind it but thin air". A closer look discloses that the place did have a former existence: "But the cracked panes reveal a dark / Interior echoing with the cries of children", where "A family ate, slept, and watched the rain". Speculations as to their current whereabouts is later followed by conjectures regarding what the place looked like while they were still around: "Surely a whitewashed sun-trap at the back / Gave way to hens, wild thyme, and the first few / Shadowy yards of an overgrown cart track".

This abandoned garage takes in the last three stanzas of the poem an almost mythical aura. A close observation of the remains of the previous inhabitants' life conveys a sacredness to the derelict. In the sixth stanza, the way Mahon exposes the left-out functional objects in all their uselessness is almost holy: "Left to itself, the functional will cast / A death-bed glow of picturesque abandon, / The intact antiquities of the recent past, / Dropped from the retail catalogues, return / To the materials that gave rise to them / And shine with a late sacramental gleam".

Mahon's attention to discarded items is interesting here as it links them back to their original matter and the material they were derived from. They are here no longer commercial objects but rather substantial realities that exist beyond their lack of use. In later poems, and recently in *An Autumn Wind*, Mahon's interest for raw material has been renewed through ecological concerns, as he sees in waste for instance a return to a raw material that is in

fact a source of creation, as in the poem “Raw Material”: “The recycling of old shoes / as raw material / makes artwork / of the contingent real” (Mahon 2010, 69). In “A Garage in Co. Cork”, it is the real which is glimpsed in the persistence of the lifeless objects. What Mahon calls here “a picturesque abandon” is enlightening about his perception of place and his usual preference for the neglected elsewhere and deserted backyard. These places appear prominently in his poetry and define his philosophy of place. The latter is hinted at in the last stanza of “A Garage in Co. Cork”: “We might be anywhere but are in one place only, / One of the milestones of earth-residence / Unique in each particular, the thinly / Peopled hinterland serenely tense – / Not in the hope of a resplendent future / But with a sure sense of its intrinsic nature”.

It appears that the concept of home, mentioned in stanza four – “Somebody somewhere thinks of this as home” – is later replaced by the idea of “earth-residence” in the last stanza of the poem. The lack of specificity of the place, “we might be anywhere”, is likewise supplanted but its inherent self-definition and uniqueness. Place thus transcends both function and time: the still visible traces of life, like passive testimonies, are not to be revived – “Not in the hope of a resplendent future”. The “recent past” of stanza six will therefore be forever lost since the place seems to have reached timelessness. In “A Garage in Co. Cork”, Mahon thus proposes a vision of an abandoned locale with mythical proportions. As he imagines a god transforming the two petrol pumps into an old man and his wife, transfigured into eternal life, the useless functionality of the pumps takes on an immaterial resonance. Mahon’s sense of place is thus both concerned with its very materiality, as shown in his interest for left-over objects and the raw material they represent, as well as with its value as an inherent elsewhere, devoid of any specificity but self-sufficient in itself.

In the poem “During the War” from *Harbour Lights* (Mahon 2005, 31-32), another representation of “picturesque abandon” is used by Mahon to enrich his vision of historical repetition and the impossibility of progress. As the title of the poem makes clear, “During the War” questions concepts of temporality and duration. By the recurring use of “as if” throughout the poem, Mahon juxtaposes different historical periods (London during the Second World War, and London at the time of the writing of the poem) which are blurred within a system of mirror-like reflections. Mahon’s poem “During the War” can be fruitfully compared to Louis MacNeice’s poem “Hiatus” (1979 [1966], 218) published in 1945. MacNeice proposes here a similar uncertain temporality: “The years that did not count – Civilians in the town / Remained at the same age as in Nineteen-Thirty-Nine, / Saying last year, meaning the last of peace”. Likewise, his use of “as if” highlights the inability of moving forward at the end of the war: “As if the weekly food queue were to stretch, / Absorb all future Europe. Or as if / The sleepers in the Tube had come from Goya’s Spain”.

In a similar vein, Mahon’s poem opens as follows: “There are those of us who say ‘during the war’ / as if the insane scramble for global power / doe-

sn't continue much as it did before". What is particularly interesting in this poem is Mahon's ability to deal with history through the representation of the persistence of waste objects. Stanzas three and four thus deliver an image of dereliction akin to that of "A Garage in Co. Cork":

... This morning in Wardour St., a skip, a tip,
 a broken pipe, some unfinished repair work.
 A basin of mud and junk has choked it up,
 reflecting the blown sky and a baroque
 cloud cinema beyond earthly intercourse:
 a hole in the road where cloud-leaves gather,
 each one framed for a moment in stagnant water
 and trailing out of the picture in due course.

This is nothing, this is the triumph of time,
 waste products mixing in the history bin,
 rain ringing with a harsh, deliberate chime
 on scrap iron, plastic and depleted tin,
 its grim persistence from the rush-hour sky
 a nuisance to the retail trade. [...]

Time has a material presence as it is thwarted by the indestructible remains of History. The image of clogged up stagnant water literally echoes a feeling of stagnation in a sense of history constantly repeating itself. Contrary to what happens in "A Garage in Co. Cork", the waste products presented here no longer have any functionality but are directly stripped back to their material nature of iron, plastic and tin, conferring to the scene a more impersonal value. Furthermore, Mahon's mention of the "retail trade", as in the "retail catalogues" of "A Garage in Co. Cork", signals his implicit criticism of a society where consumerism is the norm. The denunciation of capitalist values is explicitly put forward in the stanza that follows, where Mahon deplors the absence of dusk in areas constantly lit up by advertising: "Strip lighting writes the dusk out everywhere / on corporate space and stadium". The light effects, in the opposition between the reflections in the puddles and the final lighting up, characterize an ephemeral civilization where the passing of time is illustrated by the accumulation of rubbish. The latter's permanence turns it into the very matter of History.

2.3 "Marginal lives": between "the right place" and "hiding places"

In *An Autumn Wind* and *Harbour Lights*, Mahon's concern with place is furthermore nourished by his own finding of the "right place". This does not hinder his nonetheless relentless search for what he calls "hiding places" where it is still possible to escape the uniformity of a globalized world, and his visionary findings of places of "picturesque abandon". These three categories

of place have one common characteristic – that of being generally on the margin. In the poem “A Quiet Spot” from *An Autumn Wind* (Mahon 2010, 17), Mahon celebrates his choice to settle down in County Cork. He first of all announces his departure from city life – “We tire of cities in the end” – for reasons of pollution and unfriendliness. He then describes the area: “You always knew it would come down / to a dozy seaside town – / not really in the country, no, / but within reach of the countryside”.

This intermediary location is also later on depicted in the poem as “at the continental shelf / far from the hysteria”. Its peripheral position is ideal in Mahon’s eyes and has justified his decision to stay put after years of migratory homecomings and goings: “the perfect work-life balancing act / you’ve found after so many a fugitive year / of travel?” If the poet has found “the right place”, he is still looking out beyond its spatial limits. The last stanza thus proclaims the need to explore further, “past hedge and fencing to a clearer vision”. In other poems, this looking beyond expands into the discovery of remote “corners” which are still strongholds of authenticity.

In “The Seasons” (2010, 26) for instance, Mahon tackles first of all the disappearance of the seasons because of climate change – “What weird weather can we expect this July?” But the poem also rejoices in the ultimate advantage of the remoteness of the place: “But out here in the hot pastures of the west, / no Google goggling at our marginal lives, / there are still corners where a lark can sing”. Using a syntactic structure that recalls the first line of “A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford” – “there are places where a thought might grow” – Mahon stages here the persistence of areas as yet unmapped by corporate geography. These lives are “marginal” in the sense that they have escaped being standardized by an all-powerful data machine, represented here by Google maps, but also because they exist on the periphery of globalization and willfully remain on its outskirts. It is in such locations that creation can still take place, here embodied in the lark’s ability to sing. Later on in the poem, Mahon also mentions again his change of lifestyle and less frequent travelling: “If we don’t travel now we hibernate”. This corner is hence a place where one wants to stay and which is worthy of long-term tending, as the observation of the cycle of the seasons also underlines.

It seems that Mahon has thus found an example of the perfect places mentioned at the end of the poem “Resistance Days”. As we have analysed before, this poem explores through poetic means the possibility of resistance to globalization and corporate values. At the very end of this epistolary poem, as the *persona* is about to sign off, he sends his best wishes to his addressee through the conjuring up of images of ideal locales: “down silent paths, in secret hiding places, / the locked out-house that no-one notices, / listening for footfalls by a quiet river / the sun will find us when the worst is over”. The “locked out-house”, a reminder of the “Disused Shed in Co. Wexford”, is here associated also to “secret hiding places” that recall more specifically areas which manage to escape “Google goggling” for instance.

While Mahon's interest for abandoned sites has stretched his whole career, the idea of hiding seems to have developed parallel to his explicit criticism of globalization and is therefore more recent. Some poems, like "Resistance Days", associate images of places that bear both characteristics. It is also the case in the two-line poem aptly entitled "Where to Hide": "(Some derelict beach hut or abandoned wreck / as in that strange novel by Yann Queffélec.)"

Mahon's favouring of such places of dereliction extends to travel poems of fake exoticism. "Air India" from *An Autumn Wind*, is composed of four stanzas recalling a series of freeze-frame images of this contrasting country. The first stanza is exemplary of the functioning of the poem as a whole: "A haughty camel train in the rush hour, / a holy cow chewing a cardboard box, / sand-thudding fruit, a dusty star – / these are the images that recur, / and the new office blocks".

Each stanza thus proposes a juxtaposition of predominantly nominal lines giving miniature portraits of scenes of Indian life. Stanzas one, two and four are made of five lines, while stanza three contains an added fifth one which introduces a turning-point before the final image on which the poem closes. The two last stanzas appear as such:

a woodsmoke evening, the pink architecture,
moth-fluttering crowds around the sanctuary
where six-branched Shiva sits like a gilt candlestick,
some hunched-up creature watching
the sunrise from a cedar tree...
But the clearest picture

is a weed-trailing yard of wood and brick
up a dim lane behind a bicycle shop
with a quick monkey, rhesus or macaque,
clinging for dear life to a water pipe,
the slowly dripping tap.

The poem thus evolves from the recurring "images" to "the clearest picture", as if it gradually uncovered the real. The adjective "clearest" makes of this yard the poet's most vivid souvenir, while the choice of "picture" instead of "image" hints at Mahon's concept of "picturesque abandon". This back lane yard is where Mahon finds real life in a scene that is the most worthy of recollection.

3. *Alternative modes of creation*

Mahon's choice of hidden spaces to uncover and relate the real is part of a creative process based on a system of alternatives. His refusal of society's overwhelming values, such as globalization or consumerism, necessitates the search for alternative modes of creation or re-creation. Mahon's interest for off-centre spaces participates in a systematic renewal of what could be called

mainstream or what is part of the overall and generally accepted values of the world and of historical narrative. It is for that very reason that he praises France, in the poem “Resistance Days”, as an example of a country which resists the so-called “post-modern world”. If, as he states, “Still skeptical, statistically off-line France / resists the specious arguments most advance, / the digital movies and unnatural nosh”, it is in order to keep closer to the real. The use of the adjective “off-line” presumably refers to the rather low percentage of French homes connected to the internet compared to other countries, as opposed to “online”. It is also a way of highlighting France’s tendency to resist general trends and to express disbelief for modernization and change. In the following lines, Mahon emphasizes what France is resisting to and the country’s attempt to preserve a certain authenticity, through the repetition of the word “real”: “the digital movies and unnatural nosh, / to stick with real tomatoes, real *brioche* / and real stars like Adjani and Binoche”. Whether France can be considered as an example of resistance is not the point here, but such a representation of the country delineates Mahon’s belief in an “off-line”, off-centre search for alternative modes of inhabiting the world and of creating a poetry of the present.

3.1 *Centred creation*

As we have seen through several poems, Mahon is interested in marginal places and oblique perspectives. One of the very few contexts within which a sense of alignment and centredness is expressed concerns an almost magical moment of creation. The latter takes place in the poem “A Building Site” in *An Autumn Wind* (2010, 37-38), which first of all portrays the destroyed remains of an old school and convent: “Exposed dorms and corridors / squeak under the tracks / of cranes and earth-movers / and a fast shower rakes / the shattered greenhouses”.

The old buildings are to be shattered to the ground – “the site’s a *tabula rasa*. / Of the old convent nothing / remains on this dark day” – and replaced by a new housing development. The poem expresses no nostalgia and seems on the contrary to embrace this symbol of change as renewal: “perpetual change and flux / are the true element”. The poem is composed of eleven stanzas of five lines each: the first seven are devoted to the description of the destruction in process, while the last four deal with the great sense of creative drive the site has become open to. It is worth quoting these four last stanzas in their entirety:

opens a special place,
a field of rough energy
suspended for a minute
not at an ‘interface’
or even a ‘cutting edge’

but at a spinning centre
of heightened consciousness,

gives giddy glimpses into
the universe of blown
dust and distant stars.

This is the great answer
granted at a glance
and rained upon at once,
the magic coalition
of concrete circumstance –

a momentary, oblique
vision of an unknown
eternal dispensation,
the infinite republic
of primary creation.

The shortness of each line heightens the feeling of trepidation suggested by this sudden outburst of energy. Instead of being a scene of desolation, the “deconstruction” of the convent becomes the epitome of a new order replacing the old and is a sign of hope. A residue of the former religious building’s spirituality seems to be glimpsed in “the magic coalition / of concrete circumstance” as well as in the boundless timelessness of creation. This ultimate moment of creation is embodied in both space and time, with the words “special place”, “field” and “suspended for a minute”.

The image of the “spinning centre / of heightened consciousness” recalls both Joyce’s epiphany and a variation on a Yeatsian gyre. It is interesting that Mahon highlights this idea of a “spinning centre” by refusing other expressions inserted in the poem between inverted commas – “interface” and “cutting edge”. The quality of being in the centre, and not on the brink or in-between is essential to the emergence of creative forces. Furthermore, this instant of renewal is somewhat akin to a cosmogony, with the mention of the “universe of blown / dust and distant stars”. The poem stages a rare moment when ex-centric resistance is put aside to participate in the centred concentration of renewal forces. The “magic coalition” exposed here is glimpsed again in other poems which exhibit a peripheral positioning, notably in the exploration of alternative ways of encountering the real.

3.2 *Choosing alternatives*

It is notably the case throughout *Harbour Lights* and *An Autumn Wind* where Mahon exposes alternative ways of approaching the real, in order to go beyond its artificiality and to find its inherent magic. In Mahon’s vision, this is only possible through a complete refusal of corporate society’s ideals. In the poem “Harbour Lights” (2005, 61-67), Mahon makes clear that the moment of

creation, what is in the poem called “the first whisper of art” and its magic can only happen on the margin of mainstream culture: “Magic survives only where blind profit, / so quick on the uptake, takes no notice of it / for ours is a crude culture dazed with money, / a flighty future that would ditch its granny”.

At the end of “Resistance Days”, Mahon had announced his poetic programme: “my own New Year resolution / is to study weather, clouds and their formation”. In “Harbour Lights”, this same idea becomes a necessary alternative to a marketed world: “I toy with cloud thoughts as an alternative / to the global shit-storm that we know and love”. Such an enterprise entails a return to ancient values of time, and to places where the darkness of night is not polluted by artificial lights. This is what Mahon means when he mentions “the re-enchantment of the sky” and “the archaic night” in “Harbour Lights”. Time also has to be given a different value to allow the emergence of thought, as one reads in “Lapis Lazuli” (2005, 24-25): “when slow thought replaces the money-shower”. The denunciation of corporate values provokes an onset of nostalgia that appears in certain poems, as in “Harbour Lights”: “I claim the now disgraceful privilege / of living part-time in a subversive past”.

Contemporary society’s values have therefore to be escaped and put aside to let creation happen. One alternative encapsulates cloud observation as an epitome of slow thought and an extension to Mahon’s career-long devotion to the observation of the minute details of the visible. Another means of fighting against certain inconsistencies of the present is for Mahon to re-explore the past. Alternative creation modalities and temporalities have long been part of Mahon’s poetic stance, in recent collections they allow him to resist to the rather disappointing aspects of the present.

3.3 *Fictional alternatives*

The elaboration of alternatives also extends to Mahon’s rewritings of canonical episodes from the classical heritage. In the poem “Calypso” from *Harbour Lights* (2005, 57-60), he proposes another perspective on Homer’s epic tale. Such a fictional alternative is, as we shall see, likewise triggered by the willingness to avoid another of humanity’s evils, warfare.

In “Calypso” Mahon proposes a different version of the episode of books I and V of the *Odyssey* where the nymph keeps Ulysses hostage on her island so she could make him her immortal husband. In Mahon’s poem, Calypso’s first motivation is to temporarily divert the Homeric hero from his destiny: “Gaily distracting him from his chief design / she welcomed him with open arms and thighs, / teaching alternatives to war and power”. Little by little, Ulysses loses all desire to go back to war: “He prayed for an end to these moronic wars” and slowly aspires to a peaceful life:

He spent his days there in perpetual summer.
 Stuck in a rock-cleft like a beachcomber
 washed up, high and dry amid luminous spray,
 intent on pond life, wildflowers and wind-play,
 the immense significance of a skittering ant,
 a dolphin-leap or a plunging cormorant,
 he learned to live at peace with violent nature,
 calm under the skies' grumbling cloud-furniture
 and bored by practical tackle, iron and grease –
 an ex-king and the first philosopher in Greece.

From an epic hero whose fate requires action, Ulysses has turned into a philosopher who enjoys nothing better than the peaceful contemplation of nature. Mahon ironically underlines the difference in scale between the minute details discovered in an intent observation of nature – “the immense significance of a skittering ant” – and the grandeur of the epic sweep. Ulysses' heroism is thus played down, as exemplified by his attraction to the tiny instead of to the grandiose. Mahon hence proposes a different reading of the overall structure of the Homeric plot. In his version, the belligerent values associated to masculine protagonists no longer occupy the foreground of the narrative, as it rather explores the pacifying role of women. In Louis MacNeice's poem “The Island” (1979 [1966], 304-308), which also deals with Ulysses' forced stay on Calypso's island, the episode similarly represents a moment of peace and reprieve for the hero: “Here, he feels, is peace”. Nevertheless, the belligerent epic ideal is still to be found, contrary to what happens in Mahon's version. In MacNeice's lines, nostalgia for the battle field is clearly felt: “Polishing cone-studs as in Homeric / Times when he braced the boss on the shield / Of some rough-hewn hero under the cypresses / And held out fame in the field”.

In Mahon's version, the hero has a completely different agenda. In the final stanza, Mahon suggests an alternative ending to Ulysses' forced stay on Calypso's island. In his poem, the hero decides to remain with the nymph and not to go back to Ithaca, in order to avoid participating to new conflicts:

Bemused with his straw hat and driftwood stick,
 unmoved by the new wars and the new ships,
 he died there, fame and vigour in eclipse,
 listening to voices echo, decks and crates
 creak in the harbour like tectonic plates –
 or was he sharp still in his blithe disgrace,
 deliberate pilot of his own foggy shipwreck?
 Homer was wrong, he never made it back; or,
 if he did, spent many a curious night hour
 still questioning that strange, oracular face.

This change of perspective is triggered by feminine figures, who embody alternative lifestyles to constant warfare in classical epics. In “Calypso”, Mahon reinforces the central role played by women in the *Odyssey*, and emphasizes more particularly their influence on the narrative structure of the poem:

Homer was right though about the important thing,
 the redemptive power of women; for this narrative,
 unlike the blinding shields, is womanly stuff.
 The witch bewitches, the owl-winged sisters sing,
 some kind girl takes charge within the shadow
 of a calm glade where the sea finds a meadow;
 much-sought Penelope in her new resolute life
 has wasted no time acting the stricken widow
 and even the face that sank the final skiff
 knows more than beauty; beauty is not enough.

Beyond the archetypal battlefield scenes, women shape the plot through their pacifying power. In “Calypso” the promise of eternal glory which motivates the hero to achieve brave acts on the battlefield is replaced by a desire to enjoy a peaceful present. The glorious immortality achieved by untimely death is no longer hoped for, and the protagonist wishes to grow old in the quietness of home. Such a rewriting of this epic episode sheds new light on the concept of heroism. It seems that what Mahon proposes here as a poetic programme relies on the reconsideration of the classical model of courage. The extreme violence that forms the basis of such bravery is refused by Mahon as an ideal of heroism. In his version of the classical plot, the hero is the one who prefers staying on the sidelines away from bloody conflicts. The writing of such a version, as fictional as it may be, nevertheless expresses a deep-rooted belief in the value of peaceful alternatives both in the mythological world of the *Odyssey* and in the reality of today’s society. The example of this last alternative is therefore inherently part of Mahon’s programme of “re-enchantment”. By proposing an oblique re-reading of this Homeric episode, he explores poetry’s ability to reshape and re-visualize reality and fiction.

Ex-centricity, resistance and the envisioning of alternatives thus form the core of Mahon’s latest collections. These central themes enrich Mahon’s work on time and space. Ex-centric temporality and spatiality appear in many poems; when the real is perceived in a moment out of time and chronology, as in the art of photography and its freeze-framing power exemplified in “Resistance Days”, or in the moment of creation experienced in “A Building Site”. Mahon encourages any slowing down of time, as a resistance to modernity in his preferred use of “snail-mail”, but also as an avoidance of the constant simultaneity of the connected universe, as he expresses in “High Water” (2005, 23), where the *personae* of the poem are “in flight / from the

'totality and simultaneity' of data". He also disapproves of what he refers to in inverted commas as the "knowledge era", where, as he writes in the poem "Harbour Lights", "everything is noticed, everything known". Resistance is thus also aimed at modern technology and the fake instantaneity it triggers, with many poems shaping a time and space away from such media invasion. An interest in a slow pace that could counteract the steadfast run of capitalism towards its own ruin is also repeatedly alluded to. For Mahon, allowing time for contemplation is a necessary alternative, as the observation of clouds as a poetic programme testifies. Likewise, Mahon's poems on growth, both economic and natural, insist on the value of slow growth, as a way of persistence on the periphery, instead of participating to the growth race at all costs. This persistence is illustrated in the representation of discarded objects in places where time has stopped. They embody timelessness and a new sense of place in the face of fast consumerism and convey a reflection on the concept of the marginal picturesque.

Attempts at slowing down time also bring about nostalgia in certain poems, as if imagining an alternative version of the present, in order to offset the excesses of modernity, could eventually consist in returning to previous times. This is particularly striking in poems dealing with environmental questions, as in "World Trade Talks" where "the old days" are taken as a model, or in "Blueprint" where Mahon refers to the "ancients" and their knowledge of nature. Nostalgia here functions as a refusal to envision a future that could be a worse replica of the present. Mahon's recent collections, with their explicit voicing of opinions, offer a new outlook on the world at large and the island of Ireland in particular. Interestingly, world changes such as the economic crisis or the impending urgency of global warming are dealt with in Mahon's poetry in a way that reinforces his pre-existing leitmotifs. It is as if his poetic trajectory, for its own survival and renewal, could not but embrace these topical concerns. Following such a direction allows Mahon to propose a poetry to the present that is ever relevant to its times.

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(M)Others from the Motherland in Edna O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* and Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*

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Abstract:

From the last decade, interest in the rewriting of received notions of the Irish diaspora and of the great famine in the literature produced in Ireland has notably increased, in an attempt to revise both Irish history and identity. Within this impulse in contemporary Irish literature, two enduring authors stand out, Edna O'Brien and Colm Tóibín, whose novels, *The Light of Evening* (2006) and *Brooklyn* (2009), focus on the individual experiences of post-famine female emigrants to the United States in their unsuccessful attempts to find better living conditions either in the so-called "Promised land" or in their homeland. Taking O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* as a predecessor of Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, I will argue along this paper that the stories of female emigration unfolded in the two narratives complement each other in ways that, by and large, have passed unnoticed by critics and reviewers. Considering the bond to the land as a metaphor of the bond to the mother, through the present discussion I will also explore O'Brien's and Tóibín's current discourses on emigration in light of their portrayal of the conflictive mother figures that mirror their own motherland.

Keywords: diaspora, motherland, Edna O'Brien, post-famine female migration, Colm Tóibín

We're trying to go home now. We're still trying to find our way home,
but sometimes it's hard to know where that is any more.
Hugo Hamilton, *The Speckled People* 2003, 296

In an article suggestively entitled "The Aesthetics of Exile", published in the year 2000, George O'Brien asserted that: "It seem[ed] only a slight exaggeration to say that without exile there would be no contemporary Irish fiction" (35)¹. What at that time could be interpreted as an overstatement on the outcome of the future Irish novel has in fact proved not to be far from reality. From the last decade, interest in the rewriting of received notions of the Irish diaspora and of the great famine in the literature produced in Ireland

has notably increased, in an attempt to revise both Irish history and identity. Whether this growing tendency to readdress immigration in modern times is a response to inward Irish migration and to the social, economic, cultural and political changes that it has brought in Ireland, or whether we only refer to outward migration to the United States, Canada or other parts of the world, novels such as Maeve Kelly's *Florrie's Girl* (1989), Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You* (2001), Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002), and its sequel *Redemption Falls* (2007), or Kate O'Riordan's *The Memory Stones* (2003) share a renewed concern for the past in an attempt to revisit those places which were once inhabited by Irish migrant subjects².

Within this impulse in contemporary Irish literature, two prominent authors stand out, Edna O'Brien and Colm Tóibín, whose novels, *The Light of Evening* (2006) and *Brooklyn* (2009), focus on the individual experiences of post-famine female emigrants to the United States and their unsuccessful attempts to find better living conditions either in the so-called "Promised land" or in their homeland³. Contending that O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* is a predecessor of Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, I will argue that the stories of female emigration unfolded in the two narratives complement each other in ways that, by and large, have passed unnoticed by critics and reviewers⁴. Considering the bond to the land as a metaphor of the bond to the mother, through the present discussion I will further explore O'Brien's and Tóibín's current discourses on emigration in light of their portrayal of the conflictive mother figures that mirror their own shared motherland.

In the case of Edna O'Brien, it is important to note that if the mother-daughter relationship prevails in most of her plots, *The Light of Evening* is not an exception. The novel deals with an aged woman's attempt to reconcile with her estranged daughter, while she is on the verge of dying from cancer in a Dublin hospital and waits for her visit⁵. As widowed Dilly is lying on her bed, she sees her life passing and nostalgically recalls her remote past more than fifty years ago in North America, where she met her first love. The failure of this relationship and the violent death of her brother Michael brought her back to Ireland, to a demanding and scolding mother, where she was forced to make a new start. She married a rich man, raised two children and attached herself to the land, especially to her beloved house estate Rusheen, which will later be the source of much distress in the novel. Back in Ireland and not capable to break with the behavioural pattern that she had somehow interiorized from her own mother's reproachful nature, she finds herself reproducing the same domineering attitude in the way she brings up her own daughter Eleanora, securing, once again, her daughter's immigration to England, in order to keep away from her mother and motherland.

In the course of the narration, Dilly's discourse intertwines with Eleanora's, who has become a successful writer of contentious novels on rural Ireland, for whom the emotional and physical distance that emigration pro-

vides has become her source of inspiration⁶. Fragmentation, the combination of journals with diary entries, unsent letters and paper notes, together with the blending of reality and fiction in continuous shifts of time are the formal devices employed that contribute to bond as much as to confront the lives of the three generations of women. As it is the case with many of O'Brien's novels, autobiographical elements seem to inform much of her narrative, and, in fact, the author has acknowledged in several interviews that the letters that are interspersed in the novel are based on the real ones she received from her own mother, who had also emigrated to North America as a young woman (Meacham 2007, 25; O'Connor 2008, 885). Her family's disagreement with her decision to become a writer of "scandalous" novels, her emigration to England and her marriage to the Jewish-Czech writer Ernest Gébler has been well documented, and all these experiences are fictionally reenacted through the characters of Dilly, of her mother and of her own daughter Eleanora, since mother and daughter are more similar than what they would be ready to accept. O'Brien's fitting quote by William Faulkner opening this novel: "The past is never dead. It is not even past", foretells its ending in that it reveals how the past molds as much as it haunts, and how it is both unavoidable and irresolvable.

Three years after *The Light of Evening* came out, Tóibín published *Brooklyn*, a novel that demystified the ills and wrongs of emigration to North America, and which was based on an actual story he had heard at home when he was only twelve and his father had recently died⁷. The protagonist, Eilis Lacey, is a young and ambitious woman who lives in Enniscorthy, a small village where Tóibín himself spent much of his childhood and where she encounters difficulties trying to find a proper job. Although she is training herself to become an accountant, she can only work for the abusive Miss Kelly, who demands long hours for a small wage. Encouraged by her sister and mother to search for a better life in North America, she reluctantly emigrates and settles in Brooklyn, where a position as shop assistant has been secured for her by an Irish-American priest who will help her all the way through. Although life is not easy in the host land, she soon resumes her studies, lives quite pleasantly and even falls in love with the Italian Tony. However, dramatic news come from home, announcing that her beloved sister has suddenly died, and she is urged by her brother to come back, in order to console and mind her lonely mother.

Even though Eilis is not entirely certain of the extent of her feelings for Tony, she still lets herself be seduced and, partly unwillingly, engages and marries secretly, so that their commitment and her return to the USA can be sealed. But once in Ireland, she soon forgets what she has left behind, flirts with Jim, and even toys with the possibility of starting a new life in her homeland. However, no matter how modern the Ireland of the 1950s could have turned, the world was still too small to hide the commitment she had made on the other side of the Atlantic. Full of regrets, she is forced back by scandal in her motherland

and by her own detached mother, to her new family and to the life she had just started in the (other)land. As Maureen Murphy has explained, the actual choices migrant women had were reduced and complex in several ways since,

the young woman to return home to settle or return home to visit had to redefine herself in terms of her Irish home and family. If she stayed, she had to negotiate new work and social roles. If she returned to Ireland planning to stay and then decided to go back to America, she had to shift from the role of a sojourner to the role of a settler and take on, or take up again, the responsibilities of the American-based members of Irish kinship groups. (1997, 92)

Although the plots of *The Light of Evening* and *Brooklyn* apparently deal with different alternatives to the issue of women's emigration to North America, a closer reading reveals remarkable similarities and allows the two texts to enter into dialogue complementing each other. On the one hand, *The Light of Evening* revolves around short and long-term emigration, to the country and the city, and to Britain and America, by both mother and daughter, in different decades and circumstances. However, Dilly's memories of her youth in the USA are disclosed in bits and pieces, thus creating a jigsaw that the reader has to resolve. Drugged by sleeping tablets in hospital, she falls into a reverie that enlivens her past and confronts it with a release of blocked feelings and emotions, revealing the true *leitmotivs* of her life. In a more than evident Joycean resonance, Dilly echoes the character of Gretta in "The Dead" (1914), whose recollection of a lost love has remained alive in her mind while her love for Gabriel has faded through time. O'Brien's tribute to one of her most admired writers is paid on several occasions during the course of the novel, the most significant being precisely to have named Dilly's love Gabriel. In this case, however, attempting to reverse the Joycean tale, Dilly is made to believe by two envious friends that Gabriel has jilted her. By the time she discovers the truth she is a married woman in Ireland. Brokenhearted, she spends the rest of her life revisiting, in her imagination, the places that had been inhabited by both, hence turning her past into a haunting present⁸.

On the other hand, it has not passed unnoticed by critics that the opening lines of *Brooklyn* recall Joyce's "Evelyn" (1914), even though the plot of the stories bear less similarities (Bracken 2009, 166). But in the case of *Tóibín*, there is also a significantly subtle matching scene when Eilis is eventually leaving her hometown behind and she tries to imagine the way her mother will announce Jim that she had to go back to Brooklyn out of duty. As the narrator notes, she "imagined her years ahead, when these words would come to mean less and less to the man who heard them and would come to mean more and more to herself. She almost smiled at the thought of it, then closed her eyes and tried to imagine nothing more" (*Tóibín* 2009a, 252). The novel thus ends leaving the reader guessing how much these words will actually determine her future life in North America, haunted as she will be by the memories of the

vanished possibility of a better life in Ireland. This bleak ending constitutes the starting point of O'Brien's novel, with the protagonists recalling happy memories of an unattainable past. In this regard, the notion of motherland, which has been defined as "the bond between word, flesh and land" (Hanafin 2000, 153), perfectly captures the intricacies and dynamics surrounding all relationships in the two novels of this discussion.

After the overwhelming international success of *The Master* (2004), Tóibín expressed his desire of "going back very deep into where I'm from" (Fernández 2009, 84) and turning again to perennial Irish themes. *Brooklyn* would then follow, but during the years that spanned its publication, he wrote the short story "House for Sale" which dealt again with the sad account he had heard as a child of a young woman emigrating to North America, and with his own life at home after the death of his father⁹. In an attempt to write a sequel, the author turned the focus on the migrant experience of a single character. In fact, in his article "The Origins of a Novel" (Tóibín 2009b), he discusses in detail the genesis of *Brooklyn*, and he refers to four sources: the story he heard as a child; the writing of the short story "House for Sale"; his own experience as an emigrant in the United States and other countries; and the influence of Henry James' masterful control of the point of view in the narration. Nonetheless, a possible reading of O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* is never mentioned and it is also surprising that, to my knowledge, no review or scholarly article on *Brooklyn* has noted O'Brien's subtext in the novel.

This could be partially attributed to the fact that the critical reception of *The Light of Evening* was clearly mixed¹⁰ in comparison with *Brooklyn*'s international acclaim, which was nominated for the 2009 Booker Prize, won the prestigious Costa Novel Award in 2010 and was shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2011. Although there were critics of O'Brien who praised the lyricism of her prose and her stature (Anon. 2006; Brooke 2006, 12; Mediatore 2007, 71), many others found the novel "too long and overwrought" (Sullivan 2006, 73), considered its fragmented nature "a disruption" (O'Connor 2007, 111), or even saw it as an example "to illustrate what not to do with storytelling" (Meacham 2007, 25). Writer Anne Enright also complained about the fact that "O'Brien's women criticize themselves so much that you wonder why anyone else would want to join in" (2006). However, Iris Lindahl-Raittila has explained that O'Brien's reputation has wrongly relied on popularity and on the classification of her novels as autobiographies "often bordering on the unsuitable, and even belonging to the margins of respectable literature" (2009, 179). To this, Rebecca Pelan adds that O'Brien "has been seriously undervalued as a result of the literary establishment's perception of her as a sexually-transgressive maverick and as a writer so lacking in imagination that she has been compelled to tell the same story over and over again" (2010, iii). And Maureen O'Connor has added that "the question of autobiography has vexed discussion", making critics un-

able to perceive the rich intertextual references to the author's previous texts, especially to *Mother Ireland* and its troubled political context in turbulent times (2008, 885). All in all, as Helen Thompson claims, with few exceptions, reviews of O'Brien's work have only served to devalue it: "While her work is not polemic, *The Light of Evening*, like much of her writing, offers critiques of the connections between Irish women's role in the heterosexual economy of the state and the mythology of the Irish nation which encapsulates its women within much narrower roles than its men" (2010, 3).

Even though the settings of *The Light of Evening* and *Brooklyn* span three decades, evidencing the contrast between the social milieu of rural County Clare in the 1920s and the more modern Enniscorthy in the 1950s, the individual struggles of these young Irish migrant women abroad run parallel courses. To start with, their journeys to an unknown land, of which so many stories had circulated in their respective villages, bring different reactions in the two. In the case of O'Brien, the troubled Ireland of the 1920s is certainly a place from which Dilly wants to escape, upsetting her mother to the point of beating her up when she discovers her daughter's longed desire to emigrate:

Maybe I decided then or maybe not. There was always so much talk about America, every young person with the itch to go. Nothing for us in the rocky fields, only scrag and reeds and a few drills of potatoes [...] My mother found the note I'd written and hidden under the mattress. It said, 'I want to go to America where I can have nice clothes and a better life than I have here,' [sic] and signed Dilly. She beat me for it and ripped an old straw hat that I was decorating with gauze. She was furious. I would stick at my books and stay home and be useful. (2006, 34)

On the contrary, in Toibín's narration, Eilis had never dreamt of ever leaving Enniscorthy behind, and even feels uneasy about it, as the following extract reveals:

She had never considered going to America. Many she knew had gone to England and often came back at Christmas or in the summer. It was part of the life of the town. Although she knew friends who regularly received presents of dollars or clothes from America, it was always from their aunts and uncles, people who had emigrated long before the war. She could not remember any of these people ever appearing in the town on holidays. (2009a, 24)

Although Ireland is portrayed negatively in the two stories, as a place of reduced opportunities and narrow-minded provincialism, by an irony of fate, the two protagonists will end up forced to spend their lives in the "other" land of their choices, Dilly in Ireland, and Eilis in the USA. As women of their own times, objectified by the social demands of their communities and by their own gender limitations, they will end up domesticated by the forces of the patriarchal order.

The harsh experience of the journey across the Atlantic is enlightening for the two of them. In a distressful event in *Brooklyn*, Eilis witnesses how a woman who has given birth in the worst circumstances throws her baby overboard

three days later in front of a group of passengers. As Maureen O'Connor has explained, this "disturbing scene" is made to represent "so many of Ireland's children ... cast from their Motherland never to return" (2008, 889). Further than that, I will argue that this mother rejects her new role the very moment she sends her own son to death in a symbolic embodiment of the Joycean trope of "the old sow that eats her farrow" (Joyce 1968 [1916], 203), and in a conspicuous contrast with images of the longed motherland that will be reverted in the two novels of this discussion¹¹. During Eilis' sickening journey, on the other hand, she befriends an experienced English woman, Georgina, who mentors her offering advice about the new life that awaits her, including the insistence to hide her Irish looks, claiming that the Irish are suspicious in North America:

'Don't look too innocent,' she [Georgina] said. 'When I put some eye-liner on you and some rouge and mascara, they'll be afraid to stop you. Your suitcase is all wrong, but there's nothing we can do about that.'

'What's wrong with it?'

'It's too Irish and they stop the Irish.' (Tóibín 2009a, 49)

Once in the USA, the two protagonists settle in Brooklyn and take poor lodgings. Their lack of money, resources and means is very realistically described, delving into the role of the Catholic Church in the settlement of Irish immigrants. In both novels, it is a Catholic priest who secures them a job, as it was usually the case since the function of Irish parishes at the time was to protect these young women from the dangers of the unknown world, to make them participate in social life and to organize activities for their leisure time (Travers 1995, 190). Dilly is hence sent to the house of a pretentious Irish family to work as a maid, although she is soon turned down after a dubious incident with a lost ring. In *Brooklyn*, the function of Father Flood is utterly relevant for the development of the plot, since he sponsors her journey in the first place, finds her lodgings, a decent job and even subsidizes her studies of bookkeeping at college. For Claire Bracken, Father Flood's intentions should be interpreted as a medium through which Eilis can position herself "as an object of exchange between cultures", assisting the priest to construct an Irish community in America: "Just like her letters, she crosses and re-crosses the Atlantic. The tragedy of her story lies in her positioning by others as an object with no power" (2009a, 167). Interestingly, Father Flood's truly genuine intentions also contrast with Tóibín's negative attitude towards the Catholic Church in Ireland (Delaney 2004, 33; Böss 2005, 24; Wiesenfarth 2009, 18) and ultimately serve to emphasize the clash that exists between the uncommon opportunities Eilis finds in America and her sad ending, trapped in-between two incompatible worlds.

Although in the two novels communication with home is arranged through letters, these are scarce and uneven. In neither of the two the reader has any access to the protagonists' actual missives, and the possible messages are only inferred

through the answers from their respective scornful and detached mothers¹². In *The Light of Evening*, Dilly's mother, Bridget, constantly nags her daughter for not writing enough: "I could hear my mother talking to me the second I opened her letter, talking and scolding" (O'Brien 2006, 59). However, by the time the reader comes across this comment, it has not passed unnoticed how much Dilly's paternalistic letters to her own daughter Eleanora reproduce those sent by her own mother. In a poignant letter that Dilly receives on one occasion, Bridget even says that she fears her daughter has died because of her failure to answer, often finishing her letters with the same litany: "Write to me in God's name, write to me. Your mother, Bridget" (97). Many years later, it is Dilly who very ironically sends Eleanora an ivory letter opener with the intention of inducing her into writing back, emulating the same attitude her mother had with her and that she hated so much. The letters, full of insinuations of this kind, thus served as a means with which to keep daughters in thrall, one generation after the other. In the case of *Brooklyn*, although the letters from Eilis' mother seemed to be less reproachful, they also said nothing, either emotionally or in any other way, "there was hardly anything personal in them and nothing that sounded like anyone's own voice" (Tóibín 2009a, 66). Her mother's detachment is painfully blatant all along the novel, much in tone with Tóibín's consistent portrayal of absent, cold and abject mothers in his work, mostly modeled after his own emotionally distant mother, who left a profound mark in his childhood, as he has explained on different occasions (Wiesenfarth 2009, 8-10; Witchell 2009, 32).

A further parallel between both protagonists is established in the loss of a sibling while they are abroad, which is precisely the reason that motivates their return. Dilly presages her brother's death in a dream in which he appears dressed in black, and then receives a letter from home announcing that he was shot, presumably by British soldiers, as he was a "croppy boy" involved in insurgent activities. In spite of the effect that such loss might have had on Dilly, considering that he was her mother's "darling light" (O'Brien 2006, 106), her emotions are blocked and unknown to the reader and there is only a reference to her attending a dance dressed in black. Eilis' grief for her sister, on the other hand, is explored with more detail, which awakens in her feelings of insecurity and emptiness. But it is the pressure exerted by one of her brothers, contending that she has to fulfill her dutiful role as the only remaining daughter, what makes her come back to Ireland to mind her mother.

Following the pattern of other stories on emigration, the two protagonists also find their first love in Brooklyn. Dilly's meeting of Gabriel and final engagement, oddly enough in a Brooklyn cemetery in a snowy day, presaging a bad ending, is lived as if a dream had come true, which does not take long to dissolve thanks to the meanness of two of her friends. Painful memories of this incident will haunt her until the end of her life: "I'd been told that he was going with another girl when he wasn't. At the time he was sick, unconscious, after an accident in Wisconsin haling timber, but these two girls, these two

friends, deceived me into believing that I was jilted, which I wasn't" (238). In *Brooklyn*, Eilis falls in love with the Italian-American Tony, a decent, loving and caring young man full of good intentions. But passion does not govern their relationship and she cleverly augurs that in marrying him she will not be able to reconcile her building a career with his expectations for a wedded woman: "She knew that once she and Tony were married she would stay at home, cleaning the house and preparing food and shopping and then having children and looking after them. She had never mentioned to Tony that she would like to keep working" (Tóibín 2009a, 119-120). However, unable to stand up for her principles, she ends up trapped in marriage and forced to return to the USA. Consequently, the two end up trapped by tacit obligation, set up by a patriarchal order.

Being forced to return to their homeland, both will have to confront their mothers and, in turn, their motherland. On Dilly's return, she feels people "remarked on how different I was to the good-natured girl who had left with the oilskin bag and her few treasures in the tin box that Dinnie had padlocked" (O'Brien 2006, 123). With few options left, she marries in Ireland and has two children, but what keeps her alive in a more than obvious Joycean resonance¹⁵ are the memories of North America and of her outings with Gabriel in Coney Island. On the contrary, Eilis' return to Ireland is painfully revealing, in that it becomes evident that she could have had a more prosperous future in her homeland. Changed in her manners, clothes and even talk by the awakening experience of North America, but incapable to leave up to her mother's expectations, she is made to believe that her duty is now to replace her sister. Transformed into "Rose's ghost" (Tóibín 2009a, 218), she conceals her status as a married woman and leads a double life. She puts off her memories of Brooklyn, does not even open her husband's letters and makes herself believe that what she had left behind is just "a sort of fantasy, something she could not match with the time she was spending at home. It made her feel strangely as though she were two people, one who had battled against two cold winters and many hard days in Brooklyn and fallen in love there, and the other who was her mother's daughter, the Eilis whom everyone knew, or thought they knew" (217-218). Although she is easily carried away by this fabricated truth, once it is unveiled, duty and moral obligation offer her no choice but to go back to a life that will presumably be fueled by the memories of the alternative that Ireland could have offered her. In their final destinies, therefore, the two characters become victims of their fate being forced to choose what goes against their desires.

Nevertheless, whereas Tóibín's novel ends with Eilis' return to North America for good, leaving her mother, her motherland and her promising future behind, O'Brien's narrative unfurls a further tale on the failures of motherhood that once again derives into emigration, although in this case, to Britain. O'Brien's unveiling of the opposition from her own family to devote herself to literature or to agree with any choice she made is autobiographi-

cally reenacted in the characters of Dilly and Eleanora¹⁴. At odds with her mother Dilly and her motherland, Eleanora makes her home in England, in spite of her troubled life there, her failed marriage to a man much older than her and her incapability to maintain positive relationships with men. In her case, emigration allows her to maintain a safe and healthy distance from which to scorn her rural origins, while her mother keeps blaming her for being the source of much distress in the village, where there are people who have threatened to take action because they have recognized themselves in her writings. At this point, it cannot go unnoticed that Eleanora's blunt portrayal of a repressive country is modeled after O'Brien's, since some of her early novels of the sixties were not only banned in Ireland but also publicly burned by the priest in her own village (Brooke 2006, 12).

Interestingly enough, in none of the two novels mother and daughter interact in any significant way. In *The Light of Evening* they only ever meet once and very briefly, when Eleanora visits Dilly in the hospital. And, although there seems to be more contact between the two in Tóibín's narrative, Eilis never maintains a proper conversation with her mother; instead, she confides her concerns to her elder sister. In spite of the lack of physical contact, they all remain at odds with each other, trapped in stories of unexpressed emotions and unsaid wishes. During Eleanora's much expected visit to her mother in the hospital, she inadvertently leaves a secret journal behind, which is poignantly revealing of their stormy relationship. Although the reader is never granted access to Dilly's reaction, it seems that she is now prepared to accept her daughter's life, since Eleanora is amazed at discovering that her mother is determined to change her will and leave Rusheen to her. The reading of Eleanora's innermost feelings is balanced out at the end of the novel when the nurse hands her the letters that Dilly never sent her, which included as much daily hard life and routine at the farmhouse as regrets, reproaches, recriminations and a yearning for a closer daughter. In their final meddling with each other's secret feelings, the bond between mother and daughter is strengthened. Not ludicrously, O'Brien has dedicated *The Light of Evening*: "For my mother and my motherland", something that Allen Brooke has interpreted as "the expiatory gift of a prodigal daughter who has come, with age, mentally closer to her mother" (2006, 12).

To conclude, as passive agents of their destiny, the two protagonists are eventually trapped in or by their motherlands. In the case of Eilis, no matter how modern Enniscorthy might have been in the 1950s in comparison to the rural setting of O'Brien's narrative thirty years before, the rules of the community cannot accommodate a woman who has cheated on her husband and who is leading a double life. However, it is utterly ironic to discover that had she stayed in Ireland, she could probably have ended up better off. The life that awaits Eilis in the USA is certainly one of reduced opportunities for a migrant woman like her, who has been at pains to educate herself but has made the choice of marrying another emigrant, whose expectations of a wife are to

remain in the domestic sphere: "She had to make an effort now to remember that she really was married to Tony, that she would face into the sweltering heat of Brooklyn and the daily boredom of the shop... She would face into a life that seemed now an ordeal, with strange people, strange accents, strange streets" (Tóibín 2009a, 232). Forced into emigration again, North America emerges now as the non-promised land, in contrast with Dilly, whose urban life there could have brought her more happiness and prosperity than the one she finally had in rural Ireland. Rusheen, her prideful house now in decay, is the clear symbol of both her un-lived life and the gone prospects. For this reason, her return to Ireland, to her homeland, is one of painful memories that will only be overcome through death. Besides, Dilly's failure to finally change her will in keeping fairness to her daughter breaks Eleanora's bond to the land, to her motherland.

Nonetheless, although the protagonists are not able to fulfill their final wishes, either at home or abroad, a more optimistic ending is reserved for O'Brien's final hint at reconciliation. As Sandra M. Pearce contends, most female, lonely and isolated characters in O'Brien's novels end up finding "self-redemption through reconciliation – either with themselves or through others" (1996, 63). The story of the return to the motherland, to the original bond, merges in Eleanora's final words when she recalls a happy memory of herself massaging her mother's stiff neck, and remembers how her mother "began to bask in it, her expression melting, a happiness at being touched, as she had never been touched in all her life, and it was as though she was the child and I had become the mother" (O'Brien 2006, 344). This (con)fusion of the mother and the daughter is further symbolized by the superb Joycean ending¹⁵, which evokes the memorable image of Gabriel looking through the window at the end of "The Dead". In this case, it is not the symbol of the snow that falls upon the living and the dead, but the twilight, as a metaphor of the blending of day and night, of life and death: "Twilight falls upon her in that kitchen, in that partial darkness, the soft and beautiful light of a moment's nearness; the soul's openness, the soul's magnanimity, falling timorously through the universe and timorously falling upon us" (344).

In spite of the differences, the set of coincidences and parallel events between the two novels serve to place *The Light of Evening* as a precedent of *Brooklyn*, as much as O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* (1976) was a clear model for her novel. In fact, the opening of O'Brien's essay stated that: "Countries are either mothers or fathers, and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire. Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and of course, Hag of Beare" (1976, 1). Consequently, a comparison between these two novels reveals a shared interest by O'Brien and Tóibín to disclose the complexity and diversity of the diasporic female identity, never at home in the homeland or in the host land, and to emphasize that the meaning attached to the concept of home is shifting and psychologi-

cally constructed, embodying notions of cultural liminality and hybridity. As female objects of destiny, their fates will be drawn by paths already taken by their foremothers, and unchallenged by the preservation of social mores. Both *The Light of Evening* and *Brooklyn* delve into migrant female characters whose lives will ultimately remain “a struggle with the unfamiliar” (Tóibín 2009a, 30), either in Ireland or in the USA, with mothers in the two cases “not wanting ever to let me go, but having to let me go” (O’Brien 2006, 316).

Notes

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² Emigration to Britain and America differed greatly. While emigration to Britain was usually more seasonal, return was easier and people were less influenced by culture, the move to America was often a one-way journey that involved leaving the family behind and often with marriage prospects. Pauric Travers has explained that up until the late 1920s, Irish emigrants preferred to go to America, but that after this date Britain became the first choice, to which America, Canada and Australia followed (1995, 190).

³ In the case of O’Brien, Tom Deignan even affirms that exile is such a pervasive theme in her novels that “it is no exaggeration to say that when future historians wrestle with the history of 20th-century Ireland and how individuals charted the choppy waters of cultural change, they will ignore O’Brien’s novels only at their own peril” (2006, 33).

⁴ Further connections could also be established between Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* and George Moore’s “Home Sickness”, included in his collection *The Untilled Field* (1903), as Sylvie Mikowski noted in a paper delivered at the 9th Conference of EFACIS, last June 2013.

⁵ In an interesting and suggestive article that discusses the illness of Dilly in *The Light*, Miriam O’Kane Mara argues that the fictionalization of female cancer and, more specifically reproductive cancer, is a trope that stands for the conceptualization of female bodies as weak and permeate, which can be invaded and, thus, colonized (2009, 467).

⁶ Which is precisely what O’Brien has affirmed about her initial drive to write: “it was the separation from Ireland which brought me to the point where I *had* to write” (quoted by Guppy 2012; italics in the original).

⁷ It was during one of the evenings in which the people from the village paid their visits to his mother to express their sympathies, when he heard the story: “A woman was talking to my mother, talking on and on, about Brooklyn where her daughter had been. I began to listen. She’d never been to our house before and was never, as far as I remember, a visitor again. I saw her on the street sometimes; she was a small, stout, dignified-looking woman who always wore a hat. It was almost 40 years later before I took what I had heard, just the bones of a story about her daughter who had gone to Brooklyn and then come home, and began making a novel from it” (Tóibín 2009b).

⁸ O’Brien’s experimental method of narration is also noticeably Joycean. Visible instances occur when Dilly’s reverie of her past emerges through her dreams and materializes in a deviant use of the language, as the following quote suggests: “*I am I am n’t I am n’t. Feel for the bell feel for it Dilly it’s somewhere, find it squeeze it Nurse Nurse. She can’t hear me. They’re not listening. Is this how I die is this how one dies no one to give me the Last Sacrament all alone didn’t I rock the cradle like many another mother. Oh good God I’m slipping I’m slipping. Well... If it isn’t himself that’s in it if it isn’t Gabriel, eyes the softest brown the brown of the bulrushes, the lake reeds never boast a bulrush but the bog reeds do, cottony at first before the don their stout brown truncheons [sic]*” (2006, 28).

⁹ For more details on the genesis of the novel, see my own forthcoming article “Demystifying Stereotypes of the Irish Migrant Young Woman in Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*”.

¹⁰This is, to say the least. Even though Edna O'Brien is undoubtedly one of the most enduring and internationally acclaimed Irish voices, her reputation in Britain and Ireland has not always lived up to its promise. Her work has often been subject to unsympathetic criticism and has certainly not received the academic attention it deserved. According to Lindahl-Raittila: "Whether or not this neglect is grounded in her reputation as a popular writer and a dashing literary figure, rather than a withdrawn writer of serious literature may still be unsettled, but it is no secret today that within mainstream criticism Edna O'Brien has been the subject of rather harsh treatment – especially in Britain and Ireland where her work has often been considered either too controversial or too banal to be fully accepted within the domains of high literature and academia" (2006, 74).

¹¹Brooke, contrarily, contends that rather than relying on the Joycean trope, O'Brien's female characters stand as "beloved matriarch[s] from whom one must try, however hopelessly and sadly, to separate" (2006, 12).

¹²In the case of *Brooklyn*, Eilis also sends letters to her sister Rose, which are significantly different, since she is the only one to whom she confides her innermost feelings.

¹³At the end of the novel, there is a passing reference to her attempt some years before to end with her life. Refusing to have a white wedding, she admitted to have written the previous nights: "Gabriel's full name again and again in the hot ashes with the legs of the tongs. My mother, seeing that I was in two minds, made speech after speech of famine times and times when our forebears were evicted" (O'Brien 2006, 135).

¹⁴Most of O'Brien's novels rely on autobiographical elements since, as she has admitted in an interview, "any book that is any good must be, to some extent, autobiographical, because one cannot and should not fabricate emotions; and although style and narrative are crucial, the bulwark, emotion, is what finally matters. With luck, talent, and studiousness, one manages to make a little pearl, or egg, or something [...] But what gives birth to it is what happens inside the soul and the mind, and that has almost always to do with *conflict*" (Guppy 2012).

¹⁵The novel also relies on Yeats from its very title, which was taken from "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz" (O'Connor 2008, 890).

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Translating Charlottes. Clare Boylan's "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester": Between Red Rooms and Yellow Wallpapers

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Abstract:

In her short story "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester", Clare Boylan playfully uses a variation of the postmodern trend of "writing back" Victorian classics to create a sequel of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Shedding light on Jane's married life, Boylan makes a parody of Brontë's language and narrative conventions making Jane an eccentric. In particular, the presence of closed spaces in the story replicates the claustrophobia of the red room in *Jane Eyre*, and from this point of view Boylan's story bears parallels with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). Intertextuality and metanarrative perspectives of both stories draw attention to the textual space of the story and the elusive text that is being written/read. The "secret diary" assumed in the title is not the text that appears on the page. In both stories the protagonist and first-person narrator is engaged in writing an elusive text while confined in a secluded space.

Keywords: Clare Boylan, Charlotte Brontë, intertextuality, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, rewritings

Either at the centre of narration or in peripheral roles, characters off the norm are recurring presences in Clare Boylan's fiction. This can be due to circumstances of social disadvantage or ignorance, as the servant Nellie in Boylan's first novel *Holy Pictures* (1983), or the young girls in the stories "A Little Girl, Never Out Before" (1989) and "The Little Madonna" (1989). The will not to conform marks Dinah in *Black Baby* (1988), while different forms of social and emotional marginalization characterize Patricia Higgins, the electrolysis lady in the short story "A Particular Calling" (1989), and in different ways Annie and Maeve Beattie in "You Don't Know You're Alive" (1989), as their marriages make them victims respectively of unconsumed sex and of fertility.

Thus figures that are literally ex-centrics, off the centre, off the norm, reappear constantly in Boylan's novels and short stories, often as physically handicapped or, more frequently, as mentally disturbed characters, and they seem to belong to places that are, likewise, off the norm. In "Concerning Virgins" (1989) the cruel and implicitly mad father Narcissus Fitzgall lives in a house that seems "to be suspended in water" (Boylan 2000, 316). And in the story "Mama" (1983) William and Joanne stop at an abandoned house that attracts their attention, and their horizontal perception of the garden, the hall and the toy room emphasizes the solid pervasiveness of the presence of the mentally retarded man who lives there. The murderer in "Some Retired Ladies on a Tour" (1983) and the mad woman in "Technical Difficulties and the Plague" (1983) anticipate the unbalanced narrative voice in the disquieting story "The Prisoner" (1997), which focuses obsessively on inner and outer space – "Now I just sit in my room [...] looking out the window at the pub across the road" (Boylan 1997, 167). This sheds light on the wavering of the mind in Alzheimer's disease, the simultaneous presence and absence of consciousness. In *Beloved Stranger* (1999) Clare Boylan focuses openly on mental disturbance, and Dick Butler's first symptoms of bi-polar disorder find an outlet attacking the house he lives in. The etymology of the word "schizophrenia" implies a split mind, so that a "deranged" person inhabits two worlds at the same time, reality and delusion, here and there, now and then, and by doing so he belongs in neither.

In the short story "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" (1995) Clare Boylan follows the *fil rouge* of eccentricity playing with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and making the protagonist a character off the norm in attitudes and behaviour unexpected in the pre-text. At the same time, "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" shows interconnections and cross-references with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" in terms of narrative situation, language and imagery. Gilman's story, first published in 1892, is a narrative account of a case of post-partum depression, another case of eccentricity, and soon became "an American feminist classic" when it was republished in 1973 reaching a status of "canonization" (Lanser 1998, 415). Therefore, the analysis of the various intertextual layers of Boylan's "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" can provide interesting insights in her use of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1996 [1847]) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as explicit or implicit pre-texts.

Considering Clare Boylan's fiction in retrospect, her short story "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" can be read at different levels as a point of arrival and departure. First published in her 1995 collection *That Bad Woman*, the story develops consolidated themes in Boylan's fiction – disappointments and misunderstandings in love, interpersonal and family relationships based on miscommunication, search for identity and meaning in the confusing patterns of life – often dealt with in wry humour. However, the story is also

an interesting experiment in the postmodern trend of "writing back" Victorian fiction, which in some way anticipates *Emma Brown*, the novel she wrote in 2003 (also her last novel) from an unfinished fragment by Charlotte Brontë published posthumously in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1860.

Boylan's "daring enterprise" of finishing Brontë's unfinished story magnifies the affinity she had always felt with a writer with whom she shared birth-date and initials (Miller 2003); like Charlotte Brontë, Clare Boylan started writing at an early age building up a fictive world with her sisters (Quinn 1987 [1986], 19); and Brontë is the writer Boylan loved ever since reading *Jane Eyre* as a teenager "entranced by the [...] verbal interaction of Jane and Rochester", something that – she said – never happened in real life (Vincent 2003). Boylan also tried in vain to complete a play "based on the last year of Charlotte's life" (McDonnell 2006) and "a woman in search of her identity" (Miles 1990 [1987], 39) is at the heart of all Brontë's novels as well as Boylan's fiction too.

At the opening of *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist is an alien, an interloper and is called a liar by the Reed family (Fusini 1996, 121), so she does not belong and does not conform, she is off the centre and therefore her childhood and youth are characterised by exclusion and confinement. Likewise, the nameless protagonist of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an eccentric because her post-partum depression keeps her confined in an attic room, excluded from companionship and work. As a matter of fact, parallelisms between Brontë's novel and Gilman's story are pointed out in the landmark of feminist literary criticism, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which considers "The Yellow Wallpaper" "a striking story of confinement and escape" like *Jane Eyre* (Gilbert, Gubar 1984 [1979], 89).

The title of Boylan's 1995 collection *That Bad Woman*, the macrotext, is significant and sheds light on the eccentric characters at the heart of the volume. As Boylan herself wrote in *The Irish Independent*, "bad women are not really bad, they are merely self-seeking" and they "are not out for revenge but for revelation" (Boylan 1995, 9). Secrets and revelations, as well as self-revelation, are at the centre of "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester", and this is in line with the setting of *Jane Eyre*, as Thornfield is a house of secrets (Lamonica 2003, 68). The story is Boylan's "first attempt at getting into the mind of Charlotte Brontë" (Anon. 2006), in which she keeps a surface language that Brontë might have used, at the same time playing with the pre-text. In fact, the "Leviathan of change" (Boylan 2000, 218) that sets in motion Jane's discovery of Rochester's lies recalls the Biblical background of *Jane Eyre*. Likewise, Clare Boylan exploits language strategies characteristic of *Jane Eyre* as a form of continuity with the pre-text. For example, "Jane always calls Rochester 'my master'" in the novel (Figs 1982, 127) and Boylan repeatedly follows Brontë's use of language – for example, "I found my master as reduced as I was advantaged"; "I was compelled to be my master's eyes", "my master prefers a beauty of the man-made kind" (Boylan 2000, 217, 217-18, 218). Interestin-

gly, Boylan concentrates the use of the expression “my master” with reference to Rochester in the first part of the story and gradually replaces it with the more neutral “my husband” (220), “Mr Rochester” (218, 221), or simply the personal pronoun “he” as the story develops, thus underlining Jane’s growing self-awareness and authority in the text. The expression is resumed only in the final paragraph, where Boylan playfully has Jane assert her authority over Rochester: “I have curtailed my master’s excesses by [...] keeping his allowance very small” (225). Boylan keeps the continuity of the narrative organization of *Jane Eyre*, in which “the narrator is herself ten years after she has become Mrs Rochester” (Figs 1982, 130), but does not provide time frames, yet the use of the phrase “independent woman” (Boylan 2000, 217) early in the story creates expectations and anticipates the development of the plot. Finally, the repeated address to the reader, including “Reader, I married him” (*ibidem*) counterbalances the deconstruction Boylan makes of Brontë’s novel.

The opening paragraph is a playful use of direct quotation:

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. The sky was flooded grey and the wind was aroused to a malignant frenzy. Fainting branches clawed at my window and birds held their breath as the forest giants wrestled with invisible foe. Yet, it was not the storm that hampered me. I was at the mercy of an element less rational than tempest. (*ibidem*)

Boylan reproduces the scene of confinement that opens *Jane Eyre*, and like the beginning of the novel, the beginning of the story is a negative statement (Shor 2002, 172), which besides being a direct quotation also alerts the reader that this is a conscious and playful act of rewriting, implicitly also denying the pre-text. The rhetorical use of the explicit intertextuality of direct quotation (Doležel 1998, 201) in the first sentence is followed by expansion of descriptive elements highlighting the Gothic strain in the novel. Brontë’s “leafless shrubbery” is turned into “fainting branches” and “forest giants”, the “cold winter wind” is now “aroused to a malignant frenzy” transforming the “penetrating rain” of the original into “a storm” and “a tempest”, while sombre clouds have a parallelism in the “grey sky” (Brontë 1996 [1847], 13). This emphasizes the negative statement of Brontë’s opening, disrupting the stability of the protoworld (Doležel 1998, 206) and anticipating that the happy ending of *Jane Eyre* is going to be rewritten.

Boylan exploits the medium of the short story as a variation of the post-modern trend of “writing over” of Victorian classics (Humpherys 2002, 442), so that her aftertext could be an unwritten final chapter of *Jane Eyre*. Here Boylan imagines Jane’s life after she has become Mrs Rochester; marriage turns out to be disappointing and her married life is based on deceit.

Jane Eyre has often provided a very popular source for aftering (Humpherys 2002, 452), and retellings or related tales include Jasper Fford’s *The Eyre Affair* (2001) and Bianca Pitzorno’s *La bambinaia francese* (2004). So if Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a “prequel” to *Jane Eyre*, a rewriting

of *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of the first Mrs Rochester, "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" belongs to the series of "sequels" that include, among others, Elizabeth Newark's *Jane Eyre's Daughter* (1999) and D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000).

Boylan's choice of the short story departs from the usual trend and the shorter form seems to be consistent with and to emphasise the *topos* of entrapment and claustrophobia that recurs in her fiction from her first novel *Holy Pictures* to her short stories. For example, in the story "You Don't Know You're Alive" the protagonist spends her days in a coffin-like place: "Annie lived downstairs in the kitchen [...] It was a black sort of kitchen with a high, sooty wall outside the window and a long dark passage leading to the sink" (Boylan 2000, 92). Likewise, an allomorph for traditional settings in Gothic tales can be found in "Mama" and "Flat shadows" (1997), where the unknown house is a place of entrapment and claustrophobia.

The backdrop of Jane's married life is a difficult and unpleasant place (Boylan 2000, 220), as the sombreness of Ferndean with its enclosed space and dark isolation is a coreferent to Rochester's contradictions and past and future lies. In fact, "Edward had once declared that he could not put his mad wife there for fear its climate would end her wretched life" (*ibidem*), yet he has no hesitation to settle down in its darkness with Jane. Ferndean is a place where "sunlight never entered" (*ibidem*), and Jane is "compelled to be (her) master's eyes" (217-18) leading him around the estate. Talking to him recalls the principle of companionship and equality that characterises *Jane Eyre*: "We talk, I believe, all day long; to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking" (Brontë 1996 [1847], 500).

Yet, language is deceiving, since conversation with Rochester is often full of sarcasm. His insistence on Jane describing her clothes replicates Rochester's "boastful conquest and insistence upon adorning Jane with jewels and silks" (Lamonica 2003, 82), a form of possession. Jane finds out that Rochester has lied to her about his blindness, that he has had his sight back since before Jane's arrival at Ferndean, that the servants "have all been party to [her] deception" (Boylan 2000, 222) and that he has trapped her into marrying him. Boylan demythologises Rochester's telepathic call that Jane hears at Moor Head in Chapter 35, which is explained simply as "my poor self [...] concealed beneath some shrubbery" (223). The accumulation of lies and deceit closing around Jane gives rise to the same violent reaction against John Reed's abuse Brontë described in Chapter 1 of *Jane Eyre* in which Jane calls him "Wicked and cruel boy!" and compares him to "a murderer", "a slave-driver", "like the Roman emperors" (Brontë 1996 [1847], 17). This will lead to her confinement in the red room. Clare Boylan adds a physical element to a parallel episode in the story: "I do not quite know what was in my mind but when I came close to that erratic giant who had earned my utmost devotion, I felt the whole extent of my humiliation and struck him a violent blow" (Boylan 2000, 223). Boylan's use of the word "giant" emphasises

Jane's rage and growing authority in a parody of David and Goliath, which is anticipated at the beginning of the story by the use of the same word in both a similar and a different context. In fact, Rochester is first introduced as "a proud giant" forced to "stumble like a fledgling raw to flight", and in the opening paragraph the effects of the storm are ominously described in "the forest giants" wrestling with "invisible foes" (217). Jane's "violent blow" marks the distance of the aftertext from the pre-text, and a mirror scene occurs at the end of the story, when Jane cannot accept Rochester's request of forgiveness and understanding, and in a dramatic switch from romance to farce, Boylan has Jane lose control:

Mr Rochester was very remorseful. He begged my forgiveness and even endeavoured to earn my understanding, insisting that he had never meant to keep me contained, but only assigned me to the attic because my shrewd evaluation of his nature made him fearful of losing me. I disposed of this debate by rendering him senseless with a copper pan. (225)

Her eccentric and violent behaviour contrasts with the protagonist's composure and control in the pre-text and makes the story an alternative rewriting of the Victorian classic, while resorting again to the expression "Mr Rochester" Boylan here underlines the distance Jane is taking from her husband.

As a matter of fact, "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" is much more complex than it might appear in the first place. To recall Lubomir Doležel, the story is based on the "expansion of the protoworld" (1998, 206), so that the gap of Jane's married life is filled. Yet, Boylan seems to play with the temporal overlappings of the conclusion of *Jane Eyre* and her own story, so that her rewriting is not a polemical act of subversion (223), but a playful engagement with various layers of texts and intertexts.

For example, the conclusion of the story makes fun of Rochester as a "Gothic hero-villain" (Kitson 2002, 165) shedding light on the "life of ideal domesticity" Jane has reached "by the simple expedient of keeping his allowance very small", so that Mr Rochester is now "as useful around the house as any one-armed husband, and as blindly devoted as any tamed beasts" (Boylan 2000, 225). An allusion to *The Taming of the Shrew* in female form is apparent, alongside a reversal of Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" in *The Canterbury Tales*. In fact, speaking of her fifth husband, Alison says that "many a blow / He struck me" and Jane's act of making Rochester senseless with a pan turns the violence of "This gay young student, my delightful John" upside down: "[...] he smote me once upon the cheek / Because I tore a page out of his book / And that's the reason why I'm deaf" (Chaucer 1951, 269, 299). Incidentally, John "used to preach and scold" about wicked women taking examples from his books, which makes an interesting cross-reference to Boylan's collection *That Bad Woman*: "And he would take the Bible up and search / For Proverbs in Ecclesiasticus, / Particularly one that has it thus: / 'Suffer no *wicked woman* to gad about'" (299-300; emphasis added).

However, in the intertextual construction of "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" the predominance of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* obliquely intertwines with another story and displays interesting cross-references and parallelisms with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". The disquieting first-person narrative of a young woman imprisoned by her doctor-husband in an isolated country house, and gradually falling into a pathological state of insanity, can be read as a case history and a subversive text. Obsessed by the ugly yellow wallpaper of the room at the top of the house her husband has chosen for her, she perceives in its confusing pattern an imprisoned woman she tries to set free by peeling the paper off the wall.

Clare Boylan's "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" draws together *files rouges* that typically characterise both *Jane Eyre* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" to create an aftertext, whose complexity is worth fathoming, especially in relation to features like eccentricity, isolation, entrapment, and the elusive quality of language.

Susan Lanser has pointed out parallelisms in *Jane Eyre* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" that can provide a structural basis for Boylan's story too. In fact, the description of the country house in Gilman's story belongs to the realm of fiction, to the world of the written word: "It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that *you read about*, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock" (Gilman 1998 [1892], 42; emphasis added). Thornfield comes to mind as one of the "places you read about" and the nameless narrator perceives the place as a Gothic prison ("hedges", "walls", "gates"). Likewise, the setting of Boylan's story is a place of seclusion whose entrapment is magnified as the story goes on. Far from being a "natural edenic setting" (Peterson 1999, 105), Ferndean is "not a cheerful place", it is "densely wrapped in forest" and "[s]unlight never entered our house" (Boylan 2000, 220). The descriptive emphasis on darkness highlights the entrapment of the house. Darkness as enclosure is magnified when Jane "withdrew to a small room at the top of the house" (222) as an act of rebellion against Rochester's deceit. The "top of the house" is both a prison and a form of escape: the roof at Thornfield is a place of freedom for oppressed Jane in the novel, and when she sets fire to the mansion Bertha escapes to the roof (Figs 1982, 133). Jane is locked in this ambiguous place when she accuses Rochester of having deceived other women before her. Considered mad, she remains in that "miserable room without a candle" (Boylan 2000, 224) until she is set free by St. John Rivers. The room is an allomorph of the secret room on the third storey where Bertha Mason was kept in *Jane Eyre*. "That infernal place" with "no light" is also an explicit cross-reference within the story to the red room in which Jane was locked as a child at Gateshead Hall in Chapter 2 of *Jane Eyre* (*ibidem*).

However, the darkness of Boylan's story recalls the entrapment in the attic nursery in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper". The nursery is "at the top of the house" (Gilman 1998 [1892], 43), its windows are "barred for little children", which recalls the "thick black bars" (Brontë 1996 [1847], 26) Jane sees between

waking and sleeping after her fit in the red room in Chapter 3 of *Jane Eyre*. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” identifies the room as a place of discipline, “playroom and gymnasium” and yet the presence of “rings and things in the wall” (Gilman 1998 [1892], 43) and the “great immovable bed” that is “nailed down” (48) seem to suggest that the nursery “has roomed a madwoman or two before her” (Wiesenthal 1997, 27). Based on Gilman’s autobiographical experience of post-partum depression, the story is a “tale of hysterical confinement” (Jacobus 1986, 229) which sheds light on the narrator’s illness as a “temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency”, “a nervous condition”, “nervous weakness” (Gilman 1998 [1892], 42, 43, 46). It is to be noted that in the nineteenth century a diagnosis of “hysteria”, neurasthenia or depression was a synonym of a wide range of women’s diseases (Treichler 1984, 61, 65), and it is the same diagnosis Rochester gives Jane in “The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester” when she accuses him of having driven Bertha Mason and probably “many more unfortunate women” to madness “with similar deceptions” (Boylan 2000, 223): “Pray do not be *hysterical* Jane [...] I know that your *nerves* have been weakened by many trials and that you were subject to *fits* as a little child, but I warn you to *compose* yourself” (*ibidem*; emphasis added). Rochester’s verbal control loses ground when Jane’s accusations hit the target – “Was Céline Varens truly the devil you depict or another poor girl tricked into bigamous marriage?” (*Ibidem*), and his “single utterance” (224), his diagnosis “you are mad” is expanded in the non-verbal language of action by locking the door: “A small scratching signified the turning of a key”. A direct reference to the red room episode in *Jane Eyre* openly sheds light on the intertext of the story: “I was abandoned in that miserable room without a candle, as when I was ten years of age and locked in the red room by Mrs Reed” (*ibidem*).

Rochester’s initial order to “compose” herself replicates the narrator’s “rationalist physician-husband”’s (Jacobus 1986, 230) stress on self-control in “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Gilman 1998 [1892], 43), so that both male characters take up a patronizing attitude that expresses itself in similar verbal and physical behaviour. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” John the husband uses terms of endearment as a form of control and in a prison-like embrace “he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose” (51); “Dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed” (49), calling his wife “his darling” (*ibidem*), “little heart” (44). Likewise in Boylan’s story Rochester “caught me up in his arms” (Boylan 2000, 221) when revealing his lies about his blindness and calls Jane “beguiling elf” and “adorable idiot” (220, 223). Boylan thus rewrites the infantilising attitude of the doctor-husband in Gilman’s story, at the same time reverting the use of animal imagery from woman to man. In Brontë’s novel Abbott calls Jane “little toad” (Brontë 1996 [1847], 34) and Jane is a “mad cat” when locked in the red room (19). Boylan repeatedly refers to Rochester with animal epithets that are present in *Jane Eyre*’s “caged eagle” (479). In a playful mocking

reversal, he is alternatively a "fledgling", a "falling sparrow", he has a "lion's face", is a "captive lion" and finally "a tamed beast" (Boylan 2000, 217, 218, 220, 225). In a similar way, Rochester's libertine behaviour in *Jane Eyre* is replicated in "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" as "Mr Rochester resumed his old bohemian existence and was abroad for some time" (224). An *alter ego* of Rochester, in "The Yellow Wallpaper" John leaves his caged wife alone as he "is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious" (Gilman 1998 [1892], 44), thus implicitly betraying her, which is reiterated a few pages later: "John is kept in town very often by serious cases" (48) and his control is replaced by the sister-in-law Jeannie, who acts as a "perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper" (47) and whose name shows her as John's female *alter ego*.

The motif of light and darkness underlies *Jane Eyre* from the gloom of the red room with "the blinds always drawn" and its "deep surrounding shades" (21) to the comfort of the fire in Mrs Fairfax's room when Jane first arrives at Thornfield. Clare Boylan elaborates on the motif of darkness at Ferndean in "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester", which also characterizes "The Yellow Wallpaper". In fact, the narrator's close observation of the obsessive wallpaper gradually takes up both her days and nights, and the iterated use of the detail of moonlight (Gilman 1998 [1892], 43, 50) – light in darkness, and thus magnifying darkness – draws attention to the strangeness of the house. In fact the house has "something queer" (41), "there is something strange" (42) and the moonlight belongs to the symptoms of mental disturbance as there is no boundary between day and night: "The moon shines in all around just as the sun does" (50). It is thanks to the moonlight that the wallpaper becomes readable, or less unreadable, and therefore can be decoded or deciphered.

As a matter of fact, both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" share with *Jane Eyre* the device of first-person narration and Boylan's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* also sheds light on the conscious construction of the story as story and as a written text, at the same time undermining its authority. This can be also identified both in the fictional autobiography of *Jane Eyre* and in the diary form of "The Yellow Wallpaper".

If on one hand Boylan's "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester" is an after-text, on the other the medium of the short story draws attention to the textual space of the story. In *Jane Eyre* Thornfield is a house of secrets and "the function of the house is to conceal family history and contain secrets" (Lamonica 2003, 78). In Boylan's story, at Ferndean Jane has to unveil and disclose further and further secrets purposefully built for her own deception. This is emphasised by the story's proleptic title. In fact it soon appears that the "secret diary" is an elusive text and ambiguity is cast on its presence on the page:

It is not commonplace to give an unrelieved account of married life so I have set down what is agreeable and reserve the factual report for my private diary, in the hope that it may one day find that true reader who requires not to be assured that all ended happily [...]. (Boylan 2000, 217)

By openly and consciously referring to the fiction of a happy ending Boylan points out that in its self-reflexivity the text is not what it claims to be. Expectations are shattered and the secret diary remains secret and elusive waiting for a “reader” that is obviously not engaged in “this” reading.

The accuracy in control over writing creates a discrepancy between the actual text being written and read and the “factual report” of the private diary. Is this, then, the secret diary or something else? Is the referent in the title misleading? What text is the reader engaged in his act of reading? The reference to a “true reader” implies the impossibility to have access to the secret diary, while the reader repeatedly addressed in the story in a Brontean fashion (“Reader, I married him”, *ibidem*; “Reader, I missed the dear flesh that housed the dark soul”, 224) has access only to part of the text.

Likewise, if the issue of deceit is pivotal in Boylan’s story, the repeated reference to deceit and the predominant use of expressions such as “deception”, “charade”, “you pretended”, “you dressed up”, “you disguised”, “you deceived” (223) contribute to raise doubts on the narrator’s reliability and on the authority of the text and suggests that maybe the secret diary is a fiction too.

A further metatextual reference occurs earlier on in the story, when Rochester suggests going on their honeymoon to “Paris, Rome and Vienna” (218). Considering Rochester’s blindness and disability the “grand plan” is “now mere parody” (219). The use of the word “parody” refers to the virtual journey they have as “fireside travellers”, which enhances the *topos* of entrapment that characterises the story. “Parody”, however, is also the textual journey of the story, a conscious admission that “The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester” is in a way a parody of the pre-text *Jane Eyre*. According to Genette, parody is playful transformation, pastiche serious imitation, which poses Boylan’s story half-way between the two (Genette 1982, 37).

Similar doubts are evident also in the autobiographical stance of *Jane Eyre* itself, as, with an authorial intrusion, the opening of Chapter 10 reflects on its own referentiality:

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. But *this is not to be a regular autobiography*: I am only bound to invoke memories where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection. (97; emphasis added)

Notably in Boylan’s story the second paragraph has a similar function. Acting as a summary of the major events in Brontë’s novel, it casts a bridge between pre-text and aftertext. This is emphasised by the time reference that marks the opening of the paragraph (“A year ago, I had returned to Thornfield Hall”) and by the direct quotation closing it (“Reader, I married him”, Boylan 2000, 217), so that the textual frame of the second paragraph makes it an open reflection on intertextuality.

However, *Jane Eyre* is not a regular autobiography as it links "spiritual autobiography with domestic memoirs (Peterson 1999, 16). By being two things at the same time it is neither. Likewise, Mrs Rochester's secret diary is not a diary in a conventional sense, as a fairly straightforward and uninterrupted narration formally replaces the expected journal daily entries. The diary does not belong to the text, it is a referent outside, the actual diary is displaced and doubts arise about its existence.

Similar questions underlie the narrative organisation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", which is set in the form of a diary, made of twelve entries separated by a blank to mark either interruption in the writing or the passing of time between entry and entry (Bates Dock *et al.* 1996).

Prohibited to "work" – that is to write – in an imposed "rest cure", the narrator has to do her diary-writing "clandestinely" (Wiesenthal 1997, 27) in order not to raise suspicion. Early in the story her diary becomes a protagonist formally and self-referentially in the use of deictic tenets: "*this is dead paper* and a great relief to my mind", "*Here* comes John, and I must put *this* away"; "I don't know why I should write *this*" (Gilman 1998 [1892], 41, 44, 49, emphasis added). Doubts arise if "the text the narrator is writing is arguably the very text we are reading" (Golden 2003, 14).

It is interesting to notice that in the self-referentiality of the story Gilman calls the diary "dead paper" as it anticipates the living wallpaper (Treichler 1984, 66). "I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk behind that silly and conspicuous front design" (Gilman 1998 [1892], 47), later to be identified as "a woman stooping down and creeping about that pattern" (50). Still, the pattern remains unreadable and "diary and wallpaper are textual antitheses" in their "resistance to being read" (Wiesenthal 1997, 32). "The narrator is faced with an unreadable text, a text for which none of her interpretative strategies is adequate" (Lanser 1989, 420). The reader of Gilman's story finds himself in a similar position, as the puzzling relationship between the narrator and the unreadable text of the wallpaper can only be dealt with in another text, the text of the diary.

The self-conscious construction of the story is implied in the formal use of the diary form (Treichler 1984, 73). Yet, as in the case of Boylan's secret diary, common features as time markers, dates, or names of weekdays, generally used in diaries are missing as in Boylan's story, and entries are marked by blank spaces. Time is a blank, the diary is a blank.

Partial "journal-like textual references" (Treichler 1984, 72) support the fiction that the protagonist is keeping a journal, and yet doubts on the diary nature as a text arise that are recalled in Boylan's "The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester". "How can the narrator keep a journal when, as she tells us, she is sleeping, creeping, or watching the wallpaper the whole time? In her growing paranoia, would she confide in a journal she could not lock up? How did the journal get into our hands?" (*Ibidem*).

The stylistic insistence on the verbs “creep” (Jacobus 1986, 282) and “crawl” identifies first the movement of the woman behind the wallpaper and then the nameless narrator herself, who, like Bertha Mason creeps and crawls, thus highlighting a direct reference to *Jane Eyre*. Likewise, the narrator remains nameless until the end where “she hints that her name may be Jane” (Golden 1992, 306). Golden suggests that this could be a misprint for Jennie, the name of the sister-in-law, or a deliberate choice implying that the protagonist has freed herself from both her husband John and sister-in-law Jennie (*ibidem*). As a matter of fact the question and mystery surrounding her name is a coreferent to the ambiguous ending of the story thus obliquely highlighting the secrecy of the text the reader is engaged with.

In “The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester” Clare Boylan draws together different subtexts that display interesting cross-references with its direct pre-text *Jane Eyre* and with the less obvious intertextuality of “The Yellow Wallpaper”. In similar ways the mutual relationship between secrecy and spatial constriction characterises Clare Boylan’s “The Secret Diary of Mrs Rochester”, as well as *Jane Eyre* and “The Yellow Wallpaper” leaving some questions open about the texts themselves. Boylan’s choice of the short story for a rewriting rather than a novel seems to stress the containment and confinement of the text. A secret diary is hidden or imprisoned in the text, and as the diary of the nameless narrator in Gilman’s story, Jane’s diary remains elusive. Maybe it remains unwritten.

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Miscellanea

L'Irlanda e i suoi simboli: W.B. Yeats lettore “occulto” di Giovanni Scoto l'Eriugena

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Abstract:

La relazione tra il filosofo medievale Giovanni Scoto l'Eriugena e il poeta modernista, drammaturgo e folklorista William Butler Yeats mostra un interessante paradosso. Da un lato, quello tra i due è un legame fondamentale, che si sostanzia sul tema dell'identità culturale irlandese, sul retroterra filosofico del Neoplatonismo, e sull'importanza della fantasia come strumento gnoseologico per la scoperta di un mondo absconditus; dall'altro lato, benché tali temi intridano in modo decisivo la *Weltanschauung* yeatsiana, il nome di Eriugena è assai scarsamente citato nelle sue pagine. Per comprendere la loro relazione, è dunque necessario procedere per legami indiretti e comparazioni teoriche. Scopo del presente saggio è osservare l'impianto neoplatonico dell'opera di Yeats, al fine di comprenderne l'affinità con l'Eriugena nel contesto dello sviluppo della cultura irlandese, mostrando la natura della connessione tra il filosofo e il poeta.

Keywords: Eriugena, fantasia, Irlanda, neoplatonismo, William Butler Yeats

Yeats, forse il più celebre scrittore d'Irlanda, e il filosofo Giovanni Scoto, chiamato l'Eriugena, cioè “il figlio dell'Isola di Eriu”, incarnano aspetti profondi e correlati dello spirito e dell'immaginario irlandesi: sono due personagge iconici che Pete McCarthy avrebbe potuto evocare e magicamente incontrare nella visionaria odissea celtica *on the road* di cui racconta nel suo *La scoperta dell'Irlanda di bar in bar* (McCarthy 2003), per apprendere da loro meraviglie, segreti ed essenze della “irlandesità”.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) e Giovanni Scoto detto l'Eriugena (ca. 810-ca. 878) rappresentano in effetti due figure emblematiche della cultura irlandese, le quali, a distanza di dodici secoli, parrebbero essere connesse su molteplici livelli. Se si considera l'importanza che, nella *Weltanschauung* yeatsiana, assumono la ricerca di una specifica identità nazionale, da un lato, e il Neoplatonismo – che ebbe ad influenzare fortemente il suo mai pago interesse per l'occulto (Raine 1999) –, dall'altro, appare sorprendente come

questo pensatore, il cui nome stesso indica un legame con l'Isola di Eriu, il più importante filosofo europeo tra Sant'Agostino e Sant'Anselmo, il quale incarnò un momento decisivo nello sviluppo della filosofia neoplatonica, non appaia con maggiore presenza e con un più elevato numero di riferimenti all'interno dei versi, dei saggi e del teatro di Yeats. Inoltre, la prospettiva eriuigeniana, nella quale la ragione si nutre di quanto la trascende, ponendo le basi per un Idealismo secondo cui la visione interiore assume una preminenza epistemica rispetto alla percezione sensoriale del mondo empirico, poteva di certo fornire a Yeats le coordinate teoretiche essenziali per quello studio ermeneutico in chiave sapienziale del bagaglio folklorico e mitologico-fiabesco dell'Irlanda rurale al quale, nel connubio intellettuale con Lady Augusta Gregory, il poeta attese per tutto il corso della sua esistenza (Johnson 1996, 251-256; 291-333).

L'autore del *De divisione naturae* e Yeats parrebbero dunque collegati su tre fondamentali livelli interpretativi: per la definizione della *Irishness* che Yeats tentò variamente di definire nel corso della sua opera, e che l'Eriugena ebbe di fatto ad incarnare, essendo il pensatore rimasto alla storia con un duplice appellativo rimandante alla Terra di Eriu, e mostrando la ricchezza culturale dell'Isola, in una delle epoche più buie della civiltà europea; per l'importanza che il pensiero neoplatonico assume nei testi yeatsiani, nutrendo in modo fondamentale parte della sua poetica – pensiero che proprio nell'Eriugena ebbe un momento decisivo del suo sviluppo, giacché l'Eriugena può ritenersi a tutti gli effetti, per la sua opera di traduttore e per l'impianto originale del suo sistema di pensiero, il decisivo *trait-d'union* fra il Neoplatonismo antico greco di Proclo e Dionigi e la diffusione della filosofia neoplatonica nella latinità tardo medievale, da Eckhart fino al Rinascimento; per la concezione della facoltà gnoseologica della fantasia, che l'Eriugena definì, forse per la prima volta, nella sua importanza epistemica, in quanto facoltà gnoseologica in grado di trascendere la mera testimonianza empirica, e che Yeats fece propria in modo decisivo, per uno studio e una reinterpretazione in chiave archetipico-sapienziale di ciò che viene definito comunemente *Little People*, o *Sidhe*, secondo la dizione irlandese (ossia l'insieme delle creature fatate concepite e narrate dalla tradizione popolare, non come semplici elementi immaginativi, ma piuttosto come figure simboliche fondamentali dell'inconscio collettivo).

Volendo approfondire queste tre direttrici che, tra il IX e il XX secolo, connettono così intimamente l'opera di Yeats e la filosofia eriuigeniana, non abbiamo tuttavia a nostra disposizione un insieme significativo di riferimenti del poeta nei confronti del pensatore medievale; né, correlatamente, la storiografia ha inteso soffermarsi adeguatamente nell'analisi di questa relazione, tanto ermeneuticamente evidente quanto testualmente impalpabile. Osservando in modo comparativo i testi yeatsiani e il sistema dell'Eriugena, il presente intervento vorrebbe chiarificare, su di un piano teoretico, i punti di collegamento tra i due, ponendone in evidenza i motivi di contiguità.

Nonostante la scarsità di riferimenti espliciti, il nome e l'opera di Giovanni l'Eriugena non erano certamente ignoti a Yeats. Significativa è la

definizione che egli dà del filosofo come di uno dei due grandi esempi, con George Berkeley, del genio spirituale irlandese:

Ireland has produced but two men of religious genius: Johannes Scotus Erigena [*sic*] who lived a long time ago, and Bishop Berkeley who kept his Plato by his Bible; and Ireland forgotten both; and its moral system, being founded upon habit, not intellectual conviction, has shown that it cannot resist the onset of modern life. (Yeats 2000, 327)

Per Yeats, l'Eriugena è perciò uno degli ingegni ispiratori della spiritualità d'Irlanda e, inoltre, un riferimento fondamentale per quella autentica cultura irlandese – forgiata “attraverso sette secoli eroici”, come egli afferma nella lirica “Under Ben Bulbin” (1939) – che la Modernità ha dimenticato e disatteso, e di cui il Celtic Twilight propone un recupero culturale, civico e politico.

Inoltre, l'accostamento che Yeats propone tra Berkeley e l'Eriugena non è privo di significato, sia in quanto una similarità tra i due pensatori irlandesi è in effetti presente nella sostanza metafisica dei loro sistemi (Moran 2006), sia in quanto sappiamo come Yeats considerasse il Vescovo di Cloyne come il pensatore che aveva fondato, con la sua filosofia, un sistema idealistico al quale egli guardò con molta attenzione per definire la concezione della storia, dell'uomo e del cosmo definita nel trattato *A Vision* e affrescata in numerosi dei suoi versi (Yeats 1961, 369-411). Perciò, la considerazione di Yeats nei confronti del pensatore medievale era rilevante, a dispetto della quasi assenza di riferimenti al suo nome all'interno delle sue opere.

Sappiamo inoltre come Yeats dovette conoscere Eriugena attraverso il suo stretto legame con lo scrittore William Larminie (Marcus 1987), il quale attese a una traduzione del *De divisione naturae*, oggi conservata presso la National Library of Ireland (MSS 290-291) unitamente a una più tarda lettera autografa con la quale Yeats chiedeva al direttore della Biblioteca, T.W. Lister, un permesso affinché sua moglie Georgie potesse esaminare il manoscritto della traduzione. Possiamo supporre che fosse lo stesso Yeats a suggerire una tale consultazione, conoscendo il lavoro effettuato da Larminie sul testo dell'Eriugena e la sua relativa interpretazione, nella quale il filosofo medievale veniva considerato, al di fuori di ogni lettura di carattere confessionale o squisitamente teologica, come un pensatore incamminatosi sul sentiero di Platone alla ricerca di una *sapientia* profonda della realtà essenziale, non ridotta in senso materialistico o agnostico (Duddy 2002).

L'interesse decisivo maturato da Yeats nei confronti dell'occulto, come egli stesso spiega in *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1916), prende le mosse da un distacco dalla prospettiva positivista della Modernità novecentesca, per volgersi a un simbolismo che troverà compiuta espressione nelle sue opere poetiche e teatrali, nonché nel già citato *A Vision*. Qui il poeta dichiara come egli, fino agli anni Venti, avesse una conoscenza soltanto basilare in ambito filosofico (Yeats 1937, 3-25); e come, in seguito, fosse proprio la tradizione neoplatonica a divenire il campo principale dei suoi studi.

Il Neoplatonismo yeatsiano va inteso all'interno della sua decisiva vocazione sincretica per lo spiritualismo, l'astrologia, la magia; l'interesse per l'Occulto accompagnò il poeta per tutta la vita, intridendo la sua visione del mondo. Yeats, possiamo affermare, fu in contatto con il portato sapienziale della mitologia e delle tradizioni fiabesche d'Irlanda sin dalla sua infanzia, allorquando, negli anni Settanta del XIX secolo, nei lunghi periodi che il futuro poeta trascorse a Sligo (*Sligeach*), città nell'omonima Contea nella parte nordoccidentale dell'Isola, nella casa dei nonni materni, i Pollexfen, apprese le storie degli "esseri incantati" (*Sidhe*) che avrebbero più tardi popolato i suoi versi e costituito l'oggetto dei suoi studi; risalgono a questo periodo i primi "esperimenti magici" con lo zio George e le sue prime esperienze paranormali. In seguito, il legame di Yeats con l'amico e scrittore George William Russell (*Æ*) avrebbe dato nuovo corpo a tali pratiche (Allen 2003). Il sempre crescente interesse per questo ambito avrebbe condotto il poeta a fondare, nel giugno del 1885, la *Dublin Hermetic Society*; nonché ad entrare nella *Theosophical Society* di Madame Blavatsky (Monteith 2008), prima, e in seguito nella celebre associazione occultista dell'*Order of the Golden Dawn* (Mills-Harper 1974). Fu a partire da questo fortissimo retroterra, nutrito per il corso di una vita, che Yeats sperimentò altresì la "scrittura automatica" e le esperienze di *trance* auto-indotta che avrebbero portato alla stesura, condotta con sua moglie Georgie Hyde Lees, medium ella stessa, del trattato mistico-poetico *A Vision* (Nally 2012).

Possiamo comprendere perché, in un tale contesto di riferimento, Yeats ebbe ad interessarsi, prima e con maggiore acribia che non al suo antenato platonico irlandese, all'italiano Marsilio Ficino: il Platonismo del pensatore toscano, che connette in una linea di contiguità la sapienza pre-greca e la conoscenza astrologica, la potenza magica dell'anima e il pensiero di Platone, l'Umanesimo e la teologia, lo Zoroastrismo iranico e la dottrina della *prisca theologia* di Giorgio Gemisto Pletone, si conformava perfettamente all'interno dell'orizzonte ideale dell'eclittico misticismo yeatsiano (Fogarty 2002). Il Platonismo è, infatti, un tassello di quel complesso insieme di ideali e principi che il bardo di Sligo venne formando, fondendo tra loro elementi per molti versi eterogenei, come il primato poetico-immaginario espresso da William Blake sulla scorta delle visioni di Emanuel Swedenborg e Jacob Böhme (Adams 1995), i principi alchemici, le dottrine cabalistiche, le filosofie estremorientali.

Quello di Ficino è, dal canto suo, un Platonismo che si nutre, sospinto da un vasto eclettismo di fondo, delle fonti dirette dei testi ellenici che il filosofo toscano, in maniera epocale, ebbe per la prima volta a tradurre, su commissione di Lorenzo de' Medici; il nome di Eriugena è estraneo a Ficino, il quale, a differenza del suo contemporaneo Nicola di Kues, non guarda alla tradizione di Eckhart per definire il proprio sistema speculativo. Il dialogo tra Yeats e l'Eriugena è perciò, in questo senso, effettivo ma indiretto: poiché la filosofia platonica che Yeats conosce e indaga con maggiore attenzione è differente dalla linea della tradizione che, da Proclo, giunge allo Pseudo-Dionigi e, da

questi, all'Eriugena, per poi essere ripresa da Eckhart e da Nicola Cusano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento. Se da un lato ciò non inficia la relazione ideale che connette Yeats all'Eriugena, dall'altro chiarifica per molti versi perché il nome di questo filosofo platonico d'Irlanda non svolga un ruolo da protagonista tra le pagine vergate dal poeta di Sligo. L'Eriugena parrebbe, in questo senso, una sorta di assente presenza nei testi yeatsiani, la quale si palesa proprio nel momento in cui Yeats non ne cita il nome, ma tocca, con la sua opera, elementi decisivi del suo pensiero. In questo preciso senso, il bardo di Sligo può essere considerato una sorta di "lettore occulto" del filosofo medievale, nel duplice senso dell'espressione: sia in quanto il loro appare come un legame fortissimo, ma indiretto; sia in quanto quest'ultimo è da comprendersi proprio alla luce della visione dell'esoterismo yeatsiano.

Nel contesto del Celtic Twilight teorizzato da Yeats con Lady Augusta Gregory e John Synge, la figura di Giovanni Scoto l'Eriugena, a partire dalla etimologia del suo nome, avrebbe potuto essere considerata una immagine-simbolo di quella *Irishness* perduta che, redimendo l'oblio del popolo irlandese, avrebbe dovuto costituire la base per la nascita della *Poblacht na hÉireann*, la Repubblica nazionale. Eriugena è in effetti una figura-chiave del Medioevo europeo, che realizza la continuità tra il pensiero patristico e quello tardomedievale, mostrando come l'Irlanda, in un'epoca di profonda barbarie intellettuale quale l'età carolingia, dovette essere in quei secoli una fucina culturale in cui l'antica tradizione europea degli *Studia Humanitatis* poté essere tramandata per essere conservata sino al Rinascimento. L'Eriugena incarna perciò, ai massimi livelli, quel senso idealizzato di un'Irlanda arcaica che, nelle sue radici autoctone, ebbe ad inverare, secondo Yeats, l'essenza più profonda dell'identità culturale dell'Europa. Nelle *Glossae divinae historiae*, osserviamo come alcuni dei commenti dedicati dall'Eriugena alla Sacra Scrittura fossero, oltre che in latino, vergati in antico irlandese (Dronke 2012, xi). Quella eriugeniana può a ragione considerarsi come la prima opera di respiro europeo composta in irlandese.

A dispetto dei numerosi studi dedicatigli, la vita, la figura e la morte dell'Eriugena rimangono, al di là dei suoi testi, avvolte per molti versi nel mistero. La caratteristica ineliminabile della sua identità resta il legame con l'Isola d'Irlanda, sottolineato dai due appellativi – "Scoto" e "Eriugena" – che rimandano, in modo differente, alla medesima origine irlandese. Non abbiamo notizie di cariche ecclesiastiche esplicate dal filosofo nel corso della sua vita; della sua formazione precedente al periodo tra l'840 e l'850, nel quale egli muove dall'Irlanda alla corte francese di Carlo il Calvo, possiamo solo congetturare che avvenne in uno dei numerosi monasteri e centri-culturali che, nell'Alto Medioevo, erano massicciamente presenti nell'Isola di Eriu e che Yeats avrebbe sovente evocato nei suoi versi. In uno di tali centri l'Eriugena dovette apprendere i fondamenti della lingua greca, la filosofia neoplatonica e, ovviamente, una conoscenza analitica delle Sacre Scritture.

Presso la Corte di Carlo il Calvo, dove non sappiamo con certezza perché e come l'Eriugena ebbe a trasferirsi, il pensatore ricoprì l'ambita posizione di *magister*, e compose numerosi libelli di carattere esegetico. Fu coinvolto in durissime dispute teologiche, pericolosamente lambendo i limiti dell'eterodossia, e solo la protezione del sovrano francese dovette assicurargli l'incolumità. La sua opera più importante, il *Periphyseon*, vide la luce attorno all'870, divisa in cinque libri. Più tardi, l'Eriugena attese – oltre che alla composizione di commenti filosofici al Vangelo di Giovanni – all'importantissimo lavoro di traduzione e interpretazione del corpo patristico greco, delle opere di Dionigi (il cosiddetto *Corpus Areopagiticum*) e di Massimo il Confessore. Per importanza storica e rilevanza speculativa, tale lavoro esegetico e traduttivo realizzato dall'Eriugena per il Calvo può essere paragonato, *mutatis mutandis*, a quello compiuto sette secoli più tardi da Marsilio Ficino nella Firenze del Magnifico. In questo senso, così come nell'Alto Medioevo Giovanni Scoto definisce una precisa linea della tradizione platonica che sarà poi ripresa dalla mistica renana e dalla Scuola chartriana, similmente Ficino, nel Rinascimento, pone le basi per un ritorno a Platone che trova, nelle sue inedite traduzioni dei dialoghi originali, il suo tratto distintivo. Come accennato, Yeats dovette interessarsi primariamente al Platonismo descritto da Ficino, più che a quello delineato dall'Eriugena.

La filosofia di quest'ultimo rimanda alla sensibilità di Yeats su vari fronti: per le sue teorie in odore di eresia; per il carattere esotericamente sapienziale della sua dottrina: per il recupero di una *abscondita* antica tradizione di pensiero; per il carattere "hibernocentrico" della sua figura, che mostra l'Irlanda quale fulcro, custode e propulsore a un tempo, di una verace tradizione autoctona dall'orizzonte europeo. Cercando un'unità ontologica intrinseca al popolo irlandese, che preesistesse alla divisione tra Protestanti e Cattolici, Yeats si pose esattamente alla ricerca di un riferimento ideale che potrebbe trovare nell'opera dell'Eriugena un perfetto referente. Nel 1915, facendo cenno all'influenza che O'Leary ebbe sulla sua visione del mondo e sulla ricerca di un'identità precipua dell'Irlanda, Yeats affermava:

I began to plot and scheme how one might seal with the right image the soft wax before it began to harden. I had noticed that Irish Catholics among whom had been born so many political martyrs had not the good taste, the household courtesy and decency of the Protestant Ireland I had known, yet Protestant Ireland seemed to think of nothing but getting on in the world. I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, a European pose. (Yeats 1955, 100-101)

In questa riflessione del bardo di Sligo, l'opera eriugeniana è presente, pur nella sua assenza, su di un duplice livello. Anzitutto, il *corpus* degli scritti di Eriugena, alla luce di quanto sopra accennato, rappresenta esattamente "una letteratura nazionale in grado di mostrare l'Irlanda splendida nella sua tradizione", ma irriducibile a qualsivoglia "provincialismo", avente a tutti gli

effetti "un respiro europeo": l'Eriugena nasce e si forma in quell'ambiente unico che fu l'Irlanda altomedievale, apice di una cultura tradizionale irlandese che rappresenta un momento d'eccellenza della storia occidentale; scrive alcuni dei suoi testi, oltre che nella *koiné* latina, altresì nella lingua dell'Isola; i suoi lavori e le sue idee travalicano abbondantemente i confini "nazionali", prendendo le mosse dal retroterra greco ed ebraico, e ponendosi all'attenzione del dibattito culturale europeo, soprattutto dopo il suo passaggio alla corte del Calvo; nello sviluppo della tradizione filosofica europea, l'Eriugena non può non essere considerato un pensatore decisivo per la definizione della filosofia neoplatonica, sia in quanto traduttore dei testi antichi, che come originale autore di concezioni speculative che perdureranno intatte sino al XXI secolo: l'idea di Dio come Uno-infinito ineffabile; la concezione del mondo come metafora del divino; l'idea della *coincidentia oppositorum*; la reciprocità di *fides* e *ratio* per la comprensione dell'essenza dell'universo; il primato della facoltà immaginativa per accedere a una dimensione ulteriore rispetto a quella dell'esistenza finita. L'Eriugena è dunque, senza dubbio, l'esempio *par excellence* di una cultura tradizionale irlandese avente un respiro europeo.

Il sistema eriugeniano può inoltre collegarsi alle parole di Yeats anche su di un altro livello: il poeta irlandese persegue una Unità trascendente le differenze, la quale in ultima analisi non è di ordine squisitamente politico, ma altresì metafisico. Come ha notato Claudia Corti, Yeats è mosso dalla "profonda convinzione che proprio nelle costruzioni mitiche della tradizione ermetico-occultista si manifesti [...] l'Unità dell'Essere, l'originarietà archetipa dell'esistente umano, l'esser-ci dell'Uomo nel Mondo" (1991, 321). Il pensiero di Eriugena, in questo senso, si riferisce esattamente al concetto di *Unitas* per chiarificare l'essenza comune a tutti gli enti nelle loro differenze. Il filosofo irlandese concepisce l'universo creaturale come una differenziazione interna al principio divino. La molteplicità, nella quale il mondo decade dopo il peccato, è ciò che caratterizza gli enti finiti; l'Unità è dunque lo scopo di ogni creatura, in quanto essa è la modalità essenziale tramite cui ciò che esiste nel regno della finitudine possa essere restaurato nel suo originario *status* ontologico di matrice divina. Dio è il creatore di tutte le cose, nel senso che "le fa esistere tenendole unite tra loro nel forte vincolo di un'armonia cosmica, che, in quanto forza di coesione di enti opposti e differenti, agisce come amore universale che muove a sé tutte le cose, suscitando in esse il desiderio di unione" (Chietti in Scoto Eriugena 2011, 27):

Cum ergo audimus Deum omnia facere nil aliud debemus intelligere quam Deum in omnibus esse, hoc est, essentiam omnium subsistere. Ipse enim solus per se vere est, et omne quod vere in his quae sunt dicitur esse ipse solus est. Nihil enim eorum quae sunt per se ipsum vere est; quodcunque autem in eo vere intellegitur participatione ipsius qui solus per se ipsum unius qui solus per se ipsum vere est accipit. (Scoto Eriugena 2013, 384)

La nota divisione quadripartita della natura, che l'Eriugena propone nel *Periphyseon* – Natura non creata e creatrice; Natura creata e creatrice; Natura

creata e non creatrice; Natura non creata e non creatrice – facendo riferimento rispettivamente a Dio, al *Logos* o *Verbum*, all’universo e al ritorno (*reditus*) di tutte le cose in Dio stesso, affresca un processo di degradazione ontologica che va dall’Uno ai molti, per poi ritornare all’Unità originaria del divino. È in tale prospettiva che l’Eriugena intende la Resurrezione: Cristo, tornando dal regno dei morti, ha rivelato all’uomo la sua divinità; Egli è l’immagine dell’uomo divinizzato che, mostrandosi nell’Unità assoluta di Dio, si contrappone ad Adamo, simbolo della differenziazione finita, della separazione dall’Origine indistinta. All’uomo è permessa una sapienza esoterica, tale da (ri)attualizzare la potenzialità divina della sua esistenza, nel superamento delle opposizioni di identità e differenza proprie del regno della finitudine.

Dal canto suo, sebbene nella sua poetica non spetti al Nazareno una funzione teologica centrale come nell’Eriugena, Yeats ebbe similmente a definire la sua ricerca come un tentativo di “*mould a vaste material into a single image*” (Yeats 1916, 354; corsivi miei), giacché, come è stato rilevato da Fantaccini, “al cuore dell’opera di Yeats sta l’idea della ricerca di unità [...]. Secondo Yeats la funzione principale della poesia è quella di scoprire l’ordine sotteso alla vita, per poi imporlo alla vita stessa nel tentativo di superarne l’incoerenza e la natura accidentale” (Fantaccini 2009, 15). Tale ricerca dell’Unità sottesa agli opposti presuppone una concezione metafisica che Yeats descrive sia nel trattato *A Vision* che in vari suoi componimenti poetici; essa troverà piena espressione nella complessa teoria yeatsiana delle “spirali”, in cui il soggetto individuale, come microcosmo, non è che *imago* del destino universale. Si tratta di una concezione tipica del Neoplatonismo rinascimentale, che ha una sua prima formulazione proprio nel sistema dell’Eriugena. Sul piano gnoseologico, questo principio conduce all’idea secondo cui la mente umana, per intendere la natura di Dio, sia chiamata a trascendere se medesima, nella consapevolezza della sua fondamentale incapacità conoscitiva: poiché Dio è l’Unità assoluta coincidenza degli opposti, rispetto alla quale non si dà differenza alcuna con gli altri enti, la mente umana, che conosce le cose tramite una comparazione tra di esse, non può per definizione attingere la natura di assoluta non-alterità di Dio; ecco che dunque nella consapevolezza del non-poter conoscere – una sorta di socratico “so di non sapere”, spostato dal piano morale a quello metafisico – si disvela il mistero del divino. Per questo motivo Yeats descrive una conoscenza come percorso nell’occulto, non diversamente da come Eriugena pone una identificazione tra la più alta conoscenza e l’ignoranza: “*Ipsa itaque ignorantia summa ac vera est sapientia*” (Dronke 2002, II 28).

Tale similarità tra Yeats e il sistema platonico dell’Eriugena, che come vediamo si mostra sia sul piano metafisico che su quello gnoseologico, può altresì essere compresa alla luce dell’importanza che la filosofia neoplatonica assume nell’opera di William Blake, la cui poetica ebbe sempre sul bardo di Sligo un’influenza determinante, specialmente per quanto concerne i concetti di Uno divino e immaginazione (Antonielli 2009). In Blake troviamo una concezione quadripartita

della natura, unitamente alla concezione dell'uomo come microcosmo: principi la cui matrice è squisitamente neoplatonica (Mills-Harper 1961), e che troviamo proprio nell'Eriugena una prima formulazione, rielaborando egli in chiave cristiana le idee di Proclo. Non casualmente la cosmologia blakiana descrive un principio divino come *coincidentia oppositorum*, *topos* metafisico fondamentale di tutta la tradizione che, da Dionigi, giunge a Nicola di Kues passando in modo fondamentale per Eckhart e, appunto, per Giovanni l'Eriugena. Non sorprende, dunque, ritrovare tale nozione nei versi di William Butler Yeats.

Nella prima stanza del poema "Vacillation" (1932), Yeats richiama la dottrina neoplatonica di Dio come coincidenza degli opposti:

Between extremities
 Man runs his course;
 A brand, or flaming breath.
 Comes to destroy
 All those antinomies
 Of day and night;
 The body calls it death,
 The heart remorse.
 But if these be right
 What is joy? (1950, 282)

Come sempre in Yeats, la dimensione corporea e quella spirituale non sono poste in uno schema di dualistica divisione cartesiana, mostrandosi al contrario come aspetti di una medesima realtà trascendente o, per dirla in termini eriugeni, come diversi aspetti dei gradi ontologici di Natura. Nella battaglia che si svolge tra le antinomie che compongono il mondo, il poeta scorge l'Unità quale sostanza ultima che soggiace a ogni cosa. La "gioia", evocata da Yeats nell'ultimo verso della stanza quale impeto di superare i contrari per innalzare l'anima verso ciò che li trascende, corrisponde al concetto neoplatonico di *reditus*, descritto in particolare da Giovanni l'Eriugena nell'analisi della "quarta Natura", non creata e non creante, meta del destino teleologico degli enti. Per Eriugena, l'uomo è un microcosmo che, per mezzo della *ratio*, può risalire alla *quidditas* degli enti, la *Unitas* infinita, che determina la molteplicità caotica del mondo empirico e sensoriale. Nel trascendere la ragione attraverso la consapevolezza della infinità super-essenziale dell'Uno, l'uomo realizza come gli enti siano coeterni al Logos, in quanto esplicazione della stessa essenza divina. Il mondo non è che il contrarsi dell'Uno o, in altri termini, l'Uno stesso nel suo contrarsi.

Come non sfuggì a Mario Manlio Rossi (Rossi 1947), filosofo e anglista italiano che di Yeats fu profondo interprete, condividendo altresì con il poeta significativi momenti di vita comune (Fantaccini 2009, 74-112), in questo tratto della poetica dello scrittore irlandese appare forte il richiamo al neoplatonico rinascimentale Nicola Cusano, il quale fonda il suo sistema di pensiero a partire dal concetto di *docta ignorantia*, concependo l'universo creato come

una *contractio Dei*, una contrazione interna alla Unità divina che si traduce nella molteplicità dell'universo empirico. Il mondo non è dunque altro che l'*explicatio* di quella medesima *essentia* che, in Dio, si dà come *complicatio*. Per Cusano, la *veritas*, in quanto unità assoluta, è paragonabile a un cerchio al quale la ragione umana, la cui attività si svolge con il metodo comparativo, si approssima non diversamente da come farebbe un poligono inscritto in esso: moltiplicando in modo indefinito i suoi lati, senza poter mai giustapporvisi (Flasch 2011).

In una lettera dell'ottobre del 1931, Yeats rispondeva a Rossi che proponeva una lettura dei suoi testi sulla scorta del Cusano, notando come la questione "*of the universe as an opposition in unity*" risultasse per lui determinante, e come essa fosse presente altresì in Swift (Wade 1954, 783; corsivi miei). La dottrina della conoscenza come infinita approssimazione al Dio inconcepibile, tipicamente cusaniiana, unitamente all'idea dell'Unità quale sostanza ultima degli enti finiti, principi che tanto dovettero affascinare la coscienza yeatsiana nella formazione della sua poetica, sono dunque esplicitamente riconosciuti dallo scrittore quali espressioni direttamente connesse con la filosofia neoplatonica, così come formulata da Cusano. Risulta qui significativo notare come, oltre Meister Eckhart, il riferimento principale del pensiero cusaniiano, dal quale il pensatore di Kues prende esplicitamente le mosse quasi a riproporne una versione nella cultura del Rinascimento, sia proprio la filosofia di Giovanni Scoto l'Eriugena (Kijewska 2011). In questo senso, se consideriamo l'esplicito legame tra Yeats e Cusano, e la connessione storica tra quest'ultimo e l'Eriugena, la relazione tra il bardo di Sligo e l'autore del *Periphyseon* trova un ulteriore, significativo tassello per ricostruire il rapporto indiretto tra i due. Come nel caso di Ficino, Yeats parrebbe ritrovare nella cultura del Rinascimento quanto quest'ultima aveva originariamente tratto dal Neoplatonismo medievale eriugeniano.

Ciò può essere ulteriormente sottolineato e compreso, analizzando alcuni testi poetici nei quali il sostrato neoplatonico dello scrivere di Yeats è evidentemente richiamato. Nella lirica "Before the World was Made", seconda sezione del poema "A Woman Young and Old", contenuto nella raccolta del 1933 *The Winding Stair*, leggiamo:

If I make the lashes dark
 And the eyes more bright
 And the lips more scarlet,
 Or ask if all be right
 From mirror after mirror,
 No vanity's displayed:
 I'm looking for the face I had
 Before the world was made.
 What if I look upon a man
 As though on my beloved,
 And my blood be cold the while
 And my heart unmoved?

Why should he think me cruel
 Or that he is betrayed?
 I'd have him love the thing that was
 Before the world was made. (Yeats 1950, 308)

Evidente è qui il retroterra filosofico della lirica nella ripresa del mitema dell'amore così caro a tanta poesia di matrice neoplatonica, da Petrarca a Shakespeare, da Michelangelo a Veronica Franco, e che Ficino esemplificò nel suo trattato *De Amore*. Nell'amare, l'amante non ama *sic et simpliciter* l'amato, bensì quell'idea eterna e trascendente dell'amore, di cui la bellezza dell'amato è segno visibile. Yeats proporrà un'ulteriore prova poetica di questa tematica nella celebre lirica "When You are Old", nella quale il poeta afferma di essere "il solo" in grado di conoscere l'esemplare eterno di Maud Gonne, che permarrà immutato anche dopo la sua decadenza fisica. Amare significa, neoplatonicamente, trascendere la prospettiva immanente dell'esistere, per andare, meta-fisicamente, all'esemplare originario e imperituro dell'essere, precedente il concretizzarsi, il contrarsi, dell'universo. In altri termini, amare corrisponde al ricercare l'essenza di una persona nell'idea che precede, in quanto esemplare, la sua immagine temporale, o – come scrive Yeats nel componimento "Before the World was Made" –, "the face [...] before the world was made".

La *forma mentis* neoplatonica del poeta, che riconosce il corpo umano quale apparizione di una realtà imperitura precedente la sua manifestazione empirica, agisce in questo senso anche nella sua concezione politica (Catà 2013). Infatti, così come vi è un volto umano che precede il concretizzarsi della persona nel mondo, allo stesso modo l'essenza dell'Irlanda non diviene esistente nel momento in cui si fonda lo Stato della Repubblica Irlandese, poiché tale essenza preesiste – come Nazione, come "idea di Irlanda" – a tale concretizzazione.

In "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927), componimento che apre il volume *The Tower* del 1928, il poeta sottolinea ulteriormente tale aspetto:

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (1950, 218)

Se nella nota poesia "Easter, 1916" (nella quale Yeats ha celebrato la sollevazione di Pasqua che condurrà, di lì a cinque anni, per alterne vicende, all'indipendenza della Repubblica) il poeta ha affermato che compito ultimo dello scrivere versi fosse, a livello civico, "mormorare" i nomi dei martiri che si erano battuti per l'Isola – in "Sailing to Byzantium" quest'ultima è vista come

una sorta di meraviglia edenica, i cui abitanti sono troppo intenti a godere della sua bellezza per curarsi dei “*monuments of the unageing intellect*” (corsivi miei). Il ruolo del poeta viene qui letto su di un piano metafisico: egli diviene una pura forma, immobile, eterna, trascendente, narrante “*what is past, or passing, or to come*” (corsivi miei), ormai *out of nature*, un’anima priva di *bodily form*. Con ciò, la funzione del poeta e il rapporto tra lo scrittore e la sua patria, già descritto in “Easter, 1916”, assume una connotazione squisitamente neoplatonica, in quanto la scrittura è ciò che conferisce forma alla materia empirica. Dunque – se è vero che la Nazione è per uno Stato ciò che l’anima è per un corpo – William Butler Yeats ha vissuto, indagato e cantato i fondamenti della Nazione irlandese – i suoi miti, le sue fiabe, la sua lingua, la sua tradizione – affinché essa assumesse la “forma corporea” della *Poblacht na hÉireann*, la Repubblica d’Irlanda. Così come ebbe ad invocare l’esemplare eterno di Maud Gonne per un amore trascendente il di lei aspetto esteriore, Yeats ha ricercato in chiave neoplatonica lo spirito imperituro dell’Isola d’Irlanda.

La gnoseologia dell’Eriugena si connette, in questo senso, in modo profondo con l’interesse filosofico-politico di Yeats per le fiabe e i miti dell’Irlanda rurale. Il bagaglio mitologico-fiabesco dell’Ovest irlandese, da Yeats indagato per anni nei suoi studi folklorici e utilizzato quale riferimento primario del suo teatro e della sua poesia, rappresenta molto più d’un insieme di credenze di carattere anedddotico, popolare o allucinatorio. In una prospettiva che, come è stato notato, possiede sorprendenti punti di connessione con la psicanalisi junghiana (Oliva 1989), il bardo di Sligo interpreta le figure del folklore rurale irlandese quali immagini archetipiche della conoscenza umana. Il *Little People* (o *Sidhe*, secondo la dizione irlandese) si pone in questo senso come una rappresentazione simbolica della realtà occulta. Di qui l’importanza, filosofica e politica a un tempo, che Yeats assegnava ai racconti fiabeschi irlandesi fitti di Leprechauns, Fairies, Banshees.

Il concetto di *phantasia*, nella filosofia di Eriugena, si pone similmente come una capacità gnoseologica che, superando l’ambito della razionalità empirica, indaga gli *invisibilia* attraverso metafore, allegorie, simboli (Beierwaltes 1998; Paparella 2009), l’universo stesso essendo concepito alla stregua di una “metafora” del Dio inconcepibile. Così come la Sacra Scrittura, secondo l’Eriugena, non può e non deve essere compresa alla lettera, in quanto si serve di immagini metaforiche dal portato simbolico, similmente è la realtà in sé che – in quanto *signum Dei*, o *processio* dall’Uno ai molti – diviene simbolo dell’ineffabile. Questo concetto di *phantasia* che, da Dionigi a Ficino, percorre l’intera filosofia neoplatonica, trova in Eriugena una specifica declinazione. Yeats lo fece indirettamente proprio, per indagare quella particolare realtà ideale che l’essenza della cultura d’Irlanda poteva rivelare nelle immagini archetipiche della sua cultura folklorica. Si mostra dunque qui un ulteriore e importante motivo di connessione tra il moderno scrittore simbolista e il filosofo medievale teorizzatore del portato mistico del simbolo.

L'Eriugena utilizzò l'appellativo di *Artifex* – "creatore", "formatore" – sia a proposito della Sacra Scrittura con il suo portato mistico-metaforico, che nei confronti dello stesso principio divino: poiché l'universo non è altro che un'espressione simbolica di Dio, parola da interpretarsi. Nel medesimo senso, William Butler Yeats ebbe ad affidare al linguaggio un primato politico, etico e metafisico, nella ferma convinzione, squisitamente neoplatonica, che il linguaggio precede e determina gli accadimenti, così come la forma del pensiero la materia delle azioni: per questo, secondo Yeats – erede indiretto e legittimo del pensiero dell'Eriugena – tra tutti i beni dell'umano, come leggiamo in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (1885) "*words alone are a certain good*" (corsivi miei).

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Elizabeth Vesey and the Art of Educating Oneself, Between London and Lucan

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Abstract:

A 1926 publication describes the Library of Mrs. Elizabeth Vesey (1715-1791), a Bluestocking and the wife, by second marriage, of Agmondisham Vesey, a member of the Irish Parliament. The essay examines the books that refer to the cultural background and critical abilities of an Irish literary lady who transmitted but a small record of her literary competence to posterity. The excursus points to her historical, philosophical, and theological formation as the daughter of the Bishop of Ossory, besides her acquaintance with foreign literatures (most prominently the Italian one) and her ideological involvement with the question of the American colonies that she only briefly hints at in a letter to her friend Mrs. Montagu in order not to trespass the borders of the public sphere. Vesey's portrait would be mostly imperfect if this collection was ignored.

Keywords: bluestocking, education, Ireland, library, Mrs. Elizabeth Vesey

In “The Politics of Paradise, Insurrection, the Sunday Schools and Elizabeth Vesey's Dragon”, a chapter of *Madam Britannia*, Emma Major argues for the importance of “the political, the public and the private” in defining eighteenth-century women of letters (Major 2012, 166-99). A mixture of those categories also emerged from Elizabeth Vesey's polite circles of conversations causing Elizabeth Montagu's comment, in a letter to Elizabeth Carter, about some Dragon amusing, and simultaneously preoccupying, their beloved Sylph, who had to face “Mr Vesey's fits, Mrs Hancock's palpitations, the loss of America, the gutter that overflows in ye kitchen, & the Fleet superior to our Navy, a Foreign army ready to land &c.” (184). The foundations of Vesey's intellectual development, untraceable because of lack of published work on her part, emerge distinctly from her extensive reading as evidence of her self-motivated lifelong commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and learning including her political engagement. An analysis of her library, entwined with biographical data and her correspondence with Montagu, is being carried out in what fol-

lows in order to uncover her cultural roots and account for her way of keeping up with contemporary public events.

“It is indeed one of the most pleasant compilations that ever occupied the attention of a collector”, so writes, in the course of a three-page review, Seumas O’Sullivan, editor of *The Dublin Magazine* (O’Sullivan 1926, 75) of William H. Robinson’s catalogue *The Library of Mrs. Elizabeth Vesey, 1715-1791: The first of the blue-stockings, the friend of Laurence Sterne, Horace Walpole, Goldsmith, Gray, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Montagu, etc., etc., and the hostess of Dr. Johnson and the ‘club’* (Robinson 1926, wpn)². The Library, purchased by Robinson and removed from Lucan House, the family mansion near Dublin, is advertised as a collection “of unusual interest”, containing rare items, “treasures, the mere describing of which is a joy to read” (O’Sullivan 1926, 75). Of several of those volumes there is no trace left; as a matter of fact, the demands of business led to the dispersion of such historical assemblage of valuable writings.

Browsing the list of books interspersed with the correspondence of friends and acquaintances that discuss Elizabeth Vesey, the comments on her character and her literary engagement by contemporary writers, and her correspondence (a considerable part of which is still unpublished) – ninety-six letters on the whole, ninety addressed to Mrs. Montagu and six to Lord Lyttelton, kept at Huntington (Brimley Johnson 1926; The Montagu Collection)³ – adds a remarkable interest to one’s reading: on one hand, the whole has a cultural and affective value; on the other, the known historical and social scenario is enriched with personal and intimate notations. In a way, the technical bibliographic citation is being charged with signifiers, so much so that the list of titles becomes almost a charming narrative of the relationship between the book and its user – a different story for each different owner, for each different reader, for all those who come into contact or interact with a book, or even just keep it on their bookshelves. In this case, the collection throws light on the ability of upper-class women’s self-education in Georgian times; an ability often transmitted within the family or, sometimes, at school; an ability that improves with time, whether it is exploited in the private or the public sphere⁴.

A biographical note by Ross Balfour opens the catalogue supplying details, for those who did not know her, on Elizabeth Vesey’s life (Robinson 1926, i-iv)⁵. It is based on Reginald Blunt’s 1925 “admirable essay” – he writes – on “The Sylph” published in the *Edinburgh Review* from which he quotes (*ibidem; passim*). As is known, the Magazine was hardly benevolent towards colonial affairs. Let us just think of such a prestigious critic, philosopher, and literary writer as the Reverend Sydney Smith’s literary attack in 1820 against the former British colonies: “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?” (Smith 1820, 79) that attracted reactions by a crown of Americanists taking the field to defend the emerging American literature. Far from being an objective narrator, Balfour follows Blunt in reporting information obtained from people who had met her when already declining (Burney 1832, 264-66;

Barrett 1854, *passim*), or underestimated her intelligence, or even her cultural relevance for not transmitting a permanent memorial of herself to posterity through her writings (Robinson 1926, iii). The portrait transmitted to posterity by modern scholarship is certainly less distorted than contemporary representations: in particular, Deborah Keller's essay on "Elizabeth Vesey as The Sylph" analyses her in her playful jolly identity as a free spirit or Sylph, as she was known among the Bluestockings. Keller, however, is not too pre-occupied with her native roots, nor does she detect in her a champion of a modern life-long learning project (2003, 215-34)⁶.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Vesey wrote herself into the history of education at a time in which the pedagogical discipline was not yet official, nor were themes such as women's education, self-teaching methods, cultural dissemination, life-long learning, and the role of the learning instrument *par excellence*, the book.

About the library, it consists of one thousand and eighty-one volumes, some of which exhibit the elegant book-plate engraved by Gretton, bearing her signature, "Mrs. Vesey" or "Eliza Vesey"; others have her own or her husband's, Agmondisham Vesey, M.P., or just her husband's; others that of Colonel Vesey (Agmondisham's nephew and heir to Lucan House with its *demesne*, the Irish residence of the Veseyes), who took care of her after her husband's death (1785), during the last six years of her life (Keenan 2003)⁷.

Not all of the books were owned by Mrs. Vesey; the collection, however, is of considerable amplitude at a time when Ireland had only two public libraries and a few private ones, these last hosting between as few as fifty to six-thousand volumes. A part of the collection was removed from the London home after her death in order to join the volumes that had stayed at Lucan House, whence they were moved by boat toward a British or perhaps even an American buyer. A note in the catalogue informs that the book "enter the United States free of duty" (Cole 1974, 231-47)⁸. Col. Vesey, some of whose books carry his book-plate, could have added his own signature to that of Mrs. or Mr. Vesey's in some of the books.

Vesey is the Queen of the Bluestockings (the informal coterie she regularly attends and she contributed to get going) for Hannah More, who met her in London where she organized receptions at Clarges Street first, then at Bolton Row, for the brilliant wits of the Georgian epoch⁹. The beginning of *The Bas Bleu; or Conversation* is quite significant:

Vesey! Of verse the judge and friend!
Awhile my idle strain attend:¹⁰

The poem More dedicates to her is significant as it throws light on her critical abilities, her interest for the geometrical-mathematical paradox, her charismatic character, and her use of common sense, a quality for which she was much admired by her female friends.

Elizabeth Carter, whose knowledge of Greek Doctor Johnson greatly praises, is present in her library with three copies of her translation of Epicurus besides another two of *Poems on Several Occasions* (dating to 1762 and 1766, respectively). Through her thick correspondence with the Irish lady, Carter (who has a somewhat paternalistic attitude towards her) shows no little consideration for her literary taste, but when the matter is political she does not approve of her somewhat transgressive attitudes¹¹.

Carter dedicates to her friend a poem, "To Mrs. Vesey" (1766), whose initial lines announce the time of contemplation that leads one to reflect upon the immortality of art and of the soul:

Silent and cool the Dews of Evening fall,
Hush'd is the vernal Music of the Groves.(Carter 1766, 94)

It is a work that would stir her liberal and evasive friend towards a more solid ethical point of view. Carter complains, in a letter of 1779, of Vesey's neglect to inform her of her own attempt at writing a Pindaric ode, especially because Carter understands "Pindar as well at least as one half of the fine ladies and gentlemen do who were admitted to hear it, and certainly love you much better, not only than half, but than all of such an assembly, is such an unparalleled breach of friendship, that it would not be credited was it to be put into a note at the bottom of the said Ode, when it descends to future ages"¹² (Pennington 1809, 235-236).

Vesey also entertained a correspondence with Elizabeth Montagu, the other important London salonnière, a great guide to inquire into the tastes, fashions, and the female ethics of the eighteenth century. About the work, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, published by Montagu anonymously, Vesey is not fooled, and recognizes her friend's hand immediately. Actually, at the moment of publication she takes possession, in a friendly manner, of the volume: "I invited Mr. Hume, Ramsay and Ld. Lyttelton in hopes to hear our book talked about" (The Montagu Collection). The library also contains a copy of the first edition of Shakespeare's *Works* (Oxford 1743-1746), edited by Sir Thomas Hanmer given to her by the editor.

Among the works with a pedagogical background we find, inevitably, John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1748) and *The Works of John Locke* (1759); besides, *Les Pensées de J. J. Rousseau* (1766, that carries Col. Vesey's bookplate) and at least three volumes (out of eight) of the French controversial author, Voltaire (*Essay sur l'Histoire Général et sur les Moeurs des Nations* [1758], *Lettres Secrètes de M. de Voltaire* [1765] e *Histoire de la Guerre de 1741* [1756]) which Vesey does not include among the volumes to remove from her London home. A found item and a symbol of the eighteenth-century London intelligentsia grouped under the same "Club" presided over by the Doctor is a copy of the famous Dictionary (*Dictionary of the English Language*), an undisputed protagonist of the "Vesey's", the bluestocking meetings that were

identified with the lovable hostess in a way that they were finally called with her own surname (Craig 1895, 136)¹³.

Mrs. Vesey was not only well-read in literature, but also brilliant in the everyday social interaction. She is reported in Bluestocking studies to have told Benjamin Stillingfleet, a brilliant conversationalist at parties who had declined the invitation to participate in an evening assembly on the score of not having suitable clothes: “Don’t mind dress. Come in your blue stockings” (Ward, Trent 2000). Though still disputed, the anecdote reveals a spontaneity and enthusiasm that contributed to have her regarded by some society members as cultivated and graceful (Doctor Johnson, Horace Walpole and Jonathan Swift were among her admirers) as well as, on some occasions, inconsequent. Her Irishness, probably, made her the victim, in the London society, of condescension and a snobbish attitude.

Balfour quotes, in the biographical note introducing *The Library of Mrs. Vesey*, a letter by Mrs. Montagu (“The Queen of the Blues”, as she was called), who, having met Vesey in Bath (1755), detects in her personality “an easy politeness that gains one in a moment, while in reserve she has good sense and an improved mind” (Robinson 1926, ii). The adjective refers to the fencing of property by the landed gentry and aristocracy who, by engaging landscape architects to take care of, and indeed *improve*, their land, showed their authority, wealth and taste, in one word their social power. Strictly linked with the idealised concepts of power relations was the concept of culture in which many affluent ladies exercised their influence. In Ireland Louisa Lennox, of Castletown, county Kildare, promoted feminine culture, and so did the writings of Maria Edgeworth, who, in *Practical Education*, advised parents to sacrifice, for the benefit of their children, the amusements of the city in favour of the country life (Edgeworth, Edgeworth 1798)¹⁴. A rural archetypal dwelling in Ireland was the cottage, that was suffused with ideal and ethical overtones; Mrs. Vesey had her own “*cottage ornée*” built on the shores of the river Liffey which crosses the Lucan demesne, with a “large and roomy” parlour “fitted up with every possible accommodation for retired literary luxury” (O’Kane 2004, 66)¹⁵. The rural life conceived in Georgian times was called “idle” by William Cowper and is semantically tied with the Roman *otium* (Musser 1979, 515-31)¹⁶. The etymology of *culture*, it is to be remarked, goes back to *colère*, meaning cultivate, which is also the origin of *colony*, the master’s land cultivated by local people. In Montagu’s sophisticated language, the use of *improved* may not be innocent, but the consequence of a paternalistic attitude towards her Irish rival.

Elizabeth Vesey’s origins were definitely in keeping with a historical, philosophical, and theological culture. A descendant, on her mother’s side (Mary Muschamp, daughter and sole heir to Denny Muschamp of Horsley, Surrey, married to Thomas Vesey in 1698) of Michael Boyle, Archbishop of Dublin and Armagh, Primate of Ireland and Lord Chancellor. Her father Thomas (1716-1731) was the erudite Bishop of Ossory, who was educated,

after leaving Cork, at Eton College and Christ Church, Oxford, and a nephew of Agmondisham Vesey senior (grandfather of Elizabeth's second husband), who had married Charlotte Sarsfield¹⁷. Mrs. Vesey's letters to Lord Lyttelton prove her acquaintance with *Orlando Furioso* and *Pastor Fido*, both of them quoted by heart in the original language to attract the addressee to her romantic Lucan demesne peopled, in the Celtic tradition, of elphs and creatures of the woods¹⁸. Ariosto's and Guarini's volumes are mentioned, of course, in the Catalogue: their melancholic notes resound in Vesey's letters and define her existence as that of the prisoner of an incompassionate Hibernia.

Vesey's library is crowded with volumes that speak of the refined culture breathed through her Abbey Leix paternal home (located near medieval Kilkenny). The year of publication of some of the volumes – going back one or two centuries, and in any case earlier than the time when Elizabeth became fully mature – strikes the reader. Among others, there are: a *Fiammetta* (Firenze 1533) with a calf cover, the *Histoire de la Reunion du Royaume de Portugal à la couronne de Castille* (1680), by J. Contestagio, translated from Italian; a first edition of *The Works of Sr. William Davenant* (1673), Herringman; *Memoirs of Denzil, Lord Holles*, the historical enemy, as a moderate Presbyterian, of Charles I and Cromwell, published in 1699; Nicolò Machiavelli's *Opere* (1550), "given by Maurice, Bishop of Ossory" and with her book-plate; *Il Petrarca con l'Espositione d'Alessandro Vellutello*, Vinetia (Venezia), 1528. A French version of Tucydides, *L'Hisotire de Thucydide de la Guerre du Peloponese*, Amsterdam, 1713, and the *Dizionario di Giovanni Torriano*, Italian-English and English-Italian, written by John Florio (1688) also appear in the catalogue. The eighteenth-century edition of John Donne's poems (1699, some of which were unpublished until then) is probably a residue of her youth studies, whereas her father's gift of a copy of the precious third *in folio* edition of Spenser is inscribed with the words: "Eliz. Vesey. Given by her father Sr. Thomas Vesey," and is accompanied by a page of verse handwritten by herself¹⁹. Other foreign works appear in the catalogue with her book-plate: a seventeenth-century translation from Italian of historical interest, *The Odes, Epodes, and Carmen Seculare of Horace*, with a dual text version English-Latin 1713-1725, an edition of *La Gerusalemme Liberata di Torquato Tasso* (1716): all books, one ventures to suggest, handed to a young Elizabeth to be instructed in classic languages and literatures; books usually reserved for intellectuals. This shows how much education was heavily regarded in the Vesey home. Some fifty-odd-year-old Vesey's quotations from Tasso's and Ariosto's epic verse and the pastoral motives in her correspondence to Lord Lyttelton in the original language, with a few variants and *omisses*, cannot go unnoticed; it is as if their author was digging into her youth memories. The hippogryph, the romantic heroines, the heroes of the chivalrous world emerge from the exotic section of the collection to inscribe a gendered mark, as it were, on her epistolary, dissolving out into the magic of Irish folklore. Several years

before leaving her paternal home, Mrs. Vesey continues her interaction with Italian literature: she receives as a homage – as already mentioned – a copy of 1550 Machiavelli's *Works* by one whose chair as a Bishop of Ossory had been occupied by her own father forty years beforehand.

Vesey's educational context cannot but be exquisite, durable and steadfast; her pedigree is a *carte visite* opening doors, in Ireland and Britain, to places attended by eminent personalities such as Jonathan Swift, the Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, where her great-grandfather Boyle's (who died in 1702) human remains are kept.

The Vesey family used to leave Abbey Leix for Bath or London when the offspring were young; there Elizabeth could breathe the healthy thermal air as well as the effervescent air of urbanized society, less rigid than at home and inclined towards salon life. She begins her married life in Ireland, however, as a very young and privileged wife of William Handcock, M.P., an excessively jealous husband (Day 1991). She got married in 1731, when the Kingdom had resumed its strength after the disastrous consequences of the civil war (1680). In the course of the eighteenth-century the Irish capital goes through a splendid phase: dinners, balls, concerts, masquerades, two theatres and salon culture. Among the ladies who attended society, Miss Vesey (then Mrs. Handcock) had struck, at her first Irish visit, the refined Mary Granville, i.e. Mrs. Delaney (who belonged to the highest circles of British society). She had taken, as a second husband, the Irish Reverend Patrick Delaney, on account of his "wit and cleverness" (*ibidem*). In *Some Celebrated Irish Beauties of the Last Century* the salon cultural activity that Vesey engaged in, and was among the first women to devote themselves to it, is defined "Bluestocking mania" (Gerard 1895, xxi-xxii). The author considered the following ladies *avant garde* epitomes of feminine philosophical culture: Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Sycon (Swift's Psyche), Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Vesey, and Mrs. Brooke who sat at the foot of the great Dean, while some among those *chaste wits*, Vesey and Lady Lucan, were affiliated to the London group. This last lady, affirms Walpole, possesses "an astonishing genius for copying whatever she sees. The pictures I lent her from my collection, and some advice I gave her, certainly brought her talents to wonderful perfection in five months; for before, she painted in crayons as ill as any lady in England" (Craig 1895, 135-36).

Mrs. Delaney has some reservations on high society Irish ladies: "their education is careful and their reading, especially in classical history, extensive [...] the conversation (even of the young girls) is marked by much intelligence, this however is somewhat marred by extraordinary coarseness; they use expressions, which coming from such fresh and lovely lips, have a startling and unpleasing effect" (Gerard 1895, 166). Vulgarity was diffused; the girls do not hesitate – and this is quite rude – to call a spade a spade.

Elizabeth was obviously free from such excesses; she became Mrs. Delaney's closest friend, and, together, they devoted themselves to a material culture activ-

ity that led Delaney to develop such a good artistic and practical craftsmanship that her works were eventually acquired by the British Museum²⁰. To whoever missed becoming acquainted with Mrs. Vesey to some depth, and yet offered her portrait to posterity, she did not appear ambitious or intellectual, but rather the equivalent of a modern head-hunter (Forbes 1807, 144)²¹. She, on the contrary, held the bluestocking experience in great regard: she often refers to it, in her letters, with the French term *badinage*. On this point she writes very honestly to Mrs. Montagu: “I don’t believe you my Dear Madam that you would quit the dangerous paths of Ambition if they lay in your walk. Your Character is too animated to retire to blue Stocking or any other exclusive Philosophy!”²². Her attempt at verse writing (mentioned above) must have convinced her that poetizing wasn’t her cup of tea, and as a consequence she did not pursue publication nor is any attempt in that sense known. She obviously kept in her library her 1749 copy of Pindar, calf-bound, with her book-plate and autograph. Far from her mentality was the description, in a 1711 issue of the *Spectator*, of the perfect lady as “out of the Tract of any amorous or ambitious Pursuits of her own” (Steele 1711, 48): women’s ambition, on the contrary, was perfectly alright when they are endowed with significant intellectual qualities.

Besides literature Vesey had a penchant for contemporary politics, as is proved by various hints, in her letters, at many topics, the interest in which is corroborated by the presence of writings catalogued in her library. One of the most pressing problems is the one concerning the question of the American colonies that she discusses in a letter of 26 January, 1776 to Mrs. Montagu (The Montagu Collection). As the incursions of women in the public sphere were rare, Vesey’s approach to politics can be read in terms of civic engagement and participation besides the personal interest in public affairs connected with her husband’s role as an M.P. and Accountant General of Ireland (Warner 1990, 3)²³. She sometimes hints at the ideas of Lord Lyttelton and Edmund Burke, whose role in the debate on the constitutional limits of the King’s executive power are present throughout the correspondence, although she does not resist dropping the topic when the reader has reached the moment when something more problematic is at stake (Burke 1770)²⁴. Her library records the presence at home of *An Historical Essay on the English Constitution... wherein the Right of Parliament to Tax our distant Provinces is explained and justified upon such Principles as will afford an equal security to the Colonists as to their Brethern at Home*, undoubtedly a purchase of her husband, who put his signature on it, which would be more or less contemporary to its publication in 1771, when the debate was becoming more and more pressing. Vesey’s autograph, instead, is on at least four volumes that concern America besides the writings by Burke: *The Annual Register, or, View of History, Politicks, and Literature*, 1758-1767 and 1770-1779, in twenty volumes (some of which autographed by both husband and wife), *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1760), *Speech of Edmund Burke on American Taxation, April 19, 1774* (1775), *Observations on a*

Late State of the Nation (1769), *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontent* (1770), and *Recherches philosophiques sur l'Origine del Idées que nous avons du Beau et du Sublime* (1765). An aside concerns the mention of the first edition of *The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on moving his Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, Mar. 22, 1775* (1775), where a quotation from Burke appears in the Catalogue: "Whatever England has been growing to by a progressive increase of government, brought in by varieties of people, by succession of civilizing conquests and civilizing settlements, in a series of seventeen hundred years, you shall see as much added to her by America in a single life" (Robinson 1926, 13), an opinion that Vesey might also entertain. Among other kinds of books on America, one can list the original version of *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Etablissements et du Commerce des Europeens dans les deux Indes* in six volumes (1772) by the infamous Abbé Raynal with Agmondisham Vesey's autograph on each title and Elizabeth's on the first; also present is the English version of the important work published in Dublin in 1779²⁵.

More at ease in the literary closed circles than in public spaces Vesey comes into contact – for the important project of the construction of a pseudo-Palladian villa on the river of the Liffey in the place of the historic gothic mansion – with artists of the local and Italian school. The history that accompanies the project is a matter for another essay; it must be recalled, however, that the collection of books of Architecture – from the Greeks to Palladium, and Vitruvius to Sir William Chambers, including the copy of Edward Baynard, *The History of the Cold Bathing both Ancient and Modern* (1706) – are all directed at knowing better all the cultural apparatus around the neoclassical villa and its possible acclimatization in Hibernia.

When her husband dies (a somewhat unfaithful husband, though the second marriage was more successful than her first one) Elizabeth loses her enthusiasm, and her health declines. As a not rich, elderly Irish widow, her popularity starts declining. Burney meets her when the star has set to let the morning appear. Mrs. Montagu, who is still very much on the stage, writes to Mme d'Arblay on Mrs. Vesey in words that should be considered as those written on her tomb: "A frippery character like a gaudy flower, may please while it is in bloom; but it is the virtuous only that, like the aromatics, preserve their sweet and reviving odour when withered"²⁶ (1842, 344).

Notes

¹ Major quotes from a letter by Elizabeth Montagu to Elizabeth Carter dated 28 July 1779, The Montague Collection, The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The Montagu Collection also contains manuscript letters from Elizabeth Vesey to Elizabeth Montagu.

² An advertisement of the catalogue is in W.H. Robinson (1926), *Notes and Queries* 150, 1, 197.

³ Among others, descriptions of works are supplied such as "Three Unknown Books Printed at Aberdeen," "Four Unknown Editions of Cicero," "The First Circumnavigation of the Globe," and "The Only Copy Known" (O'Sullivan 1926, *passim*).

⁴ Among the eighteenth-century schools for men *and* women is Samuel Whyte's English Grammar School, who had opened one at No. 75, Grafton Street (among its students was Richard Brinsley Sheridan), and offered private lessons to well-off young ladies at three guineas for eight lectures (Gerard 1895, 165). The author of the book, centred upon beautiful and famous young ladies, also wrote *Angelica Kaufmann: A Biography* (London, Ward and Downey, 1893).

⁵ R. Balfour, "Elizabeth Vesey, 1715-1791. Biographical Note" (Robinson 1926, i-iv).

⁶ See also, among other works of women's study interest, for Vesey and her entourage: Myers 1990; Rizzo 1994; Eger, Peltz 2008, 20-55.

⁷ The Vesseys spent time in London because Agmondisham was an M.P. in the British Parliament; they also lived in Dublin, in Molesworth Street, during the biennial sessions of the Irish Parliament, and in other periods of the year, at Lucan House, Lucan, Co. Dublin (the present residence of the Ambassador of Italy in Ireland), a few miles from Dublin. On the tradition of book-plates (*ex-libris*), see Keenan 2003.

⁸ Public libraries funded by the Irish Parliament in the course of the eighteenth-century were: Armagh Public Library (in today's Northern Ireland) and the Marsh Library in Dublin; the private ones were: TCD (Trinity College Dublin), RDS (Royal Dublin Society), RIA (Royal Irish Academy) and Edward Worth of Dr Stevens' Hospital, all of them in Dublin, besides two hundred more libraries of religious congregations, aristocrats, judges, lawyers, military officers, writers, artists and scholars (Cole 1974, 231-47).

⁹ The poem circulated first in manuscript, it was published three years later, in 1786.

¹⁰ The poem has been exhaustively commented upon by Moyra Haslett in the course of the ECLRNI (Eighteenth-Century Literature and Research Network of Ireland, the Network coordinated by Ian Campbell Ross) Symposium "Literature and Audience: Writing, Circulation, and Publication in the Long Eighteenth Century", that took place on November 17, 2007 and hosted by the Ambassador of Italy and the author of this paper in the Vesseys' historical mansion at Lucan. Haslett has thrown light, within the poem *The Bas Bleu*, on the role of disenchanting enchantress reserved by More to Mrs. Vesey, a charismatic creature who controls the group and challenge geometry; a woman of the same stuff as *not* dreams, but the Bluestocking ideals, aspirations and desires are made.

¹¹ On this point see my contribution entitled "Elizabeth Vesey's American Politics" to a Symposium in honour of Professor Ian Campbell Ross that took place in June 2012 in the Long Room Hub of Trinity College Dublin, not in print.

¹² Letter CXXII, dated Deal, Oct 22, 1779.

¹³ Horace Walpole, instead, calls them *Babels* for the abundance of brilliant spirits who were always present at each meeting (Craig 1895, 136).

¹⁴ For the development of the concept of improvement in Ireland, see Busteded 2000.

¹⁵ The quotation comes from Rev. J. Burrows, *Diary of a Journey through England and Wales to Ireland* (1773) (O'Kane 2004, 66).

¹⁶ William Cowper, "How various his employments whom the world/Calls idle, and who justly in return/Esteems that busy world an idler too!" *The Task* (Book III, ll. 352-54).

¹⁷ She was the descendant of Patrick Sarsfield, a favourite of the Irish people as a protagonist hero in the fight between the last Catholic forces of James II, who had just been defeated in the famous "battle of the Boyne" (1690) and had taken refuge in France, and the army of William III of Orange, something that earned him the reputation of Limerick's hero. He is remembered as the Earl of Lucan in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

¹⁸ See the author's essay, "Elizabeth Vesey's Letters from Lucan", to be published.

¹⁹ The last four lines are from "The Cock and the Fox: or, the Tale of the Nun's Priest" by John Dryden, one of the editors of the text; the four initial ones centred on the myth of Philemon and Baucis are probably a translation by Vesey from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 8.

²⁰ An account of her activity is recorded in Hayden 1980; Mrs. Delaney's flowers are today exhibited as specimens and changed over every so often.

²¹“Without attempting to shine herself, she had the happy secret of bringing forward talents of all kind, and of diffusing over society the gentleness of her own character”. The same piece appears also as “Mr Stillingfleet, and the Blue Stocking Club”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 109 (1811), 309-310.

²²The letter is dated February 1775 (The Montagu Collection).

²³Warner speaks of “technology of privacy” and “technology of publicity”.

²⁴This crucial knot is discussed in Reid 1995; Edmund Burke made known his own point of view in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, of 23 April, 1770.

²⁵For Vesey’s involvement with the politics of the colonies, see note 12.

²⁶Letter of Mrs. Montagu to Frances Burney, dated 1785.

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Against the Oedipal Politics of Formation in Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*: "Women do not Count, Neither Shall they be Counted"

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Abstract:

Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* is one of her lesser-known novels, which discusses decades of women's sexual oppression and anomalous formations; it is a sexually conscious narrative of an Irish formation which enjoyed the socio-cultural and intellectual liberties of the "sexy sixties", and critiqued the Oedipal Irish society of the 1930s and 1940s. Obsessed with physical and spiritual decency, the masculinized Society formed "moral codes" that by definition exiled the Irish woman to social and political marginalia. Socio-politically conscious narratives such as O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*, however, functioned as not just social critiques, drawing on a culture of post-revolution stasis and neoconservative identity politics but also as vehicles for enabling a generation of oppressed women to voice their concerns and struggles with their feminine formation in a dominantly masculinized Society. By drawing on a Deleuzian definition of Oedipal Society, this study explores boundaries, limitations and alternatives of feminine formation in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s.

Keywords: 1930s, Anti-Oedipal feminism, Irish feminism, Edna O'Brien, Negative Dialectics

Although some feminist critics have ostracized Edna O'Brien's oeuvre for providing a fragile portrayal of women and their plights and tribulations in the post-independence Ireland, I argue it was the dialectical discourse embedded in her works, especially *The Country Girls Trilogy* (1960, 1962, 1964), *The Love Object* (1968) and *A Pagan Place* (1970), that rekindled and spearheaded feminism as a radical socio-cultural, and politically conscious movement in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s¹. It is the discourse that depicts Irish women's plights of sexual formation, abused by the masculine voice of the Constitution, and critiques not only the colonial feminized politics of female formation but also questions the State's gendered politics of development².

There lies a radical history of resistant feminist literature, however, behind Edna O'Brien's essentially feminist discourse; feminists such as Hannah Lynch, Katherine Cecil Thurston and Bithia M. Croker, and works such as Croker's *Lismoye* (1914) and Lynch's *Autobiography of a Child* (1899) and her famous feminist essay "The Spaniard at Home" published in 1898, which emerged as fictive narratives that echo years of patriarchal oppressive realism and political parochialism³.

While in Croker's *Lismoye* fundamental Victorian concepts such as social mobility, and the apparent difference in men's and women's perception of socio-economic mobility is questioned, Lynch directs the focus of her essay to tackle Victorianism and women's blighted formations at large, covering concepts such as the Victorian "Society – spelt big" as the biased source of deformation, in which the Irish girl is expected to "achieve nothing" (Lynch 1898, 270). As I shall explain shortly, while it is this conservative form of Society which strives to marginalize O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* by introducing women as mere tools for reproduction, and demanding them to surrender to the authoritarian masculine voice, the non-conformist feminist discourse appropriated by Lynch Croker and O'Brien emerges to explore and tackle radical concepts such as broken families⁴, irresponsible parenthood, and unemotional, "cold, inhuman and selfish" Irish mother (Lynch 1898, 353). In fact, the confluence of these texts and the ones by other proto-feminists such as George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne, 1859-1945) formed a feminist repertoire from which later writers, especially Kate O'Brien and Edna O'Brien, borrowed generously, tackling not only their neoconservative Irish State but also the non-libertarianism, which Lynch regarded as the "blighted will" (354), and Edna O'Brien flagged as "psychological choke" (O'Brien 1999, 127) vis-à-vis Irish female (de-) formations⁵.

O'Brien's early works, I argue, stand on a radical dialectical reading of proto-feminists such as Lynch, Sheehy-Skeffington, Louie Bennett and Croker, negating the patriarchal voice and the parochial Society (spelt big), and on producing rebellious characters whose reversed formation and bohemian sexual maturity mirror a negative dialectic of un-Irish, non-conformist formation. O'Brien's feminist inclinations, in spite of critics' accusing her of engaging with the archetypal issues of, for instance, a male dominated society and women's dependence on such a structure, stand as pivots and witnesses to the rise of Irish feminism in the neoconservative, post-independence Ireland. *The Country Girls Trilogy* (1960, 1962, 1964), *A Pagan Place* (1970), *The Love Object* (1968), *A Scandalous Woman and other Stories* (1974) and *Mother Ireland* (1976), in this respect, emerge as modern Irish narratives of formation, which stood not only as faithful socio-political critiques of the conservative Irish society but also as chronologically relevant feminist texts that dealt with un-Irish concepts such as feminine sexual initiation and sexual Bildung, namely, formation, in the 1930s-40s and the early 1950s.

As O'Brien herself claims, maybe she is "not the darling of the feminists [being] too preoccupied with old-fashioned themes like love and longing"

(Guppy 1984), but it was *The Country Girls* trilogy that broke the social taboo⁶, and boldly (re-) introduced female sexuality and valorized sexual formations in the island⁷. Through *A Pagan Place*, O'Brien explores the forbidden dimension of formation, namely, sex – hetero- and homosexual – in a culture which had demonized sex and sensuality, and tabooed such sexualized representation of women's body, reproducing it as a dreadful "black devil" (1971, 135). For instance, through her candid depiction of the binary of women's sexual deformation and a masculine, authoritarian society in *Night* (1972), and women's struggle with the State's gendered politics of abstinence and containment in *The Love Object* (1968), she not only criticized such socio-cultural taboos but allowed for the emergence of repressed stories⁸.

While it was *The Love Object* which thrilled the conservative Irish Society with an unflinching depiction of extra marital and homoerotic affairs, and of Irish women losing interest in any form of sex, O'Brien re-introduced female sexual Bildung through *The Country Girls* trilogy and *A Pagan Place*. These emerged as textually un-Irish narratives which claimed that women's sexual formation proper must be recognized as part of the national architecture of formation; a claim which allowed women's sexual maturation to be seen in a non-sexist, nationalistic context. It was claims like these, in addition, that placed her novels at the forefront of feminist psycho-cultural warfare, transforming into narratives that not only questioned the authenticity of the State-sponsored authoritarian voice, and the flagrant masculinization of Irish identity through the 1937 Constitution, but prepared Society to have a more dynamic and vivid grasp of women's significance in leading their sexual rite of passage. The path O'Brien's characters choose, I argue, leads to what Hélène Cixous regarded as proper "libidinal education" of women fighting an anti-feminist Society (Cixous 1987, 2), redirecting the Joycean dictum of *non serviam* towards not just the parochial patriarchal State but anyone who tends to deprive them of their *rite of formation*.

Although O'Brien's novels were among the first texts that uncovered socially despised concepts such as women's sexual desires, trials and tribulations, which Gerry Smyth labels as the "odd 'bad egg'" (Smyth 2012, 134), her literary efforts were victimized by the very same unforgiving force of selective masculinity⁹. Moreover, as James Cahalan notes in his dated yet substantial study of "Female and Male Perspectives" in the modern Irish novel, "neither Seamus Deane in his *Short History of Irish Literature* (1986) nor Alexander Norman Jeffares in *Anglo-Irish Literature* (1982) mention[ed] [Edna] O'Brien" and her invaluable contributions to such national socio-sexual awakenings (Cahalan 1995, 55). Although this absence might have been caused by an uninvited parapraxis by such notable scholars, the gravity of such isolating categorizations remains the same, reverberating a message that Irish feminists struggled to address throughout the history of the nation¹⁰.

Despite socio-cultural and political changes in Ireland, especially after the "sexy sixties" (Bolton 2010, 139), social fragmentation and sexual categoriza-

tion have remained as the most dominant topics of the novels (of formation) that tend to divulge certain peculiarities in the conservative history of Irish formation. Topical concerns prevalent in O'Brien's oeuvre, I argue, provide a dramatized account of how the State's authoritarian politics of formation have manipulated and led such socio-sexual bifurcations through a masculinized voice called Society in the 1930s well into the 1960s. This masculine, State-sponsored voice is most notably manifested in the Irish Constitution re-established in 1937, neglecting the Irish women as the largest marginalized people who fought for their place in history¹¹.

Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* discusses decades of sexual oppression and anomalous formation. It is a sexually conscious narrative of Irish formation which enjoyed the socio-cultural and intellectual liberties of the 1960s. Critical texts such as *A Pagan Place* freely examine the State's morbid obsession with spiritual decency and abstinence which resulted in a nation-wide radical understanding of femininity and women's body, a concept which as Jonathan Bolton notes "apotheosizes virginity, revering women's bodies as vessels of procreation while at the same time reviling them as enticement to sin" (Bolton 2010, 126). Novels such as O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* and *The Country Girls*, I argue, narrativized, though in retrospect, a sense of resistance that appeared among Irish women, questioning not only the masculinized Constitution but also Society's limited capacity as a substructure influential in women's (de-) formation.

In *A Pagan Place* the struggle between Irish women and the State's gender politics manifests itself in having the female narrator hide her identity behind the ambivalence and obscurity of second-person voice¹². The narrative begins by deploying an authoritative second-person voice as its sole mode of narration; a voice that reveals events in a dominantly predetermined and planned fashion, leaving no space for narrator's "free will" or self-determination (O'Brien 1971, 149). This is the voice which attacks the opposite sex but permits self-induced sexual pleasure, regarding it as a means to avoid sexual intercourses or courtships that may not end in marriage. In fact by abnegating the socio-cultural image of women in post-independence Ireland and associating female sex(uality) with sin, psychosomatic diseases, and wretchedness at large, the voice, perhaps unconsciously, advocates autoeroticism and masturbatory pleasures among not only men but also young Irish women. Masturbation is regarded as an "aberrant behavior" and a sin (Bolton 2010, 145), yet a form for which she can seek forgiveness: "You put two fingers in. you touched it. What were you doing? What were you doing? It was a sin" (O'Brien 1971, 101); whereas seeking sexual companionship with a man is decreed by the autocratic voice to be punishable by "hell"¹³, the disciplinary fire which stems from "wom[e]n playing fiddle" (28).

According to Dennis Schofield the second-person voice in fiction is utilized to either achieve an intense sense of intimacy with the audience, providing them with special moments in the narrative that have been imagined for them to enjoy, or to maintain a strict idiosyncratic dominance and authoritarian

distance with not only the audience but also characters, rendering their stream of consciousness useless by depending on its indefinite foreknowledge of any event that is about to happen (Schofield 1998). "Thou shalt not" or "thou shalt" as its imperative variation emerges as the very foundation of such a distinctively idiosyncratic voice and the concomitant narrative form, dictating events to the narrator's psyche instead of allowing for them to be unraveled by the narrator. In the modern Irish novel of formation, the voice of "thou shalt not" is founded on the unquestionable authority of the Constitution, namely, an authoritative source for the Irish, revised by the order of de Valera in 1937 who was seeking further political dominance and assertion by indulging in the essentially patriarchal power of the Church¹⁴.

The totalitarian ethos of "thou shalt (not)" transforms into a stringent and governing voice which takes the shape of an unnamed young girl in a crowded Irish family of five, which like many other proletariat Irish families has been hit by the post-war financial hardships, and is culturally bound by the island's politics of containment. The protagonist is introduced as a young Irish girl with her young untold ambitions of formation, bound to surrender to the voice's unreservedly restrictive, confessional nature. The voice generally practices its dominance by transforming into an interrogator that sifts through the protagonist's conscious and unconscious psyche, wild and repressed thoughts, scavenging for pieces of un-Irish, urban, "pagan" trends (O'Brien 1971, 190). For instance, when she wishes to join the young priest and enjoy his sensual presence the voice intervenes and disturbs her train of thought: "how you would love to go to the Tropics with him and see people who offered mangoes and sweet potatoes" (171); or forbids her not just from having thoughts about her most intimate parts of her body but also from even trying to understand her body: "your diddies were hardly formed. You got stinging pains in them from time to time. You discussed those pains with no one. You couldn't touch your diddies, not even with your own fingers" (139). In this respect, a woman's body, as the unvoiced narrator reveals, should remain as alien and undisclosed to others as to her own, the only exception, however, would be joining Jesus as becoming his "spouse" (192).

Sexual pleasures are treated by the voice only ambivalently, oscillating between the trio of sin, guilt, repentance, on the one hand, and the simpler version of sin, guilt and wishing for more guilt, on the other:

You sang dumb about the biggest sin of all, sitting on the carving chair in the front room and opening your legs a bit and putting the soft velvet paw of a bot doll in there, squeezing with all your might and then when the needles of pleasure came getting furious with him and chastising him and throwing him face down on the floor [... the] old way. (41)

The narrator's concept of acting like the "the old way" reveals more than a pure sense of repetition in just a childish act of self-pleasure; rather,

it suggests that not only is the narrator lost in between the double standards of her environment, between the rural and urban, and between the Catholic and Protestant dualistic realities of Irish life in the 1930s, but she also has become a marginal subject that only reflects the internal duality of sexual maturation and parochial formations. She, as an individual and an example of post-independence Irish formation isolated by internal and external binaries, appears to be torn between the “Confession on Saturdays” and “the same set of sins every week” (41); between developing a sense of hatred towards her older sister, Emma, for her premarital sexual activities and the eventual unwanted pregnancy, and her wild desire for the seductive, young priest.

To the unnamed, unvoiced female protagonist, social cognition and sexual formation meant nothing but “bad thoughts you didn’t divulge”, or concepts which she was meant to be unaware of (*ibidem*). For it is only the voice which defines right and wrong, innocence and deviance, identarian Catholic Irishness and the rebellious non-identarianism of modern Irish women; and generally, what needs to be contained not only from her internalized mental narrative but also from the audience. The voice, in this respect, appears as an authoritative, self-referential judge, who decides on morality, acceptability and possibility of sex and sexual formations at once in the girl’s novel and in the general domain of Irish formations, policing her mind and rejecting whatever plans she might have for her life. By so doing, not only does the voice reduce the girl’s significance as the narrator in her personal narrative of formation, downgrading her to a selfless marionette, but it also emerges as a register more instrumental in defining the girl’s identity than her general self-understanding. The girl, hence, appears as a puppet who finds her weekly programs planned, a repetitive cycle of non-formative religious chores: “On Saturdays [...] You went to the curate [...] and the sins had to be shouted at him. The same set of sins every week. I cursed, I told lies, I had bad thoughts [...] when the priest inquired into the bad thoughts you didn’t divulge” (*ibidem*). In other words, by oppressing her ‘I’ness and voice, the voice of “thou shalt not” becomes a self-invited arbitrator that attempts to retract the girl from the generic duality of personal and social formation, and to refashion her selfhood to fit the voice’s particular duality of instrument / marionette, the subject and the object.

Surrendering to the parochial authoritarianism of the voice provides the unnamed female protagonist with the opportunity to establish a defense mechanism against Society’s “internal colonial” efforts, and as a result survive the dogmatic anti-feminism of the 1930s, especially 1937 and beyond (Kiberd 2005, 163). By becoming the physical vessel for the voice, O’Brien’s unnamed female protagonist emerges as a subset of the conservative Irish Society in the 1930s, exemplifying its realm of containment and control. In other words, the protagonist becomes identifiable inasmuch as the masculine voice of “thou shalt not” permits, and forms “the thing”, as Adorno claims¹⁵, “against which it is conceived” (Adorno 1981, 147). Its relationship with the voice’s

masculine macrocosm is subordinative and non-reciprocal, forming a non-identarian contradictory puppet that has submitted to the voice's patriarchal dominance in fear of being lost in the oblivion of the without, namely, Society. She, in other words, has surrendered to the voice in the subliminal fear of castration, namely isolation from the leading Society, dominated by phallic personas, such as attractive priests, athletic policemen, and artists because of her association with the sub-society of her female companions and family and following her sisters' shameful sexual activism. Her final decision to become a nun, and "be[ing] the spouse of Jesus" – hence uniting with the ultimate phallic authority which makes the other side of the polarity of sexual formation – provides her at once with confidence and a clear sense of identity, though objectively religious: "she said in his time only male disciples were allowed to follow him but that too had changed and women could take up the cudgel on his behalf" (O'Brien 1971, 192). Her surrender, in addition, reflects the marginalized women's desire for "wholeness", or as Jeanne Schroeder identifies, the protagonist's endeavor to exit marginality, "because we nostalgically long for this lost sense of wholeness which we locate in the real, we want to reverse this process and collapse the three orders of the psyche" (Schroeder 1998, 81).

To achieve wholeness and social recognition, the unnamed protagonist not only reverses the order of formation, namely, sexual development, falling in love and experiencing sex through marriage, but also prioritizes her perception of reality, as in Society and other sub-societies, hence classifying her friends and family secondary to Society. As the novel progresses, we are only presented with fragmented relationships between parents and children, and broken non-communicative dialogues among children: "he said, how was [Emma] [...] Your mother said she was her willful, capricious and wayward self" (O'Brien 1971, 158); or when "Your mother said another candidate for the lunatic asylum" referencing her daughter (108); or "they were a blaspheme" when addressing her other daughters (154); or "he said a fine asset you were to any family or to any serious enterprise, with your scatter head and your scatter brain" as her father talks to the unnamed protagonist (136). By detaching herself from her emotional sub-society of family, and embracing the voice and Society as the psychologically dominant colonizing register, the protagonist although a "zero" in the voice's colonial macrocosm, seeks a much larger benefit, namely, to (re-) gain her lost "I"ness (Schroeder 1998, 81).

According to Schroeder the female protagonist (or voice) in the male-dominated reality, simply is a lost microcosm, a "zero" which doesn't *count*, and is just present "because it is signified" in their narrative of masculine formation (*ibidem*). She is a zero whose presence "[does] not Count"¹⁶, when it comes for the State to recognize the roles they have played in the formation of not just the Republic but also the general definition of free State and Constitution; and "Neither Shall they be Counted" as anything but angels of the house or faithful wives and mothers (Liddington, Crawford 2011, 98).

She, in other words, is an identarian female nothingness that exerts towards a fruitful, non-identarian becoming in an Oedipal Society¹⁷.

Oedipal Society in its Irish context, I argue, emerges as a dichotomous concept which introduced the binary of a neoconservative, essentially masculine de Valeran State and their efforts to preserve, hence protect the feminized image of their motherland after the wars of independence. Having emerged as a socio-cultural struggle charged by the State's political drive to preserve and strengthen its relation with its Celtic origin, an Oedipalized Irish Society can be read as the contradictory dualism of modernity, led by its radical definition of socio-sexual (trans-) formations and the State's masculine conservative protectiveness, defending their nativist trio of Church, Family, and what O'Brien called *Mother Ireland*. The State's emphasis on preserving their socio-cultural heritage, puritanical chastity, and valorizing the mother land through a retrospective perception of present and future, and by denying radical changes – such as freedom of using contraceptives, surrogate motherhood, sexual orientations, and legitimization of abortion – is in fact an Oedipal effort that ends in the binary of power-relation and republicanism. The former leads to an Orwellian Society, while the latter was devised not only to transcend the Empire's social subjugation but also to end the State's draconian ethos of control and identarianism. In addition, the colonial feminization of Ireland (compare with Germany as the "fatherland"), which needs the assistance of the Empire, and the subsequent masculinization of movements such as 1916 Rising, revolution and later the State as the very means to salvage the mother Ireland from the colonial enmity of the Empire, at once highlights the State's masculine intentions and further complicates the mother(land) / son (of Éire) relationship between the State and the island¹⁸. This is the relationship which led the State to describe Ireland as "our sweet, sad mother" (de Valera 1980, 131). The result of such overprotectiveness manifested itself in isolating women from taking part in social and political activities.

To deconstruct the conservative, Oedipal Society from within, and continue to form an independent 'I'ness, O'Brien's unnamed female protagonist accepts a perfunctory masculinization of her existence and further indulges in its politics of dominance. As Bolton argues, the Irish "social life, [was] oriented around the male groups, which led to a kind of immature attitude toward women reinforced by male dominance in the home" (Bolton 2010, 140). To break such a rigid social structure, the female narrator possessed by the masculinized voice of the State engages in exercising a series of deconstructive activities, such as seeking sexual companionships with male and female characters, critiquing the Constitution in its microcosmic sense, namely, her patriarchal family, and highlighting her lost basic rights under the State's rule. O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*, as a result, at once emerges as the embodiment of a radical, albeit immature, feminist voice obscured by the masculine voice of "thou shalt not"; and her unvoiced, second-person narrative becomes a sub-

jective language of “Signification – that is, the symbolic order of language”, as Schroeder argues, which brings her narrative of resistance and formation “into [...] making zero count as one” (Schroeder 1998, 81).

The protagonist's prioritization of Society over her family as a form of sub-society, endows her with not only the confidence to rebel against the parochial Society and her patriarchal family, – “you raged against captivity” – but also an independent identity to finally express herself through the first person voice in the very last page of her narrative: “I will go now, was what you said” (O'Brien 1971, 202). The confidence, I argue, is rooted in the masculine voice that had initially taken control of her formation, yet finally helps the protagonist deconstruct the sexual boundaries of the voice and manifests itself through her feminine rebelliousness. As Articles 41.1 and 41.2 of the Constitution have enabled the State to have a purely subjective recognition of family and women, especially regarding women as politically beneficial commodities, and at the same time allowed the State to freely intervene and contain parental shortcomings, the voice, being a rhetorical representation of the State and Constitution, initially empowers the protagonist to detach herself from her family and its microcosmic society and make radical decisions. The result is an eventual sense of ‘I’ness and independence which paves the path for the emergence of a generation of antiauthoritarian feminists, who defy not only religion initially though their path of formation as the first step towards socio-sexual independence but also the structural limits of Society.

By classifying sexuality and sexual formation under the “domain of moral experience” (Foucault 1987, 24), the Oedipal Society in *A Pagan Place* leads the unnamed female protagonist to embody the suppressed sexual desires or in O'Brien's terms the “guilt-ridden” desires which will cause “Our Lady” to “blush whenever a woman does such an indecent thing”, while the masculine voice symbolizes the source of authority and normalization (O'Brien 1999, 39, 52). The female protagonist representing modern Irish women, in this respect, is introduced by the voice of “thou shalt not” as the incarnation of the Foucauldian duality of “justice and the criminal” (Foucault 1980). As a result of her dichotomous formation, the narrator's desires for a proper sexual *Bildung* were sidelined by the mesmerizing ventriloquism of the Constitution, Society, her limiting parents, and the corrupt Church. The narrator, in this respect, perceives identity as a dichotomy which holds the State's authoritarian voice on the one hand, and an oppressed conception of personal formation on the other, resulting in an indefinite binary opposition that underscores her structureless identity. While she longs for love, “free will” and surrendering to the priest's sexual caress, she simultaneously censures her lack of determination and weak will, and labels love and sex as passing maladies, or “a condition of the heart, a malady” (O'Brien 1971, 149, 157). For the voice, exemplifying the Irish women in the 1930s, the State's parochial conservatism, the male-dominated Society and families are the same, namely, constituents of a socio-cultural binary op-

position that further complicates her dichotomous condition, strengthening her role as both the criminal and the justice, and leading her to believe that “everything you did was the opposite to what you wanted to do” (197).

Emboldened by her non-identarian rebellious potential, the protagonist-narrator leads her narrative by challenging the conservative Society, introducing sex and sexual formation as inseparable parts of one’s development, and demythologizing extra marital relationships as anomalous possibilities. In addition, Irish manliness is demythologized as the source of socio-cultural anachronism and tardiness in a modern agrarian Ireland of the 1930s, as she depicts her absentee, alcoholic father who wastes family resources on his hobby of betting on horses or in public houses. According to her, it is the parochial conservatism that would “gawk at you, to discern your sex and your features”, and misconstrues feminine formation as obdurate sexuality, for “everything meant more than one thing” (28). Sexual formation as described by O’Brien, in this respect, not only is beyond social tolerance but also means questioning the unquestionable “ancient political issues” of formation and the moral boundaries of the conservative State (21). Through her conscious socio-sexual critique of Society, for the first time in her narrative the narrator finds fault in the voice’s puritanical Society, detaches herself from it, and assaults the authoritarian traditionalism of Irish Society. To her, sexually active religious authorities, emotionally and sexually disintegrated families, and restrictive Society are as reproachable as her sister’s promiscuity. As a result, she emerges as an independent voice who has separated her pattern of formation from what Society requires her to become, dictates her role to the voice of “thou shalt not”, and presents herself as an Irish young girl, interested in sex and sexuality. Her independence is a new role that, albeit often challenged and subverted by the authoritarianism of the masculine voice, has been overshadowed along her identity as a narrator, a member of family and society, and a marionette in her childish sex games with Della by a submissive selfhood that Society had imposed on her.

By finding her sense of ‘I’ness in her narrative of formation, the initially unnamed protagonist emerges as an independent individual and narratorial voice, and takes control of her dramatized novel of sexual formation. “You raged against captivity. You declaimed Robert Emmet’s epitaph. You stamped and recited verses in a paddock”, the radical, now matured narrator reveals to her audience. By so doing, the narrator-protagonist further highlights maturation of the principles set by the first wave of feminist activism in Ireland, which however was an unregistered movement in the 1930s (185). Through her “rage”, not only did she rebel against the essentially subordinative perception of Irish women, which was a common misconception among Dubliners such as her sister Emma, intensifying the binary of rural and urban Irish women, but by “reciting” Robert Emmet’s epitaph, the nineteenth-century radical republican legend, she also voices her libertarian concerns with respect to women’s emancipation and de-masculinization of Irish Society.

Such radical awakenings in the 1930s in Ireland can be read as counter-responses to the anti-feminist Constitution of 1937 and in light of what the Stirnerist Nietzschean feminist Federica Montseny regarded as the impetus to discard the conservative, man-centric ethos of formation, which had envisaged women's formation only minimalistically and found social reformation possible without including women. "Emancipation of women would lead to a quicker realization of the social revolution", argues Montseny, encouraging women to seek self-formation and liberation through art and literature (Kern 1978, 327). This self-recognition and socio-cultural realization through art and education, as I noted earlier, is what Cixous regards as the epistemic agent for women's liberation; or a concept which places women on their conscious path of formation. However, to find this path, the Irish women first needed to break their inflexible cast, legitimized by the Constitution, which limited them only to housewives who were to accept to be shouted at if "the table [was not] laid", or being fired upon for not "serving him another drink" (O'Brien 1971, 101, 23).

As a column in *Irish Independent* summarized Irish women's blighted formation under such masculinization of Constitution and Society: "the death knell of the working woman is sounded in the new Constitution which Mr. de Valera is shortly to put before the country" (Gaffney 1937). It was the death knell that, as Paseta notes through "introducing specific clauses about gender roles", not only became the most notorious legislative measure in limiting women's social participation but also transformed Irish women's narratives of formation into a severely descriptive pattern of apolitical, anti-sexual development (Paseta 2004, 215). The result, I argue, is a mechanical development that in O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*, for instance, is manifested as the authoritarian voice of the State and Society, which not only polices the narrator's most personal thoughts but also warns the audience of the same possible fate should they try to break norms and have babies, like Emma's, who are born out of wedlock, as "it was arranged that [...] baby would be handed over to the State a few seconds after it was born" (O'Brien, 1971, 133-134). In another instance, to comply with the masculine voice, echoing Articles 45.2 and 45.4 of the Constitution, the narrator's mother must do "her best to keep your father in at night"; the agent or the concept which could keep fathers in was not simply the warmth or happiness of their family; rather, mothers could keep them in by "[keeping a roaring fire, prais[ing] the programs on the wireless, rub[ing] his head" in spite of "the smell of his scalp [which] got under her nails, that and the scurf" (27). Women as mothers, thus, not only lose their sense of 'I'ness but also transform into mere mechanical agents, or as her husband puts it: a parenthetic "Mud, short for mother", who should smile for their husband even though their smile "was getting old" and uninviting (*ibidem*).

Although the narrator's eventual decision, of giving up pleasure and the exotic life in large cities to join the convent, contradicts the Joycean non-identarian dictum of formation, and favors the conservatism of Society, it still

resonates with one of the most notable principles of the first wave of feminism: to enable women, especially in rural areas, to take a more active role in their educational formation by attending schools, colleges, and even convent schools. In other words, the “university question”, as Paseta claims, becomes the most leading impetus behind feminists’ perception of female formation (Paseta 2004, 215). While Stephen Dedalus rejects priesthood and religious formation, and despite his modern radical inclinations finally emerges as a non-identarian manifestation of Goethean Bildung¹⁹, the unnamed protagonist’s decision in O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place* is intrinsically non-identarian despite her plainly identarian, seemingly submissive façade. Her non-identarianism, namely, her intrinsic and natural interest in sex and sexuality, in other words, lies in her decision to give up city life and, as she reveals, pursue “*the desire to serve Jesus, [...] to be the spouse of Jesus*”, to marry God, and to be closer to him (and his son) (O’Brien 1971, 192). However, as the narrative unfolds she is neither tempted to “bring pagans the happiness” they may deserve nor interested to engage in warfare with those who shed Jesus’ blood; rather, she simply joins other nuns out of purely sexual interests, out of a cathexis of her sexual drives towards a subjective union with the masculine voice of authority, be it God or Jesus or a man: “it was a marriage to God, she admitted that most girls wished for a marriage to someone but in that union of God and woman there was something no earthly ceremony could compare with, there was constancy” (*ibidem*).

The narrator’s decision, though seemingly apostatical, resonates with Joyce’s illustration of Stephen’s religious tribulations and dilemmas in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Arbitrating between a life dedicated to submissive parochial formation or spent pursuing his Goethean Bildung led to what I flag as a modern form of Irish formation: a hybrid which sets the Irish youth to rebel against parochial patriarchy by dismantling the State’s architecture of normalized formation. O’Brien’s narrator too, therefore, emerges as a hybrid who has utilized the Joycean antiauthoritarianism and rages against patriarchal captivity and her identitylessness, pursues a sublimated form of sexual pleasure, and at the same time seeks formation by indulging in the traditionalist sense of formation, namely, joining the Convent, and rejecting the magnetic allure of large cities. Her determination to pursue education, in other words, is twofold: seeking socially unattainable pleasures, and achieving educational perfection. The result is the eventual emergence of her rebellious feminist “I” in a narrative dominated by parochial dualities and male-oriented “inertia” (40).

Education for the non-conformist Irish women in the 1930s was not just a pattern of intellectual formation, or a byproduct of modernity; rather, it was a complex means, having roots in the 1916 Constitution, the contradictoriness of the revolution and feminist rebels, the 1918 Representation of People Act, a nationwide post-revolution stasis and the concomitant second phase of feminist awakening. In other words, it is a concept which enabled

women to defend their rite of passage in the 1920s and 1930s, to advocate union among feminist groups, and to overcome the State's gendered politics of marginalization most prevalent in the Constitution²⁰. "Educational reform", notes Paseta, finally emerged as the notable achievement of such a politically hegemonic chaos late in the 1920s (Paseta 2004, 215). While the early 1920s saw major improvements in women's educational and personal life, the latter half of the 1920s and 1930s were divided into years of post-revolution stasis dominated by the State's conservative politics of containment, and the onset of the second phase of feminist awakening which formed the latter part of the 1930s. The educated Irish women were either pushed back to kitchens or were serving their time in institutions such as Magdalene Laundries²¹. The State's politics of isolation did not affect the Irish woman's life just in terms of limited social interactions; rather it threatened their very presence in community. The concept of women's citizenship, that I call social "I"ness, was the notion that was attacked by the State's re-establishment of Constitution in 1937.

In *A Pagan Place* O'Brien revisits Gertrude Gaffney's criticism of the new Constitution through her unnamed, female narrator, and accuses Society for changing into a descriptive, largely masculine definition of Irishness, in which women such as her minor female narrator appear as selfless pseudo-citizens, possessed by the idiosyncratic voice of "thou shalt not". Although the narrator, as I discussed earlier, finally discards the ventriloquist voice and finds her own rebellious "Id-entity", the concept of women's marginalized citizenship remains as a radical notion which consumes the narrator's novelistic rite of passage. It is the concept which legitimized women's citizenship as only a submissive domestic identity, the sort which also appears when the narrator engages in playing homoerotic games with her friend Dala: "the kiss was on the lips and very passionate. You knew it was passionate because you were Clark Gable and Robert Donat and Dorothy Lamour and all of those characters" (O'Brien 1971, 59). Submissiveness, in this respect, emerges as a feature that has been willingly internalized by the narrator to suit her role, as a selfless marionette; a role, albeit secondary and static, which will allow her to experience sexual maturity in a bohemian fashion, satisfying her non-identarian formation as a result.

The concept of women's submissive citizenship in *A Pagan Place* also appears in O'Brien's radical treatment of women's rite of passage. Where the clichéd departure towards city and the eventual return have been introduced as the protagonist's first steps towards her socio-sexual quest and formation, in *A Pagan Place* O'Brien introduces Dublin as a pagan place, dominated by men as sexual predators, whose companionship ends in prenuptial pregnancies, wild sexual affairs and further marginalization of women, or catastrophic deformation. The never-ending duality of rural and urban Irish identity²², in this respect, fosters the other Irish duality of rural womanliness and urban manliness, in which women emerge as expendable commodities, whose formation is twofold: contributing to men's proper formation or transmuting into

wayward, deformed individuals who dominate O'Brien's other novels, especially *The Country Girls* trilogy, *The Love Object*, and *Some Irish Loving* (1979).

For the young, unnamed narrator, manliness and sexual adventurousness only produces "willful, capricious and wayward self", or in other words an oblivion that has engulfed her teenage and pregnant sister, Emma (O'Brien 1971, 158). According to the voice, by going to the city, and growing interest in "modern things", as did Emma, you either embrace promiscuity and immoral formation, or as the doctor reveals to the narrator's mother, suddenly become "a woman", which "mean[s] a whole series of personal things; being lonesome et cetera, thing you shied away from" (86). In *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture*, Joseph Valente historicizes urban manliness in the Irish context of pre-/post- revolution. As Valente argues, manliness in an Irish context means the ability to be aggressive and filled with "thumos, the animal passion (2011, 46); to be able to defend your identity regardless of the means and methods it requires; and to be able to release such psychophysical masculine drives through reversed sublimation, namely sexual activities or war²³. Self-control, in this respect, emerges as feminization of such a heritage, and "women's strength", therefore, emerges as "a genre serving manly ends", or contributing to their formation (154). To O'Brien's suddenly self-conscious protagonist, avoiding the traditional move towards city and its male dominated, pagan environment, in this regard, means accomplishing her Bildung without experiencing common sexual tragedies of city life, and completing a rite of passage that was coveted, never begun, yet led to similar results namely self-realization and socio-sexual awareness.

By criticizing her sister's modern formation, which ended in a lost child born out of wedlock, and refraining from repeating her path of deformation by not following her to pagan places such as Dublin, the unvoiced protagonist at once submits to the State's dichotomous identity politics that had surrounded Irish women in the 1930s: a Bildung which reflects the Constitution and deems women to be politically marginal, socially submissive and can best develop by not moving to big cities²⁴. By choosing not to pursue her ideal Bildung in big cities, and instead joining the convent, she embodies the parochial patriarchal politics of formation which had taught her that "only men should whistle. The blessed Virgin blushed when women whistled and likewise when women crossed their legs", and had encouraged women to either join such religious schools and give up sexual Bildung (O'Brien 1971, 99). Her decision, namely to reconsider her interests in men, love, and the masculine modern society of Dublin, and instead investing in her independent female identity, allowed her not only to transcend such internal psycho-sexual colonial imperatives, which relegated women to sexualized toys, but to emerge defending her social right by echoing her mother's critique of the de Valeran anti-feminist 1937 Constitution: "She said she had rights too, in law. She mentioned the dowry that her parents had sacrificed to give him" (61). While her mother's claims over her constitutional

rights unwittingly ridicules the State's commodification of women's presence, limiting it to their properties and dowry, the narrator dramatizes the traumatic condition of Irish women such as her mother who have done their part in forming the State and yet suffered the most under its sexist laws.

By consciously choosing the convent over Dublin, thus reversing the mechanics of the modern Irish novel of formation, O'Brien's protagonist not only rejects the State's psychological yoke of internal colonialism, finding her independent, rebellious "I" at the end of her narrative, but also introduces an unexperienced variety of feminine modern Irish identity. She becomes a rebel who neither serves the Oedipal Irish Society nor the parochial Constitution; a character whose radical legacy animated later feminists such as Mary Kenny and Nuala O'Faolain²⁵. The protagonist, in this respect, emerges as an outcry of dissident women who opposed the State's Orwellian politics of dominance over women's socio-sexual formation in the 1930s; a marginalized crowd, such as Women's Social and Political League founded by Dorothy Macardle in November 1937, who reminded the State how they fought along with their male fellow revolutionaries for their liberation. Intrinsically sexist statements such as "women [...] shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age or strength" received replies such as the bold one below by the socio-political critic Yvonne Scannell:

But for the women of Ireland Mr. de Valera would not be in the position he holds today. He was glad enough to make use of them to transport guns and munitions, to carry secret dispatches, and to harbor himself and his colleagues when it was risking life and liberty to do so. If the women had not stood loyally behind the men we might be to-day no further than we were before 1916. It is harsh treatment this in return for all they have done for their country. (Scannell 1988, 123)

What critics such as Scannell and Gaffney claim corresponds with O'Brien's protagonist reciting Emmet's libertarian epitaph: referencing national feminist awakening and asking for equal rights and ending the politics of gender oppression²⁶. While Emmet's epitaph had called for national liberation through anti-colonial self-realization, the protagonist through her non-conformist rage and radical choices adapts a similar anti-colonial path of self-formation which led to the deconstruction of the State's architecture of internal colonialism and politics of gender bifurcation.

Notes

¹ In her comparative reading of James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and O'Brien's Kate and Baba, H el ene Cixous criticized O'Brien's treatment of women's sexuality and disregarded it as being obsessively established on a "guilt-ridden" sense of sexual formation, in which women's

sexual formation is still to be legitimized by the masculine society. See Cixous 1987; Colletta, O'Connor (eds) 2006, 90-95.

² In his "De Valera's Betrayal of the Women of 1916", Peter Berresford Ellis regards the Constitution established in the 1937 as a masculine instrumentalization of the State's political power for its removing sexual equality from the body of the draft, and limiting women's socio-cultural significance to being mothers and wives. According to Berresford Ellis, such politically-inspired marginalization of women, enraged feminists such as Dorothy Macardle, de Valera's friend and once fervent supporter, who later parted ways and questioned the de Valeran Constitution, calling it a masculine instrument.

³ Hannah Lynch's "The Spaniard at Home", for instance, at once introduced the concept of female social deformation to Irish women and contributed to the radicalization of feminist movements in Ireland, resulting in the formation of radical movements in the latter part of the twentieth century, and led them into forming groups such as the Irish Women's Liberation founded in the 1970s.

⁴ These were the concepts that were accepted neither in their Irish context and under the Constitution, which regards family and mother as the center of Irish formation, nor in their British one, where women were generally envisaged as submissive and neutral.

⁵ Croker complains bitterly about the lack of love and sexual adventurousness for the Irish girl in her *Lismoye* published in 1914, whereas Lynch heralds social fragmentation and a broken matrix of familial relationship in her serialized works and essays; O'Brien, however, explores radical sexual formations and non-conformist female-voiced characters, and as Frances Wilson regards in her review of O'Brien's *Country Girl: A Memoire*, introduces "sexual intercourse to Ireland". On O'Brien's memoir see Wilson 2012.

⁶ O'Brien's narratives of sexual maturation and desire rekindled the horror among the generally conservative Irish after similarly radical texts such as Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* (1941) and Eric Cross' *The Tailor and Ansty* (1942); these emerged as narratives that once tasted the State's conservative guillotine of censorship and were regarded as "in general tendency indecent or obscene", The Censorship of Publications Act 1929 Part II, Section 6, quoted in Carlson 1990, 3.

⁷ On Banned books and how The Censorship of Publications Act 1929 influenced later generations of radical authors such as O'Brien, John McGahern, and Brian Moore see Carlson 1990.

⁸ As Gerry Smyth argues socially suppressive institutions such as Magdalene Laundries were places that isolated stories of "women who got pregnant out of wedlock, or those who were even suspected of being sexually active" (2012, 134). Socio-sexually radical narratives by feminists such as O'Brien prepared the frozen conservative Irish Society to hear them out.

⁹ Female sexual formation were the "odd bad egg in the basket" for they remained unnoticed for a long time, and demanded a vast reservoir of socio-cultural energy to be salvaged, requiring the State to restructure its politics of formation, and the male dominated Irish society to transform into a more permissive one; a concept which sounded more impossible than anything else.

¹⁰ Re-searching my copy of Dean's title for finding traces of female writers reconfirms Cahalan's argument made in 1995. Even today, Seamus Deane's *The Short History of Irish Literature* stands as one of the most notable critiques of the State and radical writers who contributed to the formation of an independent Irish literature and literary style. However, it seems female writers as various as Kate O'Brien, Hannah Lynch, Katherine Cecil Thurston, Bithia M. Croker, and even Constance Markievicz's (jail) letters to her sister simply were not significant enough to be noted by notable pundits such as Deane or Jeffares.

¹¹ The Constitution drafted in 1922, which reflected the one established in 1916, had put the emphasis on equal rights and opportunities for every Irishman and woman "without the distinctions of sex"; whereas, the one established in 1937 had been changed to include the aforementioned statement only in 5 various places, with no references to equal rights and opportunities. These 5 instances – articles 9, 16, 45 – only reflect membership to the Irish Parliament,

Dáil, and national Irish identity. See Bunreacht Na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland): <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/>.

¹² On a linguistic study of O'Brien's use of "you" see Herman 1994, 378.

¹³ In Edna O'Brien's extensive modern corpus concepts such as autoeroticism, "masturbatory formation", lesbian sexual Bildung, which under the de Valeran rule were labeled as aberrant and un-Irish, have always been given higher priority than betrothal companionships. Where marriage in her novels has been bound to fail or never happen, these modern concepts proved to last longer, and in a less demanding context.

¹⁴ On patriarchal power of the Church in Ireland and its reflection in the modern Irish novel see Bradley, Gialanella Valiulis (eds) 1997. Also see Welch 1991, 190-205.

¹⁵ The "thing against its origin" is the fundamental concept in Adorno's negative dialectics of formation, in which the radicalism of this 'contradictory thing' becomes its integral feature, where the *non-identarian* 'thing' can be formed by indulging in the features that contradict the very essence of the opposite object. In other words, the modernist dialectics of psycho-social development opposes the traditional "mechanisms of socialization" that, according to Franco Moretti, acknowledge social mobility insofar as it "is based on a mere compliance with authority" (2000, 16). Non-identarian identity, moreover, rises against the totalizing norms of self-formation, which limit formation to the accepted boundaries of 'state-sponsored' education, and subordinate the subject to social codes of normality. The modern novel (of formation), as a candid critique of such social codes of normality, sustains this ideological opposition by supplying the subject with the knowledge to think differently, or in Adorno's terms, to "think in contradiction" (1981, 145). In other words, the protagonist finds the conventional perception of identity as "contradiction in itself", namely, an anomalous concept which is formed and normalized by the dominant Society. To overcome these dialectics and deconstruct the aforementioned concept of subordination – of the subject to society – the individual must initially free himself from the conceptual form of identity and strive towards the uniqueness of non-identity, namely, a non-conformist identity which defines itself through its resistance towards codes of normalization. See Adorno 1981, 140-165. Also see Moretti 2000, 10-20.

¹⁶ "Women do not Count, Neither Shall they be Counted" was the political slogan used the 1911 census suffragette boycott, which reversed anti-feminists calculations and resulted in the formation of radical feminist groups. See Liddington, Crawford 2011. Also see MacPherson 2012.

¹⁷ In his *Preface* to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a genealogical exploration of capitalism and its socio-cultural impacts on the masses, Michel Foucault defines the conception of Oedipal Society as being a product of normalizing rules set by an authoritarian tower society. To be able to understand this normalized, authority-oriented hegemony in order to defy its foundation, Foucault notes, you are required to obtain certain skills in language; be part of either "the anti-repressive politics" or a libidinal surge "modulated by the class struggle" (1984, xiii); or to relate to the pillars of power in that given society. To resist the dominant authority, Foucault points out, "a war [should be] fought on two fronts: against social exploitation and psychic repression" (*ibidem*). To deconstruct the former, the latter must be traced and eliminated. According to Deleuze and Guattari, psychological suppression, and libidinal radicalism and social marginalization have roots in the modern family, where father's authoritarian presence normalizes, if not suppresses, children's sense of formation. According to Deleuze and Guattari, family's hierarchal mechanism of formation, namely, "daddy, mommy, and [lastly] me" introduces the duality of submissiveness and the (child's) desire to overcome such an authoritarian voice as one of its systematic principles, in which fathers generally emerge as the force that monitors children not to cross their path of formation (1984, 111).

¹⁸ On dialogical differences between feminization and masculinization of nations see Bakhtin 1982, especially his chapter on "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", 84-258.

¹⁹ Here I meant to highlight the aesthetico-educational sense of Goethean Bildung, which initially prioritizes education and artistic mastery over psycho-social perfection.

²⁰ According to Paseta, early in the 1910s to late 1920s, feminist movements in Ireland were victimized by radically political divisions: those who found themselves to be more British than Eire-Irish and those who identified with Home Rule Ireland. The result was a constantly widening gap between the two, with feminist ideals becoming expendable concerns. The emergence of the republicanism even further complicated the relationship.

²¹ On State-sponsored institutions of containment such as Magdalene Laundries and industrial schools, built to suppress uninvited voices of unmarried pregnant mothers, children born out of wedlock and other morally aberrant phenomena, see Arnold 2009.

²² O'Brien's radical treatment of the duality of rural and urban Irish formation in her *A Pagan Place* resonates with what Chinua Achebe discussed in his *Home and Exile*, in which the concept of home and homeliness at large have been attacked by the foreignness of an alien or (neo-) colonial home; under such circumstances, Achebe, notes exile and departing from one's deformed home in hope of finding and redefining home appears as the closest perception of home (2003, 1-36). In *A Pagan Place*, the unnamed narrator initially follows the modern pattern of formation and as a result finds her agrarian identity and rural home as a setback, preventing her from experiencing certain unknown experiences, especially sexual initiation and sexual maturation; as her narrative develops, however, disconcerted by the sexually demonizing image of Dublin, where young rural girls such as her sister would get pregnant, she endeavors to redefine homeliness by rejecting city life and seeking her roots in her small county, redefining home and homeliness.

²³ Such manliness and masculine pride were the founding elements in Celtic mythological narratives of Brian Boru in defeating the Danish Vikings, or as Valente notes are manifested in the modern Irish struggles with the British over independence and decolonization. See Valente 2011, 7, 15, 43-46.

²⁴ In his discussion of the Constitution and women's right in Ireland, Peter Berresford Ellis claims that the de Valeran Constitution of 1937 has officially established chauvinism as the foundation of Irish society and identity. See Berresford Ellis 2006.

²⁵ Nuala O'Faolain, Mary Kenny, June Levin, Margaret Gaj, Nell McCafferty were the leading Irish feminists who founded the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, IWLM in 1970, and engaged in advocating women's basic rights. See Levine 2009.

²⁶ Through his libertarian and nationalist rhetoric Robert Emmet besought his fellow Irishmen and women to unite and to question the unknown, and their country being ruled by powers which have marginalized the Irish for centuries: "I have but one request to ask at my departure from this world — it is the charity of its silence! Let no man write my epitaph: for as no man who knows my motives dare now vindicate them. Let not prejudice or ignorance asperse them. Let them and me repose in obscurity and peace, and my tomb remain uninscribed, until other times, and other men, can do justice to my character; when my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written. I have done" (2013).

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Creative Writing,
Translations, Readings

Two Poems

Frank McGuinness

Aeneas

I
When my father came
From his grave
In the story of Oedipus
To tell me
I would marry
My mad sister
Should I not leave Carthage,
I took this
As sound warning,
He being expert
At incest,
Oedipus that is,
Not my father –
There and then I upped anchor

The widow Dido
Caressed my shadow
As if it were panthers
Bred to do her bidding
Ridding the house of rats
Feeding on my hair
Delighting in its lice,
She siring a son,
Creating daughters,

Making me a promise
That I would believe
Were she not past child bearing,
Were I not at her beck,
Were I not at her call.

II

When my father came
From his grave
In the story of Oedipus
To ask me
Why was it she cursed you
Should you stay in Carthage,
My mad sister,
I took this
As sound warning,
Me being expert
At departing
From burning cities,
From burning temples,
From burning fathers.

The widow Dido
Caressed my backbone
As if we were sisters
Bred to do the bidding
Of our dying father,
Worshipping the panthers
Licking our hair,
Cleansing it of lice.

He filled us with sons,
Identical daughters,
Each making a promise
That we would believe
Were we not burning
In my father's temple.

Other Men

I know a man, he used to ask
Why do you sleep with other men?
He'd pop that question as he basked
In the eyes of other men.

Coward to the last, I must confess
I am fearful when other men
Shelter behind their girlfriend's dress
In company with other men.

I know of men, they need to ask
Why do you sleep with other men?
Theirs is the Sisyphian task
To be men among other men.

Voices

Q&A with Frank McGuinness

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Abstract

Since his debut as a playwright with *Baglady* in the early 1980s, Frank McGuinness in his plays, poetry, and adaptations of classics has addressed common perceptions of “Irishness” mainly through the lens of sexuality, gender, and human bonding so as to confront public and private losses, often leading his characters to experience a catharsis. The interview is the revised version of the original conversation that took place in Frank McGuinness’s office at University College Dublin, in Summer 2010. Starting with a reflection on issues of sexuality and the Nation in his 1980s plays, McGuinness discusses his playwrighting in tandem with his poetry, life, and faith in the power of love to overcome loss, despair, and isolation.

Keywords: Frank McGuinness, interview, Ireland, queer, sexuality

SG: My first question is about your relationship with theatre critics, especially here in Ireland. I find it alarming, but not surprising, that your more sexually explicit plays were often flawed by critics, and male critics in Dublin in particular – Innocence (1986), Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme (1985)¹ and your other more sexually explicit plays. I wonder whether you think it was more the sexuality or the politics imbued in these text that upset critics, or both?

FMcG: Well, I have to be honest with you: I never really read critics, I don’t. And it’s pure freedom on my part that I just go my own way... You have to remember that *Innocence* was first performed in 1986. Homosexuality was still illegal here; it was not legalised until 1993. It was going to be a very tough call for any Irish audience to deal with the subject, when taken seriously. And it would be an extraordinary tough call to deal with such a complex sexuality as the one I imagined Caravaggio had. I think that the critics were no more ahead of their time than an awful lot of the audience were, and they reflected the audience’s bias and fear. So, I feel that was part and parcel of their negative reaction to the play. That said, there was also an

extremely positive reaction to the play, and it became very much a call that people would fight for, and they defended the right to go and see it. But it was, in Irish terms, ahead of its time. And, anything that is ahead of its time is going to get a rough reception. It just does. And I knew it was to get a rough reception. That's really what I feel about it. I wasn't surprised by the response to it. I wasn't depressed by it. I sort of thought, "Well that's life, that's what they're going to say anyway", because, you know, critics reflect the theatre-going public's taste. They always have and they always will. So, I knew I'd be prepared for it, and I was... I think that they also didn't see the homosexuality in *Sons of Ulster* when it was first performed. They deliberately blanked it out, which pictures the reaction of the majority of the public at the time. I went out of my way to cause trouble, and at some level I got it.

SG: Which shows just how the connections of sexuality and politics have been and still are deliberately left out by most people, in and out of the theatre, whereas instead they are interconnected on so many levels...

FMcG: Absolutely yes! But you know, they found it hard to take. The audience found it hard to take: it's never revived. After all the years I've written it it's never been. But that's that. For example, early this year I thought, "this is the 400th anniversary of Caravaggio's death", and I thought that somebody somewhere would perform *Innocence*, but they didn't. Maybe even a little piece that they would later cut. I feel I was probably wrong when I said it's clever making theatre. Think of *Gates of Gold* (2002), for instance. In the last days of Gabriel's life, in the last days of their relationship, he is, as he always has been, sufficiently violent enough to put everything that he's done under extreme interrogation, and extreme focus, and to dare to say it wasn't worth it. This is what he dares us to say. But of course, as always Conrad anticipates him, as he sees that the reason why they did it was because it wasn't worth it, saying, "We had the courage to say that. That's why we do it, that's why we know it's worth it: because, paradoxically, it's not worth it". So they have this rather unique understanding of the business around, which corresponds to the rather unique understanding of each other. And that is the success of their life together: that only they could have pursued the lonely journey that they did pursue together. They're full of contradiction, they're full of ironies, but at the root of their love, at the root at their lives, is the sense they gave to it.

SG: And in the end, they really are the only ones who really are able to see this.

FMcG: They're the only ones who are able to understand it and Conrad articulates that in the scene with Cassie, when he speaks about the Venerable

Bede (Scene Six), daring to say to the young director, “What was it worth? You leave nothing behind”. I deliberately did that, and that to me is a great liberation. There is a unique environment around their love. And while they allow people to come near the centre of the circle, they don’t allow people to touch that subject. They’ve learned the hard way and that that’s a very special and unique space that only they can get into.

SG: The so-called “queer culture” has been hiking in Ireland at least since the mid-1990s, which paved the way for criticism to discuss new ways to free individuals from encapsulating notions of sexual, political, and cultural identity. On the other hand, it seems as if there always had already been something inherently eccentric in Irish history and culture, and I think this sometimes shows in your works. Can you say something on this?

FMcG: Well, to me queer culture is not something that I really know too much about, actually. I am gay, but I feel that there’s a world out there with which queer culture deals with, and instead I don’t. I mean, it’s just a language that I don’t get.

SG: There is a thin veil uncovering your depictions of women as figures of acceptance of and resistance to the role of “Mother(s) Ireland”. I find it very incisive when you define Rima, in Dolly West’s Kitchen (1999), “an anarchic spirit, despairing for her sorely unhappy children” (3). Don’t you find it an appropriate metaphor of Ireland’s troubled past, and in particular as regards the connection of women with the idea of Nation?

FMcG: I never made that kind of equation. I feel it is a very dangerous one to do, both for the Nation and for the women. You know, if you look at it, there’s always been a tendency in my plays to stand up to the mother, or to take on a mother’s role: Rebecca does it in *The Factory Girls* (1982). In *Dolly West’s Kitchen*, yes, Rima is worrying and despairing for her children, but she comes to die, and she actually dies in the play. And the part of that play is about your mother’s death, and you having got to survive that death, the fact that she’s not there to complete you and to guide you, and to lead you for the rest of your existence. In the play, Rima is very deeply aware of her own mortality. She knows that she doesn’t have much longer to go, and that confirms everything that she’s doing. She is a woman of astonishing strength, a woman of very deep insight – imaginative insight. She can read people and read situations with great speed and quiet accuracy. But she’s also a woman who has made a terrible mess of her life – her choice of partner, her decision to have children: none of it has really brought her liberation, and none of this has really brought her the kind of achievement that will lead her to feel she has done something that has been substantial with

her existence. So, under a certain aspect Rima dies in grief and from loss, while at the same time absolving her children from feeling responsible for that. She tells them, “You’re good kids”, but she dies a desperately broken woman. It has been a mistake on people’s part to imagine that I write these very positive, very strong images of woman. I do try to have strong images of woman, but I don’t idealise them. I’m in fact deeply critical of many of the decisions they’ve made in their lives. And that has been the case to write through all that I’ve written. And I’ll certainly never make the mistake of the Kathleen Ni Houlihan figure: I don’t write about Ireland as a woman, I don’t try to put women as embodiments of Ireland. Everybody in my play has made a series of individual choices that has made them what they are. But some of these choice have been economic, some of them have been sexual, some of them have been psychological, and some of them all three. And they’ve come about because of the consequence of these women being Irish. But none of them is seeking to assume the mantle of the nation upon themselves, because that, I think it is a very dated and very dangerous concept. I’ve always found Ireland as a woman to be ludicrous actually, a silly personification. It’s a convention that has way outgrown its use actually, and in the long run, you know I would never do that with them. I hope that I created a highly individual, highly flawed and highly strong woman, and that’s what I’m setting up to do in exploring the role of the mother, the role of the wife, the role of the worker, the role of the independent woman I want to highlight.

SG: That’s probably why the women in your plays are powerful images, because you deal with roles, you don’t idealise the role itself.

FMcG: Absolutely not. And as I said, they said they are very strong, but they are also very flawed. Always very flawed...

SG: And complex characters, not easy at all to get into...

FMcG: They’re not easy people. They’re just not. A classic example is *Carthaginians*, where there are three radically different and radically damaged women, three differently damaged women there in that graveyard².

SG: In an interview for the Irish Sunday Independent³, you pointed out that AIDS has influenced your writing since Sons of Ulster. I think there are marked, though artful references to the AIDS crisis in Carthaginians and Innocence. Hopes and fears of Aids are there in The Bird Sanctuary (1993). And of course, there is that song, “Sleep” that you wrote for a friend’s death. Can you say something more on this, and about AIDS within the contexts of your plays?

FMcG: I was never aware of the AIDS crisis really until the mid-1980s, same as I think a lot of people were on that respect, but I've always thought it was rather alarmingly prescient that when I was writing *Sons of Ulster* – about eight young men living under the shadow of Death, in the First World War, eight young men of one generation gone out and to a battlefield, many of whom will not come back – that this was when the AIDS virus, without us knowing it, was spreading like a wildfire through the gay community, certainly in America. And I've always felt that there is an affinity between the circumstances of the illness, and the circumstances right from the play without my knowing it. I absolutely make that point, but I don't think it's pushing it to say that. That is something that did happen. After the arrival of AIDS in Ireland, and knowing people who developed it, of course, the subject became more pressing and more obvious. And there are very direct references in *Innocence* to the disease, to what it is dying of disease, and in *Carthaginians* as well, in one of Hark's speeches⁴. And then in *The Bird Sanctuary*, written many years later, over nearly ten years after *Sons of Ulster* Tina finally confronts the grief of what is lost, and the cruelty of those immune to loss. So, over a ten-year-period, I think it is fair to say that the subject was there, in the foreground of my mind actually, but I never particularly wanted to write or to furnish an AIDS play, largely because other people were doing it. And I really felt that that was their subject. I actually felt that really it was the province of journalists and researchers, and television on following to do it. I had no great desire to exclusively concentrate on the subject, largely because, as I said, it was something that was already there. And then I think of when one of my close friends died from AIDS in 1995, that was a big turning point for me. The subject didn't diminish in importance for me, or anything; but I felt that his death was actually the major statement that I had to make, what was going to be made in my life, that he had died and I was mourning.

SG: *And that was when you wrote "Sleep".*

FMcG: "Sleep" came then, yes. Also if you look at *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* there's an analogy there, for Adam, the American who dies, he doesn't die from AIDS, he got shot, but it's very easy to extend what's been said there it's my elegy for my generation. Now, I'm not trying to trivialise this, but I went to San Francisco, and it was only when I went there that I recognise the sheer scale, the sheer numbers who have died from my generation, because there were so few men in the gay community left my age. I decided to grow a beard as an act of mourning, and I haven't shaved the beard.

SG: *Also, for a very long time, there was this connection of the language of AIDS and the language of war...*

FMcG: It was a dreadful time, there is no question about that. It was a very hard time. And any gay men in their thirties in the 1980s was going to be radically effected by the reality of AIDS.

SG: AIDS discourse has been a matter of love and death. The two are prominent themes in your writing. In my view, this is more acutely expressed in Gates of Gold, in the negativity of death and the gold metaphorically represented by love and affection. Could we say that beauty, I mean real beauty as represented in this play, is actually in death?

FMcG: Well, it's in loyalty, real beauty is in loyalty, and the lasting of love. In the play, Ryan is a beautiful boy, a very beautiful boy. But that mask of his, the mask of beauty hides a gigantic insecurity, a violence... the deepest violence of not knowing who you are and frantically searching for what defines you, "What am I?". You know, he's not even sure if he's gay or straight in the play – he moves in many directions. He keeps inflicting sorrow on himself, he keeps inflicting the potential for even more sorrow on himself, he keeps betraying people, he keeps looking for material wealth, he keeps looking for his father in everybody that he meets, and he'll never find that, he's never going to find that. Whereas in Gabriel and in Conrad there is a different type of violence, there is a violence that is more in the wounding of each other, and the knowledge of each other. On one level, they know too much about each other through living together for so long. Ryan doesn't know who he is; Alma has a good idea of who she is; and Cassie is whoever she wants to be. These are just facts that are not to be pondered, but those three – Alma, Conrad, and Gabriel – are victims of excessive knowledge, if you like: that it can come over, too, as a psychic burden to bear, and that can wound you. Gabriel mostly wounds Conrad, but Conrad is extremely adept at avoiding punches, if you think of it. Gabriel has lashed at so many so often before, and with such dexterity and expertise, but Conrad is usually up to it. And that is the supreme pleasure of pain in Gabriel: "I've got you. I've got you. I've wounded you". But at the end of the play, what is beautiful is survival. They're accustomed to each other, and they have come through. It ends not with the death; it ends with a kiss. That's very important in a play about dying: one is living. That to me is the whole journey in the play, a journey towards that kiss, and towards that breath, which is the continuation of their life together. And because they have this intense, fractious, unpredictable marriage, it will go on, while one of them goes on. It is a titanic moment!

SG: In an interview with Anthony Roche, you have claimed that Gene in There Came a Gipsy Riding (2007) literally urges all his family to follow him in the grave (2010, 12). Do you think embracing this theory of negativity, this

mourning of trauma – also in relation to Ireland’s past – may work productively in terms of identities no longer oppressive?

FMcG: Well, remember this is what Margaret, his mother reads in the letter. I’m not giving away anything when I say that originally her name was Kathleen: I decided to change her name to Margaret so that people would have been under no confusion about whether she was Kathleen Ni Houlihan or Ireland. The truth is that I have an Aunt Margaret and I have an Aunt Kathleen, so I went from my aunt Kathleen and my aunt Margaret to find the name. They’re not this woman, but that’s the basic fact of it... And I think that you must remember that Margaret in the play has an extremely strange relationship with this boy that I very deliberately didn’t elaborate on, I didn’t articulate too much who Gene was – why he did it, what does he like. It’s all left for other people to imagine. What I feel is happening to Margaret at this stage of her career, at this stage of her life is that absolute exhaustion has cracked into her existence. All of her life she has to achieve more and more to affirm herself, and this exhaustion takes the form of hyperactivity, hyper-energy. So that when she does read the letter, you can see it is she who frames what Gene wants to do, as Gene will well know she would, that’s how close they are in there... You know, that is only her in her despair and in her desire, to stop the voices, to stop the work, to stop the demands upon herself that she makes all the time. It may be her who is urging this on her family, not the dead son and maybe it’s her guilt at what she has done. That’s what maybe goes on there.

SG: She always seem to be wanting to keep everything and everyone under control, while at the same time letting out this feeling that she’s actually losing control, that things are going to be shattering...

FMcG: Yes. Absolutely. Well, nothing could be the same after this weekend. Absolutely nothing could be the same. That approach that she has, that speech that she has when she talks about her own violent upbringing and all that was done to her: the children can never forget they’ve heard this from their mother; it’s going to explain an awful lot about her. They don’t know how each of them is going to have to deal with it. But the world has changed after this weekend. What happens this weekend is the direct consequence of the bomb that Eugene sets off when he kills himself.

SG: My former questions were evidently inspired by the issue of Irish University Review celebrating your career. In the article you have written for the journal, you say that of all businesses, theatre business is “rarely truth or rarer still, realism” (1) which is a very striking statement on theatre. Can you say something more on how truth and fiction play with each other in your writing

for the stage – because they always seem to play with each other – and how not only actual truth and fiction, but also how people may read something as truth or fiction, and how people may read this ongoing play between them?

FMcG: Well, again, the matter in my last play (*Greta Garbo Came to Donegal*, 2010) is simply, that Greta Garbo did come to Donegal. That is true. She came in 1976, I think. I made her come in 1967 because 1976 was the height of the horror in the North of Ireland, really it was a terrible time, and I didn't want to write about that particular period, the background, but I was very intrigued about writing on 1967, when things were absolutely stirring – the explosion was about to happen – and I wanted Garbo to come and to be, if you like, a catalyst for many unspoken tension within the family that she finds herself in, so there is a truth and a fiction working together. The geographical truth is that she came to Donegal but not exactly to where I put her. The historical truth is she came in 1976, the imagined truth that she came in 1967. There is something that happens at a very basic level. And if you look at all the plays, most of the plays I've written like *The Factory Girls*, my mother and my aunts were all factory women, but they differ, they were never involved in any strike of any kind let alone taking over an office. So, there's truth and fiction working together. And in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, my partner, Philip, he's an English man, a lecturer of Old and Middle English, but he never went to Lebanon, he was never captured – again, there is truth and fiction working out together. So, if you like, I may start with a basis in truth, but I need to turn it into a fiction: that's for me the business of writing, the business of imagining for the stage. And similarly, you know, I feel that realism on the stage is dead, because the cinema does it better and television does it better. I did this television play called *A Short Stay in Switzerland* which is about a woman going Zurich for assisted suicide; I simply knew that the actual act of drinking the potion would be immensely more effective as a television act than as a stage act because of the close-up – you watch her doing it. There's a brutal fact about it, actually, that is, if I wish to write a realistic story – this was the most realistic piece I've ever done because I was rooting it in an actual woman's journey in an actual family going with her – I would choose to do it on television. I've no regret for that. But I am terribly reluctant to embrace another story for television. If I do it, it'll probably be another true, real story, because that's the medium that suits it, theatre doesn't suit that, my theatre certainly doesn't. If you look at the life of Caravaggio, I take a few facts, and then weave another story from it, such a completely different story from it. He becomes someone with mutability. I take a few facts as, you know, Edmund Spenser wrote part of *The Faerie Queen* in Ireland. Everything else is invented, everything, but that is fact. And I just let subjecting this trills to a marginal pressure from fiction.

SG: And, how does your poetry fit within this perspective on truth and fiction, theatre and TV?

FMcG: Well, I think the poetry will be a more accurate gate to life in terms of biographical detail than plays ever will be. I kind of deliberately leave a lot of poems rough and unfinished, because that's not my medium, my medium is the theatre, but I enjoy the release of poetry, I enjoy the fact that if you are in a hotel room you can draft a sonnet that you can carry around. It keeps the mind operating. The most ambitious thing I've done in poetry is this sixty sequence, sixty sonnets, which I think is an enormously ambitious task to set yourself if you're not a poet. I let the game of that, I let the joy of evolving different line forms and seeing if it would be possible to tackle sixty sonnets on this theme. And you know, I'm very proud of that as a technical achievement. Other people may regard it "technically as too harsh". I do. So that's what I would say about it: the life is closer to the poems in a weird way. It's closer in a way I wouldn't want the plays to be. But I like the poems because as I said they're rougher and they're not my main call, my main art form.

SG: Do you think this affects your feeling more comfortable with poetry, in terms of releasing yourself?

FMcG: I would think so. There's certainly a childhood, there's certainly a lot closer memories of childhood directly in poetry than they are in the plays, but the poems are really an alternative – well no, alternative is not the word –, they're a relief from the plays, that's what they are. I don't worry too much about the reception of them, to be honest with you. Because I love books – I think that Gallery produces beautiful books – I take them seriously and I don't throw things together. You know, if you were to look at my archives here, if you looked at the work that I take with poems, I am very careful with them. I do a lot of versions and then I put them together. The poems are a very useful complement to the plays.

SG: In your Greta Garbo Came to Donegal, you come back "home" – to Donegal – as much as you come back to focus on women...

FMcG: Very much. Yes...

SG: Was this coming back home for you an urge? And, how do you relate this choice to finding home "elsewhere", itself a very powerful message you often convey in your plays?

FMcG: In Greta Garbo Came to Donegal I just decided to add some part of the script at home. The fact is that I only found that Greta Garbo

went to Donegal because I'm a great admirer, and I had to write a play about that, there is no question of it and then there was the question of getting the format: if she came to Ireland and she came to Donegal, and was going stuck in Donegal there was question for what part of Donegal it was going to be, and I decided that my own part, Buncrana was the ideal place to bring her because it's ten miles from the border. This is the right place for her to come, because for me Garbo was this extraordinary creature of instinct and intelligence, the instinctive intelligence. So within some days of being there, she has read not only the situation within the family, she's read the situation within the country. She knows, she hasn't had the vocabulary for Republicans and Nationalist, and Loyalist at that sort, but she recognises trouble when she sees it. She is too good an actress not to know when something is seriously starting. So that's why I put her there, I so suppose Garbo dictated when and where would we go, and because she dictated it, I was coming to it as an alien as well. I was looking at my own environment through alien eyes and I could construct it that way. Also, I thought that because Garbo was coming as alien – she's European, she's American – she would bring a different sensibility – a combined sensibility – on Ireland-England while she was there. She was very much the muse – what a horrible term! –, but she was very much the guide through the play, and with her I felt that there was a sufficient attachment and essence to go home, without fears of being swamped, or anything else.

SG: July 2009 marked the 25th anniversary of Sons of Ulster with a production at Hampstead Theatre in London. Did the event offer you a chance to look back at your career, and in what terms?

FMcG: No, I don't look back. I just don't.

SG: If you were stranded on a deserted island, what novel, play, and city would you bring with you?

FMcG: I'd bring *Pride and Prejudice*, *Hamlet*, and Florence. You may not appreciate Florence... I do!

Notes

¹ From here onwards *Sons of Ulster*.

² Greta, Macla, Sarah.

³ Interview by Joe Jackson (2002).

⁴ "Tell me what's between your legs. Is there anything between your legs? Is there anything between your legs? (Hark grabs Dido's groin.) Is the united Ireland between your legs? What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease" (McGuinness 1996 [1988], 314).

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Recensioni / Reviews

Sara Brady, Fintan Walsh (eds), *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009, pp. xii+255. ISBN 978-0-230-21998-4

In one of the essays contained in the collection edited by Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh, *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture* (2009), J'aime Morrison writes that “[b]ecause of their double focus, crossroads are important spaces for reconsidering Irish identity” (82). This is a more than fitting description of the main objective of this volume, which, in its entirety, represents an attempt to rethink Irish culture and to chart the several ramifications of twenty-first century Irish identity.

Crossroads is divided into five parts: I. “Tradition, Ritual, and Play”; II. “Place, Landscape, and Commemoration”; III. “Political Performances”; IV. “Gender, Feminism, and Queer Performance”; V. “Diaspora, Migration, and Globalization”. Clearly these sections are meant to encompass the main cultural (and political) hot spots that, at least in the eye of the foreigner, usually define and permeate Irish identity – i.e. traditional cultural expressions such as mumming, folk music and storytelling, lush green landscapes, en masse emigration, and religious and territorial issues. Throughout the collection, these components of Irish culture are (re)considered using the broad-spectrum lens of performance studies.

The editors claim that they wish to “[...] impress the need for performance as a paradigm and as an object of study to be considered in greater depth in the context of Irish culture” (8). Partly this is because at the time of publication Brady and Walsh were both affiliated with a drama department in Ireland, but more significantly, they feel that performance studies have the potential to develop new critical perspectives in fields that are not typically associated with performative arts. Not exactly surprising is the fact that famous political speeches and acts – as in Anne Pulju’s essay on De Valera’s political oath – or sports events are considered to be pieces of performance, while it comes more as a surprise to see religious pilgrimages, and even roads taken into consideration. *Crossroads* can be read as an all-embracing survey on the concept of performance as a viable interpretative tool for all things Irish. The result is undoubtedly refreshing and thought provoking.

The first part of the book is the longest, with five essays on traditional subjects. It starts with the contribution of Jack Santino, “Performing Ireland: A Performative Approach to the Study of Irish Culture”, which delves into the performative qualities of what he calls “ritualesque”. In his analysis of public events, such as the Bloody Sunday commemorations or the Gay Pride Day

celebrations, he highlights a certain aspect that he believes to be neglected by academic studies. Santino claims that these events do not simply function as a public display of mourning in the first case, or of “carnavalesque excess” in the second, but that they try to pursue “social change as well as personal transformation” (16). It is this specific aspiration toward a change in society that makes them expressions of the “ritualesque”.

The section continues with Bernadette Sweney’s “Performing Tradition”, a discussion on the staging of traditional folk rituals (such as mumming, wakening, Wrenboys, Strawboys and Patterns) in the Irish theatre, and with Sara Brady’s extremely interesting essay on Irish sports, “Sporting ‘Irish’ Identities: Performance and the Gaelic Games”. Brady’s examination of Gaelic games leads to an insightful analysis of their role in the construction of an authentic Irish identity. Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, from the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in 1884, games such as hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, handball and rounders were bound up with notions of authenticity about the Irish race and nation. Although the Gaelic antiquity of the games has been questioned, Brady explains how the GAA has been absolutely successful in “creating viable and competitive games [...] [which] have become immensely popular, uniquely ‘Irish,’ and”, most importantly, “clearly *distinguishable* from British games” (37; italics in the original).

The relatively recent economic growth has transformed Ireland from a place of emigration into one of immigration. The games have become the site where “communities make contact, offering new immigrants and established Irish opportunities to negotiate [...] cultural expressions, and to forge ‘new’ ideas of what it means to be ‘Irish’” (39). The fact that immigrants play hurling problematises the games’ established association with a genuine Irish identity. As a matter of fact the GAA has been recalcitrant in the recognition of these foreign participants, even though nowadays more and more people (especially the young) with diverse cultural heritages contribute to both the prestige of the association and to the popularity of the games.

The first part ends with two essays, one by Mike Wilson and the other by Scott Spencer. Wilson’s “‘It’s beyond Candide – it’s Švejk’: Wise Foolery in the Work of Jack Lynch, Storyteller” is an examination of the performances of Jack Lynch and of the state of affairs of contemporary professional storytelling. Spencer in his “Traditional Irish Music in the Twenty-first Century: Networks, Technology, and the Negotiation of Authenticity” muses on the continual negotiations that pervade “concepts of authenticity and traditionality within traditional Irish music” (69), and explains how they are influenced by modern sound recording technologies.

The second part of *Crossroads* consists of four essays and deals mainly with memory and commemoration. J’aime Morrison’s “‘Tapping Secrecies of Stone’: Irish Roads as Performances of Movement, Measurement, and Memory” provides an original exploration of Irish roads. By emphasizing roads’

particular quality of engendering movement, and hence of bringing people together, she claims that “roads run at the intersection between history and memory” (74), thus playing a fundamental part in commemorating the Irish past. On a similar note are the contributions that follow. In these, both Emily Mark FitzGerald (“Commemoration and the Performance of Irish Famine Memory”), and Matthew Spangler (“Performing ‘the Troubles’: Murals and the Spectacle of Commemoration at Free Derry Corner”) focus on the strong bond between public commemoration and tourism.

The essay that closes this section is David Cregan’s “St Patrick’s Purgatory and the Performance of Pilgrimage”, which exploits the paradigm of performance to analyse religious pilgrimages. Cregan’s starting point is that although faith in organized religions has been dwindling significantly over the last few decades, pilgrimages have increased remarkably in popularity. According to the author, the reason for this renewed fascination lies in the high-tech routines of contemporary life. During their journeys pilgrims “unplug” themselves from the humming of everyday machinery, and so they end up seeing the hassle-free space of the pilgrimage as a way of achieving harmony, a “unity of body and soul, a desire to belong to the community of humanity over the commodities of commercialism” (122). This is the result of a bodily performance that even though it is extremely tiring, and it does not however discourage the modern traveler. Cregan then concludes that even though the religious pilgrimage might have lost its connection with religion, certainly it has not lost its appeal to people, because of their need for “something spiritual” (124).

The third part of *Crossroads*, comprises Matthew Causey’s compelling essay “Jus Soli/Jus Sanguinis: The Biopolitics of Performing Irishness”. In his disquisition Causey takes three different events into consideration: the 2006 protests and riots that ensued from the Love Ulster march in Dublin, the 2006 celebrations for the centenary of Samuel Beckett’s birth, and the 2004 amendment of the Irish constitution after the successful result of the referendum to restrict citizenship rights of children born to foreign parents. The author’s thesis is that:

Each of these events suggests an uneasy relationship of elements in contemporary Ireland to new models of Irish identity and represents unique strategies for control. The struggle exists at the level of personal and cultural identity, but spreads out to economic concerns of cultural tourism, which markets an authentic branding of Irishness. [...] In effect, what these events and legislation enact is a situation in which citizenship and identity cannot be performed but can only be transferred, bestowed, inherited, i.e., controlled. (153)

Drawing on the notions on biopolitics expressed by Giorgio Agamben (via Michel Foucault), and on Alain Badiou’s model of performable subjectivity, Causey turns to the xenophobic drift that has characterized the Irish political and identitarian discourses of the last decade. After having analysed the response of the press to the assault on a Mongolian immigrant during the

riots in Dublin, the exploitation of Beckett's name and oeuvre to "sell" Irish culture to tourists, and the anti-immigrant feelings that fuelled the amendment of the constitution in order to avoid "baby and citizenship tourism" (162), Causey concludes bitterly that Ireland appears as a country preoccupied with "state control of *bare life*" (164; italics in the original). Although Ireland has been welcoming to foreign workers during the Celtic Tiger years, it looks like it could have become a less hospitable country.

Charlotte McIvor's examination of the tragic episode of the burning of Bridget Cleary, "Ghosting Bridgie Cleary: Tom Mac Intyre and Staging This Woman's Death", opens the fifth part of the collection followed by Gabriella Calchi Novati's survey on Amanda Coogan's arts, "Challenging Patriarchal Imagery: Amanda Coogan's Performance Art", and by Fintan Walsh's investigation of Irish beauty pageants, "Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant". Walsh's essay revolves around the concept of homelysexuality: "not a place, or even a stable subject position, but rather the default aestheticization of female sexuality designed to match nostalgic perceptions of Irish cultural experience" (200). According to him the ritual of beauty pageants, such as the Rose Of Tralee or the Calor Housewife of the Year, in Ireland became not just a way of channelling customary notions of national identity, but they also represented a chance for women to monetize their potential within strictly sanctioned ideals of quaint femininity.

These types of pageants held sway until the 1980s, when the derelict Miss Ireland was revived by conspicuous corporate investments. Whereas the Rose of Tralee and Housewife of the Year disappeared, Miss Ireland survived as a successful competition because it suited the modern international role of Ireland: "With its international focus [...] Miss Ireland always aspired to a more cosmopolitan than local appeal, and the tempering of sexuality was neither fostered not especially valued. Miss Ireland has always been less committed to domestic affairs *per se*" (203). Walsh concludes with an overview of queer beauty pageants such as Alternative Miss Ireland and Mister Gay Ireland and compares them with their traditional counterparts. Giving full credit to Alternative Miss Ireland for raising money for AIDS charities and "disturb[ing] the homogeneity of international beauty pageants" (204), the author also warns against the possible risk run by Mister Gay Ireland of "com-modifying homosexuality" (206).

The three final essays of *Crossroads* are dedicated to Irish identity, immigration and ethnicity. In this section anthropologist Eileen Moore Quinn ("Taking Northern Irish Identity on the Road: The Smithsonian Folklife Festival of 2007") describes the strategies used during the the Smithsonian Institution's Festival to provide new narratives of Northern Irish past in order to reconfigure its identity. Eric Weitz's contribution ("Who's laughing Now? Comic Currents for a New Irish Audience") takes a look at audience responses to the work of Arambe, an African theatre company based in Dublin.

In the Introduction to their volume, Brady and Walsh affirm that “[d]espite the number and variety of essays gathered here, this volume aims to be representative and suggestive rather than encyclopedic or exhaustive” (8). Indeed its interdisciplinary quality makes the volume a multilayered account of contemporary Irish culture, a map to hidden treasures and solitary landscapes. Even if some of the essays may seem to appeal more to an academic audience, thanks to its broad-ranging scope of investigation *Crossroads* can be largely enjoyed also by the common reader. However, its appeal does not just lie in the variety of its subjects, but also in its readability. The intent of the essays is to provide a point of entrance into one of the many expressions of Irish culture, and not to strand the reader in some lengthy dissertation about well-known Irish artists. For instance, whoever is interested in the art of Alastair MacLennan will enjoy Carmen Szabó’s examination of his work, and readers who want to know more about parading will appreciate Holly Maples’ new perspective on the Dublin St Patrick’s Day Festival parade. Finally, for once it is stimulating to walk off the beaten paths of the land of leprechauns, W.B. Yeats and James Joyce.

Arianna Gremigni

David Cregan, *Frank McGuinness’s Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre*, Peter Lang, New York-Washington, D.C./Baltimore-Bern-Frankfurt-Berlin-Brussels-Vienna-Oxford 2011, pp. 231. ISBN 978-1-4331-0933-1

Dr. David Cregan comes from a fascinating background. He earned his doctoral degree from the Samuel Beckett School of Drama at Trinity College in Ireland, but before becoming an associate professor, he worked as a professional actor in New York City for four years. He toured the U.S. and Europe with different productions, and now he is the Chair of the Theatre Department at Villanova University in Philadelphia. There he has created the Philadelphia Theatre Research Symposium, a site where scholars and practitioners are invited to discuss what is happening in the field of the performing arts. His research interests mainly concern modern and contemporary Irish theatre.

Throughout his career Cregan has looked at dramatic arts through the lens of Queer and Gender Studies. His first edited volume *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance* (2009) provides an exhaustive overview of the Irish theatrical scene as a place to explore queer identities and practices. His latest accomplishment, *Frank McGuinness’s Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre* (2011) is no exception. In it Cregan concentrates on the work of one of the most prominent playwrights of contemporary Irish theatre: Frank McGuinness (1953-). McGuinness is a prolific and successful author who has won various awards and who, as Cregan immediately points out, has proved to be like “[n]o other Irish playwright of his generation”, since nobody else “has had the professional consistency, or occupational longevity

that has characterized McGuinness's theatrical career" (1). McGuinness has worked incessantly from 1982, producing more than twenty original plays and adapting nineteen others – by authors such as Henrik Ibsen, Bertold Brecht, Anton Chekhov and others – both for the stage and for the screen. Besides this already impressive opus, we can include a recently published novel, *Arimathea* (2013), and five collections of poems.

In his book Cregan takes into account a considerable number of McGuinness's dramatic creations. His intent is to highlight "his diverse representations of gender and sexuality", because he feels that "little critical attention has been paid to [this] most unique and challenging aspect of his writing" (1). In order to do so, he adopts a "queer perspective". Cregan makes clear the scope of this perspective in the "Introduction", where he explains how he conceives Queer Theory. He sees it as a tool that is effective to interpret (and decode) the historical and social variables that enable the marginalisation of certain subjects. This means that Cregan's work is not (only) preoccupied with queer sexualities, but with a broad spectrum of factors. This standpoint makes his exploration of McGuinness's dramaturgy open to textual, historical and social analysis: "Consequently, this book is not a monograph but a theatrical liberation of queer themes that account for the hidden or repressed stories of Irish sexual identity" (3).

The book is divided into six chapters and has two intriguing appendixes. Each chapter takes into consideration several of McGuinness's plays, while the appendixes comprise two interviews. The first is an interview of Frank McGuinness himself by Cregan, while the second is with Patrick Mason (1951-), who is a longtime collaborator of McGuinness's. He is the award winning director of several of his plays and back in the 1980s he was the first one to recognize his talent. He is also the former artistic director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (from 1993-1999).

As anticipated by Cregan in the introduction, Chapter 1, "Defective Histories: Re-presenting History in *Innocence*, *Mary and Lizzie*, and *Mutabilitie*", draws heavily on Michel Foucault's theories. The chapter delves into three of McGuinness's plays, *Innocence*, *Mary and Lizzie*, and *Mutabilitie*, all three of which are based on real people and historical facts. *Innocence* (1986) is based on the life of the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi, also known as Caravaggio (1571-1610); *Mary and Lizzie* (1989) deals with Mary (1823-1863) and Lizzie Burns (1827-1878), who were the lovers of the illustrious Marxist thinker Frederick Engels (1820-1895), while *Mutabilitie* (1997) revolves around the figures of two of the greatest writers of English literature: Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616).

In this first chapter Cregan argues that McGuinness' "queer fictional accounts" (19) defy the commonly accepted vulgate regarding the lives of these people. Therefore these plays "create 'defective' versions of historical biography" (*ibidem*). The concept of defective histories comes from Foucault's notion of "effective history". Foucault's idea is that official history is a result of

power struggles that end up obliterating other, alternative versions. According to this line of thought, history does not provide the future generations with a multifaceted – and more real – account of past events. What it passes on is the version of the strongest. Effective histories, instead, are queer. They grapple with unauthorized stories and break the uniform surface of dominant historiography. Cregan analyses each of these plays in order to explain the ways in which McGuinness manages to represent the non-traditional and the non-normative. As he writes, *Innocence, Mary and Lizzie* and *Mutabilitie* are “queer because [they explore] hints of sexuality, and the politics of gender to analyze the discourse of history, and expose how this discourse has constructed ‘reality’ in western culture” (20).

Chapter 2, as stated in the title, “‘Queer Nation’ Homosexual Representations of Irish Identity in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and *Dolly West’s Kitchen*”, focusses on two plays. The former is set at the beginning of the First World War and is centred around the experience of eight young volunteers enrolled in the 36th (Ulster) Division. It was first staged in 1985. The latter is set in County Donegal during the Second World War, and it depicts the life changing events that war brings to the members of the West family. It was staged for the first time in 1999.

In this second chapter Cregan’s argument revolves around issues of nationalism and national identity. His line of thought concerns McGuinness’s ability to confront his audiences with “versions of diversity never before imagined on the Irish stage” (59). This diversity is embodied by McGuinness’s gay characters. Their stories take place against the masculine backdrop of the military life, and question the heterosexual orthodoxy of official History by representing “alternative subject positions” (*ibidem*). This dramaturgical device is intended to urge the audience to recognize, reconsider, and reformulate their established notions of Irishness, i.e. of national identity, and of gender. In Cregan’s words: “[if] McGuinness’s use of gay bodies as a dramatic strategy for the disruption of basic national ideologies is true, then cultural concepts of homosexuality must somehow penetrate the theatrical imagination to impact an audience’s sensibilities” (65).

History and biographical memoir are also the topic of the third chapter, “The Wilde Irishmen: ‘Theatre Theatrical’ in *Gates of Gold*”, which is probably the most interesting and original part of this work. Here Cregan steers away from nationalism and deals with “openly gay identity and popular conception in twentieth-century Ireland” (91).

In his 2002 play *Gates of Gold*, McGuinness stages the lives of Irish theatre practitioners and longtime romantic partners Micheál MacLiammóir (1899-1978) and Hilton Edwards (1903-1982). Although they were called “the boys”, their partnership was never acknowledged publicly. Simply “they were ‘known’ to be a homosexual couple” (92). According to Cregan this uncertainty regarding the realities of their lives comes both from a patronizing attitude of the public

and the media towards homosexuality, and from the ways in which MacLiammóir and Edwards mastered the art of concealment. To put it more clearly:

Edwards and MacLiammóir had their own unique way of representing themselves publicly, a method which simultaneously revealed and concealed information about their intriguing lives. This technique of representation created a blend of certainty and uncertainty about the ‘facts’ of their lives, a balance that stimulated the interest of the Irish public, however patronizingly, in their story for decades. (93)

That is to say that their popularity was somehow, whether openly or not, rooted in popular misconceptions and myths about homosexuality. Cregan points out how McGuinness’s play captures the essence of the life of these two men – i.e. this mixture of public and private, of real facts and fiction – better than any “attempt at historical biographical precision” (*ibidem*). However, McGuinness is absolutely not committed to providing the audience with the ultimate truth.

Most importantly *Gates of Gold* establishes a sort of continuity among the homosexual artists of Irish theatre: “a queer legacy” (93), as Cregan defines it, which passing through Edwards and MacLiammóir, goes backwards from McGuinness to Oscar Wilde. This queer legacy operates to disrupt and disappoint the expectations of the audience regarding the intimacy of gay characters. McGuinness refuses to reveal the sexual stories of MacLiammóir and Edwards, even though the promise of being fed salacious insights is perhaps what enticed the audience in the first place.

In the following chapter, titled “Camping in Utopia: *Carthaginians* and the Queer Aesthetic”, Cregan explores the campy aesthetics of *Carthaginians* (1988). In this play McGuinness engages with a sadly famous event of Irish recent history: the tragic massacre of 1972 in Derry, known as Bloody Sunday. Cregan uses the lens of camp in order to analyse the queer way in which McGuinness tackles this dreadful incident and creates an artistically engaging work. Camp is finally shown to be a viable tool to interpret the many different levels that are at stake in theatrical representation.

Chapter 5, “Holy Irreverence: The Gospel According to Judas”, is a fascinating examination of the unpublished monologue *The Gospel According to Judas*, in which Judas is the only character on stage. As mentioned in the “Introduction”, McGuinness is deeply interested in religious issues, and he has always found a way to stage the influence of Roman Catholicism on Irish society “with a measured balance between criticism and inspiration” (152). While McGuinness has always acknowledged the fact that Catholicism and homosexuality are two conflicting positions, here, as Cregan points out, he tries to find a way to re-conciliate them through “a queer theological narrative” (153).

In this thoughtful and thought provoking work, McGuinness stages a series of contradictions that penetrate the images of Judas, of Christ, and the

Catholic doctrine itself. Indeed, it stages the millennial dispute around the corporeality and incorporeality of Jesus, and that irredeemable tension between the sublimated and at the same time carnal love that the Catholic believer has to demonstrate for Jesus. Cregan explains how this tension is inherently heretical because it forces the Catholic believer to acknowledge the flesh and blood of Christ in all its mundanity, and at the same to negate it in order to embrace Christian piety and asceticism. This is particularly unsettling for the male homosexual practitioner, because the strength with which the Church condemns homosexual desire is counterbalanced by the sensual adoration of the naked body of Jesus that it encourages.

The exploration of McGuinness's theatrical production ends with a chapter titled: "There's No Place Like 'Home': *The Bird Sanctuary*, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and *The Factory Girls*". In this last chapter Cregan deals with the notions of "home" and "family" in McGuinness's plays *The Bird Sanctuary* (1994), *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), and *The Factory Girls* (1982), all three of which are attempts to redefine traditional visions of domesticity. For a long time now, queer subjects have struggled to validate alternative family formations, and the characters in these plays "exhibit the growing awareness of the benefits of these new queer alliances and the effects on individual lives" (194).

David Cregan's book fulfils its promise and provides the reader with a rich and intelligent exploration of Frank McGuinness's work and ideas. Although the premises can seem demanding for the uninformed reader, Cregan writes with a degree of clarity and sharpness that is not always found in scholarly dissertations. Moreover, his declared queer viewpoint is not a way of encapsulating the entire production of McGuinness into the gay paradigm. Instead he tries to put the plays at the centre of intersecting discourses that go beyond the horizon of a homosexual life. This, he explains, is the trap in which critics and the public are often caught when they consider McGuinness's work. Indeed, in the "Conclusion" chapter, Cregan lucidly explains that McGuinness is one of the most influential figures in contemporary theatre for reasons that cannot (and must not) be ascribed to his open homosexuality.

This stance can be clearly seen in the conclusive passage, when Cregan clarifies how his analysis is primarily concerned with McGuinness's employment of "deviance" as a

theatrical strategy used to preach a dramatic sermon proclaiming difference as the new aesthetic. Diversity is the mirror McGuinness's work turns on the Irish theatrical tradition, and the ideology that supports it, in order to expose its homogeneity. By defecting from the norm and, at times, flaunting social or cultural standards, McGuinness's work struggles to free the imaginative dramatic fiction from the confines of 'reality' which, ultimately, only accommodates normality. (205)

Arianna Gremigni

Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington: romanzo*, trad. di Raffaella Leproni, Introduzione e note di Carla De Petris, Salomone Belforte, Livorno 2012, pp. lxx + 271.

Readers of *Studi irlandesi* will immediately recognize the potential value of this new translation of a major work by Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), complete with a lucid introduction and extensive contextual materials by Carla De Petris, herself a noted translator of Irish literature. The value resides initially in the fact that so little of the work of Edgeworth, a significant figure in Irish writing in English, exists in Italian translation at all. Even Pietro Meneghelli's 1999 translation of *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the author's most frequently read and written-about work, is out of print, as is another of Edgeworth's best-known works on Ireland, *The Absentee* (1812), in Amalia Bordiga's 1967 translation, *L'assenteista*. So, the prolific and influential Edgeworth is represented in Italian today only by Chiara Vatteroni's translation of the early *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) as *Se nasce femmina* and two of Edgeworth's stories for children "The Purple Jar" and "The Little Merchants", "Lampolla viola" and "I piccoli mercanti", brought together in *Due racconti* (2009) by the translator of *Harrington*, Raffaella Leproni.

If its potential value is clear, what then about the edition itself? In short, it combines a thoughtful, flexible, and readable translation, complemented by a rewarding translator's note (67-70), with an introduction at once thorough and incisive (9-42), along with an extremely valuable "Scheda storica" (43-53), a "Scheda biografica" (55-59), a bibliography (51-56) and extensive annotation in the form of footnotes.

Harrington: a tale is simple enough in outline. (We might question Prof. Leproni's decision to translate "tale" as "romanzo"? but Susan Manly's generally excellent Broadview edition [2004] of the work evades tricky issues of genre by omitting the subtitle altogether). The first-person narrative, set in England in the second half of the eighteenth century, opens with the eponymous hero, spending his first night in London at the age of six, looking in fascination from his father's town-house window at unfamiliar city-sights, including the street lamp-lighter and an old Jewish rag-collector. Unwilling to go to bed, he is frightened into compliance by an irresponsible maid who threatens that if he continues to disobey she will call the white-bearded rag-collector, Simon the Jew, to take the boy away in his great bag. The result is to prompt a pathological fear and hatred of Jews in the young boy that continues, with the encouragement of his father, into early manhood. In the course of the fiction, Harrington will learn to overcome his fear of and prejudice against Jews as he encounters a number of Jewish characters, including the young pedlar Jacob, the (real-life) mathematician and rabbi, Israel Lyons, and the virtuous and benevolent Mr Montenero, with whose daughter, Berenice, he will fall in love.

Often thought of as a pivotal figure in Irish literary history, Edgeworth is rarely more so than in *Harrington*. Here, we find ample evidence of the Enlight-

enment values she inherited from her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, whose serious interest in education she shared, while the fiction itself often reads like the kind of thesis-novel made familiar in the 1780s and 1790s by writers like Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. If the political and social values of Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth were often very different, then the two writers shared both a suspicion of the excesses of sensibility and a belief in the importance of education. Both are evident in *Harrington's* powerful opening scene where the irresponsible maid, lacking in modern ideas of education, plays on her charge's over-wrought imagination to produce the anti-Semitic young man Harrington will become. *Harrington* also looks forward, however, and not just in their explicit engagement with Jewish themes, to such works as George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) or Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) but, less directly, to the opening scene of Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), for example, where Pip's life is overshadowed by his meeting with Magwitch, much as Harrington's is by his encounter with Simon the Jew.

It is, however, Shakespeare, and the figure of Shylock, who cast the greatest shadow over Edgeworth's tale and, perhaps, over Edgeworth herself. *Harrington* is an early example in English literature of a work that engages with, and offers a critique of the stereotypical figure of the malevolent Jew. While Professor De Petris rightly draws attention to Richard Cumberland's drama, *The Jew* (1794), it would have been appropriate to have mentioned also Tobias Smollett's much earlier refutation of Shylock in his depiction of a benevolent Jewish merchant, Mr Manasseh, in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753). That this depiction, albeit of a minor character, resulted from Smollett's espousal of Enlightenment values is certain, following on views expressed in his early poem "Reproof" (1746), in which the poet declares:

Jew's, Turk's, or Pagan's: hallow'd be the mouth
That teems with moral zeal, and dauntless truth. (ll. 27-8)

Edgeworth's decision to write on the theme of anti-semitism was very differently motivated. In 1815, the already celebrated writer received a letter from a young Jewish woman living in the United States. Rebecca Mordecai wrote, in respectful tones, asking Edgeworth why she, so often an exemplar of "justice and liberality" should have been prejudiced in just one respect, prejudiced enough indeed to "instill that prejudice into the minds of youth" (letter of RM to ME, 7 August 1815). In so writing, Mordecai had in mind not only the negative stereotype of the Jew introduced into Edgeworth's adult fictions, *Castle Rackrent*, *Belinda* (1801) and *The Absentee*, but also those in "The Prussian Jar" and "Good Aunt", stories included in *Moral Tales* (1801), intended for children. Edgeworth seems to have had no immediate answer to the question but instead of ignoring the letter or apologizing to her correspondent she set instead about writing *Harrington*.

When complete, the tale appeared in a three-volume publication as *Harrington: a tale* and *Ormond: a tale* (1817, London), the first edition title-page being most helpfully reproduced in the present edition (71). The reproduction is useful, not least for anyone engaged in Irish Studies, for it draws attention to an important feature of Edgeworth's fiction: the lack of a clear division in the author's own mind between her "Irish" and her "English" works. In her lifetime, Edgeworth was as renowned for *Belinda*, *Patronage* (1814) and *Helen* (1834), all set in England, as she was for her "Irish" fictions. Now, Edgeworth holds a precarious position in the study of "English" literature, narrowly conceived, but remains a powerful presence in studies of Irish fiction. Today, the Irish *Ormond* – with its memorable account of Cornelius O'Shane, King Corny of the Black Isles – is more read than *Harrington*, not least because the two novels are today invariably published separately (even, sad to say, in the Pickering & Chatto edition of *The Works of Maria Edgeworth*).

One of the virtues of the present edition is Carla De Petris's recognition that the subject matter of *Harrington* cannot, and should not, be neatly separated from the concerns of Edgeworth's Irish fictions. While the tale opens around the time of the 1753 Jewish Naturalization Act debate, its climactic scene is set in 1780 during the anti-Roman Catholic Gordon Riots. Here, a virulently anti-Jewish noblewoman and her daughter, caught up in mob violence, are saved by the joint efforts of the "warm-hearted" Irishwoman, a barrow-seller of oranges, and the morally upright Jew, Mr Montenero. The orange seller is, as she admits, "a little bit of a cat'olick myself, all as one as what they call a *papish*" ("io pure sono un po' cattolica, tipo quello che loro chiamano *papisti*" [202]) and so doubly the subject of English prejudice, both as a Roman Catholic and as an Irish woman. Yet it is she who recognizes, without prejudice, Montenero's moral worth: "Never fear, jewel! Jew as you have this day the misfortune to be, you're the best Christian any way ever I happened on" ("Non temere, tesoro! Anche se oggi hai la sfortuna di essere ebreo, sei il miglior cristiano che m'è mai capitato a tiro" [201]). Here the socially conservative Edgeworth conflates, confronts and confounds national, religious, and ethnic stereotypes, drawing the attention of English readers in particular to the varieties of contemporary prejudice. In doing so, Edgeworth moves from the merely personal – her response to Rebecca Mordecai – to engage with a long and itself varied line of pleas for individual tolerance and political toleration. It is a line that can be traced back through works both Irish and English: Edmund Burke's Irish writings of the 1790s and John Toland's *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland* (1714), and *Nazarenus* (1718), or Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (post-1667) to *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) by James Harrington, the English republican who very plausibly, if unexpectedly, gave his name to Edgeworth's tale. Edgeworth did not know all these works at first hand – Locke's *Essay* was not published until 1876 and, *pace* De Petris's comments on Toland's

Reasons, the work was not republished between its first edition in 1714 and the twentieth century, while the first edition is so rare that only two copies survive, in the New York Jewish Theological Seminary and in Trinity College Dublin – but the thrust of the argument for toleration was certainly familiar to her, allowing *Harrington* both to constitute an attack on anti-Semitism and to encompass that purpose within wider considerations of prejudice, the need for education, tolerance and toleration.

The present edition, imaginatively included in the *Collana di Studi Ebraici*, published by the firm of Salomone Belforte, founded in 1805, is generally very well presented. A few errors creep in, particularly in English or French words and names: “*Naturalising*” for “*Naturalizing*” (47), “*Peterborough*” for “*Peterborough*”, “*Cocluded*” for “*Concluded*” (61), “*Marylin*” for “*Marilyn*” (63; though Professor Butler’s name is spelled correctly elsewhere), while French words seem to favour acute accents at the expense of grave accents throughout. These, though, are very minor blemishes on an excellent edition that deserves to draw attention to a work and to a writer still underrated both, and not only in Italy.

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