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**STUDI IRLANDESI**  
**A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES**





UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE

DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE E STUDI INTERCULTURALI

BIBLIOTECA DI STUDI DI FILOLOGIA MODERNA: COLLANA, RIVISTE E LABORATORIO

Studi irlandesi.  
A Journal of Irish Studies  
7

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FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

2017

Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies. -  
n. 7, 2017  
ISSN 2239-3978  
ISBN 978-88-6453-518-0 (online)  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-7>

Direttore Responsabile: Beatrice Töttössy  
Registrazione al Tribunale di Firenze: N. 5819 del 21/02/2011  
CC 2012 Firenze UP

La rivista è pubblicata on-line ad accesso aperto al seguente indirizzo: [www.fupress.com/bsfm-sijis](http://www.fupress.com/bsfm-sijis)

The products of the Publishing Committee of Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio (<<http://www.lilsi.unifi.it/vp-82-laboratorio-editoriale-open-access-ricerca-formazione-e-produzione-dal-2006.html>>) are published with financial support from the Department of Languages, Literatures and Intercultural Studies of the University of Florence, and in accordance with the agreement, dated 10 February 2009 (updated 19 February 2015), between the Department, the Open Access Publishing Workshop and Firenze UP. The Workshop promotes the development of OA publishing and its application in teaching and career advice for undergraduates, graduates, and PhD students in the area of foreign languages and literatures, as well as providing training and planning services. The Workshop's publishing team are responsible for the editorial workflow of all the volumes and journals published in the Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna series. *Sijis* employs the double-blind peer review process. For further information please visit the journal homepage (<[www.fupress.com/bsfm-sijis](http://www.fupress.com/bsfm-sijis)>).

Editing e composizione: Laboratorio editoriale Open Access (<[laboa@lilsi.unifi.it](mailto:laboa@lilsi.unifi.it)>) con A. Antonielli (Journal Manager) e S. Grassi (Review Editor), A. Bonchi, A. Camardo, C. Giacalone, L. Lanzi, F. Salvadori, C. Veropalumbo. Elaborazione grafica: Journal Manager. Cover idea and design: Marco Vanchetti.

We gratefully record that this issue has been sponsored by Efacis (<[www.efacis.org](http://www.efacis.org)>):



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Università degli Studi di Firenze  
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Via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Firenze, Italy  
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## Ringraziamenti /Acknowledgements

Questa volta, i nostri ringraziamenti vanno:

alla Biblioteca di Trinity College, Dublin, per il permesso di riprodurre i testi delle ballate “A Call From the Prison Graves” e “Dark Rosaleen’s Last Chaperlet”, alle pp. 142-143 e 143-144, del saggio di Seán Ó Cadhla; a CoisCéim Dance Theatre, Brian Fleming, Raymond Keane, Bernard McGlinchey, Amy Miller, Patrick Redmond, per aver concesso il permesso di riprodurre le foto incluse nel saggio di Molly E. Ferguson (pp. 146, 151, 157, 160); a Mary O’Donnell per aver offerto ai lettori di *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* una scelta della sua produzione narrativa e poetica; grazie alle case editrici e alle riviste che hanno consentito la ristampa di un racconto e di tre testi poetici della scrittrice: a New Island Books per “The Path to Heaven” (pp. 358-365) apparso nell’antologia *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women from the North of Ireland*, a cura di Sinéad Gleeson (2016); *The Café Review* per “Those Prostitutes” (p. 349); a *RAUM Poetry* per “Heron and the Women” (pp. 349-350); a *Salmonpoetry* per “Unlegendary Heroes” (pp. 350-352), precedentemente pubblicata nel volume *Unlegendary Heroes* (1998). Infine, un grazie di cuore a John Denton e Marco Vanchetti, sempre generosi e disponibili, e a Alessandra Bonchi, Angelo Camardo, Claudia Giacalone, Lucia Lanzi, Francesca Salvadori, Cristina Veropalumbo del Laboratorio editoriale Open Access (LabOA) del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali dell’Università di Firenze, per l’eccellente lavoro editoriale.

\*\*\*

Thanks this time to:

the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, for permission to reprint the texts of the ballads “A Call From the Prison Graves” and “Dark Rosaleen’s Last Chaperlet” in Seán Ó Cadhla’s essay (pp. 142-143 e 143-144); CoisCéim Dance Theatre, Brian Fleming, Raymond Keane, Bernard McGlinchey, Amy Miller, Patrick Redmond, for permission to reproduce the images included in Molly E. Ferguson’s essay (pp. 146, 151, 157, 160); Mary O’Donnell for offering

the readers of the *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* a selection of her poetry and fiction. A special word of thanks goes to the publishing houses and journals that have granted permission to reprint O'Donnell's work: "The Path to Heaven" (pp. 358-365) which originally appeared in the anthology *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women from the North of Ireland*, ed. by Sinéad Gleeson (New Island 2016); "Those Prostitutes" (p. 349) was originally published in *The Cafe' Review*; "Heron and the Women" (pp. 349-350) was originally published in *RAUM Poetry*; "Unlegendary Heroes" (pp. 350-352) was originally published in *Unlegendary Heroes* (Salmonpoetry 1998). Finally, our heartfelt thanks go to John Denton, Marco Vanchetti, for their constant generosity, and to the students of the Open Access Publishing Workshop (LabOA), Department of Languages, Literatures and Intercultural Studies, University of Florence (Alessandra Bonchi, Angelo Camardo, Claudia Giacalone, Lucia Lanzi, Francesca Salvadori, Cristina Veropalumbo) for their excellent editorial work.

Arianna Antonielli, Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Samuele Grassi

## Resistance in Modern Ireland Introduction

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The recent wave of Anti-Water-Charges protests, the refusal of meals by Republican prisoners in HMP Maghaberry, and the successful Gay-marriage campaign of early 2015 are but three examples of resistance to the status quo in Ireland. Throughout the history of medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary Ireland, the island has witnessed various forms of resistance both to foreign interference and domestic situations. It is a famous and overused illustration of modern Irish history that “since the Society of United Irishmen in 1798, in every generation, a section of the Irish people resisted British rule”<sup>1</sup>. Robert W. White quotes an Irish Republican saying: “There has never been a period of peace in Ireland” (2017, 3). The 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic states that “[i]n every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms” (Lyons 1973, 369). While this notion is true, it is too simplistic to narrow Irish history and resistance within Irish society to militant, Republican uprisings. Even at the dawn of the Northern Ireland conflict, Ed Moloney argues, “[t]o say, however, that violent Republicanism was the predominant sentiment among Northern Ireland’s Catholics would be wrong” (2007, 37). Resistance in Ireland indeed reaches indeed far beyond the Republican paramilitaries’ use of arms. Thus, Joseph Ruane argues that the “long history of conflict” started with the 1570s colonisations of Ireland by English and Scottish settlers (2014, 167).

The concept of resistance has attracted the attention of researchers in several academic fields. As diverse as the forms of resistance takes, so are its definitions; as diverse as the sources to research resistance are so its interpretations; and as diverse as the causes of resistance so are its actors. Hence, “resistance constitutes a dynamic phenomenon that can occur at

<sup>1</sup> D. Reinisch, Interview with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Roscommon Town, Co Roscommon, 5 April 2010.

multiple levels and can take multiple forms” (Courpasson, Vallas 2016, 7). To be sure, resistance can be understood as defensive demeanour, as well as insubordination and offensive opposition against rules and the status quo in general. The field of law, for example, perceives it as obstruction and civil disorder. Social Sciences describe it as an action intended to diminish the effects of another action, while Political Sciences interpret those actions of a particular group as resistances which are directed against authorities, rules, or governments. Psychology, furthermore, understands resistance as a principled distaste of any rules, orders, or norms. In fact, the essays collected in this monographic section all deal with forms of cultural resistance. Stephen Duncombe describes cultural resistance as following: “[T]o describe culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political economic and/or social structure. But cultural resistance, too, can mean many things and take on many forms” (2002, 5).

I agree with Duncombe that cultural resistance is political action. He argues that this cultural resistance creates a “free space” both ideologically, by creating a new language, meanings, and visions of the future, and materially, by establishing places to build community, networks, and organisational models. Furthermore, cultural resistance is a stepping-stone, providing a language, practice, and community to ease the way into political activity, and is a political activity itself by writing or rewriting political discourse and, thus, political practice writes Duncombe. He, furthermore, argues that cultural resistance is a “haven in a heartless world”; in other words, it is an escape from the world of politics and problems. Finally, he stresses that cultural resistance does not exist because “all culture is, or will immediately become, an expression of the dominant power” (2002, 8). In our example, that is resistance in modern Ireland, the resistance to this dominant power is played on the one hand in the post-colonial arena of the Republic of Ireland, and on the other hand colonial arena of Northern Ireland.

Duncombe understands four means of cultural resistance. First, content: meaning that the political message resides within the content of culture. Second, form: meaning that the political message is expressed through the medium of transmission. Third, interpretation: meaning that the political message is determined by how the culture is received and interpreted. Fourth: activity, meaning that the action of producing culture regardless of content or form or reception is the political message. If the scale of the cultural resistance is unconsciously political, the individual aims to survive. If the scale is appropriation, the development of a subculture leads to rebellion. Finally, if the cultural resistance is indeed self-consciously political, it takes on the form of the revolution carried by the given society, rather than the individuals or the subculture, as in the first two scales of cultural resistance (Duncombe 2002, 8).

All of the above meanings and forms of resistance are reflected in Irish society through the Republican and Loyalist movements, the prison protests in the 19th and 20th centuries, social and workers' struggles, the 1913-lockout, the Belfast Outdoor Relief Strike of 1932, the Home Rule campaign, the Limerick Soviet, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the recent Anti-Water-Charges protests, the LGBTQ rights movement, the suffragettes, the Land League, the fight for women's liberation and abortion rights, but also through culture, music, literature, film, and theatre in the last 250 years.

This monographic section of *Studi irlandesi* serves to provide a wide selection of different forms and interpretations of resistance in Irish history and culture. This is merely a humble effort to provide insight into several case studies of modern Irish resistance. For this special issue, we were looking for papers that examine the various forms and interpretations of resistance in Irish history and society since the late 18th century. We received a wide range of thematic topics, covering many disciplines and periods of modern Ireland. A selection of these proposals is published in this edition. The contributions range from an analysis of non-violent resistance in the work of Samuel Beckett, and political Folk music in contemporary Republicanism, to an examination of the LGBTQ equal rights movement and one of Ireland's most recent social movement, the Occupy movement.

As the selection of the articles reflects, our research of resistance in Ireland is an All-Ireland approach. While Ireland was divided into two separate states, the Republic of Ireland in the south, and the British part, Northern Ireland, in 1922/3, developments in each of the two states cannot be understood in isolation from each other. To be sure, the post-colonial resistance in the Republic of Ireland is due to its share history and politics, strongly interlinked with the colonial resistance in Northern Ireland. This becomes most obvious when the forms of resistance are Republican, as the articles of Seán Ó Cadlha and Robert White explain. However, the significant but all too often neglected forms of both non-Republican and non-violent resistance analysed by Patrick James McDonagh and Frédéric Royall are two separate case studies on social movements in the Republic of Ireland. Contrary to these forms of resistance, the contributions by Rosa Gilbert, Tracey Icton, and Laurence McKeown put their geographical focus North of the Irish border. Additionally, Keith Hopper and Neil Murphy, Molly Ferguson, and José Francisco Fernandez write about forms of resistance in contemporary Irish literature and theatre.

The first essay of the monographic section on "Resistance in Modern Ireland" takes the readers to the emerging conflict in the North of Ireland. Rosa Gilbert analyses the popular campaign which was initiated in response to the re-introduction of internment without trial in summer 1971, while Robert W. White writes about the contemporary Irish repub-

licans and multi-method approach to the dynamics of “resistance” in Ireland. Patrick McDonagh takes us away from the anti-colonial conflict in the North to the struggle for LGBTQ rights between the 1970s and 1990s in the Republic of Ireland; similarly, Frédéric Royall looks at the recent mobilisation cycle of Occupy in Ireland. It is Seán Ó Cadha who brings us back to Irish Republicanism: his essay on death, immortality, and the *Otherworld* in modern Irish Republican ballads introduces the contributions on cultural studies. Molly Ferguson focuses on clown techniques in devised theatre pieces by Charlie O’Neill and Brian Fleming, claiming those strategies as an emergent category of human rights activism in Irish theatre. José Francisco Fernández explores Samuel Beckett’s *Catastrophe* effectiveness of advocating the idea of non-violent resistance by setting it in the context of Beckett’s complex relation with Irish history. The final essay of the first part of the section is written by Keith Hopper and Neil Murphy who offer a detailed analysis of how Dermot Healy’s *Fighting with Shadows* exemplifies acts of resistance while seeking to engage with Healy’s provincial Irish context.

The second part is amalgamated of two contributions. First, Tracey Icton provides a fictional account of the experience of being a woman in the Provisional IRA, based on extensive reading on women in the Northern Ireland conflict. The second contribution contains the transcript of an interview with former IRA member and hunger striker turned academic and playwright, Laurence McKeown. The interview was conducted by Alexander Etkind and me, Dieter Reinisch, during the conference “Irish Society, History, and Culture: 100 years after the Easter Rising”, held in Florence in October 2016, co-hosted by Lorenzo Bosi (Scuola Normale Superiore), the General Editor of *Studi irlandesi*, Fiorenzo Fantaccini (Università di Firenze), and me, Dieter Reinisch (European University Institute).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the conference and the publication of this issue of *Studi irlandesi* are the results of an intensive collaboration in the field of modern Irish history of various institutions and scholars in Florence during the past two years: the contributions of Rosa Gilbert, Robert W. White, Patrick McDonagh, and Frédéric Royall are, in fact, based on papers they previously presented at the “Irish Society, History, and Culture” conference in October 2016. I want to use this opportunity to thank again all those who made the organisation of this conference possible, in particular, Pieter Judson for the Department of History and Civilization, and Brigid Laffan for the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, both from the European University Institute.

<sup>2</sup> D. Reinisch, Conference on Irish Society in Florence, 11 October 2016, <<https://me.eui.eu/dieter-reinisch/blog/conference-ireland>> (05/2017).

As an addition to the contributions in these two parts of the journal and in line with the general topic of “Resistance in Modern Ireland”, Gianluca de Fazio reviews Lorenzo Bosi’s Italian-language book on Provisional IRA members, while Kaan Orhon reviews a German-language Oral History study on women in the Provisional IRA and Cumann na mBan. Finally, I want to thank everyone who made the publication of this monographic section possible, in particular, the General Editor Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Journal Manager Arianna Antonielli, and all the anonymous reviewers.

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# Resistance in Modern Ireland

edited by  
Dieter Reinisch



# No Rent, No Rates: Civil Disobedience Against Internment in Northern Ireland, 1971-1974

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*Abstract:*

Recent scholarship on civil disobedience in Northern Ireland primarily focuses on the immediate period before the breakout of violence in 1969, and in some cases, on the mass protests of the late 1970s around the H-Block/Armagh prison protests. This paper attempts to fill the gap between these two periods in its analysis of the rent and rates strike of the early 1970s, which was initiated in response to the re-introduction of internment without trial. In doing so, it positions itself against simplistic approaches towards civil disobedience as either oppositional, or causally linked, to armed struggle. Instead, it probes the complexity of its relationship to armed struggle in relation to the Northern Irish and British state's security policies.

*Keywords:* Civil Disobedience, Housing, Internment, Northern Ireland Troubles, Rent Strike

## *1. Introduction*

Civil disobedience in Northern Ireland during the conflict, euphemistically described as the Troubles, has received attention from historians hoping to understand its success and failures in relation to the armed struggle, either as a proxy for Republicanism or a mechanism to sustain it, or as an underlying reason for a perceived descent into violence as the 1960s gave way to the bloodshed of the 1970s. Extra-parliamentary protest is often treated as an addendum to armed struggle and a means by which violence paved the way for electoral politics.

This paper addresses the rent and rates strike, which started in response to the re-introduction of internment without trial by the Northern Ireland Prime Minister Brian Faulkner in August 1971. The aim is to explain the

emergence of the rent strike, the measures taken by the governments in Belfast and Westminster to suppress the strike, and to frame it within the general trajectory of violent and non-violent political struggle during the decade. In doing so, it will be pertinent to touch on similarities and differences between the anti-internment rent strike and other forms of civil disobedience during this time both in Ireland and Britain. Northern Ireland has precariously remained within the United Kingdom since the southern 26 counties of Ireland gained independence following the 1919-1921 war of independence, and throughout the history of the province, acts of civil disobedience have been treated differently to those in Britain. This was partly as a result of the characteristics of the security forces in Northern Ireland, which were established to maintain the British unionist ascendancy and repress the minority Catholic population, who were viewed as dangerous to the political settlement.

The anti-internment rent and rates strike has received scant attention in accounts of the early 1970s. It is mentioned briefly in the memoirs of Derry-based civil rights protagonist Eamonn McCann and SDLP politician Austin Currie but, compared to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the street movement around the prison protests later in the 1970s, the rent strike has drawn next to no interest (Currie 2004; McCann 1980). With many studies focused on political violence and the rise of the IRA in this period (Hennessey 2005; 2007), it is understandable how this event can be overlooked. However this relies on a somewhat false – or at least unhelpful – binary of violent and non-violent forms of action, and fails to appreciate the political aspect of armed struggle and the relationship between these various outlets for political grievances.

The re-introduction of internment in 1971 illustrates this well: many of those detained in the first internment sweep were political activists involved in the civil rights movement rather than the Republican armed struggle such as Michael Farrell of People's Democracy, and even Belfast city councillor James O'Kane<sup>1</sup>. A private memo from the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Brian Faulkner on 18 February 1972 stated that "all internees are, on the evidence available, either members of the IRA or otherwise involved in terrorism"<sup>2</sup>. Those opposing internment were assumed to be sympathisers of the use of violence and therefore of concern to the security services. Quite unsurprisingly, a police spokesperson told the *Belfast Telegraph* that the names of marchers at a West Belfast anti-internment rally in January 1972 were noted

<sup>1</sup> Linen Hall Library (LHL), Northern Ireland Political Collection (NIPC), P1421, S. Ó Tuathail, *They Came in the Morning* (Official Sinn Féin, 1972), Belfast.

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), CAB/9/B/83/7, "Detention and Internment under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts", 18 February 1972, Memorandum by the Prime Minister of Home Affairs on Internment, Belfast.

by police<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the way in which the state contended with the rent and rates strike itself had direct implications on security strategy – despite huge debts for gas and electricity payments, disconnection was said to only be an option in middle-class areas due to the potential destabilisation that it would provoke in working-class neighbourhoods, areas that were prone to police and army incursion and rioting<sup>4</sup>.

This long overdue study of the rent and rates strike is therefore useful for precisely this reason – namely, an understanding of the state's response to its concerns over the popularity of the Republican struggle. Firstly, the attempt to counter what it perceived as popular support; the figure of senior military theorist and Brigadier Frank Kitson was a *bête-noir* to the IRA, and his elucidation of Mao's theory of guerrilla warfare (Bennett and Cormac 2014, 106) and the subsequent need to starve the IRA of their public support has become a regularly referenced epithet. But it was not just the hearts and minds campaigns to cut off the lifeblood of the IRA by way of its civilian support that constituted British policy; as we see with the response to the rent strike, there was a concerted effort to re-shape the citizens of Northern Ireland by producing patterns of behaviour that would stymie the momentum for future civil disobedience. In addition to this, it was part of a fundamental change at a conjunctural moment in how social security apparatus was used and understood, which would irreversibly alter the provision of social housing and benefits in Britain and Northern Ireland. For this reason, the context of similar contentious action in the rest of the United Kingdom and the government's response is pertinent to this study.

More broadly, this study of the rent and rates strike is useful for those with a desire to understand the ebb and flow of the civil rights movement and the gap in knowledge of the time frame from the late 1960s demonstrations to the prisoner support group of the late 1970s and subsequent rise of Sinn Féin. As such, many of the sources used are from information sheets and newspapers produced by civil rights groups, republicans and radical left groups who supported the strike. Declassified files from the Stormont cabinet meetings are used to illustrate the perspective of the state as well as material from the National Archives in London – although formal power remained in Belfast until direct rule was implemented in March 1972, the Westminster cabinet's Joint Intelligence Committee's role in security matters following the deployment of troops in 1969, and particularly after disturbances in June 1970, are instructive to our understanding of the complex and sometimes contradictory approaches of senior politicians, heads of security forces and intelligence services. Beginning with an overview of the re-introduc-

<sup>3</sup> LHL, *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 January 1972, Belfast, Microfiche.

<sup>4</sup> PRONI, CENT/1/3/27, Northern Ireland Office Press Release, 15 May 1974.

tion of internment in 1971 and the response by the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, the following section will then focus on the mechanisms of the rent strike and the dynamics between the main protagonists. Section four will turn to the Northern Ireland administration's response to the rent strike, with a particular emphasis on the emergency legislation brought in to deal with non-payment, followed by a summary of the effects of the legislation. The concluding section will then look at the early 1970s within the trajectory of civil disobedience in Northern Ireland in relation to the conflict.

## *2. Internment and civil resistance*

The use of detention and internment without trial was enabled by regulations 11 and 12 respectively of the 1922 Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland), a controversial piece of legislation introduced by the Parliament of Northern Ireland at the inception of the state following the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and the 1922 Anglo-Irish Treaty. The first wave of internment took place in May 1922 when around 500 Sinn Féin members and sympathisers were interned, its use being inexorably connected to the origins of the province of Northern Ireland (Donohue 1998, 1092). This is not to say it was peculiar to Northern Ireland – following the 1916 Easter Rising, almost 2,000 Irish citizens were interned in Frongoch camp, Wales; during the IRA Border Campaign of 1956-1962, the Republic of Ireland introduced internment simultaneously with Northern Ireland. Irish history – particularly since the revolutionary period of 1916-1923, and specifically in the partitioned North – is haunted by the use of this exceptional measure.

As the civil rights movement of the late 1960s was increasingly repressed by police, and as violence escalated after British soldiers were sent first into Derry's Bogside then Belfast in August 1969, the Northern Ireland Parliament relied on draconian legislation to restore order, for example the 1970 Criminal Justice (Temporary Provisions) Act, which imposed mandatory sentences for certain offences during an 'emergency' period starting 30 June 1970. Internment was mooted by the Stormont administration in May 1970 and again in August, after rioting in Belfast that June, which had prompted the Criminal Justice Act and emergency period, as well as the use of curfews<sup>5</sup>.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s has been characterised in opposition to the Republican armed struggle of the 1970s, and in some cases as a cause of the descent into violence. Historian Thomas Hennessey places responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities on the civil rights movement, arguing that the 5

<sup>5</sup> The National Archives (TNA), CJ/4/462, "Internment without Trial in Northern Ireland: Possible Imposition. Policy on Home Office Authorisation and Involvement. Cuttings and Correspondence", 21 May 1970.

October 1968 march in Derry “altered everything”, making British intervention “inevitable” (2005, 145). Hennessey’s claim that British oversight by 1970 should have reassured Catholics who were distrustful, with reason, of the Stormont government is somewhat supported by the view from London that Catholics were primarily the victims, not perpetrators, of political violence (Hennessey 2005, 394; O’Halpin 2008, 669)<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the Joint Intelligence Committee placed blame for the growth of political violence squarely on the shoulders of the failures of the Northern Ireland government (O’Halpin 2008, 668).

Despite the growing importance of the Joint Intelligence Committee in security decision-making by the end of 1970, it repeatedly expressed fears that the loyalty of the predominantly Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Special Branch could be strained under direct rule, and particularly if the Westminster government “came into direct confrontation with the hard-line Protestants”. It could therefore rely on Special Branch on coverage of “all except Protestant targets”<sup>7</sup>. Although the Joint Intelligence Committee provides crucial insights into the antagonistic relationships between MI5 and RUC Special Branch and the different approaches of the varying authorities, Hennessey’s depiction of the Westminster government as a neutral arbiter, able to oversee action against discrimination with fairness, is confounded by this example of the hold which the RUC had over the British government, whether real or imagined. There was a clear apprehension regarding the RUC, which gave way to major criticisms of its Special Branch from 1969 to 1972, and plans were made in spring 1971 to build parallel intelligence structures to avoid reliance on the RUC<sup>8</sup>. In practice, the fear of a “protestant backlash” meant that intelligence on Protestant paramilitaries was not acted upon until February 1973, eighteen months after the introduction of internment (McCleery 2015, 170).

The special powers regulation for internment was finally put into action on the morning of 9 August 1971, under the guise of Operation Demetrius. On that day, 342 men, all of whom were Catholic, were arrested by British soldiers, detained, taken to regional holding centres (Ballykinler, Magilligan, Girdwood Park) where they were interrogated by RUC Special Branch, after which they were taken to the prison ship HMS Maidstone or Crumlin Road jail (Bennett 2010, 191). Derry’s Bogside and Creggan estate, Catholic enclaves on the west of the city’s Foyle river, defended themselves with

<sup>6</sup> TNA, CJ/4/462, O’Halpin quotes Joint Intelligence Committee records from 1970.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, CAB/190/8, “Northern Ireland Intelligence Working Party: Meetings and Memoranda”, 10 March 1971.

<sup>8</sup> TNA, CA/185/3, “Joint Intelligence Committee (A) (JIC(A)) Meetings”, 1 January 1970 – 25 June 1970; TNA, CAB/190/8, “Northern Ireland Intelligence Working Party: Meetings and Memoranda”, 8 October 1970 – 17 April 1972.

barricades, which remained up from the day of internment until the British Army's Operation Motorman tore them down in July 1972. Thousands of Catholics fled the North to the Republic of Ireland as refugees seeking asylum. The position of internees was dubious to say the least. Internees were detained based on Special Branch intelligence and initially not subject to any form of judicial decision, so in essence subject to at best a quasi-legal process which had been introduced upon the decision of the government.

In October 1971, the International Red Cross visited the internment camp at Long Kesh near Lisburn, just outside of Belfast, and reported on the differences between sentenced prisoners and internees, stating: "The internee is a man without a future"<sup>9</sup>. This strikes precisely on the position of internees as simultaneously subject to, yet outside of, the legal system, and thus in a position of ambiguity. Such a position is underlined by the point raised in the local Republican newspaper the *Andersonstown News* in 1974 that technically, under the 1973 Emergency Powers Act, those detained were not guilty of an offence, but it would be illegal for them to escape their detention inside the Long Kesh internment camp<sup>10</sup>. Although the Detention of Terrorists Order introduced in November 1972 formalised a quasi-judicial process of reviewing internment cases independent of the executive, the character of the legal powers themselves magnified the tenuous legal position of internees<sup>11</sup>. The special powers provided for a permanent-exception and were presented as a reality rather than an option which, ideally, would be phased out, if only the situation allowed – the Northern Ireland government announced in September 1971 that their objective was "to bring about as soon as possible a situation in which all emergency measures – not only internment – but also such measures as minimum mandatory sentences – can be phased out without risk"<sup>12</sup>. Contrary to this presentation of internment as purely a security necessity, its political nature is clear as indicated by the demographics of the men interned, aimed at Catholics and conflating the Catholic community with armed Republicanism. Additionally, a legal review written in 1986 underlined the political use of internment and in particular the detention of innocent men to taint them as Provisional IRA members, and the cynical increase in internee numbers to placate unionists at opportune moments and also the increase in internee releases to conciliate the broadly anti-internment mainstream nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) (Spjut 1986, 731).

<sup>9</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/83/7, "Detention and Internment under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts", 18 February 1972.

<sup>10</sup> LHL, NIPC, *Andersonstown News* 5, 5, 8 June 1974, Microfiche.

<sup>11</sup> For details of internment legislation see Boyle, Hadden, Hillyard (1975).

<sup>12</sup> LHL, NIPC, "Statement by Northern Ireland Government", 21 September 1971.



Before moving on to look more closely at the rent strike, it is worth paying attention to the colonial dimension of internment. This is a crucial element to the imposition and implementation of emergency regulations in Northern Ireland, but also it helps scholars to distinguish between forms of civil disobedience in Ireland and those in Britain. Internment was a common feature of British colonialism: internment camps were in place right across the empire to deal with anti-colonial dissidents. Hola Camp in Kenya was one striking example that provides a useful comparison for Northern Ireland (McCleery 2015, 14). Ian Cobain's *Cruel Britannia* traces the use of torture throughout post-war British colonial history, providing documentary evidence of the use of the five techniques of torture in Cyprus, Aden and Kenya – particularly in Hola Camp – that were then used on internees in August and October 1971 and became the subject of the 1978 European Court case (Cobain 2012).

Indeed, whilst denying the use of torture, British Home Secretary Reginald Maudling admitted that the “principles applied in the interrogation of suspects in Northern Ireland and the methods employed are the same as those which have been used in other struggles against armed terrorists in which Britain has been involved in recent years”. The Parker Report of March 1972 admitted that the five techniques had “played an important part in counter insurgency operations in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus” and also the British Cameroons, Brunei, British Guiana, Aden, Borneo/Malaysia, the Persian Gulf and Northern Ireland<sup>13</sup>. Although Northern Ireland was at the time served by its own government, its position within the United Kingdom remained one of clientelist neo-colony, and the use of “experience in other emergency situations” – the British euphemism for anti-colonial wars – by government advisers attests to this<sup>14</sup>.

The colonial features of internment in Northern Ireland were apparent in the demographics of internees. As ministerial documents from late 1972 indicate, following the Detention of Terrorists Order, discussions were held over whether or not to include Protestant terrorists in arrest lists for detention. They state that the current arrest policy did not provide for the arrest of Protestant terrorists except with the object of bringing a criminal charge. It goes on to say that “this is not the moment to start arresting Protestants for detention; there has been something of a decrease in large-scale organised Protestant terrorism”<sup>15</sup>. There was indeed loyalist violence – the 1969 bombings of electricity substations resulted in troops being drafted in to guard key

<sup>13</sup> House of Commons, Lord Parker of Waddington, *Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism, Parliamentary Papers, 1971-1972*, series XVIII, 53, Cmnd. 4901, 3.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, CAB/190/8, “Northern Ireland Intelligence Working Party: Meetings and Memoranda”, 8 October 1970.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, DEFE/24/824, “Northern Ireland: Arrest Policy”, 1972.

public utilities, and the Ulster Volunteer Force had been active since the mid-1960s bombing Catholic-owned businesses, significantly the McGurk's Bar in December 1971, which was the deadliest attack throughout the conflict, and carrying out gun attacks on Catholic civilians (MacAirt 2012). On the 9 July 1971 officials recorded 36 IRA prisoners and 33 "extreme protestants"<sup>16</sup>. It was therefore clear that Protestants were involved in terrorist activity, for which they were being imprisoned; and yet, internment was a strategy used almost solely against the Catholic population. This is confirmed by the custody records: Boyle, Hadden and Hillyard gave the figures in May 1974 of loyalists constituting almost one-third of those held under court sentences but only one-tenth of those detained<sup>17</sup>.

This final feature of internment is important in attempting to understand why it was that a rent and rates strike was used as protest. Given that internment was clearly aimed at the Catholic community, it is unsurprising that the response shared traits, organisational and institutional, with the civil rights movement that organised in the late 1960s around discrimination against Catholics on housing, employment and suffrage. Even previous rent strikes that were organised over housing conditions rather than discrimination were fraught with sectarian rivalries between tenants associations from Catholic and Protestant estates (Ó Dochartaigh 2005, 84). Considering that the Special Powers Act was such a point of resentment for the civil rights movement, it is understandable that the rent and rates strike was as much targeted at the emergency legislation and Stormont government as a whole rather than the specific policy of internment, though it helped that it was a tangible symbol of the legislation and general discriminatory politics of the so-called Orange state. The issue of housing and specifically the lack of decent housing available to Catholic families was a central plank to the civil rights movement, particularly in Derry<sup>18</sup>. Though there is not space for a detailed overview of the civil rights movement in this paper, the pioneering work of, amongst others, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Simon Prince, Lorenzo Bosi, and Geoffrey Warner has provided thorough elucidation of this phenomenon, including nuanced explanations of the heterogeneity of the civil rights movement and the various political traditions within (Ó Dochartaigh 2005; Prince 2007; Bosi and Prince 2009; Prince and Warner 2012).

From a longer historical perspective, the Irish nationalist struggle had dealt with the unfair rents, rates and tenancy agreements forced upon the peasantry by the British colonialists; the Land League was formed in the late

<sup>16</sup> PRONI, CAB/9R/238/6, "Report by Working Party on Membership of Unlawful Organisations", 2 August 1971.

<sup>17</sup> LHL, NIPC, K. Boyle, T. Hadden, P. Hillyard, "The Facts on Internment", *Fortnight* 94, 29 November 1974, 9-12, Internment Ephemera Box.

<sup>18</sup> For information on the Derry Housing Action Committee see Ó Dochartaigh 1994; 2005.

nineteenth century to counter rent increases and evictions. After the partition of Ireland, housing for Catholics in the North continued to be unsatisfactory, and the lack of housing for Catholics was made worse by the onset of the conflict as entire neighbourhoods were burned down during attacks on Catholic areas. Figures produced by the Minister of Development indicate that in August 1971, 300 houses were destroyed and 2,000 families registered on the emergency housing list<sup>19</sup>. Further investigation of this use of a rent strike against the policy of internment rather than against housing issues or rent increases is pertinent to the longer historical understanding of repressive colonial policies against Irish Catholics and resistance to such repression.

### 3. *The Rent Strike*

On the first day of internment, a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) emergency bulletin from the Belfast branch called for “total withdrawal by non-Unionists from every governmental structure, rent and rate strikes by the people, barricades for defence where necessary and total non-co-operation with a regime which has been stigmatised by the British establishment itself”<sup>20</sup>. This was decided during a meeting that day in Duggan’s – which had been a hotspot for anti-Catholic housing discrimination – between the SDLP, Nationalist Party, Republican Labour Party and NICRA, groups that tended towards reformism rather than revolution<sup>21</sup>. According to ministerial papers, the rent strike called by Belfast Civil Rights Association was backed officially by the SDLP and Nationalist MPs on 15 August, with 16 August proposed as the starting date<sup>22</sup>. By 10 September, 25,000 tenants were on strike out of 135,000 public authority tenancies, providing a weekly loss of £50,000 to the exchequer, with 32 out of 60 local authorities affected by civil disobedience as well as the Housing Trust<sup>23</sup>. This had risen to 26,000 on strike on 29 September, a loss of £60,000 a week and support ranging from 3-4% to 80% in areas<sup>24</sup>. These are all official internal government statistics. NICRA estimated that by October 5 over £500,000 had been withheld in rent and rates.

<sup>19</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>20</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, *Emergency Bulletin*, 9 August 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>21</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, “The Rent & Rates Strike - Some Questions Answered”, n.d., Internment Ephemera Box.

<sup>22</sup> PRONI, COM/58/3/9, “Ministry of Commerce: Effects of Civil Disobedience on Gas and Electricity, 1971-1973”, 3 May 1972.

<sup>23</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>24</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/19, “Note of a meeting between UK and NI Government officials”, *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Counter-Measures to Civil Disobedience Proposed by Ministry of Health and Social Services*, 21 October 1971.

According to a Northern Ireland Cabinet meeting on 21 October 1971, the main support for the rent strike was from the big estates in Belfast such as Divis, and also in the following areas: Strabane (87% uptake among local authority tenants), Newry (76%), Warrenpoint (66%), Derry (52%). Overall 21% of Housing Trust/Housing Executive tenants across the country were on rent strike<sup>25</sup>. Statistics from the 1971 census indicate that the percentage of Catholics who were public renters (40.9%) was higher than the total percentage of public renters (34.6%), but less than the total in both private rental and home ownership (Melaugh 1994). This amounted to 45,436 Catholic households out of a total of 147,854 publicly-rented households. The reliability on public housing amongst the Catholic community goes some way to providing an explanation of how the rent strike became widespread so quickly, when juxtaposed with the fact that internment targeted the Catholic/nationalist community. At the same time, given the precarious housing situation many found themselves in following the housing struggles of the previous decade as well as the burning of Catholic neighbourhoods in 1969, it shows an impressive determination that so many took up and continued the rent strike despite government sanctions and threats which could quite easily have displaced them and ruined them financially. As Stormont civil servants privately admitted in May 1972:

no doubt of the great mass of sincere and immediate support from the rank and file for this opposition to internment. Indeed the relative success of the campaign from the beginning is probably due less to any organisation behind it, which can only have been minimal, than to the conviction of individual participants that their cause was just.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst this report admits – contrary to contemporary public assertions by the state, and to Eamonn McCann’s insinuation of arm-twisting (McCann 1980, 94) – that the unpopularity of internment was more of a motivating factor in the success of the rent strike than pressure from the groups behind it, it is worth examining here the dynamics between the various groups behind the rent strike. Whilst Austin Currie describes the start of the strike with the joint call out by NICRA and the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) published in the *Irish News* on 27 August (Currie 2004, 177), the two groups in no way could claim ownership or responsibility for the strike. The initial interest was sparked by local campaign groups, forming civil resistance committees in housing estates to co-ordinate strike action and other protests; indeed, People’s Democracy claimed that the call by groups for a rent and rates strike was simply “ratifying a fait ac-

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> PRONI, COM/58/3/9, “Ministry of Commerce: Effects of Civil Disobedience on Gas and Electricity, 1971-1973”, 3 May 1972.

compli” as it had already begun in earnest<sup>27</sup>. This is supported by a rent and rates strike leaflet circulated just before Christmas 1971, which instructed tenants to proceed with the rates strike as advised by their local Disobedience Committee and obey their instructions<sup>28</sup>. One example was the Andersonstown Tenants Association and Civil Resistance Committee, which were based in the Republican stronghold of Andersonstown, West Belfast. The latter group was elected at a public meeting at Holy Child School on Sunday 15 August to organise the campaign after the decision was made to embark on a rent and rates strike. This group was also behind the production of the P. J. McGuigan song *The Men Behind the Wire*, which sold over 90,000 copies and was banned by the BBC<sup>29</sup>. One of the key figures in Andersonstown Civil Resistance Committee was Des O’Donnell, a local teacher, who claimed in late October that 5,000 households in Andersonstown were on strike – 90% of the total<sup>30</sup>.

Areas of Belfast like Andersonstown were key points of the rent strike, along with Ardoyne to its north east, where people’s assemblies were set up to co-ordinate civil disobedience – not just the rent strike, but the civilian warnings of army incurrence into the area. In the Lower Falls part of the city, take up in the Divis estate was almost 100%. In conjunction with the rent strike, local councillors refused to serve in certain local authorities, withdrawing from Strabane & Warrenpoint Urban councils, which both ceased to function in September 1971, and around half a dozen other local authorities were affected by individual councillors’ boycott<sup>31</sup>. In February 1972, Keady council joined Strabane and Warrenpoint after the Northern Resistance Movement – a broad but politically radical group supported by People’s Democracy and republicans, set up on October 17 – and Armagh Resistance Council forced a resignation in order to tip the balance in favour of the boycott<sup>32</sup>. As F. Stuart Ross indicates in his book on the H-Block/Armagh campaign, there was an attempt later in the decade to repeat this tactic in order to force government policy change on the issue of special category status for prisoners, but the lobbying of councillors at that stage was largely unsuccessful (2011, 99). It is likely that the changes in legislation to deal with withdrawal of councillors – the Local Bodies Bill, detailed later – had a role its failure later that decade.

<sup>27</sup> Queen’s University Belfast (QUB), Special Collections, People’s Democracy, “Internment ’71 H-Block ’81: The Same Struggle”, Belfast 1981, 11-13.

<sup>28</sup> LHL, NIPC, “Civil Disobedience Rededication”, December 1971, Internment Ephemera Box.

<sup>29</sup> LHL, NIPC, *Andersonstown News* 1, 1, 22 November 1972, Microfiche.

<sup>30</sup> British Library (BL), Newspaper Archive (NA), P. Hildew, “Drive to Escalate the Rent Strike War”, *The Guardian*, 30 October 1971, 2.

<sup>31</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>32</sup> LHL, NIPC, People’s Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 4 February 1972, Microfiche.

Although the SDLP had been one of the groups involved with the original call for the rent and rates strike, by June 1972 they were already receiving criticism from NICRA for advising councillors and members of public bodies to return to their positions<sup>33</sup>. It is unsurprising they garnered opprobrium from NICRA and People's Democracy. The latter group, who had changed the name of their publication from *Free Citizen* to *Unfree Citizen* after the introduction of internment, had encouraged strikers not to save the unpaid rent and rates to be paid off at a later date, but to spend the money, so that there would be no question of paying back arrears<sup>34</sup>. By contrast, the SDLP later advocated stringent terms for the recuperation of non-payment, whilst NICRA eventually attempted negotiations between those still in arrears and the Northern Ireland Office in Westminster in order to come to "humane arrangements"<sup>35</sup>.

There were other forms of civil disobedience against internment that kept attention and pressure on the government both before and after the removal of Stormont's powers and imposition of direct rule from Westminster in March 1972. There were of course street demonstrations in the tradition of the 1960s civil rights movement, the march in Derry on 30 January 1972 that became known as Bloody Sunday being the most prominent in retrospect. Many demonstrations defied the parades ban including a 15,000-strong rally in Casement Park on 12 September 1971 (with the slogan "Smash Heath in the teeth!")<sup>36</sup> and a Christmas Day march to Long Kesh organised by the Northern Resistance Movement, which was stopped en route and dispersed. People's Democracy's *Unfree Citizen* reported doctors resigning in protest and ex-servicemen returning their medals<sup>37</sup>. Workers also took strike action: 8,000 workers carried out a one-day strike in Derry on 16 August and 1,000 deep sea dockers in Belfast went on strike on 7 September<sup>38</sup>. In addition, the trade unions collided with the government over the proposed reclamation of rent and rates money from wages, according to NICRA<sup>39</sup>. Though, as we shall see later, ministerial papers indicate that their stance against the government legislation was not particularly strong.

<sup>33</sup> PRONI, D/3072/2/3/5, "Civil Rights", 3 June 1972.

<sup>34</sup> LHL, NIPC, People's Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 21 August 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>35</sup> PRONI, CENT/1/3/27, "Letter from NICRA to Merlyn Rees, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland", 31 January 1976.

<sup>36</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, *Emergency Bulletin*, 26 August 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>37</sup> LHL, NIPC, People's Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 25 August 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>38</sup> QUB, Special Collections, People's Democracy, "Internment '71 H-Block '81: The Same Struggle", Belfast 1981, 12.

<sup>39</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, "The Rent & Rates Strike - Some Questions Answered", n.d., Internment Ephemera Box.

#### 4. *Payment for Debt: The political use of social security*

Not long after the rent and rates strike had acquired some momentum, it became clear that it was widespread enough and had enough staying power to create serious financial damage to the treasury. As I will show, it was not just financial imperative that led the government to introduce draconian legislation to undermine the rent and rates strike, but an attempt to contain and condition the Catholic citizenry whose relationship to the state was still semi-colonial. This latter point is supported by the use of internment without trial, aimed primarily at the Catholic community, as well as more generally the regulations in the Special Powers Act against Republicanism, and the sectarian behaviour of the RUC, the predominantly protestant police force of Northern Ireland.

The Payment for Debt Act of 1971 was a piece of emergency legislation aimed to deal with civil disobedience. The government were concerned by the rent strike campaign, not so much by the revenue loss but by what was essentially a mass opt-out of the social contract – the Minister of Development regarded it as a “most serious threat” and stated that “neither our laws nor our administration are suited to countering these difficulties”<sup>40</sup>. At the same time as directly countering the withholding of rent payments, it transformed the relationship between the state and citizens in a much more pervasive way than juridical acts that sought to punish certain behaviours with imprisonment, given the sheer numbers that it targeted. The Act allowed ministerial departments, mainly the Ministry for Health and Social Services, which set up a Benefits Allocations Branch, to redirect welfare payments to the local authorities – and later, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive – in order to settle rent arrears. This necessitated the collaboration of local authorities, a number of which, like Newry, refused to participate<sup>41</sup>. In turn, the government brought in Local Bodies (Northern Ireland) Bill to bypass local authorities that were resisting.

The implementation of the Payment for Debt Act required cross-departmental co-ordination. In discussions, ministers stated that “the whole payment for debt machinery is part of the Government service and ought to be treated as such”<sup>42</sup>. The government consulted with the Confederation of British Industry and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, who gave their tacit approval of the recovery of debts through salaries as well as welfare pay-

<sup>40</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>41</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/20A, “Memorandum by the Minister of Health and Social Services”, *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Recovery of Rents and Rates Withheld under Civil Disobedience Campaign*, 5 November 1971.

<sup>42</sup> PRONI, COM/58/3/9, “Effects of Civil Disobedience on Gas and Electricity”, Meeting of Interdepartmental Committee on Payments for Debt Act 1971, 3 January 1972.

ments<sup>43</sup>. There was a 1969 bill called the Judgements Enforcement Act, which was seen as insufficient; it would be too slow and cumbersome in reclaiming the debts and therefore frustrate the purpose of the campaign. Furthermore, it did not include the possibility of reclaiming debts through social security payments or other public fund payments; the Payment for Debt Act did, and would “place the Department responsible for making such payments in the position of an ‘employer’ for the purposes of the Act”<sup>44</sup>. As far as civil rights activists were concerned, civil servants and benefits clerks became as much a part of the security industry as the RUC and British army. Indeed, the broad-based and comparatively moderate NICRA stated that the civil servants implementing the legislation were “lin[ing] up with the repressive R.U.C. and British Army in their attack on the lives, livelihoods [*sic*] and liberties of a section of the Irish people”<sup>45</sup>.

The Payment for Debt Act was rationalised by the government through the implication that ringleaders were intimidating tenants, forcing them to withhold their rent and rates. It launched a publicity campaign stating “Do not be intimidated”, offering a service by which tenants could secretly pay off their debts in October of 1971, with the press reporting that the responsible department, the Ministry of Development “does not claim that intimidation can be proved, but only that it is known to be going on”<sup>46</sup>. Along with the more blatant implications of intimidation against the IRA, and accusations that the IRA were in control of civil disobedience in Northern Ireland, it allowed the government to smear those partaking as not just lawbreakers or criminals but as security threats. This was broadly in line with the attitude of the Westminster-based Joint Intelligence Committee, who by February 1972 recorded that “[p]erhaps the most threatening feature of the present situation in Northern Ireland is the civil disobedience campaign”<sup>47</sup>. Tellingly, they warned of the dual effects of the civil rights campaign and Republican armed struggle, the former being able to “undermine the fabric of society slowly and by attrition” (*ibidem*).

The potential for the rent strike to work, in conjunction with the general unrest on the streets, to unseat the government and heighten disorder was a fear that mobilised the government into action. On 2 September 1971, before the legislation was put forward but after the decision for action had

<sup>43</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/19, “Civil Disobedience Campaign - Recovery Action Extract from Cabinet Conclusion”, 1 October 1971.

<sup>44</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>45</sup> LHL, NIPC, “NICRA Emergency Bulletin”, 9 November 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>46</sup> BL, NA, P. Hildew, “Drive to Escalate the Rent Strike War”, *The Guardian*, 30 October 1971, 2.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, CJ/4/237, “Northern Ireland: The Year Ahead”, *Drafts for Proposed Joint Intelligence Committee Assessment of Northern Ireland in 1972*, 2 February 1972.



been agreed, the Northern Ireland administration wrote to the UK Home Secretary Reginald Maudling stating:

The situation has all the seeds of anarchy. It could rapidly degenerate to the point at which orderly administration could no longer be maintained in many parts of Northern Ireland. The consequences of such civil anarchy, super-imposed upon the continuing campaign of violence, are not difficult to predict, and the damage to the social and economic fabric of Northern Ireland could be irreparable.<sup>48</sup>

It was not just the idea that the strike would directly impinge on the ability for the administration to function, but also that it would result in a loss of authority and credibility of the government<sup>49</sup>. This is particularly striking given that just a month beforehand, the government had been slightly less concerned about its integrity as it introduced internment without trial despite trepidations around potential legal issues, expressed during a meeting just three days before the first internment sweep: “We would look foolish if these detentions were tested and found to be illegal”<sup>50</sup>. This sense of precarity on behalf of the Northern Ireland government was not unfounded – just over six months later in March 1972, the UK government suspended Stormont and imposed direct rule.

Whilst the rent and rate strike undoubtedly displayed a popular and widespread opposition to internment and the Stormont administration, the withdrawal of local councillors from administrations perhaps brought about more of a crisis in government, particularly when Newry council refused to co-operate with the Department of Health in advance of the Payment for Debt bill to help recover social security payments<sup>51</sup>. The Joint Intelligence Committee confirmed this fear, stating that “the fabric of local government at large in the province is in peril”<sup>52</sup>. Local authorities in places provided pockets of resistance to the otherwise hegemonic power of the unionist-dominated Stormont government, ruled by the Ulster Unionist Party since the inception of the state in 1922. One example of this was the refusal of local authorities to implement rent increases. Strabane Council had attracted the ire of the government in July of 1971 when it refused to implement public housing rent increases

<sup>48</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/19, “Letter to Reginald Maudling (UK Home Secretary)”, 2 September 1971.

<sup>49</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1615, “Cabinet Meeting”, 14 September 1971.

<sup>50</sup> PRONI, NIO/25/3/16, “Stormont meeting on Internment”, 6 August 1971.

<sup>51</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/20A, “Memorandum by the Minister of Health and Social Services”, *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Recovery of Rents and Rates Withheld under Civil Disobedience Campaign*, 5 November 1971.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, CJ/4/237, “Northern Ireland: The Year Ahead”, *Drafts for Proposed Joint Intelligence Committee Assessment of Northern Ireland in 1972*, 2 February 1972.

mandated by central government<sup>53</sup>. The year before in January 1970, the Strabane Civil Rights Association backed Strabane Town Tenants Association in their decision not to pay a rent increase of 7.5% imposed by the council<sup>54</sup>. The rent and rates strike gave the Stormont government the opportunity at last to discipline rebellious councils; Strabane was the first to be censured for running an overdraft and refusing to raise house rents, and was dissolved in October 1971 under the new Local Bodies (Emergency Powers) Bill<sup>55</sup>.

The Local Bodies Bill was proposed on 2 September 1971 via Reginald Maudling, the UK Home Secretary, and allowed the Governor of Northern Ireland to remove members of a local authority, which failed to carry out its functions. It authorised the Minister of Development to appoint a commissioner to take over the functions of that authority<sup>56</sup>. This prevented communities from bringing pressure on their local authorities in order to strengthen their opposition to the Stormont government, and removed local government as a site of contention, replacing it with managerial and bureaucratic implementation of the increasingly securitised welfare policies, in conjunction with the movement of housing responsibilities from (often sectarian and discriminatory) local authorities towards the newly-formed Housing Executive. A similar process was to occur over a decade later in Britain, when Margaret Thatcher introduced a series of rate-capping policies and break-up of metropolitan councils, which aimed to undermine large seats of counter-power in local government controlled by those undertaking protest and disobedience in opposition to the Thatcher government.

The Local Bodies Bill in any case allowed Stormont to bypass the disruption of council procedures that the protests caused. As the rent and rates strike continued unabated, the government broadened its action against strikers. In March 1972, the Payment for Debt Act was extended to salaries paid by the state; whilst this was subsequently clarified to mean salaries only and not wages, in October 1972 this was extended too to wage earners<sup>57</sup>. Before the Act had even been introduced, NICRA accused the government of threatening, and then attempting to “starve people into submission” by targeting the most vulnerable and impoverished, those on social security benefits<sup>58</sup>. People’s Democracy recorded rent strikers having social security payments

<sup>53</sup> PRONI, CAB/4/1605/9, “Memorandum to the Cabinet by the Minister of Development (R H Bradford)”, 2 July 1971.

<sup>54</sup> LHL, NIPC, People’s Democracy, *Citizen Press*, 24 January 1970, Microfiche.

<sup>55</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/N/46/1, “Local Bodies (Emergency Powers) Bill (Northern Ireland)”, 1971.

<sup>56</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/19, “Letter to Reginald Maudling (UK Home Secretary)”, 2 September 1971.

<sup>57</sup> PRONI, COM/58/3/9, “Civil Disobedience: Letter from R H Kidd, Ministry of Finance to Secretary of State”, 20 October 1972.

<sup>58</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, *Emergency Bulletin*, 26 August 1971, Microfiche.

cut off as early as 3 September, before the act was brought in<sup>59</sup>. Clearly this was a form of punishment taken against the most vulnerable, but the extension to those salaried by the state drew in an additional demographic, and in doing so entrenched the conditionality of state benefits, the position of the recipients as employees who, like those with state salaries, could have their pay docked or withdrawn based on political decision.

The extension of the Payment for Debt Act was gradual. It received royal assent on 14 October, and the Benefits Allocation Branch was set up by the Ministry of Health and Social Services in order to redirect benefit payments towards offsetting withheld rent and rates. This led to an escalation of the strike to include as many bill payments as possible, the civil rights conference in Dungannon on October 24 advising withholding of radio and television licenses, land annuities, ground rent, income tax, gas, electricity and water bills<sup>60</sup>. This was accompanied by demonstrations and riots including one in Newry following the killing of a young man that led to a no-go zone being established, and a riot also in Long Kesh internment camp which was at that time holding hundreds of detainees<sup>61</sup>. The government reported that bills and rates were being withheld in February 1972 in preparation for the extension of the legislation from benefit recipients to include those in receipt of state salaries. At this stage they acknowledged that only a third of the 20,000+ rent defaulters could be dealt with by the re-allocation of benefits<sup>62</sup>.

However, as the strike wore on, more and more defaulters dropped out. In February 1973, though the skeleton Stormont regime that existed after direct rule backed out of the inclusion of wage earners in the Payment for Debt mechanism, and the *Andersonstown News* claimed 26,000 still on strike in Belfast, Derry and Newry, by October this had halved to 13,000 according to the Northern Ireland Secretary as quoted in the People's Democracy paper *Unfree Citizen*<sup>63</sup>. By the time the SDLP's Austin Currie – newly appointed housing minister in the new executive – made a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 3 April 1974 urging for an end to the rent strike, there were still 11,000 tenants on strike, although just 1,500 of these were *not* subject to the Payment for Debt Act and therefore having deductions made from benefits or salaries<sup>64</sup>. In 1986, long after the official phas-

<sup>59</sup> LHL, NIPC, People's Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 3 September 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>60</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, *Emergency Bulletin*, 9 November 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>61</sup> LHL, NIPC, People's Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 29 October 1971, Microfiche.

<sup>62</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/20A, "Letter to Cabinet Ministers", *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Recovery of Rents and Rates Withheld under Civil Disobedience Campaign*, 17 February 1972.

<sup>63</sup> LHL, NIPC, *Andersonstown News* 1, 13, 16 February 1973, Microfiche; LHL, NIPC, People's Democracy, *Unfree Citizen*, 15 October 1973, Microfiche.

<sup>64</sup> PRONI, CENT/1/3/27, "Northern Ireland Office: Press Release of Currie's Statement to the Assembly", 3 April 1974.

ing out of internment, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported the “legacy of debt” left in Divis flats, West Belfast, still being paid either voluntary or, more often, through the Payment for Debt Act<sup>65</sup>.

### 5. *Effects of the Act*

The Payment for Debt Act must be understood as part of the extensive legal mechanisms, to a large extent consisting of emergency law, aimed largely at the Catholic community. As such it had the effect of reinforcing the perception of the Northern Ireland state as unionist-dominated and its mechanisms as entirely sectarian. This perception is illustrated in the first edition of the *Andersonstown News* in November 1972 – the local paper of the area of West Belfast where the rent strike was perhaps strongest – which claimed that the Act meant that “the terror apparatus for suppressing the Catholic population seemed complete”<sup>66</sup>. This may seem hyperbolic compared to the regulations in the Special Powers Act but what underlined this legislation was its attempt to condition the behaviour of those involved in civil disobedience – predominantly Catholics and Irish nationalists – by making social security contingent on obedience at a time when the nationalist community was taking unprecedented steps towards humiliating the discrimination in Northern Ireland through these methods.

This was made clear in a government statement in November 1971. Their three-pronged strategy was defeating terrorism and restoring the rule of law, creating the conditions in which “responsible elements of the community” can ensure enjoyment of equal rights, and, as a corollary to equal rights, “the proper fulfilment of the obligations of good citizenship, under the law and otherwise”. Specifically in dealing with rent and rates defaulting, the government stated it would reclaim the money because it would be intolerable if “part of the community refuses to bear its fair share of public burdens”<sup>67</sup>. Thus the universal nature of social security and the welfare state was made clearly conditional on not partaking in dissident behaviour. That same month, the Minister of Community Relations – whose predecessor, the only Catholic in the cabinet, had resigned at the introduction of internment – decided to delay and discourage grants to projects in deprived areas of West Belfast where civil disobedience was strong<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> LHL, NIPC, L. White, “What Went Wrong”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 November 1986, Homelessness/Housing Ephemera Box.

<sup>66</sup> LHL, NIPC, *Andersonstown News* 1, 1, 22 November 1972, Microfiche.

<sup>67</sup> Linen Hall Library, NIPC, P4308, “Statement by Northern Ireland Government”, 21 September 1971.

<sup>68</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/20A, “Memorandum by Minister of Community Relations”, *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Recovery of Rents and Rates Withheld under Civil Disobedience Campaign*, 23 November 1971.

The Payment for Debt Act was further extended beyond its specific use to deal with those withholding rent for reasons of civil disobedience. A 1984 information sheet provided by a West Belfast housing action group advised tenants that, under the 1971 legislation, statutory bodies such as the Housing Executive (which was created in 1971 to take over the management of publicly-owned housing) were “covered by legislation to recover money owed to them by deducting it from your Social Security benefits”, as well as deducting from wages and claims and compensation such as redundancy pay. There was no mention of rent strike or civil disobedience – legislation introduced to deal with the rent strike had simply been extended to recover all housing debt, including on houses since vacated, through social security benefits, regardless of the original reason<sup>69</sup>. This is backed up by ministerial papers that show that in April 1976 – months after the ending of internment, and the phasing out of special category status for political prisoners – the Payment for Debt Act was extended to include *all* debts to the Housing Executive, not just non-payment because of the rent strike<sup>70</sup>. A year later, a government press release confirmed that the Act was extended so that the Benefits Allocation scheme involved those unable to pay gas and electricity bills too, allowing for the inclusion of utility companies as well as the Housing Executive in the re-allocation of benefit payments<sup>71</sup>. This went directly against the decision at the beginning of the Payment for Debt implementation whereby, when proffering the idea of recovering unpaid rent from all those in debt, not just those involved with the civil disobedience campaign, it was rejected because “the emergency legislation was presented to Parliament and recommended as a measure to cope with supporters of the civil disobedience campaign”, and therefore it would be “wrong” to use it for ordinary debts<sup>72</sup>. The final totalisation of the Payment for Debt Act beyond the issue of civil disobedience was therefore completed in 1977.

## 6. Conclusion: From '68 to H-Blocks

The rent strike that started in 1971 as a response to the re-introduction of internment certainly benefited from the civil rights movement of the 1960s in terms of the organisational elements and infrastructure – NICRA

<sup>69</sup> LHL, NIPC, Falls Community Council, *Guide to Housing Executive Policies*, 1984, Homeless/Housing Ephemera Box 2.

<sup>70</sup> PRONI, CENT/1/3/27, “Northern Ireland Office: Rent and Rates Strike”, 29 January 1976.

<sup>71</sup> PRONI, CENT/1/3/27, “Northern Ireland Office: Press Release”, 13 April 1977.

<sup>72</sup> PRONI, CAB/9/B/312/20A, “Civil Disobedience Campaign - MPs and Senators”, *Civil Disobedience Campaign: Recovery of Rents and Rates Withheld under Civil Disobedience Campaign*, 26 November 1971.

and People's Democracy, two of the main groups supporting the strike, had the personnel and capacities for publicity to drive the campaign. This goes some way to explaining the immediacy of the strike. In 1970, People's Democracy had launched a rent strike against a rent hike and bus fare strike against the cost of tickets<sup>73</sup>.

There was also a rent strike of around 35,000 people in the Republic of Ireland in November 1971 against the 1966 Housing Act, and later in Great Britain against the 1972 Housing Finance Act. The latter was significant in that, like in Northern Ireland, some local authorities rebelled against the legislation that had been imposed on them by central government and defended their tenants on strike. The British government then brought in measures to punish local councillors for not implementing the rent increases, making them personally financially liable. Indeed during a 1972 railworkers' strike, the British government in Westminster considered bringing in legislation to "curtail the entitlement to social security benefits which enabled strikers to transfer to the community at large their responsibilities for supporting their families during a strike"<sup>74</sup>. Although this was not introduced, the conditionality of social security based on good behaviour was behind this concept as it was with the Payment for Debt Act.

The rent and rates strike was effective in hitting the exchequer precisely because of the demographic situation – Catholics were more likely to take action in protest against internment, as it was Catholics who tended to be interned, and were overrepresented in public sector housing. The participation in the rent strike was not simply a communal reaction that can be explained by religious denomination/ethnic identity, as there were particular areas where the takeup in the rent strike was higher, and where local councillors were more truculent, which tended to coincide with civil rights-era areas of contention where the groundwork had been laid in terms of organising groups and committees to coordinate action. Enniskillen, for example, had seen police take action, with military back up, in November 1970 when a ban on marches was broken by civil rights activists<sup>75</sup>. According to NICRA, this was the one town in Fermanagh where support for the rent strike was near on 100%<sup>76</sup>.

One consequence of the rent strike was the total break between the SDLP and the civil disobedience movement which was further emphasised

<sup>73</sup> LHL, NIPC, PPO0553, People's Democracy, "Down with Fares", 1970; LHL, NIPC, PPO0511, People's Democracy, "Not a Cent on the Rent", 1970.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, CAB/128/50/15, "Cabinet Meeting", 9 March 1972.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, CJ/4/462, "Internment without Trial in Northern Ireland: Possible Imposition", 9 December 1970.

<sup>76</sup> LHL, NIPC, NICRA, *Emergency Bulletin*, 26 August 1971, Microfiche.

during the anti-H-Block/Armagh campaign. The SDLP ended up joining the executive that was created in 1973 under the Sunningdale Agreement, with Austin Currie, who had been a champion of both the Derry-based housing action struggle and the rent strike in its early stages, becoming housing minister. Currie advised tenants to come off strike, despite the fact that internment was still in active use. Ironically, his position was shortlived when the executive fell in May 1974 following the loyalist UWC strike. This position of the SDLP was strongly rebutted by local tenants steering groups. In Andersonstown, West Belfast, tenants argued that since the strike was not started by the SDLP but by “mass, spontaneous and unorganised protest of the group”, no one group could own it and have the authority to call it off<sup>77</sup>.

The apparent betrayal of the SDLP for their positions of power in the executive – as illustrated by a 1974 Sinn Féin poster of an SDLP dagger stabbing someone in the back<sup>78</sup> – drew another comparison with the rent strike in Britain against the Housing Finance Act. After Currie had issued an ultimatum threatening an increase in arrears payments in April 1974, activists drew attention to what was happening in Britain, calling on SDLP members of the executive to resign and either obtain an amnesty for all tenants or “accept the fate of the Clay Cross councillors and pay the arrears themselves”<sup>79</sup>. In Clay Cross, one of the most truculent local authorities where central government eventually took over control of council mechanisms, the burden of the unpaid rent was placed upon the individual councillors, some of whom faced financial ruin as a result.

Overall the 1971-1974 rent and rates strike has made little mark on Irish history, perhaps deservedly in that its impact on the trajectory of the conflict is relatively small compared with other terrains on which the injustices of Stormont and Westminster were fought. But the government’s response through the Payment for Debt Act was a significant turning point in the overt use of social security to punish political dissidence. It is in the use of this emergency legislation that the rent strike becomes significant. The postwar settlement of the welfare state, council housing and social security was to irrevocably fracture during the 1970s. Whilst Northern Ireland was certainly in a different situation to Great Britain at this point in history<sup>80</sup>, and had a different relationship with welfarism, the mechanisms by which the state could use social security to punish and reward were certainly not dissimilar from those deployed in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. This is apparent in the fact that the sale of council hous-

<sup>77</sup> LHL, NIPC, *Andersonstown News*, 29 November 1973, Microfiche.

<sup>78</sup> LHL, NIPC, PPO0277A, Sinn Féin, “Support rent and rates strike”, 1974.

<sup>79</sup> PRONI, D/3072/4/23/1, “SDLP and the Rent and Rates Strike”, May 1974.

<sup>80</sup> A description of the particulars of the welfare state settlement in Northern Ireland detailed in Bew, Gibbon, Patterson 1996, 17; see also Hennessey 2005.

ing stock to tenants was introduced in Northern Ireland before the rest of the United Kingdom, albeit with conditions that didn't exist in Britain to ensure the replacement of housing stock<sup>81</sup>. The reward and punish mechanism is visible in the extension of the Payment for Debt Act to include salaried workers, and the further extension of its use to all debts not just those incurred through civil disobedience. We see in this the tendency for the welfare state to develop an employer-employee relationship, establishing greater purchase over the control of behaviour as universality paves the way for behavioural conditionality.

In Northern Ireland in 1971, this was of particular use for the state and security forces dealing with political opposition to internment and the Stormont government. At the same time, there were continuities from the treatment of Catholics through the welfare system of the postwar period into the 1970s. The issue of housing is the most germane as discrimination there was a motivating factor of the civil rights movement, and the large numbers of Catholics reliant on social housing and welfare payments underlines why the civil disobedience campaign against internment took the form it did, and why the state's response was effective. What came out of the rent and rates strike was mass opposition to the government's discriminatory policies that heightened after the onset of the conflict, and also the defiance of a vast proportion of the Catholic community to weather the draconian attempts to stop the strike. What it also illustrates for historians is the state's willingness to use a catalogue of tools to contend with political unrest in Northern Ireland, beyond military and policing strategies against the armed struggle. That social security was part of this is instructive not just in understanding Northern Ireland's precarious position within the United Kingdom throughout the twentieth century, but in re-assessing the trajectory of the welfare state and its use by government to condition and control behaviour.

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<sup>81</sup> LHL, NIPC, Northern Ireland Information Service, "Right to Buy Press Release", 28 May 1982, Homeless/Housing Ephemera Box 2.



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# From State Terrorism to Petty Harassment: A Multi-Method Approach to Understanding Repression of Irish Republicans<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:*

Beginning in 1969, the Provisional Irish Republican Army conducted a paramilitary campaign designed to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, creating a 32 county democratic socialist republic. The Provisional IRA's campaign officially ended in 2005, but former Provisionals and others who followed them continue to pursue armed struggle to this day. The Provisional IRA and its successors are part of the centuries old and highly documented "resistance" of Irish people to British interference in Ireland. Over those centuries, state authorities – the British, Irish, and Northern Irish governments – have "resisted" the dissent of Irish Republicans. This paper draws on three different research methodologies available to social scientists – counts of events that inform quantitative analyses, intensive interviews/oral histories, and visual sociology – and argues that a multi-method approach will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of "resistance" in Ireland and, more generally, social protest.

*Keywords:* Irish Republican Army, Sinn Féin, Social Movements, State Repression, Terrorism

Since the eighteenth century, Irish republicans have often been at the forefront of "the layers of resistance" to British occupation of Ireland. In

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by a National Research Foundation Dissertation Grant (1984), the Indiana University Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, and the IUPUI Office of Professional Development. I thank Des Dalton, Kenzie Latham-Mintus, Mike Maitzen, Lynn Blinn Pike, Dieter Reinisch, and Terry F. White for their help. Please direct all correspondence to Robert W. White. The author retains exclusive copyright to all photographs.

1798, inspired by Republican philosophy and the American and French Revolutions, the United Irishmen tried to “break the connection with England” and create an independent Irish Republic. The United Irishmen failed, but they would serve as an inspiration for those who followed them. In 1916, rebels seized the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin and proclaimed the Irish Republic. Although the British quickly smashed the rebellion, it set the stage for the Irish “War of Independence” (1919-1922). The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Féin, pursued a political and military campaign that was most successful in the south and west of Ireland, and in Dublin. In response, the British partitioned the island into the six counties of Northern Ireland (which remains a part of the United Kingdom) and the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State (to become the Republic of Ireland in 1949).

The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1922) confirmed partition but also granted nominal independence to the Free State and this satisfied many republicans (see Lyons 1973). Other republicans refused to accept the Treaty and continued to support the use of armed struggle for a re-united Irish republic, including IRA campaigns from 1939-1945 and 1956-1962 (Bell 1979). And beginning in 1969, the Provisional IRA and its political wing, Provisional Sinn Féin, waged a guerrilla and political campaign in pursuit of a 32 county democratic socialist republic. Between 1969 and 2005, when the Provisional IRA formally ended its campaign and decommissioned weapons, more than 3,600 people were killed.

The conflict has generated an incredible number of scholarly books and articles (see Whyte 1990; McGarry and O’Leary 1995; Hargie and Dickson 2003). The Provisional IRA was responsible for approximately 1,800 of those fatalities, more than any other organization or grouping of activists. Because they played such a prominent role in the conflict, much of the focus has been on the Provisionals (e.g., Bell 1993; Taylor 1997; Moloney 2002, 2010; English 2003) and their successors in “dissident” organizations that continue to support armed struggle for a united Ireland (e.g., Horgan 2012; Morrison 2013). However, state agents, led by the British Army and including the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (amalgamated into the Royal Irish Regiment in 1992; UDR/RIR), were responsible for more than 350 fatalities. In fact, British soldiers killed more Catholic/nationalist civilians in Northern Ireland than they did Provisional IRA volunteers (see Sutton 1994; Conflict Archive on the Internet, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/>>; McKittrick *et al.* 2007).

Repression is “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action” (Tilly, 1978, 100; Davenport *et al.* 2005). Some of the most insightful work on state repression in Ireland – “resistance” to Irish republicans by state forces – has been by journalists and other interested parties. For example, writer/journalist John McGuffin (1973) docu-

mented the use of internment without trial as a part of the state's repertoire of responses to unrest. Journalists Peter Taylor (1980) and Anne Cadwalader (2013) documented the brutalization of suspected republicans by the police and collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries (loyal to the Crown). Similarly, Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray (2016 [1974]) documented the torture of Irish republicans that followed the introduction of internment in 1971 and the British Army's involvement in alleged "shoot-to-kill" operations in which suspected republicans were shot dead when they might have been arrested (Murray 1990; Faul and Murray 2016 [1974]; see also McGuffin 1974). If these activities had occurred in a non-Western country, experts would have labelled them "state terrorism". Social scientists who have examined state violence in Ireland include White and White (1995), White (1999), Rolston and Gilmartin (2000), Sluka (2000), and De Fazio (2009, 2013; see also Koopmans, 1997; Earl 2011).

In the following, three different social science methods offer insight on the repression of Irish republicans since 1969: quantitative counts of events; qualitative intensive interviews/oral histories; and visual sociology. Each approach has its costs and benefits and they are only three of several that might enhance our understanding of the conflict and its associated state repression. Other methodological approaches available include participant observation and comparative and historical research (see Ragin 1994, 31-53). My purpose is to demonstrate that our understanding of the dynamic relationship between "resistance" (by Irish republicans in this case) and the state's response ("state resistance" or "state repression") will be significantly enhanced through multi-method approaches.

### 1. *Counts of Events*

A common approach to studying social protest is to examine counts of events over time, such as the monthly number of deaths from political violence (see Rucht *et al.* 1998). Quantitative data on the Irish conflict have been available for decades (such as, Elliott and Flackes 1999 and earlier editions; Sutton 1994), and their examination reveal important dynamics of the conflict.

Figure 1 presents the monthly number of fatalities associated with the Irish conflict between 1966 and 2006. The data show clearly that *something* happened in 1969 that started a low level conflict and in 1971 *something* triggered an escalation of violence that peaked in 1972. Political violence stayed at a relatively high level for a few years and then stabilized at a lower but still deadly level that lasted into the 1990s. The effect of the Provisional IRA's 1994 cease-fire and the Omagh bomb in 1998 that killed 29 people are also shown (the Omagh bomb was the single most deadly incident in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 2005).

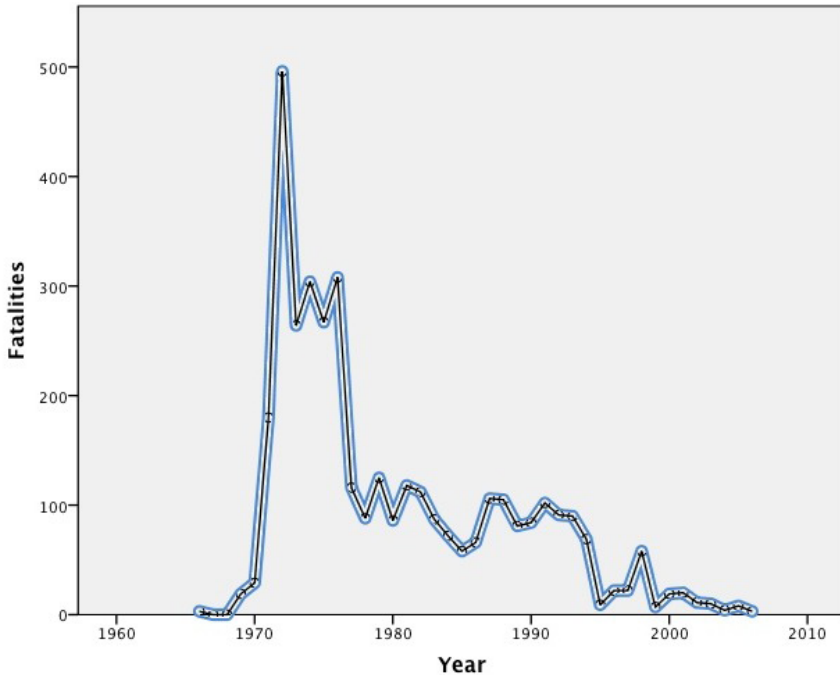


Figure 1 - Deaths Caused By Irish Political Violence, 1966-2006.  
Source: D. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, 2007

Historians, journalists, and social scientists have identified key events that explain the onset of conflict in 1969 and its rapid escalation in 1971 (Bell 1979; Bishop and Mallie 1987; English 2003). In the late 1960s, a civil rights movement sought equal rights for the minority nationalist/Catholic community who faced discrimination from the majority unionist/Protestant community (not all Catholics are nationalists and not all unionists are Protestant). The Northern Ireland government at Stormont grudgingly granted civil rights demands while loyalists (loyal to the Crown) and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) assaulted peaceful civil rights activists. This culminated in August 1969 with major rioting in Derry and loyalist attacks on Catholic neighbourhoods in Belfast. In the short term, the British Army replaced the RUC as peacekeepers. In the long term, the British Army became an agent of repression.

Unrest in both communities escalated and in the summer of 1971 the British gave the Northern Irish government permission to introduce internment without trial. It was a standard response to unrest (McGuffin 1973). Even though nationalists and unionists had engaged in violence, on 9 August 1971, British soldiers raided nationalist areas, arrested suspected IRA sympathizers, and held them without charge or trial. It was a gross violation of



civil liberties and the Provisional IRA experienced a sudden increase in support that was immediately translated into paramilitary activity, as shown in Figure 1. Internment was followed by Bloody Sunday. On 30 January 1972, at an anti-internment march, British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed nationalists/Catholics in Derry; a 14th victim died later. Violence peaked in 1972.

From the founding of Northern Ireland in 1920, Irish nationalists had long-standing grievances against the local Stormont government and the British government in London. Until August of 1971, those grievances had not generated a mass insurgency. Presenting the annual count of fatalities and having a basic understanding of events shows that the response of state authorities to unrest was a key variable that gave the Provisional IRA mass support in the early 1970s and provided enough support that they would they would remain active for a quarter of a century (see Bell 1979, 1993).

Figure 1 also shows that when it is carefully organized, state repression can inhibit violence. At the end of July 1972, the British Army implemented Operation Motorman. Soldiers saturated Provisional IRA strongholds in Belfast, Derry, and other locations. The heavy presence of troops limited paramilitary operations and violence declined. Over time, more sophisticated counter-insurgency techniques, and other factors beyond the discussion here, reduced the violence even more. Between the late 1970s and 1998, there was a low-grade insurgency in Northern Ireland that the authorities could contain, but not eliminate.

The data in Figure 1 were compiled by a mix of journalists and historians and offer a summary of *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles* (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 13-21). *Lost Lives* is an amazing resource for detailed and sobering information on the victims. Another detailed source is Malcom Sutton's *Bear in Mind These Dead: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993* (1994). Although some have questioned the categorization that Sutton provides (Bruce 1997), the general conclusions drawn from McKittrick *et al.* are consistent with those of Sutton. Further, because both McKittrick and Sutton present detailed information on each death, scholars may draw on the raw data to classify the deaths according to schemes that fit their own research agendas, e.g., focusing on the activities of Republican or Loyalist organizations.

Recently developed "terrorism" databases also offer counts of events on the Irish conflict. The most prominent of these is probably the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which offers information on "non-state" political violence across the world (Lafree and Dugan 2007; Global Terrorism Database 2011, <<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>>). Scholars and other interested parties may browse the GTD by region, country, attack type ("armed assault", "bombing/explosion", etc.), and perpetrator group. The data are "open-source" and scholars may focus on the activities of individual organizations as varied as Al-Qaeda, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the

Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). As is always the case, however, there is a risk to relying on secondary data. With respect to Ireland, the GTD should be viewed with caution. For example, six civilians and a military chaplain were killed in the famous bombing of the British army base at Aldershot in February 1972. The bomb is often wrongly described as a reply to Bloody Sunday when in fact it had been planned for some time. The GTD (accessed 20 April 2017) attributes the bomb to both the “Official IRA” (who were responsible) *and* the generic Irish Republican Army (see Bell 1993, 288).

There is not a specific entry for the Provisional IRA. Instead, the GTD reports incidents for the Irish Republican Army that were perpetrated between 1970 on through to 2011. A Continuity IRA (formed in 1986) attack in Dungannon in November 2003 and a Real IRA (formed in 1997) attack in Derry in May 2011 are attributed to the Irish Republican Army (GTD, accessed 20 April 2017; “British Crown Forces Targeted” 2003; “For The Record”, 2011). The Continuity IRA and the Real IRA are found among the perpetrator groups, but these attacks are not attributed to those organizations. Although the GTD has improved over time, the data should be handled with care<sup>2</sup>. It is also important to note that some scholars painstakingly collect their own data (see Tilly 1978, 245-306; Demirel-Pegg 2014).

Research on the conflict in Ireland that draws on event counts has found important results (such as, Thompson 1989; White 1993a; Lafree, Dugan and Korte 2009). Peroff and Hewitt (1980), as an example, drew on Richard Deutsch and Vivien Magowan’s three volume *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of Events* (1968-1974) to show the effect of different policy approaches on Catholic and Protestant rioting between 1969 and 1973.

With respect to understanding state repression and its influence on activism, the most important limitation of event counts is that they only document a reaction, they do not necessarily tell us why the reaction occurred. Figure 1 shows that internment and Bloody Sunday were followed by an increase in political violence but the counts do not explain *why* people turned to armed struggle. Was it because young nationalists wanted to lash out and hit back at the British or because state violence de-legitimated state authority and suggested that political violence was an appropriate political choice? The

<sup>2</sup> The issues noted with respect to the GTD and the Irish conflict are at the time of writing and are subject to correction. For example, into 2016, the GTD attributed to the Official IRA incidents that occurred as recently as 2013. As of March 2017, however, the most recent attack attributed to the Officials was in September 1979. Currently (accessed 20 April 2017) listed under the generic Irish Republican Army are recent events perpetrated by a variety of organizations that include the New Irish Republican Army, the Continuity Irish Republican Army, Oglaiigh na hEireann, the Real Irish Republican Army and older events that would have been perpetrated by the Provisional IRA. The value of these data will likely depend upon how familiar a given researcher is with Irish Republicanism.

best way to learn how repressive events shaped the lives and decision-making processes of activists is to speak to them (see also Sageman 2014; White 2017).

## 2. *Intensive Interviews/Oral Histories*

Intensive interviews and oral histories are frequently used to study involvement in social movements and political protest (see Portelli 1991; della Porta 1992; Blee and Taylor 2002). Accounts from activists offer rich, detailed information on the motives and social processes that promote recruitment and sustain activism. Several authors have interviewed activists to better understand the conflict in Ireland (such as, Bell 1979; Sluka 1989; Moloney 2002, 2010; Bosi 2012; Reinisch 2016).

The quotations that follow are from interviews I have conducted with activists in the Irish Republican Movement (see White 1993b, 2017). For a respondent from Portadown who joined the Provisionals in the early 1970s, Bloody Sunday was important, but that event in and of itself did not prompt his recruitment. His involvement was also influenced by the state's response to events which included suspending civil liberties and introducing internment without trial in the context of a civil rights campaign:

*Q: What made you change – change your mind (about peaceful protest)...?*

*A:* Well, um – different events, like Bloody Sunday and such like things like that convinced me totally that there was not – the only way to get rid of them was through armed struggle. That you weren't going to do it by peaceful marches. Like the civil rights marches were some massive big marches, multi-thousands of people, you know? And there was a bit of a feeling that this would do something. But it turned out like that nobody listened to the masses that were marching.

For this respondent political violence became an option because of the perceived failure of peaceful protest. His involvement in the Republican Movement was a *political* decision and not a simple reaction that he wanted to hit back in response to Bloody Sunday.

Governments learn from their mistakes. We can pretty much assume that the British Army took steps to ensure that there would never be another Bloody Sunday. Previous Dublin governments had interned Irish republicans in response to insurgencies. With first-hand evidence that it would be counter-productive, the Dublin government did not re-introduce internment in the 1970s. Following Operation Motorman, successive British and Irish governments did employ an array of counter-insurgency methods to constrain Irish republicans.

In Northern Ireland, British troops, the RUC, and the UDR/RIR patrolled city streets and the countryside, supported by helicopters. Activists and potential activists were monitored. Tens of thousands of homes were raided. There

would be millions of car searches. The Irish government worked to secure the border and monitor activists. Both governments introduced legislation making it easier to obtain convictions and over time there was more and more cooperation between the Irish, Northern Irish, and British security establishments (see Burke 1987, 41-42; Bell 1993, 287-288, 362-363, 404; Coogan 2000, 382-383).

Much of Northern Ireland became a war zone. Counts of fatalities and changes in the monthly size of the security forces do not capture what life was like for Irish republicans. Personal accounts from activists do. The following is from an activist who grew up in Newry and was a teenager in the early 1970s when she became involved with the Provisionals. She responded to the general question of why she became involved in the Republican Movement:

A: Well, I decided to get involved with the Republican Movement because – I was 8 years old when the Troubles started, when the present campaign started in the Six Counties, and the family was all Republican and most of my friends' fathers and that were taken away and interned. And I used to – used to see the Brits regularly beating women and men and that on the streets. And I myself was beat up. I was only about twelve. So I just knew, even when I was so young, that this was Ireland and they had no right to be here. Beating us up. And I knew at that stage that the police was corrupt. The B-Specials [a reserve police force disbanded in 1970] and – would just come into nationalist areas and breaking down doors and beating people up and things like that. You know, and taking them away. And hearing on the news that a man was shot dead because he was Catholic. That kind of thing. I just knew that it was all wrong and that eh – that there was an army called the IRA that was fighting to get them out...They had no right to be here. And it wasn't until I got older that I sort of understood the thing a bit better then, you know?

The respondent was influenced by a complex panoply of social forces, including her family background, state repression from the police and the British Army, and loyalist attacks on Catholic civilians. Through the 1970s and into the 1990s, the authorities would use a combination of measures to monitor activists and limit their ability to operate.

At the front of the counterinsurgency were the RUC, the British Army, and the UDR/RIR. This respondent, from Belfast, was a teenager when he joined the Provisionals in the early 1980s. He had no memory of the civil rights movement but he was very aware of police harassment:

*Q: Do you remember the Civil Rights Movement?*

A: No.

*Q: No? Okay, before you got involved, being from a Republican family were you harassed? Was your family harassed by the RUC?*

A: Oh yeah. Well about two or three years ago before I joined Sinn Féin the British Army and the RUC came to our home. It was three or four in the morning and they stripped the house down. They took my father away in his pajamas, and he wasn't released until six o'clock that night.

A count of the number of persons arrested would not capture the experience of an early morning raid in which the house was “stripped” and your father arrested only to be released without charge fourteen hours later.

Accounts collected through intensive interviews and oral histories are an important source for understanding human behaviour. Like counts of events, accounts from activists have their limits. Memories are fallible. Some activists will intentionally lie while others will unintentionally tailor their responses to make themselves and/or their movement look better. Scholars who collect intensive interviews should recognize these threats and take steps to limit their influence, such as by checking accounts against the historical record (Brown and Sime 1981; White 2007). Unfortunately, the collection of intensive interviews from activists in the Irish conflict has recently come under a different kind of threat.

In the early 2000s, the “Belfast Project” quietly collected interviews from veteran Irish Republican and Loyalist activists. The goal was to record the “motives and mind sets of participants in the conflict, a resource of inestimable value for future studies attempting to understand the phenomenology of societal violence” (Hachey and O’Neill 2010, 2). The project was funded by Boston College and directed by journalist Ed Moloney and a key reason that persons agreed to be interviewed was the promise that their accounts would be not be made public for thirty years or until after the respondents had died. When Moloney published *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (2010), which was based on interviews with former IRA commander Brendan Hughes (1948-2008) and prominent loyalist David Ervine (1953-2007), it was assumed that the project was safely lodged with the Burns Library of Boston College.

In his account, Brendan Hughes implicated Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Féin, and Ivor Bell, a reported former IRA leader, in the 1972 murder of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of ten and alleged informer. Hughes was deceased and the controversy might have faded but for statements from Dolours Price, who was still living. Price implicated herself and Gerry Adams in the McConville case and revealed that she had also been interviewed. Subpoenas ultimately led to the transfer of some interviews from Boston College to the Police Service Northern Ireland (the RUC’s successor), several arrests, and charges against Ivor Bell and loyalist Winston Rea (see for example, Pals and Lowman 2012; “The Belfast Project, Boston College, and a Sealed Subpoena”).

The Belfast Project casts a long shadow over scholarship based on interviews with activists. Even if the questions asked are not controversial, respondents today are rightly concerned that their personal opinions might end up in the hands of the authorities. This may hinder scholarship for the foreseeable future but with time the controversy will fade. In the meantime here is a third methodology available that thus far has been underutilized.

### 3. *Visual Sociology*

Photographs and video have for decades documented the state's response to protest in Ireland. An RUC attack on a peaceful civil rights march, in Derry on 5 October 1968, is often considered the start of the modern "Irish Troubles". The shocking attack was filmed and broadcast world-wide and the film is often included in documentaries. Books, newspapers, magazines, and documentaries addressing the conflict often include photographs or film of rioting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, photos of IRA and loyalist volunteers, and the funerals of the 1981 hunger strikers, especially the funeral of Bobby Sands (see for example, O'Doherty 1986). To the author's knowledge, however, there has been no systematic examination of the conflict in Ireland through the lens of visual sociology (see Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013).

Visual sociology is "based on the premise that the world that is seen, photographed, drawn or otherwise represented visually is different from the world that is represented through words and numbers" (Harper 2012, 4). Visual sociology "connects to different realities" and therefore leads to different understandings and insights when compared to more traditional social science methods (*ibidem*; see also Becker 1998). In the 1990s, two Provisional IRA ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement (1998) greatly reduced the level of conflict in Ireland but, as shown in Figure 1, conflict did not end. The ongoing conflict provides an opportunity to examine state repression through visual sociology.

Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA, which split from the Provisionals in 1986, are two of several "dissident" Irish Republican organizations that reject the Good Friday Agreement. They also reject the "dissident" label and argue that it is the Provisionals who have abandoned the ethos of Irish Republicanism.

Republican Sinn Féin is widely viewed as the political wing of the Continuity IRA, but the connection is denied. The party does acknowledge that the two organizations share the same political goal and supports the right of Irish people to engage in armed struggle in pursuit of a united Ireland. Because of this, its members are subject to state repression. However, the nature of state repression has changed. With the decommissioning of Provisional IRA weapons in 2005 and the transformation of Sinn Féin into a fully constitutional party that is embraced by most Irish republicans, there was no longer a need for a heavy police and army presence on the streets of Northern Ireland or spy posts in places like South Armagh, and so on. Visual sociology offers insight on the subtle kinds of state repression that are currently used against Irish republicans.

Republican Sinn Féin pledges its allegiance to the all-Ireland Republic proclaimed in 1916 and does not recognize the authority of the Northern Ireland or Dublin governments that resulted from the Government of Ireland Act (1920). Over Easter weekend (25-28 March) of 2016, the Dublin government and several non-governmental organizations commemorated the 100th anni-

versary of the Easter Rising. On 26 March 2016 (Holy Saturday), Republican Sinn Féin organized a commemorative event in the Kilwilkie Estate in Lurgan, County Armagh, Northern Ireland. A parade led by a “Republican colour guard” marched to nearby St. Colman’s Cemetery where wreaths were laid in honour of deceased republicans. Republican Sinn Féin advertised the march but did not notify the authorities of the march. It was, therefore, an illegal march.

Image 1 shows the colour guard – dressed in fatigues and wearing scarves and berets – marching through the Kilwilkie Estate. The fatigues and scarves are controversial and often draw the attention of the press, anti-Republican political figures, and the police (see McDonald 2016). Prior to the event, an unmarked police car drove through the area and passed by several people who participated. A helicopter appeared overhead.



1 - Republican colour guard, Kilwilkie Estate, Lurgan (26 March 2016)  
© Robert White

At St. Colman’s Cemetery, speakers addressed a small crowd and the “Easter Statement from the Leadership of the Republican Movement” was read by a member of the colour guard. At one point, a Police Service North-

ern Ireland (PSNI) land rover stopped outside the main cemetery gate. The threat of arrest was enough that some people, primarily those with small children, withdrew from the scene. After a short period of time the land rover moved on; the helicopter was present throughout the event.

In Image 2, a member of the colour guard addresses the crowd while the helicopter hovers overhead. The helicopter is relatively high above the cemetery and it appears that its presence was a minor inconvenience. However, at times the helicopter would fly at a lower level, perhaps to allow for better photography and/or video recording by the authorities, and this would make it difficult to hear speakers. Also, as I moved about the cemetery trying to photograph the speaker and the helicopter in one image, it seemed that the helicopter would intentionally change location. Filming, instead of photographing the speaker and the helicopter, would probably have provided a better record of the event.



2 - A member of the colour guard reads the "Easter Statement" while a helicopter hovers overhead (26 March 2016) © Robert White



Two days after the Lurgan event, Republican Sinn Féin commemorated the “Easter Rising Centenary” with a march in Dublin from the Garden of Remembrance in Parnell Square to the nearby General Post Office (GPO) on O’Connell Street. The authorities were not notified of this march, either.

Before the march, there was a heavy police presence in front of the Garden of Remembrance. Image 3 shows groups of officers from the counterterrorism Special Detective Unit (“Special Branch”), wearing distinctive dark blue jackets and hats, standing in the street and watching potential marchers, interested passersby, and journalists.



3 - Police officers (with “Garda” on the back of their jackets) observing the crowd outside of the Garden of Remembrance (28 March 2016)

© Robert White

A piper and colour guard usually lead a Republican Sinn Féin march. As members of the colour guard began to “form up”, members of the Special Branch moved in to explain that they would not be allowed to wear scarves over their faces, as shown in Image 4. The officers claimed it was illegal for the colour guard to cover their faces in public, but no specific legislation was identified. When someone in the crowd asked if that applied to women wearing burqas, there was no reply. As the police officer left the conversation he repeated his warning that they would not be allowed to parade through Dublin’s streets wearing their scarves.



4 - A member of the Special Branch warns members of the colour guard that they will not be allowed to march with their faces covered (28 March 2016) © Robert White

In addition to the disagreement over the wearing of scarves, the route of the march had to be negotiated. It was a holiday and as part of the state's commemoration of Easter 1916, streets in central Dublin were blocked. In contrast to the small number of people who witnessed the Lurgan parade, central Dublin was crowded with shoppers, vendors, entertainers, other commemorative events, and so on. There was some concern that the march would not be allowed to reach the GPO. Image 5 combines three separate photographs of Des Dalton, the President of Republican Sinn Féin (along with other members of the party) negotiating the parade route with a Garda Superintendent (wearing the more formal cap) while members of the Special Branch (in baseball caps) watch. After some discussion, there was an agreed upon circuitous route to the landmark GPO.



5 - Des Dalton works to arrange the parade route for Republican Sinn Féin's march in central Dublin (28 March 2016) © Robert White

When the march left the Garden of Remembrance, the colour guard had their scarves but they were not covering their faces. By the time they reached the GPO, they had paraded past thousands of people with their scarves covering their faces, as shown in Image 6.



6 - A republican colour guard leads the “Easter Rising Centenary” march through central Dublin (28 March 2016) © Robert White

After the group took their positions in front of a podium from which speakers would address a sizeable crowd, Special Branch officers walked into the formation and pulled the scarves down. Image 7 presents two photographs combined into one image. It was a petty and provocative display of the ability of state agents to interfere with an event. If someone had resisted, s/he would have been arrested. And even if the charges were eventually dropped, it might be after a year or more of entanglement in the legal system.



7 - A member of the Garda Special Branch pulls the scarf from the face of a member of the republican colour guard (28 March 2016) © Robert White

Attempts to intimidate anti-GFA activists are frequent. The Easter Rising started on Monday, 24 April 1916. There were commemorative events at Easter 2016 (27 March) and then a month later around the anniversary date. Another Republican Sinn Féin march from the Garden of Remembrance to the GPO, on Sunday, 23 April 2016, passed without incident. A few hours after that march, however, activists were relaxing in a Dublin pub when members of the Special Branch arrived, as shown in Image 8. The officers walked from the front of the pub to the back, looked around, and then returned to the front and left. And in May 2016, following another “un-notified” Republican Sinn Féin event in Lurgan, the PSNI arrested twelve people suspected “of offences under the public processions act and associated offences”. A ten-year old boy was among those questioned by the PSNI and several people have been charged (see Young 2016).



8 - Members of the Special Branch walk through a group of Republican Sinn Féin supporters in a Dublin pub (taken with a cell phone; 23 April 2016)  
© Robert White

A next step in this visual analysis might be “photo-elicitation”, which combines intensive interview methods with visual sociology. As Harper (2012, 156) describes it, photo-elicitation involves “inserting a photograph (or other image, though most are photos) into the research interview” (see also Collier and Collier 1986; Blinn and Harrist 1991). In a photo-elicitation, members of Republican Sinn Féin, the colour guard, and/or the Special Branch might

be asked to offer their perspective on the photographs presented here. Photo-elicitation would probably reveal interesting insight on dissent and repression in the Republic of Ireland.

In Ireland, photographs and video have for decades documented dissent and the state's response. Quantitative analyses and intensive interviews/oral histories show the influence of high-level repression like internment or Bloody Sunday and less intense but still important (mid-range) repression, like being arrested but not charged. Irish republicans (and other activists) have also experienced subtle and petty state repression/harassment for decades, if not centuries. Our understanding of this kind of repression and its influence on activism can be better understood through visual sociology, especially with photo-elicitation.

Like event counts and intensive interviews/oral histories, visual sociology has its threats. The decision to include some images and not others, along with fundamental questions of obtaining access and deciding when and where to take photos or video, will influence the presentation. And underlying every presentation is an assumption that the investigator has not manipulated the images (Prosser 1998; Harper 2012). That assumption, of course, applies to all social data.

#### *4. Conclusion*

For centuries Irish republicans have resisted Britain's influence in Ireland. In reply, various state authorities have repressed ('resisted') Irish republicans. Different research methodologies demonstrate the different kinds of repression that Irish republicans have faced and offer insight on the reaction to repression. As described, there are merits to each of the methodological approaches, but there are also limitations.

Most important, the presentation shows that our understanding of state repression of dissent is significantly enhanced if we employ a variety of research methods. The power of sophisticated statistical analyses of quantitative data is complemented by the insight provided by accounts from intensive interviews/oral histories and the documentation provided by photographs and videos. Photo-elicitation provides an opportunity for additional insight. If our goal as social scientists is to better understand human behaviour, then we should be open to multi-method approaches.

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# ‘Homosexuals Are Revolting’ – Gay & Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland 1970s – 1990s

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## *Abstract:*

The current historiography on the early gay and lesbian liberation movement in Ireland 1970s-1990s has resulted in a narrative which has focused solely on the battle to decriminalise sexual activity between males. In turn, this has presented a picture of a movement comprised of one individual, David Norris, and one goal, decriminalisation. This narrative is predominantly an urban one, which excludes the activities of provincial activists, and most notably lesbian women. In this paper, I move away from viewing David Norris’ legal battle as the only form of resistance to Ireland’s sexual mores. Instead, I explore the other, often forgotten, forms of resistance carried out by Ireland’s gay and lesbian citizens; such as their attempts to create public spaces for gay and lesbian individuals; the appearance of homosexuals in the media to try dispel the negative stereotypes of homosexuality, and finally, their organisation of public demonstrations to declare pride in their identity and demand their place in Irish society. By doing so, these actions facilitated a public dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately helped change the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuality and renegotiated Ireland’s sexual mores.

*Keywords:* Irish Gay & Lesbian Movement, Liberation, Sexual Mores, Stereotypes, Resistance

## *1. Introduction*

On May 22, 2015, in what has been described as a social revolution within Irish society, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same sex marriage by popular vote. 41 of Ireland’s 42 constituencies, representing 1,202,198 people (62.01% of electorate) (Hand 2015), overwhelming endorsed the following amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution): “Mar-

riage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex”<sup>1</sup>. Internationally, Ireland received widespread praise and admiration as a beacon for LGBT civil rights, with United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon remarking: “The result sends an important message to the world: All people are entitled to enjoy their human rights no matter who they are or whom they love”<sup>2</sup>. The widespread backing for same sex marriage in Ireland was supported by many sections of Irish society in both rural and urban areas. In a society such as Ireland, which, since the foundation of the state up to decriminalisation in 1993 had viewed sexual acts between males as criminal activity and homosexuals as sick and perverted, how is it that Ireland has now become a beacon for the LGBT community throughout the world? Moreover, how was it possible for the leaders of the main political parties, most notably Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Fine Gael, often seen as socially conservative, to express support for marriage equality without suffering any political fallout or significant controversy? In the aftermath of Ireland’s historic decision to legalise same sex marriage, commentators sought to explain this dramatic transformation in a country once renowned for its so-called strict adherence to Catholic social teaching. In an article in the *Irish Independent*, titled, “Our Republic of Equals Has sent a Message of Hope to the Entire World”, former Labour party leader, Eamon Gilmore, argued that Ireland’s positive endorsement for marriage equality owed much to the efforts of the Women’s Movement. Gilmore stated:

The modernisation of Ireland, and the liberalisation of its social laws, owes much to education, and to the women’s movement. . . . Women gave the lead. They were no longer willing to have their lives and their childbearing determined by elderly celibate and often unsympathetic, male clerics. By persisting to oppose and condemn artificial contraception, the Catholic Church lost its hold on Ireland’s social laws. (Gilmore 2015)

Others argued that the transformation was the direct result of an individual effort on the part of Senator David Norris. In Seanad Éireann (Upper House of the Irish Parliament), Senators congratulated David Norris on getting “the ball rolling many decades ago when it was neither popular nor profitable” (Lord 2015) Fianna Fáil’s Denis O’Donovan, who entered Seanad Éireann in 1989, argued: “At that stage Senator Norris was ploughing a lone furrow, not alone in this House, but in this country and he was often scoffed at by members of my party and other parties” (*ibidem*). Similarly, Senator Eamonn Coghlan

<sup>1</sup> “Wording of same-sex marriage referendum published”, *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ), 21 January 2015, <<http://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0121/674602-marriage-equality/>> (05/2017).

<sup>2</sup> “Ban Ki-moon praises Ireland on marriage equality vote”, *Irish Examiner*, 24 May 2015 <<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/ban-ki-moon-praises-ireland-on-marriage-equality-vote-678570.html>> (05/2017).

remarked: “I take this opportunity to acknowledge Senator David Norris as the pathfinder on this human rights issue and for his role in leading us to a more modern Ireland” (*ibidem*). Prior to the referendum other politicians such as former prime minister Albert Reynolds and former justice minister Maire Geoghegan-Quinn had also been credited with helping this transformation. At his death, in 2014, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, stated that former prime minister Albert Reynolds had helped start “the great transformation in the status of lesbian and gay people in Ireland” (Brophy 2014). Although Reynolds was indeed prime minister when sexual activity between males was decriminalised, he had never been an outspoken proponent of decriminalization<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, in a 2004 article in the *Irish Independent*, former Minister for Justice Maire Geoghegan-Quinn was listed as one of only 5 individuals who helped change “gay Ireland”<sup>4</sup>. While Maire Geoghegan-Quinn was justifiably lauded for introducing the Sexual Offences Bill in 1993, for many years Geoghegan-Quinn, along with Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party had studiously avoided introducing legislation to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation or to decriminalise male homosexuality.

An examination of the most notable grand histories of twentieth century Ireland reveal little, if anything, on the existence of nationwide gay and lesbian organisations in Ireland (Brown 2004, Keogh 1994, Ferriter 2004, Foster 2007). Other accounts, such as Chrystel Hug’s, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, focused solely on the legal treatment of homosexuality, excluding completely any account of the role of lesbian women in Irish society, not to mention a nationwide gay and lesbian movement. Hug concludes her analysis, for example, by mentioning the existence of a movement, while focusing completely on David Norris’s role:

[He took] his own liberalisation campaign to its rightful conclusion thanks to the fantastic expert work of his lawyer and friend, now President of Ireland had put into it ... The legalisation of homosexual acts was hailed as one of the historic events of the decade, a satisfying conclusion to nearly two decades of commitment and involvement in the gay rights movement on the part of David Norris. (Hug 1999, 228)

Diarmaid Ferriter’s, *Occasions of Sin*, briefly explored the impact of AIDS and the split within the Irish Gay and Lesbian Movement, it specifically focused on the legal campaign and produces much the same kind of narrative as that of Hug. Moreover, Ferriter’s is very much an urban account restricted to Dublin, and it says very little about the early lesbian movement in Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> “Legislation on Homosexuality”, *Dáil Eireann Debate* 420, 6, 3 June 1992.

<sup>4</sup> “Five people who changed gay Ireland”, *Independent*, 1 May 2004, <<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/five-people-who-changed-gay-ireland-25912487.html>> (05/2017).

The current narrative has reduced a broad Irish Gay and Lesbian liberation movement to the actions of a single individual (David Norris) and to the single campaign for decriminalization. The overwhelming focus on the role of David Norris completely ignores the creation of a gay/lesbian identity in Ireland during the 1970s/1980s, and a movement which could not suddenly have appeared in 1993. By focusing on the role of a few pioneering politicians, historians exclude all those gay and lesbian individuals who were active agents in their own liberation. By focusing on the campaign for decriminalisation historians presume that legal reform was the sole concern of homosexuals, both male and female in Ireland. Furthermore, if lesbian acts were never criminalised, are we to believe that lesbianism constituted an accepted sexuality in Ireland during this period? One might be forgiven for thinking that the decriminalisation alone led to the emergence and acceptance of Irish homosexuals in Irish society. Societal attitudes in Ireland apparently could be changed almost overnight with the introduction of sympathetic legislation. A gradual process of education and discourse outside of the courts and parliament, it would seem, was not necessary in Ireland to change attitudes, to the extent with which it was in most other countries.

The reality of course, is not so straightforward. While there can be no doubt that David Norris's victory at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988 was a watershed moment in the history of legal rights, it would be misleading to view the legal campaign as the only form of political resistance carried out by lesbian and gay individuals against their oppression in the 1970s and 1980s. I argue that this resistance involved women as well as men throughout Irish society who took up issues beyond narrowly legal ones, and that it was not restricted to urban Dublin. In the rest of this paper I argue that the untold stories of gay and lesbian activists throughout Irish society in the 1970s and 1980s were largely responsible for the sea change in public attitudes that characterizes the last decade of Irish history. The multiple forms of resistance and activism of gay and lesbian activists during the 1970s and 1980s contributed far more to the dramatic changes that have taken place in the last 40 years in Irish society than did the legal campaign against legal discrimination. The resistance I will discuss in this paper was highly diverse, it fought to create lesbian and gay spaces throughout Ireland, it promoted a greater understanding and tolerance of lesbian and gay individuals through the media and attempted to claim a full place in Irish society through public demonstrations.

Irish gay and lesbian activists in the latter half of the twentieth century began a dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately helped to win over a vast proportion of Irish society and renegotiated Ireland's sexual mores. Its success was so notable, that by 1993, the then government could introduce legislation, not only to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, but also, other legislation sympathetic to homosexuals, without much opposition, both inside and outside Leinster House.

## 2. *Everyday Resistance*

From infancy, we are taught and conditioned to believe that any expression of sexuality which does not conform to the rigid, procrustean heterosexual norm is perversion. We are, in fact programmed to regard all feelings of sexual or sensual attraction for a person of our own sex as a sign of moral degeneracy and decadence.<sup>5</sup>

In her analysis of queer life in San Francisco, Nan Alamilla Boyd argued: “the politics of everyday life became an important venue for resisting dominant social structures” (Boyd 2003, 71). Much like their gay and lesbian counterparts in San Francisco, Irish lesbian and gay individuals in the 1970s/1980s resisted society’s condemnation of their sexual orientation by choosing to live out, as openly as possible, a gay or lesbian lifestyle. Their refusal to follow the accepted social mores was crucial in the creation of a gay and lesbian identity in Ireland at a time when such behaviour was not welcomed. While, gay and lesbian individuals had lived out a gay/lesbian lifestyle prior to the 1970s; the 1970s heralded active attempts to foster a new sense of community amongst these gay and lesbian individuals, by creating venues openly advertised as gay/lesbian venues, and by taking part in events organised by gay/lesbian groups. Significantly, these efforts took place, not only in the larger cities of Dublin and Cork, but also in provincial areas such as Galway, Clonmel, Limerick, Kilkenny, Sligo and many more.

Following the founding of the first gay rights organisation in Ireland, the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) in 1974, groups inside and outside of Dublin quickly began to emerge, such as, Cork Irish Gay Rights Movement in 1976, Liberation for Irish Lesbians (LIL) in 1978, the National Gay Federation (NGF) in 1979, the Cork Gay Collective (CGC) Cork Lesbian Collective in 1980/1983, Dublin Gay Collective and the Galway Irish Gay Rights Movement and Galway Gay Collective also in 1980. In comparison with other countries, the number of gay and lesbian groups in Ireland was quite remarkable, particularly for such a small country. While these groups were not homogenous in their aims and the activism in these regions was different in scale, the groups, nevertheless, shared at least one common goal; the creation of gay & lesbian spaces for Irish homosexuals to socialise in, without judgment, ridicule or persecution. Together these spaces helped to foster a sense of a gay and lesbian community, at a time when their very identity was neither recognised nor tolerated.

The IGRM was responsible for the establishment of the first publicly recognised and run gay and lesbian centre in the Republic of Ireland, the Phoenix Club, at 46 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. In Cork, Cork IGRM and the Cork

<sup>5</sup> National Library of Ireland (NLI), Irish Queer Archive (IQA), MS 45,966/5, “Fairview Park”, *NGF News*, c. 1983.

Gay Collective also succeeded in acquiring premises shortly afterwards, known as the Phoenix Club on MacCurtain Street and Quay Co-Op on O'Sullivan's Quay, respectively (Egan 2014b). While, in 1979, the NGF established the Hirschfeld Centre on Fownes Street, which became the focal point of gay social life in Dublin for much of the 1980s<sup>6</sup>. What is perhaps most striking about both venues in Cork and Dublin was their acceptance by and amicable relationship with An Garda Síochána. Cathal Kerrigan, who was involved with the Cork IGRM and Cork Gay Collective, remembered how those involved in the Cork IGRM invited the local police to visit the centre to reinforce that "there were no drugs or fornication on the premises"<sup>7</sup>.



1 – Advertisements for Irish Gay Rights Movement (*The Cork Review*, April-May 1981)

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Redmond on the foundation of the National Gay Federation and the opening of the Hirschfeld Centre (see Redmond 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Cathal Kerrigan interview with author, 14 January 2016.

Rather than attempting to disguise the true nature of these premises, those involved actively sought to promote and advertise them as locations specifically geared towards or welcoming of homosexuals. The Hirschfeld Centre, not alone being named after a Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering gay rights activist in Germany, even placed a pink triangle outside its entrance, while the Quay Co-Op hung a banner outside the centre supporting lesbian and gay pride week in 1984 in Cork City. Moreover, while many publications, primarily the mainstream national newspapers refused to accept advertisements for these organisations and premises, gay and lesbian activists did succeed in placing advertisements in more liberal local publications, such as *The Cork Review*, *Hot Press*, *In Dublin*, and even regional publications such as the *Mayo News*, and the *Galway Advertiser* (see Figure 1). The advertisements, particularly those in the *Cork Review*, *In Dublin* and *Hot Press*, publicly stated the title of the organisations, their location, contact details and activities. In other words, anyone reading these journals was made aware of the existence of venues for gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. Throughout the early 1980s, advertisements for both Phoenix Club's and the Hirschfeld Centre were a common feature of the aforementioned publications, so much so, that in October 1983, *In Dublin*, introduced a "Gay" section in their events guide, listing the different gay venues and activities taking place in Dublin<sup>8</sup>.

These centres presented Irish homosexuals with the opportunity to freely express their sexuality in a non-judgmental environment, and this they did in great numbers. In the Phoenix Club in Dublin and Cork, and the Hirschfeld Centre in Dublin, activities ranged from, discos, theatre groups, hiking groups, poetry reading, a telephone befriending and counselling service, known as Tel-A-Friend and a cinema in the Hirschfeld Centre. Discos, in particular, proved the most popular activity organised by gay groups in Ireland and were a clear sign of the willingness, intended or otherwise, of many Irish homosexuals to challenge Ireland's sexual mores. When the Phoenix Club first opened in 1976, the venue was equipped to hold 150 people, but according to a *Gay News* article over 180 people attended each Friday and Saturday night<sup>9</sup>. By the early 1980s, even in the face of a conservative backlash in Ireland, the Hirschfeld Centre was catering to close to 1,000 individuals, 4 nights a week. In one week alone in March 1981, 1,381 individuals from all over Ireland and abroad attended the discos at the Hirschfeld Centre<sup>10</sup>. One such individual who attended the Hirschfeld Centre, Gerard Lawlor, fondly remembered the Hirschfeld Centre in a 2013 interview, stating:

<sup>8</sup> NLI, Irish Section (IR), 94133 I 2, *In Dublin*, 6-20 October 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), D3762/1/10/1, "Dublin Toast", *Gay News*, c. 1976, Belfast.

<sup>10</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,946/1, "NGF 1981 Weekly Disco Attendances".

When I was 30, which was around 1979, the Hirschfeld Centre was opened and it was, I think, the best thing that happened in Ireland to the gay scene because suddenly we had a place to go to that was organised for us and where you could attend – you could go to discos, you could go in during the week and have coffee. It was a great place. What most of us of course enjoyed was the discos on the Friday and Saturday nights, at the weekends. They were excellent. And there was just a wonderful friendly atmosphere and a great place for gay people to go to.<sup>11</sup>

South of Dublin, in Cork, the Quay Co-Op founded in 1982 facilitated the emergence of the Cork Lesbian Collective in 1983. Perhaps one of the most exciting events organised by activists involved in the lesbian movement in Cork was the ‘Cork Women’s Fun Weekend’ beginning in April 1984, which still takes place today. While this was essentially a mixed event, comprising lesbian and heterosexual women, there was an overwhelmingly strong lesbian influence and participation. According to Deirdre Walsh, a lesbian activist who helped organise the weekend, “the original aim of the fun weekend was to provide a forum for women to spend time with other women in the context of having fun and enjoying ourselves as a counterbalance to ‘women’s’ work never being done, i.e. paid work, caring and nurturing of children, housework, etc. as well as meetings and conferences”<sup>12</sup>. The first Cork Women’s Weekend took place in the Quay Co-Op from 13 to 15 April 1984 (Egan 2014a). Organisers arranged for a disco, cabaret performance, women’s films, discussions, workshops and card games. Remembering her time at the Women’s Weekend, Louise Walsh fondly stated:

It was a huge event for the Cork women to organise, but they pulled it off. Women travelled from all parts of the country. Like a lot of women in Cork, I found the idea of going to a cabaret of all women performers, having days of women’s films, discussions, workshops and card games totally mind-blowing. I identified as heterosexual at the time, but as I watched all these women dancing together, celebrating and flirting in this wonderful atmosphere I knew something quite important and powerful had happened. A strong open lesbian community had rooted itself in Cork ... (1995, 172)

Another individual who attended the weekend in 1985, was Mary Flanagan, a lesbian who travelled from Galway. She remembers the Fun Weekend as an empowering and uplifting experience:

My first outing where I saw lesbians kissing was in a wild and wonderful weekend down in Cork, it happens every year, and I remember going down there with a straight friend of mine because this other woman encouraged us to go and we went on

<sup>11</sup> Gerard Lawlor, *Irish LGBT History Project 2014*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 23 February 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Deirdre Walsh (1988), *Women’s Space Newsletter 2*, May-June, <<http://corklgbtarchive.com/items/show/60>> (05/2017).



the Friday night and there was a disco and at the disco they were dancing. My God, I couldn't believe it, it was like being in heaven and the next morning, I remember the Office Bar down in Cork, on the Sunday morning, there was a gathering around half twelve, and that was just tremendous. I can still feel it. You go in and all these lovely women are inside, nothing but women and the craic was great and there was intimacy, you know, and I just remember coming out to my friends at that stage and that's 1985, I think it was, so that was my first kind of lovely feeling ...<sup>13</sup>

The Cork Women's Fun Weekend, was an event where lesbian women were, firstly able to meet others like them, but secondly were able to express their sexuality in a relaxed and an enjoyable setting. Moreover, these weekends offered an opportunity for women, but specifically lesbian women, for even a weekend, to claim a public space to express their sexuality. Rather than remaining "invisible" and "isolated" these events facilitated the creation of a lesbian identity in Cork and Ireland. Orla Egan, who attended these events writes that: "It helped to forge and foster relationships between women from Cork and elsewhere, Belfast, Galway, Dublin, London etc. I remember literally busloads of women travelling down from Belfast to attend the Cork Women's Fun Weekend in the 1980s" (Egan 2014a). As Mary Flanagan highlighted, the Cork Women's Weekend was an exhilarating and empowering weekend for those coming to terms with their sexuality. It offered hope that being lesbian in Ireland, but specifically for provincial lesbian women, did not have to be hidden or seen as intolerable. For Mary Flanagan the Cork Women's Fun Weekend appears to have given her the confidence to accept her sexuality and come out to friends.

Even in areas without a gay centre, such as Galway and Tipperary, activists in the Galway Gay Collective and Galway IGRM succeeded in arranging venues to host social events for gay and lesbian individuals and played their own part in the shaping of a gay and lesbian identity in their respective regions and resisting heteronormativity. The events in these regions took on a very different character to those in Dublin and Cork, reflecting the much more challenging terrain activists in these regions had to contend with. In order to facilitate these events, symbols and code words were crucially important in resisting societies condemnation and in enabling individuals to participate. For example, in arranging an outing to Connemara in 1983, which involved meeting at Lyons Tower, in Eyre Square, Marese Walsh and John Porter of the Galway Gay Collective, informed those wishing to take part, that they would be recognised by a flower in their lapels<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, in the latter half of the 1980s, activists in Clonmel, Tipperary hosted meetings in Hearn's Hotel, under the name APEX. James Quinn, who attended these meetings in 1987, remembers: "The meeting

<sup>13</sup> Mary Flanagan, *Irish LGBT History Project 2014*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 15 June 2015.

<sup>14</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/6, "Galway Gay Collective to NGF", December 1983.

was called APEX, which was completely anonymous. So, if you arrived into reception, you'd simply say, to the people, Oh, I'm here for an APEX meeting, and they would say oh that's the group over there"<sup>15</sup>.

At these meetings, besides being able to meet and talk to other homosexuals, copies of gay magazines, which otherwise could not have been freely obtained in these regions, such as *Out*, published by NGF, London based *Gay News*, and later *Gay Community News* were handed out. In a clear sign of the emergence of a pink economy in provincial Ireland, James Quinn, remembered, how at certain meetings two individuals would arrive with an enormous cardboard box of merchandise, filled with items such as "fancy underwear and dildos that they would be trying to flog if people were interested"<sup>16</sup>. Discos, while not a regular phenomenon in Galway, did take place. In October 1981, the Galway Gay Collective organised the first gay/lesbian disco in the West of Ireland at the Lenaboy Hotel where 30 people turned up. Not long after, the Galway IGRM began discos in Rockland's Hotel, also in Salthill, which attracted up to 80 people from areas as far away as Cork and Waterford<sup>17</sup>. The success of these discos was reflected in their regular occurrence, which in the case of the Galway IGRM was every three weeks, something which Sean Rabbitte of the Galway IGRM stated led many to believe that "change of a type was beginning to happen" in the early 1980s<sup>18</sup>.

Although the activities in provincial Ireland were more secretive in comparison with events in Dublin and Cork, they nevertheless were crucial in facilitating gay and lesbian individuals to become part of a gay/lesbian community. The very existence of these meetings and events, and participation by many individuals was a strong force of personal resistance. Not only did they facilitate individuals to live out a gay and lesbian lifestyle, they also provided individuals with the opportunity to foster friendships, and in many cases homosexual relationships. One such individual who attended the APEX meetings in Clonmel, Joe O'Mara, stated in a 2013 that it was through attending the APEX meetings that he met his future partner<sup>19</sup>.

By taking part in these events, or crossing the threshold of the Hirschfeld Centre or Phoenix Club, each individual took a personal decision to act out a gay or lesbian lifestyle, thereby challenging the heteronormative lifestyle, which was the only accepted lifestyle in Ireland at this time. Moreover, the *laissez-faire* attitude of the aforementioned journals in advertising gay centres/gay organisations and the tolerance shown by An Garda Síochána helped to gradually

<sup>15</sup> James Quinn, *Irish LGBT History Project 2013*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 28 September 2013.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/6, "John Porter to Bernard Keogh", 19 January 1982.

<sup>18</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,948/8, "Sean Rabbitte", Galway, Irish Gay Rights Movement.

<sup>19</sup> Joe O'Mara, *Irish LGBT History Project 2013*, dir. by Edmund Lynch, 4 August 2015.

normalise such venues/groups in their localities and lay claim to their right to a space within Irish society for such a community. The significance of these social events and venues should not be underestimated. Not only do they show that individuals were determined to circumvent societies negative opinions on homosexuality by taking part in these events, they also highlight the extent to which gay males were willing to risk prosecution. In fact, their determination in doing so, highlights one of the key desires of Irish homosexuals at that time, which was not so much focused on legal reform, but rather a strong desire to meet others like them and end their isolation.

### 3. *Challenging Stereotypes*

During his trial he [Oscar Wilde] spoke of the love that dare not speak its name. On last night's [Week-In] 'Week End', two homosexuals dared not only to speak the name of their love but openly face the television camera and assert their right to acceptance in a heterosexual society.<sup>20</sup>

In a 1974 article in *The Irish Times*, journalist Christina Murphy, who had just attended the first symposium on homosexuality in the Republic of Ireland at Trinity College Dublin, stated those who attended were: "a pretty widely assorted group, comprising young students, clerics, middle-age respectable looking men, very attractive looking girls, country, posh, and working class accents and a contingent from Northern Ireland. They didn't look in the least queer, freaky or weird ..." (Murphy 1974). What is evident from Murphy's comments is that she had obviously expected to see individuals who were in fact queer, freaky or weird and was surprised to find that the gay and lesbian individuals in attendance were in fact a diverse group, not the least bit queer, much like the rest of Irish society. Murphy's comments are, I believe, reflective of a broad cohort of Irish society's views on homosexuals at this time. For the vast majority, they had grown up to believe that homosexuals were freaky and weird, without actually ever meeting, talking, or seeing one, just like Murphy herself. This is hardly surprising, considering no organisation, let alone any individual, had at this point in time come out publicly to challenge these negative assumptions, or proudly declare their sexuality in a public setting. Without doing so, these negative stereotypes were sustained. Positive role models for lesbian and gay individuals, or for that matter, Irish society, did not exist in the Ireland before the 1970s. This in turn allowed the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuality to go unchallenged, thus preventing any acceptance or understanding of homosexuality in Irish society. One individual writing in *Out for*

<sup>20</sup> "Speaking out on a taboo subject", *Irish Press*, 12 February 1980.

*Ourselves* remembered some of the negative stereotypes of homosexuals he was accustomed to hearing when growing up in Ireland before the 1970s:

Growing up gay is very hard, but more so if you happen to be growing up in rural Ireland. You have a very negative attitude all around you and many people would prefer to lose a gay family member rather than have to face the neighbours. ... People saw stereotypes and most articles which appeared in the papers helped to reinforce these stereotyped images. Two of these that my family believed were that all gays were either screaming queens or else they were child molesters. These ideas were implanted within me from a very early age. (Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men's Collectives 1986, 122)

Challenging these negative assumptions and presenting a more humane and positive image of homosexuals was paramount to the long-term liberation of Irish homosexuals. In fact, the 1975 constitution of the IGRM had as one of its main objectives "the promotion of [a] better understanding of homosexuality by the community at large, by education and example"<sup>21</sup>. In trying to do just that, members of the IGRM, along with the NGF, LIL and CGC sought to utilise the media, particularly television, to speak directly to an Irish audience about being either gay or lesbian and what exactly that entailed. Speaking on the first broadcast of RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann) in 1961, former president of Ireland, Éamon de Valera forewarned: "Never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude"<sup>22</sup>. It was precisely this that gay and lesbian activists sought to achieve with their appearances in the media. In the period from 1977 to 1980, Irish homosexuals bravely appeared on three separate television programmes to try dispel much of the stereotypes surrounding homosexuality. The first of these programmes was, *Tuesday Report*, with Cathal O'Shannon in February 1977. This was followed in 1980 by an interview by Aine O'Connor with a Cork gay male couple (Laurie Steele & Arthur Leahy) on *Week In/Week End*. Also, in that same year, Joni Sherin of LIL appearing on the, *Late Late Show*, became the first lesbian woman to appear on Irish television. For a society which, hitherto, had been unaccustomed to dealing with this topic, these appearances played an important role in confronting the misinformation and misunderstanding around homosexuality and initiating a dialogue around this topic. The participant's ability to resist their subjugation as second-class citizens and to present a much more positive, sympathetic and confident image of gay and lesbian individuals, was, as we shall see, vital in helping to win over many supporters for the case of greater tolerance and freedom for gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. Throughout Cathal O'Shannon's forty-minute-long documentary

<sup>21</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,951/2, "Irish Gay Rights Movement Constitution", 28 September 1975.

<sup>22</sup> *RTÉ TV History* (1961), 31 December, <<http://www.rte.ie/tv50/history/1960s.html>> (05/2017).

viewers were given an insight into gay life in Ireland. Numerous members of IGRM and some of their parents, with the support of Nancy Diuguid of London's Gay Sweatshop and Rose Robertson of England's Parents Enquiry spoke candidly about homosexuality and attempted to dispel many of the myths surrounding homosexuals as perverted, promiscuous child molesters. Diuguid began the documentary by declaring "You are looking at a screaming lesbian, a raving dyke a pervert, deviant, queer, fairy, fruitcake, freak, daughter, sister, niece, mother, cousin, actress, bishops wife, MP, machinist, typist, teacher. I am everywhere. ... Yes here, right in front of you. I am here to stay" (O'Shannon 1977). In his contribution, Sean Connolly, a founding member of the IGRM explained what being gay meant to him: "I discovered that my orientation was towards members of my own same sex, for the same reasons as anybody else, for companionship, emotional stimulation and the usual things one forms a relationship for" (Lynch 2003). Instead of disguising themselves, which many might have expected them to do, those who appeared looked straight into the camera and presented a picture of homosexuals, as normal everyday individuals, who, with the exception of who they were attracted to, were much the same as every other Irish citizen; respectable up-standing individuals. Those who spoke, were neither insecure nor shameful; instead they were confident, articulate and for the most part happy individuals, who were proud of their sexuality, despite the cultural climate they had grown up in. In one of the most daring and provocative scenes of the documentary, the audience were taken inside the Phoenix Club and shown footage of lesbian women and gay men dancing unashamedly together (O'Shannon 1977). If the personal is political, then the participation of those in this documentary was as strong a show of public defiance to Ireland's sexual mores by a group of homosexuals at this time. While many in Irish society would have liked to believe that such individuals did not exist in Ireland and were foreign imports, this documentary strongly challenged this assertion. To be Irish and homosexual was not mutually exclusive. The disco scene and number of homosexuals who appeared helped bring a very much hidden aspect of Irish society out into the open, in a way which had never been seen before. For 1970's Ireland, this documentary was radical. Speaking 25 years after the production of the documentary, Cathal O'Shannon remarked:

I am amazed looking at it now, at the courage of the people who took part in it. Although they had come out, among their own friends, they were now exposing themselves to the great Irish public. And this could in fact be shocking, and to a lot of people the film was shocking.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cathal O'Shannon speaking 25 years after his *Tuesday Report* documentary on "Homosexuality in Ireland". Personal Papers of Sean J. Connolly.

The reaction to the documentary demonstrated the positive impact of such public appearances by Irish homosexuals. While the documentary did, unsurprisingly, receive complaints, particularly the disco scene, the openly positive media and viewer response to the documentary highlighted the extent with which the documentary had, to a certain degree, begun a conversation within Irish society on homosexuality. For example, Ken Gray of the *Irish Times* wrote:

What was most surprising even to those who haven't adopted hard attitudes and haven't thought much about the subject one way or another, was that the people to whom Cathal O'Shannon talked to were not as he said himself the 'prancing queens' he expected to find, but very ordinary, rational and apparently well-balanced human beings.<sup>24</sup>

The *Hibernia* journal similarly demonstrated the success of the documentary in challenging the negative assumptions surrounding homosexuals in Irish society:

If the *Tuesday Report* did nothing else for the homosexual it did, at least attempt to explode this particular myth (homosexuals are sick, weak and depraved human beings). Here was a group of normal, decent and intelligent people who just happened to be sexually orientated towards members of their own sex. They did not choose to be what they are – who does? And all they were demanding was the right to live their own lives in their own way without interference from the State, or anyone else. This is the same right that any heterosexual would demand – and get. So where's the problem? You may well ask. It is not often these days that one can lavish praise on RTÉ, especially in the area of current affairs programmes, but in this case they deserve to be congratulated. The programme was a winner.<sup>25</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting is the reaction of those who viewed the documentary and felt the need to contact RTÉ. Of the 40 or so calls RTÉ received following the show, only 4 expressed anger at RTÉ for airing it, with 26 congratulating RTÉ, 4 requesting information on the IGRM and 6 callers requesting the time the programme was aired<sup>26</sup>. One such viewer, who felt the need to write to O'Shannon personally, Margaret Kegley, commended O'Shannon and the homosexuals who appeared on the show, writing:

<sup>24</sup> PRONI, NIGRA, D3762/1/3/2, Ken Gray, "When Boy Meets Boy", *Irish Times*, 28 February 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Galvin (1977), "A Gay Dog", *Hibernia*, 4 March.

<sup>26</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,943/2, "Summary of calls received by RTÉ on *Tuesday Report*" between 22 February 1977 and 24 February 1977.

It was with some misgivings I sat to watch the program you presented on the above topic (homosexuality). May I say I was impressed by your handling of such an explosive and unpopular subject. Being a viewer of BBC I was not too unaware, but certainly I gained a measure of respect for the men who talked and who admitted they were homosexual. I feel you may have let yourself in for a lot of flak but on the plus side, it is a social problem that must be faced squarely, not only by homosexuals, but by all the population, particularly parents.<sup>27</sup>

Kegley herself appears to have somewhat changed her opinion of homosexuals following the documentary. Acknowledging her own misgivings prior to the documentary, and the bravery of O'Shannon in tackling this 'explosive subject', Kegley recognised that the homosexuals in the documentary should be respected and the topic itself was one that needed greater discussion within Irish society. Other letters were also addressed to O'Shannon demonstrating the extent to which the documentary had got segments of Irish society to consider a topic rarely if ever, discussed. Perhaps most encouraging for those involved with the programme was the decision by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission not to uphold a complaint by one viewer, who argued that the documentary was in breach of legislation due to the nature of the programme. While, stating that they did have reservations about the dancing scene, the commission maintained that the programme did not fail to comply with the existing legislation (Lynch 2003). A considerable victory for all those who took part. Equally ground-breaking was Aine O'Connor's interview with a Cork gay couple, Laurie Steele and Arthur Leahy both of the Cork Gay Collective in 1980, the first such couple to be interviewed on Irish television. While, O'Shannon's documentary was significant in helping to dispel many of the myths surrounding homosexuality and was in that sense educational, O'Connor's interview with Leahy and Steele was a much more personal poignant account of the turmoil and difficulties of two individuals, who were trying to maintain a gay relationship in an unaccommodating Ireland. The interview set in the home of Arthur and Laurie, who disclosed that they had been in a relationship for five years, highlighted the oppressive and demoralising impact society's attitudes had on both men and their families. According to Arthur, he was viewed as "inadequate" by his family, and they in turn felt that they were inadequate because he had turned out to be homosexual. Arthur explained that the oppression does do damage. For Laurie the oppression led to self-oppression and a sense of alienation, which impacted on how he related to other people, in particular his struggle to build up emotional connections or strong bonds with other individuals. Speaking

<sup>27</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,943/2, "Letter from Margaret Kegley to Cathal O'Shannon", 23 February 1977.

about the challenges they faced as a gay couple, Laurie stated that: “society does not accommodate gay couples, you don’t see other gay couples” (*ibidem*). Most of Irish society at the time did not consider the treatment of Irish homosexuals to be in fact oppressive. Homosexuals were considered deviant individuals. If homosexuals felt insecure or like second-class citizens, then that was a result of their own actions, rather than society’s. In this context the importance of Arthur and Laurie articulating the mundaneness of their existence as a gay couple, not unlike heterosexual couples, was important in garnering support and greater tolerance. Moreover, Laurie’s and Arthur’s appearance as a gay couple sent a clear message that gay couples did exist in Ireland and it was time Irish society recognised that reality. This was something noted in the *Irish Times* prior to programme:

This programme examines the lifestyle of what appears to be a normal couple in a stable relationship, except that they both belong to the same sex. This provides the jumping off point for a serious discussion of the failure of Irish people to realise that there is a homosexual community living in our midst and the futility of pretending otherwise.<sup>28</sup>

By disclosing their relationship was five years old, Laurie and Arthur challenged the assertion that homosexuals were typically promiscuous. Not only did Laurie and Arthur openly declare themselves to be a gay couple in Ireland, thus resisting much of their own social conditioning, they were also sending a clear message that such couples did exist in Irish society. Both men’s public acknowledgment as a gay couple, offered resistance to the belief heterosexual relationships were the only possible acceptable form of intimate relationship in Irish society. One of the few shortcomings of the aforementioned documentaries, was the predominance of gay male voices, at the expense of lesbian women. While two lesbian women did appear in the 1977 documentary, neither of them were Irish. Whereas the 1861 and 1885 laws had criminalised sexual activity between males, lesbian women were not subjected to these laws since women historically were not seen to be sexual “actors”. Lesbians were, as one Cork woman described them, the “invisible phantoms of Irish society” (“A Lesbian in Cork”, 1985). Perhaps the one and only advantage of the 1861 and 1885 laws was the fact that it acknowledged a certain type of individual, a male who engaged in sexual activity with other males. By the late 1970s, with the founding of Liberation for Irish Lesbians, lesbian women were no longer willing to remain the “invisible phantoms” of Irish society. Rather than depending on gay males to take up their case, lesbian women actively took it upon themselves to begin a process of generating

<sup>28</sup> “Television Today” (1980), *Irish Times*, 11 February.



a greater sense of community, awareness and understanding of lesbianism in Irish society. Particularly important was the appearance of Joni Sherrin, a lesbian activist who had been involved with the Irish Gay Rights Movement and a founding member of LIL, on the popular late night chat show, *The Late Late Show*, to discuss being a lesbian in Ireland. The extent of the task Joni Sherrin and other lesbian activists set themselves was summed up by a comment in the audience that same night when Joni appeared on stage: "But she doesn't look like a lesbian"<sup>29</sup>. Joni Sherrin's appearance on the show was particularly courageous. While those involved in the previous documentaries had appeared with other homosexuals and the shows had been pre-recorded, Sherrin appeared alone on live television on one of the most watched television shows in Ireland. This however did not seem to faze her. Like her male counterparts, Joni Sherrin confidently discussed the difficulties coming to the stage where she could come out publicly and speak positively about her lesbian identity, declaring to Gay Byrne that she was a proud lesbian (O'Carroll and Collins 1995, 62). When asked had she had any reservations about speaking on the show, Sherrin simply replied: "No". She went on to explain that while her family was still coming to terms with her sexuality: "I have my life to live and I only have the one life and I have to be true to myself too" (Lynch 2003). Sherrin's appearance was important in introducing the term 'lesbian' to an Irish audience, a word that many would have had little or no knowledge of previously and in introducing Irish society to a lesbian individual. While, many were aware of the word 'homosexual', this was a term predominantly associated with men, rather than females as well. Moreover, by actually declaring herself to be an Irish lesbian Sherrin, like Arthur and Laurie, challenged Irish society to recognise that lesbian women too existed, as she said in their thousands throughout the country. Much like the 1977 documentary, the public's reaction to Joni's appearance was mixed. One caller who contacted RTÉ, complained: "He (Gay Byrne) had a prostitute on last week and he insults us further by bringing on a lesbian". Another caller stated: "I do not want to pay a license fee to see that filthy person." While the negative comments were to be expected, the impact of Joni's appearance did lead many to contact the show to commend her bravery and sincerity. One caller stated: "If every heterosexual was as sincere and honest as that lady, the world would be a much happier place". An individual speaking for four persons complimented Joni, saying: "She came across as a very nice person and will surely help many people of both sexes"<sup>30</sup>. Again while the positive comments no doubt were welcomed by Joni and other lesbian women, it was more

<sup>29</sup> NLI, IR 369 I 23, *In Touch: Journal of the National Gay Federation* 2, 3, March 1980.

<sup>30</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/4, "Summary of Telephone Reaction received for Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), Programmes", Friday 9 February 1980.

the fact that people were recognising and discussing her lesbian identity that was crucial. Writing 15 years after her appearance on the show, Joni Sheerin stated: “so many lesbians have told me over the years how important it was in their lives that I had appeared on the *Late Late Show* and proclaimed: I am Lesbian and I am proud” (O’Carroll and Collins 1995, 62). Within the lesbian community Joni’s appearance had a profoundly positive impact. One individual who contributed to *Out for Ourselves* in 1986, Máire Ní Bheagliach described the impact of Joni’s appearance: “Joni’s coming out on the *Late Late Show* had a more dramatic effect and as a result of this I contacted the NGF, read some literature and met my first lesbians, who surprised me by being very ordinary! Life would never be the same again” (Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men’s Collectives 1986, 81). Ní Bheagliach’s comment underlines the extent to which many Irish lesbian women had come to believe that there was something strange about their sexuality. Joni’s appearance no doubt, like with Ní Bheagliach, encouraged many lesbian women and members of the broader society to have a much more positive outlook on their sexuality and lesbian women. At a time when most households only received one or two channels, it is conceivable to suggest that a vast proportion of Irish society might have viewed some, if not all of these three programmes. In turn, they provided a much more positive representation of homosexuality to Irish society and to Irish homosexuals themselves, than had ever before been seen in Ireland. More crucially these appearances instigated a dialogue around homosexuality in Irish society, which was not confined to urban areas, thanks to the willingness of these individuals to appear on national television. The extent to which these lesbian and gay individuals were successful in igniting a debate was reflected in one viewer’s comment who wrote: “While I realised the Lesbian on this show was a genuine person, I am really tired of the topic”<sup>31</sup>.

#### 4. *Taking to the Streets*

Only today, as I write, five teenagers were found guilty of beating and kicking a 31-year old man to death in a Dublin park. They were, they told the court, conducting a campaign of ‘queer-bashing’, which may or may not have been a mitigating factor. At any rate, they walked from the court, free. I find this heartening. It is nice to know that while you may be bludgeoned and booted to a bloody end in a Fairview Park on a fine Spring evening, at least a homosexual is unlikely to wink at you. Let us, by all means, get our values right.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Leonard, “I’ll not be moved from Mr. Dukes’ Ireland”, *Sunday Independent*, 13 March 1983.

Hugh Leonard's above reaction to the suspended sentence of five individuals for the killing of Declan Flynn at Fairview Park on 9 September 1982, who, according to the trial was attacked because it was believed he was homosexual, exemplifies the courage of the individuals, who sought to live out a gay and lesbian lifestyle and those who were willing to speak publicly about their sexuality. For many gay and lesbian citizens, and members of the heterosexual community, as highlighted by Proinsias De Rossa of the Workers' Party in Dail Éireann:

The only reasonable interpretation that can be drawn from the sentencing policy adopted in this case is that the life of a person who was alleged by his attackers to have been a homosexual – and there was no evidence whatever to support this – was considered in some way to be of less value than the life of any other person.<sup>33</sup>

The immediate impact of this case led to the Dublin Gay Collective, National Gay Federation, Cork Gay Collective, IGRM, and LIL with the support of their allies, taking to the streets in the first large scale public demonstration organised by gay and lesbian individuals in Ireland. The holding of this large scale protest is hard to envisage, had it not been for the creation of the aforementioned centres where homosexuals came together and fostered bonds as a community. Moreover, the role played by homosexuals who appeared in the media to dismantle much of the stereotypes of homosexuals also significantly contributed to encouraging heterosexuals to take part in the demonstration. In other words, had Declan Flynn been murdered prior to 1974, I maintain that no such large scale demonstrations could or would have taken place. While it would seem that it was the suspended sentence, rather than the killing of an individual because of his presumed homosexuality, was the main cause of the public outcry following the Flynn court case, there can be no doubt, that the treatment of homosexuals in Irish became irreversibly intertwined with the Declan Flynn case. According to Kieran Rose, many within the gay and lesbian community experienced it as an attack on their very existence. Explaining why he had travelled from Cork to take part in the subsequent protest march, Rose explained:

Well because it's a matter of gay rights for everybody and in fact it's a matter of life and death for gay people in Ireland, and of course we came up here to march and we'll be up again and I hope people from up here will be down in Cork anytime gay people are threatened.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "Criminal Case Sentences" (1983), *Dáil Éireann Debate* 340, 12, 10 March.

<sup>34</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,941/1, "Interviews with Tony Gregory, Michael Keating, Tonic Walsh and Charles Kerrigan among others following the demonstration march after the judgement in the Declan Flynn case", March 1983.

On 19 March 1983, gay and lesbian individuals, with the support of the Union of Students in Ireland, People's Democracy, Socialist Worker's Movement, Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, Democratic Socialists and the Rape Crisis Centre, marched from Liberty Hall to Fairview Park with banners declaring: "Gays are Human", "Gays have the right to Life" and "Stop Violence against Gays and Women"<sup>35</sup>. The support garnered from these groups owed much to the efforts of the different gay organisations who had opened dialogue with these groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, on foot of a request from the International Gay Association in 1981 the NGF sent questionnaires to all the political parties seeking their views on gay rights. In replying both Sinn Féin and the Republican Socialist Party stated their support for the gay rights movement<sup>36</sup>. While the USI, who the IGRM and NGF had lobbied extensively since 1974, wrote to the *Irish Times* in 1980 stating their support for decriminalisation of homosexuality<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, the Democratic Socialist Party issued a strongly worded statement preceding the march condemning 'queer-bashing' and calling on the government to amend the laws<sup>38</sup>. Particularly important, however in garnering support from these groups was the affiliation of the NGF, Dublin Gay Collective and the CGC to the Anti-Amendment Campaign (AAC) of 1983. This brought the gay movement into close alliance with all the aforementioned groups who were willing to come out and support gay rights, just as the gay movement had supported the AAC<sup>39</sup>. Remarkably, while both Fine Gael and the Labour Party had passed motions calling for decriminalisation as early as 1979 and 1981 respectively neither party took part in the Fairview March. The number of individuals who took part was reported by the media to have been 400, while the different gay rights organisations claimed close to 1000 marched. Even, if the 400 figure is to be accepted, this still represents a significant turn-out for the first mass demonstration on gay rights, particularly one organised only a few short days after the sentence was delivered. Speaking in Fairview Park, Charles Kerrigan of the Dublin Gay Collective

<sup>35</sup> "Demo over attacks on 'gays'" (1983), *Evening Herald*, 19 March.

<sup>36</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/3, "Naomi Brennan General Secretary to NGF", 3 February 1981; "International Gay Association Political Parties World Survey 1981"; "Response from Sinn Féin to NGF".

<sup>37</sup> "Homosexuality and the USI", *Irish Times*, 10 October 1980, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/search/archive.html?q=Homosexuality+and+the+USI&fromDate=09%2F10%2F1980&toDate=11%2F10%2F1980&rm=listresults&filter=>> (05/2017).

<sup>38</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,940/3, "Democratic Socialist Party Press Statement", 9 March 1983.

<sup>39</sup> The Anti-Amendment Campaign sought to prevent the insertion of a constitutional ban on abortion. The amendment was successfully passed, becoming the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Irish constitution.

declared: "This march was not an isolated event, but rather, it was only the start of a new campaign for lesbian and gay rights, for equal rights, for protection at work and for decriminalization"<sup>40</sup>. The demonstration was headline news throughout the country. Reports on the march, appeared in the *Sunday World*, *Evening Herald*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Press* and *Irish Times*<sup>41</sup>. Asked how he felt after the march, Eamon Somers of the NGF, stated: "Excellent, absolutely amazing, because it was such a show of solidarity its' just incredible. I'm amazed so many people turned up and a lot of local people turned up and they were in favour of what was going on it was very good"<sup>42</sup>. Three of those local people who turned up were Fr. Jack Harris and an unnamed married couple. Giving his reaction Fr. Jack Harris stated: "First of all I was very happy at the number of people that turned out today I thought it was really terrific and it was a clear indication to me that people were disgusted at what happened here and they were also disgusted with the result of the court case"<sup>43</sup>. Speaking on behalf of herself and her husband, the unnamed woman gave their reasons for participating as:

Well we all felt very strongly when we heard of the sentence so called that the guys got for murdering the man in the park. The gay people were the only people seemingly who took a stand on this and though we are not gay ourselves we supported them in this march against injustice really.<sup>44</sup>

While both comments were not a ringing endorsement of gay and lesbian rights, rather a reflection of their anger at the sentences handed down, nevertheless they, along with other members of the heterosexual community were willing to stand side by side with gay and lesbian individuals who carried banners calling for the better treatment of gay and lesbian individuals in Irish society. The Fairview Park march was a symbolic moment for Irish gay and lesbian individuals, who demonstrated their unwillingness to no longer be abused, or mistreated by society. The march was a strong declaration that they were not going to go away, or succumb to the hostility they were facing. To some extent, the public outcry and participation of many from outside the gay community suggests that their attempts to highlight that homosexuals were human and should not be treated differently, was getting through to many. The public outcry demonstrates the extent to which a vast majority of

<sup>40</sup> NLI, IQA, 46,053/3-4, "The March to Fairview Park", *Quare Times*, c. 1983.

<sup>41</sup> NLI, IR 369 I 25, "Fairview Park", *Identity* 5, April-June 1983.

<sup>42</sup> NLI, IQA, MS 45,941/1, "Interviews with Tony Gregory, Michael Keating, Tonic Walsh and Charles Kerrigan among others following the demonstration march after the judgement in the Declan Flynn case", March 1983.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

Irish citizens opposed the actions of the 5 youths, who had defended themselves by arguing that they were seeking to clean the park of homosexuals. In 1983 this excuse met with little support outside the court room. Much like the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the Declan Flynn case and the subsequent protest march became the catalyst to fight back in the streets. The march itself, led to the organisation of the first gay pride parades in Ireland later that summer, which previously had been celebrated without a parade. Over the next few years, Irish gay and lesbian individuals took to the streets in increasing numbers and increasing places, in Dublin, Cork and Galway declaring pride in their sexuality. In one of the most blatant public acts of public resistance, 30 gay and lesbian individuals, in front of 100 on lookers, staged a kiss-in outside government buildings in 1988. Four years later, in 1992, at a time when gay and lesbian individuals were banned from marching in the New York St. Patrick's Day Parade, a group of gay and mainly lesbian women in reaction to this ban marched in the Cork St. Patrick's Day parade. Singing Tom Robinson's anthem "Sing if you're glad to be Gay", these individuals became the first openly Irish lesbian and gay group to participate and be recognised in a St. Patrick's Day parade in Ireland. As an event which is synonymous with Irish identity, the presence of gay and lesbian individuals openly marching in a St. Patrick's Day parade in Cork reinforced the claim that one could in fact be Irish and gay/lesbian. This was strongly reinforced by the awarding of the prize for "best new entrant" to the lesbian and gay float. If anything, this prize was a symbol of recognition and acceptance by Cork city council. Speaking after the parade, Orla Egan, a lesbian activist in Cork, declared: "We had reason to celebrate. We brought the words lesbian, gay and bisexual into people's vocabulary and consciousness and we had made ourselves visible in a proud, happy and positive way"<sup>45</sup>.

### 5. Conclusion

By the time Maire Geoghegan-Quinn introduced the Sexual Offences Bill 1993, which decriminalised sexual activity between males, legislation had already been introduced which was sympathetic to gay and lesbian individuals. For example, the 1989 Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act included sexual orientation, while the Unfair Dismissal Act of 1977 was amended in 1993 to include sexual orientation as one of the grounds for unfair dismissal<sup>46</sup>. This owed much to the efforts of the Cork Gay Collective and the NGF

<sup>45</sup> NLI, ILB, 305 G 2, "History Victory", *Gay Community News*, April 1992.

<sup>46</sup> "Unfair Dismissal (Amendment) Act, 1993", *electronic Irish Statute Book* (eISB), <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1993/act/22/section/5/enacted/en/html>>; "Prohibition of Incitement To Hatred Act, 1989", *electronic Irish Statute Book* (eISB), <<http://www.irish->

in garnering support from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 1982. In 1987, the ICTU published *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace: Guidelines for Negotiators*. What is perhaps most surprising about all three legislative decisions is the ease with which the then governments were able to pass these legislations into law. While one might argue that the Sexual Offences Bill was inevitable in light of the 1988 decision by the European Court of Human Rights, the overwhelming support for the other two bills demonstrated the extent to which the political class were now willing to support the rights of gay and lesbian individuals on these matters, without it would seem the fear of a public backlash. While there was strong conservative mobilisation in 1983 in support of the amendment to the constitution banning abortion and during the 1986 divorce referendum, the lack of any organised opposition to the introduction of these legislative changes indicated the change in mind-set which had taken place within Irish society about recognising the right of gay and lesbian individuals to basic human rights and self-determination. This is not to say that gay and lesbian citizens had achieved a full place in Irish society, rather that Irish society began to acknowledge the many restrictions placed on the citizenship rights of gay/lesbian individuals as unjust. This paper has outlined many forms of resistance carried out by lesbian and gay activists throughout Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, a period that has been ignored in the achievement of lesbian and gay rights in Ireland. Irish homosexuals did not hide behind David Norris's court case and did not suddenly appear in Irish society in 1993 with the introduction of the Sexual Offences Bill. Instead, throughout Ireland, gay and lesbian individuals had actively resisted their own subjugation, either by choosing to act out a gay or lesbian lifestyle, organising lesbian and gay social life, publicly challenging the misunderstandings around homosexuality, or by taking to the streets to demand their rights to live openly as gay and lesbian individuals in Irish society. These earlier actions were crucial to begin a public dialogue around homosexuality, which ultimately influenced public opinion, so much so, that the 1993 Sexual Offences Bill could be introduced with cross party support. Rather than viewing other groups, such as the Women's Movement, or individual politicians, as the sole agents behind the renegotiation of Ireland's sexual mores, it was Irish Gay and Lesbian individuals who, by challenging the dominant social mores with which they had been raised, became active agents in their own liberation. The sites of their on-going activism could be found in some shape or form throughout all Ireland. Together with Norris' victory in 1988, their resistance ultimately laid the foundations for the subsequent changes that have taken place in recent years for gay and lesbian citizens.

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# From Solidarity to Disillusionment

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*Abstract:*

This article focuses on the mobilization cycle of Occupy in Ireland. It looks first at factors which facilitated the building of group solidarity before turning attention to some of the processes which led participants to become disillusioned and, ultimately, to demobilize. I argue that, in the short term, Occupy was of particular importance to many of the occupiers – and the more socially fragile participants notably – because it helped them to make their voices heard and to deal with their day-to-day personal concerns. Such a process was also of assistance to create a form of group identity and solidarity. In the longer term, however, the Occupy camps became beset by a number of unintended – and interrelated – complications. These relate to the rise in increasingly destabilizing power struggles and to the upsurge in doubts about the ways the camps were run. Both these issues undermined group solidarity and contributed, ultimately, to widespread disillusionment and to demobilization.

*Keywords:* Collective Action, Disillusionment, Ireland, Occupy, Solidarity

## *1. Introduction*

In the years following the 2008 economic and financial meltdown, in the Republic of Ireland many people took to the streets to protest against the declining standards of living and to oppose the implementation of austerity measures<sup>1</sup>. Even if there were fewer anti-austerity protests in Ireland than in

<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer surveys show that the percentage of the Irish that considered the financial situation of their household to be “rather bad” or “very bad” increased from 34% in 2008 to 45% in 2011. See Standard Eurobarometers, 70-76, 2008-2011, <[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/cf/step1.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/step1.cfm)> (05/2017).

other European crisis-hit countries (Benski *et al.* 2013; Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Rüdiger and Karyotis 2013; Geary 2016) the number of protesters was quite remarkable from an historical standpoint (Kirby 2010). Civil society responses to the crisis led to a lively debate since many specialists as well as casual observers have generally described the Irish as passive and demobilized owing to historical and socio-cultural factors (Mair 2010; Murphy 2011; O'Brien 2011; Storey 2012). Power (2016) in particular suggests that collective memories played a role in mitigating civil unrest in general and in the post-2008 years in particular. By contrast, an increasing number of commentators have argued that a politics of community grass roots protest and empowerment has emerged in recent years and that there are notable examples of a rise in civil society militancy (Cox 2012; O'Flynn *et al.* 2013): "People are no longer looking to their politician to fix their problem, they are taking action themselves, through protest. This is a massive change"<sup>2</sup>. One interesting example of recent civil society militancy was the occupation of public spaces in a number of the country's major cities as of October 2011 by which occupiers sought to denounce the country's democratic deficit, lost sovereignty and rising levels of inequality and poverty.

Recent civil society mobilizations – including Occupy in Ireland as elsewhere – has led to a growing body of literature which has sought to understand what they meant from social and political standpoints and/or why and how they came about despite the major obstacles that protesters usually face such as the lack of material resources or the difficulty of securing political and/or civil society allies (Cox 2012; Kriesi 2012; Benski *et al.* 2013; Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Gamson and Sifry 2013; Streeck and Schäfer 2013; Chabanet and Royall 2014; Gould-Wartofsky 2015; Ancelovici, Dufour, Nez 2016). As Le Texier (2006), Péchu (2006), Chabanet and Faniel (2012), Mattoni and Vogiatzoglou (2014) or Renouard (2014) have shown in the cases of undocumented migrants in the United States, precarious workers in Greece and Italy, the homeless in France, the unemployed across Europe or Gypsies in Finland respectively, the people involved in such movements seek to 'voice' their concerns through collective action. Additionally, studies of this type have tried to move away from the classical view of the constraining effects of Social Movement Organizations (SMO) on "poor people" (Piven Fox and Cloward 1977) and to focus instead on the opportunities that are available for mobilization and/or on cognitive processes so as to understand the micro-interactions that take place between protesters and their environment (Ketelaars 2016). My approach has affinities with these types of studies. I argue that in the short term, the occupation of public spaces was important at the level of the individuals involved. Many of the occupiers – and the more

<sup>2</sup> Rory Hearne, quoted in *The Sunday Times*, 23 November 2014.

socially fragile occupiers in particular – felt that they were now able to express their frustration, outrage or anger; that they were able to overcome the stigma to which they were subjected; that they were in a better position to deal with their everyday problems; and that they sensed that they were doing something useful for the community that could help change the way society was organized. Such a process helped to create a form of group identity and solidarity. I also argue that there were some unintended – though perhaps not fully unexpected – outcomes in the longer term. These relate to the increasingly contentious power struggles which developed and to many occupiers' rising doubts about operational procedures. These processes undermined group solidarity and contributed, ultimately, to disillusionment and, thus, to demobilization processes.

This article is a qualitative sociological study that draws on my research on Occupy and on a number of anti-austerity events in Ireland from 2011 to 2015. I carried out over 50 open-ended and semi-structured interviews – occupy activists, trade union officers and community and voluntary activists – between 2011 and 2013 in Limerick, Galway and Dublin with some people interviewed on two or more occasions. I made over 15 follow-on interviews with former occupiers in Galway and in Dublin in 2014 and 2015 which allowed me to gain their insights with the benefit of time<sup>3</sup>. The research also involved participant observations during several marches between 2011 and 2014. Finally, I analyzed a wide range of Occupy documents from printed and electronic sources as well as specialist academic and media publications.

The article is structured as follows. The first section assesses some of the issues raised by social movement scholars as they relate to many of today's contentious collective actions such as Occupy. The next section describes Occupy in Ireland and focuses on the camps' inner-workings. The final section analyzes the short- and long-term effects of the occupations' dynamics and discusses in particular the rise of two unintended developments: power struggles and disquiet about fixed practices.

## *2. Alternative forms of mobilization*

Social movements are generally and broadly understood to be the collective challenges taken by ordinary people against elites or authorities. Resource mobilization scholars suggest that SMOs are the formal and organized elements of social movements which share the movements' goals and which

<sup>3</sup> All the interviewees were actively involved at varying levels of the occupations and they were recruited randomly. I relied on snowball sampling and then added new interviewees so as to increase the sample's diversity. The interviews varied in duration but lasted on average 45 minutes. They were held on a one-to-one basis and were conducted face-to-face and, where not possible, by telephone.

help them to ensure their long-term sustainability (Zald and Ash 1966). And as Zald and McCarthy have noted:

Whether we study revolutionary movements, broad or narrow social reform movements, or religious movements, we find a variety of SMOs or groups, linked to various segments of supporting constituencies (both institutional and individual), competing among themselves for resources and symbolic leadership, sharing facilities and resources at other times, developing stable and many times differentiated functions, occasionally merging into unified ad hoc coalitions, and occasionally engaging in all-out war against each other. (2009, 161)

This said SMOs are important from two points of view. First, they often use protest-related tools and actions – repertoires – during contentious interactions with elites, opponents or authorities when they consider that the decisions taken are unjust or threatening. Second, SMOs also often provide a range of services for their constituents’ benefit (and also to help them to develop as individuals).

In terms of SMO repertoires, sit-ins, mass demonstrations, barricades or traffic blockages are some of the more easily recognized actions. Drawing on Goffman (1975), Cohen (2014) argues that marches and occupations are especially useful for socially fragile people when their SMOs seek to change power relations and to turn stigmas into positive attributes. In terms of the provision of services, SMOs often make available physical spaces where people can meet their peers and find relational and moral support: listening to others’ experiences, talking about coping strategies, reviewing their rights and entitlements or learning/improving practical and social skills such as word processing, interview preparation and submission, job hunting, personal finance management and so on. Cohen (2014) maintains that such services are particularly useful for socially fragile people since they help them to try to overturn the negative connotations associated with their status. McGinn and Allen (1991) have shown the importance and the relevance of such services in the case of the unemployed in Ireland, even if the benefits for end-users can only be assessed weeks or even months later. SMOs thereby often provide vital and non-quantifiable services that help people to gain a ‘voice’, to “express” themselves, to be “heard” and, consequently, to help them cope with their daily experiences and to try to change others’ perception of their status (Hirschman 1970).

Research on many of today’s contentious collective actions – including Occupy – also shows that they must be understood and framed in their longer-term national, historical and political contexts (cultural continuity and of collective learning processes) and that such protests strengthen or deepen previously existing practices (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Cox 2016). But recent research has shown that something may be slightly different with many of today’s mobilizations. For instance, Peterson *et al.*



suggest that Occupy in a number of countries was “significantly different from ‘traditional’ European anti-austerity protests with respect to socio-demographic composition as well as organizational embeddedness” (2013, 3). Many of today’s contentious collective actions are “new, new” movements as Langman (2013) describes them and they are driven by complex and horizontal decision-making processes, by decentralization and by specific power relations including the rejection of leaders (della Porta and Rucht 2013). Grasso and Giugni (2015) are more circumspect. In analyzing a number of recent anti-austerity movements across seven European countries, they offer a mixed picture and suggest that participants share some traits with both “old” movements (i.e. labor) and “new” (post-materialist) movements that focus on identity, lifestyle and culture (e.g. ecology, human rights, pacifism, feminism, etc.). Nonetheless, it is true that many Occupy movements began as a result of specific local contexts, they availed of favorable political opportunities and they used a range of repertoires of action including, notably, the occupation of public spaces where the general public was invited to join others in their opposition to the perceived injustices of the economic and political system (Dufour *et al.* 2016). But while acknowledging that Occupy movements share similarities with earlier social movements, Nez underlines that their novelty “lies mainly in the forms of commitment, the greater number of individuals and in the singular attention carried in the practices of internal democracy” (Nez 2016, 181). Thus occupiers in Ireland – as in many other countries – were profoundly committed, in practice and in discourse, to the principles of direct, deliberative and participative democracy: no leaders, no spokesperson, no formal structures, no strict norms, no formal rites, and so on (Szolucha 2013; Kiersey 2014; Gould-Wartofsky 2015). One important consequence is that they made a point in rejecting all formal representative organizations – SMOs, political parties or trade unions – that could structure protests or provide services.

In short, many of today’s mobilizations – including Occupy – that are structured around alternative forms are slightly different from their predecessors to the extent that they focus very much on an organizational culture based on the values of diversity, subjectivity, transparency, and open/democratic decision-making processes. To paraphrase della Porta (2005), they place “ideological contamination” ahead of dogma. They are not however exempt from a number of unintended – though perhaps not unexpected – developments which inevitably arise when people come together to protest. In Occupy these came about in two interlinked areas in my view. The first relates to the power struggles that slowly developed between distinct groups owing to the occupiers’ sociological make-up: on the one hand, the mobilization *entrepreneurs* – that is the people endowed with higher levels of social, cultural or political capital – and the “ordinary” occupiers, on the other (Sutherland *et al.* 2013). The second unintended development relates to some of the oc-

cupiers' rising doubts about the way Occupy evolved. Both points are discussed in greater detail in section four.

### 3. Structuring the cause and trying to empower occupiers

Occupy in Ireland was framed by distinct political and mobilization contexts. From the late 1980s Ireland enjoyed an unprecedented period of economic growth and labor peace. A key contributing factor is that the prevailing political culture and institutions were based on political conservatism and complacency and on consensus-oriented centralism. Another distinctive feature of Irish political life is the historical weakness of the political left although recent electoral results tend to show that this trait is waning somewhat (Mair 2010; Little 2011). These elements were reinforced by a centralized bargaining structure known as social partnership encompassing employer groups, trade unions and a good number of civil society organizations. The upshot is that the consensus-led political culture had fostered an environment in which inter-actions were effectively de-politicized and dissent muted (Meade 2005). But the 2008 economic and financial crisis put an end this extended period of growth and brought to the fore the possibility of a more conflict-oriented atmosphere. In terms of the mobilization context, the pre-2008 period was also characterized by a de-politicized and non-ideological discourse framework and by a weak protest culture (O'Connor 2017). In the 2008-2010 period there were a few trade union-led protests in response to the government's ineffective anti-crisis policies and to its acceptance of a rescue package – and the consequent implementation of 'austerity' measures – from a so-called troika: the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Donovan and Murphy 2013). But by and large, these initial protests against austerity continued to be relatively de-politicized and fragmented. However, by 2010 the situation had started to evolve. In his analysis of the various protests from 2008 to 2016, O'Connor argues that they slowly became more focused and tangible culminating in the 2014 anti-water charges movement. This anti-austerity protest soon became "the largest popular mobilization witnessed in modern Irish history" (2017, 83) and it "disavowed the simplistic narrative that there was no opposition to austerity in Ireland" (*ibidem*, 89).

It is framed by these political and mobilization contexts that Occupy emerged in Ireland in late 2011. Loosely inspired by Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and by the *Indignados* movement in Spain, Occupy in Ireland also became part of an international wave of mobilization (Calhoun 2013, 27-28). As elsewhere people took to the streets to protest and to carry out symbolic occupations of public spaces. Occupy Dame Street (ODS, Dublin) started on 8 October 2011, soon followed the occupation of public spaces in all of the Republic's major cities (Campbell 2012; Szolucha 2013; Kiersey 2014).

ODS was launched by a group of politically active people, many of which were loosely linked to anarchist and environmental groups and to left-leaning political or trade union organizations. Organizers had called for the Irish to resist the effects of neo-liberal policies and to join with others to celebrate the upcoming international day of solidarity with the global Occupy movement. In Dublin, a number of these initiators were in fact young Spanish residents who had been motivated by the M-15 movement in Spain and who were associated with the Irish spin-off of 'Democracia Real Ya! – Real Democracy Now'<sup>4</sup>. These activists had been organizing weekly meetings and had been in contact with each other via social media to discuss the *Indignados* movement and to see if it could be replicated in Ireland. They had also wished to set up forums where people could have a chance to express their grievances and to discuss how to change society<sup>5</sup>. Examples of Real Democracy Now-organized events include a protest on 21 May 2011 in favor of 'True Democracy', a march on 19 June against the European Union Pact and a demonstration on 13 July to protest against a visit to Dublin by International Monetary Fund representatives.

The camps varied in size and in duration. ODS was the largest, bringing together several dozen 'full-time' occupiers at one stage and, at most, several dozen 'occasional' occupiers<sup>6</sup>. Limerick's was the smallest with only a few occupiers. The occupations lasted several weeks in Limerick, slightly over four months in Waterford, five months in Cork and Dublin and seven months in Galway. Initial occupiers in Dublin, Galway and elsewhere were of a similar sociological make-up to what has been noted in many Occupy movements around the world (Benski *et al.* 2013, 548-550; Peterson *et al.* 2013). They were young and old, men and women, employed and unemployed, politically affiliated and non-affiliated, educated and less well educated. Many were students, artists, academics, trade union activists, service workers, local community organizers, and seasoned political, social and environmental activists. Most of the initial occupiers were Irish of course, but some Euro-

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Mo..., female, employee, 25+, Dublin, 26 November 2014. In order to preserve the integrity and privacy of the interviewees, references to them have been anonymized.

<sup>5</sup> Real Democracy Now activists wanted to get as many people as possible to come together and to protest and to show their outrage, anger or frustration. "We are ordinary people. We are like you. We are a group of citizens of different ages, nationalities and social backgrounds. We get up every morning to study, to look after our homes, to go to work, or to look for work. We all work hard every day at building a better future for ourselves and for the people around us. But all of us are worried and angry about what is unfolding, politically and economically, in our society. ... For all the above we are outraged", <<http://www.politicalworld.org/showthread.php?8664-For-Real-Democracy-Now!-Draft-Manifesto-Ireland#.VPRhC47y3fc>> (05/2017).

<sup>6</sup> Indicative data on country-wide participation rates are notably unreliable as there are no official records of the number of people involved. The figures given here are based on various media reports and on participants' informal estimates.

pean backpackers who had been involved in Occupy in their home country also visited the camps and stayed for short periods. Some of the ODS occupiers knew each other prior to the occupation because of their involvement in Real Democracy Now or in other left-leaning organizations, but most of the occupiers met for the first time during Occupy.

The occupations were held located in high visibility public spaces in most of the cities from where, occupiers felt, they could not be evicted or arrested for trespassing. One occupier specified that such public places “belong to everybody and to nobody at the same time”<sup>7</sup>. The Dublin camp was formed in an open space in front of the Central Bank of Ireland in the city center. In Galway, it was set up on the city’s main square: “We are in Eyre Square because the public owns the square and because the protest is a visual statement”<sup>8</sup>. Cork protesters set up camp at a main intersection in the heart of the city. In Waterford the camp was located on the quays next to the main thoroughfare. By contrast, the Limerick camp suffered from a ‘lack of visibility’ since it was situated in a by-street, far removed from the city’s busy shopping district and away from through-traffic. By skilfully choosing high-visibility places, occupiers felt that they could be in the best location to meet the general public so as to explain their views and, ultimately, to garner support and sympathy for their cause. Since the camps were located in such central places, occupiers were also able to get the attention of the media and, by becoming better known, they received various types of help<sup>9</sup>. Local businesses gave food and allowed occupiers to use their toilet facilities. Academics provided free public lectures. Tradesmen offered their expertise and building material. The general public donated money, food, sleeping bags and tents<sup>10</sup>. In time, these material and symbolic resources enabled small-scale support services for some homeless people or for ‘short-term’ occupiers:

People have come with blankets and food and words of encouragement, others stay for a while in solidarity. ... Even people who are opposed to what we do, when we explain what we are about see what we are getting at.<sup>11</sup>

As the occupations moved from autumn to winter and then to spring, the number of occupiers and their profile changed, with the Dublin camp in particular becoming increasingly a refuge for very young, unemployed and/or homeless people. “The older, part-time, middle-class occupiers went away”<sup>12</sup> and were re-

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Ch..., male, unemployed, 25+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Andrews 2011.

<sup>9</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCpoilSLBS8>> (05/2017).

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Gi..., male, unemployed, 50+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Andrews 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, Mo..., female, employee, 25+, Dublin, 26 November 2014.

placed by “a good number of crazies” as two disgruntled occupiers commented<sup>13</sup>:

It is true that the place did start to attract people who had nothing to do with it. Just people who thought it was a good place to pan-handle ... You just get professional beggars turning up. This was bound to happen. I don't see this as anything particular to the Occupy movement. ... All body-politics get infiltrated by parasites. The Occupy movement is nothing special in that case.<sup>14</sup>

By December, we noticed that most of the permanent occupiers were in fact homeless young men. They weren't really interested in the movement. All they really wanted was a place to sleep and to get warm. ... This led to a lot of problems.<sup>15</sup>

Occupiers' were determined to ensure that the camps remained open to the general public and run according to “direct” democratic principles with decisions taken by consensus so as to reinforce members' commitment to the cause and their belief of having a communal fate. This is a common occurrence in similar types of mobilizations (Traïni and Siméant 2009, 14-19). Occupiers also sought to promote group solidarity and to channel the participants' expectations towards Occupy symbols. Occupiers thereby organized public meetings, rallies, demonstrations, teach-ins and musical and poetic performances. In ODS as elsewhere, the public was invited to participate in all of these events as well as to attend general assemblies, to take part in the daily activities and to join in the various workgroups (finance, action, media, security, food, events and so on). In the early days, trade unionists, academics, political activists and the general public were often invited to participate in debates on current issues.

Occupiers were requested to obey basic rules: no violence, alcohol, drugs or political party/trade union banners or flags. Likewise, they were strongly discouraged from framing their discourse in class terms<sup>16</sup>. Because of the blanket “no politics” stance, occupiers refused to be drawn into alliances with political parties or with civil society or trade union organizations. Political parties in particular were indiscriminately accused of pursuing self-serving agendas, of corruption, of incompetence or of kowtowing to international capital. As one Waterford “facilitator” explained: “People are sick and tired of the party politics. [The parties] are in bed with the bankers. It's obvious”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, He..., female, retired, 65+, Dublin, 19 November 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Da..., male, independent filmmaker, 35+, Dublin, 19 February 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Interview, Mo..., female, employee, 25+, Dublin, 8 January 2013.

<sup>16</sup> *Socialist Voice* (November 2011), <<http://www.comunistpartyofireland.ie/sv2011-11/03-dame-st-2.html>> (05/2017).

<sup>17</sup> “Occupy Waterford” (2011), <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCpoilSLBS8>> (05/2017).

Another Galway occupier stated: “We are not a political group”<sup>18</sup>. Occupiers also kept well away from the trade-union organized anti-austerity protests in late 2011 and early 2012 because many of them felt that nothing would come of colluding with such protesters. In any event, many of the occupiers distrusted trade unions and they were extremely wary of being infiltrated by radical political activists as one disillusioned occupier explained: “There was an obsession with a ban on political and trade union banners and literature. There was fear of any organization bringing its own agenda into this movement” (Sheehan 2012, 3). Another occupier pointed out that:

In Galway, we took a pragmatic stance. We let the various parties or organisations that gravitated around Occupy access to the camp but they couldn’t use it as a platform to get recruits for themselves because we were not linked to anyone and we didn’t share the Socialist Workers’ Party’s political views.<sup>19</sup>

Public opinion was initially favorable to Occupy but soon became somewhat indifferent and gradually negative. The occupations were at times dismissed as public disturbances initiated by small groups of socially, economically and politically marginalized/disadvantaged people<sup>20</sup>. Occupiers refused to accept such portrayals and worked tirelessly to justify and to clarify their actions. As one Waterford occupier-blogger posted:

Why is everyone so negative towards this movement??? Its great that people are getting up and standing for what they believe... all the people here who are being negative just stand and take what the governments throw at them... for a change you could get out here and support us instead of being against us... we are all one and we are all fighting for the same thing... it makes no sense giving out and doin nothing about it, be supportive of this peacefull protest its a great thing and its about time it started Waterford needs it [*sic*].<sup>21</sup>

One way occupiers challenged the ways they were commonly portrayed was by making the public aware of the reasons they had joined the camps. Many occupiers indicated that they simply wanted to raise awareness that the austerity measures overwhelmingly targeted the poor and the weak while those responsible for the country’s economic collapse were not held to task. A recurring comment in the interviews was that occupiers wanted to make sure that Ireland became a better place: “Irish children could have a future

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Gi..., male, unemployed, 50+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Ch..., male, unemployed, 25+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>20</sup> *Broadsheet* (30 October 2011), <<http://www.broadsheet.ie/2012/03/08/occupy-dame-street-gone/>> (05/2017).

<sup>21</sup> *Politics.ie*, <<http://www.politics.ie/forum/waterford/174912-occupy-waterford-protest-7.html>> (05/2017).

other than to join dole queues or to emigrate”<sup>22</sup>. When asked if she had ever protested before Occupy, a young student and former Occupy Galway activist answered: “No, this was the first time. I just became fed-up with the lies. I was sickened by what was happening around me. I wanted to do something this time”<sup>23</sup>. Another occupier stated that she wanted to show how “frustrated” she was by the state of social and political affairs<sup>24</sup>. One occupier saw his participation as a first step in “kicking out the government and the politicians in power”<sup>25</sup>. Still another stated that she came to understand that greed and corruption were at the root of the country’s problems<sup>26</sup>. In airing his “outrage”, “anger” or “despair” at the institutional failings, an unemployed occupier wanted the public to understand that his actions were legitimate and focused on the reckless investments and on the greed culture that had been tolerated<sup>27</sup>. A political novice indicated that he felt that the occupations helped to expose the contradictions in neo-liberal democracies<sup>28</sup>. For all these occupiers, Occupy became a means by which to show the general public that the political class had failed to protect citizens’ interests.

#### 4. *Unintended developments*

As noted, a number of people committed to Occupy because they believed deeply that the crisis and subsequent ill-advised political decisions – and notably the imposition of austerity measures – were at the root of their problems. Once involved in Occupy, however, many of them were unsure what to do in terms of offering concrete, alternative solutions or of ensuring widespread support for the cause. Arguably, the occupation of public spaces until eviction was the extent of the radical measures they took leading one displeased Dublin occupier to claim that: “The camp was too inward looking and it drained away from the movement”<sup>29</sup>. This dissenter’s comment points to some of the intractable issues facing the occupiers in a short space of time and to the problems of ensuring that many people remained loyal to the cause, as is common in many social movements (Fillieule 2005; 2013). This is akin to what Tarrow describes in his reference to the 1848 Revolution in France:

<sup>22</sup> Interview, St..., male, unemployed, 35+, Cork, 8 December 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, El..., female, student, 20+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Fi..., female, student, 20+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Ch..., male, unemployed, 25+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Gr..., female, unemployed, 30+, Dublin, 3 February 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Br..., male, unemployed, 55+, Dublin, 2 February 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, Eo..., male, unemployed, 45+, Dublin, 30 March 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, He..., female, retired, 65+, Dublin, 19 November 2012.

The initial euphoria of the ‘springtime of peoples’ soon evaporated; people wearied of life in the streets; some went home, others joined liberal governments, still other turned to reaction. ‘*Post coitum omnia animal triste*,’ writes Aristote Zolbert, quoting the old adage to reflect the disillusionment that follows waves of contention. (2011, 198)

The short-dynamics and the long-term effects – power struggles and fixed practices – are worthy of note in this regard.

In the short term, the occupations did help people from a wide social and economic spectrum to find the internal fortitude to make public their indignation, outrage, frustration or disappointment. The occupations also helped many of the occupiers to find comfort and security through their interactions with their peers. This has affinities with Jasper’s discussion of social movement participants’ shared and reciprocal emotions (2009, 182)<sup>30</sup>. But it should not be assumed that because people took part in Occupy, they automatically acquired the vital skills to gain a ‘voice’ or to ‘express’ themselves. This is because the occupiers were likely to fall trap to the divisions of labor and to the social relations of domination that are prevalent in the wider world. As Dunezat (2009) has argued, it is often the case in a collective action that only a limited number of people (frequently men) with the relevant social and cultural capital are vested with the duties of carrying out key organizational, administrative or public speaking tasks. In such circumstances, the least socially-endowed people – that is those with the lowest levels of social or cultural capital or those with very limited experience in social or political militancy – are the least likely to take up active roles and are often confined to the least taxing – and least socially viable – tasks such as doing minor administrative or housekeeping chores. Such divisions of labor or social relations of domination may in turn compromise many people’s active participation in long-term mobilizations and may be detrimental to the objective of ensuring that all people gain a ‘voice’ through collective action.

But all is not negative and people do derive a number of personal advantages from participating in a collective action such as Occupy. Much depends

<sup>30</sup> “Some of the emotions generated within a social movement – call them *reciprocal* – concern participants’ ongoing feelings towards each other. These are the close affective ties of friendship, love, solidarity and loyalty, and the more specific emotions they give rise to. ... Other emotions – call them *shared* – are consciously held by a group at the same time, but they do not have the other group members as their objects. The group nurtures anger towards outsiders, or outrage towards government policies. Reciprocal and shared emotions, although distinct, reinforce each other, thereby building a movement’s culture. Each measure of shared outrage towards a nuclear plant reinforces the shared fondness for others specifically because they feel the same way. They are like us; they understand. Conversely, mutual affection is one context in which new shared emotions are easily created. Because you are fond of others, you want to adopt their feelings. Both kinds of collective emotions foster solidarity within a protest group. They are key resources of identification with a movement”.



on the extent to which this person takes part as Maurer (2001) has highlighted. For instance, did he/she participate in the daily tasks which require specific skills and knowledge/familiarity with the codes and rules including speaking in public? As Cohen (2014) has shown, socially fragile people are more likely to take an active role during a mobilization's intense phases and when it is weakly structured – in an occupation for example. The extent of a person's commitment results therefore in contrasting feelings of empowerment. For mobilization *entrepreneurs*, this empowerment process (including raising self-esteem) is rather straightforward. Such people are deemed to be useful to the cause and their peers respect and listen to them<sup>31</sup>. But over time, mobilization *entrepreneurs* may well feel 'trapped' by the repetitive nature of the tasks they do on behalf of others. The more common activists/occupiers may also find great value in the work they do (cooking, cleaning, getting food, building shelters, dealing with security and so on) even if other people may not consider that their chores are all that important and/or indispensable. But such duties are not necessarily degrading or embarrassing since they are extremely important from the point of view of making the people who carry them out believe that they are doing something that is socially constructive and personally satisfying. Performing such duties is part of the empowerment process and helps these people to improve their lot in life: links are made, feelings of belonging are established. In the short term, such people gain confidence in themselves. They find renewed energy by virtue of the tasks they do and that they find meaningful and rewarding or by virtue of their day-to-day interactions with their peers.

In this regard, a recurring theme drawn from the interviews is that many of the occupiers believed that the camps made them feel loyal to the cause and to their peers and that they were now in a better position to deal with their day-to-day personal issues. These occupiers felt that participation had a therapeutic effect on them in that, for once, they were able to give public voice to their concerns and to find comfort in doing so<sup>32</sup>. Participating in the occupations also helped them to move away from negative feelings of anger, annoyance, loneliness, failure, guilt, solitude and/or despondency<sup>33</sup>. As such, the camps became for them havens of help and of solidarity. Some occupiers said that they learned how to do creative and useful tasks such as building tents, dealing with the police, talking to the media or learning mediation skills in dealing with disruptive local residents, passers-by and late-night revelers<sup>34</sup>. Despite despairing at the prevailing level of passivity in Irish society,

<sup>31</sup> On this general concept see McCarthy and Zald 1977.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Th..., male, unemployed, 40+, Cork, 15 December 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, Fi..., female, student, 20+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, Ao..., female, student, 20+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

a Galway occupier indicated that the camp was for her a “wake-up call” and that the camp helped her to begin to play a greater part in her community and to do something positive for the country<sup>35</sup>. Another occupier in Dublin stated that “At least we were doing something and weren’t complaining or being apathetic”<sup>36</sup>. Many of the younger occupiers who had never before been members of a community or voluntary association or who had never before participated in a collective action stated that they were keen to learn from others how to become politically active and how to raise public awareness about the “awful” state of the nation<sup>37</sup>.

In the longer term, however, emerging power struggles and rising doubts about operational procedures made the situation more complex – a common occurrence in many mobilizations as discussed above. The camps slowly became bogged down by issues arising from the occupiers’ sociological diversity and their increasingly incompatible sets of objectives – all of which slowly undermined group solidarity. In ODS, for instance, a number of the original mobilization *entrepreneurs* – ‘middle-class’ occupiers – felt that they were being pushed to the camp’s fringes. These ‘middle-class’ occupiers believed that the mobilization would ultimately fail because too many occupiers refused to frame their claims in class-based terms and to set up alliances. It is true that refusing alliances may well have worked in the camps’ favor in the very short term in the sense that it helped to foster group solidarity. Some felt that by refusing to become aligned they could not be accused of political favoritism and/or of diluting the purity of the cause. But refusing to set-up alliances may well have compromised Occupy’s longer term prospects. As Lipsky’s explains: powerless people “depend for success not upon direct utilization of power, but upon activating other groups to enter the political arena [on their behalf]” (1970, 1). For example, an occupier with extensive political or trade union experience considered that the “no politics” and the “no alliances” stances were naive and ultimately destructive<sup>38</sup>. Another politically engaged activist felt that her younger – and politically disengaged – colleagues failed to appreciate the history of the left and of the trade union movement in Ireland: “It was as if all protest started in October 2011”<sup>39</sup>. Petty disputes also undermined morale. Cliques soon formed and tensions between ‘full-time’ and ‘occasional’ occupiers became ever-present, particularly in ODS:

<sup>35</sup> Interview, El..., female, student, 20+, Galway, 17 November 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Mo..., male, employee, Dublin, 8 January 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, Se..., male, student, 25+, Dublin, 16 February 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Ge..., male, employee, 50+, Dublin, 5 January 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, He..., female, retired, 65+, Dublin, 19 November 2012.

Some of those camping became obsessed with the camp and with an inflated image of themselves as the core of this movement. ... One habitually referred to himself and others in the camp as ‘heroes of the revolution’ ... I believed that a camp obsession, even narcissism, was subverting the attempt to build a movement. (Sheehan 2012, 7)

In some ways, clique formations and petty disputes were linked to social class. In ODS for instance, some “working-class” occupiers felt that the “middle-class” occupiers were doing all of the easy tasks but that they were not carrying out their share of the more difficult hands-on duties such as getting food, building shelters or dealing with security issues<sup>40</sup>:

Some resented those who came for the talks and assemblies, but did not camp. ... From their point of view, they were outside in the cold, the rain and the dark when others were home asleep in their warm beds. They were vulnerable to the drunks, junkies, thieves and crazies on the city streets when others were secure in their homes. They were up all night on security duty while others arrived after a good night’s sleep seeking interesting company and intellectual conversation. (*Ibidem*, 7)

Another source of rising tension was linked to questions surrounding the use of the open/democratic decision-making format. Unquestionably, all the occupiers were committed to such a format but some felt that the ways it was used was counter-productive. For instance, a Dublin occupier suggested that the general assemblies were ineffective because they became bogged down in “tortuous discussions”<sup>41</sup>. A Galway occupier claimed that the “full-time” occupiers dominated proceedings and “silenced the occasional occupiers”<sup>42</sup>. These types of issues highlight the problems that many occupiers increasingly had in talking to and in understanding one another and, ultimately, in ensuring solidarity and commitment to the cause. To some extent, the camps soon became ends in themselves, generating an exclusionary group dynamic and contradicting the slogan: “We are the 99%”.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article I have sought to consider the issues of mobilization and disillusionment as they refer to Occupy in Ireland. Occupy emerged at a time of major social and economic turmoil in the country and its emergence validates in part the case of a rise in civil society resistance to austerity in the post-2008 period. I noted that the occupations enabled many people from very wide socio-demographic backgrounds to come together to express their

<sup>40</sup> Interview, Mo..., female, employee, 25+, Dublin, 26 November 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, He..., female, retired, 65+, Dublin, 19 November 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Interview, Th..., male, employee, 30+, Galway, 25 May 2013.

concerns. Initially, a relatively good number of ‘middle-class’ people (high levels of social and cultural capital) took part in the mobilization but, as the occupations lasted over time, the camps became increasingly populated by socially fragile individuals. The occupations were also somewhat different from ‘traditional’ protests notably because the occupiers were very much committed to the principles of direct, deliberative and participative democracy: no leaders, no spokesperson, no formal structures, no strict norms, no formal rites, and so on. One outcome is that there were no SMOs to organize protests or to provide services. In the short term, therefore, Occupy was important because it helped all occupiers – rich and poor, educated and less well educated, young and old – to challenge the perceived injustices in society and to give voice to their frustration, outrage or anger. Occupy also enabled many of these participants to deal with their day-to-day personal issues and/or to do creative and useful tasks. The process helped to create a form of group identity and solidarity. In the longer term, however, the camps became beset by a number of unintended problems and, particularly, by the upsurge in destabilizing power struggles and by rising doubts about the ways they operated. Both these issues undermined group solidarity and contributed, ultimately, to disillusionment and then to demobilization.

I would like to conclude this article by returning to a few issues that may be of interest and relevance to a wider audience. The first issue relates to the collective action cycles of precarious people – including Occupy and similar movements. Although there is a growing body of literature on such mobilizations, further research could focus on comparative analyses of the cycles of protest in order to assess the dynamics that take place over time within and across countries. Another strand of research could look at what becomes of the neo-activists that have acquired vital, social, organizational and political knowledge through collective action. Have these people withdrawn from militancy or have they moved on to populate alternative social and/or political movements as sites and sources of resistance? If they are still active, what do they bring to these new movements/issues?<sup>43</sup> Further research could thus analyze the effects that neo-activists may have on the various SMOs. Finally, this article supports the view that there has been an increasing pattern of resistance to austerity in Ireland. Further research could focus on the state of play of the political and mobilization contexts in the country. Has there been an irremediable change in the country or are we simply witnessing a ‘false springtime of discontent’? Further research on all these points could provide for interesting points of comparison, discussion and analysis.

<sup>43</sup> My follow-on interviews with many of the neo-activists that participated in Occupy confirm that they now play a role in a number of organizations that are involved in a range of social issues.

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# “Young Men of Erin, Our Dead Are Calling”<sup>1</sup>: Death, Immortality and the Otherworld in Modern Irish Republican Ballads

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*Abstract:*

Irish physical-force Republicanism has long been noted for its tendency to promote the tropes of martyrdom and immortality as core tenets of its ideological belief system. This essay sets out to examine the *genre* of Republican death ballads so as to identify how such essentialist concepts are represented and promoted within the attendant song tradition. Particular attention will be paid to works that deploy overtly supernatural tropes in order to articulate the key Republican concept of heroic immortality. The present research will demonstrate the consistency with which such narrative devices have been retained within the Republican song tradition into the late twentieth century and beyond, a time when their utilisation had become largely redundant within the broader folksong tradition.

*Keywords:* Ballad, Immortality, Ireland, Irish Republicanism, Revenant

While Irish Republicanism has received growing levels of academic focus in recent years, its attendant ballad tradition continues to avoid scholarly attention. Despite the enduring longevity of Republican ballads within Irish folksong, the *genre* is notable for a marked absence of published material, with the last major scholarly work being Zimmerman’s *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Irish Political Ballads and Street Songs 1780-1900*, a 1967 publication which largely ignores twentieth century output. Considerable volumes of Repub-

<sup>1</sup> Quotation taken from the ballad ‘Seán Mac Neela and Tony D’Arcy’ (*The Harp: Songs and Recitations of Ireland*, 1960, 37).

lican songbooks continue to be published up to the present but contain little, if any, by way of literary analysis or commentary. As ancillary literature, the popular ballad provides an invaluable insight into the shifting ideological sands of Irish Republicanism – as well as the communities from which it continues to draw popular support – and its absence from any scholarly evaluation creates a considerable academic lacuna.

In its more dogmatic, physical-force manifestations, Irish Republicanism displays an essentialism that promotes the tropes of martyrdom and immortality as core tenets of its ideological belief system. The following essay will demonstrate how such concepts have been popularly represented within Republican song culture through the utilisation of supernatural and/or revenant tropes in ballads narrating the deaths of militants. The present work focuses exclusively on works from the twentieth century, a time when the composition of such narratives had become largely redundant within the broader folksong tradition, their more extreme manifestations from previous eras being largely rationalised by performers and composers alike (Ellis 1979, 170, 178). Despite their almost universal abandonment elsewhere, such culturally defunct narratives have been retained within modern Irish Republican ballads with a remarkable consistency. In the works under review, a sense of thematic ‘other’ is pervasive and all show considerable diversity in terms of afterlife locations, spiritual transitions, resurrections, ghosts and revenants, among others. Thus, the current work does not focus exclusively on any one particular aspect of the supernatural: instead, it is intended as a broad academic overview of the varying ways in which Republican death and immortality are represented via the medium of the popular political ballad in Ireland. In doing so, a suitable literary paradigm is provided through which these key ideological concepts can be satisfactorily analysed and developed within the broader scholarly framework of modern Irish Republicanism.

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The origins of modern Irish Republicanism can be traced to political events of the late eighteenth century, when the varying forces of Irish separatism embraced the principles of modern European Republicanism, having been significantly influenced by the successes of both the American and the French Revolutions (Adams 1986, 133; Bishop and Mallie 1987, 18; English 2006, 95-96; Sanders 2011, 22; *et al.*). In tandem with the core objective of establishing an independent 32-county state, Irish Republicanism has consistently displayed a quasi-theological adherence to the tropes of protracted endurance and heroic self-sacrifice, at times elevating them to essential prerequisites of national liberation (Coogan 1980, 14; Kearney 1980-1981, 62; Sweeney 2004, 338-339). One of the most totemic and enduring articula-

tions of same was by Patrick Pearse<sup>2</sup> who famously declared that: "Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations" (1916, 133-137). Bishop and Mallie have argued that this concept of "turn[ing] disaster into an emotional triumph" has created "[t]he perverse psyche of Republicanism" (1987, 455) in which failure through ideological adherence will invariably supersede advances made through expedient political pragmatism (Ó Broin 2009, 13; Frampton 2011, 83-85, 281; Sanders 2011, 9). With the binary of sacrificial martyrdom and national liberation occupying such an elementary position within physical-force Republicanism, a resultant immortality has become embedded within its ideological belief structure, with death regularly obfuscated as a transient event in which the self-sacrificing Republican volunteer has willingly participated. Consequently, militants who have lost their lives quickly transcend their status as earthly patriots and come to be revered by the Republican community as mythological "hero-martyrs" (McCann 2003, 928). As shown throughout the following selection of ballads, such immortality is accentuated by the utilisation of the tropes of suffering, death and resurrection, such metaphorical representations of the eternal Republican deliberately mirroring the unrealised vision of the arisen, liberated Ireland.

While all Republican ballads ultimately fulfil the basic propaganda requirements of political song by serving as platforms for the interwoven tropes of heroic bravery, patriotism, national liberation, etc., those containing death narratives perform a separate and very specific function. Such works are essentially commemorative in nature and are quite often hagiographic; however, they also display a clear narrative duality, by being thematically inspirational in parallel with their primary commemorative focus. In such instances, they seek to serve as inspirational constructs by providing exemplars that future generations are expected to emulate. Thus, within Republican ballad narrative, the twin tropes of self-sacrifice and immortality primarily serve as dramatic devices used to reinforce this commemorative/inspirational dichotomy and essentially act as the fulcrum for this propagandistic binary. By deliberately focussing the narrative on the Republican's martyrdom, the audience is explicitly warned to never allow the sacrifice made to have been in vain. Thus, the ballads serve an instructive role as a motivation-cum-warning to the living. In such instances, the (specifically Republican) audience is not simply inspired to complete the project of national liberation, but is also urged to emulate the sacrificial path taken by the now deceased volunteer, should

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) was a Dublin-born barrister, poet, playwright, educationist, Irish-language revivalist and Republican militant. On May 3, 1916, he was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin, for his role in the Easter Rising. The quotation cited is from his graveside oration for Fenian leader Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915), delivered on August 1, 1915.

this ultimately prove necessary<sup>3</sup>. Republican death ballads, therefore, function as unifying narratives between past and future events, but perhaps more importantly, they also act as facilitators in the intrinsically cyclical culture of militant Irish Republicanism. This is achieved by both commemorating past, and seeking to inspire, future armed activity in equal measure<sup>4</sup>. This dramatic utilisation of the dead as motivation for the living, combined with the promotion of a glorious immortality, has led to a deliberate ambiguity between matters corporeal and otherworldly within Republican cultural narrative. As the following analysis will show, such ambiguity is reflected in the retention of paranormal tropes throughout the canon of modern Republican ballads, despite such dramatic devices having been either significantly rationalised or wholly discarded elsewhere within traditional folksong during the modern era.

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Given that the metaphorical resurrection and rebirth of Ireland is well attested as far back as the *aisling*<sup>5</sup> poetic *genre* of the XVII and XVIII centuries, it is unsurprising that ethereal depictions of Ireland have been retained throughout the modern canon of Republican song. Thematic representations of death as a transitional gateway to a heroic afterlife in Ireland are evident in “Shall My Soul Pass Through Old Ireland?” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 80), “Take Me Home To Mayo” (*ibidem*, 75) and “Brave Frank Stagg”<sup>6</sup>, works which document the final hours of three IRA hunger strikers who died in English prisons<sup>7</sup>. All three are narrated by the dying republicans themselves,

<sup>3</sup> The hunger strike ballad “Mac Swiney Thought Us How To Die” provides an explicit example of such sentiment (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 99).

<sup>4</sup> These dialectic representations are manifest at Republican commemorations which form an indispensable component of the tradition. Such events are deeply ritualistic and traditionally involve marches (led by IRA colour parties) to Republican graves and are comparable to religious pilgrimages in protocol. In such activities, physical-force republicans essentially seek to contemporise their history and thus, legitimise their actions (Currie and Taylor, eds, 2011, 81-84).

<sup>5</sup> “Vision”. In such output, Ireland will appear in (generally very beautiful) female form, lamenting the condition of the Irish people under British rule. She will then invoke a young man to arise from his degeneracy and strive on her behalf. Shields notes the clearly erotic subtexts in such representations (1992-1993, 171).

<sup>6</sup> Accessed at: <<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=32684>> (05/2017).

<sup>7</sup> The three in question are Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920), Michael Gaughan (1949-1974) and Frank Stagg (1942-1976). The former was Lord Mayor of Cork at the time of his arrest for “possession of seditious materials” in August 1920 (Flynn 2011, 43). MacSwiney died on October 25, 1920 after 74 days on hunger strike, the longest recorded fast to death by a Republican political prisoner. Michael Gaughan was convicted and sentenced to seven

with each articulating predictive accounts of posthumous, spiritual journeys back to Ireland. Despite the obviously corporeal aspect of narratives related by still living subjects, all three works convey an unavoidable sense of the ethereal. As is the norm in Republican ballad culture, the offences for which the three were originally convicted are essentially irrelevant and are deliberately eschewed (Ó Cadhla 2017, 96), resulting in narratives concentrating exclusively on the spiritual transition of the dying hunger strikers. In each of the three works, the concept of a posthumous journey is not restricted to the religious context of a celestial otherworld as all three primarily focus on the men's dying wishes to be brought home to Ireland, a feature explicit in two of the titles. The trope of pilgrimage, coupled with the ritualistic descriptions of the journey home, is solidified by the utilisation of imagery conveying a pervasive sense of place and belonging in Ireland, juxtaposed against total alienation within Britain. Such unavoidable references to home and location have a binary force from a Republican perspective: firstly, they reflect the role – however self-appointed – of the Republican guerrilla as a defender of his/her community, but also serve to portray Britain as an invader, representative of an alien, unwelcome presence<sup>8</sup>. Thus, each narrative depicts Britain as being at best, a torturous purgatory or at worst, a hell which must be endured before the return to Ireland. The latter is in turn described in deliberately affectionate language as the heavenly destination that awaits the Republican hero-martyr. Descriptions of the remains returning to Ireland are infused with ritualistic imagery and contain spiritual subtexts that evoke a form of sacred journey that the dying republican must undertake to complete his sacrifice. The hunger strikers are each portrayed as being indifferent to their impending death, displaying a stoicism commonly found in Republican execution ballads (Zimmerman 1967, 70; O'Brien 2003, 159-161). In parallel with such fatalism, their only concern appears to be the aforementioned wish to be brought 'home', which is portrayed as a heavenly deliverance from their Hellish suffering in English prisons. This journey is, of course, not simply their wish to be returned to Ireland for burial, but is representative of both their physical and spiritual liberation and, by extension, an analogy for the newly resurrected and, thus, liberated Ireland.

years imprisonment in 1971 for his role in a bank raid. He embarked on a hunger strike for recognition as a political prisoner and for repatriation to an Irish prison and died on June 3, 1974. Along with six others, Frank Stagg was convicted of arson in 1973 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. During his time in several English jails, Stagg undertook four separate hunger strikes, the last of which was to lead to his death on February 12, 1976. For further reading on the centrality of hunger striking within Irish Republicanism, see Coogan 1980, Beresford 1987, O'Malley 1990, Hennessy 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the local defensive dynamic of physical-force Republicanism, see Alonso 2002, 38-66 and Moloney 2002, 80-87, 229.

The motif of the sacred journey is evident in “Take Me Home To Mayo”, in which both “home” and “Mayo” are cited in each of the four lines of the chorus. The ballad has just two verses – placed between the three refrains of the ‘homeward-bound’ chorus – which contrast the idyllic life enjoyed by Gaughan in Ireland with his grim existence as a political prisoner on hunger strike in England. In Verse 1, the audience is presented with Gaughan as a young man in Mayo who has been compelled to leave home and take action against external aggression. The notion of a ‘reluctant revolutionary’ predominates, a popular feature of the Republican ballad tradition. He is dying in Verse 2, thoroughly alienated in Britain and wishing simply to be brought home. The clear sense of pilgrimage alluded to in the ballad was also evident throughout Gaughan’s funeral proceedings in which his remains were escorted by IRA colour parties through Irish emigrant areas of North London and similarly, from Dublin to Ballina via every town along the route<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, MacSwiney’s questioning of the priest in the second narrative as to whether his soul shall “pass through old Ireland” is followed by a chorus which explicitly references his city of birth, along with places of close personal and familial connections. The deliberate use of descriptors such as “old”, “little”, “loving”, “dear”, “pure”, “sanctified” in relation to Ireland convey a pervasive sense of homeliness and belonging, all of which are absent in Britain (“foreign”, “dreary”), and which MacSwiney will only reconnect with following his journey home. While ballads from the late twentieth century generally convey a less overtly religious dynamic than earlier works (McCann 2003, 928), “Brave Frank Stagg” retains strong spiritual and quasi-religious subtexts. Unlike MacSwiney who sought consolation from a priest, Stagg’s family appeal directly to God on his behalf. The presence of two women – his wife and mother – at Stagg’s side deliberately evokes the Biblical crucifixion scene, as do his final words of consolation to his family as he nears death: “‘Ah, my loves,’ the young man murmurs, ‘do not cry your tears for me, / For my time is nearly over, and today I will be free’ ”<sup>10</sup>. Again, the sense of place

<sup>9</sup> In keeping with the ritualism associated with the Irish physical-force tradition, the tricolour draped on Gaughan’s coffin was the same one used to cover MacSwiney’s remains in 1920. Five months after Gaughan’s death, the same tricolour was to be used again, this time on the coffin of IRA volunteer James McDade who was killed in a premature bomb explosion in Coventry, England. For a detailed account of Gaughan’s death and funeral, see O’Donnell 2011, 201-207.

<sup>10</sup> This quotation is readily comparable with lyrics found in the traditional Irish-language crucifixion lament “Caoineadh na dTrí Muire” (“The Lament of Three Marys”). The relevant lines read: “Éist, a mháithrín, is ná bí cráite / Óchón is óchón-ó! / Tá mná mo chainte le breith fós, a mháithrín / Óchón is óchón-ó!” (“Listen, dear mother, and do not be tormented / Alas! Woe is me! / The women who will mourn for me have yet to be born / Alas! Woe is me!”). The Three Marys in question are Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James and Joseph.

and home is pervasive throughout ("Ireland/Erin" being mentioned three times, and "Mayo" twice, in just three verses), with Ireland again posited as the heavenly terminus that awaits the Republican at the end of his sacrificial journey. Before he dies, Stagg has a heavenly apparition and comforts his mother and wife with the words, "I can see a bright sun shining on my own green Mayo fields, / And I see dear Michael Gaughan, waiting there beneath the trees", again articulating an awaiting paradise which ensures – and indeed, celebrates – Republican immortality. In Stagg's case there was to be a further exposition of the Republican resurrection trope in the aftermath of his death, following a dispute regarding the hunger striker's legal instruction that he be afforded an IRA funeral and burial beside Gaughan. Unwilling to witness a similar display as had happened with the latter's funeral in 1974, the Irish government took the unprecedented decision to divert the aeroplane carrying Stagg's remains in order to frustrate a Republican funeral. He was interred three days later with 3 feet of concrete placed over his grave by police to prevent his reburial by the IRA. An armed police guard was removed from his grave in November 1976, at which point republicans – accompanied by a priest – tunneled through the adjoining grave and reinterred Stagg beside Gaughan with full IRA honours<sup>11</sup>. The discovery of the empty grave following his re-interment clearly evoke the opening of the tomb on Easter Monday and further accentuate the overtly Christian aspect of his self-immolation. In the popular Republican mindset, Stagg has finally completed his mortal suffering and is now not just spiritually, but also physically 'arisen' from the dead. Thus, he has become immortalised within Republican consciousness, as evidenced in the attendant ballad narrative: "But he lives in Erin's heart yet and wherever flies her flag, / Ireland's sons and Ireland's daughters will remember brave Frank Stagg".

Similar thematic portrayals of Ireland as an idyllic otherworld are liberally employed; however, numerous works also articulate a specific Republican Elysium beyond Ireland that all volunteers will ultimately reside in, similar to that alluded to in "Brave Frank Stagg"<sup>12</sup>. Ellis notes the widespread propensity for vagueness regarding descriptions of such locations, with a heaven of "definite theological connotations [and] Biblical descriptions" (1979, 176) by no means being the norm within traditional folksong<sup>13</sup>. Such output is ubiquitous throughout the *genre* of Republican ballads with narratives displaying constructs similar to that found in "Kevin Coen" (*Songs of Resist-*

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the considerable controversy surrounding Stagg's funeral, see O'Donnell 2011, 350-373.

<sup>12</sup> A comparable heroic otherworld – *An Mag Mell* (The Plain of Happiness) – is well-attested in pre-Christian Irish warrior mythology. See MacKillop 2005, 24, 149, 213.

<sup>13</sup> See also, Van Effelterre 2007, 69.

ance 2001, 52)<sup>14</sup> (“He has gone to join the company of Sligo’s gallant dead, / The six men on Benbulbin’s slopes who fought and nobly bled, / Sheeran, Breheny, Gorman, Savage<sup>15</sup>, who bravely faced the foe, / Are there to greet the dauntless soul of Rusheen’s Kevin Coen”), “Seán Sabhat<sup>16</sup> from Garryowen” (*ibidem*, 39) (“They have gone to join that gallant band of Plunkett<sup>17</sup>, Pearse and Tone<sup>18</sup>”), “The Ballad of John Greene” (*ibidem*, 51)<sup>19</sup>, (“Tonight amongst the martyrs of Erin, / God rest you, brave Johnnie Greene”) and “Seán Mac Neela and Tony D’Arcy” (*The Harp: Songs and Recitations of Ireland* 1960, 37)<sup>20</sup>, whom we are told reside in “Halls Eternal” with “Ashe<sup>21</sup> ... and brave MacSwiney”. This dramatic ploy of reciting lists of martyred republicans from previous generations is a consistent feature of Republican song, described by Zimmerman as “strings of names ... repeated in a litany like names of saints” (1967, 66). As well as accentuating Republican immortality, the practice also enables the ballad writer to convey a strong sense of historical continuity to the audience which in turn, is used to instil the con-

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Coen (1947-1975) was killed during a gun battle with the British Army on the Cavan-Fermanagh border on January 20, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> The six republicans in question here are Sligo anti-Treaty IRA members Seamus Devins, Brian MacNeill, Harry Benson, Paddy Carroll, Tommy Langan and Joseph Banks, all of whom were executed on Benbulbin Mountain, Sligo, by Irish Free State soldiers on September 20, 1922. Thomas Sheerin, Harry Breheny and Patrick Gorman – again, all from Sligo – were also killed by government forces during the Civil War period. Martin Savage was a native of Sligo, but was a member of the IRA’s Dublin Brigade when he was killed in action on December 19, 1919.

<sup>16</sup> Seán Sabhat (1928-1957) was killed with Feargal O’Hanlon (1936-1957) during an IRA attack on Brookborough RUC station, County Fermanagh on New Year’s Eve, 1956.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Plunkett (1887-1916) was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin on May 4, 1916, for his role in the Easter Rising.

<sup>18</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) was a Dublin-born Protestant radical who was arrested and charged with treason for his role in the 1798 Rising. He died on November 19 of the same year from an alleged self-inflicted injury while in custody following a refusal of execution by firing-squad.

<sup>19</sup> John Greene (1946-1975) was shot dead in disputed circumstances outside Castleblaney, County Monaghan on January 10, 1975.

<sup>20</sup> Tony D’Arcy (b. 1906) and Seán McNeela (b. 1914) both died on hunger strike in Dublin in 1940 (March 16 and 19, respectively) following their conviction for relatively minor political offences. The former was sentenced to three months for refusing to account for his movements and for not giving his name and address when arrested, with the latter receiving two years for “conspiracy to usurp a function of Government” by operating a pirate radio station (Flynn 2011, 95).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ashe (1885-1917) was sentenced to death for his role in the 1916 Rising, the sentence being later commuted to penal servitude for life. Following a general amnesty in June 1917, he was rearrested and charged with sedition and sentenced to two years hard labour. He embarked on a hunger strike for political status in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, where he died from the effects of force-feeding by prison staff on September 25, 1917.



temporary struggle with a greater political legitimacy, an essential feature of the physical-force tradition in Ireland<sup>22</sup>.

The trope of a heroic Republican Otherworld is developed significantly in several other works in which not only is the volunteer shown to be immortal within this realm – and consequently in the collective folkloric recall of the Republican community – but he/she is also portrayed as having physically transcended the grave. In such instances, the dead volunteer is no longer solely functioning as an ideologically inspirational figure from the relative distance of an abstract Republican paradise. Instead, he/she is also depicted as returning to Ireland – *post mortem* – to reinvigorate and lead the next generation of militants. This represents an interesting thematic shift from the three ‘pilgrimage’ ballads previously discussed. Here, Ireland is now no longer representative of an ethereal paradise that the volunteer will journey to after death; instead, it is a clearly physical setting to which the resurrected Republican will return in order to maintain the struggle and to encourage and ensure that others do likewise. Thus, the act of self-sacrifice is but one dimension of the Republican martyrdom trope, pointing further to the ballad narratives containing parallel commemorative and inspirational force, as previously argued.

An examination of such output reveals narratives that focus primarily on events before, and subsequent to, the actual death which the ballads were originally conceived to narrate. This deliberate obfuscation of death provides a seamless continuity between matters corporeal and ethereal and infuses the subjects with a pervasive sense of the eternal. Such immortality is manifest in “Hughes<sup>23</sup> Lives on Forever”, a work which focuses on the military prowess of its subject in the years preceding his imprisonment, to the almost complete exclusion of his eventual self-immolation on hunger strike<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, Hughes’ death is notably absent from the narrative, a feature re-enforced by the repetition of the ballad’s title at the end of each verse and chorus, respectively. Thus, in spite of Hughes’ death, his deeds are shown to be very much of the present as, “[t]he flame he carried now burns on”, he is “[u]nconquered

<sup>22</sup> “For [dissident republicans], history offers the ultimate validation – and the guarantee of future success. The culture of the dissidents is steeped in commemoration and reverence for republican ancestry ... devotees sees themselves as following in the footsteps of those who have gone before” (Frampton 2011, 281). See also Sinn Féin policy document, “Where Sinn Féin Stands”: “... we take our inspiration and experience from the past” (1970).

<sup>23</sup> On May 12, 1981, Francis Hughes (1957-1981) became the second of the H-Block hunger strikers to die.

<sup>24</sup> This work appeared on the album *The Roll of Honour* (1983), an independently-released recording by Irish ballad group, The Irish Brigade. Lyrics are unavailable in printed source and are reproduced here with the kind permission of their author, Gerry O’Glacain.

still”, his “spirit is free” to complete the task pursued while alive<sup>25</sup>. The narrator indicates that Hughes is among the living by addressing him directly, claiming his death will be avenged and finally, cites Hughes as an omnipresent force within the Republican struggle: “They feared you then, they fear you yet / For Hughes lives on forever”<sup>26</sup>. Hughes’ immortality resurfaces in the “The Volunteer”<sup>27</sup>, an explicitly paranormal ballad narrated by a fictional IRA man who has been wounded in a gun battle with the SAS. Before being summarily executed, the narrator is rescued by an unidentified militant who single-handedly overcomes an entire company of British soldiers, before carrying him to a safe house. The wounded man then “turned to thank my comrade brave, but I found I was alone”. He tells the household of his “comrade strange, but it seemed they already knew”. The popular folkloric motif whereby the living only fully realise that they have encountered a revenant after its disappearance is shown at the ballad’s conclusion when the narrator ultimately recognises his rescuer in a framed picture which reads: “In memory of Francis Hughes” (Van Effelterre 2007, 69). In “The Volunteer”, the deceased Hughes speaks twice: firstly to the SAS men (“Just drop those guns down gently”) and secondly, to the narrator (“You’ll be safe here, ... / They’re friends of mine, though we haven’t met for many a lonely year”). This represents a significant development of the dramatic device previously cited in which the deceased is addressed by the narrator. The attribution of direct speech to Hughes further emphasises both his physical, and of course, politico-ideological, immortality and thus, his active participation within the broader Republican struggle. Again, what the audience is presented with is not a militant who is simply immortal within the abstract confines of a heroic Republican afterlife. Hughes’ faculty of speech, coupled with his physical ability to carry a wounded comrade to safety while carrying a rifle, all combine to show his narrative presence as being very much of this world.

The ballad “Mairéad Farrell”<sup>28</sup> contains a resurrection narrative related not by an anonymous figure, but by the deceased Republican herself. The

<sup>25</sup> A similar representation is evident in “The Ballad of Francis Hughes” which again, after presenting his various military feats, depicts Hughes as an active IRA volunteer who has transcended death: “And high ‘round the hills of Bellaghy / Francie Hughes watches over his men” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 6).

<sup>26</sup> Comparable expressions are also evident in “The Ballad of Billy Reid”: “But they still fear him yet and they’ll never forget / How brave Billy Reid stood his ground” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 69). Reid (1939-1971) was part of an IRA unit which ambushed a British Army patrol in Belfast city centre on May 15, 1971, resulting in the wounding of two British soldiers and in Reid’s own death.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>28</sup> Accessed at: <<http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/multimedia/songs#18>> (05/2017). Along with two other Belfast IRA members, Mairéad Farrell (1957-1988) was assassinated by the SAS in Gibraltar, on March 6, 1988.

ballad opens with the line, "Do not stand at my grave and weep. / I am not there I do not sleep", thereby imposing her immortality on the narrative from the outset. The established motif of symbolically equating the resurrected Republican with the newly-reborn Ireland is also evident throughout, "When Ireland lives I do not die", as is the familiar trope of suffering necessarily preceding liberation: "In Armagh jail I served my time, / Strip searches were a British crime. / Degraded me but they could not see, / I suffered this to see Ireland free". Similarly, "Martin Hurson"<sup>29</sup> also employs the device of posthumous speech with three of the four verses narrated directly by the hunger striker himself. The first verse states (three times) that Hurson is dead, but in the remaining three, he is clearly alive and recounts his childhood, his years on IRA active service, his imprisonment and finally, his time on hunger strike. Hurson engages in the familiar inspiration-cum-warning widely deployed throughout the canon: "And though I'm gone you must fight on 'til Ireland is free again"<sup>30</sup>. Any potential for doubt that he has not, in fact, transcended the grave is dealt with in the final verse when – similar to Hughes – he is omnipresent and leads his fellow republicans: "My ... companions brave I'm watching over you yet". Hurson's immortality is again emphasised in the final (repeated) line, in which he says, "*a chairde, slán go fóill*"<sup>31</sup>, his *au revoir* again indicating that death does not conclude the activity of the deceased Republican hero-martyr.

Despite the tangible sense of "other" in the above depictions of Hughes, Farrell and Hurson – and while they have clearly risen from the dead – it is still somewhat unclear whether their *post mortem* status is, in fact, corporeal, ethereal or revenant, a common ambiguity of ballads that are thematically supernatural (Munnely 1992-1993, 177). Indeed, Atkinson's deployment of the non-specific "unmortal character" in such instances is perhaps appropriate in this regard (1991, 233). In the case of "The Volunteer", the arisen Hughes still possesses wholly physical attributes and faculties, despite the unmistakably paranormal narrative related. Similarly ambiguous representations are also clearly evident in "Hughes Lives On Forever", as well as the previously discussed portrayals of Farrell and Hurson. While the corporeality – or otherwise – of these particular visitations may be equivocal, elsewhere in the canon, ballad writers show no reluctance in fully embracing the supernatural through the promotion of exclusively revenant apparitions. In one such work – "Feargal Óg O'Hanlon" (*The Easter Lily: Songs and Recitations of Ireland 3*, 1964, 23)<sup>32</sup> – the subject re-

<sup>29</sup> On July 13, 1981, Martin Hurson (1956-1981) became the sixth of the H-Block hunger strikers to die.

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>31</sup> "Friends, goodbye for now".

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 16.

turns from the dead and appears in apparition near the border town of Clones. He speaks lucidly throughout the ballad, narrating the circumstances of his death at Brookborough with Seán Sabhat. The established trope of Republican paradise is duly referenced, as they both now reside among “the hosts of Count O’Hanlon”<sup>33</sup>. The encounter is related anonymously and describes the arisen O’Hanlon as: “a freedom fighter of great renown, who fought and laid his young life down. / ... His eyes were bright with freedom’s glow as when on earth he walked below”. The paranormal theme is reinforced in the final verse in which O’Hanlon “vanished in an Ulster dell ... / But forever in our hearts shall dwell” thus, remaining (as ever) immortal. Before his disappearance, the narrator – clearly unperturbed by the apparition – asks the dead Republican if he has “a message to convey”. O’Hanlon replies (albeit somewhat predictably), “‘I have,’ said he – ‘Fight on’”, the posthumous rallying call clearly being the sole reason for his visitation.

Ballads in a similar thematic vein are pervasive. In such works, the dead reappear to instruct former comrades to complete the task of national liberation for which their own lives have been sacrificed. More importantly, perhaps, they also seek to ensure that the living do not stray from the path of self-sacrificial militancy. Such tropes are reinforced by the appropriation of the ballads’ closing lines as inspirational constructs for the following generation. It should be noted that these posthumous statements are wholly unambiguous and bear no similarity to the popular revenant ballad motif of “a confrontation ... and an ensuing wit combat, the outcome of which determines whether the unmortal can lay claim to the mortal” (Atkinson 1991, 232). Such riddling episodes are not a feature of Republican ballads as revenants have a specific message to relate and are never of malign intent. (In any event, such activity is wholly unnecessary, as Republican revenants are very much preaching to the already converted). This device is ubiquitous and is not restricted to explicitly resurrection-focussed narratives. Similar expressions are to be found in execution ballads such as “Kevin Barry”<sup>34</sup> and “Brave Tom Williams”<sup>35</sup>, but are also evident in works that narrate physical confrontations, such as “The Ballad of Billy

<sup>33</sup> Count Redmond O’Hanlon (c. 1640-1681), seventeenth century Irish outlaw.

<sup>34</sup> “Lads like Barry are no cowards, from the foe they will not fly; / Lads like Barry will free Ireland, for her sake they’ll live and die” (Cronin 1965, 51). Kevin Barry (1902-1920) was captured following an attempt to relieve arms from a British Army patrol in Dublin in which three soldiers were killed. He was subsequently convicted of murder and was hanged in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, on November 1, 1920.

<sup>35</sup> “So, I say to Irish soldiers: ‘If from Tom’s path you chance to stray. / Keep in memory of that morn when Ireland’s cross was proudly born / By a lad who lies within the prison clay’” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 13). Tom Williams (1923-1942) was convicted of murder for his role in a diversionary IRA operation to facilitate the passage of a banned Easter 1916 commemorative march in West Belfast, during which a member of the RUC was shot and fatally injured. He was hanged in Crumlin Road Gaol on September 2, 1942.

Reid"<sup>36</sup>. While such political exhortations are clearly unambiguous, their impact is considerably lessened – certainly from the perspective of a Republican audience – by virtue of their anonymous narration. In "Feargal Óg O'Hanlon", however, a tangible gravitas is added to the invocations due to their utterance by a volunteer who has transcended the grave, rather than simply by an anonymous narrator. In "The Ballad of John Greene" the dead volunteer now resides in Republican paradise "amongst the martyrs of Erin"; however, this is but a temporary destination before his inevitable return to the conflict in Ireland. The theme of Republican immortality is revisited throughout the narrative, with references such as "the deathless Irish Republic" accompanying descriptions of Greene's return from the dead. His resurrection is symbolic of the reborn Ireland, which will be delivered with his own personal participation in the struggle: "And we march to the dawn light of freedom, / You will lead us, brave Johnnie Greene". An almost identical narrative is evident in "Seán Mac Neela and Tony D'Arcy". Again, their immortality is heavily emphasised. The pair are "deathless heroes", whose deeds "we'll hold ... in our hearts forever ... / We'll tell their tales through generations". Similar to previous narratives, the two deceased republicans return to physically participate in what will be the final, victorious battle: "Brave Tony D'Arcy and brave Seán MacNeela and all our heroes from sea to sea. / We'll march beside you 'till in joy and triumph, we'll sing your praises in Ireland free". The opening line of Verse 3 contains an interesting literary device: "Young men of Erin, our dead are calling to their comrades in field and town, / To join the standard of *Poblacht na hÉireann*<sup>37</sup> and fight the forces of the British Crown". In such narratives, the inspirational trope found in the final lines of "Kevin Barry" *et al.*, is accentuated to the point where living republicans are infused with a pre-emptive guilt should they even consider abandoning the path of sacrificial militancy and thus, are effectively haunted by the dead to complete the task of national liberation. Similarly, in "The Roll Of Honour"<sup>38</sup>, the writer insists on utilising the paranormal so as the dead may instruct the living, despite the ballad being an ostensibly corporeal-focussed work which commemorates the 1981 hunger strike. The first three verses provide a generic account of the collective grief of the Republican community in the wake of the hunger strikes, but the narrator appropriates the final lines to address the final (now dead) hunger striker directly: "Michael Devine from Derry you were the last to die. / With your nine brave companions with the martyred dead you lie". All ten dead hunger strikers then reply in unison: "Remember! Our deaths were not in vain! / Fight on and make our homeland a nation once again!".

<sup>36</sup> "If you think he was right, come and join in the fight and help to free Belfast. / For the blood Billy shed and although he lies dead, in our hearts his memory will last" (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 69). See footnote 26.

<sup>37</sup> "The Irish Republic".

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 24.

Comparable hauntings appear throughout the canon with considerable frequency. “A Call From The Prison Graves”<sup>39</sup> relates a striking narrative in which living republicans are not simply extolled to rededicate themselves due to the sacrifice already made, but are explicitly haunted into doing so, as seen in “The Roll of Honour”. Direct speech is utilised throughout, and all four verses are spoken by the dead. Unlike in previous works, the republicans here are anonymous, an iconic figure clearly unnecessary to develop the narrative, such is the force of sentiment contained therein. Again, immortality is centre stage, as shown in the opening line in which the dead are deemed to merely “sleep in death”. The familiar invocation appears early in the ballad (Verse 1), when the living are instructed, thus: “Before the flame we kindled wanes, we charge you do your part”. Verse 2 conveys a greater sense of urgency (“The creed our blood re-baptised – then will you not serve it too? / We cannot man the breach again, ‘tis you must dare and do”) with the living scorned, and effectively ordered to embrace death in the cause of Irish freedom (“Oh, what is life, that you should pause or fear to cast behind?”), a cause without which their lives are deemed meaningless: “Life consecrate to some high cause alone doth purpose find”. Verse 3 returns to the familiar theme of Republican continuity and the living are instructed to complete the task of national liberation for which the dead have sacrificed their lives: “From our cold hands then take the sword, complete what we began ... the sacred fire still fan”. Should the living renege on this task, Verse 4 contains stark and explicit warnings as to the consequences of failure: the dead will return to their “blood-dyed grave [and] your shame will curse and know’. This fate will not be borne solely by the living, as a considerably worse humiliation will be brought to bear on the Republican dead who “will feel a fiercer pain than sting of England’s lead, / If you betray, for ease or gain, the trust of martyred dead”. As already noted, living republicans are to draw inspiration from the fact that they will be accompanied in militant action by the risen dead, a coalition which will assure victory: “Beside you in your columns proud, we martyred ones will walk. / You strong with life, we in our shroud – the tyrant still will baulk”. In this instance, the thematic utilisation of the martyred dead as an inspirational trope is taken to dramatic extremity with the representation of shroud-clad, revenant IRA volunteers march-

<sup>39</sup> Accessed at: <[http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS\\_ID=Samuels-Box5\\_0620](http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=Samuels-Box5_0620)> (05/2017). The lyrics for this ballad are reproduced with the kind permission of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. As noted previously in the instance of Pearse’s 1915 funeral oration, the grave is an ever-popular trope within Irish Republican culture. Similar sentiments were expressed the year previously by fellow 1916 Rising leader James Connolly: “If you strike at, imprison, or kill us, out of our prisons graves we will evoke a spirit that will thwart you and, mayhap, raise a force that will destroy you. We defy you! Do your worst!” (Quoted in Adams 1986, 70).

ing in military columns alongside the living<sup>40</sup>. By depicting republicans in their death shrouds – yet still able to fight – the narrative succeeds in articulating a form of purgatory that the deceased cannot escape until the struggle for Irish independence has been completed, which perhaps may explain their eagerness to return to the corporeal world. The revenants in this work, being of a more obviously ghostly nature than previous examples, would be the exception rather than the rule in Republican song. In terms of general appearance and activity, the revenant Republican largely tallies with Buchan's definition of a "corporeal creature, a substantial person acting like a human being because he or she is to all appearances a human being, though one returned from the Otherworld" and certainly bear no resemblance to "ghosts of the diaphanous variety with jangling chains and heads tucked under arms" (1986, 145-146). As noted, the revenant republican not only verbally encourages former comrades to continue the struggle, but will also popularly participate in same and thus, is very much a "walking, talking dead person in a significant part of the action" (*ibidem*, 151).

Given the established consistency of supernatural tropes within the Republican death ballad *genre*, it is appropriate at this point to examine comparable representations of same throughout the broader folk song tradition. Folklorist and musicologist Hugh Shields has researched extensively in the field and has set out a series of criteria that are pervasive in ballads containing revenant narratives, namely:

- (i) The popular use of decayed, decomposed bodies rising from the grave (Shields 1972, 101);
- (ii) The occurrence of supernatural events within dream sequences (*ibidem*, 103; Shields 1992-1993, 164);
- (iii) Subject matters are generally of a "latter day banality" with "sketchy apparitions" (1972, 108);
- (iv) The use of revenant characters solely as a "narrative device to bring about a suitable conclusion to the story", such occurrences being "quite perfunctory and no more remarkable than any natural event" (*ibidem*, 109);
- (v) The propensity for apparitions to be "feebly motivated ... express[ing] in their relations with the living ... nothing more than a vague benignity" (*ibidem*, 109);

<sup>40</sup> A similar narrative can be found in the ballad "The Dead March Past" (*The Flag: Songs and Recitations of Ireland*, no. 1, n.d., 22).

- (vi) Shields also notes the gradual disappearance of revenant tropes from popular ballad tradition over time, explaining the loss as being “possibly as a result of simple degeneration, but often rather through the tendency to rationalise by effacing supernatural features wherever they occur” (*ibidem*, 99), citing the “general decline in the strong, collective conviction that things against nature can happen” (*ibidem*, 99). Munnely further observes that “[b]allads dealing specifically with supernatural occurrences, individuals and other beings do not make up a very large corpus of traditional song in English in Ireland” (Shields 1992-1993, 173). Essentially, with the arrival of more sophisticated, literate audiences, such folkloric motifs have been rendered somewhat *passé* in the modern era (Ó Cadhla 2012, 69-70).

If we are to employ the above criteria as a comparative paradigm between thematically paranormal ballads from both the Republican and the broader folksong traditions, immediate anomalies become apparent. The current research has shown that within Republican ballad narrative, revenant hero-martyr figures:

- (i) are physically strong and battle-ready, and regularly display corporeal faculties, most notably speech. They also participate in armed action;
- (ii) appear to the living in specifically non-dream settings;
- (iii) are clearly identifiable and have heroic, epic roles;
- (iv) represent the climactic moment of the narrative and thus, are in no way perfunctory;
- (v) have very clear and definitive roles and are motivated to return so as to inspire and physically assist future generations, conveying explicit instructions and warnings;
- (vi) enjoy a ubiquitous position within the ballad *genre* and show no signs of the deconstruction evident within folksong tradition in general.

It is clear from the above comparison that all six of Shields’ criteria are at some considerable variance with the established format of the revenant Republican ballad, something which puts the *genre* in a rather unique position when compared with the broader folksong tradition. Similarly, Republican ballads show no evidence of “a central relationship [that] has been severed” (Buchan 1986, 146), nor of the emotional upheaval and excessive grieving commonly found throughout folksong (*ibidem*, 147-148; Moreira 2008, 109), nor indeed, of the traditional role of ballad revenants as providers of solace and consolation to the living (Ellis 1979, 178; 1986, 147-150; 2008, 109). Therefore, revenants in Republican song display no comparable cathartic function for the wider Republican community. In essence, such a role is effectively redundant given the clear obfuscation of death within the song tradition, a direct consequence



of the fundamental importance of self-sacrifice, resurrection and immortality as inspirational tropes within physical-force Republicanism. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the attendant song tradition has not undergone the transition evident elsewhere. With the concept of heroic immortality being so deeply embedded within the ideology, revenant representations are consequently not viewed as nostalgic, quaint narrative motifs, but rather have a genuinely contemporary resonance within popular Republican consciousness. All of the above is not to suggest, of course, that republicans retain an archaic belief in superstition and ghosts. Put simply, the trope of heroic immortality, as represented by the revenant Republican hero-martyr, has proven far too powerful and totemic a propaganda device to allow its disappearance. Thus, the often explicitly essentialist nature of Irish Republicanism has acted as an effective barrier to the rationalisation and discarding of such revenant tropes, which as demonstrated, have been retained within the ballad tradition with remarkable consistency.

One final ballad that is worthy of discussion is "Dark Rosaleen's"<sup>41</sup> Last Chaplet". The early twentieth century work contains an explicitly paranormal narrative in which the executed leaders<sup>42</sup> of the 1916 Rising are portrayed as spirits flying over Dublin city. Verse 1 revisits the theme of Republican immortality by describing the interment of Pádraig Pearse, thus: "Forty feet deep they dug his grave ... / But none could bury his soul". The absurd grave depth is repeated in the following line ("Forty feet of Irish earth / The true heart of Pearse they covered") as a dramatic device – albeit a clumsy one – to again pointedly articulate the concept that death is not the final role for the Republican hero-martyr. As per the political resurrection motif famously extolled by Pearse himself, the grave is no obstacle for the deceased Republican as "over the city that gave him birth the wind of his spirit hovered". The following two verses continue in a similar vein, citing several of the executed 1916 leaders<sup>43</sup> who, like Pearse, are all portrayed as ethereal figures in the Dublin skies. The sense of paranormal eeriness is further accentuated with archaic descriptions of inclement nocturnal weather: "Toll the bells of Ireland, toll"; "The wind of his spirit hovered"; "His soul sailing under the morning star"; "The red wind

<sup>41</sup> Variation on "Róisín Dubh" ("Dark Róisín"). Archaic poetic personification of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, <[http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS\\_ID=SamuelsBox5\\_0620](http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=SamuelsBox5_0620)> (05/2017). The lyrics for this ballad are reproduced with the kind permission of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

<sup>42</sup> The ballad lists the 15 leaders executed from May 3 to May 12, so it may be assumed that the work was penned before the execution by hanging of Sir Roger Casement in London on August 3, 1916.

<sup>43</sup> The executed republicans cited are: Michael O'Hanrahan, Thomas Clarke, Thomas McDonough, Edward Daly, Seán McBride, Michael Mallin, Thomas Kent and Eamon Ceannt, along with Pearse's younger brother Willie.

of death rushed by”; “The winds of Ireland ... / At dawn ... and at dark”; “In the mist”; “On His wind”; “The twelve winds of Erin”; “the grey-green winds”; “The purple winds ...”. Verse 4 is spoken by no less a narrator than God himself, who personally grieves for Joseph Plunkett and while addressing him directly, returns to the theme of equating the suffering of Ireland with that of the Biblical crucifixion: “I have a care for thee, / Since many a crown was for Ireland weaved, / Like one that was wove for me”. The Christian imagery is repeated in the following verse in which God proceeds to extol a martyrdom willingly embraced so as to alleviate the suffering of others: “I saw [Con] Colbert chose a felon’s path that a comrade might go free”. Verses 6 and 7 personify Ireland, portraying her in the familiar role of a lamenting mother in a perpetual state of suffering, the only escape for her ‘children’ being Republican martyrdom and immortality: “And the voice of Ireland chanted slow / ‘Only my dead are free’ ”. A conversation heavily-infused with religious imagery follows in which ‘Mother Ireland’ addresses God, claiming that the wreath of mourning she carries for her ‘sons’ is “of a thorn-bush ... made”, clearly implying that the 1916 leaders have not so much been executed, as crucified. Along with the wreath, she also offers God her chaplet containing 15 rosary beads, each symbolising one of her executed ‘sons’. The ballad writer’s representation of the executed 1916 leaders as a set of rosary beads in the hands of a mourning mother implies unity of political purpose and communal endurance. Coupled with the veneration of a maternal deity figure associated with rosary recitation within Catholicism, the image completes a picture of *pietà* – like suffering regularly promoted within the Irish physical-force tradition (Zimmerman 1967, 67; Sisson 2004, 162-163). Heavenly angels – *dramatis personae* notably absent from Republican death narratives – escort the 1916 martyrs to “the highest place”, where they are addressed by a God infuriated by “the black story of England’s way”, proclaiming that for “[t]oo long hath Ireland the thorn-path trod”. Ellis remarks that angels’ primary role in folksong was “to mediate between this world and the next so as to minimise the importance of death” (1979, 173), but here they appear to assist solely in the transition of the 1916 leaders into angels themselves, further evidence of revenant Republican song narratives eschewing a cathartic function for the wider Republican community. The ballad concludes with apocalyptic utterances from God as he descends to earth and vows to “ ‘show the dawning of Ireland’s day’ ”, by inflicting similar suffering on Britain: “ ‘Vengeance is Mine!’ said the mighty God, / ‘Is mine! I will repay!’ ”. The adaptation of God as a *de facto* IRA man is an interesting narrative development. While obviously infusing the Republican struggle with a further degree of hallowed sacredness, it is also an obvious acknowledgement of the vastly superior strength of Britain and consequently, the unlikelihood of an outright Republican victory in the classic military sense. The appropriation of a heavenly deity to the Republican struggle points to a

rather extreme development of the dramatic device whereby such ballads are used in an attempt at inverting the prevailing colonial power dynamic, and points clearly to the "perverse psyche of Republicanism" already discussed. Thus, if national liberation and control of political destiny are not possible via military victory over Britain in this life, then perhaps they may only be achieved symbolically by the embracing of suffering and endurance leading to an inevitable death – and importantly, resurrection and immortality – a consistent feature of the Republican song tradition that would benefit from further scholarly attention.

### *Concluding remarks*

Since the late nineteenth century, Irish physical-force Republicanism has displayed a propensity to elevate the tropes of endurance and heroic self-sacrifice as prerequisites of Irish national liberation. This essentialist ideal of "turn[ing] disaster into an emotional triumph" has created what Bishop and Mallie have termed "[t]he perverse psyche of Republicanism" (1987, 455). This is evidenced in the widespread promotion of heroic immortality throughout the ideological belief structure of Irish Republicanism. Within such discourse, death is popularly represented as having no finality, with deceased militants lionised as "hero-martyrs" (McCann 2003, 928) who have transcended death. In Republican popular culture, such figures are regularly portrayed as earthly patriots and mythological figures in equal measure. This paper has examined a diverse cross-section of Republican death ballads so as to identify how the tropes of sacrifice and immortality are represented and promoted within the *genre*. It has been established that such works display a narrative duality, by being thematically inspirational in parallel with their primary commemorative focus, with the twin tropes of self-sacrifice and immortality serving to reinforce this dichotomy. This is achieved by deliberately focussing the narrative on the Republican's martyrdom and in doing so, explicitly warning the audience not to allow this sacrifice to have been in vain. It has been demonstrated that by utilising the immortal dead as motivation for the living, a deliberate ambiguity has been contrived between matters corporeal and ethereal. Such ambiguity can be observed in the widespread utilisation of paranormal tropes within the popular musical tradition of Irish Republicanism. Several distinct categories of Republican death ballads have been identified, all of which are thematically supernatural to varying degrees. Several works represent Ireland as an idyllic, ethereal otherworld that awaits the deceased Republican, while others articulate a specific Republican Elysium that all volunteers will ultimately reside in. Works popularly portray the Republican hero-martyr as physically transcending the grave and subsequently returning to Ireland. Here, Ireland is no longer representative of a heavenly otherworld but is a clearly physical setting to which the revenant Republican returns.

Regular inconsistencies have been identified as to the *post mortem* status of characters within the ballads reviewed. It has been argued that the representation of death in Republican ballads is deliberately obfuscated so as to provide seamless continuity between the corporeal and ethereal realms, with such works progressed by focussing primarily on events before, and subsequent to, the Republican's death. Direct speech is regularly attributed to the arisen Republican so as to further accentuate the sense of immortality. Exclusively revenant apparitions are also widely employed throughout the canon. It has been demonstrated how the dead perform a very distinctive function within such works by pointedly instructing former comrades to continue the struggle for which they themselves have sacrificed their lives. Closing lines are regularly appropriated as inspirational constructs for the following generation in this regard, with the living effectively haunted by the dead into pursuing the task of national liberation to its completion. Such thematic utilisation of the dead is taken to extremity in several works through the graphic depiction of dead IRA volunteers marching beside the living to fight the British. Such ballads articulate a form of political purgatory that the hero-martyr cannot escape until the struggle for Irish liberation has been successfully concluded. A comparison with thematically revenant ballads from the broader canon of folksong has also been provided. A total of six distinctive features common to such works have been identified, while the almost complete disappearance of revenant narratives from traditional song in the modern era has also been noted. All six of these criteria have been demonstrated to be at significant odds with the established format of the revenant Republican ballad. This puts the *genre* under review in a somewhat unique position within the broader folksong tradition, demonstrating as it does, the complete absence of the modernising transition evident elsewhere. Further comparisons have revealed that revenant Republican ballads display no evidence of a severed close relationship, excessive grieving, or of revenants providing consolation to the living, all of which are universally found throughout folksong tradition. Thus, the revenants in Republican song provide no discernible catharsis for the wider Republican community, instead functioning primarily as motivating exemplars for future generations of militants. With the tropes of self-sacrifice, resurrection and heroic immortality being so deeply embedded within Irish Republicanism, revenant representations have been retained as inspirational tropes within the attendant ballad tradition with notable consistency. I argue that this is due to the ideal of heroic immortality – as represented by the revenant Republican hero-martyr – being too powerful and totemic a propaganda tool to permit its removal. Thus, the often explicitly essentialist nature of Irish Republicanism has acted as an effective barrier to the discarding of such revenant tropes from the Republican song canon, as has been demonstrated to be the case throughout the wider folksong tradition throughout the modern era.

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*Appendix*<sup>44</sup>

"Shall My Soul Pass Through Old Ireland?"

In a dreary Brixton prison where an Irish rebel lay.  
By his side a priest was standing, 'ere his soul should pass away.  
As he faintly murmured 'Father', as he clasped him by the hand.  
'Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

Chorus:

'Shall my soul pass through old Ireland, pass through Cork's old city grand?  
Shall I see that old Cathedral, where Saint Patrick took his stand?  
Shall I see that little chapel, where I pledged my heart and hand?  
Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

'Was for loving dear old Ireland in this prison cell I lie.  
Was for loving dear old Ireland in this foreign land I die.  
Will you meet my little daughter? Will you make her understand?  
Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

(Chorus)

With his heart pure as a lily and his body sanctified.  
In that dreary British prison our brave Irish rebel died.  
Prayed the priest that wish be granted as in blessing raised his hand.  
'Oh, Father grant this brave man's wish: may his soul pass through  
Ireland.'

(Chorus)

"Take Me Home To Mayo"

Chorus:

Take me home to Mayo, across the Irish Sea.  
Home to dear old Mayo, where once I roamed so free.  
Take me home to Mayo, there let my body lie.  
Home at last in Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

<sup>44</sup> Copyright to reproduce the lyrics of "Brave Frank Stagg" and "Mairéad Farrell" has not been fully secured. Full texts are respectively available at: <<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=32684>> and <<http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/multimedia/songs#18>> (05/2017).

My name is Michael Gaughan, from Ballina I came;  
 I saw my people suffering and swore to break their chain.  
 I raised the flag in England, prepared to fight or die.  
 Far away from Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

(Chorus)

My body cold and hungry, in Parkhurst Gaol I lie.  
 For loving of my country, on hunger strike I die.  
 I have just one last longing, I pray you'll not deny.  
 Bury me in Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

(Chorus)

### “Kevin Coen”

No more he'll roam the laneways he wandered as a lad,  
 No more he'll welcome springtime as the green comes o'er the land,  
 For he stood in the gap of danger to redeem his country's loss  
 And he fell 'mid a hail of bullets on the road near Cassidy's Cross.

Chorus:

When Ireland is a nation from sea to roaming sea;  
 When we rid ourselves of Quislings and men are really free;  
 Remember him with honour, remember him with pride,  
 For he fought to free his country and for its cause he died.

He has gone to join the company of Sligo's gallant dead,  
 The six men on Benbulbin's slopes who fought and nobly bled,  
 Sheeran, Breheny, Gorman, Savage who bravely faced the foe,  
 Are there to greet the dauntless soul of Rusheen's Kevin Coen.

(Chorus)

Get out of our country England and take your thugs away,  
 For there are still men like Kevin in the Provo IRA,  
 Who will face your hired killers and die if that must be,  
 To establish peace with justice in a land that's truly free.

(Chorus)



"Seán Sabhat From Garryowen"

It was on a dreary New Year's Eve as the shades of night came down,  
A lorry load of Volunteers approached the border town.  
There were men from Dublin and from Cork, Fermanagh and Tyrone,  
And the leader was a Limerick man, Seán Sabhat from Garryowen.

And as they moved along the street up to the barracks door,  
They scorned the danger they might face, their fate that lay in store.  
They were fighting for old Ireland to claim their very own,  
And the foremost of that gallant band was Sabhat from Garryowen.

But the sergeant spied their daring plan, he spied them through the door.  
The Sten guns and the rifles, a hail of death did pour.  
And when that awful night was passed two men lay cold as stone.  
There was one from near the border and one from Garryowen.

No more he will hear the seagull's cry o'er the murmuring Shannon tide.  
For he fell beneath a Northern sky, brave Hanlon by his side.  
They have gone to join that gallant band of Plunkett, Pearse and Tone,  
A martyr for old Ireland, Seán Sabhat from Garryowen.

"The Ballad of John Greene"

All through the four kingdoms of Ireland  
There rises a loud swelling peal –  
A cry full of anger and sorrow,  
They have murdered our brave Johnnie Greene.

A prayer rises up from the faithful,  
The faithful in woe and in weal,  
Tonight amongst the martyrs of Erin,  
God rest you, brave Johnnie Greene.

You came to the red gap of danger,  
And never bent knee to the foe,  
You fought like a Gael and a soldier,  
For a cause that lay trampled low.

When the deathless Irish Republic  
Is rescued from slavery and shame,

We'll give you a place in her memory  
And a soldier's salute to her name.

And all Volunteers make answer  
When the foe in front of us yields,  
And we march to the dawnlight of freedom,  
You will lead us, brave Johnnie Greene.

“Seán MacNeela and Tony D’Arcy”

Brave Tony D’Arcy, brave Seán MacNeela  
From storied Galway and proud Mayo,  
They have walked the ways of deathless heroes  
And have won the glory that martyrs know.  
We’ll hold their deeds in our hearts forever,  
We’ll call their names over land and sea.  
We’ll tell their tales through generations  
By the glowing firesides of Ireland free.

Their lives they offered for *Poblacht na hÉireann*  
For truth and justice and stainless right.  
God give them rest in the Halls Eternal,  
For with hearts unbending they fought the fight.  
May Ashe be near them and brave MacSwiney  
And all who travelled the same hard road.  
Through the gloom and pain and the vale of shadows  
Where no bright hope star above them glowed.

They foe they fought was the foe of ages,  
The vile invader who laid us low,  
Whose empire strangles all peaceful nations,  
And robs the weak that itself may grow.  
While slaves in Ireland bow down to England  
And lower the flag that was floating high,  
Our best and bravest, and loved and dearest  
For *Poblacht na hÉireann* must fight and die.

Young men of Erin, our dead are calling  
To their living comrades in field and town,  
To join the standard of *Poblacht na hÉireann*  
And fight the forces of the British Crown.

Brave Tony D'Arcy, brave Seán MacNeela  
And all our heroes from sea to sea –  
We'll march beside you, 'til in joy and triumph  
We'll sing your praises in Ireland free.

"Hughes Lives On Forever"

In Derry's hills they mourn a son,  
A brave young Irish soldier's gone.  
The flame he carried still burns on,  
For Hughes lives on forever.

Chorus:  
Freedom's dawn has come at last,  
Judgement for injustice past.  
Your tyranny is dying fast,  
While Hughes lives on forever.

Guardian of the hill and dales,  
Tyrone and Derry loved him well.  
Though tortured in that H-Block cell,  
Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

The scourge of Ireland's enemies,  
The SAS and RUC.  
Unconquered still, your spirit's free,  
For Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

Brave Francis Hughes you're with us yet,  
Your murderers we'll not forget.  
They feared you then and they fear you yet,  
While Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

“The Volunteer”

The gunfire split the still night air, from my side the blood flowed red,  
 Informer's work had been well done, an ambush had been laid.  
 My comrades turned back to my aid, I waved them on again,  
 Escape for me was hopeless: why should they die in vain?

The soldiers soon around me stood, their unit I could guess,  
 Their blackened faces could not disguise the hated SAS.  
 “Finish him off!” I heard one say as a gun moved towards my head,  
 “Tomorrow they'll all sing of another Fenian dead.”

“Just drop those guns down gently” a voice called from the dark.  
 They turned and fired a volley, but it seemed they missed their mark.  
 A stranger stood before them now, with eyes that seemed alight.  
 The cowards turned and quickly fled as he raised his Armalite.

His face, somewhere I'd seen before, though I couldn't tell just where,  
 But I knew from his green battledress that he was a volunteer.  
 He never said a word to me as we moved off through the night,  
 I was hoisted across his shoulders, a burden that seemed light.

“You'll be safe here”, at last he said, as a cottage door drew near.  
 “They're friends of mine, though we haven't met for many's a lonely year.”  
 He laid me gently down beside a wall of slate and stone.  
 I turned to thank my comrade brave, but I found I was alone.

When next I woke, I found myself with a family staunch and true,  
 I told them of my comrade strange, but it seemed they already knew.  
 I gazed upon that parlour wall, and things came clear at last,  
 And I thought of songs and of stories heard often in the past.

And I knew then that our struggle was a fight we could not lose,  
 For beneath his picture there I read “In memory of Francis Hughes.”

“Martin Hurson”

Among the hills of green Tyrone an Irish soldier lies.  
 The youthful Martin Hurson who for Ireland gave his life.  
 To uphold his country's dignity he followed Bobby Sands  
 On hunger strike for human rights, 'til death he took his stand.

Through dreary days in that H-Block cage, my thoughts returned to you.  
 Though beaten low by a savage foe, your memory saw me through.  
 In tortured nights you're prayers brought light and soothed fears and pain.  
 And though I'm gone you must fight on 'til Ireland is free again.

Now gaunt and pale in my H-Block cell, my heart still burns aflame.  
 In fondest dreams I drilled it seems among your hills again.  
 A guiding light to lead the fight to free my green Tyrone.  
 The voice of truth for Irish youth to crush the British throne.

Farewell my native green Tyrone and you sweet Bernadette.  
 My parents and companions brave, I'm watching over you yet.  
 Of Cappagh's braes, my childhood days, fond memories I recall.  
 And so adieu to the land I love true, *a chairde, slán go fóill.*

"Fergal Óg O'Hanlon"

I met a lad near Clones town,  
 A freedom fighter of renown,  
 Who fought and laid his young life down,  
 Brave Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

His eyes were bright with freedom's glow,  
 As when on earth he walked below,  
 And with his comrades faced the foe,  
 Brave Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

'God save you kindly', I did say,  
 'Have you a message to convey?'  
 'I have' said he – 'Fight on and pray  
 For Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.'

'At Brookeborough we fought and died,  
 Seán Sabhat and I fell side by side,  
 And now we've joined with joy and pride,  
 The hosts of Count O'Hanlon.'

Near Clones town he said farewell,  
 He vanished in an Ulster dell,  
 But forever in our hearts shall dwell,  
 Young Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

“The Roll of Honour”

Chorus:

Read the roll of honour for Ireland’s bravest men.  
 We must be united in memory of the ten.  
 England you’re a monster, don’t think that you have won.  
 We will never be defeated while Ireland has such sons.

In those dreary H-Block cages, ten brave young Irishmen lay.  
 Hungering for justice as their young lives ebbed away.  
 For their rights as Irish soldiers and to free their native land,  
 They stood beside their leader - the gallant Bobby Sands.

(Chorus)

Now they mourn Hughes in Bellaghy, Ray McCreesh in Armagh’s hills.  
 In those narrow streets of Derry they miss O’Hara still.  
 They so proudly gave their young lives to break Britannia’s hold.  
 Their names will be remembered as history unfolds.

(Chorus)

Through the war torn streets of Ulster the black flags did sadly wave.  
 To salute ten Irish martyrs the bravest of the brave.  
 Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty,  
 They gave their lives for freedom with Thomas McElwee.

(Chorus)

Michael Devine from Derry, you were the last to die.  
 With your nine brave companions with the martyred dead you lie.  
 Your souls cry out: ‘Remember! Our deaths were not in vain!  
 Fight on and make our homeland a nation once again!’

(Chorus)

“A Call From The Prison Graves”

In prison graves we sleep in death, we cannot battle more.  
 We fought the fight ’til our last breath, the stress and brunt we bore.  
 Now with life still in your veins, with manhood’s eager heart,  
 Before the flame we kindled wanes, we charge you, do your part.

The creed our blood rebaptised – then will you not serve it too?  
 We cannot man the breach again, 'tis you must dare and do.  
 Oh, what is life that you should pause or fear to cast behind?  
 Life consecrate to some high cause alone doth purpose find.

From our cold hands then take the sword, complete what we began.  
 By daring deed and fearless word, the sacred fire still fan.  
 Beside you in your columns proud we martyred ones will walk.  
 You, strong with life, we in our shroud, the tyrant still will baulk.

But should you fail – ah, God who gave us strength to strike the blow,  
 We each within our blood-soaked grave, your shame will curse and know;  
 And we will a fiercer pain than sting of England's lead,  
 If you betray, for ease or gain, the trust of martyred dead.

"Dark Rosaleen's Last Chaplet"

Forty feet deep they dug his grave, toll the bells of Ireland, toll.  
 They buried the man who Ireland would save but none could bury his soul.  
 Forty feet of Irish earth, the true heart of Pearse they covered,  
 But over the city that gave him birth, the wind of his spirit hovered.

His soul sailing under the morning star heard the desecrate city sigh,  
 And bearing his brother's soul afar, the red wind of death rushed by.  
 The winds of Ireland met up there, at dawn they met and at dark,  
 O'Hanrahan's soul on their wings they bore and the soul of Thomas Clarke.

The watchers down in the city heard MacDonough's soul go by,  
 But hardly his sleeping children stirred so gently he passed them nigh.  
 The souls of Daly and John McBride in the mist with Mallin's went,  
 And the Lord bade the soul of Thomas ride on His wind with Eamon Kent.

And the Lord was for Joseph Plunkett grieved and said 'I have a care for thee,  
 Since many a crown was for Ireland weaved like one that was wove for me.  
 Men knew that I broke not the bruised reed, yet they would not let me live.  
 My way was hard for My sons indeed and My mind is to forgive.'

'I saw Colbert chose a felon's path that a comrade might go free.  
 And much is pardoned to one that hath loved another as much as he.'  
 The twelve winds of Erin went to find the scattered souls of the rest,  
 And Heuston was found by the grey-green winds, the wind the wild birds love best.'

The purple winds swept up the Liffey tide for Connolly's soul unseen,  
And Seán MacDermott's, the last that died, God counted in all fifteen.  
The lights of Ireland gleamed below in the ring of her leaden sea,  
And the voice of Ireland chanted slow: 'Only my dead are free.'

'Dear Lord! Of a thorn bush my wreath is made', so mourned my Dark Rosaleen.  
'My chaplet tonight at Thy feet is laid, I give Thee my beads fifteen.'  
He heard who dwelt in the highest place and His angels silent led  
The waiting souls to His holy face and He spoke unto the dead:

'I have never yet dropped a feeble wing too small for mine eyes to see,  
Nor ever was sought by a hunted thing a refuge in vain with Me.  
I would the black story of England's way were blotted from my sight.  
I will show the dawning of Ireland's day he passing of her night.'

Then God from the steps of His high throne went down for many a mile,  
And He saw great England hard as stone and he bent in thought awhile.  
'Too long hath Ireland the thorn-path trod, I will turn my face away,  
Vengeance is Mine!' said the mighty God, 'Is mine! I will repay!'



# Clowning as Human Rights Activism in Recent Devised Irish Theatre\*

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*Abstract:*

This article focuses on clown techniques in devised theatre pieces by Charlie O'Neill and Brian Fleming, claiming those strategies as an emergent category of human rights activism in Irish theatre. Fleming's *Trilogy* (2011, 2012, 2014) and O'Neill's *Hurl* (2003) and *Dodgems* (2008a) are influenced by clown as practiced by Barabbas, but they return to a more text-driven, issue-based theatre to advocate for human rights. In close-reading these theatre pieces, I examine the following clown techniques: physical theatre, audience participation, parody and reversals of power, and self-examination. I argue that clowning is a growing undercurrent in Irish theatre, advancing human rights speech that challenges neoliberal and conservative views on immigration, racism, poverty, and homosexual rights.

*Keywords:* Clown, Devised Theatre, Human Rights, Physical Theatre, Resistance

## *1. Send in the Clowns*

Following the withdrawal of Ireland's Arts Council funding for his company Barabbas in 2010, Raymond Keane devised and performed in *City of Clowns* (2011) as the homeless clown Fibril, in which he playfully interacted with a sea of cardboard boxes and was ultimately enveloped by 50 volunteer clowns (Crawley 2011). "Clowns are by nature homeless", Keane muses when discussing the show, remembering his time working as a hairdresser in London in the late 1970s where he first witnessed a large homeless population (*ibidem*). Keane's inspiration from both artistic economic deprivation and the condition of homelessness is an example of the social justice imperative embedded within contemporary clown work in Ireland. The resistant

politics of the performance surfaced when a workshop of the production was staged during the International Monetary Fund (IMF) visit to Dublin, characterized by Peter Crawley as a “much angrier show” (*ibidem*). Indeed, the clown’s response to his environment is *not* apolitical as it may seem, but absorbs the political atmosphere surrounding it and reflects its own precarious position. Fibril’s emergence from storage in a large packing box, his playful interactions with an imagined world, and his recognition of his place within a world of other clowns enact the metaphorical journey of the clown: from play to self-knowledge and recognition of others as equal beings. Keane’s philosophy of clown centers on the clown as “very truthful”, as fools who can proclaim that the Emperor is not wearing clothes (Murphy 2007). He insists, “A clown is a state rather than a character. I am very much a clown. Everybody has a clown within them” (*ibidem*). Within this framework, the clown’s role as observer and mimic of society offers a subversive form of resistance to forms of power that threaten human rights.



1 - Raymond Keane in *City of Clowns*. Photograph by Patrick Redmond

While several scholars have discussed the ‘theatre of clown’ in Ireland as originated by the Barabbas company, few if any have explored how subsequent theatre practitioners are adapting and projecting clown techniques forward in

Irish theatre. This article focuses on clown techniques in devised theatre pieces by Charlie O'Neill and Brian Fleming, claiming those strategies under an emergent category of human rights activism. Fleming's *Trilogy*<sup>1</sup> (2011, 2012, 2014) and O'Neill's *Hurl* (2003) and *Dodgems* (2008a) draw from Keane's clown perspective and modes of devising, but they return to a more text-driven, issue-based theatre to advocate for human rights. While there are several different types of clown and clown techniques, I will examine the following here: physical theatre, audience participation, parody and reversals of power, and self-examination. These four 'clown' techniques enhance the social justice imperatives of the theatre-makers' work and assert its function as resistance to abuses of human rights. I argue that clowning is a growing undercurrent in Irish theatre, advancing human rights speech that challenges neoliberal and conservative views on immigration, racism, poverty, and homosexual rights.

Clown-influenced theatre is overdue for critical recognition within a growing body of scholarly interest in contemporary Irish devised theatre. Identifying a lineage of physical clown theatre in these pieces charts a path from social justice theatre in Ireland to a larger movement of human rights theatre that uses clown tactics to advocate for recognition of the dignity and rights of others. In this way, clown-driven performances build intentional micro-communities of awareness concerning human rights abuses. Clowns are necessarily irreverent, implicitly interrogating systems of power and parodying authority. What is accepted without question as logical is suspended and even reversed by the clown figure. Eric Weitz explains that in clown theatre, "A playful quality of behavior loosens, floats, frees its participants from the earthbound embrace of the physical" (2000, 270). The conscious presentation of a clown can suspend gender binaries and bring intentionality to the emotions clowns embody, such as a tear drop painted under one eye, or the exaggerated red upturned mouth. Their red noses, big shoes and wigs denote self-conscious performance and play, yet even when not in costume clowns use techniques of physicality and power reversals to command self-reflection. The clown performer can get away with provocative statements and dangerous parodies, because the utterances are coded as clown. Inherent within the dynamics of clown theatre's oppositional stance is an interactive, authentic, politicized engagement.

As a white, middle-class native Irish *bodhrán* player, Brian Fleming comes to the clown persona as an outsider, asking audiences to believe that clowning was thrust upon him. Using the clown persona, however, Fleming is able in his

<sup>1</sup> Fleming's *Trilogy* consists of three pieces: *Gis a Shot of Your Bongos Mister* (2011), *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?* (2012), and *A Sacrilegious Lesbian and Homosexual Parade* (2014). All three pieces were directed by Raymond Keane. Each piece has been performed separately at times, but I viewed them at the Galway Theatre Festival in 2015 billed as a trilogy, therefore I will consider them as a connected series in this article.

work to transcend his own embodiment and bring audiences along in identifying with marginalized groups in Ireland. Charlie O'Neill draws upon his own fairgrounds upbringing to channel clown technique into his performers' depictions of the lives of individuals speaking from subject positions not typically heard. His use of humor, physical theatre, and storytelling raises awareness and inspires empathy. O'Neill's work centers around the concept of the outsider, a figure whom he finds compelling because it "[gives] us a sense of another world, another possibility, another set of rules, it helps us 'make ourselves up'" (2016, personal communication). If the outsider shows an alternative state of being, his theory of clown envisions the clown with the power to inspire self-knowledge: "the clown draws people in, subverts power, educates and survives. The clown is flawed like all of us so we can identify with him – or her" (*ibidem*). Fleming, too, sees clowns as subversive: "they don't leave anything, they don't take anything away. They don't go as powerful people, they are not telling people what to do, they're Fools, people laugh at them" and yet in his experience "they broke down barriers everywhere they went" (McBride 2015). For both theatre practitioners, the clown provides an entry-point to exploring the lives of those lacking power and to guiding audiences towards identifying with them.

Clowns call attention to themselves, and they create a connection with audiences that has political potential. Veronica Coburn, one of the trio of Barabba founders with Raymond Keane and Mikel Murfi, wrote in her book *Clown Through Mask* (2013) with Sue Morrison of the potential of clowns for resistance speech: "The clowns are then society's safety valve. The clowns provide the emergency exit. They keep society safe by being unafraid. Unafraid to say what needs to be said, see what needs to be seen and, if necessary, tear down that which should no longer be allowed to prevail" (2013, 3). Raymond Keane further explains, "clown is a mask behind and through which is revealed the very essence of being human" (quoted in O'Connor 2012). The clown's red nose, what Jacques LeCoq called "the smallest mask in the world" conveys exaggerated emotions that can either affirm or mock the audience (quoted in Keane 2004, 96). When a white man who blends in with the majority and retains unquestioned privilege dons clown garb, he joins the minority, the outcasts and outsiders. Thus, the clown allows for a limited disavowal of privileged status that opens up avenues for incisive critique. Unfortunately, clown-influenced theatre has not yet been connected explicitly with human rights theatre, despite its compelling symbolic articulation of essential human equality and dignity.

## 2. *Human Rights Theatre and Devised Performance*

In his book *Theater and Human Rights* (2009), Paul Rae asserts a special role for theatre as an "inherently social activity" with the capacity for making vocal human rights interventions:

As an art form operating at the charged point where lives are given voice and experiences form, and where representatives of one group can make their address to others, the theatre is well-placed to bring to light behavior that contests or contravenes human rights standards. (22)

Following the idea that the theatre gives voice to issues of human experience, Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin describe human rights theatre as “tied to the unspoken and the unspeakable: it exploits silence, site, the body, gesture and objects in order to speak to, for and against” (2015, 6). Through performance, the paradox of human rights – a concept that ironically emerges only in the *absence* of rights – is explored through silences and expressions of voice. Further, the relationship created between the performers and the audience is an essential aspect of theatre that allows for contemporary critique of social and political conditions. According to David Román, “Performance proves an especially effective means to engage the contemporary in that artists and audiences are constituted and composed as a provisional collective in a particular temporal moment and in a specific localized space ... they enact and perform a temporary and conditional we” (2005, 1). Following the “provisional collective” of contemporary performance, this “conditional we” is poised to address shared concerns. This potential is maximized when theatre pieces are made in collaboration, as in devised performance.

An understanding of O’Neill’s and Fleming’s work as devised theatre paves the way for recognizing clown techniques within it, and further for exploring how those methods articulate resistance to human rights abuses. In *Devised Performance in Irish Theatre*, Siobhan O’Gorman and Charlotte McIvor define devised performance as “material that is collectively created by individuals working together in ways that resist (but do not necessarily reject altogether) the hierarchical organizational structures usually associated with institutional theatre” (2015, 2). They go further to identify devised theatre as a “politicized practice” employed by Irish theatre makers to address complex social issues, to create “theatre that contests hegemonic, stratified constructions of community that are grounded in such interconnected identity categorizations as gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, and religion” (*ibidem*, 13, 21). The collaborative, multimodal, and physical nature of Fleming’s *Trilogy* (2011, 2012, 2014) and O’Neill’s *Hurl* (2003) and *Dodgems* (2008a) places them firmly in the category of devised theatre. I contend that the very features that make these pieces devised theatre are contiguous with clown theatre.

Devised theatre also overlaps with physical theatre when discussing the theatre pieces examined in this article. Physical theatre, with its integration of movement, visual aspects, and music, unsettles the dominance of text-based Irish theatre, making it an apt venue for clown-influenced work and a theatre that challenges hierarchies of power. Deirdre Mulrooney contrasts the

prevailing tradition of Irish theatre as “static, neck-up ‘stand and deliver’ Abbey acting style, which was used to deliver the typical wordy, cerebral Abbey script” with physical theatre as a “new idiom” in Irish culture that became prominent beginning in 1993 with the inception of *Barabbas the Company* (2006, 175). Colleen Szabó notes that “*Barabbas* attempted to break into a theatre market that famously wanted to banish all movement from the stage” (2012, 35). Charlie O’Neill also cites the absence of physical theatre prior to that period: “While Irish drama and arts policy was (rightly) obsessed with our wonderful literary tradition, there was no sense of the physical, the body, of movement in our canon” (2016, personal communication). Therefore, the decision to privilege movement and music equally to language in Fleming’s and O’Neill’s pieces is itself a kind of revolutionary act, a choice to resist the canon of Irish theatre in order to create an alternative expression suited to representing marginalized people and controversial issues.

### 3. *The Outsider in Charlie O’Neill’s Work*

Charlie O’Neill’s *Hurl*, first produced at the Galway Arts Festival in 2003, is a signal example of clown influences acting on a more naturalized theatre piece. Eight actors play thirty-two roles, rotating in and out of roles and relying on gesture and mannerism to differentiate the characters. A hurling team in a rural town forms out of the boredom of several characters stuck at a Direct Provision center, and it comes to be made up of African, Latin American, and Bosnian members as well as a few native Irish ‘outsiders’. The play exposes the very real challenges of asylum-seekers, who are prohibited from work yet only receive 19 euros per week, and who must wait sometimes years for their applications to be heard while isolated 2 miles outside of town. While the play acknowledges that the human rights abuses in their home countries are often much worse (i.e., the team’s captain, Musa, knows he will be killed when he returns to Sierra Leone), the complicity of the Irish in stowing away vulnerable human beings in refugee camp conditions is simultaneously projected as a violation of basic humanity and dignity.

*Dodgems*, produced in 2008a by CoisCéim dance theatre, envelops the audience in the frenetic energy of a carnival atmosphere and colliding bumper cars on a working track (called dodgems in fairgrounds vernacular) to represent the exotic and chaotic world of “new arrivals and indigenous misfits”<sup>2</sup>. O’Neill’s rationale for the piece distinctly claims a human rights agenda:

<sup>2</sup> All references from *Dodgems* are from an unpublished version, the 5<sup>th</sup> draft of the play from August 2008, which Charlie O’Neill generously shared with me. It must be noted that any critical discussion of *Dodgems* is necessarily limited by the fact that the performance continued evolving throughout its two and a half week run, including deleted scenes and the two acts in the script combined into one.

Exclusion is becoming systemic in certain areas and socio-economic classes. The arrival of new cheap labour is causing fear and jealousy. ... Because of these systems and events, we are blindly germinating a race of outsiders, inside our own borders. ... Our outsiders need to be supported and invited in - not shunned and excluded. (O'Neill 2008b)

The piece is episodic, constructed as a series of dance vignettes about various types of outsiders confronting resistance to social and policy barriers towards their success. The movement language establishes the common humanity of the characters and evokes empathy from the audience. The central conceit, a dodgem car, is transformed throughout the piece to represent different images of mobility or crashing against obstacles. *Dodgems* builds to a raucous, hoofing dance at the end that encourages unity between the players and the audience.



2 - *Dodgems*, photograph by Patrick Redmond

In *Hurl* (2003), physical theatre is a transformative tool that harnesses the cultural influence of sport to drive its dual imperatives of social justice and creative artistry. The show incorporates puppets, choreographed dance, and shadow play as a response to racism and bigotry towards inward migrants residing in Ireland. The percussion of *De Jimbe* (composed by Brian Fleming) works with a screen projection to conflate the scenes of civil war in Africa, where children use hurleys as weapons, with the rural Irish setting of the foreground hurling pitch. This aural conflation with war and sport

is representative of the types of equalizing found in *Hurl*<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the choreographed hurling sequences liken the sport with dancing, poetry, and laughter. Prior to a match, Father Lofty coaches his team: “Let poetry write ye’re script today lads. ... They won’t rhyme like ye” (2003, 103). Metatextually, the play employs hurling to merge different cultures under an Irish banner; hurling is not just a physical competition but also an artistic and cultural expression of Irish resistance. The stylized and physical choreography of the play by Raymond Keane resembles a clown performance. For example, when the coaches deliver intercut team pep talks, the players are lined up on a bench representing each team in turn, with each coach giving a pep talk and the team spinning around to play the opposite team between speeches. The game of hurling is presented as a dance, with the Freetown Slashers “[dancing] the opposition into submission” (*ibidem*, 110, stage directions). Physical clowning is used for humor when a Yarn Teller describes the Slashers as “shitless” as they cower and shiver in terror with their backs to the audience. As each game moves them closer to the final the players become more politicized with their clown techniques, wearing identical masks bearing the face of their team captain Musa, who was deported to Sierra Leone through the intervention of local GAA chairman Rusty. When they remove those masks in synchronization, they wear their ‘game faces’ so to speak, and the unity of the team’s statement of support is registered. Using mask as a clown technique in this instance, to equalize and depersonalize, offers a powerful non-verbal form of opposition to injustice.

In *Dodgems*, too, physical theatre aspects are central to the piece: the stage is a working dodgem track with 12 electric cars, the live circus band joins both the players and the audience, and the sign-language interpreter becomes a character. Choreographed by David Bolger, who admits to being “fascinated by circus” from a young age, the movement vocabulary in the piece displays the themes of avoidance versus collision and the displacement of outsiders (Mulrooney 2006, 145). In one visual example David Toole, a 3 foot, 2 inch amputee, dances with taps on his hands and leverages his differences in physicality to unsettle expectations about ability and humanity. Traditional Irish dancing is also referenced subversively when a black man dressed in a girl’s Irish dancing costume step-dances while delivering a lecture about ‘the burqa’ that combines Irish and Islamic religious traditions.

Audience participation in *Hurl* occurs primarily through interactions between the players and the audience. The storytelling structure, which ro-

<sup>3</sup> Several discussions of *Hurl* have been unfavorable regarding what some see as the play’s oversimplifications, notably those by Colleen Szabó and Susan Conley. Szabó concludes that despite the engaging choreography of hurling through dancing, “It seems as if all the possible clichés and stereotypes that can be associated with the topic of the play appear in the performance” (2012, 126).



tates “yarn-tellers” who sometimes act roles and other times narrate or act as spectators, destabilizes the boundary between audience and players. In *Theatre and Globalization*, Dan Rebellato links the audience’s position with a unified “cosmopolitan ethical principle” explaining, “There may be something distinctly ethical in the position of the audience. First, their identification with characters on stage – often kinds of people that we would not ordinarily encounter – perhaps prepares the way for such identifications outside the theatre” (2009, 72). The audience enters the space where actors are selling tickets to the hurling match, reminding them that they are part of a collectively imagined stadium of fans come to watch a performance *and* sporting event. This becomes evident in the scene when the actors play spectators at a Freetown Slashers match who are making assumptions about each other. A local man assumes that a black man next to him supports the Slashers because of his race, and a Chinese man in the stands turns out to be an Irish language teacher. The audience of the play, perhaps having judged the other audience members themselves, is encouraged to reflect on biases and perhaps recognize their own unintentional racism.

As conceived by O’Neill and enacted by the players in *Dodgems*, audience participation is a ‘total immersion’ in the sights and smells of the fairgrounds environment. The audience interacts with the characters in the prologue, selling tickets that include a voucher for free candy floss, a Polish pierogi or an African plantain. At the end of the performance, the audience is encouraged to join the cast in dodgem cars, stimulating a feeling of unity with the players. By bookending the performance with audience-response activities, the audience resembles a circus clown’s spectators, constantly reminded that their reactions are being watched as well as the players, and that events depicted in the show are based on reality though packaged as circus fantasy. When immigrants arrive on shore via a dodgem car imaginatively fashioned as a ship, each passenger performs a nervous dance to present him or herself to the authorities, transforming the audience into the officials responsible for stamping and thus affirming or rejecting their humanity (McGrath 2013, 153). Another dance using suitcases as props reflects the restless, crowded waiting that asylum seekers must endure, while employing stylized and non-verbal movement with the suitcases that is reminiscent of clown performance.

Parody, one of the clown’s most effective tools, is also used to advance a human rights agenda on behalf of acceptance of the refugees. In *Hurl*, Rusty, who resents the outsiders invading his turf, recruits his own team of native Irish brutes and is portrayed in the language of the play as a dictator with terrorist ideologies. Lofty describes Rusty’s xenophobia in terms of zealous American “war on terror” initiatives: “This is his empire... anyone outside the townland boundary is Taliban” (2003, 93). Rusty advocates ruthless violence towards the other team: “winning usn’t enough lads—I want terrorism!” (*ibidem*, 110). Rusty’s vulgar accent signals his provincialism, and his speeches incite racist

violence towards the Freetown Slashers. He instigates: “they’re fired up in there definy now with their blow-ins and black fellas and Bosnians. They’ve red diesel in their veins. They’ve curry on their chips. Look out in the crowd there biys. It’s a fucking circus out there!” (*ibidem*, 103). It is telling that he calls the outsiders a “circus”, the word choice indicating that a circus stands for diversity, variety, freakishness, and uncontrolled energy. As a parody figure, Rusty animates the voice of those who wish to exclude inward migrants due to racist stereotypes, and dismantles its rhetoric by becoming the clown himself. The audience is encouraged to laugh at Rusty’s ridiculous perspective, such as when he attempts to redirect the hopeful players away from a sport associated with Irish culture: “Would ye not do the runnin biys? Yeer good at that” (*ibidem*, 95). By recognizing Rusty’s wrong-headed fear of losing his heritage by sharing it with those who don’t conform to his idea of Irishness, his language is disarmed and replaced with a more inclusive concept of Irish culture.

The clown’s ability to reverse power imbalances is well represented in *Dodgems*, when the same car that represented the boat of precarious refugees becomes a lap-dancing booth and then a taxi driven by an insensitive driver with Muslim passengers. These transformations retain the initial impression of a dodgems car, originally associated with funfair recreation and glee, then becoming a space of anguish, terror, and discomfort. The symbolic reminder of space as occupied by the powerful, and of the outsider at risk of being bumped while trying to avoid collision is a potent one. Some outsiders are on the margins of one group, but become gatekeepers of another, a concept that may be portrayed through linguistic variances. For example Toberboss speaks to a Romany man named Stanislav in Palari, the cant of fairground workers:

Stan my apple flan, I can’t waste my reason or rhyme getting bamboozled with some rinki-dink, didikoi like you coming far and near to maund for leer and lurk, from some fucking, foreign, faraway drum and base, dressed like a dog’s dinner in that filthy whistle and flute, fishing and hooking for work, out to steal our palones and expect to be given an uncle Ned to Bo-Peep in. What are you like? Look at the mooeey on you! (2008, 9)

The phonetic nature of Palari means that the audience will understand the broad strokes of the speech yet still feel confused, replicating the humor and embarrassment of a clown interaction. While his alternative vernacular marks him as an outsider himself, he refuses a job to Stanislav, despite the fact that Stanislav partially understands his language due to its overlap with his own. Through this linguistic exchange, the economically marginal, ‘Othered’ figure of the carnival worker becomes the force of exclusion for an even less powerful Other, the Romany migrant.

Self-reflection in *Hurl* happens primarily through acknowledgement of the ironies and injustices in Irish policy towards outsiders. For example, the player Santos from Argentina is a descendant of Irish emigrants – he can't claim Irish citizenship but his parents can. Dong is of Vietnamese descent but Irish, a self-described “feckin culchie”, yet he wouldn't be seen as Irish due to his race (2003, 101). Several moments of irony are conveyed through the character Father Lofty, who initially tries to talk Musa and Fatmata out of hurling and is humorously reminded of his insensitivity. He insists, “You'll stand out a mile playing hurling”, to which Musa replies “Because now of course we merge in perfectly. The nice tan and all that” (*ibidem*, 92). Lofty's journey to understanding and empathy is charted when he educates Rusty that hurling is a game brought to Ireland by immigrants, and advanced when he rejects the label of Musa as an “illegal alien”: “Watch who you're talking about sonny! He's our captain! He's a...hurler!” (*ibidem*, 117). The vehicle of sport thus transforms perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees from abstract political subjects to individual, human agents to be supported and included. Musa's Irish identity is affirmed at the end of the play when he speaks Irish from his jail cell, recalling the famous 1928 acceptance speech for Kildare by Bill ‘Squires’ Gannon. That the play ends with an African man speaking Irish models the accountability it demands of its audiences. Musa claims a place for the unjustly detained by invoking hurling's intersection with cultural nationalism and historic claims to Irish identity. While scholars like Szabó critique *Hurl*'s “predictable story and characters” and argue that it entrenches stereotypes, the play must be commended for breaking new ground in its weaving of physicality, lived experiences, and the mythological nature of hurling in Ireland into a coherent narrative that moves towards processing complex recent events (2012, 122).

Self-reflection in *Dodgems* occurs for both characters and the audience through the metaphor of the dodgems themselves. The instructive sign that reads, “the less you bump, the faster you go” serves as a reminder to native Irish people that discrimination against newcomers serves no one (2008a, stage directions). When locals shove to get to every dodgem car while the cars of the outsiders won't start, the outsiders' frustration inspires a self-reflective moment for those who wonder why inward migrants can't just support themselves or even return to their countries of origin. Within the carnival frame, the ‘fairness’ of human rights becomes more evident: everyone should get a chance with a car that works. In another clown-influenced moment of pathos, a woman irons a hole into her coat in the shape where her heart would be, non-verbally inducing empathy for her pain. Those who consider themselves progressive may still question their own ableist assumptions when the sounds of lovemaking in a caravan end and a man with no legs emerges, or when a disabled man refers to himself as “some sort of freak”, but he's speaking of his Polish identity rather than his disability.

#### 4. Brian Fleming's *Red Nose Theatre of Alliance*

Fleming's *Trilogy*, which can be viewed in any order, begins chronologically with *Gis a Shot of your Bongos Mister* (2011). In that theatre piece, Fleming tells the story of his friendships with his drumming mentors Bala and Chico from his travels to Senegal, and the reverse culture shock he sustained when his friends came to Ireland. Amidst the story of cross-cultural friendship, Fleming includes a sub-narrative about the Fatima housing project and its regeneration that suggests both the similarities between the Irish and African treatment of the poor and the vast difference in lifestyles<sup>4</sup>. Next, *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?* (2012) interrogates the nature of home and humanitarian efforts in chronicling Fleming's adventures as a clown in a Clowns Without Borders relief trip to Rwanda. This piece, which opens and closes with Fleming wearing a red nose, depicts his reluctance to join the clown troupe, his apprehension towards performing at the refugee camp, and finally the ability of clowns to transcend violence and horror and build humanity. The final piece, *A Sacrilegious Lesbian and Homosexual Parade* (2014), places Fleming more in the background as an observer of the efforts of Brendan Fay, a homosexual Irish man who organized the "St. Pat's for All" parade in New York City as an alternative to the official St. Patrick's Day parade, which until recently did not allow homosexual groups to participate under their own banners. The subjects of hospitality, ownership and export of Irish culture, and questioning capitalism entwine in this piece in support of free speech and the rights and dignity of homosexuals.

Fleming's theatre pieces are highly physical performances, featuring juggling, puppetry, movement and combining music from distinct cultures in inventive ways. In *Gis a Shot of your Bongos Mister* (2011), Fleming dances while relating the experience of dancing in a pub in Dakar, making himself ridiculous through exaggerated movements: "I'm rolling down windows, electric windows, rolling back the sunroof, electric sunroof, doing the monkey dance, riding the pony, spank that pony, throwing in a few local moves...". He is similarly self-deprecating in *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?* through obvious clown technique, when he wears a red nose and struggles to put on his too-tight yellow clown costume. Through puppetry, Fleming recognizes the cultural difference of the African spiritual relationship with masks and puppets. In Fleming's re-enacted telling of the story with a puppet and a trunk, the clown named Mr. Orange interacts with a silly bird puppet that airport authorities are trying to confiscate: "The bird comes to life on his arm. It

<sup>4</sup> Both Brian Fleming and Charlie O'Neill participated in the Fatima Regeneration project, a scheme for redesigning the low-income Fatima housing project with the influence of artists and contributions of the residents to have a voice in their own homes. Fleming produced "Tower Songs" as part of the project.

doesn't go down well". Instead of seeming like a mockery of the airport security worker's insistence that the puppet "can kill", the moment plays as a mockery of Mr. Orange's inability to stop clowning in a serious situation. Fleming's description of the clowns on the plane to Rwanda acts out their physical play to cast himself as the "straight man": "As the plane takes off, three clowns beside me all throw their hands in the air like kids on a roller coaster. You've got two choices, you throw your hands in the air too or you ignore them, in which case, you're the straight man". His recognition of clowning as infectious prepares the audience to be won over to clowning themselves during the performance: "*They* can't just switch off the clowning and *you* can't avoid getting involved". As he performs the characters of each of the other clowns: Mr. Green, Mr. Orange, and Mr. Blue, Fleming asks the audience to identify with his "straight man" position of skepticism toward clowning. And yet, the straight man is a clown himself, thus Fleming's persona of the anti-clown is itself a clown character.



3 - Brian Fleming juggling in *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?*  
Photograph by Amy Miller

Being an audience member in any of the three *Trilogy* performances is an active and at times unsettling experience. During seating for *Gis a Shot* (2011), Fleming greets audience members himself and hands out tickets with phrases to be used later in the performance, instructing the audience in when and how to participate in moments such as an African Kumpo chorus. In *A Sacrilegious Lesbian and Homosexual Parade* (2014), Fleming hands out cards and tells the audience: "So the deal, is you've got to shout out your line

right after the person beside you and once we get to the end, everyone shouts out their lines randomly. You got it? Do we need to do a practice?”. When he announces a new piece called “The Cast of ‘Riverdance’ Falling Down a Stairs”, audience members yell out their lines while Fleming acts it out musically with three sets of bones and a *bodhrán*. Fleming’s engagement with his audiences performs clown as theorized by Colleen Szabó: “It is not possible to be a clown for the audience; the clown comes into being through the play with the audience” (2012, 24). This interaction inserts the audience into both Fleming’s personal stories and the political positions he subtly reinforces.

The clown techniques of play and parody feature heavily in Fleming’s *Trilogy*, especially in *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?*, during which Fleming puts on a red nose and a yellow clown jumpsuit as he tells the story of his recruitment into and participation in Clowns Without Borders in Rwanda. He stares dolefully out at the audience in clown garb, communicating his misgivings about both adopting clown costume *and* agreeing to perform in Rwanda at all. The call to go “away with the clowns”, which he mocks by likening it to being “Away with the bleedin’ fairies” finally seduces him and he ultimately witnesses the positive humanitarian impact of clowning. Another power reversal occurs with a little boy during his clown solo, relating the boy’s mimicry of his dance moves: “When it comes to my solo, there’s a kid who starts imitating me and we’re riffing off each other, him being brilliant and me being shit”. Significantly, the boy’s “riffing” off of Fleming’s performance of the Michael Jackson suite using a loop pedal is characterized as “brilliant”, underscoring the way Fleming sees performance as a conversation with the audience and a way to give power to the marginalized. Fleming also describes Mr. Green as effectively reversing power relationships, explaining that the kids delight in making a fool of him, which represents “their chance to get one back on authority”. While Mr. Green allows himself to play the fool for the young refugees, he also makes a fool of men who beat the children back with sticks, putting a red nose or wig on them and turning them into clowns during his show. According to clown activist John Jordan, “One fundamental tactic of clowning is the use of absurdity to demystify the aura of authority” (2016, n.p.). Fleming’s piece clearly illustrates how absurdity can fragment the monolithic appearance of power.

In *A Sacrilegious Lesbian and Homosexual Parade* (2014), Fleming opens the performance dressed in a cloak as St. Patrick, and cuts to Panti Bliss’ viral “Noble Call” speech at the Abbey Theatre. Panti Bliss, whose parade outfit is “a cross between Mary Robinson and Marilyn Monroe” becomes a figure of intentional parody in the piece, and her statement about parade as a site of queer subversion follows the logic of clown. She asserts: “If they’re not kind of gay, they’re not really a parade. A heterosexual parade seems to me an organized walk in the traffic lane”. LGBTQ groups have applied since 1990 to march in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue parade but until 2014 they were denied par-

participation and even heckled in their own parade by people such as a woman Fleming parodies, who attends every year to protest with a bigoted sign that demands: “Stop the Sacrilege! Protest the Homosexuals’ Parade!”. In Fleming’s depiction of the woman who sparked the idea for the performance piece, he creates another clown figure. This woman, captured in photos holding a sign with a dour expression, is made ridiculous and her protest of the parade is mocked. In fact, Fleming himself appropriates her photo as the publicity photo for the performance, photoshopping himself into it. In an inversion of expectations the larger-than-life spectacle of Panti Bliss renders her a heroine of the piece, while the disapproving homophobe becomes a kind of clown.

Fleming’s theatre pieces are deeply personal stories of his confrontations with other cultures. His exposure to political realities requires him to reflect on his own biases and privilege, which he also implicitly asks of audiences. In *Gis a Shot* (2011), transnational friendship through drumming leads to an understanding of how the poverty in Africa might correspond with poverty in Ireland. Fleming reconsiders his own identity through his relationships with his African friends, reflecting, “I’d never been the only white person in a room before”. His new awareness of whiteness as a racial category embedded with privilege permeates his experiences in Dakar. Differing cultural norms also require him to challenge his homophobia; Fleming relates that when Chico holds his hand “I had to get used to it”. Conversely, when Bala and Chico come to Dublin, Fleming realizes that the Fatima mansions “regeneration” project he’s been working on as an artist in the form of the Tower Songs album is not even seen as necessary by the visitors from Senegal: “The way things were now, with a whole flat for each family, with running water, electricity and even television seemed like unimaginable wealth”. Fleming attempts to equate Ireland with Senegal under a “common history of colonization and oppression”, but his friends educate him about the ongoing effects of colonialism for them – the IMF and France recently devalued the Central African Franc by 90%, while “You robbed that bloody post office and the British gave you back your country!”.

In *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?* (2012), Fleming persistently questions the role of humanitarians, whether they are unintentionally imperialist, if they upset the balance of ravaged areas, and even if they bear responsibility for suffering, including genocide and its fallout. The playfulness of clown is undercut by Fleming’s serious self-reflection on his privilege and complicity in systems of global oppression. When he was approached by Clowns Without Borders to participate in their relief efforts at refugee camps, which promise via their website to foster “resilience through laughter” Fleming recalls being surprised and baffled that his talent set was necessary, since Africa is known for its drummers: “It’s Africa, man. Why would you want to bring a drummer to Africa?”. Fleming relates to the audience a crucial moment of self-questioning about the political agenda of Clowns Without Borders and what his participation might mean:

We're going over to entertain Congolese refugees. They're fleeing a country ravaged by 20 years of war. It's not too much of a stretch to say that white European colonialism and global economics are at least partly to blame. ... Could we be just another invading wave of the global economic machine?

Fleming's repetition of what he calls the "Madonna moment" – the photo opportunity snapped of one who thinks (s)he's being altruistic amongst African children – gets an audience laugh every time he mentions it. He re-appropriates this image through clowning, for instead of looking like Madonna, magnanimous and basking in the moment, he digitally inserts himself onto the image the final time he references it, wide-eyed like a deer caught in headlights. Fleming's conveyance of his awareness of "how this must look" develops trust with the audience and assumes a mutual skepticism of the "white savior" who goes to Africa intending to fix poverty, genocide, and disease. Audiences are then able to overcome skepticism and release tension about their own complicity during the performance. The clown ethos requires that you join the festival atmosphere and let go of both prejudice and anxiety about "getting it wrong".



4 - Brian Fleming as the Madonna clown in *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?*  
Photograph by Brian Fleming with photo montage by Bernard McGlinchey



Further, Fleming makes the claim that clowning goes beyond empathy and actually empowers displaced people, since at least temporarily all the talk in the camp was of fools and acrobats and “no one asked for help for two whole days” after the performance, which was a profound measure of success in that camp. If one believes this, then clowning in Rwanda functioned as a mechanism to heal trauma, and further, the re-telling and secondary enactment of the narrative in retrospect as a theatre piece honors the humanity of the refugees and calls for further effort from those who hear the story once removed. Fleming further calls for accountability for Irish complicity in genocide, remembering, “We watched while Kofi Annan and the UN airlifted foreigners out of Rwanda, but declined to send very same number of troops to stop the genocide. We watched it happen again in Darfur and Syria”. The cycle of violence and silence from the West confers a sense of accountability for genocide by the end of the piece. Fleming channels this accountability towards recognition of the contemporary refugee crisis:

We’re becoming more aware of refugees with all these people drowning in the Mediterranean, we’re realising that all these rich countries, one of which we live in, have all pulled up the drawbridge. You can’t keep sticking people in refugee camps, at some stage you have to open up the borders. It took the clowns to show me that.

Fleming’s realization that the clowns have forced him to acknowledge his connection to the lives of others suggests that clowning places humans in critical relation to one another, and develops a deep sense of validation that benefits both sides of the interaction.

In *A Sacrilegious* (2014) Fleming muses on what culture means, and how the appropriation of Irish culture for bigotry has made him think differently about what it is to be Irish and what happens when Irish culture is exported abroad. His statement “Culture is owned by us” meaningfully summarizes the stake he felt in returning each year for the St. Pat’s for All Parade. He reflects on hospitality and exclusion, and how homophobia strips people of their cultural belonging. Brendan Fay’s assertion, “Hospitality is such a justice issue” references the stereotype of Irish hospitality but in reverse. Once again, art, this time through parade and spectacle, has the capacity to express resistance to abuses of human rights.

The parable of “the man with two skins” that Fleming relates, is an important symbolic thread in *Have Yis No Homes to Go To?*, appearing as it does three times in the performance. Mr. Orange tells the story of a “man with two skins” in an African accent, clowning in his impersonation, who carries two skins upon his back. One is cracked and leaking, and the skin says to the man, “You should leave me behind, I am losing water and holding back your progress”. The man said to the skin,

Look behind you. Do you see that trail of flowers and greenery? It is because the water coming out of you watered the path and left new growth trailing behind you. You have left a trail of water on the ground all the way to the well for years now and in that trail flowers and shrubs have grown and it is looking at these that gives me the strength to go on.

This parable illustrates the clowns' perspective that their efforts have an impact that even they may not yet know. Supporting the human rights of others may seem to hold one back, but the collective benefit to the whole is beyond what one can assess himself.

##### 5. Conclusion – *“This really positive side of how Ireland can be in the world”*

Clowning is a political act, uniquely poised for contemporary protest. In Finland in early 2016, a clown troupe called the LOLdiers of Odin followed around the self-proclaimed Soldiers of Odin, an anti-immigrant group that patrols streets to ‘protect’ Finnish people from migrants and asylum seekers they viewed as destroying the Scandinavian way of life. Wielding lollipops, feather dusters, and toilet brushes, the clowns blustered and bumbled after the right-wing ‘Soldiers’, drawing attention to their affected machismo and bravado through parody and exaggerated performance. The police finally ended their street demonstration, or as one clown tells it: “The blue clowns stopped us”. Yet the aim of the clowns, to draw attention to the absurdity of keeping the streets safe from migrants and to undermine the xenophobic oppression of the Soldiers of Odin, had been achieved. Throughout Europe and indeed throughout the world, clowns are supporting human rights resistance efforts through opposition via performance. They affirm the humanity of all through embodied activism and play, and affectively destabilize the structures that threaten to disenfranchise those lacking institutional power.

When the techniques of clown intersect with Irish devised theatre work, the inventive combinations engendered generate resistance to unquestioned patterns of hierarchy. In the process of destabilizing audience expectations, clown theatre inverts and thereby makes visible the institutions and conventions that reify privilege. O’Neill and Fleming each use clown techniques that mask their oppositional nature through humor, experimentation, and reversal. Tracing their work back to Barabbas’ theatre of clown suggests that these clown techniques bear a powerful potential to stand in solidarity with marginalized groups, including inward migrants, people with disabilities, and homosexuals. And yet, the question of whether these artists may at times speak *for* the oppressed lingers. Given the danger of making art on *behalf* of those whose rights are abrogated, both Fleming and O’Neill rely on devising practices to create collaborative art. The clown’s ability to address serious issues effectively through physicality, audience interaction, power reversals and self-reflection are

among its most effective tools, empowering art to question the distribution of power and privilege. With a history that includes Samuel Beckett's plays, figures like "the Irish singing clown" Johnny Patterson, and the Barabbas company, today's Irish artists invoking clown build upon and transcend its history. Fleming found himself drawn to telling the story of the St. Pat's for All parade because it offered "This really positive side of how Ireland can be in the world" (2014). These politicized pieces of theatre are steeped in awareness of a colonial past, but also in the knowledge that the current neoliberal political environment positions Ireland as a contributor to systems of oppression that dehumanize precarious people. Clowning in devised theatre acts as a contribution to an ongoing, progressive resistance speech advancing human dignity through art.

\*Special thanks to the ASPiRE grant program at Ball State University for funding support with the research of this article. The four photographs featured in the text of this essay are here reproduced with permission of the copyright owners (fig. 1: courtesy of Raymond Keane, copyright Patrick Redmond; fig. 2: courtesy of CoisCéim Dance Theatre, copyright Patrick Redmond; fig. 3: courtesy of Brian Fleming, copyright Amy Miller; fig. 4: courtesy of Brian Fleming, copyright Brian Fleming and Bernard McGlinchey).

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## A Politically Committed Kind of Silence. Ireland in Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*

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### *Abstract:*

Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982), which is dedicated to Václav Havel, exemplifies in a direct way the idea of non-violent resistance. It is a short work in which an actor, who is going to appear before an audience under the instruction of a tyrannical director, performs an act of defiance with one simple gesture. The present article aims to explore the play's effectiveness by setting it in the context of Beckett's complex relation with Irish history. *Catastrophe*, hence, will be read from an Irish perspective, and the nature of Ireland's presence in Beckett's work will be analysed together with the subtle ways in which the author seeks to accommodate his own refusal to engage personally in a factious vision of Irish politics with a need to understand and interpret his country's contemporary history.

*Keywords:* Contemporary Theatre, Easter Rising, Ireland, Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats

*Catastrophe*, which according to Beckett should be pronounced *Catastroph*, "without the final e" (Gussow 1996, 39), was first written in French in the early months of 1982. It is a play about maintaining basic moral principles in the face of oppression. It presents a destitute character, with a status similar as that of a prisoner, who finds himself in an act of public humiliation but who manages to turn the tables and to assert his own dignity (by extension, human dignity) without violence and in fact without uttering a word, in "a kind of sombre, stoic, and miraculous victory" (Bernold 2015, 74).

*Catastrophe* is a short play, about ten minutes long, and shares many of the features of Samuel Beckett's later drama: it is brief, minimal, austere and reduced to its basic theatrical elements in terms of dialogue, movement, props and lighting. The action is framed within another play, in which a theatre director and his female assistant are putting the final touches to their pro-

duction in the dress rehearsal. At the centre of this play is the Protagonist, a man on a pedestal, barefoot, dressed in his pyjamas, gown and a hat, whose posture and appearance need to accommodate the wishes of the Director, presumably in order to achieve an image of helplessness in a closing scene representing pathos. There is an additional character, Luke, a technician in charge of the lights, who does not appear on stage but who we hear answering the orders from the Director to the Assistant.

Notable in the Director's design for the last scene of his play is the disrespectful way in which he treats the Protagonist, with the reluctant help of the Assistant: "Under the director's impatient instructions, his assistant manipulates the protagonist as if he were a prop, rather than a human being" (Cohn 2005, 373). The Director orders the Assistant to unclench the man's fists, to whiten his head, hands and legs, to remove his gown, regardless of the cold felt by the Protagonist, and to expose his breast. When at last the tableau is complete and the final details, such as the lighting of the Protagonist's head, are to the Director's satisfaction, something extraordinary occurs: the same person who has thus far not acted autonomously raises his head and, with that single gesture, silences the applause that the Director imagines his creation has provoked. The lights then fade and the play ends.

The circumstances surrounding the writing of *Catastrophe* are well-known: Beckett had been approached by members of the International Association for the Defense of Artists (AIDA) with the request of writing a play in honour of Václav Havel, a political dissident and writer who was at that time in jail in Czechoslovakia (a few years later he would become president of his country). The play was premiered at the Avignon Festival on 20 July 1982, and it was one of a group of plays presented at the festival that year in which authors showed their support for the imprisoned playwright. That same year Beckett translated the play into English, and it was published by Faber in 1984. Such precise information has made possible one basic interpretation of the play:

not only did he dedicate what proved to be his last stage play (if one excepts the slight *What Where* [1983]) to Havel, but he also wrote it, on one level at least, directly about Havel's plight. Indeed, writing for Havel led Beckett to open up a new political direction in his own work which time did not permit him to take further. (Elam 1994, 6-7)

The play has therefore been interpreted, quite rightly, in the context of a political tyranny imposing its ruthless power on defenceless individuals, recalling what was happening at that time in the countries of the Eastern Block under Communism: the dishevelled appearance of the Protagonist might indicate ill-treatment and perhaps torture. The light focusing on his head, for instance, is reminiscent of the techniques of interrogation. Following the orders of the Director, through instructions to his Assistant, the technician Luke "shoots" the Protagonist twice in the head in what Tyrus Miller has

defined as a “disciplined, even punitive use of lighting” (Miller 2000, 263). Rosemary Pountney is yet more incisive in her description of the historical events suggested by the play, linking the Protagonist’s raising of his head to a precise episode in Havel’s nation, as the Protagonist’s gesture would be “foreshadowing indeed the overthrow of the Czechoslovakian regime that eventually resulted in Havel’s presidency of his country” (Pountney 1992, 93-94). In addition to the helplessness of the Protagonist, additional details indicate that in the society recreated in the play, power is exerted without any restraint. The demeanour of the Director, being curt and blunt with the Assistant, together with his clothes, a fur coat and matching toque, suggests someone who is used to imposing his authority and who does not expect his subordinates to question his orders. In fact, he firmly rejects and mocks the Assistant’s timidly uttered suggestions to introduce minimal changes to the scene. He is certainly an important man, connected to the spheres of power: “Step on it, I have a caucus” (Beckett 2006, 458) he says to the Assistant at one point, urging her to hurry up with the rehearsal.

Beckett’s plays never lend themselves into an easy classification into just one category, resisting thus any unequivocal interpretation. In *Catastrophe*, apart from an obvious denunciation of human right abuses, there is another level of reference which has to do with the medium of theatre. The fact that the petty tyrant who dominates the action is a theatre director has led some scholars to believe that Beckett was also reflecting on his experience during rehearsals of his own plays: “The director” writes Ruby Cohn “is unambiguously unpleasant, and Beckett ascribes to him some of his own characteristics. The director’s cruelty to his actor parallels that of Beckett himself in the theatre, and his continual smoking mirrors Beckett’s habit” (2005, 373-374). Following this line of interpretation, we might see Beckett as seeking to establish a certain kind of parallelism between the cruel precision of torture and the mechanical, professional and carefully designed preparation required in theatre before the raising of the curtain: “One procedure is much like the other. Thus the subtext of the play is continually whispering that art is achieved by the same patience that characterizes science (as systematic brutality)” (States 1987, 16). This is particularly so in a play like this, where the final aim is to achieve a perfect image of subjugation, and to accomplish this goal the firm control of the actors’ interventions is required, removing any trace of emotion from their words, and indeed the virtual immobilisation of one of them. The content of the play aptly underlines the repressive methods that are necessary for a satisfactory outcome of the production: “It is the success of this very process for which the director might later receive congratulations and applause much as wardens are commended for their run of a prison, or as teachers are praised for their students’ good behaviour” (Jackson 1992, 26). In any case, the metatheatrical aspect of *Catastrophe* would be something common to the plays he wrote in his late period: “In their very sparse-

ness and challenges to dramatic conventions, these plays help to ‘lay bare’ the specific nature of the dramatic work and its implications for their reception” (Laughlin 1989, 20). The twist at the end of the play, the denouement that in fact constitutes the catastrophe of the title (according to the etymological meaning of the word as ‘turning point’), consisting of the Protagonist’s raising of his head and fixing his gaze on the audience, has also given way to many reflections on the role of “us”, the real audience in the theatre, who are expected to applaud after the actor playing the Protagonist has silenced the recorded applause with his gesture of defiance. Are we accomplices in the crime? For Katherine Weiss there is no question of the spectators behaving as if the play is not directly addressing their consciences: “The applause dies down and the lights go out. The viewers in the auditorium are meant to ponder whether or not they should applaud the catastrophe they have just witnessed” (Weiss 2013, 130). If we push the allegory further, this dilemma gives way to profound questions concerning our role as the spectators of the everyday atrocities presented to us in the media. Segments of such information have also been carefully filmed and edited for our consumption as viewers: images of war, famine or fleeing refugees bombard us continuously, and in *Catastrophe* Beckett makes us question a principle in theatre and in life, “that from an ‘aesthetic distance’ it is pleasurable to see and participate (voyeuristically, of course) in the pain of others” (States 1987, 18).

The strong ethical element in *Catastrophe* and the anomaly of Beckett writing a clearly political piece, together with its being dedicated to a respected and widely admired fighter for human rights, have prevented other interpretations from being explored. But I would like to consider the possibility of examining an almost hidden and deep-laid connection to Irish history in the play, prompted by a set of associations and nuances that take us back to the author’s complex relation with his home country<sup>1</sup>. It is well known that Beckett did not feel at ease in the new Irish state created after its independence from Britain in 1922. In Dublin, where he lived intermittently during the 1930s, he experienced first-hand the inadequacies of the state’s cultural policies, including the censorship of books and the recovery of Celtic myths from the past as the foundation of the nation’s culture. Furthermore, the essays he wrote in the 1930s reveal his disgust towards an established conservative policy that abolished divorce and banned the sale of contraceptives, among other curtailments of individual liberties. As a member of a dwindling Protestant class and, more acutely, as an intellectual who had been at the centre of

<sup>1</sup> This essay is part of the research project FFI2016-76477-P, funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad and by AEI/FEDER. I am grateful to Feargal Whelan and Paul Stewart for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay. I would also like to thank CEI Patrimonio (Universidad de Almería) for their support.



the artistic avant-garde in Paris, he was highly sensitive to the provincialism of the new authorities. In 1937 he settled definitely in France and from then on his work maintained traces of an Irish upbringing, represented by images of landscapes of his childhood shrouded in the mists of time or by particular turns of phrase with an Irish resonance. But Ireland as an object of thought always haunted his imagination, however much he insisted to actors of his plays that they keep a neutral accent, or when he tried to hide the references to Irish history within universal concerns: "The more Beckett attempted to purge his writing of its Irish echoes and reliance upon an Irish context, the more these elements insinuated themselves as structural problems: the process of erosion, accretion and displacement that shape his representations of Ireland leave an indelible imprint on his brand of minimalism" (Morin 2009, 11).

The 'structural problem' presented in this play could be summed up in the question of whether it is possible to read *Catastrophe* from an Irish perspective, that is, if it can be ascertained that Beckett turned to any elements of Ireland's own history of violence in the foundations of this particular dramatic piece. It seems to me that the political significance of the Protagonist's silence in *Catastrophe* is enhanced by the author's skilful introduction of connotative elements associated with Ireland's troubled past. Some particular terms are charged with echoes of history that perhaps reveal how Beckett kept open the possibility of an interpretation of such an aseptic play within an Irish dimension. True, the Protagonist is described in the most neutral terms, as if to stress his symbolic status as a dissident who could have been arrested anywhere in the world: "P midstage standing on a black block 18 inches high. Black wide-brimmed hat. Black dressing-gown to ankles. Barefoot. Head bowed. Hands in pockets. Age and physique unimportant" (Beckett 2006, 457). Nothing in his attire might be said to refer to an Irish person. Later, when the Director gives the order and the Assistant removes the man's gown, he is revealed to be wearing some "old grey pyjamas" (*ibidem*, 458). This could be an indication that he has been taken out of bed, late at night, for his detention and arrest (Siess 1997, 51), the kind of action against agitators that unfortunately is common practice in times of unrest. Going by the Assistant's description of him, the man seems to be of a certain age: he hardly has any hair left and suffers from fibrous degeneration in the hands. His seniority, together with the fact of having been chosen as a showcase for an exemplary punishment as a "propaganda warning for *all* to see in *all* his agony" (Sandarg 1989, 141) might indicate that he is more than just a common party member. The Assistant's fear that he may speak during the performance might be indicative of his status; she seems anxious that his words might entice others to rebellion: "A: Sure he won't utter? / D: Not a squeak" (Beckett 2006, 459). But if he holds some position of power in a seditious faction against the established authority, how is that connected to an Irish context other than through mere speculation? The history underly-

ing the use of certain key words in the play would, in my opinion, point to an interpretation of the play in terms of Ireland.

The most obvious indication of this possible connection is an anatomical term. From his superior point of view, the director refers to the man's head in a clinical way: "How's the skull?" (*ibidem*, 458) he asks, and a few moments later the Assistant in turn asks him: "Like that cranium?" (*ibidem*, 459). The way they refer to the man's head, using such precise vocabulary, speaks of heated debates on the skull as the site of ideological controversy at the time just prior to Beckett's coming of age: "Late Victorian and early modernist fiction reflects a widespread fascination with the racial semiotics of the skull and the head" (Seshagiri 2007, 577). In the late nineteenth century pseudo-scientific disciplines such as craniometry and anthropometry, as part of a general theory of eugenics, had flourished with the aim of racially distinguishing deviant types of human beings: any kind of perversion or deficiency in an individual (or in an ethnic group) would be reflected in the irregularity of the cranium, according to Western eurocentric standards. In the case of Ireland, since the beginning of English colonization, it was not uncommon to find depictions of the native population with irregular, ape-like heads, with the aim of indicating their lack of development. In the usual classification of heads at the time, the long dolichocephalic type of skull corresponded to the purest white race, while the broad brachycephalic head indicated a high degree of primitivism in the genetic composition of that human group. Craniums in Ireland, as a topic, bring with them added interest in that, once mashed-up, they were used for medical purposes: "Whilst English soldiers and settlers seized Irish land, others discreetly foraged for moss-crowned skulls" (Sugg 2011, 203). The history of repressed rebellions, particularly in the west of Ireland, had left fields literally full of unburied rebels' heads and bodies. Being a nation generally considered "intrinsically backward, degenerate, and inferior" (*ibidem*, 102), their bones could be used without any qualms by the colonisers, who even exported them in the XVI and XVII centuries to other parts of Europe as medicine.

Ireland's enclosed space and homogeneous population was seen as an ideal laboratory to test ideas on racial hierarchy by Victorian ethnologists such as John Beddoe at the end of the nineteenth century. Here, the study of the skulls was essential in ascertaining the alleged backwardness of Ireland's inhabitants:

but the Connemara people are generally short, and depart in some respects from the common type, having less angularity of cheek bones and chin, and less prominence of mouth; the forehead looks broad and low; the greatest breadth of face is at the level of the eyes. Light eyes predominate, as usual; the combination of dark-gray with black hair is very common, and dark hair and complexion attain their maximum. There are in Connemara clans considered as of servile origin. (Beddoe 1885, 266)

According to Barra O'Donnabhain and E. Murphy, the further that

one travelled from Britain, the greater the perception of primitiveness: "This particular construct that the population of the west of Ireland was a relic of earlier, primitive groups is a recurring theme in the literature of the physical anthropology of Ireland" (2014, 157).

The notorious Harvard Mission (1932-1936) also considered the country of Ireland as a good object for the study of race. A group of scholars led by anthropologist Earnest Hooton implemented a very large survey of the Irish people, taking back to America a huge quantity of bodily remains found in ancient cemeteries. Although their methods were the same as earlier eugenicists, with a particular emphasis on the measurement of skulls, their aims differed from those of Victorian social scientists. Due to the growing importance of Irish descendants in American politics, they wanted to prove that the original inhabitants of Ireland were not defective in any sense: "The term 'Celtic' gradually became associated with nationalism and white supremacy and no longer with the image of the drunken apish Irishman beloved of British and American cartoonist" (Carew 2012, 40). In any case, what is evident is that the question of race was one of the key issues being discussed in intellectual and political circles when Beckett began writing and that the shape of heads was one specific focus of those debates. John Pilling (2004, 271) indicates that in the "Trueborn Jackeen" notes Beckett took in around 1934, which deal mainly with Irish history, he copied from an encyclopaedia the characteristics of the skulls of the first inhabitants of Ireland; the topic, then, was not completely foreign to him.

As time went on and fascism emerged as a strong political force in many countries of Europe, theories that favoured a drastic solution to an alleged degeneration of the race were implemented with a terrifying outcome. There is no doubt that Beckett was well aware of the adoption of a racist ideology by the Vichy regime under which he lived for two years. He and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil had gone into hiding in Roussillon, in the south of France, after fleeing from Paris in September 1942 at great risk of their lives due to his membership of the Resistance. As Andrew Gibson has convincingly demonstrated, the hardships of the war, the deprivation, the permanent suspicion and fear, all these events seep through into *Waiting for Godot*, which he wrote in the final months of 1948 when his experiences of the previous years, including the purges, denunciations and executions of the dark early days after liberation, would have been vivid in his memory. Lucky's monologue in *Waiting for Godot*, normally considered a wonderfully absurd concatenation of nonsense, in fact hides a veiled critique of a state ideology that supported an improvement of the race at the cost of human suffering. The speech, with its reference to the "Acacacademy of Anthropopometry" (Beckett 2006, 42), as well as other examples of fake scientific jargon, underlines the idea "that the Vichyite and eugenicist discourses are at best irrelevant to and at worst a noxious violation of limited, deficient, suffering

human being” (Gibson 2010, 187). Lucky famously includes in his monologue a reference to “the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara” (Beckett 2006, 43), bringing to the fore the long history of oppression and the massacres suffered by the Irish in the west of Ireland, which Gibson interprets as Beckett’s attempts “toward an identification with the historical lament of the ‘other Ireland’” (Gibson 2010, 194).

*Waiting for Godot* was not the first work in which Beckett had playfully made use of references to Irish heads. In his first novel, written in 1932 but not published until 1992, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, he expressed scepticism towards the anatomical dogmatism that was rampant in official discourses on race. At the time he had not yet found the austere and minimalist style that would characterize his mature period. Beckett was, at the age of 26, mercilessly looking back at the events of his life thus far, showing a directness in his personal views that would not be found in subsequent works. There is a minor incident in the novel that takes place in a Dublin street involving a professor of Trinity College and a garage attendant. As a result of their argument, the narrator half-mockingly comments on the lack of deference shown to members of the Protestant upper-middle class by common workers in the Irish Free State, looking back with nostalgia to the days of “the Garrison” when Ireland was under British control and this kind of thing simply did not happen: “The scurvy dog has taught the snarl to his scurvy master, the snarl, the fawn, the howl and the cocked leg: the general coprotechnics” (Beckett 1992, 159). Although he, the narrator, explicitly linked in the narrative to the author by the pronoun “we”, makes clear that he does not want to revert to a previous situation of foreign control and approves of the end of British rule in Ireland, it is clear that “his enthusiasm for this event is somewhat weakened by his assessment of the alternative power” (O’Brien 1986, 353). The narrator’s afterthought is loaded with irony:

The point it seems almost worth our while trying to make is not that the passing of the Castle as it was in the days of the Garrison is to be deprecated. Not at all. We hope we know our place better than that. We uncover our *ancient Irish wedge-head* in deference to that happy ejection. Nor are we the least prone to suggest that the kennel is a less utopian community than the pen or coop or shoal or convent or any other form of natural or stylised pullulation. (Beckett 1992, 159; my emphasis)

The narrator’s comments on the kind of low-quality democracy that is now established in the land, implicit in the reference to the kennel, the pen and the coop, as well as other symbols for a coarse mass of people, indicate Beckett’s severe criticism of the “stultifying lack of social, cultural and economic ambition” (Brown 1981, 14) that characterized the Irish Free State, showing concern, at the same time “about the place of a shrinking Protestant minority in an ostensibly Catholic and Gaelic nation” (Bixby 2013, 72). But it is the reference to heads what stands out in this paragraph. He, a member

of that Protestant minority, although worried about the future, at the same time adopts the language that is typically assigned to the “other Ireland”, applying to himself the anatomical description that one would normally find in portraits of supposedly native types. This reference should, in my opinion, be interpreted as a mark of sympathy for the Irish, normally described in such terms in the specialized literature of the time, and also as a sneering remark meant to show the vacuity of this kind of discourse. It is perhaps not wide of the mark, then, to suggest that fifty years later Beckett recovered the stale and reactionary usage of the vocabulary of anthropometry, the words “skull” and “cranium” in the particular context of race distinctions, to assign a social background to the Protagonist in *Catastrophe*. On this interpretation, the individual who is the subject of the pompous Director and his Assistant’s remodellings and transformations, would belong to that huge stratum including the vast majority of the people of Ireland, those whose head shape was for centuries the subject of speculation and study. As Michael Wood writes in relation to traces of Ireland in Beckett’s late period, it is not a question of establishing neat parallelism in his texts, but of underlining the existing semantic suggestions: “Ireland in such a construction would not be a homeland or an allegiance, or a determinant of character, so much as a marker of a certain politics, even a philosophy, of style” (2010, 173). By including in his play such associations in the complex configuration of a character, Beckett would leave open the access to the realm of Irish politics and history.

Beckett’s procedure is twofold. His building-up of a character is reduced to the minimum of words, expressions which are apparently devoid of any specificity as regards nationality or historical circumstance. At the same time, in the genealogy of those same words, there are traces which reveal, in the context of his own background and biography, an ideological environment to which these words are inevitably attached. It should be noted that Beckett is not interested in validating any collective response in particular: “Despite his sense of social responsibility,” writes Robert Sandarg, “Beckett is far too pessimistic to believe in any theatre of political action or to hope for any general human emancipation” (1989, 144). The accumulation of disconcerting images, his going against the normal flow of linguistic articulation, and the presence of words loaded with a strong evocative power, create in his late plays a hazy configuration of meanings where memories of a distant past can mingle with power relations in the present: “By carefully layering stark visual images, sounds, and often only vaguely understandable dialogue, by confronting us with a clash of word and image or with substantial gaps between what is seen and what is said, Beckett’s theatre inundates us with percepts” (Laughlin 1989, 27). That is, while it is true that Beckett is dealing with universal themes, he does not prevent historical connections from being made, thanks to the complex web of echoes and allusions that revolves around his fictional constructions. Take for instance the manipulation of the Protagonist

in *Catastrophe* by the Director so that the man is finally transformed into “an icon of suffering designed to elicit maximum audience response” (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 85). His interest in whitening the Protagonist’s head, hands and legs previous to his appearance before the audience might apply to any situation in which a totalitarian regime is determined to erase the singularity of those who are subjugated. In this process of homogenization other elements could be included, such as vernacular languages, cultural traits or daily habits. This would reflect the universal appeal of Beckett’s work, his compromise with those who, silently and courageously, resist tyranny. My contention here is that Ireland is not excluded from this paradigm. In fact, by the almost hidden clues in the play, Beckett would be making indirect comments on Ireland’s past, something that would be in tune with the evolution of his concerns in his mature period. J.C.C. Mays, in his study of allusions to Ireland in Beckett’s late drama and narrative, remarks how Beckett suppressed any elements of local colour which would be too close to his own experience, establishing more and more distance between himself and his memories, because he was moving in the opposite direction from the kind of anecdotal and comforting fiction that he loathed. Mays cites *All that Fall* (1956) and *Embers* (1957) as examples of plays which recreate a time that he could have only known by family stories or by other documents, like old photographs. For Mays there is no doubt that “while the trilogy returned to a situation Beckett, the author, left behind with childhood, his subsequent writing pushes further back and engages with a time just before he was born” (1992, 140). Although in the present essay I do not go so far back in time, it does seem that Beckett’s *Catastrophe* continues this direction in the examination of Ireland’s contemporary history. Given the evident political nature of the play, I would suggest that echoes of the revolution and the upheaval that occurred in Ireland in the period between 1913 and 1923 can indeed be found in the work<sup>2</sup>.

Beckett was aware that any chronicle of events of the past is normally modified by official discourses in order to build a narrative that suits the ideology of those in power. In the case of Ireland, the established version would run on the lines of “a centuries-long struggle for the freedom of a Gaelic, Catholic people from English oppression” (McGarry 2010, 10). Beckett certainly would not contribute to the establishment of this construct. He would

<sup>2</sup> The presence of historical events in various works from his mature period reinforces the idea that Beckett had a keen interest in revisiting the segment of time beginning with the Easter Rising and ending with the Irish Civil War. In *Texts for Nothing*, there is a comic recreation of the street fights during the Rising (Beckett 1999, 18). Also in a satirical tone, in *Malone Dies* (1951) the narrator refers to the hunger strike of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, in October 1920 (Beckett 1979, 251); in *Mercier and Camier* (1946) the protagonists pass by the memorial of Noel Lemass in the Dublin mountains, assassinated by forces of the Irish Free State in 1923 (Beckett 2010, 82), to mention just a few examples.

find himself at loggerheads with any form of essentialist nationalism. In its schematism and abstraction, *Catastrophe* questions exactly the profusion of details that are employed to transform what happened in the past into a biased historical recreation: "It is a play that is not quite real, fixed, and certain, echoing but not fulfilling the play of the past that seemed so confident in its account of the way things were" (Pearce 1992, 87). Beckett's dramatization is consequently devoid of heroes, no names are mentioned, all the characters, except the technician, are referred to by their initials, and instead of having the Protagonist pronounce an inspiring discourse that would compel his followers to continue the fight with renewed energies, he remains silent. The Protagonist might have some position among the rebels, but he is portrayed as the image of despair: a common man, subdued, in his pyjamas, probably ill, who makes no protest at the director's whimsical orders regarding his appearance. Beckett therefore took pains to remove any sign from the play that would establish a clear reading of Irish history, focusing instead on the act of defiance. The emphasis is so well-marked that even the main character, the one who defies the established power represented by the Director, is doubly removed from reality. As Howard Pearce observes, while the Director and the Assistant are actors playing their roles, the Protagonist is "an actor playing an actor playing a character" (*ibidem*, 84), so that any identification with him becomes enmeshed in a tangle of reflections, like an image viewed through a succession of mirrors.

Deprived as he is of personal history, voice and relevant individual features, what the character of the Protagonist clearly has to offer, what he embodies and represents more than anything else, is his own person as the last vestige of humanity, his physicality. Beckett was able to erase any marks that would reveal the character's allegiances, but what was left, a single man, he could not delete, a point that Richard Begam makes about another well-known individual figure in one of Beckett's most famous plays: "Admittedly, the stage accomplishes what the radio cannot, literally thrusting Krapp before us, insisting on his corporeal reality, his inert and undeniable 'thereness'" (2002, 27). It is in the Protagonist's body, with its "unrelenting continuity" (Jackson 1992, 25), where the mesmerizing power of the play lies, as the spectator observes the manipulation that is applied to it and its minimal but significant reaction (shivering) to the orders of the Director. By the gesture of raising the Protagonist's head and showing his face for the first time, Beckett seems to be pointing to the establishment of new terms of relationship between subjugated and subjugators, which in the context of a political play written by an Irish author of Protestant origin who never ceased to negotiate acceptable images of Ireland in his work, would correspond, at least, to a recognition of an existing problem.

Beckett was of course not the first non-Catholic Irish author to reflect on the tragic events that surrounded the formation of the Irish state. The towering

figure of W.B. Yeats and his poem “Easter 1916” looms large in the literature of the troubles. In the poem we find a Protestant author who, from a sense of duty, and almost grudgingly, acknowledges the acts of courage by individuals (names of the leaders of the rebellion included) who defied a far superior force. It is not possible to think that Beckett had meant to make a revision of Yeats’s poem during the composition of his theatre play; his process of the distillation of events through the prism of time is located at the other end of the spectrum from Yeats’s specific historical grounding, his display of emotions is far more subdued and tempered than Yeats’s expansiveness, but the correspondences between the two pieces nevertheless reveal a common aim in both authors, that of paying respect to an act of courage<sup>3</sup>. If a dialogue is here imposed upon these two, very dissimilar works, it is simply to reveal that on this particular issue there might be a comparable political motivation in Yeats and Beckett. Although the latter had long embarked in a solitary and highly personal endeavour, the influence of Yeats on his mature period has been amply demonstrated: “It is here [in Beckett’s literary production of the 1970s and 1980s] that the presence of Yeats, the poet rather than the playwright, is at its most beguiling, its most haunting, and its most unequivocal” (Brater 2004, 34). In the case of *Catastrophe*, Beckett would increase further the emotional distance between the events indirectly referred to and his own view of them by changing Yeats’s “sacrifice” to “catastrophe”, introducing a less painful tone through the use of a more technical term, one taken from the field of literary criticism, as a way of removing any shadow of passion or an excessive display of feelings:

the term ‘catastrophe’ must only be understood in its original sense, the technical sense that it has in Greek tragedy: reversal, turnaround, dénouement of the action, the exact sense that it doubly assumes in the text, but from which Beckett would have liked the ideas implied by the everyday use of the word to be disassociated. (Bernold 2015, 76)

The Protagonist in *Catastrophe* is certainly someone who has been given prominence against his will in a situation of social tension and who has been chosen as an example by others without any volition on his part. In that sense he could well be one of those “unpromising souls” mentioned at the beginning of Yeats’s poem who “manage to rise to the mythical out of their matter-of-fact beginnings, achieving the tragic transformation of pity and terror” (Kiberd 1996, 214). In *Catastrophe* there is of course no description of the Protagonist’s past, but from what we know of him, he could well

<sup>3</sup> Beckett maintained an interest in Yeats’s poetry and drama throughout his life, and although he opposed Yeats’s romanticism and rejected “the legacy of Yeats the revivalist”, he admired “Yeats the mature poet and experimental playwright” (Kennedy 2013, 208).



be one of those common people in "Easter 1916" whom the poet has often met in the street, "Coming with vivid faces / From counter or desk among grey/Eighteenth-century houses" (Yeats 1990, 93), ordinary citizens who had perhaps been objects of ridicule and who acquire a new dimension (respect, dignity, public recognition) because of their participation in the upheaval. By clearly showing the face of the Protagonist at the end of the play Beckett, it could be inferred, perhaps did not want to fall into the same error as the author of the poem: "Yeats, after all, recounts his own fallacy in 'Easter 1916' in failing to recognise those 'vivid faces', coming from 'counter or desk', as the faces of men and women who were capable of heroic action" (Brannigan 2009, 79). By contrast, the final scene in *Catastrophe* would be saying, "here I am, this is my face, make no mistake, remember me". No textual evidence supports this interpretation, but it is important to stress the fact that neither are there any specific references in the text that prevent such a connection from being made, as if Beckett had left open the door for a myriad of cases from history to be applied here, instances in which the forces of repression have been brutally imposed upon individuals, with the turbulent years of the late 1910s and early 1920s in Ireland representing just one of those troubled periods in history. The connection of *Catastrophe* with the events in Ireland before Independence is tenuously made, by indirect allusion and by an almost indiscernible chain of associations, but that is so in all cases when a contextual background has been built around the incidents that are narrated in the play. No direct description of the protagonists or of the props that appear on stage transport the spectator of *Catastrophe* to a communist regime in Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, save perhaps the fur coat and toque worn by the Director, reminiscent of typically Russian garments, but then again these clothes tend to be worn in any place with low temperatures. This is the way the connotative element works in a play by Beckett, the intimation of knowledge is there, but it is impossible to grasp in its entirety. Another example may also be illustrative of this point. It has been suggested earlier in this essay that the Protagonist might well have been arrested at home, taken somewhere for interrogation while still in his pyjamas, and surely Beckett was aware that this was not an uncommon practice of the security forces in Ireland during the War of Independence. In response to attacks by the IRA in the last months before the truce that led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the members of the RIC and the Black and Tans had intensified their repressive measures against possible suspects, as reported in a publication of the time: "'They know that women and children have to hurry out of their beds at midnight to escape from houses deliberately set on fire by the agents of law and order', including those 'dragged from their beds, stripped naked and flogged'" (qtd. by Ferriter 2015, 205). In an episode in one of the most telling literary portraits of the War of Independence, *The Last September* (1929) by Elizabeth Bowen, a British Army officer, Ger-

ald Lesworth, tells another character about the events of the previous night when the security forces went on a raid:

“We were looking for arms, really. And at night you find the most surprising people at home. We were after a fellow called Peter Connor: we got him.”

“Fight?” said Laurence eagerly.

“He was at home, in bed. These blighters think we are greater fools than we are.”  
(Bowen 2000, 131)

This specific scene is part of a rich field of resonance surrounding Beckett's play that sends the reader or spectator to a realm of memory in which Ireland is felt as a hazy and yet indelible presence. Again, nowhere in the play is it said that the Protagonist has just been taken from his bed for his detention, but his being in his pyjamas and his absolute lack of freedom suggest that this may have been the case, and the historical events of a recent past inevitably come to mind. There is an equally enigmatic description that the Assistant makes of the Protagonist's skull that would correspond to this series of echoes of an Irish past. She defines his head as “Moulting. A few tufts” (Beckett 2006, 458), as if the Protagonist were some kind of fowl, which takes us back to the fragment of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* quoted above in which the author/narrator is comparing the new society established in Ireland after independence as a pen or a coop. The silent main character, it may be suggested, would be an anonymous member of this community who, through his participation in the revolt, has been transformed and is shedding his feathers, so to speak. He now stands out in the “stylicised pullulation” (Beckett 1992, 159) of his community. This line of interpretation would not invalidate other possibilities which take as a frame of reference a different set of connotations. The rather cryptic description of the colour of the Protagonist's night attire in *Catastrophe*, as well as his head, described in both cases as “ash”, not grey, may add to his description a vague reminiscence of someone who has come out of smouldering ruins. But this is not of course the only possible way to understand that reference. The ashen colour in the body and clothes of the Protagonist has been interpreted by Elizabeth Barry in relation to Beckett's interest in the philosophy of the Stoics and with a line in *Malone Dies* in which catastrophe is linked with the indifferent acceptance of a doomed fate: “To be buried in lava and not turn a hair, it is then a man shows what stuff he is made of” (Beckett 1979, 233). The proximity of death for the Protagonist explains, for Barry, the particular hue described in the text: “This creature is already, proleptically, beginning to resemble the ‘lava’ that buries the unfortunate in *Malone Dies*, to become inorganic like the stone that Beckett cherishes in so much of his work” (Barry 2007, 177). Far from being opposing interpretations, what these differing opinions show is that *Catastrophe* is a multi-layered play which can be accessed to from a variety of points of sensibility. After all, it

was Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, who proposed the most haunting image represented by the Protagonist, as he "recalls images of the concentration camp or holocaust victim" (1997, 679).

The kind of links established among the characters other than the Protagonist might also contain, in the same indirect vein, elements of an Irish context that reinforce this interpretation. Between the poles of the Director and the Protagonist, their relationship being clearly expressed by "the objectification of the Other by institutionalized power" (Elam 1994, 9), lies the figure of the Assistant, ideologically in an intermediate position, something which has previously been noted:

She embodies the shrewd but stealthy aspiration of the upper subordinate to the highest power but her secret alliance with the lowest in the social hierarchy reveals at the same time that she will join, once the right momentum is given, a force subversive to the system, establishing solidarity with those in social positions even more abject than hers. (Noh 2005, 71-72)

She is the one who helps the Director in the rehearsal of the play, that is, in the preparation of the Protagonist for his final exposure before the audience, and it is her work on the man himself that the Director examines and to which he gives his approval, although introducing a number of modifications. What seems evident from her attitude is that there is a current of sympathy on her part towards the figure that she has placed on the pedestal, ready for inspection, while keeping a professional obedience to the Director. She timidly points out to the Director that the Protagonist is shivering and suggests some changes in the performance, even the possibility of the man raising his head, that would result in a better standing position for the Protagonist, reducing his humiliation in front of the audience. Beckett hardly ever explained the meaning of his work and in the play there is a curious example of this aspect of his personality, represented by a strongly expressed opinion by the Director that could well have come from the author himself: "For God's sake! This craze for explicitation! Every i dotted to death!" (Beckett 2006, 459). Yet, on one occasion, he gave Spanish scholar Antonia Rodríguez-Gago some additional information that corroborates the emotional link between the Assistant and the Protagonist. "Well, she, the Assistant," Beckett said, "has to show her clandestine love for the Protagonist to the audience, but, at the same time, she doesn't want the Director to know about it" (Rodríguez Gago 2016, 22). If her affection towards the Protagonist is made clear by her concern for him, the Director on the other hand provokes in her a feeling of dislike: she is upset at some of his remarks and even rubs the surface of the armchair which he had previously used before sitting down herself, as if she did not want to be tainted by touching the same object as her superior. A telling detail in her characterization is her particular use of

language, her “syntactic awkwardness”, which situates her on an altogether different plane from that of the Director. Her “difficulties with English verb phrase construction ... connotes foreignness” (Elam 1994, 12), as if the language that the Director so fluently and idiomatically uses was not her native tongue but a language recently acquired. Considering that the Protagonist is “a character with whom she has an identity” (Pearce 1992, 89), it is reasonable to imagine that Assistant and Protagonist perhaps once shared the same language. Furthermore, the Director treats the Assistant as a servant rather than as an assistant, continually asking her for a light for his cigar, giving her blunt orders or laughing at her suggestions. Somehow it seems as if she, a collaborator with those in high office, is secretly waiting for someone to carry out a decisive act of rebellion.

The question that may be asked at this point is how much in this universal scheme of colonization speaks to the Irish experience. Following the approach favoured in the present essay, some parallelisms may be established between the ambiguous relationship of the Assistant and the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* and the mixed emotions generated by the Easter Rising in the inhabitants of Dublin in particular and the Irish people in general. At the turn of the twentieth century it can be safely stated that most people in Ireland supported the lawfully approved politics followed by Irish MPs in Westminster in order to eventually obtain Home Rule from the British government. Life for the great majority of people went on in the normal way, accepting the lesser evil of the presence of a foreign administration in the land, because most civic liberties that made ordinary life viable in terms of education, ownership of property, freedom of religion, access to the professions, etc. had been achieved at the end of the nineteenth century. In any case, acquiescence with the powers that be was a common attitude for the vast majority of citizens: “Theirs was a history which seemed always to happen in their absence, or at least without their active participation” (Kiberd 1996, 530). The sense of feeling like strangers in their own country, as Declan Kiberd describes Irish citizens during the upheaval, strikes an uncanny chord with the character of the Assistant in *Catastrophe*. She is an able professional who dutifully carries on with her job and who, without openly voicing her disgust, accepts orders from someone whose higher position she has no option but to accept. She has nevertheless managed to create her own strategies of resistance and is able to display for herself a moderate protection from the abuses of power by the representative of authority. What happens at the beginning of the play can be connected to the period before the troubles, when ordinary citizens objected to the disruptive tactics of the revolutionaries because they could destabilize the status quo. In the play this complicated situation might be seen to be represented by the obsession of the Assistant to cover up the Protagonist’s body (i.e. to minimize the violent actions of a minority) and the willingness of the Director, here representing the official authority in Ire-

land at the time, to undress the Protagonist (i.e. to reveal the identity of the rebels and to expose the nature of their actions): "In the opening scene, before D intervenes in the setting up of the stage, it becomes clear that A has been shaping P into an image diametrically opposite to that which will be required by D" (Noh 2005, 69).

The Assistant thus feels a mixture of tenderness and disapproval with regard to the Protagonist, because he can destroy the fragile climate of cohabitation with the alien authority that she has been able to sustain until now, although at the same time he represents the possibility of breaking free from oppression. A similar sense of outrage was initially felt by the citizens of Dublin towards the insurrectionists: "The notion that a tiny band of poorly armed rebels could penetrate the heart of the British establishment in Ireland must have seemed unthinkable, to supporters and opponents of the union alike, until they actually did so" (McGarry 2010, 3). Theirs was merely a heroic gesture, but the very fact that it happened, together with the violent repression that followed, made people change their minds. Perhaps what happens on stage during the performance of *Catastrophe* may symbolize that very moment prior to the change of attitude, as the Assistant sees in the Protagonist's action the promise of unfulfilled possibilities, even if these have not yet been fully imagined and will take a long time to be achieved. Such an interpretation would account for her changing attitude towards the man in custody, sometimes concerned about his state, sometimes willing to cooperate in his torture, even suggesting the possibility of gagging him. What is beyond doubt is that it will not be "business as usual" in the representation of the play in *Catastrophe* after the Protagonist's subversive act, just as the political situation experienced a radical change in Ireland after the Rising. As David Lloyd writes, "the transformation of lout or clown into martyr that brings about the foundation of the nation, is seen to produce not reconciliation but a troubled tension" (1993, 71).

At the end of the play there is no need for the Protagonist to speak, his gesture deemed more than enough to convey the necessary meaning, because Beckett has, by this time, loaded the play with multiple connections to universal situations of human rights abuses, to dictatorial techniques in the theatre, and to crucial moments in Irish history. The Protagonist's silence is political because the context in which he is performing that silence, a timeless representation, can be related to a variety of specific situations, all having in common the clash between forces of repression and individual freedom. It is highly unlikely that Beckett was exclusively thinking in terms of Ireland when he wrote *Catastrophe*, but in the structure of the play he left open the possibility of letting Irish history creep in. Irish references would take advantage of the "tension between an aesthetics of the finished product and an alternative poetics of process" (Van Hulle 2007, 332) to occupy a shifting terrain. Perhaps Ireland was an uncomfortable presence, even inimical to

his original purpose, but as with everything else in the play, it was a source of conflicting images that Beckett could not refrain from including as part and parcel of his historic vision.

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## Elegant Resistance: Dermot Healy's *Fighting with Shadows*

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### *Abstract:*

Dermot Healy's *Fighting with Shadows* (1984) features a broad array of technical innovations: the narrative focus shifts, temporal frames vary, and the inner and outer worlds of the characters frequently interchange, all generating a sense of a world that forever lies just out of sharp focus. Far from being a failure of observation, this registers a way of seeing that extends beyond merely linear modes of representation and is suggestive of a world that is not a neat, easily-observed set of phenomena. In this, Healy's first novel, a compelling interdependence between complex narrative experiment and deeply-felt social and political engagement with the Northern Troubles is already evident. Healy's work has always been firmly about resistance to received forms, political fixities, social malaise, and the limits of consciousness itself – and all in a richly-textured Irish landscape. This essay offers detailed analysis of how *Fighting with Shadows* exemplifies such acts of resistance while seeking to engage with Healy's provincial Irish context.

*Keywords:* Borderlands, Irish Landscape, Narrative, Provincial, Troubles

The truth always comes out in the end, because he has learned that the  
truth is an even greater invention than lies.  
(*Fighting with Shadows*, 321)

Initially published in 1984, *Fighting with Shadows* is set in the border county of Fermanagh, in the fictional village of Fanacross, and spans the 1970s

and the early years of the 1980s. The novel is thus reflective of a particular cultural and historical moment in provincial Ireland, when the Northern Troubles erupted in the Irish and European consciousness. The Allen family, around whom the narrative is woven, co-exist in perpetual uneasiness under a dull glare of violence, poverty, and sometimes bitter familial strife. In this uncertain world, lives end abruptly in the most violent of circumstances; migratory characters shift uneasily between different states of unbelonging, both north and south of the border; and the seductive allure of a new American culture fuels the emerging fantasies of the young. At one stage or another, the twin brothers Frank and George, and their older brother Tom, all live in the South; however, the Six Counties continue to exert a magnetic pull for the twins. Frank's son Joseph is also sent south to work in Manager Tom's hotel, in what appears to be a fictional version of Cavan town, and so the second half of the novel is largely situated amongst the hectic provincialism of the Irish midlands in the 1970s. The key oppositions throughout the text vacillate starkly between love and hate, longing and loss, and between a traumatic past and an oddly compelling present. Meanwhile, the literal movement across the Northern Irish border reads like a sequence of interwoven moments, or what Luke Maxted calls the "unrestful orbit of the Fermanagh border" (2016, 20). Ultimately, the physical border turns out to be less significant than the haunting inner battles that rage in the echo-chambers of the characters' minds, or in the distance that exists between family members and lovers.

*Fighting with Shadows* may well be one of the most profoundly unsettling of all Northern Irish Troubles novels precisely because Dermot Healy probes the grim, cavernous lives of the characters who lived in the fallout zone of political violence instead of training a direct narrative eye on that violence. As Joanne Hayden has argued, Healy "is far from apolitical but comes at weighty subjects – the North, colonialism, class – sideways, through the consciousness of his characters" (2015). This remark is largely accurate, although there are moments in the novel, as we shall see, when even the characters' perspectives are temporarily abandoned. The world one witnesses in *Fighting with Shadows* is a deeply unsettling place. Its focus on the violence is oblique, with the voice bordering on the effaced narration that one finds in Joyce's *Dubliners*, rendering, as a result, the brute realities of casual violence even more monstrous. The unexpected murder of Frank Allen, for example, is delivered in a disconnected form of reportage: "Things in the country had been bad for a while. Then he answered the door to a man with a gun who shot him three times in the head" (Healy 2015 [1984], 14). The act of violence is simply reported, not described, and Frank vanishes in the general flurry of living that proceeds unabated. Consequently, this essay will consider the manner in which *Fighting with Shadows* mediates its immediate socio-historical context through a highly complex narrative form – a form that both

confused its immediate reviewing public and simultaneously extended the modernist fictional tradition from which it emerged.

On its most literal level the novel is a relatively realist fictional record of a specific time and place, since lost to the passage of the years and the partial resolution of the Northern Irish conflict. Provincial landscapes, which dominate most of Healy's fictions, frequently vanish from historical mappings which usually focus on metropolitan centres to inform their topographies of the past. *Fighting with Shadows* offers an artistically transposed insight into this lost world. In addition to the Troubles, which hum away, baritone-like, in the background for much of the novel, there is also the strange stirring of the 'New American Ireland', of the intoxicating interpenetration of external influences in still inward-looking towns and villages, of a faded yet exotic era of drugs, rock music, jazz, and localized Irish politics. The lounge of the Cove Hotel, where Joseph works, is haunted by the airs of American and English music, which sound potent notes of pathos, wonder, and longing in the closed, grim lives of the employees and casual punters. All of this is a telling footnote to the birth of modern Ireland, with its idiosyncratic medley of cultures and a provincial world that still very much exists (and to which Healy's last novel, *Long Time, No See*, bears extraordinary witness). The soulful (and always ironic) note of Dinah Washington crooning "What a Difference a Day Makes" (1959) to Irish farmers and labourers in Manager Tom's airless lounge strikes a deep chord, and contributes to an incomparable atmosphere – this was a world quite unlike any other, and Healy's powers of observation are powerfully evocative of the time. For all his stunning technical innovation, it is in such moments that the novel fixes the world in its unsettling fictions and retains some of its essence. And yet, for all its potency in the set-piece moments, in the capturing of nuanced phrasing in the home, the pub, and the marketplace, *Fighting with Shadows* is also far more complex than simply an effective record of the daily minutiae of provincial Ireland. The context is both a function and a cause of the innovative technical heights that Healy reached in the novel and, like all innovative art, the formal demands it initially made on its readers generated a recurring pattern of puzzlement in the early reviews it received in 1984. Furthermore, technical innovation was to become a key identifying characteristic in all Healy's fiction after *Fighting with Shadows*, and so this early novel is an important starting point for understanding the formal evolution of his later work.

Patrick McCabe considers Healy's fiction to be a "truly revolutionary work, and high literary art" (cited in O'Grady 2010, 21), while Aidan Higgins saw his work as belonging to an extended modernist tradition. In an essay entitled "The Hollow and the Bitter and the Mirthless in Irish Writing" (2008), Higgins bemoaned the general state of modern and contemporary Irish writing, allowing only for a few formally adventurous works, including Healy's short story collection, *Banished Misfortune*:

The modernist movement began and ended in Ireland, in full retreat before it had hardly begun, soon sunk out of light, making hardly a ripple. The old lies were merely being perpetuated and no great effort attempted to “make it new”. Some exceptions: *Sailing, Sailing Swiftly* (1933) by Jack B. Yeats; *Murphy* (1938) by Samuel Beckett; *The Ginger Man* (1955) by J.P. Donleavy; *Felo de Se* (1960) (my first story collection); *Night in Tunisia* (1976) by Neil Jordan; *In Night's City* (1982) by Dorothy Nelson; *Banished Misfortune* (1982) by D. Healy. (2008, 25)

Higgins also claimed of Healy's work that “few [other] Irish writers in the generation that came after me have profited from *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*” (cited in O'Grady 2010, 26). More specifically, Healy, like Joyce in all of his novels, explicitly foregrounded the complex problem of locating suitable fictive forms that might adequately express the complexity of lived experience, and in the case of several of his later protagonists, that lived experience is even more complex being infused with alcoholism (Jack Ferris, *A Goat's Song* [1994]), mental instability (Ollie Ewing, *Sudden Times*, 1999), and trauma (Philip Feeney, *Long Time, No See*, 2011). And lived experience is enormously complex in Healy: reality shape-shifts, small-town life is explosively layered with its own particular energy, and all of this is represented in a way that may render it quite alien to metropolitan imaginations. Several of the critics who respond to the material realities of the plot in Healy's work, particularly *A Goat's Song*, exhibit an awareness of the complex narrative shape that contains and shapes its subject matter. Kim Wallace, for example, focuses on the political difficulties of identity formation but also acknowledges the complex implications of how reality is subjectivised in the novel: “It transfigures the world of Ireland, but also examines the problematic of remaking ‘reality’, exploring the dialectic between the ‘world of action’ and the ‘world of the text’ ” (2004, 122). Ultimately, however, the material ‘reality’ of Irish politics is Wallace's primary consideration. Healy's work is undoubtedly rooted in its largely Irish contexts but, as with Joyce, the material reality with which the work is engaged is only ultimately accessible via the forms of art. In all of Healy's novels we witness a perpetual negotiation between the complex unfolding of the characters' lives and an artistic desire to coherently speak of the richness of these lives. In the first novel, *Fighting with Shadows*, the formulation of his immediate experience into a complex, multi-layered narrative – specifically in order to offer due testament to the very complexity of that experience – initially resulted in a certain degree of miscomprehension from earlier reviewers about Healy's focus. The immediate reception to *Fighting with Shadows*, in the 1980s, offers an insight into certain historical-specific contextual obsessions, as well as to the literary-critical expectations of the reviewing industry at the time. The immediacy of the Northern conflict in 1984 – especially in the emotive aftermath of the IRA Hunger Strikes – is frequently evident in the recurring critical focus on the novel's significance for the political situation. Similarly,

the novel's significance as a potential political statement appears more important to some reviewers than perhaps it would be nowadays, with Peter Brooke, for instance, suggesting that the novel was symptomatic of "a collapse of Irish Catholic Nationalist self-confidence" and strongly objected to its apparent "self-enclosed introspection." In a somewhat bizarre review, Brooke dismissed the novel in terms that reveal how fundamentally different the reviewing culture was at the time: "[Healy] is unable to believe in the superiority of Catholic Irish culture over British culture and so is left, like Milton's vision of the fate of Evil after the Last Judgement, self-consuming and self-consumed" (1984-1985, 19).

Perhaps of more genuine importance is the clear confusion expressed by many reviewers, particularly with respect to the form of the novel, who appear to yearn for a more linear narrative approach (Sommerville-Large 1984, 14; Hazeldine 1986, 88). The benefit of hindsight, of course, offers greater contextual distance and, in this case, the luxury of thirty years of critical distillation. Furthermore, a consideration of Healy's formal innovation in the novels that followed *Fighting with Shadows* – perhaps unparalleled in post-1980s fiction in terms of its technical range and achievement – allows us to return to the first novel with an informed sense of how complex an aesthetic innovator Healy really was. Rather than simply producing what Hazeldine suggested was "an aimless quality" (*ibidem*, 88) in its narrative, *Fighting with Shadows* was instead simply refusing a clear didactic centre in an effort to suggest that all sides in the simmering conflict were equally, and variously, damaged, and none more so than those on the peripheries of the violence, scarred as much by the harsh economic impact, and resultant familial separation, as by bullets and bombs. Far from being a failure of political observation, this registers a way of seeing that extends beyond merely linear modes of representation, and is suggestive of a world that is not a neat, easily-observed set of phenomena. Healy's artistic act of resistance gestures against easy-delineated narrative models and, in turn, gestures towards the complex problems of living in the midst of conflict, both political and personal.

The subtlety and range of Healy's technical ability was to be repeatedly confirmed in the years ahead. In *A Goat's Song* (1994), for example, Jack Ferris's invented narrative of his love affair with Catherine, and of her life (and that of her family) before they met, operates within an embedded, framed narrative that runs parallel to Jack's actual existence, ultimately forcing both modes of existence into narrative conflict. Furthermore, in one of the most striking and terrifying narrative sequences written about the Northern conflict, a significant portion of the novel features Ferris' naïve refusal to limit his movements in Loyalist areas of Belfast, where he lives for a time with Catherine. The fractured romantic narrative is fused at an abstruse angle with Healy's observations about Belfast, and is all the more effective for doing so – with this portion of the novel generating an immense amount of anxiety and fear that lingers in the text thereafter.

Similarly, in *Sudden Times* (Healey 1999), the challenge was to locate a form that would serve to imaginatively encompass Ollie Ewing's broken consciousness rather than simply represent him as a deranged character, and the resultant novel is both a record of the protagonist's mental perspective and a powerful re-ordering of how we experience the world through his eyes. *Sudden Times* reveals a deeply innovative technical focus, in which Ollie's consciousness is composed of a fusion of fragments of real conversations in his head, guilt-driven nightmares and a deeply compromised capacity to gain access to the communal sense of the real that most other characters in the novel inhabit. Most unsettling, perhaps, is his fluid sense of time and space:

I went back to the crossword. Then some word made me step down off a train in France. One word and I'm away. For a long period I walked the docks listening to the sailors. ... After a long trip through the fields of wheat, I bed down for the night in Montmartre. (*Ibidem*, 116)

Within two pages his mental-spatial frame shifts from Sligo to France to London, and back to Sligo, with the barest of narrative transitions (*ibidem*, 116-117).

Healy's last novel, *Long Time, No See* (2011) further extends the search for a narrative form that might fit the endlessly complex, and ordinary, world of small-town Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years. The fluid form of the novel is largely constructed out of sequences of dialogue between local characters, various passersby, and immigrants, while many of the characters are adorned with characteristically exotic names (typical of rural Irish towns and villages) such as Mister Psyche, the Judge, the Bird, the Blackbird, Mr Awesome, Mister John, and Mrs Puff. Everyone seems to have a nickname in small-town Ireland. The ordinary, but imaginatively exaggerated, spectacles of their lives are what dictate the movement of the novel. But what is again artistically striking is the commitment to the dialogue-driven, unique formal system – the absence of a fixed central narrator, or designator of reality, creates a polyphony of voices each competing with the other, in effect suggesting that what we understand to be the real is an ever-changing dynamic composite rather than a coherent model. Although the form is quite different, it is clear that *Fighting with Shadows*, almost thirty years earlier, was similarly engaged in generating a style that might speak to the strange fluidity of everyday life; the true drama, it is implied, lies in how we conceive of and classify experience.

But the logic of the complex form of Healy's first novel was not immediately obvious. Several of the first reviewers of *Fighting* were bothered by the fact that the "Troubles remain in the background", and that Healy's "concern for the terrible scenes he describes" are in question because of the narrative distance (Morton 1985, 41; Hazeldine 1986, 87). Such concerns, of course,

primarily reveal the reviewers' own critical templates and they appear not to have grasped the aesthetic motivation that lay behind the carefully calibrated, detached voice that avoids any emotional, psychological, or overt political positioning. Several critics and reviewers did, however, recognize the kind of novel that Healy was writing, and were aware of the potent power of the voice that accompanies (rather than guides) the reader. Marianne Koenig, for example, although troubled somewhat by what she saw as the "difficulty" of the novel, nonetheless recognized the rationale and benefits of the "dispassionate, detached voice ... which effectively allows the author to survey, permeate, and withdraw from its characters at will" (1985, 113). And rather than see the narrative distance as a problem, Seán Golden, too, was aware of the potential impact achieved by "representing overt violence obliquely" and that by "ignoring the details and descriptions that we have come to expect", Healy managed instead to imbue in the reader a sense of perpetual dread that would otherwise have been unattainable (1984, 18). Golden further vindicates the author's frequently absentee narrator by illustrating how it facilitates an integrated, living quality in the represented landscape:

His approach to characterization creates the effect of a hand-tinted monochrome, a vision of a set of individuals objectified in intimate relation with their environment. The narrative voice intermingles with the thoughts and words of the characters to such an extent that it could as well be said that the characters live to contribute to the creation of that narrative voice, which, unspecified, avoiding the embodiment of an "I", shares their lives at the same time that it creates and comments on them. It also creates the living world around them. (*Ibidem*, 18)

The way in which the narrative voice and multiple other strands of perspective and information coalesce demands intense concentration from readers, but the result is a fluid assimilated dreamlike quality in which characters and context, both micro and macro, have a deeply integrated quality. Critics like Koenig and Golden clearly recognized the novel's technical achievement and saw in its construction a considered mode of responding both to the immediate socio-political upheavals – and, paradoxically, the concurrent deathly stagnation – that gripped the country, as well as the invention of a formal approach that allowed its author to speak of a mode of experience, above, or beyond, the very material realities that frequently threaten to devour his subjects. As a result *Fighting with Shadows* manages to, almost paradoxically, represent a genuinely meaningful engagement with the Troubles – in fact, the publisher Steve MacDonogh believed that it was one of the best novels to come out of the Troubles (cited in Morrison 2016, 67).

But the novel is not exclusively a Northern conflict fiction. It operates in a perpetual narrative borderland, on several different levels. Healy was fascinated by borderlands and liminal states of mind, and he frequently transgressed the conventional boundaries between poetry, drama and fic-

tion, and between fiction and reality. In all of Healy's work there is a productive tension between the representation of complex lives and events, and the neo-modernist desire to find new ways of expressing the rich subjectivity of these lives – a mode of discourse which we wish to refer to as *counterrealism*<sup>1</sup>. Though usually set in small provincial towns, Healy's fictional worlds perpetually approach the edge of myth, and his vivid sense of place is rendered with an almost shamanistic intensity. Consequently, these strange landscapes and fractured lives can sometimes appear rather alien to metropolitan critics, which may well account for some of the more tentative and confused responses to his fiction.

In addition, the relationships between the characters are marked by a profound narrative distance – oceans of grief, longing and misreading, particularly in the furiously contested emotional and psychological spaces between Helen and Frank, although the other characters also do little more than probe each other's outer zones and remain imprisoned in their insulated imaginations. Similarly, the constant, unannounced time-shifts have the effect of introducing a thickening background context to our perspective on the characters, not with the intention of rendering them more comprehensible, but largely to remind us of the endless unknowable depths to the lives of people. More information does not necessarily clarify. And these depths, as elsewhere in Healy, are a complex amalgam of the material substances of daily struggle and the imaginative re-making of these struggles: "The night air was ripe with the smell of the local tannery. Calves with their hooves stiffened into the air had been hauled over the ditches. 'It looks,' whispered Geraldine, 'like we are only imagining all this' " (Healy 2015, 19).

Seán Golden's observations about the diminishing of the first person narrative voice at certain moments offer significant insights into the workings of the novel. Most obviously, the primary narrative voice is frequently surrendered to the characters' perspective via free indirect discourse – when the primary narrator's voice gives way to the individual characters' point of view, often for lengthy periods. Similarly, the point of view frequently shifts between several of the main characters, sometimes accompanied by shifts in pronouns. There is a constant shift in narratorial focus, between first and third person while, on occasion, the primary narrative voice is removed altogether and is

<sup>1</sup> The concept of counterrealism was first mooted by Richard Kearney in *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (1988), where he uses it to describe an anti-realist mode of writing which explores the "fundamental tensions between imagination and memory, narration and history, self and language". For Kearney, the Irish authors within this recent counterrealist tradition – epitomized for him by Flann O'Brien, Aidan Higgins, the later Francis Stuart, John Banville and Neil Jordan – "share with Joyce and Beckett the basic modernist project of transforming the traditional narrative of *quest* into a critical narrative of *self-questioning*" (*ibidem*, 83).



replaced by direct speech from the characters for a few pages, as when we are, variously, offered direct commentary by Helen, Peter, the soldiers, and Pop, without explicit narratorial anchoring (Golden 1984, 132). This elaborately-wrought approach ensures that the narrator appears to vanish at times, and lets the world get on with its own business. This is further accentuated by a regular alternating of the inner minds of the characters with a rather panoramic sweep and, at certain intervals, the characters are omitted from the narrative, and images of the landscape, or local historical data, momentarily replace the plot sequence (*ibidem*, 133-135). A direct contrast to this is also used in chapter thirty-three, when the epistolary mode replaces the primary narrator with a sequence of loosely connected letters between Margaret, Helen and Joseph. All such variations are indicative of a desire to reject the single, authoritative narrative voice and, by extension, to decline the implicit notion of the world as a monotone, knowable space – the textured tapestry of life becomes the primary focus, in which the characters themselves are simply constituent parts of its totality.

In this multi-focused world, many kinds of voice emerge, from the epistolary registers offered in the chapter of letters, to the diverse ways that reported speech is presented, including occasional intrusions such as “Said the radio” or “Said Maurice Caulfield” or “Said the Islander who rarely spoke” (Healy 2015 [1984], 136), and with the occasional interspersing of lines from songs by Dinah Washington (*ibidem*, 60), The Animals (*ibidem*, 295), and the music of The Beatles and Elvis Presley. Everywhere the texture of reality is interwoven with multiple voices, ghostly presences, shifts in perspective, and so a deeply interconnected world is elevated to become the primary focus of our attention. In fact, as recently as 2011, in an interview that accompanied the publication of *Long Time, No See*, Healy sought to explain his use of vernacular dialogue in the novel in the following terms: “I was trying to stay out of it and let the reader take over and run with it. So I would often put the meaning of a passage in, then take it out again” (O’Hagan 2011). His explanation holds a resonance for all of his fiction, in which there is a recurring fascination with somehow finding a way to allow the world to find utterance and to be witnessed, but without recourse to the singular authority of the fixed narrative voice. In *Long Time, No See* the world is channelled through the orchestra of voices that bear witness to their lives, while in *Fighting with Shadows* the complex narrative design offered advance notice of Healy’s desire to move beyond a linear mode of expression.

This desire is also evident in his evasion of a linear sense of time, so much so that several reviewers appear to be genuinely confused by the precise temporal frame that we fictionally inhabit (Hazeldine 1986, 88; Koenig 1985, 112). This is largely a result of lazy reviewing, as a novel like *Fighting with Shadows* is something of a trap for those who read swiftly, searching for the easy sequential temporality that structures many ‘realist’ novels. Healy’s fo-

cus, however, moves repeatedly back and forth in time, frequently switches tense in mid-flow, and offers up abrupt signals of temporal shifts at the beginning of chapters, e.g. “This was a long time ago”, or “There was another time” (2015, chapters 34, 37). Such temporal variations are all part of the mosaic-like tapestry of the novel. Healy instead allows coherence to emerge via a series of interconnected temporal patterns that speak of a less-structured understanding of time, akin to that which Margaret speaks of in one of her letters to Joseph: “life is made up of the half-forgetting” (*ibidem*, 255). Similarly, the genealogical lines of connection that link Frank, George, Tom, and Pop, knit the novel’s diverse structure together, while the recurring images of home that linger in Joseph’s maturing mind, long after he leaves, and his familial inheritance of anxiety and diffidence, ensures that the past perpetually haunts the present – again, though, just out of sight.

Aubrey Dillon-Malone recognized in some of these genealogical patterns a connection to the work of William Faulkner, but several critics have also observed a more profound, if calibrated, influence of Gabriel García Márquez on Healy’s early work. Eoin McNamee insightfully argues that the comparison holds, “up to a point”, arguing that Healy’s perspective is different – that the novels are related from the centre of strangeness itself, rather than simply being about a strange world – and certainly the disorientating point of view at times challenges material reality itself (McNamee 2015, 13); at one point in *Fighting with Shadows*, for example, we are informed that the island “veered sharply across the sea” (Healy 2015 [1984], 294), momentarily disrupting one’s sense of the real. In a telling recollection, Bill Swainson, Healy’s first editor, also acknowledges the presence of García Márquez’s work in Healy’s consciousness during the years when he was composing the first novel:

In 1980 when I first met him, he was reading *The Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez and this was an influence he had to absorb and then expel, or at least all that he could not use. I remember that in an early draft of *Fighting with Shadows* (then called *Sciamachy* or *A Fight with Shadows*) there was a chapter called “The City of the Swallows and the City of the Swifts” that owed a lot to the Colombian master, but being undigested did not make the final cut, nor did the opening sentence of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* survive as the epigraph it had once been destined to be (“Over the weekend the vultures got into the presidential palace by pecking through the screens on the balcony windows ...”). On the other hand, the Márquezian influence can be seen most clearly in the attempt to generalise by elevating the particular to an almost mythic level. You can sense it in “Banished Misfortune” and see it at its most fully developed in *Fighting with Shadows*. (Swainson 2016, 185-186)

The influence of García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is also clearly evident in this respect, the structure of which is in part framed around the multi-generational complications of the extended Buendía family. In both

cases we have an apocalyptic opening, a drought, the hint of incestuous relationships, while the madness and gaiety of Healy's midlands town reads like a peculiarly Irish variation on García Márquez's *Macondo*:

At two, the bell-ringer sauntered round the sodden streets announcing how the parade would begin at three. His sons swung out of his coat-tails. He was a chimney sweep by trade. Not long after the bell-ringer came the float from the bacon factory, with live pigs chortling through the bars, and then a man on stilts, fearful of the thin snow below and the bunting above. Next a showband playing Country and Western airs on the back of a lorry advertising furniture. The owner of a large supermarket in the town seated, in old-fashioned regalia, on a penny farthing. "Will you look at Fegan," said Cathy, "and a pair of balls on him like the weights of a grandfather clock." Next the brass band marching into step as they played a mixture of patriotic and show business tunes, "Oklahoma" and "Mise Éire", their ranks depleted because of death and lack of instruments. (Healy 2015 [1984], 276-277)

In *Fighting with Shadows*, the narrative focus shifts, temporal frames vary, and the inner and outer worlds of the characters frequently interchange, all generating a sense of a world that forever lies just out of sharp focus. While this quality is clearly apparent in his later work, already in *Fighting with Shadows* one has a haunted sense of the fragility of human consciousness in perpetual negotiation with material reality. In fact, throughout the novel, several characters experience deeply unsettling slippages in their sense of themselves, as when Frank, one day after a solitary drink, "lost touch with his surroundings and headed towards some house in the town" imagining, wrongly, it to be his own house (*ibidem*, 9). Similarly, in a particularly disorientating temporal and spatial shift, Healy presents Joseph as he experiences a profound sense of dislocation:

His bladder began to pain him and out in the yard he stood waiting. And pissing, he went back through all the times he had stood like this, his *bod* in his hands, pissing. Smaller, smaller he went till he shook with fear that his mind might not return to him, but stay in the head of some two-year-old self, and leave him mindless. Only bits of him would travel back. Though he could sense the yard around him, the yard was not there. (*Ibidem*, 75)

From the point of view of the characters there is a general sense of the unsolidity of material reality in the novel; George occasionally believed that his children "Margaret and Jim were only figments of his imagination" (*ibidem*, 59), while Pop, after having had his cataracts removed, can for a time "see through the ceiling to the sky beyond" (*ibidem*, 89).

Healy's imaginative appropriation of place names also speaks to the wider struggle for meaning within a fiercely divided culture. As we have noted in our brief "Glossary of Irish Terms" for the 2015 Dalkey Archive Press edition of *Fighting with Shadows*:

The etymology of the name of the fictional village, Fanacross, is explained differently on two occasions in the novel: first by Frank Allen: “Fanacross. *Fan ocras*, the end of hunger, surely” (Healy 2015 [1984], 9); and then, towards the end of the book, a police interrogator says to George, Frank’s twin brother: “‘Fanacross,’ he says, ‘*Fánaí na coise*, the slopes of the bank’” (*ibidem*, 352). Both etymologies are imprecise and this may be deliberate on Healy’s part, implying a kind of ignorance of place that is a result of not knowing the language properly. (*Ibidem*, xxiii)<sup>2</sup>

Midway through *Fighting with Shadows*, this brooding obsession with *dinnseanchas* (the lore of place names) finds its fullest expression in a strange and uncanny funeral sequence. Following the brutal murder of Frank Allen, his family bring his body to an island graveyard on a lake near Fanacross, where generations of the Allens are buried. In a moment reminiscent of Healy’s groundbreaking short story “Banished Misfortune” (1975)<sup>3</sup>, the naturalistic flow of the primary mimetic narrative is suddenly interrupted – without signpost or warning – by a diegetic digression, as if history itself seems determined to have its say beyond the characters or the exigencies of plot:

Seabirds’ droppings, white as shingle, covered the other Allen graves. Geraldine, and around her the recent deaths buttressed with stone, and beyond that, the unmarked grave from the Famine. For when the lazy beds failed and the first boatloads of skeletons took to the sea looking for grain, the villagers were too tired to bring any new corpses up to the old burial ground at the deserted village in the mountains. . . . So they turned their funeral boats up the river, across the freshwater lake to the Island. (2015, 149)

This dramatic slippage into the dark Famine past continues on for another two pages. Then, just as suddenly – and again without signpost or warn-

<sup>2</sup> It is possible to discern a deliberate mischievousness in these misrepresentations of the etymological roots of Fanacross: “fan” (wait), “fán” (slope), and “fánaí” (wanderer), plus “coise” instead of “croise” (of the cross[roads]). Implicit in this Joycean wordplay is a subtle statement about cultural disconnectedness, one which speaks of waiting, wandering, and a terrible sense of loss in the lives of the Irish people. See Murphy and Hopper, “Glossary of Irish Terms” (Healy 2015 [1984], xxiii. Thanks to Dr Seosamh Mac Muirí and Dr Guinevere Barlow for their Irish-language expertise.

<sup>3</sup> In “Banished Misfortune” the narrative cross-cuts between multiple viewpoints, but it also flickers backwards and forwards in time and space, and as the critic John Wilson Foster remarked: “The journey through history and geography becomes a form of meditation on Ireland’s violent present and broken past” (Foster 2015, 1093). At the end of the story – which, like *Fighting with Shadows*, is set on both sides of the Irish border in the 1970s – the narrative abruptly and unexpectedly shifts back in time to 1910. For further discussion of this formal strategy, see Keith Hopper and Neil Murphy, “Editors’ Introduction: Making it New”, in Healy 2015, xix-xxi.

ing – the primary mimetic narrative begins to reassert itself, mid-sentence: “And when another of their clan fell dead from starvation they oared to the Island just as the Allens did, over the same water, knowing nothing of who came after” (*ibidem*, 150). Briefly, for another few beats, the narrative lapses back into a kind of continuous past, before finally flickering back to the present moment, and to Frank’s distraught father, Pop:

Water-lilies lifted up like a mat before the cut of the boat.  
The black depths followed them.

Two weeks later the [coastguard] cutter passed again. This time they had biscuits, Indian meal and salt. Again they had been saved. They cursed the dead for not having hung on just one day longer. So Pop took leave of his son. (*Ibidem*, 150-151)

It is difficult to locate with any real certainty the source of the diegetic narrative voice: is it simply an authorial amplification of Pop’s grief-stricken imagination, or some kind of collective unconscious channelling itself through Pop and the other mourners? Or is it, perhaps, the melancholy voice of the island itself – a ghostly enunciation of past traumas coming back to haunt? In any case, it is a bold and unsettling moment, one where the habitus itself seems to bear witness to the memories and desires of a troubled people, and to the terrible burden of Irish history.

All of this contributes to a sense of the novel being structured not by the tight rules of verifiable reality or linear histories, but with a sense of the world as a product of the imagination. In fact, the novel frequently hints at the idea of the imagination as an alternative ordering system, as when Frank assures us that there is “nothing ... in your imagination cannot happen in reality” (*ibidem*, 40). Healy too suggests as much in a book review the year after *Fighting with Shadows* was first published, when he expressed the view that “Irish people prefer to side with the imagination, leaving linear history to those who can chart specifics into generalisations” (Healy 1985, 13). The general sense of the essential mutability of things, of the powerful ebb and flow of time and space, explains the vast multi-focal range of Healy’s narrative, and the subtle manner of its own ordering principles. Indeed, within the novel itself the fiction sometimes self-reflexively hints at this fact – for example, when George’s mind threatens to break free of its moorings, while he is imprisoned:

He heard himself say and think things that seemed rootless, to have no seat in his mind. Yet the outside world could accommodate all this randomness. Anything he thought or said was possible. It was in the yard. It was in the indescribable trees. It was in the things fought over. It was in what remained after the fighting was over. It was the shadow of things long dead that stretched off into the future. That sudden darkening of the fields and the streets that has no explanation. And then the brightening, even a greater darkness. (2015 [1984], 350)

The world for Healy was always a commanding, haunted, imperious presence and while his work provides constant reminders of this, it does so via a sequence of intricate, innovative fictions that both confirm the – paradoxically – coherent randomness of the living, and perpetually register the artistic struggle to name that apparent randomness. *Fighting with Shadows* opens with an unanswered question: “Anything strange?”. The same question is asked again almost a hundred pages later, but Frank Allen denies that anything is strange. However, as Eoin McNamee suggests, Frank is wrong: “The answer is that it is all strange, the world mutable, not to be depended upon but strewn with marvels. The air is thick with the dark matter of the Troubles” (2015, 13). A powerful sense of strangeness, of the uncanny, permeates the novel, as McNamee observes, and this may, in fact, be the major achievement of the novel, speaking as it does of the immeasurable, and peculiar, multiplicity of things:

The novel circles back on itself. There are shifts in time and in points of view. There’s an argument for taking the whole book as a poem, for it demands the same attention and resolve that a poem does and rewards in equal measure. Neither the novel nor the stories depend on plot. They are driven by the majestic impulse of Healy’s prose. There is always the possibility that words will break the structure of the sentence and become incantation. (*Ibidem*, 13)

In recent years, several critics and reviewers have considered Healy’s work in the context of modernism. Luke Maxted has written of Healy’s “imagistic late modernism” (2016, 20), while J.P. O’Malley observes that the “footprints of Irish modernism are everywhere” in Healy’s early work (O’Malley 2015, 22). But as far back as 1978, two of Healy’s early stories were included in *Paddy No More* – an anthology of contemporary Irish stories that featured work by several writers associated with the Irish Writers’ Co-op, including Neil Jordan, Desmond Hogan, Lucile Redmond, and Dermot Healy. It was prefaced with an introductory essay by Francis Stuart, “The Soft Centre of Irish Writing”, first published in the *Irish Times* in 1976. For Stuart, the history of the Irish short story is an ongoing struggle for signifying supremacy between “cosy” realists and “subversive” modernists: between conformists who wish “to preserve communal cultural standards and present the national identity”, and dissidents who seek “to preserve the true purpose of art as an instrument for the discovery of alternative concepts and new insights” (1978 [1976], 5-6). From this perspective, traditional Irish realism – exemplified for Stuart by “soft-centred fiction like Frank O’Connor’s ‘Guests of the Nation’” – is more easily consumed and assimilated by the dominant culture, and its conventional poetics enshrine an inherently conservative politics:

This writing – knitting would be a better word – is to the expected pattern or formula ... Familiar sayings and attitudes are echoed with a nudge of humorous intent, the curtains are drawn, the fire poked, and a nice little tale with a whimsi-

cal slant is about to be told. No passion, no interior obsession, no real or outrageous comedy as in Flann O'Brien, Joyce or Mr Beckett. (*Ibidem*, 7-8)

Dermot Healy's work offers neither the interior obsessions of Joyce, nor the metafictional fascinations of Beckett or O'Brien, in part because, like Aidan Higgins, he never quite relinquished the desire to accommodate his powerful sense of the real, of the incantatory presence of the world in which he lived. The living forces of provincial Ireland offered unique and profoundly compelling landscapes for Healy's imagination and the subtle and masterful narrative complexities of his work managed to speak of that context, even when it so often – unavoidably – declared itself to be a living dynamic presence.

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# Troubles Women: A Creative Exploration of the Experience of Being a Woman in the Provisional IRA

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## *Abstract:*

What was it like being a woman in the Irish Republican Army? Drawing on her practice-led creative writing doctoral research Tracey Icton attempts to answer this question. Including extracts from Icton's PhD novel, *Herself Alone in Orange Rain*, this paper illustrates how her creative practice explores and represents the lived experiences of IRA women. A survey of Troubles fiction reveals how the genre stereotypes portrayals of IRA women and their experiences, misrepresenting the reality. Alongside this literary review, Icton presents factual accounts of female IRA volunteers and outlines, in author commentaries, how her creative writing practice draws on these accounts to ensure her novel offers a more accurate fictional portrayal of female IRA volunteers and their experiences of active service.

*Keywords:* Creative Writing, Herself Alone, IRA, Troubles, Women

## *1. Introduction*

*Herself Alone in Orange Rain* is part two of my Celtic Colours trilogy which will, when completed in 2019, explore a hundred years of Irish conflict from the 1916 Easter Rising to the centenary of that pivotal event<sup>1</sup>. It is also

<sup>1</sup> Part one of the trilogy, *Green Dawn at St Enda's*, was published by Cinnamon Press in March 2016 and explores the experience of fictional St Enda's pupil, Finn Devoy, in the years 1911-1916, including his involvement in the Easter rebellion. *Herself Alone in Orange Rain* will be released in the autumn of 2017, with part three (working title *White Leaves of Peace*) being published in 2019.

the creative component of my practice-based creative writing doctoral project. *Herself Alone* tells the story of promising art student Caoilainn Devoy, who, aged nineteen, puts down her paint brushes and picks up an Armalite. Joining the Provisional IRA after the 1981 hunger strike, Caoilainn operates for the movement throughout the 1980s, participating in several high profile missions. She endures the hardships of the life she chooses, giving up everything in the fight for freedom and independence for her homeland and herself.

*Herself Alone* was initially a novelistic idea but became a research project. For this development I thank a fellow writer who suggested I devote part two of my trilogy to exploring the Irish conflict from the perspective of a female IRA volunteer. Her suggestion raised interesting questions. Did women actually join the IRA, as opposed to the Cumann na mBan<sup>2</sup>? If so then, what was it like being an IRA woman? How did they think, act and feel while engaged in guerrilla warfare? Were fiction and media portrayals of such women accurate reflections of the reality? And, most importantly for me as a novelist, how do I write a novel that is compelling yet offers a credible account of the experiences of IRA women? In order to write such a work I needed to answer these questions thus my research entailed reading both factual accounts by/about IRA women to inform the novel's content and existing works of Troubles fiction to establish what methods other writers had employed in novels featuring IRA women. I then used this research to guide my creative practice, enabling me to develop a novel that represented, as faithfully as is possible in fiction, the experience of being an IRA woman.

While reference is here made to women who were at one time imprisoned for IRA activity, the extracts and commentary included in this article focus on the representation of IRA women on active service. Therefore, literature specifically about the experience of being a female IRA prisoner has not been included with this article although such material is included in the PhD thesis from which this article is drawn.

## *2. Exemplifying how Troubles fiction represents the lived experience of being an IRA woman*

Through concurrently researching fiction and non-fiction narratives about female Republican activists I realised the reported realities and fictional representations differed significantly. Troubles novels are mostly thrillers. Constrained by genre conventions, they employ implausibly dramatic adven-

<sup>2</sup> Cumann na mBhan (literally 'women's group') was the separate Republican organisation for women activists. It was established by women during preparations for the 1916 Rising and continued to maintain a separate role, command structure and membership policy until the late 1970s, when the Provisional IRA disbanded it and took women volunteers directly into the IRA.

ture plots over believable fact-based events and stock goodies/baddies instead of characters who imitate real people. Reading such novels I found books, both literary and popular, repeatedly invoking common misconceptions about women combatants and resorting to sexist stereotypes in their character portrayals. Despite reading extensively I did not find any novel based on factual experiences as reported by IRA women that developed a plausible cause-and-effect plot and, crucially, that had female characters depicted as realistically rendered individuals, not sexist stereotypes.

Critical analyses of women paramilitary characters in Troubles fiction generally agree that these female protagonists are represented as flawed. Either they allow themselves to become victims or some abnormality in their psychology is manifested through their military activities and connected to some sexual deviance. They are emotionally unstable, Bill Rolston describing how they “wilt under fire”, being “prone to tears” or do “not care about harming children, even when men do” (1989, 50). In fiction “The explanation of women’s violence is always at the emotional level” (*ibidem*, 52) he concludes. Ronan Bennett agrees, identifying depictions of them as “of low intelligence, ... driven by bloodlust. If they have politics, they are the politics of the fanatic” (1994, 6). Additionally, Aaron Kelly notes their portrayal as “unmanageable revolutionaries” (2005, 130). Rolston, Kelly and Bennett concur that fiction frequently misrepresents women combatants, depicting them being uncontrollably violent, implying they are psychopathic.

However, a perhaps greater misrepresentation in this genre is that which denies women activists their femaleness. Fiona McCann suggests that “in order to commit acts of violence, women must adopt aggressive (and stereotypically masculine) characteristics” (2012, 76). Similarly, Laura Pelaschiar notes they are bestowed with “violent male characteristics, as if their activism in political terrorism had necessarily forced them to define themselves in masculine or male terms and to give up their own female identities for more macho ones” (1998, 83). Michael L. Storey also acknowledges this trope, stating that most representations are “not a well balanced integration of woman and terrorist” (2004, 206). Such characters must be woman or terrorist. Rolston develops this view, suggesting these female characters are portrayed as “sad specimens of woman-kind” and “second-class ‘terrorists’” (1989, 50). Researching Troubles fiction and critical perspectives of it, I concluded that female combatants in Troubles novels are subjected to one or more of the following stereotypical misrepresentations; mother, whore, femme fatale, traitor, madwoman, devil woman, macho woman.

Rolston notes: “It is an unwritten rule of these novels that women’s most important role is that of mother ... even women who are not mothers have that potential” (*ibidem*, 44). One example is Tom Bradby’s Collette from *Shadow Dancer* who is labelled “Mother. Widow. Terrorist” (2012, rear cover); the syntactical order of the description suggests terrorist is the least important

of her roles, maternal and matrimonial duties taking precedence. Opposing maternal representations is the whore portrayal. In *1916* this is developed literally through Sile, a prostitute who says “we’re supposed to live the lives our mothers lived – or be disgraced forever, like me” (Llywelyn 1999 [1998], 257). It is disgraced Sile, not Mary the wholesome shop-assistant, who fights during the Easter Rising. The stereotyping of female combatant characters’ sexual behaviour is developed further by femme fatale and honeytrap<sup>3</sup> representations. A violent example of this trope appears in Liam Murray Bell’s *So It Is*. Independent Republican paramilitary Cassie lures Loyalist men into sexual liaisons, using a broken bottleneck inserted into her vagina to “inflict real damage” (2012, 80) on them during intercourse. Female paramilitaries depicted thus, as duplicitous and treacherous, are indeed common in Troubles thrillers and some even turn against their own organisation like Bradby’s Colette who informs on the IRA rather than face imprisonment. She is threatened “You are not going to see your children for *at least* fifteen years” (italics original; 2012, 51). This portrayal suggests motherhood causes her treachery, reinforcing the portrayal that mothers cannot be successful paramilitaries. Such depictions illustrate how women activists in Troubles novels are often either good women (sacrificing mothers) or good terrorists (calculating combatants) or bad at both (treacherous, weak, failing family and fight). Those striving to be successful paramilitaries are characterised either as madwomen, like Kate in Peter Ransley’s *The Price* who is called “the witch” (1984, 154) and described as being “nearer to the edge” (*ibidem*, 155) when she handles a gun, a phrase suggesting insanity, or as devil women, purely evil, like Norah from *The Savage Day* who, after killing a comrade, showed “no evidence of even the slightest remorse” (Higgins 2008, 338). Those female characters not depicted as mad or evil are made into macho women, as seen in Marion Urch’s *Violent Shadows*, when Tara coaxes her body into a male form: “Tara’s breasts became smaller, her stomach lost its curve, there was no more softness to her. When her period didn’t arrive she was pleased. She thought about what a man is ... trained herself to invulnerability” (1996, 88). This representation implies her success as a paramilitary depends on eradicating her femaleness and such masculinising of female characters often prefaces portrayals of their paramilitary activities.

However, many of the texts surveyed restrict depictions of women participating in military violence<sup>4</sup>. Unlike actual IRA women, they rarely have guns. Bell’s Cassie, for example, has “only broken glass” for protection (2012, 333). Cassie’s one kill is done with a hammer, under duress, and the lan-

<sup>3</sup> A honeytrap is a woman paramilitary operating to lure, through sexual temptation, their (male) enemies into a trap where the woman may or, more often, may not, carry out the execution.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. carrying out shootings, bombings or other means of engaging/attacking the enemy.

guage used emphasises her horror: “Hot tears bubble and burn at my closed eyelids and – suddenly, mercifully – I’m aware that I’m the only one making noise” (2012, 310). Douglas Hurd in *A Vote to Kill* gives Clarissa an implausibly complex weapon, a crossbow concealed in a box file<sup>5</sup>; she misses with it. In some novels women hold a gun, threaten to use it, but do not fire (Sile in *1916*, Kate in *The Price* and Isabel in Eugene McCabe’s *Victims*). In others they only wound, like Colette in *Shadow Dancer*, the text specifying she “took aim at the boy’s right thigh and fired” (Bradby 1998, 91). Another non-fatal shooting is Tara’s of Michael about which she reflects “she should have finished the job. But he was hardly a crow or a hare” (Urch 1996, 203). Previously she coldly killed animals but here she is portrayed as unable to kill a person, something real IRA volunteers had to do. Some writers only depict women killing in reported action like Roddy Doyle in *A Star Called Henry* who has a farmer tell Henry that Miss O’Shea is “killing those new Tan bastards” (2005, 269) or Cathy Spellman whose narrator in *An Excess of Love* only hints that Constance may kill:

Had he [their father] never taught her to shoot, might it be that I would never have seen her as she was that fearful Easter Friday morning at the barricade, commanding a troop of ragtag and bobtail rebels ... a rifle at her shoulder, carried with the casual pride of one who knows full well how to use it. (1986, 12)

Other writers allow female combatants to engage briefly in violence, like Beth in Valerie Miner’s *Blood Sisters* who participates in a bombing in the novel’s penultimate chapter (she is lookout for a male comrade who plants the bomb<sup>6</sup>) and Sorcha in Aly Renwick’s ... *Last Night Another Soldier* ... who does not join the IRA until the novel’s final section. Sorcha is then shown sniping at a British soldier but the portrayal ends once she has “squeezed the trigger” (1989, 173). The narrative switches focalisation to the shot soldier; the reader knows Sorcha fired but is given only a glimpse of her doing so. These two examples offer the most realistic portrayals of women paramilitaries found in my review of Troubles fiction. Both protagonists are complex, developed in detail, given some agency over their involvement and mainly political motivations. They are committed to the armed struggle but not depicted as mad or evil. However, as representations of their participation in active service are limited, neither novel is a credible exploration of the experience of being an IRA woman. This also applies to Tina in Danny Morrison’s *The Wrong Man* (1997). Tina, though an active service volunteer throughout the novel, is a minor character making too few appearances to be fully developed. Texts that do portray women’s sus-

<sup>5</sup> I found no accounts of any IRA operations involving a crossbow.

<sup>6</sup> See Miner 2003, 190-193.

tained participation in violence misrepresent women combatants in the sexist, stereotyped ways outlined above.

Wide reading of Troubles novels with Republican female combatant characters consistently demonstrated what Eve Patten calls the “superficially drawn terrorist presence” (1995, 132). Her assessment is difficult to refute when comparing fiction and non-fiction accounts about the lived experience of being an IRA woman. Undertaking as thorough as possible a review of Troubles fiction, uncovering existent portrayals of female republicans, enabled me to make informed decisions about how my representation of IRA women would be written to challenge these representations and offer a fictional portrayal that more closely imitated reality.

### *3. Representing the lived experience of being a woman in the IRA through creative practice*

#### *i. Extract 1*

Having joined the IRA, Caoilainn here takes part in her first mission, the planting of a car bomb. She is accompanied by Aiden O’Neill, a fellow volunteer and her childhood friend, now her boyfriend. The scene is set just months after Bobby Sands and nine other republicans died on hunger strike in HMP Maze while protesting for political status for those jailed for paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

Belfast – 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1981

“It’s a fu... it’s a disgrace,” Kelly jabs his finger at me, “sending a wee girl to do this. If it was up to me we’d not let you in.”

We’re in his sister-in-law’s front room, me, Aiden and Kelly who’s a hardboiled Belfast Provo.

“Well, it’s not,” I say, “and I am so...”

Aiden digs me in the ribs. I suppress angry words; they’ll only convince Kelly I’m not cool-headed enough for active service ops.

“This for the lads in jail, to show we haven’t forgotten them,” Kelly mutters, ice-cold eyes burning me. “There’d better not be any cock ups.”

“There won’t be,” Aiden says.

Kelly flicks his stare to Aiden. “It’s on you to make sure she does what she’s supposed to.” He slides a scrap of paper across the coffee table. On it is a north Belfast address and the details of a car, including reg number. “No mistakes, love,” he says, face stony.

Outside I vent, firing off oaths about Kelly’s bigoted bullshit.

“Forget him,” Aiden says. “You need your mind on this.” He waves the paper at me. “Are you sure you’re ready for it?”

“I’ve said, haven’t I?”

“Just be clear about it: this is a military attack on a legitimate target.”

I shrug Kelly off, think of Daideo instead, his matchstick arms and legs, the tissue paper skin holding him together, old pains flickering behind his eyes. “I am clear.”

At 2am, driving a commandeered car, we head for the address, bomb in the boot. The air is sleety; white flakes blowing into the headlights make it seem like we’re driving into a time travel vortex. I’ll wake up in my bed in Dublin last week.

Aiden drives sedately, stopping at red lights even when the junction is clear. Around one corner a cat darts from an entry; Aiden brakes and we’re flung forward. I smash my arm on the dashboard and feel the handgun tucked in my belt jab the small of my back as I rebound against the seat.

“Jesus. Did I hit it?”

We both check behind and see the cat scurrying off up the road.

“Christ, you alright?”

“Yes, but I reckon we’re all down a life there,” I joke, not letting myself think about the package in the boot being slammed around.

Aiden drives on. A few minutes later we’re there.

“You can stay in the car if you want,” he offers.

This bastard was one of them scrubbing the lads down with wire brushes, spreading them over mirrors and beating them up. He’s the enemy.

“No. I need to do this.”

“Fine. Don’t forget to...”

“I know what I’m doing,” I hiss, getting out of the car but leaving the door open.

The silver Cortina is parked on the drive; I double-check the registration then get the bomb. The house is asleep, no curtains twitching or telly flickering. I open the wrought iron gate; the hinges whine. I freeze but no lights come on so I creep up the drive and wriggle under the car.

It’s a small bomb, magnets for attaching it to the car’s underbelly, two primer switches, set on a timer. So it shouldn’t go off in my face, which is only inches from it in the cramped space beneath the car. Lying on my back the gun digs into my spine so I set it beside me and lift the bomb overhead, arms trembling with the strain. A second before touching it to the chassis the magnets snatch it from my grip, sucking it in place with a resounding clang that rebukes me for snapping at Aiden; he’s only wanting to keep me safe. Jesus, I’m a bitch sometimes. Get this done and I can be back with him, get us both safe. I pull a torch from my pocket and illuminate the switches I need to flick, starting the countdown that will end as the screw pulls up outside Long Kesh for another day’s grind.

There’s a sound, like a book falling flat onto a wooden floor. I click off the torch, turn my head and see a pair of tartan slippers, wrinkled socks rising from them. They point towards the street, back towards the house and back again: towards me.

I have the gun in my hand before I’ve picked it up. A face joins the slippers, peering under the car: there’s a moustache, grey and bushy; baggy, weather-worn skin. Eyes lock into mine, widening in surprise as they see me. The mouth opens to speak. I point and pull the trigger. The only sound is the gun’s crack.

Trapped in the narrow space the recoil jerks my hand, the gun smacks me on the nose. Shards of shock pierce my brain. Scrambling static clouds my vision. I blink back the burning pain and dazzling sparks; see the slippers, upended, worn-

through soles staring blankly at me. I fumble for the switches, feel the two raised pimples, and press. Then roll out from under the car.

The screw is on his back, a dark hole in his forehead, a blood trickle trailing from the wound and a larger pool of inky blackness saturating the ground beneath his head where the exploding bullet churned tissue, shattered bone, ripped skin. He's dead. And he's not the screw. I see now he's too old, frail, for the Kesh's brutal work.

Aiden flashes the headlights. I run down and throw myself into the car, not getting the door shut before he has his foot through the floor, speeding us away, the gun still in my hand. The stench of cordite fills the car.

"Jesus. What the fuck happened?" Aiden asks.

I can't speak. I'm trying to unload the gun but keep missing the catch that releases the magazine. He snatches the gun from me, tossing it on the back seat, speeds up. We're thrown round corners, swiping traffic bollards and lampposts, running red lights, heading for the Falls, the unlit streets that can hide us. My mouth fills with the salty metallic taste of blood. I feel myself ragged about but all I see is a pair of tartan slippers, the soles worn out.

We've stopped. Aiden's shaking me.

"We've gotta go."

A door slams, his. I'm dragged out, hauled to my feet. The street comes into focus; shuttered shops, up-tipped bins, piles of rubble. Aiden leans into the car, grabs my gun and tucks it into his belt. His hand grips my arm and he jumps into a run, towing me, my feet stumbling to find a rhythm. Then I'm running on my own, his grip gone. We're side by side, our boots belting over broken pavement slabs. I want to keep running, heart pumping, legs thrusting, lungs burning. I want to stay in my body; out of my head.

We sprint down narrow entries and into the Divis flats complex where the concrete warren of Lego-stacked blocks squats. Aiden turns left, right, bangs through a door, mounts a flight of stairs and races along a walkway to a peeling blue-paint door. He pummels it. A light snaps on. A woman opens the door, clutching a pink dressing gown to her throat. She looks us over, holds back the door, letting us tumble in, then slams and bolts it.

We stand there, panting. Blood drips from my nose, disappearing into the brown lino. I sag against the wall, shaking.

"Sorry to wake you, Cathy," Aiden says, the words gasped between breaths, "but we've a spot of bother."

"You better come through."

She strides down the passage. We follow her into a kitchen, bright with yellow Formica and green cupboards. She's at the sink, filling the kettle. Aiden pulls out a chair, makes me sit, tilts my chin, facing me into the light.

"Jesus, you're hurt."

I jerk my head away and pinch my bleeding nose.

"Bathroom's next door," Cathy says.

On trembling legs I stagger into the loo. The mirror above the cracked white sink reveals the result of my self-inflicted make-over; purple bruises shadowing my eyes, nose swollen and pulpy, blood rouging my lips. I wash off the sticky red film that's drying to a crust in my nostrils.

Back in the kitchen Cathy and Aiden are drinking tea, smoking. She pushes



her pack across as I sit. The lines around her mouth deepen as she takes a drag; she brushes frazzled brown hair off her forehead. Her roots are grey. She stares at me but doesn't ask my name which I guess means Aiden's already told her.

"Do I want to know?" she asks Aiden.

"You don't." He taps ash off the end of his cigarette. "Can you get a message across town for us?"

"Aye, tomorrow." She sighs. "I'll get yous some blankets for the sofa." She shuffles out.

"Are you alright?" he asks, reaching for my hand.

"Fine."

"What happened?"

"Weren't you watching?"

"Thought I saw something up the road. Next I knew he was by the car and..."

He takes my hand again. "He was going up in a few hours anyway."

"It wasn't him."

"What?"

"It was some ould fella. I didn't see until after..."

"Shite. Who then?"

"I don't know. Maybe his da? Is this going to get me disciplined?"

"Ach, no. You had to get away. You're no use in jail."

"I'm no use out of it if I'm shooting the wrong people."

"Don't think that. We don't know who he was. You were reacting to a developing situation," Aiden reassures, gripping my hand.

I rub at the ache in my forehead.

"You want me to see if she's got any pills?" he offers.

I tell him yes, but two Aspirin aren't going to make this better.

We doss down in the living room, me on the sofa, Aiden in an armchair with his feet, still in their boots, on the coffee table: next to the gun. The night plays on a loop in my head. I see the man's face, the eyes reading mine, the mouth open to plead, and the second face, staring sightlessly. The before and after images alternate, faces on a spinning coin. I lose whichever way up it falls.

A car collects us midmorning. A young lad drives, eyes welded to the road, while Kelly rages at me from beside him.

"That fella you shot was the screw's bleeding father-in-law. And they found the fu... the bomb before it went off." He faces me. "You'll not be doing any more ops here. It's alright yous running messages but, catch yourself on, you're useless at proper jobs."

"That's not fair," Aiden bleats. "She..."

"Don't you say fuck all to me, boyo. Letting your lass do your job, you're a fucking shower," Kelly barks.

His chivalrous sexism, how he curses Aiden instead of me because he won't swear at women, makes me long to call him a cunt just to shut him up, make him wither, but I'm in too much trouble to risk it, even for Aiden. I reach for Aiden's hand. He tears it free. I don't know who he's mad at; Kelly, me or himself.

I fix on the scrolling view, throat tight, eyes stinging. To Kelly the shooting is a chance lost, justification for his macho bigotry. To me it's a line crossed.

ii. *Extract 2*

Having been in the IRA for over three years and participated in some high profile bombings in England, Caoilainn is now on active service in Belfast. In this scene she is called upon to shoot a British sniper. The scene happens on the first anniversary of the death of Aiden O'Neill who she married in 1982. Aiden was killed in an SAS ambush along with two other volunteers. Danny, who accompanies Caoilainn during the scene, is another member of Caoilainn's Active Service Unit (ASU) and Aiden's younger brother.

Belfast – 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1984

A year ago today I was unaware the end of the world was coming. It's my first thought when I wake up hours before dawn, uncertain I was sleeping. I stay in bed, smoking and staring at the ceiling, trying to conjure Aiden's face in the curls of vapour that drift away from me, wondering if I'll be able to go to his grave later.

The door bangs, Ciaran leaving for his lunchtime shift. Alone now, I struggle up. In the bathroom I stand under a cold shower, numbing myself. It doesn't help.

I sit at the table, tea going cold, suffocating in the silence, eyes flicking from object to object, mind fighting itself to remember and forget.

There's a knock at the door.

One of the Fianna lads is on the step in his St Michael's blazer.

"Mrs Murphy says there's a Brit sniper across the way from her."

"Shouldn't you be in school?"

"It's break. What'll I tell her, about the sniper?"

"Get to school, Eoin."

"Aren't you gonna do something?" His freckly face screws into an angry scowl.

His rage is infectious. I see Aiden, crumpled, bloodied: dead.

*The IRA volunteer acts most of the time on his own initiative.*

"Leave it with me." I slam the door, press up against it and rub at the tight band constricting my forehead.

Minutes later I'm walking up the road, an empty rucksack over my shoulder, heading for the butchers.

Fred acknowledges me with a nod as I cross the shop, pushing through the door to the back; queuing housewives throw curious glances my way.

I dodge the dangling carcasses in the cold store, moving out to the slaughterhouse in the yard. Fred doesn't do his own slaughtering anymore; the shed is our emergency weapons dump.

Inside the windowless shack fluorescent strip lights judder awake, illuminating the gore-stained floor. The stench of old blood, fishy and rotten, makes me gag. Squatting in a corner, I prise up the floorboards and rake around the hole until a plastic bag rustles in my fingers. Hauling it out, I peel back the polythene keeping the damp from an AR-15 and a half full magazine. Broken down, it'll fit in my rucksack. Fingers shaking, I drag bloody air into my lungs, exhale and recite the drill: check the chamber; shoot the bolt; press the pins through; pull from the other side; click the barrel free. I do the rear take down pin but fumble the front pivot

pin, not pulling it through far enough to release the barrel. Jesus, a recruit two days into basic training can do this. I put the gun down, take another breath; get it apart.

“Managing, love?” Fred asks from the doorway.

“Yeah. Any chance of me borrowing your car?”

“I took it round to Mick’s yesterday, brakes are knackered. If they’ve sorted it help yourself.”

The garage is a two minute walk away; the Divis Flats, where Mrs Murphy and the Brit sniper are eyeballing each other, is twenty. Even if Fred’s car isn’t driveable there’ll be another I can borrow. Urgency rakes my chest with jagged claws. I have to get the bastard: for Aiden.

At the garage Fred’s Vauxhall is on the forecourt. I poke my head into the workshop.

“Mick?”

He emerges from the loo, fag dangling.

“Hiya, Caoilainn, everything alright?”

“Fine. You sorted Fred’s brakes?”

“Aye.”

“Grand. I’m just borrowing it for a wee job. He said it’s O.K.”

Danny rolls out from beneath a Beetle. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. Go back to work.”

He peels off his overalls.

“I said go back to work.”

“No.”

He charges past. I chase but he’s already in the driving seat when I emerge into weak winter sun. Yanking the door open, I seize his sleeve.

“Get out.”

“No.” He grips the steering wheel.

“Jesus, I’ve not got time for this.”

“So get in.”

“You best do it if you’re in a hurry,” Mick advises.

Fuck sake. I get in the passenger side. “You’re to stay in the car or I’ll have you bollocked for disobeying an order. Divis Flats.”

Danny nods and starts the engine.

He parks in front of Mrs Murphy’s block.

The lift is knackered again; I pound up the stairs. She opens the door as I’m running down the walkway.

“Caoilainn, grand, it’s yourself. Away in.”

She’s a fierce old Republican. Her husband was anti-treaty during the Civil War and pity help Dev’s immortal soul when she gets to heaven. She leads me to the bedroom. Net curtains swish and billow at the open window.

“He’s across the way. I saw him moving about and knew something was up; that flat’s been empty this past month. Here.” She offers me a pair of field glasses, her Dermot’s from his flying column days.

Adjusting the focus, I see the sniper stretched out on a table at the window, squinting through the scope of his rifle.

“Can you get him from here?” she asks.

I gauge the distance: six hundred yards at least.

“Hope so.”

“Good girl.” She pats my arm. “I’ll put the kettle on.” She slips out.

I check the sniper again, making sure he’s not about to wrap in and go. He’s motionless in his firing position. Calmly, I dig the rifle from the bag and reassemble it without fumbling. In a minute he’ll be dead and next 4 December there’ll be two of us waking up alone, grief suffocating us.

“There you go.” Mrs Murphy sets a china cup and saucer on the windowsill.

Clicking the magazine into place, I stare at her.

“I’ll not put you off, will I? Sure, I’d like to see you hit the so-and-so.”

My cheeks flame at the thought of Mrs Murphy witnessing this killing. I bolt myself. He’s an enemy soldier: a legitimate target. She knows it’s my duty as a volunteer to shoot him. He knows it too. But the hungry gnawing inside me that wants him dead and someone else aching with emptiness makes me know it’s not duty or patriotism or faith with the Cause that will have me pull the trigger today.

“Are you alright, love?”

I can’t not do this, for all the right, and the wrong, reasons.

“Fine.”

I crouch at the window, bracing the rifle against my shoulder and resting on the sill. The sight isn’t telescopic so I take another look with the binoculars for reference, then aim and fire.

My shot cracks the air, singeing a blackened hole through the net.

“Did you get him?”

I snatch the binoculars but before I raise them there’s a reply to my shot. We duck; the bullet crunches into the wall above and to the left of our window.

Shit.

He knows I’m here; he’ll be on the radio: “Shots fired.” Half the BA could be kicking Mrs Murphy’s door down in minutes. Protocol says I get out now.

“Shite, Caoilainn, you can do it,” Mrs Murphy encourages.

I sight along the barrel, centring the sniper’s window in the standard sight: fire again.

Two shots crack back. The second shatters the window, spraying me with glass.

“Fuck!” I recoil, glance at Mrs Murphy. “Sorry for the language.”

“Have a drink of tea,” she suggests. “My Dermot was after saying you need to steady yourself for these things.”

Hand shaking I get the cup to my lips, blistering my tongue on the scalding liquid. I should already be gone. When I set my cup down tea slops into the saucer.

I rub my sweaty palms onto my jeans. Either I get him or he gets me, nothing else is viable now. Mrs Murphy steps up beside me, training the field glasses on the opposite window.

“I’ll direct you,” she offers.

I fire.

“It hit the brickwork. Go a smidge lower.”

I fire again. The bullet flies from the muzzle.

I fly with it become it spinning and diving across the space between the flats air rushing past me the velocity making me feel like I’m boring through solid rock the world blurs into blue sky grey concrete the target rises up I close on it details emerge the pale lines of cement between the bricks a green window frame the paint flaked patches of dry dead wood exposed a face smeared with camouflage paint the

eyes young straining I strike the forehead between them with a jolt and spin down into the warm moist brain tissue coming to rest against the back of his skull my energy dissipated by the distance and the impact.

“Got the bugger! Maith thú!” Mrs Murphy whoops, lowering the binoculars.

I sit up, listening for boots thumping towards us, the crunch of a door splintering, voices screaming, “Hands up!” There’s only a post-apocalypse silence. My mouth is dry; I drain the teacup.

“Do you want another, love?”

“I best go.”

Sitting cross-legged below the window I unload and disassemble the gun before wiping off any prints and packing it, crushed by a tightening circle of urgency.

Two minutes later I’m running to the car. Tossing the bag in the boot, I open the driver’s door.

“Shove over.”

Danny clambers across.

“Did you get him?”

“Aye.”

“Grand.”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

I u-turn in the quad between the blocks, pulling onto the main road.

Two Saracens are parked snout to snout across the street. I jam on the brakes.

“Fuck.”

“Are they for us?” Danny’s words quiver.

“I didn’t get him with the first shot. He must’ve radioed backup,” I confess.

Two foot patrols flank the car. A soldier, captain’s epaulets, climbs from a Saracen clutching a loud hailer.

“Get out of the vehicle with your hands up.”

“What’re we going to do?” Danny whimpers.

“Unless you’re wanting to be shot we’re gonna get out.”

“But the gun?”

“What gun?”

“In the boot, you...”

“What gun?” I repeat. “As far as those bastards know we’ve been visiting a weould woman, taking her shopping, in a borrowed car. Whatever’s in the boot’s nothing to do with us. That’s what you tell ’em, Danny. Mrs Murphy’ll back us. Apart from that you say nothing, not a fucking thing, O.K.?”

“Get out of the vehicle now. You have five seconds before we open fire.” The captain’s words echo robotically.

“Caoilainn?” Danny bleats my name.

“They can only hold us a week. Get through it with your mouth shut and that’ll be the end of it.” I forbid myself to think about what’ll happen when they realise he’s an O’Neill.

“Get out of the vehicle. This is your final warning.”

“And for Christ sake, keep your hands where they can see them. Don’t give them any excuse, Danny.”

Swinging open my door, I throw him a final look. His face is white but his jaw is tight, the muscle along it flexing under the strain. I mouth, “sorry.” He nods and opens his door.

Half a dozen squaddies have drawn up to my side of the car. I plant my feet so I can stand without hands to propel me up and, arms raised, climb out.

The squaddies are in full battle dress, aiming their Heckle and Koch rifles. I run my eyes over each of them; they blink their surprise at the sight of a wee lassie, her hands raised. For five seconds we’re locked in a tableau. Then one of them steps forwards, gesturing with his weapon.

“Hands on your head. Get on the ground.”

#### *4. Using factual accounts of the experiences of IRA women to inform the creative practice*

##### *i. Author commentary on Extract 1*

I did not want Caoilainn’s involvement with military activism to be the token participation found in other Troubles novels. Having researched women who were IRA members I knew women did the same things as their male counterparts; bombings, armed raids and sniper attacks: killing enemy targets<sup>8</sup>. A novel reflecting this reality and challenging the misrepresentation of them as “selfless assistants” (Ryan and Ward 2004, 54) required Caoilainn’s full participation in military operations. Throughout the novel, her involvement in violence is presented as legitimate military action because this is how IRA volunteers viewed their actions<sup>9</sup> and to be a credible fictional volunteer Caoilainn’s portrayal had to represent her being thus motivated. Furthermore, by embedding a degree of military professionalism into her characterisation, Caoilainn challenges the misrepresentations of IRA women that depict them as incompetent, incapable and unprofessional military combatants, Rolston’s “second-class ‘terrorists’ ” (1989, 50).

Many sources offered accounts of active service, inspiring Caoilainn’s fictional experiences. Firstly, quoting a 1977 IRA Staff Report, Coogan cites this IRA directive: “Women and girls have greater roles to play as military activists” (2000, 467) marking the point when more female volunteers became combatants. This reference assured me that it was credible to portray Cao-

<sup>8</sup> This is in contrast to women in the Cumann na mBan who were mainly deployed in supporting roles (e.g. as messengers, carrying weapons, helping to hide IRA members on the run etc.), although some did participate in active service (e.g. setting bombs).

<sup>9</sup> The IRA’s *Green Book* states “The Irish Republican Army, as the legal representatives of the Irish people, is morally justified in carrying out a campaign of resistance against foreign occupation forces and domestic collaborators” (Coogan 2000, 545). It further notes “Volunteers are expected to wage a military war of liberation” (*ibidem*, 547) and adds that “Tactics are dictated by the existing conditions” (*ibidem*, 552).

ilainn operating as a combatant during the 1980s, participating in military missions. Her first IRA operation, the planting of a car bomb (see Extract 1), was informed by several found facts. One female volunteer stated “Today [1970s] women volunteers in the IRA are used just as the men are. They take part in armed encounters against the British soldiers. They are asked to plant bombs” (Ryan and Ward 2004, 136). Another explained “If, for instance, you are doing a car bomb, you need to be armed too” (MacDonald 1991, 140). Both sources reassured me that Caoilainn’s role in her first mission, involving her in a bombing and shooting, were plausible.

While many Troubles novels contain stereotypically emotionless IRA characters my research revealed some of the emotions of real IRA members. Coogan notes “When thinking of the IRA operative one should not visualise hardened neo-psychopaths of ice-cold nerve” (2000, 379) and his remark is evidenced by IRA women’s comments about their emotions during missions. They spoke of being afraid but of needing to control that fear to be effective when carrying out IRA missions; these comments informed my portrayal of Caoilainn’s feelings during the car bombing scene. Of doing a bank job<sup>10</sup> Síle said “I was terrified ... You’ve no idea – the sweat broke out on me ... anyone who says they’re not afraid is lying” (Fairweather, McDonough and McFaydean 1984, 257-258). Another admitted “When I went on my first operation I was frightened and extremely nervous and lacked confidence ... after that first one you are still nervous about operations but not enough to stop you continuing” (MacDonald 1991, 145). Other volunteers emphasised the need to control emotions. Jennifer McCann, former Republican prisoner, said “You put up a sort of mental block. If you were thinking too much about what might happen you might panic, and then you would be no use to anyone. You have to be calm” (*ibidem*, 166). Caoilainn’s fear during the car bombing scene is explored implicitly to reflect the reality reported by IRA women who admitted they were afraid but focused on repressing those feelings. For example, on the drive to the address where she is to plant the bomb, Caoilainn reflects that it seems as though they are “driving into a time travel vortex” and she muses “I’ll wake up in my bed in Dublin last week” which together imply that the moment is surreal for her and one she wishes she wasn’t experiencing. This suggests her fear without explicitly stating it in order to maintain the idea that she is trying to control her feelings. This is further emphasised when, after they swerve to avoid hitting a cat in the road, Caoilainn admits to “not letting myself think about the package in the boot being slammed around” because she doesn’t want to dwell on the danger of death and injury she is facing at that moment.

<sup>10</sup> Armed robbery has been one means by which the IRA raised capital to fund their military actions.

As well as being afraid during missions, some IRA women expressed regret for the actions they felt compelled to take during the armed struggle. One female volunteer admitted “There have been mistakes which are horrible and brutal”. Speaking about the 1978 La Mon Bombing<sup>11</sup>, she explained “I thought of the suffering first and the panic and people dying in agony like that” and she added “It’s war itself that makes you callous ... It brutalizes people inevitably, not because they’re cold and callous to begin with, but simply out of sheer necessity and survival” (Fairweather, McDonough and McFaydean 1984, 252-253). Similarly Rita O’Hare, former Republican prisoner, said “We hate this war and all the suffering it has brought to all the people affected by it” (McAuley 1989, 85). Elsewhere she asked “Do you think that we rejoice when a busload of young Yorkshire soldiers gets blown up?”, the interviewer noted “She looked agitated and distressed when she asked this question” (MacDonald 1991, 153). Thus when Caoilainn realises the man she has shot was not the target, she is traumatised by the consequences of her actions. She “can’t speak” and struggles to unload her gun: “I’m trying to unload the gun but keep missing the catch that releases the magazine” which physical reactions emphasise that she is in shock. While fleeing the scene, Caoilainn’s mental trauma becomes more obvious as, despite the peril of their situation all she can think about is “a pair of tartan slippers, the soles worn out.” The slippers here symbolise and humanise the man “too old, frail, for the Kesh’s brutal work” who she has killed, offering a tragic, haunting image that illustrates Caoilainn’s emotional distress.

The car bombing scene and, in particular, Caoilainn’s shooting of the wrong man, also illustrate the sexist attitudes some female volunteers reported experiencing. However, it is difficult to judge how much sexual discrimination female volunteers did encounter; some women admitted suffering it personally while others denied this but accepted that the IRA, like other male dominated organisations, did have a sexual discrimination problem. Accounts by IRA women were read with an awareness of potential bias; there are obvious reasons why women in such organisations might state there was little/no sexual discrimination (e.g. loyalty to the organisation or fear of airing grievances). The following statements evidence the differing experiences of sexual discrimination that IRA women say they encountered.

One stated “I have personally never come across any sexism in the movement, but that’s not to say that it is exempt from it” (MacDonald 1991, 144). Another said “I’m in an ASU ... no allowances are made for me because I’m a woman ... you’ve to meet the same requirements as your male comrades and you take the same risks they do” (McAuley 1989, 50). One female vol-

<sup>11</sup> This IRA operation involved a homemade incendiary similar to napalm which resulted in many of those caught in the attack suffering horrific burn injuries.



unteer did admit “You are constantly fighting this battle for equal status ... The leadership recognizes this and I honestly couldn’t say that there’s much discrimination at that level. It’s the lower ranks mainly ... I constantly have to prove myself to them” (Fairweather, McDonough and McFaydean 1984, 241). This inspired Kelly’s opening remarks to Caoilainn: “ ‘It’s a fu... it’s a disgrace.’ Kelly jabs his finger at me. ‘Sending a wee girl to do this. If it was up to me we’d not let you in’ ”. Further to this, feminist Margaretta D’Arcy felt that, while imprisoned IRA women “stated time and again that there was sexual equality in the Republican Movement,” she believed them “only in so far as individual women could be equal to individual men” (1981, 110). This is something Caoilainn attempts to achieve when, in the scene, she restrains herself from responding to Kelly’s sexist remarks about women in the IRA because doing so would only “convince Kelly I’m not cool-headed enough for active service ops”. Additionally, one female volunteer, speaking of attitudes to women in the IRA, said “it’s particularly difficult if you make a mistake ... if a woman does, it just reinforces their prejudices that you aren’t competent” (Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 1984, 241) which I explore in the scene’s conclusion. After the shooting Kelly reprimands Caoilainn, gender, not inexperience, being blamed for her failure: “You’ll not be doing any more ops here. It’s alright you’re running messages but, catch yourself on, you’re useless at proper jobs”. Caoilainn comments that “To Kelly the shooting is a chance lost, justification for his macho bigotry. To me it’s a line crossed”. Her thoughts here acknowledge the discrimination some women reported experiencing in the IRA and reference her emotional response to her actions, accepting that she is changed forever by the shooting which echoes the idea, expounded by an actual volunteer (see above) that war brutalised those involved.

*ii. Author commentary on Extract 2*

Throughout the novel I strove to reflect, in Caoilainn’s fictional military activism, the factual accounts of women combatants to challenge the incompetent terrorist misrepresentation of IRA women in Troubles fiction. Caoilainn is, as IRA volunteers were, a soldier<sup>12</sup>. Depicting her as such required showing her participating in military operations with professionalism which, to me, meant thinking and acting as soldiers might (e.g. planning operations thoroughly, adopting appropriate tactics, having a strategic approach

<sup>12</sup> Although they serve an army, it should be noted that IRA members rarely use this term to refer to themselves, preferring to differentiate themselves from soldiers by virtue of the fact that they volunteered to serve to help their community rather than to earn a wage. Brendan Hughes, however, does call himself a soldier (see Moloney 2010, 263).

to combat etc.). This method of characterising her helps Caoilainn resemble a credible soldier and writing her as a credible soldier challenges misrepresentations in Troubles fiction that depict women paramilitaries as unprofessional. Caoilainn does her duty as a volunteer capably but without her representation resorting to either the unwilling/unable or too-willing/fanatical tropes.

While civilians may generally view killing others as deplorable, attitudes are different for those who consider themselves soldiers fighting a legitimate war of liberation, as IRA volunteers do. D'Arcy notes: "The republican prisoners remained unaffected by the intense battery of moralistic propaganda insisting that they should feel guilty for their crimes. They were fighting a war. Simply that" (1981, 98). IRA members accepted that their duty was to kill the enemy<sup>13</sup>. This is explored in my novel when Caoilainn has to shoot the British sniper (see Extract 2). She rationalises: "He's an enemy soldier: a legitimate target. She [Mrs Murphy] knows it's my duty as a volunteer to shoot him. He [the British soldier] knows it too." Caoilainn's credible competence as a soldier is demonstrated particularly in this scene, which exemplify how her portrayal throughout the novel challenges misrepresentations common in Troubles fiction that women were incompetent/incapable female paramilitaries whose actions are rooted in personal motivations.

Caoilainn's characterisation challenges the misrepresentation of female paramilitaries participating in armed struggles for personal, not political, reasons because accounts by female IRA volunteers refute such misconceptions. Of her reasons for joining the IRA, Mairead Farrell<sup>14</sup> said: "I've always believed we had a legitimate right to take up arms and defend our country and ourselves against British occupation" (Aretxaga 1997, 47) adding "you just accepted that you would be involved to defend your country against the Brits [sic] occupation" (McIntosh and Urquhart 2010, 163). IRA volunteer Cathleen said "Then internment was brought in. I felt I'd no other option but to join after that ... it became clear to me that the Brits were here to suppress the Catholic minority" (Fairweather, McDonough and McFaydean 1984, 236). An anonymous volunteer said she joined so "I could help remove the British from Ireland ... Throughout my life I have seen the way the British people abuse us" (MacDonald 1991, 139). Mary Doyle, former Republican prisoner, said "I came from a Republican family, but it was my own decision to join" (*ibidem*, 157). Another unnamed volunteer said "It wasn't a decision I took lightly at all; I was aware of the risks ... I had reached a point where I had to do everything I could" (McAuley 1989, 49).

<sup>13</sup> Tim Pat Coogan reports how one volunteer told him "We've nothing against them personally [British soldiers/RUC officers]. It's the uniform we are after" (2000, 380).

<sup>14</sup> Farrell was an IRA volunteer and former Republican prisoner who was shot dead on Gibraltar by the SAS in 1988 while on a reconnaissance mission for the IRA.

Important to me here was evidence of women choosing military activism because they believed it would help end the British occupation of Northern Ireland. However, I decided against portraying Caoilainn's every kill as a calculated act of war, devoid of personal involvement. Doing so, I would have inclined her towards the ice-maiden assassin stereotype, as misrepresentative of women's participation in military violence as the passive assistant trope. She needed to kill primarily for political reasons, as volunteers say they did but, considering James Wood's argument that "things that can be correctly said of persons can also be said of them [characters]" (2009, 93), I recognised Caoilainn should also be subject to emotional/personal reasons for killing, as real people potentially could. Furthermore, Linda Anderson notes the "conflicts within character" are what "make our characters credible and complex" (2006, 75) and I responded to such creative writing theory by establishing, within Caoilainn's emotional range, complex reactions to her military activism. The sniper scene therefore complicates Caoilainn's representation as a killer whilst still reflecting the reality that women did operate competently as snipers at various points in the Irish conflict.

Margaret Skinnider's account of being a sniper during the Easter Rising was the initial inspiration for my sniper scene. Skinnider said "I ... was assigned a loophole through which to shoot ... more than once I saw the man I aimed at fall" (1917, 137). Caoilainn is equally successful. Another IRA woman, Geraldine Crawford, who was an active service volunteer during the 1970s, confirmed that she also took part in a sniper attack:

I had a rifle and I was standing in the Sufflok Road, near Andersontwon. There was another girl with me and three fellows, but I was the only one with a gun. It was the first thing I had done. My group had gone round first to see if it was all clear, then I was going to take a snipe at the army barracks. (MacDonald 1991, 160)

Additionally, Brendan Hughes, an IRA volunteer who was at one stage Operations Officer, recalled an incident of a young girl being involved in a Belfast gun battle: "there was a wee girl ... a member of the Official IRA<sup>15</sup>, Patricia McKay you called her. She actually had an Armalite ... She was game enough to come out and do it" (Moloney 2010, 84-85). Furthermore, Sean MacStiofain, at one time Chief-of-Staff for the Provisional IRA noted "some of the best shots I ever knew were women" (MacStiofain 1975, 218). These accounts confirmed that Caoilainn's undertaking the role of sniper was credible and helped inform my writing of the scene.

<sup>15</sup> The Official IRA was the faction who voted in favour of recognising the partition governments of Stormont, Westminster and Dublin in 1970. Those members who voted against recognising the partition governments and subsequently broke away established themselves as the Provisional IRA.

As well as exploring her capabilities as a combatant and feelings about killing, the sniper scene also juxtaposes the private sphere of home with the public sphere of warfare, a feature of the Irish conflict. Several IRA volunteers commented on how the war invaded people's homes. Cathleen describes how her aunt's house was damaged by British soldiers during a raid: "They deliberately wrecked her new lino – danced all over it and laughed as they were doing it" (Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 1984, 236). The sniper scene at Mrs Murphy's flat is one example of how I portrayed the private/public dichotomy of the war that volunteers discussed. Caoilainn is served tea in a china cup while preparing to engage the enemy by firing on him through Mrs Murphy's net curtained window. The chintzy description is deliberately juxtaposed with references to Caoilainn assembling/disassembling her Armalite rifle to emphasise how, because the conflict entered their homes, many women felt compelled to participate in the fighting.

David Lodge notes that coincidence in novels is "all too obviously a structural device" (2011, 150), one I employed for the sniper scene to establish conflicting motivations for Caoilainn's actions. Setting the scene on the anniversary of Aiden's death, my use of coincidence offered Caoilainn a personal, as well as political, reason for killing the sniper. Interior monologue reveals Caoilainn's thoughts about this shooting's personal nature because I deemed her admitting it externally would be inconsistent with her characterisation and something IRA volunteers would be unlikely to do. To avoid representing her as wholly motivated by revenge, I first referenced her military duty then revealed what is really driving her to shoot: "the hungry gnawing inside me that wants him dead and someone else aching with emptiness makes me know it's not duty or patriotism or faith with the Cause that will have me pull the trigger today". Wood argues that a metaphor "floats a rival reality" (2009, 153) the purpose of which is "speeding us, imaginatively, towards a new meaning" (*ibidem*, 154) and I hoped the metaphor "hungry gnawing" would speed readers to better understand Caoilainn's grief by comparing her emotional pain to a rival physical one. Caoilainn also says "I can't not do this, for all the right, and the wrong, reasons", the double negative emphatically conveying her obligation to shoot while implying Caoilainn knows this is both a legitimate act of war and personal act of reprisal. Finally, I brought Caoilainn up close to the killing to demonstrate her emotional involvement with this enemy death. This is done in the section beginning "The bullet flies from the muzzle. I fly with it become it" where Caoilainn pictures herself as the bullet as it kills the soldier. Having her imagine herself thus, feeling the impact as a "jolt", a verb suggesting pain, reiterates her personal connection to and reason for this killing. Writing this section without punctuation further helps to emphasize the chaos of her emotions. By depicting Caoilainn, here and elsewhere in the novel, as emotionally *and* professionally motivated I strove to challenge the stereotypically binary portrayals of women's military violence by creating a representation including both, not either/or.

## 5. Conclusion

As my introduction discussed, my practice-led creative writing project aimed to write a compelling novel offering a credible fictional portrayal of the experience of being an IRA woman while challenging misrepresentations of such women in Troubles fiction. Gallagher, Lubelska and Ryan argue: “new approaches are required to enable feminists to interpret the past in a way which means that women are not only visibilised but that their roles as actors and agents are more fully understood” (2001, 4). Creative writing research could, I feel, be one new approach. Reading Troubles novels highlighted the extent to which female paramilitary protagonists are confined to misrepresentative stereotyped portrayals that bear little resemblance to the reported reality. Conducting research that revealed the roles played by IRA women enabled me to understand the reality of being an IRA woman. I was then able, through the writing of a novel, to explore ways of conveying the diverse experiences of IRA women that offered a more realistic fictional representation of them and their lives.

John Mullan suggests that fiction has a “unique capacity to live on in, even form, our imaginations” (2008, 4) and, if it may form our imaginations, perhaps it has a responsibility to do so with some accuracy, particularly when it appears to imitate reality as realist novels do. Furthermore, Lodge argues: “We read fiction ... to enlarge our knowledge and understanding of the world” (2011, 10). It is possible that some people’s only knowledge of particular experiences comes from fictional accounts. While readers know they are reading fiction, it is understandable if some believe fiction reflects reality, especially when that fiction is a work of realism seemingly based on facts. Furthermore, Monika Fludernik says: “Narrative texts create the illusion that the fictional world ... really does exist, and in the precise form in which it is described” (2009, 56). Considering these views, I felt my project had both an opportunity and a responsibility to challenge fictional misrepresentations of IRA women. By presenting an alternative portrayal of female paramilitary protagonists that reflected the information uncovered by factual research and by using writing methods I judged would best convey that information in a fictional narrative I have, hopefully, produced, in *Herself Alone in Orange Rain*, a text that offers such a challenge.

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# Interview with Former Political Prisoner, Irish Republican Activist, and Playwright Laurence McKeown

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*Abstract:*

This is an interview with former IRA prisoners, 1981 hunger striker, and Irish Republican activist Laurence McKeown. He received an Open University Degree in HMP Maze and went on to conduct a PhD at Queen's University Belfast. McKeown is now a playwright who lives in the Republic of Ireland. In this interview, he speaks about growing up in the North of Ireland, how he became an Irish republican, the conflict in the North of Ireland, his prison experience in the H-Blocks of HMP Maze, the prison protests that led to the hunger strikes, and his life after prison, studying at university during the conflict, the sectarianism, and his life as a playwright. The interview was conducted during the conference "Irish Society, History & Culture: 100 Years After 1916" at the European University Institute, Florence, 12 October 2016.

*Keywords:* Interview, IRA, Irish Republicanism, Northern Ireland, Prisons

## *1. Introduction*

Laurence McKeown was born in Randalstown, County Antrim, in 1956. In the 1970s, he joined the Provisional Irish Republican Movement, which was one of the various Republican factions at that time. In 1969/70, the Irish Republican Movement had split into the Provisional – and the Official tendency; later renamed itself from Official Sinn Féin to Workers Party and abandoned Republicanism while the Provisionals became the main Republican organisation with its political party Sinn Féin and the armed group Provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army), commonly referred to as just IRA (Bell 1997; White 2017).

In April 1977, Laurence was sentenced to life imprisonment. He spent 16 years in prison, from 1976 to 1992, and joined the blanket – and no-wash pro-

tests in HMP Maze prison, also known as the H-Blocks, in the late 1970s. He also took part in the hunger strike in which Bobby Sands and nine other Irish Republican prisoners died in 1981. McKeown was on hunger strike 70 days until he faded into a coma and his family took him off the strike (Beresford 1987).

From 1987 to 1989, McKeown was in charge of prisoner education in the H-Blocks. He also started a prison magazine, *An Glór Gafa* (The Captive Voice), and began learning the craft of writing. In prison, he took an Open University degree in sociology. He gained a doctorate from Queen's University Belfast when he got out. His thesis was called *Unrepentant Fenian Bastards*. The thesis was later published by Beyond the Pale Publications under the title *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (McKeown 2001). He also co-edited a book with recollections of former Irish Republican prisoners (Campbell, McKeown, O'Hagan 1994).

Laurence McKeown is now a playwright and filmmaker. He recently returned from the National Arts Festival in South Africa, where his play about dealing with the past, "Those You Pass on the Street", was performed. In this interview, McKeown speaks about this experience, growing up in 1960s Ireland, joining the Republican Movement, his memories of imprisonment, protests, and hunger strike, as well as his life since release as a PhD student and playwright.

This public interview was the inaugural event of the Conference "Irish Society, History & Culture: 100 Years after 1916" (12-14 October 2016), organised by Lorenzo Bosi of the Scuola Normale Superiore, Fiorenzo Fantaccini of the University of Florence, and myself. I, as the conference co-organiser (R), and Alexander Etkind, Mikhail M. Bakhtin Professor of History of Russia-Europe Relations at European University Institute (EUI) conducted this conversation with Laurence McKeown (M) on Wednesday, 12 October 2016, at the Badia Fiesolana of the EUI. What follows is the *verbatim* transcription of that interview; it has been left in the format of spoken language; only long pauses, silences and interruptions have been edited out.

## 2. Identity and self-understanding

*R: Laurence, you were a member of the IRA. You joined the IRA in the 1970s. You were in prison where you joined the blanket protest, the no-wash protest and, later, you went on hunger strike. But after that you did an Open University degree while still in prison, and upon your release you defended a PhD at Queen's University Belfast. You presented some papers at academic conferences and now you work as a playwright. So, how would you describe yourself? Who are you?*

*M: How many days do we have here? Well firstly, thank you, Dieter and Lorenzo and your colleagues for inviting me here and it is good that, yes, this issue is still being discussed and discussed widely in terms of the North of Ireland and the struggle and prisons. I find it hard to describe myself. I have*



played about with that idea – I’m an academic because I have done a doctorate, I don’t teach in academia. I try to speak slowly, too, also because I know I have a particular accent. So I have been involved with education, academia, but I don’t really class myself as an academic. I am an activist also, but I am not a member of Sinn Féin. I think the struggle has widened on that also. And I work in the arts as a playwright and filmmaker so I see it as all part of the one person. I think that education can be enjoyable. I think you can use art to deal with some very difficult situations, and I think that particularly using theatre, as I have been doing, allows an audience to engage with a story and with characters that they would never meet in real life, probably would not want to meet in real life, would not have a conversation with in real life and I think that probably over the last ten years, certainly over the last five years, it has been the arts, I think, in Ireland that have allowed people to take part in that conversation. And, I do think, increasingly within academia – and Niall’s here and I was down in Galway recently, thanks to Niall (Ó Dóchartaigh) and Giada (Laganà) for the invite down there – and I think it was a great example of universities opening up to the public and opening up to students about other topics. Actually, what they have had in Ireland, both North and South, often is often a reluctance to talk about the big issues, you know – the elephant in the room? Like why there was a conflict and what is happening now? What’s happening to conflict survivors? What’s happening to former political prisoners? And I think that unless these issues are discussed then we are almost doomed to repeat history in a signal.

So, back to your original question: I’m all of those things. I enjoy life also, but part of that is about dealing with the past that lives on in the present, and while I say that it’s not about the ‘big events’ like Bloody Sunday the Ballymurphy Massacre or other big events that people at the moment are engaged with trying to get to the truth about, but the past in terms of the people we would know, the places we would go to, the places we don’t know, don’t go to, or the people we don’t know, all this is very much influenced by the past, and yet things have changed so dramatically that sometimes people don’t move without change. We were just talking briefly there about memory, because today people often live with a memory that’s there in the past, so even though the situation may have changed dramatically, their view of the present is still very much dominated by that thing of the past, and I think that’s why we need to discuss it and get it out in the open to actually maybe free people up to move forward.

### 3. *Growing up*

*R: Randalstown, for those who don’t know Ireland or the North of Ireland, is a small town north-west of Belfast, a pretty rural area; so how did a boy growing up in this environment end up in the IRA in the 1970s?*

M: Yes. I grew up in a very rural area. My daughters are now tired of hearing the story about growing up in a house that didn't have electricity, didn't have indoor sanitation, didn't have a phone. We could just go on and on, but that was normal life and it wasn't regarded as rare because everybody around you lived in the exact same sort of condition – that was life in rural Ireland in the Fifties and Sixties both North and South. Really, I suppose it was a very mixed area, Protestant and Catholic. I've never seen the conflict as being about religion, it was about politics, but religion has been used in it. It's been used to divide and conquer the way that imperialists have used ethnic difference, skin colour, religion, whatever down through the decades and centuries, I think to divide folks in their colonies. So, it was a very idyllic, peaceful upbringing, and I remember when I was twelve it was the start of the civil rights protests, which at the time I was unaware of, but also around just the time that the civil rights campaign really started, with a collection of different people, and involved both radical Protestants, liberal Protestants and Catholics, but basically it was about discrimination in housing and employment against Catholics in the North of Ireland. And it's very simple, their two demands were: end to discrimination in housing; end to discrimination in employment; and one man, one vote. It was one man, I don't know what they meant to do with the women – but at least that was at the stage – well it was very minimal demands. And basically, they were battered off the streets and then eventually shot off the streets. But I was just twelve, thirteen, fourteen at that time.

We moved from where we had lived because there was a new motorway being built and it went straight through our house so we had to move and where we moved to, we now did have access to TV, electricity and such like and that would have been around the time when my father would have been watching the debates on TV by a number of the people who were civil rights campaigners and they would have become better known in the new year like John Hume and others, Bernadette Devlin particularly. And I remember always seeing my father very excited when he was watching the programmes. My family wasn't political in any way. They didn't get involved in politics outside. It was really just, I think, I suppose looking back on it what my father was hearing on television was people articulating his own experience and the experience of Catholics and Nationalists at that time about employment and discrimination. And I suppose because of those things I started to become more interested in the debates on television and then people who I had been at school with, who were maybe two or three years older than me, were being imprisoned. We also had internment without trial, which meant that people were just imprisoned without any trial; so, I think I was more and more interested in what was happening and reading a bit more about Irish history, though I think a lot of that only came in later years. I finally came to the decision. I wanted to become involved in the struggle, in the armed

struggle. And I think probably what was the turning point in that was the impact of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). The UDR was a locally recruited basically Protestant militia but they were part of the British Army; they were a regiment of the British Army. And again, this is about, when you look at any of the colonial situations first – Kenya, Cyprus, Aden – wherever else – the exact same policy. But I remember then just going to the dances, I would have been fifteen, sixteen, and being stopped during the night by the UDR by people who I knew, knew well – had I played football with. And I can still recall like the first night I was stopped by this person who knew me and he asked me my name. And I think he was even embarrassed because he said to me: “Now, what’s your name?”. We knew one another, and we knew one another well, and where I was coming from, where I was going to. But the second and third time that it happened, the embarrassment had gone and now it was just the hostility. I think it was around that time, and I wouldn’t have necessarily have articulated this way at the time, but I think I became aware there were really two communities and it wasn’t about religion. It was about one having the power, as in the rifle and the uniform, to wave on the streets and stop me and basically do as they wish as they then did; you could be held for several hours, you could be arrested and taken to the barracks, you could be kicked over a hedge and at this time I wasn’t involved in anything. So, I think for me that it was the psychological point; it was a combination of coming to a growing awareness of the North of Ireland and the history of it, a growing awareness of what people were demanding in terms of just basic civil rights and then really the impact of this armed militia on the streets – all of that contributed to me when I was sixteen.

Making the decision to join the IRA and then the big difficulty was: “How do you actually join and get into the thing? How do you let it be known that you want to join?”. And I ended up speaking to someone who had gone to school with me, who I thought might have connections because of where he lived. And I still don’t know to this day if that’s what happened, but I told him what I was thinking and several months later I was approached by someone one night who said: “I believe you want to join the IRA”. And then it was a process after that. I was taken to meet two people who surprised me at the time – two older people and one of them was a woman – and I was basically told: “Look, you want to re-think this? If you join the IRA you’re probably going to end up in prison or end up dead. You’re only sixteen, so think about it”. I didn’t really think more about it. It was definite what I wanted to do. But that was the process. The IRA didn’t accept people who just came along and very quickly accepted them into the ranks. They wanted to see if you were really committed to it. So, several months later, by the time I was seventeen, I then was accepted into the ranks of the IRA.

#### 4. *Writing a PhD as an activist*

*R: And in a relatively short time, within a few years later, you were in prison. I want to speak with you about your prison experience, since you wrote the PhD about your prison experience, about the history of the prison you were held in for sixteen years. Why did you decide to write a PhD about this experience and not a memoir or a novel like so many other prisoners? Why a PhD thesis?*

M: Well, following on from the hunger strike and just located even within the prison there were big, massive changes within the jail. I know there's a lot talked about the hunger strike itself, which is important, but I think what's actually probably more important is the years later, and I can go into that later, about the change within both the politics and the structures, the command structures, that we operated in, the type of education programme that we had within the jail which was very much influenced by Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which we could smuggle into jail in 1982, and a very extensive programme of education within the jail in terms of politics, world politics, guerrilla armies, whatever, as well as academic education. So, I was, as you've already said, I was in charge of it for a number of years. So, on one hand when I got out of prison, I thought maybe that's it – that's my days of education over, but I found once I was out a few months I sort of missed that obligation to study and such like, and I actually was in a conversation with the person who became my supervisor, Mike Tomlinson, Professor Mike Tomlinson, he wasn't a professor at that time. He was a lecturer at Queen's University in Belfast. He wrote a lot about prisons and about torture and torture in interrogation centres, shoot-to-kill-policies and there were very few academics at that time writing about those types of issues and those who did their careers didn't really blossom in any particular way. And it's interesting that then post-ceasefire their careers really took off and they became professors and heads of school and such like. But at that time Mike was just a lecturer, a senior lecturer; he had come into the prisons to teach. And we were having a discussion one night in a pub, which is always a good place to have a discussion, where the best ideas always come up – and you'll write them down because you'll forget about them the next day – and I said that I wanted to write a book about the experiences because I think, or I thought, that what had happened within the Republican prisoner community itself was important for the Republican community to understand rather than just focusing on the hunger strike because there was a massive change from, let's say, the imprisonment in the early 1970s – this was when IRA prisoners would have been very, and certainly their command staff, would have been very conservative, very right-wing, very Catholic and that's the reflection of the community and the IRA at that time, whereas in later years very much more left – studying Marxism, very much more col-

lective leadership, very much more de-structuring of command structures. So, in terms of the internal change that had taken place, I felt that was important to record that and make people aware of it. And as Mike said: "Well, why don't you do your PhD and you'll have your book and you'll have your qualifications as well"; and that were as simple as that.

I started in '94, I think it was, to do the PhD and, I suppose, it was interesting going to Queen's University, despite my background in the jails, background in the IRA, background in education. I found it a sort of an intimidating place. Probably like a lot of those institutions you almost think they are built to be intimidating, they're meant to be intimidating, you know. And remember that was a time when Catholics weren't there and certainly not Nationalists. Today, the university is overwhelmingly Nationalist. It was interesting to be there and that intimidating element of it, and, probably, I suppose the process of academia challenged me a bit because our whole process of education in the prison, as I said, was very much based on Paulo Freire's outlook whereas the teacher is the pupil, the pupil is the teacher and it's all about getting relevance, hierarchy, within academia. And I suppose there were times when I was doing my own, doing the PhD, that you almost think the doors are going to open some day and someone's coming in and saying: "Hey! You're a fraud. Get out of here because this is just a story you're telling here". Because I was locating myself within the story, so interviewing myself. And largely it was based on what I ended up using, the feminist methodologies within the prison. I had been involved for a number of years with doing a programme, for two years, which is an informal study carried out in conjunction with Joanna McMinn, who became Dr Joanna McMinn later, and she came into the prison as an Open University tutor for a course I was doing and it was called "The Changing Experience of Women". Myself and another couple of guys that studied it and thought it was fascinating and we should develop this programme asked Joanna would she come in and do informal classes around masculinity and whatever which she agreed to do if I or another guy, Jackie McMullan, co-facilitate. So, there had been this study within the jail, it was on feminism and feminist politics, and I really liked feminist methodology because for me what it did it was challenging this idea of objectivity versus subjectivity, and I suppose probably what now are very outdated theories within academia that you've got to be objective and apart, somehow, from the story that they're telling. So, my victim, who am I, who was someone who's very much a part of the story, able to write about the story in a way which is still the same as authentic, and I actually struggled with that for many years, but at the end of the day, obviously I succeeded because I got my doctorate. But yeah, but it was new to me. So, I suppose what I was delighted about was that I could get the story that I wanted, but at the same time I would have, I would be given if you want, a standing within academia.

I remember I presented it and it was only in the last stages before submitting that I was trying to think of a title and I came up with this one: *Unrepentant Fenian Bastards*. For people who don't know the terminology, in Ireland 'Fenian bastards' is always seen as a derogatory term used by Unionism which I could never work out because republicans very much admired the Fenians who were an armed insurrectionary group around the 1860s and I think when you put 'unrepentant' in front of it, it really changes the tone. And, it actually was the title of a song by an American, Irish-American, rock band originally called Black 47, they took that title from the famine, which was the blackened potatoes, and then they became Seanchaí and they had come to Belfast to play in a festival and this was a song they wrote and people were going around with T-shirts – so I just thought ...

I was delighted going into Queen's and presenting it and I remember the person taking it, looked at it, turned it around with their fingertips and looked at the title and pushed it back to me again and said: "No. They couldn't accept that". And I said: "Why not?". They said: "We can't accept that title". But they did accept it a week later. So, a long answer to your story. I could do the book and at the same time also get the qualification which I found was really helpful if you were stopped at a checkpoint and say you're 'Doctor McKeown' as opposed to 'Laurence McKeown'. It's amazing the difference that suddenly happens – he was someone in a uniform – so I have seen it be a bit of subverting the system as well, you know?

*R: The feeling is that Queen's University was an intimidating place, but you still went on to write your PhD there, and in your book you mention also a number of security issues you had going to seminars at Queen's University at that time. Laurence, you said you started your PhD in 1994. It was before the start of the ceasefire of the IRA and the Loyalist paramilitary organisations. Could you tell a bit about the security issues you had going to seminars?*

M: Well, the first thing about Queen's, well, during the conflict, and as you said, I started studying at Queen's while the armed conflict was still going on, there had been a young woman, a member of Sinn Féin, very bright and I don't mean that in any condescending way, but really in terms of electoral strategy. She was one of the people, Sheena Campbell, we called her, who had devised this particular approach to campaigning for elections which then had been adopted by Sinn Féin across the board as their way of approaching elections. It was very methodical, very thought out, and Sheena was studying at Queen's University and she was executed by Loyalist paramilitaries a few years previously; I'd say quite deliberately, because she was seen by, say, British security services as someone who was a major threat, a young person coming through in this way with this type of approach. So,

that had happened, I mean, very close to the grounds of the university – the conflict still going on. Queen’s University doesn’t sit within a Republican area. West Belfast was a Republican area and I lived in West Belfast at that time, in Ballymurphy. For a lot of people, the thought of going over to the university area just wouldn’t be something they would do and a lot of people advised me not to be going there because I would be recognised, because I was doing media interviews, etc. Because I was doing the doctorate in later years it meant I didn’t have to attend any formal classes. I just had to have meetings with my supervisor but in that first year, it was obligatory to attend a number of classes that were on research methodology.

And I was also studying at the same time as Anthony McIntyre. I had been in prison with him, he probably is well-known to people in terms of some of his writings. He would be at the opposite end of the spectrum from myself but at that time we started at the same time. And basically, sometimes we didn’t go into the class, we’d come in half-way through. We would never sit in the same seat in the classroom. We would sit at an angle to each other so that if anything happened, if anybody had come through the door, that one or the other of us could intervene, so it was. We just didn’t stroll into the university and do the studies and, in particular, in that first year. After the first year, the ceasefire was already in place and I didn’t have to attend formal classes. But it’s just interesting. But, also, Queen’s was very different at that time. The majority of the students would have been from Protestant/Unionist areas. I think it’s regrettable that a lot of them now don’t go to Queen’s – they go abroad. The majority of students now at Queen’s would be from a Nationalist area. And it’s interesting going about Queen’s today, in a relatively short period of time from my attending, and now what you constantly see is people with Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) jumpers on them. GAA is the Nationalists football game in Ireland. At one time they would have been banned from Queen’s University. The other thing that happened around the time that I got into Queen’s was that they then introduced a ban on ex-prisoners, on political ex-prisoners, which I think it was just highlighted by the fact that myself and Anthony had started. I don’t think they previously had anybody that fit that profile and Queen’s attempted to bar ex-prisoners and there had to be a legal case taken. And their argument was that it would disrupt the ‘neutral’ atmosphere or climate of the university. Obviously, that was an interesting terminology, the ‘neutral’. They thought our university campus was not a place for debate and discussion, the sharing of knowledge and the development of knowledge. It didn’t work. Legally they weren’t able to do it. But it just showed at that time what you were talking in terms of an establishment that has dramatically changed and you’re looking now at the various departments, people who are in various positions, loads of them are from the Nationalist perspective and such like.

### 5. *The Prison Experience*

*R: So, let us go back to your prison experience. When you were in prison, in charge, there was a protest going on in the H-Blocks. The political prisoners had lost special category status in 1975 and they refused to be classified as ordinary criminals. They refused the prison uniform and wrapped themselves in blankets, and theirs was called the 'blanket protest'. And when you came into prison you immediately joined the blanket protest. How was it for you? You were about nineteen, twenty years of age at the time. What were your first impressions? What are your memories of going to prison, joining the protest? How was it for you?*

M: Yeah, well, as Dieter said, in the early 70s, Republican prisoners were regarded as political prisoners, they didn't have to do prison work, you wore your own clothes, you were housed with your own group and you had your own command structures, etc. And as part of a very elaborate counter-insurgency programme, the British introduced a policy which was called officially, 'criminalisation', which meant anyone convicted even on political charges was considered criminal. We rejected that. And in fact, if you look at their policy, I mean we were arrested under special legislation, we were interrogated under special laws, we could be interrogated for a week without lawyers. We were sentenced in special courts, one judge, no jury. So, we went through this very special process and then what they were saying afterwards was: "Well, you're just the same as ordinary criminals. But we didn't go through that process".

I remember when the protest started; the first guy was Kieran Nugent. We were very politically naive about this policy. We thought it was something that, you know, the British introduce now, we'll challenge it and it'll probably disappear within six months or a year. It didn't. By the time, I was sentenced there were about one hundred prisoners on the protest and basically, as you said, how the protest started was that the first prisoner was told to wear a prison uniform and he refused and therefore he was naked until he was given a blanket to wear and that's what became known as 'the blanket protest'. At its height, there would have been like four hundred prisoners on it. It developed into a no-wash protest. I didn't wash for three years from 1978 until 1981. So, when I was sentenced in April, there already was, as I said, about a hundred prisoners on it, basically you were taken from remand court or remand prison in Belfast to Long Kesh to the H-Blocks. You were told about prison gear. You said: "No, I'm not going to". My experience was I was taken into what was the reception area of the H-Block, it was H-Block 2, it's called the 'circle area' even though it's a rectangle, so it's part of the terminology. We had already heard at that time a lot of reports of brutality as people were going down to the prison because, obviously, the prison authorities were trying to dissuade people from going on the protest. I was told to strip and put my clothes into a brown bag, and I stripped down to



my underpants and it's bizarre because you're in the middle of this square and there are other activities going on around you, there are prison guards and orderlies going back and forward, there's the Governor going about, and you're standing in the middle of this stripped down to your underpants and then somebody said: "Group", and a group of them gathered round, and I thought there was going to be a lot of physical abuse. But there wasn't and somebody said: "We said strip. Get the fucking heap off". So, I ended up totally naked in the middle of this circle. And probably thinking back it was done to degrade you or humiliate you or whatever in some way.

But I didn't get physically beaten. People in later months, in later years, did get very severely beaten at that point with entering into the prison. And I was taken down a wing and I was held there for a few days. And then I was moved to join other comrades on it. As I said, in 1978, it intensified and we had much more extreme conditions where basically you're in a cell 24/7 that was covered in excrement. We had no access to books, TV, radio, magazines – nothing. I mean it's easier to say what we had which was a piece of sponge for a mattress, we had a piss pot because we had no toilet in the cell and we had a water container and, oh yes, a Bible, in case we wanted some light reading. And that was it. And you had one visit a month for a half an hour if you were prepared to wear the prison clothes and some people died on the hunger strike who hadn't even taken visits for four or five years.

I've often said that even though I did go on to various studies and get a doctorate, I consider those years being the most educational of my life because it was about unlearning. It was unlearning of a lot of the nonsense probably that was in your head that you'd just soak up from parents, teachers, the state, the church. You know, you suddenly discover just from doing dialogue with people, because that's all we had was discussions, we didn't have this academic reading. So, therefore, the only thing you had was discussing ideas, but what I suddenly realised was that you had these opinions that you never had really sat down and consciously thought out, you just thought this. And then when someone challenged you and said: "Well, why do you think that?" and it could be about anything, colonialism, racism, sectarianism, issues like divorce, abortion, you name it. You suddenly realised: "Yeah, I have these opinions but I never had any time, I never sat down and thought: What am I thinking and maybe there's a contradiction between what I think there, what I think here. Maybe there's a contradiction between my Republican politics". And then there is the challenging of all Republicanism itself. So, that period became one of the most educational and it really influenced what happened in the jail after the hunger strike because by then, I think people had developed a critical approach and critical also of Republicanism and critical of Republican structures which then, I think, led on to the formation of: Well, if we're critical of the old what is it that we want the shift to be the new?

So, the protest, yes, was harsh in all of its other features. You had the casual brutality on a daily basis, you had the hunger strike, but in the midst of it all there was the learning process and not only in terms of politics, was the other thing that particularly developed during that times: the Irish language. That's where I learned to speak Irish. I never learned it at school even though the teacher tried her best. So, it was a very vibrant period as well as a very extremely brutal one.

#### *6. Unrepentant Fenian Bastards, Reconciliation, and Post-Hunger-Strike-Imprisonment*

*R: I want to ask you both as Dr. McKeown and Laurence: what happened after this extraordinary experience? And I want to broaden the conversation a little bit because my specific interest is in the memory of the Stalinist era – you know, what happened after the gulag with the prisoners and with those who were thinking about and writing about them – of course, in music, shooting films about all that, and also I've been doing a comparison to the Holocaust Studies. And it seems that in the holocaust studies there is an idea that with the military defeat of Nazi Germany it's an entirely different situation – every situation is different, of course, in Ireland, in Russia, in Germany with the Jews – but the theory basically says that three generations should pass before repentance would work. You wrote about “Unrepentant Bastards”, but you know, repentance on one or both sides would work. Consolation plays an important part, making people shake hands, working together and doing things together. So how did it work on that grand scale?*

M: Well, in Ireland there's actually a saying that it's seven generations, so we're just about at fifty percent. There is a poet, I think Seamus Heaney, I think at some point he said that it was seven generations before there's change. I think it was two different periods there and yes, I called my thesis that but at the moment the engagements I would have with former police, Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), former British Army – I have them regularly in fact. I have a new play coming out in two weeks' time which is based on the transcripts of interviews from former RUC and former Guards (Members of the Republic of Ireland's police, An Garda Síochána) in the South. So, it's interesting company I've been in these days and the fact that they have no problem with me writing their story in a sense.

I think probably our situation in the blocks was very different from that what you're talking about there in the gulags or the concentration camps during the Second World War, and I don't think there is any comparison between what we would have been having during the period leading up to the hunger strikes in the later years, then and what was going on in the likes of the gulags elsewhere. We also had a community on the outside that was very much supportive of us. We had very strong links to them so it changed our whole approach, I suppose, inside. And also because what did happen during the hunger

strike meant that the prison authorities obviously were very wary of getting into any head-to-head confrontation with us in the later years. We were able to use a whole range of other, different devices, techniques, to overcome. And that's why I said it's an interesting period. Like I look back on the time in prison in 1981 as, I think, the end of rebellion and the start of revolution in that narrow cliché of left-wing sloganizing, but the hunger strike and the five years that preceded it brought to an end that head-to-head confrontation, that sort of in terms of being equal – it's not those who can inflict the most but those that can endure the most – and I don't really believe that quote now but really we did at that time. There was never again going to be a physical protest within the jail that was going to exceed the hunger strike or the blanket protest. At the end of the hunger strike we had had five demands; we only got one of them which was the right to wear our own clothes so we still had four demands, of course. It was the most significant demand, the right to wear our own clothes, because on two levels, in terms of it was the stigma – so on a subjective level, we never had to wear the prison uniform and so we never had sort of 'criminalised' ourselves as we seen it – what we would have been doing wearing this uniform, this badge of criminality. But on a more practical level it allowed us, for the first time in five years, to get out of our prison cell and actually congregate with one another in the prison yard and the canteen and start to plan and strategize about how we were going to move forward and achieve our outstanding demands and that meant a lot of soul searching because basically what we decided to do and what we knew we had to do – because there was no other option – was that we were going to have to go into the system. And what that meant was actually saying to – we were still regarded as 'non-conforming prisoners' because we refused to do prison work – but what it meant to do was say: "Yes, I prefer to do prison work" – even though our problem was we wouldn't do it. We would go down to the workshops and we would destroy them and we would sabotage them which is what we ended up doing. But even to make that decision, because this was coming one year after, ten comrades had died because they refused to do prison work and wear prison clothes, and some of the prisoners refused to do it. And I can remember the day that we came off the protest and the prison governor had come to my door and – because you were asked regularly every two weeks: "Are you ready to do prison work?". And I said: "Yes", and he stood and looked at me and he did it deliberately; and he asked me again: "I'm asking you, Laurence: are you prepared to do prison work?". And I knew what he was saying: "Are you prepared to do prison work given that ten of your comrades died last year, that you were on hunger strike for seventy days, you're now saying that you're going to do prison work?". It was like a stroke and I said "Yes" and at that time the "Yes" somehow came out "Fuck" – didn't want it to come out but... So, it was this battle between knowing in your head this is the right decision to do but your heart doesn't feel it and you want to say something else to this prison governor. So that changed.

That was a significant change and I was then starting to say how do we actually get around obstacles, over them, under them – whatever way rather than this: Bring it on. We can take it. We're tough. And that really changed, I think, dramatically, the whole situation within the jail. And then that experience of during the blanket protest and the solidarity that built up – it was a big leveller during that period of time – that's the term I use for it – it didn't matter who had been on the outside, as in the IRA, it didn't matter how long you were sentenced to prison, it didn't matter how long you'd been there – it didn't matter any at all. The only thing that mattered was that you were on the protest. So that period built up a great solidarity amongst people, which is why ten people died on hunger strike – because there was that bond, that comradeship – and that again influenced in later years how we treated one another, dealt with one another as opposed to hierarchical structures, or any elitism, or militarism or whatever – and then that started to dribble to the outside.

And I think then also as we looked further into our education it was about – and I've had this discussion with people who had a different experience of say the Soviet Union, but obviously we looked very much to Marxist groups, whether it was in Mozambique or Angola, Cuba, the Soviet Union. I was studying Marxism which was really the opposite of what republicans in the early stages would have done. In fact, they weren't allowed to study Marxism. But for us it was, we had a saying: *A concrete analysis of a concrete situation* – as opposed to the old attitude of Republicanism which was very simplistic, very principled, idealistic – not really thought out – so, I suppose in a sense our whole approach in the period after the hunger strike was that things have to be very methodically and objectively thought out – Okay, if I'm going to do this what's that going to lead on to? What's going to be the implications? So why do this? Am I supposed to do this – so developing that very critical thinking? But then as it developed on it became more, as Dieter has mentioned, in the creative writing – it's certainly more expressive and I mean, the jail situation changed also. I would have been on first name terms with the prison guards, so even people who had brutalised us during that period – again, because you had to now work with them and come into contact with them – and that, in later years on the outside – I got very much involved, and I still regard myself very much as an Irish republican, but I see part of the process now that I was in the conflict and that is about engagements. And I sometimes think that the word 'reconciliation' has become meaningless because it means everything, or it meant anything to anybody or whatever. And actually, when I was in South Africa, Albie Sachs, you know, was mentioned at a conference: why should we ask people to reconcile if there's never been conciliation in the first place? So, I think the word needs to be sort of deconstructed. But I do think what is needed, and I say this from a Republican point of view, is that it doesn't matter if someone who was in the Loyalist group or in the RUC police group or in the British Army if they live in Ireland then I regard them as Irish regardless of

how they see themselves. And my Republican politics would be that I engage with them as I would engage with anyone else and I have learned through those engagements, as I mentioned earlier, how the arts, particularly, have helped out there. I've engaged with, as I said, with numerous people – I kept track of their stories. I filmed them. I've made it available online. So, there is, I think, a lot of that already going on in the North. Sometimes if you were to look just at the political situation you would think maybe not a lot has changed, but I always thought there were two parallel processes going on: there's the political process at one level – which is Stormont and the administrative level, but below that there's the peace process level which basically is communities come together. I think the amount of dialogue that goes on if you want a cross-community between people who were once sworn enemies it's amazing the amount of that goes on and it's probably why we have the level of peace that there is at the moment. I think there's still a lot of big issues to be dealt with, but I think that what they're talking about in terms of, if you want to use the word, reconciliation, that there is a lot of that going on, even though, I say to myself, it is driven by the Republican side of it. I think the Unionist side fear engagement because I think they fear that they don't have the arguments sometimes. I think that they're the ones who are going to continue to try to still maintain a situation of inequality, and there are those who want equality, and whether it's about gay marriage or whether it's about anything else that there's that very different politic being worked out, but at least it's being worked out now in an unarmed way, in a bloodless way, whereas in the past it was through war.

### 7. *Brexit and EU*

*R: I have a final question. So much has changed and now we have Brexit. So how do you feel your political experience is relevant now and what do you think will happen next?*

*M: Yeah, well, there were actually a lot of protests at the weekend there on the border. And then again, using the arts because close to where I live – I live just south of the border now between Dundalk and Newry. I lived in an area that was very heavily militarised during the conflict and now you wouldn't – right across the border, you wouldn't be aware you have crossed the border unless you see the road signs are different. But at the weekend they put up a border post. The activists put up like a mock customs post and put up barriers at all – you're now leaving the European Union or you're now leaving Britain – you're now entering – depending on what direction you were coming from, from Belfast or Derry, which is good to see them using that type of approach. But, yeah, Brexit has raised lots of questions and I think no one knows at the moment just where it will go. It's interesting, the people I suppose who were really promoting it, Farage and Boris Johnson, as soon*

as the vote was taken they walked away from it and were sort of like: “Well, you deal with it now”. In the North of Ireland a majority voted to remain as part of the European Union and I suppose the interesting thing is that vote wasn’t confined to one community the vote is one of the few issues that can’t be simply divided into what is either a Republican issue or Unionist. Because Scotland also voted to remain, I would imagine that they will have another vote, a referendum, on independence, which I would imagine this time will go through. In a sense, it has thrown up. So I begin to question: if Scotland actually became independent and that would start the break-up of the United Kingdom, it would have lots of implications. In the sense that if they left the UK, I think the UK’s seat on the Security Council and such like goes with it. I didn’t realise until a few years ago, I suppose it was at the time of the last Referendum in Scotland. In the North of Ireland, Unionists would often look to Scotland as being somehow their connection with the Ulster-Scots. So, if Scotland actually leaves the UK, how does that impact the Unionists? And then what does the land border be like? I know that, at the moment, there are all sorts of reassurances being given by British ministers that they don’t want to return to what was evidence in terms of border checkpoints during the conflict. But, as other people are pointing out well, how else do you impose the border? How else do you? Because the big issue with them was immigration. This means that in fact there’s going to be some sort of checkpoints. So, I suppose, without knowing all of the nitty-gritty of it – what Brexit has done is confusion. With everything up in the air, republicans have called in for a border poll – as in people voting about whether there should be a united Ireland – I think that’s going to happen but certainly, it’s anyone’s guess what is happening.

I suppose at the moment one of the impacts of it is a lot of the work that has been done over recent years, in particular there were the terms of the EU peace funding. The European Union has put an awful lot of money into Ireland with the three peace programmes. The peace programme was originally for peace and reconciliation – then it became Peace I, as it was known; and then Peace II because there was a second round. There was a third round and now there’s now going to be a fourth round which was meant to be from 2016 to 2020 because they complained in the past with all these preconditions it wasn’t a long enough period to actually get projects firmly established within two years or three years as part of a five-year programme. Because of Brexit, it means that there’s uncertainty about the funding beyond December 2018. Probably a lot of the work that has been done which has, I think, probably supported the peace process has been that EU funding. If the EU funding hadn’t been available a lot of work that I do with ex-prisoners groups wouldn’t have happened because there wouldn’t have been that level of funding, that level of engagement. So, in terms of Brexit, I mean at the moment there is no answer to it. All there is, is loads of questions about what is going

to happen once that they trigger that clause that actually starts the whole process of the Brexit.

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# Miscellanea



# Enlightened Deception: An Analysis of Slavery in Maria Edgeworth's *Whim for Whim* (1798)

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## *Abstract*

Within the realm of Edgeworth studies, *Whim for Whim* (1798) has been a play unexplored by researchers until it was brought to light in 1999 thanks to the complete edition of Edgeworth's *oeuvre*. This article focuses on three points in this comedy: drama represented a new genre for the Anglo-Irish author; *Whim for Whim* contains many topics later developed in Edgeworth's canon; and Edgeworth deals with a very controversial issue, abolitionism, by featuring a black character for the first time in her writings. By referring to the work of post-colonial and eighteenth-century scholars, I argue that Edgeworth uses the black figure to affirm her reliance on enlightened tenets and her political position towards Great Britain as a Union; but, at the same time, there is a great deal of instability and criticism in her play suggesting that Edgeworth was not blind to the marginalization of the blacks in England. Also, the incorporation of other forms of slavery affecting the high classes and woman reveals that Edgeworth's critique was extended to intellectualism and gender.

*Keywords:* Abolitionism, Anglo-Irish Literature, Maria Edgeworth, Postcolonial Studies, *Whim for Whim*

## 1. Introduction

Though *Whim for Whim* is sufficiently attractive, this play by Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was hidden from the main public until 1999, when it was included in the complete edition of the Anglo-Irish author's *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, this comedy reveals much about Edgeworth's political thought by dealing with the topics of the woman of fashion or colonialism that are later

developed in her narrative, namely in *Belinda* (1801), “The Grateful Negro” (*Popular Tales* 1804), and the comedy *The Two Guardians* (1817), where it is easy to establish many parallelisms with *Whim for Whim*. The three productions appeared at a time of social turmoil and revolution in Europe. It was the age of the vindication of the rights of woman, the uprising of nationalism, the years after the French and the American Revolutions. It is no wonder that so many topics converged in literary works and that Edgeworth has been called “an uncomfortable authority” for the way she attempted to preserve her own privileged position as a Protestant landowner and her acknowledgement of the tenuousness of that position (Kaufmann and Fauske 2004, 11). Here we are interested in the importance of a black character in *Whim for Whim* and its relation with Edgeworth’s stance towards abolitionism, a movement which challenged existing stereotypes about the moral and intellectual capacity of black people.

The 1770s and 1780s witnessed the flourishing of abolitionist poems, like Thomas Day and John Bicknell’s “The Dying Negro” (1775), William Cowper’s “The Negro Complaint” (1788) or Hannah More’s “Slavery: A Poem” (1788). By introducing black characters in her works, Edgeworth was participating in a social debate: Marshal and Stock suggest that the popularity of black subjects helped set the stage for the emancipation of slaves in Britain and its colonies (Carlson 2007, 176), and scholars like Debora C. De Rosa consider that Edgeworth inspired American domestic abolitionists along with Eliza Weaver Bradburn and Amelia Opie since “The Grateful Negro” appeared repeatedly in the United States under various publishers until 1859 (De Rosa 2003, 14). In George Boulukos’ perceptive article on “The Grateful Negro”, Edgeworth’s concern about the black slaves is related to the concern about the Irish and woman following Rachel Ann Jennings (1995). This tale is about two Jamaican planters, Mr. Jefferies, who considers blacks as inferior and indolent, and Mr. Edwards, a kind master and supporter of emancipation. Mr. Edwards prevents Caesar, a Koromantyn black belonging to Jefferies, and his partner Clara from being sold and even gives them provision ground and a cottage. Meanwhile, Jefferies’ blacks plot against their master and Hector, one of Caesar’s friends, heads the conspiracy in spite of Caesar’s efforts to persuade Hector not to go ahead with their plans. Caesar runs away to Edwards’ plantation and warns his master about what is going to happen, thus frustrating the conspiracy. Though initially regarding Edgeworth as moderate towards abolitionism, Boulukos later redefines his stance:

... to her, slavery was undesirable and unpleasant, but it was also necessary to contain the irrationality, and the tendency to vengeance, of African descended people. While she, with her character of Mr. Edwards, would prefer a better world were such things weren’t necessary, in the real world she was, in fact, a lukewarm, ameliorationist *supporter* of slavery. (1999, 22)

Boulukos focuses on the economic dimension of slavery and considers that Edgeworth refuses to acknowledge the violence inherent in slavery and its effects as indispensable for the master-slave relationship. For Boulukos, "The Grateful Negro" becomes a relevant work in the antislavery debate for two reasons: first, Edgeworth illustrates the fallacy that sentimental humanitarianism leads to antislavery because slavery apologists used sentimental discourse to make slaves accept their condition voluntarily and to accept slavery in the same way that a free laborer accepts a contract (*ibidem*, 13); and second, she also shows the interdependence of slavery and free labor as extremely beneficial to members of the capitalist employer class "whether they were planter, landlords or industrialists" (*ibidem*, 24). Finally, Boulukos maintains that Edgeworth falls short of exemplifying the difference between new emerging bourgeois values and the receding aristocratic ones (*ibidem*, 29). Here I want to emphasize the condemnation of the diverse forms of slavery portrayed in *Whim for Whim*. By using the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha and other postcolonial scholars, I will argue that in *Whim for Whim* the black character is placed in an ambivalent position in British culture and that Edgeworth illustrates her pedagogical aims by exposing the abuses suffered by the blacks in Britain.

An additional point of interest is the fact that the theatre meant a new genre for Edgeworth, who used to collaborate with his father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and was just enjoying the success of the educational essay *The Parent's Assistant* (1796). The nature of drama provided more freedom of expression than the essay or the novel which would make Edgeworth a name. The stage offered the advantage that women could "mock the powerful, debate cultural assumptions, and challenge gender roles in ways that were pleasurable and unthreatening to the audience" (Anderson 2007, 147). However, cultivating this genre meant risking a lady's reputation: as eighteenth-century scholars have pointed out, "long-standing concerns about sexual impropriety in the theatre and the likelihood of the critical censure in the rough-and-tumble world of reviewing made life in the theatre a suspect choice for a 'proper' lady" (*ibidem*, 145). Defined in the introduction to Edgeworth's complete work as "A play that begins in an impressionistic view of West Ends London [and] ends as a panorama of the military battles and Masonic networking of the Europe-wide Revolutionary wars" (Eger, ÓGallchoir, Butler 2003, 295), *Whim for Whim* was written in November 1798 for performance by the family. Edgeworth based her piece on real episodes and real people, as it is extensively documented in the introduction. In a letter to Sophy Ruxton dated 19 November 1798, Edgeworth describes the theatre and its location in the house: "a charming theatre in the room over [the father's] study: It will be twice as large as old Poz's little theatre in the dining room" (Hare 1894, 62-63). The Anglo-Irish author also provides the cast of the play in which we find her father and his wife Honora, "[who] painted the scenery and arranged the dresses" (*ibidem*, 63). More interestingly, Edgeworth gives us the

play-bill with only one servant (Jemina), so the subplot of the diamonds was added later. The idea was to include *Whim for Whim* in one of her series for adolescents, so Edgeworth sent the work to the dramatist Richard B. Sheridan, an abolitionist whig and a member of Parliament who was committed to the parliamentary campaign to end the slave trade from the 1780s onwards (Gibbs 2008, 86). The Anglo-Irish author faced Sheridan's first "no" to one of her comedies since "the subject was not considered of sufficient interest or comic enough for the stage" (Eger, ÓGallchoir, Butler 2003, 379; Fernández 2012, 34). By all means, *Whim for Whim* is an early work and Edgeworth refused to polish it. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Irish author kept in mind many of the characters and issues depicted in that play for her first successful feminocentric fiction, *Belinda*, and it is even possible to identify some traces of *Whim for Whim* in *Castle Rackrent* (1800), Edgeworth's most memorable production.

## 2. The "ugly white diamonds" and the helpless urchin.

*Whim for Whim* focuses on wealthy Sir Mordent's relationship with Mrs. Fangle, a widow with two children, Heliodorus and Christina. Mrs. Fangle's desire to enter the mysterious circle of Illuminati promoted by Count Babelhausen runs parallel to her refusal of Sir Mordent for his old-fashioned ideas. The widow is much more attracted to the Count, who intercepts Sir Mordent's letters to Mrs. Fangle thanks to his malevolent servant, Felix. Another subplot is about Caroline and Opal, Sir Mordent's ward and nephew respectively. In spite of Caroline's love for Opal, Sir Mordent cannot approve of the young gentleman since Opal has not fixed upon a profession. Mrs. Fangle goes bankrupt and Felix plans to steal her diamonds and run away with them with the help of Count Babelhausen's mistress, Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche, who is passing for a French governess and will take part in Mrs. Fangle's initiatory ceremony into Illuminatism. Fortunately, Felix's plan is frustrated and both Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche and Felix are arrested.

Together with the footman Felix and Jemina, Quaco is a secondary character and one of the three servants that appear in *Whim for Whim* with a special feature: his black skin, "the visibility of darkness, and a prime signifier of the body and its social and cultural correlates" (Bhabha 1994, 82). Quaco represents the black people who were ferried to London and other ports on the same ships that brought imperial products to enrich national economy. As literary critics and art historians have argued, in England black people worked as butlers or household attendants with a decorative function equivalent to the porcelain, textiles and expensive pieces that the English nobility was increasingly buying from the east (Markley 2009, 88-89). Life in Great Britain was preferable to the punishing work they had in the West Indies, though black people were not treated as fully human and they

were often placed next to dogs and other domestic animals with which they shared the same status (Tobin 2003, 176-178), as pictures by William Hogarth repeatedly show (see *A Harlot's Progress: plate 2* [1732], *The Rake's Progress* [1733] and *Marriage à la Mode: 4, The Toilet* [c. 1745]). More importantly, it was said that black slaves lacked reason. Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that in the eighteenth century writing was taken to be the visible sign of reason and Enlightenment used the absence and presence of reason to delimit and circumscribe the very humanity of the cultures and people of color which Europeans had been "discovering", so black people were relegated to a lower place in the great chain of being (1986, 8). However, some aristocrats educated black slaves and there were some famous blacks, like Oludah Equiano (c. 1745-1797), Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), or Francis Barber (c. 1735-1801).

Edgeworth scholar Siobhán Kilfeather points out that Quaco bears a strong resemblance to a historical figure, Tony Small, who was Lord Edward Fitzgerald's servant and companion (2003, xxxii). In her excellent biography about Fitzgerald, the fifth son of the first Duke of Leinster, Stella Tillyard explains that Small was a runaway slave that Fitzgerald encountered in the United States and he later employed Small as a personal assistant. Often referred to as "faithful Tony" by Fitzgerald, African American Small was an uncommon sight among the predominantly Irish and British people in Dublin, and the two formed a close friendship. On one occasion, when Fitzgerald was returning home, Small warned him about British soldiers inside and saved Fitzgerald from arrest. The partnership between Fitzgerald and Small is best summarized in Tillyard's words: "Tony embodied and brought to life his master's commitment to freedom and equality for all men" (1997, x).

In *Whim for Whim*, Quaco's difference is immediately obvious through his speech. Though the play is a patchwork of idiolects ranging from Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche's French to Opal's tilted rhetoric, Quaco's discourse departs from the prevailing standard English of the main characters and tells much about his sincere attachment to Opal. In Bhabha's theory, what Edgeworth represents through Quaco corresponds with "mimicry", or the desire to produce a reformed, recognizable Other, Europeanized in tastes and opinion, yet native in appearance and language. Mimicry is the authority of colonial discourse and emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal: "Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Within the framework of colonialism, cultural hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, a close cousin of mimicry, and

... the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and dis-

placement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turned the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of the power. (Bhabha 1994, 112)

As a matter of fact, Quaco is a hybrid, rather than an “Other”; he has been absorbed and incorporated into the metropolis where he does not feel annihilated but defies the expectations of others who see their authority as challenged. Quaco’s attitude sets him apart from a resentful black; and, conscious of his privileged position, Quaco cannot but celebrate his happiness in England.

Quaco endorsement to his master’s democratic views coincides with the Edgeworths’ ideas of the Union as a political territory encompassing the integration of different identities (Bhabha 1994, 86). Alison Harvey makes a point which cannot be skipped here since she argues that the redefinition of nationalism offered by Edgeworth in *Belinda, Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), “The Grateful Negro” and *The Two Guardians* (1817) blurs conventional views of gender and race and proves to be a critique of the hegemonic power assumed by English patriarchal society: “The analogies Edgeworth draws between the situation of the Irish in Ireland and the slaves in the West Indies suggest a more liberal view of both groups than critics tend to grant her” (2006, 16). *The Two Guardians* must be regarded as directly inspired on *Whim for Whim* and equally critical of social injustice. Carmen María Fernández has already examined the former as a play in which black characters are imbued with humanity despite being rejected by whites to the point that a young lady insults them “Negroes are all naturally inferior” (Edgeworth 1817, 234). According to Fernández, in *The Two Guardians* Quaco’s generosity towards Mrs. Beauchamps – to whom he has anonymously lent money – is more valuable than the ridiculous efforts of Miss Juliana, Lady Courtington’s daughter, to conquer the hero’s heart (2012, 39), and this will similarly be registered in *Whim for Whim*, where wealth means more than material possessions.

The first time that Quaco appears on stage he sings a song about his release and the kindness he feels to his master. The audience has to reconstruct the uncomfortable story of his Self from what the black man says. In his conversation with Felix, Quaco states that he is free in Great Britain, where slavery was abolished in 1772 thanks to Lord Chief Justice Mansfield after the James Somerset case. Far from keeping his condition as a free man to himself, Opal’s servant represents the universalization of freedom:

Happy little Quaco has now a massa kind  
 “QUACO!” said he —  
 “From dis day be free” —  
 May every little Quaco such a massa find



Happy little Quaco has now a massa kind  
 To QUACO he cry —  
 “No slaves by and by”  
 May every little Quaco such a massa find. (Edgeworth 1999, 319)

Leaving apart Quaco's optimism, a more complex view of abolitionism cannot be ignored. For Felicity Nussbaum, British imperialism certainly aimed at 'civilize' and 'anglicize' Others; however, many used the abolitionist cause to heighten the British opportunities for expansion, to encourage trade in Africa or simply to control territory (2009, 138-139). In that sense, Quaco defends the supremacy of England, which is taken as a metonymy of the Empire. When his land and his parents are mentioned, Quaco's attitude shifts from melancholy to resentment against those who exploit black slaves since his insertion in English culture has turned him into a human being. Quaco feels grateful to England, which is embodied by Opal and associated with kindness:

QUACO (*with indignation*). Me no slave!—Dere be no slave in Englan—  
 Massa Opal said dere be no slave in Englan—I be slave great while in de diamond  
 mine—dey did sell Quaco for tobacco pipe—but Massa Opal took me from the  
 cruel mens, and carry me to Englis men's land where be no slaves—Fine country  
 Englan! (Edgeworth 1999, 320)

As the play progresses, more information about Quaco's past comes to light and the black slave's voice is recorded in his autobiographical narrative. After having run away from a “cruel man” (*ibidem*, 352) who mistreated him, Quaco has known freedom, the most treasured asset, even surpassing the comfort provided by money or wealth. Applying Gates's terms, “[w]ithout writing, no *repeatable* sign of the workings of reason, of mind, could exist. Without memory or mind, no history could exist” (1986, 11) and the black man remembers his past in his autobiographical song, a mechanism of retrospection and denunciation and also the opportunity to incorporate other abolitionism-related issues. No matter what the economic value of the diamonds is, in Quaco's song they turn into ‘ugly’ products because human suffering was necessary to satisfy the fine ladies' ambition to stand up in society, and this eventually becomes the source of social injustice and economic exploitation, which is passionately condemned by enlightened minds like Opal's and echoed in Quaco's speeches:

Down below—down below—hot hothot! Down below  
 Over de Sea  
 In far countree  
 De ugly, ugly, ugly, white diamuns grow  
 Poor little negro work in the mine

Lash from the whip  
 Black skin all strip  
 White and rich lady for to make fines  
 Down below—down below—hot hothot! Down below  
 Over de Sea  
 In far countree  
 De ugly, ugly, ugly, white diamuns grow. (Edgeworth 1999, 352)

Edgeworth's comedy does not ignore the fact that Quaco has enemies and competitors who perpetuate and increase his alienation as a black man and deny his social insertion, producing what Frantz Fanon calls "Manichaeic delirium" (Bhabha 1994, 43). These perverting forces clearly expose instability and opposition to what Quaco voices. According to Kilfeather, the play presents "a group of characters whose willingness to experiment with ideas of inheritance, property, gender roles and class relations draws them into a world of secret societies and new forms of affiliation" (2003, xiii), and, in *Whim for Whim*, the theme of encryption and secret knowledge is equally important (*ibidem*, xvii). Quaco's first enemy is Sir Mordent – the representative of order and conservative patriarchy – whose inability to understand Quaco is contrasted with the black man's proficiency of the colonial language. While Quaco is branded a "helpless urchin" (Edgeworth 1999, 325), the black servant explicitly rejects his objectification. In this regard, the play purposefully presents a denial of the traditional image of the black servant in British theatre: Carlson refers to the frequently intoxicated Mungo in Isaac Bickerstaff's *The Padlock* (1768), Hassan in *The Spectre Castle* (1797) and Cymbalo in John Cross's *The Surrender of Trinidad* (1797), who assist their masters' intrigues; or the sentimental slave Caesar in Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (2007 [1788], 180). In all these plays the role was invariably low in terms of social status (slave, servant) and it was 'white-washed' in its eroticism. Also, Quaco has undergone a process of self-consciousness facilitated by Opal ("massa Opal tell me he never like I wear lace band like puppy", Edgeworth 1999, 325), reversing the image of black servants as solitary mutes, or infantilized and servile figures which were even dressed in fancy garb. Edgeworth is careful to bridge the racial gap and makes Quaco a sentimental figure almost at the same level as his master. According to Lynn Festa, in eighteenth-century texts sentimentality defined who was acknowledged as human and the interest in the interior life of sentimental characters and readers not only responded to colonial expansion: it helped distinguish the particularity of the human from the interchangeability of the commodity and sparked a struggle to claim feelings for one's one (2006, 3-6). The same idea is used by Boulukos, who maintains that Edgeworth envisions slaves as easy to manipulate, but capable of internalizing a sentimental contract with their masters and ready to see their interests as intertwined with their masters (1999, 14). Quaco behaves as

a child in need of guidance and improvement. His loyalty reaches the point that, when ill-willed Felix suggests running away from Opal, Quaco says he would rather prefer any unpleasant chore than let Opal down and challenge his authority. The key for this bond is affection verging homoeroticism, the voluntary identification with the representative of the Self and civilization.

Quaco's second enemy is his counterpart as a servant, Felix, who is knowledgeable of low life above stairs and derides Quaco. Through Felix and other servants, Edgeworth enriches the aristocratic milieu that Bouloukos misses in "The Grateful Negro". Felix will be expelled from England, in accordance with the Edgeworths' recurrent association of nationalism and morality which is recurrent in *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809-1812) and *Patronage* (1814). Envious of Quaco's joy, Count Babelhausen's servant keeps for himself the "magnificent" diamonds (Edgeworth 1999, 359) and gives Quaco the false ones while he insults him by using racial epithets and by pointing to his economic status:

FELIX. Always singing!—Where the devil can that little foolish fellow find those spirits of his—He's a blackamoor—he has not a guinea in the world—he has no portmanteau—and yet there he's singing away—There's something in a light heart that I never could understand! (*Ibidem*, 360)

The unprincipled servant does not only alienate Quaco through language, but he also cheats his master and Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche when he changes the diamonds and calculates they are worth ten thousand pounds. Another reason accounting for Felix's hate of Quaco is the fact that Quaco is occupying a white man's post and has his master's reliance. As Nussbaum explains, the competition between black slaves and white servants created some cultural anxieties in the metropolis:

... when slaves first came to England their paltry wages have merely amounted to shelter and clothing in exchange for their services, their devotion, and the display of themselves as part of their owner's wealth. Native-born English servants, however, were more likely to demand monetary remuneration, and even earlier in the century blacks had been legally prevented from gaining upward mobility and from competing with whites by serving as apprentices. (2003, 222)

In the same way that Thady Quirk participates in the action of *Castle Rackrent* and reveals the family story to British readers, the black servant is involved in Count Babelhausen's plot by chance and proves decisive in its conclusion. While Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche convinces Mrs. Fangle that her diamonds are too dirty to be worn at the masquerade *raisonnée* organized by Count Babelhausen, Quaco enters the stage and disturbs Jemina. The former prostitute now redeemed by Mrs. Fangle hates blackamoors where-

as Mrs. Fangle is not surprised at all and gives Quaco a tip for the feathers, a gesture which is appreciated but gently refused: “Massa Opal tell me no take money” (Edgeworth 1999, 351). Quaco’s honesty surprises the ladies, who decide to trust him with the diamonds. Like the Jewess’s diamonds in *Castle Rackent*, Mrs. Fangle’s jewels become a fetish, a source of authority in Quaco’s hands. They signify both European refinement and civilization and a metonymy of Africa, like Quaco himself, who turns into an authorized version of otherness and a doubling because he is the part-object of a metonymy of colonial desire which alienates dominant discourses in which he emerges (Bhabha 1994, 88):

QUACO. But me sorry to have no massa Opal—Me love to hear massa Opal say—Do dis—Do dat—cause wen Quaco has done dis,—done dat— Massa Opal smile and say—Tank ye Quaco—Good Quaco! And Quaco very glad den. (Edgeworth 1999, 321)

### 3. *Testing the slave and the masters*

For *Kilfeather*, in *Whim for Whim* major characters struggle to reconcile their principles with their instincts or passions (2003, xiii). However, the relationship between Quaco and Opal can hardly be assimilated to the one between Felix and Count Babelhausen or the one between Opal and the Count: Opal pursues to educate Quaco while the Count has an economic motivation. In Edgeworth’s comedy people are obsessed with secret knowledge which is never revealed, explained or overcome, as it happens with prejudice, and Edgeworth’s play is not exclusively reduced to denounce racial exploitation but also deals with other forms of enslavement – to prejudice, to customs and fashion. Quaco, Mrs. Fangle and Opal constitute three Others estranged from the rest of characters embodying the establishment and conventional values.

Mrs. Fangle’s ruin symbolizes her intellectual defeat in the hands of Count Babelhausen. Seduced by false discourse and the aesthetic of Illuminatism, she has neglected her children, like Lady Delacour in *Belinda*, and her independence is at risk at one point. Several remarkable ladies inspired the character of Mrs. Fangle: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Emma Hart, Catherine Macaulay and Catherine II, Empress of Russia, and especially, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu. It seems that Sheridan “launched a theatrical fashion for portraying leaders of ‘the ton’, so that these glamorous figures could watch their counterparts on stage from their boxes, and themselves could provide the pit and the gods with a second spectacle” (Eger, ÓGallchoir, Butler 2003, 286). Mrs. Montagu was the center of the Bluestocking circle, the mid-eighteenth-century group of men and women which, according to Gary Kelly “enabled increasing numbers of women to avoid being

‘sentenced to everyday life,’ to escape ‘confinement’ in the domestic sphere, and to pursue work and knowledge within a wider and supposedly superior sphere of intellectual work and sociability, an idealized version of academia” (2015, 175-176). The term “bluestocking” became derogatory; it often indicated traits of independent-mindedness, intellectual display, disdain for domesticity, and disregard of social and sexual propriety (*ibidem*, 182) and was similarly ridiculed in Frances Burney’s *The Wiltings* (1779), which was also rejected by Sheridan.

In *Whim for Whim*, Mrs. Fangle’s behaviour and way of thinking are incongruent and whimsical. Caroline praises Mrs. Fangle’s capacity to label something already existing: “When one can’t have a new thing, give an old thing a new name and it will go down the public throat directly... Mrs. Fangle is to have a masquerade raisonnée” (Edgeworth 1999, 316). Her attempt to recreate life in Ancient Rome affects both her hair style imitating Empress Poppea and her custom to have a bath with milk of seven hundred asses like Empress Faustina (*ibidem*, 340). However, anxiety brings her to incoherence, for example, when she tells Sir Mordent: “This Count’s charming Herculean ornaments have come so apropos for my Roman matron’s toilette—especially this box of antient [*sic*] rouge” (*ibidem*, 341). In search of novelties, she aims to reform language. Consequently, expressions like “How do you do?” are disgraceful to philosophic tongues (*ibidem*, 314) and are to be replaced by “even a new pain is better than an old pleasure” (*ibidem*, 318), or “How are the affections today?” (*ibidem*, 379). Edgeworth parodies exaggerated feminism through Mrs. Fangle. Rather than a sponsor of the rights of woman – which were in vogue after the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) –, Mrs. Fangle sets her mind to become an Amazon, to build up a new social system, and her rhetoric features the concerns of that time: “Curtsies are symbols of slavery—Odious homage to man—Remains of the feudal system which subjugated and imbruted our unfortunate sex” (Edgeworth 1999, 314). According to Mrs. Fangle, maternal weakness spoils everything (*ibidem*, 314) and maternity simply provides the opportunity to test her theories. Her concept of a woman of fashion is very clear; she is allowed to say what no other woman dares to say and do, and her main virtue is courage (*ibidem*, 341).

Sexual appeal and secrecy are manipulated by the villain of the play, Count Babelhausen, to achieve his goal and remove all the obstacles to obtain Mrs. Fangle’s jointure. The Count’s irresistible appeal to Mrs. Fangle stems from the novelty of his “manner—new language—and new system” (*ibidem*, 318) and from the conditions he imposes on her to be accepted among Illuminati: keeping silence, joining an international secret society in which origin and race do not matter and having a confidant. In Mrs. Fangle’s case this role is performed by a German princess called Aspasia (who is actually Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche in disguise). Therefore, in the sophisti-

cated initiation ceremony orchestrated by Count Babelhausen, Mrs. Fangle will be Pulcheria – in allusion to the powerful Empress of the Eastern Roman Empire who took a vow of virginity–, and she will be metaphorically sacrificed on the Altar of Pure Reason before the Count has collected purses and revealed in an aside it has been “No bad day’s work” (*ibidem*, 359). No character escapes from Count Babelhausen’s tricks, and, at the masquerade, Caroline is even courted as “dear, dearest, dear lady” (*ibidem*, 373) by the Count, who does his utmost to raise her doubts about Opal: “What suspense, what agony I feel amidst this scene of festivity, and noise, and folly” (*ibidem*, 376). A daughter of Enlightenment, Edgeworth introduces the Count to represent the dark side of secret lodges and opportunism, which is parodied in *Whim for Whim*. One of the sources she used to write the comedy was John Robinson’s *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and the Governments of Europe Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* (1798). This controversial book argued that Illuminati had spread “under the specious pretext of enlightening the world by the torch of philosophy, and of dispelling the clouds of civil and religious superstition which keep the nations of Europe in darkness and slavery” (1798, 11), a metaphor which can be very suitably applied to the Count’s proceedings in *Whim for Whim*. Aware that Opal will inherit Sir Mordent’s wealth and that it will be easy to manipulate his friend, Count Babelhausen tells his mistress, Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche, to seduce Opal. The discovery that Sir Mordent assigns great importance to symbols and ranks leads the Count to cheat the old gentleman into the belief that he is in possession of the Order of the Red Eagle and that Mrs. Fangle will undoubtedly attract the Count: “Charming bewitching whimsical creature!—with the learning of a bachelor [*sic*] of arts, the enthusiasm of a girl of fifteen, and the airs of a woman of fashion, she has wit and beauty enough to drive a man mad” (Edgeworth 1999, 329). Unluckily, Sir Mordent’s stiffness prevents Mrs. Fangle from loving him, and Caroline, who is “wedded to the world and bound in chains of gold” (*ibidem*) warns Opal that the Count is playing a double game.

Both Opal and his servant are tested in opposite ways. The first is in love with Caroline, who thinks Opal’s pure reason is pure folly (*ibidem*, 328). Opal is committed to truth and despises wealth, as he explains to Caroline: “not all my love dear Caroline for you, the center to which every radius of my happiness tends, can induce me to adopt opinions not my own, to follow plans my mind approves not, or to find myself in the fetters of antiquated prejudice” (*ibidem*, 328). Rather than “dutiful” or “obedient”, he transforms language like Mrs. Fangle and defines himself as “affectionate”: “I acknowledge no such principle as duty to relatives” (*ibidem*, 336). Opal’s enthusiasm is not sanctioned by Sir Mordent: while the young man lives in this world of fancy expecting to be guided by his Illuminatus dirigens, Sir Mordent is worried because Opal is so ridiculous that he will easily be made a dupe and he will

never fix upon a profession. The old gentleman hardly bears Opal's remarks: "Men of contracted views, men of 'tideless passions' can make themselves understood in a few words—but men of Genius speak a language of their own, not always easily understood" (*ibidem*, 333). Two very different ideologies are contrasted in a previous conversation with Sir Mordent. At this point in the play, Opal's speech on the education of negroes and on a crusade about the Barbary corsairs is quite short, but these views are presented as opposed to Sir Mordent's and closely related to Quaco's regard of the ugly diamonds as not indispensable for most human beings:

OPAL. An individual cannot do all—but he can do something Sir Mordent—What because one bee cannot fill the whole hive, shall he refuse to make a single cell in the cosmopolitical honeycomb? (*Ibidem*, 309)

Unable to approve of Opal's "cursed jargon" (*ibidem*, 310) and Kantian manner, Sir Mordent despises his nephew's ideas because an individual cannot reform the world ("The fly upon the chariot wheel!", *ibidem*, 309) while Opal explains that mercantilism cannot stand much longer in Europe and that the rise of stocks that is celebrated by Sir Mordent has no meaning. Facing Sir Mordent's patriotic views, Opal proclaims his universalism: "I am a citizen of the world—Patriotism is a narrow principle—Cosmopolitanism" (*ibidem*, 310). Similarly, in his conversations with Caroline, Opal is featured as a reformer who denounces the oppression of custom ("Vain forms! Senseless ceremonies — shall man with an inquisitorial ubiquity of tyranny torture the unuttered thoughts from his fellow man" *ibidem*, 333) and the obedience to the family ("What privileges of consanguinity, What prerogatives of seniority can justify this unqualified breach of imprescriptible unalienable rights of man", *ibidem*).

Opal's submission to Count Babelhausen represents a more sophisticated subjection than Mrs. Fangle's, as Caroline points out to Sir Mordent. For the old gentleman, Mrs. Fangle is "a woman of sense under all her follies" (*ibidem*, 372) and "a woman of real feeling under the appearance of thoughtlessness" (*ibidem*) who will eventually give up her whim to a man while for Caroline, "even people of the best sense...and the best hearts are sometimes strangely run away by their whims" (*ibidem*) in reference to Opal. The symbiotic relationship between the Count and Opal is reflected in the way they refer to each other as Socrates and Alcibiades. In Plato's *The Symposium*, the latter is an extravagant Athenian statesman and general who becomes a pupil of Socrates and hopes to seduce him with his good looks in order to glean some wisdom from his tutor. Though a promising youth, Alcibiades is too independent and resolute and Socrates does not succeed in winning him to the philosophical life. Edgeworth refashions this erotic relationship: Count Babelhausen takes advantage of Opal's fascination for

Illuminatism to challenge him and tells Opal to sacrifice his passion for non-Illuminée Caroline (“a slave to the customs of the world”, *ibidem*, 358) and to love another woman, Aspasia. Yielding to blackmail seems a condition to complete Opal’s training as an Illuminatus, but Caroline does justice to her name and represents the voice of reason, like Edgeworth’s homonymous heroines. When Opal proposes Caroline to live with him in poverty and to give her money to “the great work” (*ibidem*, 329), the young lady’s answer cannot be more adamant: “he [Count Babelhausen] has saved me from becoming a victim to your whims misguided Opal—I forgive you—Farewell!” (*ibidem*, 365).

As we can see, Quaco is rejected because of his skin and Opal because of his extravagant ideas leading to unhappiness and frustration, and there is one carnivalesque scenario for racial and social reversal. Terry Castle envisions masquerade as the site where the categories of domination fold endlessly into the categories of powerlessness and vice versa: “The venerated topoi of eighteenth-century culture (humanity, masculinity, adulthood, nobility, rationality) merge with the despised opposites (the bestial, effeminacy, childishness, servility, madness)” (1986, 79). Here Quaco’s blackness is extended to whites and identities are confused: “Me tinkmens and womens all mad dis night—me see all de white peoples wid de negro face—black! Black! Me know nobody—nobody know Quaco” (Edgeworth 1999, 378). Quaco is the only character not wearing a fancy dress while Opal dresses as a slave to attend Mrs. Fangle’s masquerade *raisonnée* because he feels as such.

It is worth noting that, in her correspondence with an American friend, the Jewess Rachel Mordecai Lazarus, Edgeworth agreed with Miss Martineau on the slave question and the inconsistency of American liberty and slavery system (11 July 1837; MacDonald 1977, 298), and some months before she had just raised a significant objection: “[t]he slaves must be prepared by education to be free and to provide for themselves before they can be set free without danger to others and destruction and misery to themselves and society” (15 April 1836; *ibidem*, 279). Despite similarities between Quaco and Opal, the former’s views are not misguided by empty discourse. Quaco is never discouraged by prejudice, and he is the only character who never hesitates and always refuses to lie. The play features a man with moral strength, integrity and dignity (“Me no like to tall [*sic*] tales”, Edgeworth 1999, 325). Besides, in Edgeworth, the black servant throws more light upon what is happening than Count Babelhausen’s Illuminist theories. He does not only know that the diamonds are false but also discovers the fake one by showing both cases to Opal. Quaco’s test of authenticity places him at the level of Mrs. Fangle’s children when they explain that the mysterious foreign princess is really Mademoiselle Fanfarlouche:



Wat me see dese diamons—me tink—Ah Quaco know good way to try de good diamons—dey cold to de tongue— me try

*(puts the false diamonds to his tongue)*

No cold! —no diamons!—Felix make a great mistake—me run and tell him—

*(In running across the stage QUACO catches his foot in the straps of FELIX portmanteau drags it after him and opens—He disentangles his foot and is going to shut the portmanteau when he sees the case of real diamonds which have fallen out)*

Watme see! Watme see! Dese are de diamons de lady give Quaco

*(puts them to his tongue)*

Yes dese cold—dese good!—Ah!—Ah!—Ah!—me great fear Felix be bad white man! (*Ibidem*, 361)

As a colonial subject, Quaco has some limitation or prohibition within the authoritative discourse itself, which is represented by his dependance and gratitude to Opal. Bhabha highlights that the success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure (1994, 86). On the one hand, his life as a slave in the diamond mine taught him to tell authentic diamonds from false ones. On the other hand, he feels cheated and misses Opal: "... what to do?—De lady will tink me bad man when she sees dese—but Quaco honest!—Quacohonest!—Oh massa Opal!—me wish you here" (Edgeworth 1999, 366). Caroline's promise that he will have justice and she will be his friend reassures him to the point of revealing: "Next to massa Opal I love her the best in de world" (*ibidem*). Poetic justice works when Quaco reveals the truth and Sir Mordent sends him for a Bow Street officer who takes Felix up (*ibidem*, 383), but Count Babelhausen escapes punishment and leaves the stage "bowing with an air of assurance" (*ibidem*, 382). The dramatic climax coincides with the comic plot of social mobility and takes place when Mrs. Fangle, Quaco and Opal are together on stage in act 5. The news of Mrs. Fangle's "fatal loss of fortune" (*ibidem*) brings Sir Mordent closer; he feels bound to her in honour and resolves to propose to her at the masquerade. Both relinquish to their whims in a sprightly dialogue, which provides the cure for Mrs. Fangle's eccentricities and her rescue from ruin: "Let these diamonds be sold—this is the last night of Mrs. Fangle's extravagance—I will shew the world I can bear adversity—better than prosperity" (*ibidem*, 384). Opal likewise sees he has also been duped by the farce of Illuminatism:

OPAL (clasping his hands). Heavens! What do I hear! What a scene of villainy! What a dupe I have been! (stamps then turns to Caroline)—And I have been exposing myself to Caroline all this time! But the Count! My Illuminatus dirigens! Villain of villain! And is this the great work! Is this the end of Illumination—And was it for this I was on the point of sacrificing all my hopes of happiness—Oh Caroline—can you ever forgive my folly? (*Ibidem*, 383)

#### 4. Conclusion

Set against the background of the changes affecting British society at the end of the eighteenth century, *Whim for Whim* must be regarded as an ideologically complex piece of work taking into account its portrait of many forms of social and sexual dependence. Behind the comic façade, the manipulation of people's beliefs and attitudes is not limited to a particular group. Therefore, both Mrs. Fangle and Opal are self-alienated: the former represents the contradictions of feminist intellectualism at the time colliding with maternal duties and Opal's absurd submission to secret knowledge compromises his happiness. Rather than an attack against a particular philosophy, the Anglo-Irish author expresses her concern about the consequences of sectarianism and intolerance opposing the values of liberty and freedom. In *Whim for Whim*, the Count's rhetoric is only a means of imposing his will and Illuminatism proves the most suitable medium to lure his initiatives and menace the microcosmos of the play representing the Empire.

Despite Opal's defense of Illuminatism as "the most stupendous enterprise [*sic*] ever conceived by human intellect" (Edgeworth 1999, 329); this theory eventually becomes an obscure abusive system for Caroline, who perceptively defines it as "darkness to my weak eyes" (*ibidem*, 329). Such darkness is ironically lit up by a black character. With Quaco, Edgeworth made a notable contribution to the representation of black characters on the British stage. His integrity and perspicacity suggest that Edgeworth was aware of the potential that the performance of slavery in the theatrical and print culture had to sway public opinion. According to Bhabha's theory, Quaco's mimicry exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power and they stand unresolved because, though Quaco feels part of society, the black character remains in the unstable position of the hybrid described by Bhabha and is marginalized and outraged. From her enlightened post, Edgeworth argues against human inferiority based on race. The play positions the individual, his history and his commitment to others at the level of national sympathies or social class, and it is through Quaco that Edgeworth voices her liberal views and exposes injustice. The agency of the black man in *Whim for Whim* is comparable to the Irish peasant, (un)loyal Thady Quirk, in *Castle Rackrent*. Far from neutral, Edgeworth proves to be an egalitarian writer because the black man is no longer a luxury object or commodity and becomes instrumental to reveal deception and restore social order.

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## Brian O’Nolan, the Conspirator

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### *Abstract*

Brian O’Nolan, writer and civil servant, wanted the Irish to explore alternative realities and build a new country. He unsettled taken-for-granted relationships between words and things, and used storytelling devices to engage his readers. However, once his status had been achieved, he profited from his ‘specific weight’ in society to launch deeper attacks on conventional beliefs. As a comic writer, he had the duty to criticise society even at the risk of losing benefits. As Bakhtin noted, inertia is maybe the worst social threat. In this respect, comic figures function as actors of solidarity, and keepers of a “culture in common”, in Raymond Williams’s words. Brian O’Nolan the comic writer was a negotiator of change, offering a comfortable and distressing perspective, but in the end not as harmful as that of the ruling class. He let us peep into parallel worlds for the improvement of our understanding of things.

*Keywords:* Brian O’Nolan, Cruiskeen Lawn, Flann O’Brien, Humour, Journalism

### *1. Introduction*

*Conspirator* is a nice word carrying negative meanings with it. If we trace back its origins, as Brian O’Nolan himself often loved to do, we might see with some surprise that it meant quite the opposite of today’s usage. In effect, a conspirator (or conspirer) is ‘one who conspires’. According to the OED, to conspire means

[a. F. conspire-r (15th c. in Littré) (= Pr. conspirar, Sp. conspirar, It. conspire), ad. L. conspīrāre lit. “to breathe together”, whence, “to accord, harmonize, agree, combine or unite in a purpose, plot mischief together secretly”.]

intr. To combine privily for an evil or unlawful purpose; to agree together to do something criminal, illegal, or reprehensible (esp. to commit treason or murder, excite sedition, etc.); to plot. Const. with, against, to do something. (OED 2009, “Conspire, v.”)

Of course, now it means what we all think it means. But originally, to conspire meant ‘to breathe together’, to be in agreement, which is exactly what my reading of Brian O’Nolan’s works aims to show. Breathing together with his public, feeling the general sentiment and trying to educate people, in sum, is what I think he did in all his years as a writer and journalist engaged in Ireland’s public life.

By using different pen names, styles and techniques, what he managed to do was offer the Irish Plain People different points of view, possibilities of reality, or whole alternative worlds to look at and take inspiration from – fresh breaths, indeed – to drive the stagnant, suffocating and at times staunching cultural atmosphere to a new paradigm: a culture in common for an Ireland united and possibly reconciled.

Brian O’Nolan chose to write under many pen names, or *personas*, to whom what Declan Kiberd said of the characters in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* very well applies: “... in re-enacting the roles of Telemachus and Odysseus, these characters remind us of what peoples have in common across the ages, thereby achieving one of the basic purposes of art, making man feel less alone” (Kiberd 1992, xxix). And of its author: “Joyce believed that a writer’s first duty might be to insult rather than to flatter national vanity” (*ibidem*, xiii).

Writing as Myles na gCopaleen in his “*Cruiskeen Lawn*” column in the *Irish Times*, Brian O’Nolan talks of himself in similar terms: “I sometimes flatter myself that I am a most valuable person (or public institution) because I ventilate certain disquiets and resentments widely held, but mostly by people who have no means of public expression” (O’Nolan 1956).

Who was he, then? More than an author, he was certainly a comic *figure*, since his many personas allowed him to express a variety of points of view in different styles and different media, all linked together by a humorous bloodline. For this reason, he could reach a wider audience than that of a writer like Joyce, who was of course known but could not compete with the scale of a newspaper readership. Thus, he kept in contact with his public for 26 years (from 1940 to 1966, when he died) and influenced their views. To understand how and why he managed to do this, i.e. the ways in which he used humour to trigger social change, we first need a precise definition of humour and humorous writer.

## 2. *Exploring alternative realities through laughter*

Humour is quite easy to understand at face value. Actually, humour is one of the few things all human beings really have in common, as it regulates the threshold between the physical and the spiritual. We *understand* a verbal or non-verbal situation, and we *show* our reaction through smile and laughter – or frowning, if we disapprove of it. It is almost depressing to list the philosophers, writers and scientists who addressed the nature of humour

and laughter, the list itself being proof of how widely debated (and debatable) the definition of humour is.

Some of these definitions are today considered out of date or simply surpassed by acquired scientific evidence: one example is Bergson, who maintained that we perceive humour, and then laugh, only when we feel superior to others. Nevertheless, hidden in the past, there are also some valuable items still useful for our understanding. In ancient Greece, for example, laughter had a fundamental role in religion. Laughing was a sacred, key process in the rites of Dionysius, where the *komos* – the delirious crowd attending the ceremonies – reached a collective *ekstasis* and breached all rules governing body and mind. Ekstasis does in fact mean exactly 'to stand out' of the limited, corporeal body and seek contact with the divine element. Therefore, laughing and laughter were the privileged means of letting the earthly body into communion with the extra-terrestrial element. It was considered divine because of its mysterious nature, and like all things divine it was revered and respected. During the rites, comedy plays were performed where the actors sought to bring all the audience to this ecstasy of divine union using humour and laughter:

As to the mood in which the drama was performed it was one of Dionysian ecstasy and dithyrambic rapture. The player, withdrawn from the ordinary world by the mask he wore, felt himself transformed into another ego which he did not so much represent as incarnate and actualize. The audience was swept along with him into that state of mind. (Huizinga 1955 [1944], 145)

Johan Huizinga, the great Dutch anthropologist, in his justly famous study on play, *Homo Ludens* (1955 [1944]), frequently links the states of mind in play and humour. Nietzsche, in his work on the birth of tragedy, reminds us that, contrary to what we might intuitively think today, comedy was born first in the humus of Dionysian stage contests. Tragedy arose later, as a sort of counterbalance to a practice that seemed to get out of control to the then regulators (Nietzsche 1993 [1872]). This view on humour passed almost untouched from the Greeks down to the Romans, who were great admirers of Greek culture and exported its values throughout their empire.

The advent of Christianity in Europe brought about a reconsideration of humour as a fundamentally sinful attitude, and today's perception of it is still influenced by this view, at least in the countries where Christianity is still deep-rooted. If laughing at gods in a polytheistic pantheon was permitted and somehow due, now laughing at an all-powerful, single God became forbidden. If anything, for at least a logical reason: any act of communication is an act of knowledge and needs more than one player to be enacted. But if the new God is omnipresent and all-encompassing, there is no possibility of new knowledge because he knows everything and does not need a

second party to enact a communicative play. The ancient Greek and Roman gods laughed, but the one God does not laugh because he is never surprised by anything, so why should we be? In the Middle Ages, continental Europe passed on and reinforced this principle thanks to the strong links between Christianity and the (Roman and then Holy Roman) Empire.

Ireland was an exception, as often happens: in the fifth and sixth centuries AD, Saint Patrick christianised the island and founded many monasteries, but took great care not to admit Ireland to the territories of the Empire or the Papacy. Irish monasteries, under the more relaxed rule of local kings – some of them even setting up their residences in the very monasteries – were thus allowed to flourish and Irish monks turned to saving ancient texts from complete oblivion by copying them. The distance from the bloody wars and invasions that the Continent saw in those turbulent centuries, up until the ninth century at least, provided a relative peace and prosperous mingling of old pagan traditions and new Christian ideals. The good relations and collaboration between kings and monks, together with the distance from strict authorities like the emperor and the Pope, might well be what permitted the ancient tradition of pagan humour to survive the Middle Ages in the Irish texts that came from one of Europe's oldest written literatures. Vivian Mercier devoted a whole study to this entitled *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962), linking the perhaps over mythicized Irish Middle Ages with the existence and persistence of modern Irish spirit and humour.

Some centuries later, Humanism and the Renaissance in Italy and afterwards in Europe brought man and the human disciplines back to the centre: humour was revalued and employed in the arts, albeit as a side dish, rather than a main course, so to say. A debate in modern, scientific terms on the principles of humour only started in the seventeenth century with Hobbes, who in his treatises *On Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (1994 [1640]) and *The Leviathan* (2008 [1651]) said more or less what Bergson was still saying at the beginning of the twentieth century: we laugh because we feel superior, fundamentally equalling humour with aggressiveness. Later on, other thinkers started to focus on its psychological aspects: the eighteenth century Irish philosopher, Francis Hutcheson, in "Reflections Upon Laughter" (1973 [1725]), was the first to introduce the concept of *incongruity*, still at the basis of today's mainstream theories of humour. In his opinion, laughter is nothing but human response to the external stimuli that are perceived as incongruous, therefore not interpretable according to our existing mental schemes.

A century later, Herbert Spencer, in his "Physiology of Laughter" (2017 [1860]), maintained that the 'energy' running through our nervous system always tends to generate a muscular movement proportional to the intensity of the emotions felt. When the tension reaches a peak that cannot be endured by our muscles alone, we use laughter as an outlet of this surplus energy. And this peak takes place, he says, "when consciousness is unawares



transferred from great things to small” (cited in Koestler 1975, 55). Though incomplete, it is one of the most satisfactory theories so far on the origins of laughter, since it gives a working definition of the foggy threshold between humour and laughter.

Freud was the one who placed the next tile in the puzzle. Even though he only wrote on wit and not on general humour, devoting to the former his famous essay entitled *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious* (Freud 2002 [1905]), he spent some words on humour in general. He maintained that humour was something out of one's control, unintentional, while wit was an act of will in view of a specific purpose. Wit, for Freud, is the open-eye equivalent of dream, insofar as it operates to circumvent taboos and prohibitions and let tensions out. In a controlled context – jokes normally taking place in conventional, socially accepted places and situations – and through wit, one can let inner taboo contents out without activating Super-Ego censorship. He was then the first to establish a key principle: humour is a social activity and involves aspects of social regulation such as inclusion, exclusion, and bond enforcement.

If humour is not so much a literary device as a social practice with some standardised codifications in literature, some ideas from anthropological and sociological research can be included to clarify the limits of our subjects.

Fabio Ceccarelli is an anthropologist who wrote extensively on chimpanzee societies. In his biosocial study *Sorriso e riso* (Ceccarelli 1988; Smile and laughter), he demonstrates that laughter is used among chimpanzees to mark the inclusion in, or the exclusion from, the elite group. Basically, it is a conventional badge of membership. He argues that human societies are also organized in circles, that elite circles are recognized and institutionalized in all types of societies, and that the pressure to be included in them is a common social phenomenon. Laughter, then, is meant as a unifying signal that corroborates bonds within an elite and decrees the exclusion from the same elite of those who are laughed at and do not laugh together. This is the first known study to me that proposes a link between laughter, culture and society. Because being part of the same group means also to share the group's values and customs or, in other words, culture.

I think it is now quite clear where I am heading. Humour being a subject where so many giants of human thought failed, I think that the only way to deal with it, and thus understand more deeply what the humourist's motives are, is to cross some boundaries and go and search for connections with other disciplines that can illuminate this phenomenon. All scholars agree that humour fiercely resists categorizations in single slots or disciplines, be they biology, culture, or society. I think that what we call humour, for lack of better definitions, is a complex process involving many areas of life that we distinctly recognize and appreciate, but that we invariably fail to describe when they blend.

Research about humour is ripe today – there is even a dedicated quarterly, *Humor*, published by the International Society of Humor Studies – with theorists who devote their investigations almost exclusively to it. However, in many cases their research concentrates in psychology and the neurosciences and aims at finding which brain area is activated by which ‘kind’ of humour (or “scripts”, as Attardo and Raskin call them; see Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001). This, of course, is still very useful for the literary critic and the social scientist because it helps to better define the terms of the question, but it does not yield directly usable tools for analysing texts and bodies of work. In some respects, we find ourselves more or less the way Huizinga put it:

All the terms in this loosely connected group of ideas — play, laughter, folly, wit, jest, joke, the comic, etc. — share the characteristic which we had to attribute to play, namely that of resisting any attempt to reduce it to other terms. Their rationale and their mutual relationship must lie in a very deep layer of our mental being. (1955, 6)

In my search for a usable framework to apply to Brian O’Nolan’s case study, I found some very interesting points in the works of three scholars that helped me better define humour and the humourist.

The first is Arthur Koestler. Born in Budapest in 1905 from a Jewish family of mixed Russian-Hungarian origins, he studied engineering at the Polytechnic in Vienna but left his studies to follow the Zionist project in Palestine in 1926. He eventually turned to journalism and earned his living from writing. He published novels, autobiographical works, and many non-fiction writings on such diverse subjects as the history of science, the paranormal, ethnography, Judaism, and most of all politics. Maybe only a man of such wide views on human knowledge could write a book like *The Act of Creation* (Koestler 1975).

In this unconventional essay, Koestler upholds creation as a human cognitive process that can take place in many fields. He examines the cases of the jester, the scientist and the artist. All of them create by using the same mental process, that of *bisociation*, as he calls it. To bisociate means to associate an idea to two different *matrices*, or mental patterns, normally not connected. When we expect something but something else happens, we react by laughing (to jokes), crying (when we are desperate or, on the contrary, extremely happy), or standing in awe (when we experience a ‘eureka’ moment). In any case, it happens when we find out new connections in our knowledge. Physically, it might be compared to the creation of many new synapses between our neurons. He was the first author I found who associated humour directly with knowledge and broke off the traditionally disparaging, debasing view that philosophers usually had. In effect, they used to assign it to the sphere of aesthetics, rather than knowledge, and, as it was considered in-

variably ugly, its destiny was to be simply named and forgotten without any in-depth analysis on its nature.

Koestler uses a famous joke to illustrate a union of matrices:

Chamfort tells a story of a Marquis at the court of Louis XIV who, on entering his wife's boudoir and finding her in the arms of a Bishop, walked calmly to the window and went through the motions of blessing the people in the street.

"What are you doing?" cried the anguished wife.

"Monseigneur is performing my functions", replied the Marquis, "so I am performing his". (1975, 33)

Here we would expect a plausible outburst of rage on the part of the betrayed husband. Instead, he connects two behaviours in a new way. Of course, a joke can be read in many ways but conceiving it as a production of new knowledge through an unexpected connection (the improbable, but possible, role exchange) sheds new light on the role of these constructs in social life.

The second is Peter L. Berger, an Austrian sociologist naturalized American. Famous for his thesis that reality is a form of consciousness (also the title of a book of his), he produced towards the end of the 1990s an interesting study on laughter, *Redeeming Laughter* (Berger 1997), in which he rescued two concepts earlier formulated by the Austrian sociologist Alfred Schütz: "paramount reality" (1945, 533) and "finite provinces of meaning" (551). The first is what everybody considers the conventional reading of reality, the set of accepted norms. The second are, on the other hand, all other possible readings and interpretations that might challenge taken-for-granted conventions. The first is soothing, reassuring, allowing for a tranquil flowing of everyday lives. The second are mostly subversive, rich in taboos and permanently revolutionary, not exactly the best environment where to live everyday routines. Therefore, he contends, there is a constant fight between the two, with the paramount reality always defending its privileged status against the aggression of other possible realities. As we all experience in our lives, conventions cannot suppress the emergence of other ideas. Our praxis has then created this sort of 'bubbles', revolutionary sandboxes opened and closed by conventional signs in which we can test these possibilities. This is the case of jokes (where taboos can be expressed), but also of theatre, film and fiction (where we can create entirely fictional worlds), of dreams, mystic ecstasies, and so on. We experience these finite provinces of meaning even many times a day, and this is not at all considered exceptional or schizophrenic but an integral part of our lives. It is in this very way that we can test ideas before buying them, and integrate them in a new paramount reality, different from the one we had before. It goes without saying that humour is the cheapest, most common and most sought-after way to experience these realities and, exactly for this reason, then again the preferred form of exploration and knowledge.

The third is Robert R. Provine. An American psychologist and neuroscientist who has studied laughter in social interaction for decades, he has drawn his own, original conclusions about its nature and functions. He thinks that laughter and smile are fundamentally social communication markers, but his most remarkable finding lies in my opinion in what he says about tickling. Though apparently an unimportant phenomenon, it is nonetheless revealing in that it demonstrates that laughing is not always (at least, not exclusively) linked to humour, and serves to prove that laughter is a social regulator, not differently from what Ceccarelli said about chimpanzees. We laugh when we are tickled, but only when the tickling comes from an accepted member of our circles. We do not accept tickling from strangers – as we do not accept sweets – because it represents a threat, rather than a pleasure. The conclusive proof seems to come from the self-tickling experience: normally, it does not work, and therefore we recognize that the stimulus comes from us and not from others. As a consequence, he postulates a sort of ‘nonself detector’ that allows us to recognize when the stimulus comes from the outside, this way describing laughter as a marker associated with a positive relationship with others.

A theoretical remark on humour and laughter by Ceccarelli can finally lead to the next stage, about the translation of a humorous idea into practical action. Just as animals do, he says, we have some innate mechanisms of reaction to stimuli, and react even when we are not in the presence of a *live* stimulus but only a symbol of it, a decoy:

And when we talk of an Innate Unleashing Mechanism [such as laughter], we talk about the possibility of deceit through decoys. Furthermore, the human being is a “talking animal” and human language has the characteristic, empirically detectable, of being “reified”: a tendency exists, highlighted many a time, in human beings so that it appears natural, at times incoercible, that they treat words, or better symbols in general, as they were “things” ... For this reason, we can logically derive that decoys capable of triggering the IUM concerning the hierarchical order of human individuals, can also be symbols, i.e., “words”, “verbal constructions” such as, for example, communism and capitalism. (Ceccarelli 1988, 142; my translation)

### *3. Unsettling taken-for-granted worlds*

We have seen that one of the tasks that is conventionally assigned to humour is that of exploring alternative realities and bringing them to life in the designated test areas of the finite provinces of meaning. If these possibilities of reality are any good, it is up to the public to tell and signal through the conventional sign of laughter. Telling good jokes is a serious matter, but laughing, paradoxically, is what marks the approbation of these ideas and not their dismissal.

Let us consider the jester, a figure omnipresent in the history of laughter. The court buffoon has always been the only one allowed to treat badly a divinely chosen king. But this had its advantages for the king himself: in a

court where he was often lied to for political and personal reasons, the jester was the only one who could tell him the blunt truth. It was then far more than a nostalgic remnant of time bygone; it was a key political function. It does not come as a surprise that the king who suppressed this office forever was the most autocratic king of all, Louis XIV of France. One who not only could not stand a joke, but also thought he was never wrong.

Jesters were the representatives of an authentic comic tradition: confined in an apparently uncomfortable role, they were able to tell the truth. In this case, again we can find a parallel with what Vivian Mercier said of the Irish: never in power, but ever mocking power. Maybe the poverty that marked so much of the history of Ireland, and the submission to its stronger neighbour, contributed to forge their national character as much as their pagan tradition of grotesque humour. This is quite difficult to demonstrate but also quite easy to tell, since all ethnic groups who suffered for long – I think of the Jews – have developed original means to survive in the most terrible situations, and a strong dose of humour was certainly not the weakest arrow in their quiver.

We are not used to treating jesters as central in literature, mostly because their performances were mainly oral and not usually recorded for posterity. However, they existed and certainly influenced other authors and writers of their times. Luckily, modern jesters today write, to leave at least a hint in written words of what the power of words combined to action is. One of them even managed, for the first time in history, to be recognized as a canonical author: Dario Fo, the Italian playwright who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1997 on the grounds that he “emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden”. If we scroll the full speech introducing the Prize motivation, it is interesting to read at the end an unexpected Irish connection made by the Swedish Academy:

Looking backwards in time from Dario Fo, the ninety-fourth laureate for literature, to earlier writers given the award, it is tempting to arrest oneself at George Bernard Shaw, winner of the Prize seventy years ago. On that occasion the Swedish Academy emphasised the laureate’s idealism, humanity, and stimulating satire. The two writers are no doubt different from each other, but the same evaluative words can be applied to Dario Fo. (Frängsmyr 1998)

So “satire” and “scourging humour” have been finally recognized even by the solemnest academics as central in the fight for the “dignity of the downtrodden”, thus sanctioning the strong link between humour and society, intended as a group of actual individuals and not just an idealized readership. The same academics recognize at the beginning of the motivation document that “To be a jester is, and always has been, a serious matter” (*ibidem*).

As a self-appointed jester of the Republic, O’Nolan employed his full equipment of techniques. The first and simplest was the unsettling of the taken for granted relationships between words and things. O’Nolan liked this trick, which

would go from simple bad puns to very elaborate situation comedies. In the Keats & Chapman series, the pun was central, as in the feat where the two writers go to France to stage Molière, Keats not agreeing with Chapman's choices, though. Chapman's scenery had to be freighted by barge on the Seine, but an accident occurred and all his stuff sank in the river. Keats's dry punch line on this was: "For once I admire your *mise en Seine*" (O'Brien 2005 [1976], 21). Other sketches see the two poets-turned-comedians, together or individually, in bizarre situations like this, combining more than one pun and non-sequitur references:

A Guinness.

Of course there is no drink [that] can compare with a bottle of stout. It is *sui guinnessis*. Keats once called a cab and was disgusted to find the beautiful upholstery ruined with milk spilt by some previous reveller who had been going home with it. Instead of crying over the spilt milk, Keats said to the cabman: "What's this? A cabri-au-lait?". (O'Brien 2005, 12)

Or this, imitating the Irish pronunciation of some words and opening an article in a fictional reprise of earlier conversations:

The language problem again – I *am* sorry, but we must, you know. First, pronunciation; this is very important. ... Dublin people are perhaps the worst offenders in this respect. One thinks immediately of the words: "Cow", "Man", "Office", "Foreign", "It", "This", "Carry", "Dog", readers can finish the list (themselves). You know how they come out: "Kehaouw", "Mhaaanh", "Uffuss", "Phurren", "Ihh", "Dis", "Korry", "Dawg"... It is simply not good enough, that is all. The language will never progress if we make no effort to speak it properly. (O'Nolan 2000, 95)

However, this apparently innocent joking was just one layer of his multilevel game. He was not afraid of shifting to attacking politicians or other established figures, though at the same time he included play on words, especially on spellings, repetitions typical of oral storytelling, irony and even comic transliterations from the German (pronounced the Irish way, of course):

I, who have for so many centuries presided personally over the destinies of the very reverend the people of Ireland, cannot and will not pretend to be unmoved by the great news which from the grand mother country of Britain has just come to hand, bringing words of cheer and encouragement and abundant promise of good things in the daze to come to all good men who in this green clime dwell. There has been, it appears, there has been formed and established within the ranks of the Mother of Imperial Par (laments!), Co. Westminster, a little enclave, a few Jems set in that silver See, a small but select coterie, whose O'Vowed object it is, once and for all from the chain of the rt hon. the O'Pessor to emancip8 the gallant and indomitable company of the Royal Gaels, Southern Irish Divn. There has been set on Foote (Co. Dingle) a distinguished club, gathering within the esoteric circle of its élite all that is brightest and best in the British political harena, and holding always

in the most genuine O'Steam those pitiful nomadic hordes of displaced personnel which, Vorlach of Faub-Badenheim, we do not deem unfitting to denominate as the Irish, traditional and time-honoured fusiliers! (Some of them are still doing it – the others are marking it). (*Ibidem*, 144-145)

Engaging in such an activity – we agree with the Swedish Academy – means voicing the ideas and the whole cultural world of the many towards, and sometimes against, the established culture of the few, i.e., of the elites in command. This was the role O'Nolan took for his personas, but we could say also for himself: Carol Taaffe, in her *Ireland Through the Looking Glass. Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate*, remarks that “his inconsistency not only reflects the plain fact that his was not really a single (if a singular) voice, it also betrays Myles's position, as Anthony Cronin saw it, as the licensed jester of the Dublin intelligentsia” (1990, 127).

This is only partly true, as Taaffe herself admits elsewhere. O'Nolan was certainly the scourge of Dublin, and Irish, *intelligentsia*, but also sought to alternate hefty, Latin-stuffed pieces with other popular themes such as *The Brother* or the *Plain People of Ireland* series. And, *in se*, all articles included the high and the low, as for example the many instances in which he explicitly used the (stet) and other marks indicating that a likely mistake is indeed correct because it is a play on words or an intended, usually bad, pun: “That mush (stet) at least is certain”, “demi-cracies (stet)” (O'Nolan 2000, 91), “The Abbey Theatre is a case in paint. (Yes – *paint!*)” (*ibidem*, 130) and “the Crok philosopher (stet)” (*ibidem*, 167). He even resorted to an asterisk on the title of a piece: “\* An asterisk at the title of an article means, and will henceforth mean, that the article is absolutely true and that any incredible statement in it has been, where possible, verified” (O'Nolan 1989, 75).

This idea of him as part of the intelligentsia but also holding a foot in plain people's doors, connects to another ground-breaking concept introduced by Raymond Williams in his seminal work, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1982 [1958]), reaffirmed by Terry Eagleton in *The Idea of Culture* (2000). It is the concept of a *culture in common*, stressing the importance of negotiation between the culture of the elites, the exclusive culture including regulations and canons originating in the middle classes, and the culture of the masses, the inclusive culture of the people passed on through the generations and including traditions, superstitions, songs and the like.

One of the focal points in the building of a culture – and then of a nation – is that culture is a convention in which elements are chosen rather than received, acritically and in bulk, from a mythical golden age in the past when they were all created once and for all. But who chooses them? Of course it is the elites, who always tended to exclude the products of popular literature and culture. But the people, as Bakhtin showed in his study on popular culture (1984), never passively accepted this and always fought back to keep

their traditions and at times also to speak up against rulers, as was the case of the Carnival period in the European Middle Ages. In this short yearly festive period before Lent and Easter, humour, subversion and the culture of the people took temporarily the power to mimic, or to test, what the world could be like if other ideas, other sets of values were *really* ruling. A proper finite province of meaning, in the very sense Alfred Schütz intended for these experiments in alternative realities.

Humour is certainly not the only means of negotiating between the culture of the elites and that of the masses; but it is one of the most powerful ones, since, as we have seen, it shares with art and science a fundamental mechanism of discovery and creation in an accepted testing environment. Maybe it does not actually work as Koestler postulates – neuroscientists are today working intensely on this, so we can expect more insights in the future – but we can be positive enough that the basic procedure is that of the connection between two (or even more) matrices or patterns not previously associated. This would include the notion of incongruity, as eighteenth century philosophers claimed, because there is no previous relation between the newly associated domains.

Afterwards, the idea that at first struck one as incongruous begins to work as actual possibility and, if the new association produces fruitful and viable inferences, what seemed laughable now becomes possible and eventually real. This would also explain why jokes, sketches and in general all humorous performances work best only the first time we see or hear them, and why their effect wanes steadily with exposure: they are no longer new, but appropriated ideas already connected in our patterns, therefore not surprising and certainly not inspiring any new knowledge. Comic figures like Brian O’Nolan, who managed to engage their audiences for a long time with a humour always different but always inspiring, faced a task more difficult than it looked. The use of many personas was certainly part of the strategy he decided to employ so as not to lose the grip on his public’s hearts. Taaffe again, speaking of *The Third Policeman*, notes that “The language of such times [the war years] has a certain affinity with nonsense, creating an alternative reality (however improbable) that can only be sustained on its own terms” (Taaffe 2008, 87).

This did not prevent him from making reference to real threats such as the atomic bomb, and to imagine comic situations in a tragically real contemporary setting. Just after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in 1945, the usual Keats & Chapman go to America and take their residence in a nuclear test area without knowing it. While Chapman is away on errands, Keats is hit by a prototype bomb that selectively blows people’s backs off, leaving them alive and with all organs in view and functioning. Chapman finds his friend in this condition and provides him with a cardboard back. But there is a surprise:



Morning revealed another wonder. All the human backs blown off by the bomb were to be seen piled in a heap in a nearby field. Keats, still cursing loudly and vowing vengeance on the bombers, insisted on stumbling in among the bleeding backs, surveying them carefully. Chapman took exception to the poet's language.

"You mustn't talk like that," he remonstrated. "This is an outrage, but it is not for human agents to exact retribution. Vengeance is not for mortals. Please come away from this ghoulish repository of flesh..."

"I'm going to get my own back," Keats said savagely, turning over nearby flesh-es. (Quoted in O'Brien 2003, 174-175)

Along with George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce can be cited as well as an example of a comic figure who, through satire, stimulated the debate for the building of a culture. As Niall Sheridan recalled in *Myles. Portraits of Brian O'Nolan* (O'Keeffe 1973, 32), Joyce himself said that most critics failed to appreciate his *Ulysses* for what it really was, a "funny book" (*ibidem*, 49). Funny it was indeed, so profoundly funny that it unsettled many conventional views on literature, society, and maybe the very mindset of many. Brian O'Nolan loved the master for this reason, as John McCourt remarks in "Myles na gCopaleen. A portrait of the artist as a Joyce scholar": "What most appealed to O'Nolan was, very simply, Joyce's humour and his 'almost supernatural skill in conveying Dublin dialogue'. However, like many other supporters, he remained disenchanted with much of the later part of *Ulysses* and with all of *Finnegans Wake*" (McCourt 2014, 112).

And he also went so far as to write in 1962 to the *Irish Times*, as Flann O'Brien, to complain about the unreadability of the latter book by the common reader, and to let other readers know that he himself had bought a copy and "given it away within a fortnight" (cited in *ibidem*). On top of that, he surely envied his fame and had different ideas on novel writing, while the American academia who jumped in the wake probably irritated him, because he might have felt that foreigners were appropriating a national glory. Nonetheless, the Great Exile remained a touchstone for Irish writers and for him in particular:

He admired the Joyce who challenged the stultifying political and religious status quo in Ireland, whose writings engaged with and put it up to, "the Plain People of Ireland", of whom, in many ways, Myles always felt he was a member. ...

For all his annoyance and perhaps envy at all the attention Joyce was receiving, O'Nolan greatly identified with the older writer's use of humour and parody which was used with such great effect to undermine Irish pieties. (*Ibidem*, 122-123)

Kiberd summarized this complex relationship with a catchy formula:

The problem of language confronting an Irish author in English had not changed all that greatly since the time of Joyce. It might be summed up in the fact that all of O'Brien debunking of Joyce were parodies of a parody, since there was no definitively Joycean style. (2000, 507-508)

However, as already mentioned, comic figures build and do not destroy. If a comic debunks and shatters something to pieces, it is always with a purpose. It can vary from one case to another, but in general, their purpose is to build a common framework with the audience, in which to play with language and culture and to explore, safely, possibilities of reality. That is, a culture in common.

#### *4. Building a culture in common*

It is universally acknowledged that a single man cannot be many a man. Carol Taaffe says of O’Nolan that his “humour spiralled from the erudite and the ordinary, scolding the Plain People of Ireland while very much remaining a part of their world. There is not much else like it” (Taaffe 2008, 207).

Brian O’Nolan is difficult to treat critically for various reasons, namely, the many pen names he adopted in his life as a journalist and writer. Even if from the very start some critics called him by his real name (in the several variants, Brian Nolan, Brian O’Nolan, Brian Ó Nualláin) there have always also been those who preferred to relate to one or the other of his celebrity personas, Flann O’Brien or Myles na gCopaleen / na Gopaleen). The ambiguity was created by the author himself, to be sure, and he was almost delighted that many failed to recognize him as the man behind Myles or Flann. But once we are certain that the author is dead – and we are – there is no point in keeping up this distinction. In recent years, a number of studies have been published mixing contents in which Brian O’Nolan was recognized as such, with titles featuring his most famous pen names of Myles and Flann to attract attention (Taaffe 2008; Borg, Fagan, Huber 2014). Of course, there are understandable publishers’ reasons, but it is time for literary criticism to make a step further and speak of Brian O’Nolan, the author.

This is particularly important in my view since, as the first section on the theories of humour attempted to point out, comic figures function as essential social connectors, invested with key responsibilities in maintaining society’s cohesion. Using different pen names is only part of the strategy and the reason for it, given the premises, is quite clear: the humorist wants to create multiple identities to survive as long as possible and acquire a stable status in society. Normally, comic figures are not allowed this – except jesters, although at the same time they were hated for their privileges – but O’Nolan felt that modern mass communications society could now provide comic figures at a distance from the centre of attention from where to continue provoking conventions and testing alternative realities.

The context was favourable: the civil war in Ireland ended formally in 1922, when he was eleven, and then the new constitution and the country’s neutrality in the Second World War kept a relative peace at home. His civil service employment secured a fixed income, a thing not to underestimate

in those years, so he had his back covered. He started writing as a journalist and it was a beginning full of great expectations, but his first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, published in 1939, was not a success in terms of sales. The second, *The Third Policeman*, was bluntly rejected by the publisher and literally put in a drawer for the rest of his life. He still had his column, which, amidst highs and lows, he kept for twenty-five years until the very day of his death, on 1 April 1966. He signed his novels as Flann O'Brien and his most famous column as Myles na Gopaleen, neither of them his real name, not counting the many other pseudonyms he used for other columns in national newspapers. But of course he was behind these writings (vouchsafing also what Niall Montgomery ghost-wrote for him, cf. Taaffe 2008), and the framework was one and only.

As already mentioned, the only strategy possible for anyone engaging in the difficult craft of making people laugh through humour, is not to aggress (as Bergson would say) but to show them that the world is more than the current pattern of paramount reality, and that new ideas coming to the surface during the designated appearances of the finite provinces of meaning could change it. Such was Brian O'Nolan's strategy: taken together, all columns offer themselves to us at first sight as a bunch of funny sketches. At a closer look, some of them are not at all so; on the contrary, they are pretty rough in tone, thought-provoking, revolutionary. At the beginning of 1953, Myles attacked Andrew Clarkin, mayor of Dublin, about his shop's broken clock (he called the article series ACCISS, for Andy Clarkin's Clock Is Still Stopped), and one year later resumed the point to further explore his mission as a writer:

I KEEP evading the point. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, as a tyrant once said. I confess that I have been myself too remiss and facetious in the past. Jokes are jokes, and they are necessary —just like occasional hysteria in women. But it is wrong for even a professional comic to turn away from contemporary decomposition of civilization and society.

The column I run here — it runs me, to some extent— is the best in the whole world. I mutilate grammar to say that I intend to improve the best by making it better. Ultimately it may be our simple boast that the stuff is good. In old age, a senile blush may welcome the assurance of a young caller that it is "fair." We won't go into the value of the compliment where the word "bad" is mentioned.

\* \* \*

We are going to be more serious in the future. Do you think, reader, it is infantile —this belated resolution to change the world? What else is there left to change? (If that slurred sound I half-heard was the word "ME," I will have the blood of the speaker!). (O'Nolan 1964)

Not the funniest, I agree. But the truest, maybe. After 14 years of mostly entertaining columns, this one hit serious problems and revealed the writer's

propositions. Its point of departure is a trifling one (the broken clock), but what it says on its way is dangerous enough: Brian O’Nolan (and not his personas) was indeed forced to retire from the civil service in 1953, curiously immediately after the ACCISS affair. This series criticized things, people, customs, even alliances (with the US), trying to maintain a playful tone *en passant*. Of course, the risk was of not being funny, but the Plain People had to get the chance to see a possible, alternative future.

This to me is a confirmation of Brian O’Nolan’s idea of being a writer: he was serving his country, both with his daytime job as a civil servant and in the papers as a ‘hackney journalist’ – as he dubbed his Myles persona. Giving readers hints for reflection was and still is the most dangerous thing to do in a very controlled country – and Ireland was one, if we are not to pretend that the reference to a tyrant was simply casual, given his long-running antipathy for the party system. In this “Brother” incipit, O’Nolan describes how the Plain People generally saw politics at the time of De Valera (whom he dubbed “Dev”), i.e., as a shady environment where everything important is discussed in guilty nightly meetings. The People, now like then, seem to know it instinctively and to have mixed feelings of complaint and admiration:

The brother is thinkin of goin up.

*Going up what?*

The brother is thinkin of standin.

*Standing what? Drinks?*

The brother is thinkin of having a go at the big parties.

*Do you mean that your relative is considering offering himself as a candidate when a general election becomes due by reason of constitutional requirement?*

The brother is thinkin of goin up at the elections.

*I see.*

Of course it’s not the brother himself that is all mad for this game. He’s been pushed do you understand me. Certain influential parties is behind him. They’re night and mornin’ callin’ to the digs and colloquin with the brother inside in the back-room with the brother giving orders for tea to be made at wan in the mornin’. Any amount of fat oul’ fellas with the belly well out in front, substantial cattle-men be the look of them. No shortage of the ready there. (O’Nolan 1993, 58)

Being a literary humourist, as we have seen, forces the author to search for new material outside the proper domain of literature to establish unexpected connections and elicit laughter. As a matter of fact, many critics correctly underlined O’Nolan’s interest in science, pataphysics, philosophy, religion, international relations and politics. The reason for this wide-ranging esprit, given our premises, becomes quite obvious in the light of the fact that keeping a strict ‘literary’ profile would have exhausted his creative force very soon, while cross-domain expansions and connections allowed for an otherwise unreachable creativity and possibility for humour. This is why critics

have always had problems in categorizing Brian O'Nolan. Strictly speaking, he might be included both in Modernism and Post-Modernism, as Keith Hopper argued in his *Flann O'Brien. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (1995) and in his essay on "John Duffy's Brother":

It seems to me that Flann O'Brien's particular brand of post-modernism needs to be understood in two interrelated contexts: in an aesthetic domain (a challenge to the conceits of high modernism); and in an ethical domain (a resistance to the nativist and Catholic hegemony of post-colonial Ireland). (Hopper 2014, 27)

Marion Quirici, in the same collection with a piece on the use of frame device in O'Nolan's short fiction, also notes that he possesses some of the qualities normally assigned to post-modernism:

the only thing being exposed here [in "Two in One"] is the construction of the story itself: the naked story does not hide the conventions of its own manufacturing ...

As his puns and purposeful misspellings in "*Cruiskeen Lawn*" attest, the failure of language can give rise to fresh meanings and can be a means of subverting the "mortified language" of clichés. (O'Nolan 1993, 227)

If the limitations of language can be exploited to creative ends, so can the limitations of the frame. (Quirici 2014, 49-50)

Both of these sound convincing, but I prefer to widen the scope in order to include the later novels, which are more conventional and less experimental as regards points of view, reliability of the narrator and, yes, humour as a destructive force; and to include the whole of his journalistic production otherwise neglected, a mass of more than two million words, outnumbering by far the books he wrote. It is not just a question of quantity, it is the quality of these writings that places them in the (again, very Irish) tradition of life writing, even if of fictional lives. In a sense, the very telling of invented life episodes involving Myles and many other characters makes this a long narrative, a story fragmented just like real life and collected to make up a new novel deserving to be included in his corpus. Ruben Borg, Paul Fagan and Werner Huber, editors of the most recent volume on the author, *Flann O'Brien. Contesting Legacies* (2014), in the "Introduction" to the volume put it in an interrogative way:

What if, rather than the ruination of his immense talent in subservience to an inferior medium, the "*Cruiskeen Lawn*" columns represent O'Nolan's great modernist magnum opus in that most Benjaminian site of modernity, the newspaper? What if, rather than a minor, if funny, bald parody of *Peig* and *An t-Oileánach*, Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* deserves acknowledgement for the subtlety of

its nuanced cultural critiques, the innovation of its compositional strategies and the fullness of its achievement beside Flann O'Brien's more established novels? What if long-standing views of O'Nolan's position on the spectrum from parochial conservatism to international experimentalism are complicated by the rich expanses of largely uncollected experimental Gaelic texts, from the anarchic tales and columns that he contributed to Eamon de Valera's *Irish Press* to the predominantly Gaelic first years of "Cruiskeen Lawn"? (*Ibidem*, 5)

Indeed, this is not a new idea. Stephen Young had already supported it in his essay "Fact/Fiction: 'Cruiskeen Lawn', 1945-46". With respect to the journalistic period of O'Nolan, he comments: "I think this enormous work should be recognised as a new kind of satire, perhaps even as a new kind of novel" (Young 1997, 118). John Wyse Jackson, too, who edited two collections of Brian O'Nolan's articles (*Myles before Myles*, 1988, and *At War*, 1999), recalls that he "began to think of 'Cruiskeen Lawn' as some unidentified subspecies of the fiction family, a random, episodic, wildly innocent rough beast of a 'novel', in which the novel form itself has been stretched to screaming point and beyond" (O'Brien 2003, 11).

If readers and critics had noticed this unity of intents in Brian O'Nolan's lifetime, it would have been dangerous for him. Because, as he wrote in 1964 (as Myles) in a famous autobiographical piece, being credited with fixed attitudes is the worst danger for a writer, and even more so for a humourist:

Apart from a thorough education of the widest kind, a contender in this field [literature] must have an equable yet versatile temperament, and the compartmentation of his personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking, fixed attitudes, irreversible techniques of expression. No author should write under his own name nor under one permanent pen-name; a male writer should include in his impostures a female pen-name, and possibly vice versa. (Cited in Cronin 1990, 247; originally in O'Nolan 1964)

I believe that we can certainly consider "*Cruiskeen Lawn*" as an integral part of Brian O'Nolan's opus. The reasons put forward by O'Nolan's critics are certainly valuable but, formally, I reckon that Bakhtin's and Eco's definitions of novel, postmodernity and the comic are what make for a definitive classification of O'Nolan's journalism in the category of the novel.

Bakhtin, in his essay on epic and the novel, identifies the foundational features of the novel itself:

I find three basic characteristics that fundamentally distinguish the novel in principle from other genres: 1) its stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-linguaged consciousness realized in the novel; 2) the radical change it effects in the temporal coordinates of the literary image; 3) the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely, the zone of

maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its open-endedness. (Bakhtin 1981, 11)

They almost seem taken straight out of a case study on O'Nolan. They are striking to the point of needing no additions, so well do they depict our journalist's condition.

Eco, on the other hand, in his essay on "The comic and the rule", observes that, contrary to the common belief that comedy is linked only to contemporaneity while tragedy is universal and a-temporal, the real difference is that the moral universe in a comedy is implicitly shared between the author and the audience, and there is no need to state it. Only when the author is unobtrusive can the spectator actively collaborate in the construction of new meaning. On the other hand, a 'serious' work of art such as a tragedy, normally explicitly contains its moral universe of reference: in this case, the author is not in search of collaboration but imposes his world view on the audience, and exactly for this reason viewers cannot bisociate but only associate the elements proposed to their corresponding places in the framework of reference. Humour generates only when we actively do something, only when we create *our* new references, *our* new bisociations (Eco 2014, 269 ff.).

O'Nolan makes wide use of traditional storytelling techniques as he tries to engage his audience by constantly reclaiming attention, prompting responses, recovering the story's thread (for those who got distracted or were absent), or challenging the belief of his readers/listeners with openings like the opening epigraph of *At Swim-Two-Birds*: "All the characters represented in this book, / including the first person singular, / are entirely fictitious and bear no relation / to any person living or dead" (O'Brien 2001, 7).

Maybe these very techniques are what suggested his possible belonging to an avant-garde postmodernism, because of their jumping in and out of the literary conventions. He actually starts sometimes as if he were interrupting something else he was doing, and finishes to converse with an imaginary audience, mimicking real-life storytelling environments (and creating, again, another finite province of meaning):

Dog bites man. O.K., we know that ain't news, no good newspaper man would try to make a story out of that. But man bites hot-dog, is that news? Man chases cat, is that news? Well-known dog elected to Board of Bank of Ireland, is that news? Puce-faced usurer fights ferret, how about that? If over-zealous Customs men at Dundalk insist on searching the bags under your eyes, is that news? If ebullient zestful Myles na gCopaleen quips in Dublin's swish uptown Shelbourne Hotel that the Americans and Japs are "Pacifists", is that news? JOCKEY RIDES STRAIGHT RACE AND DOES HIS BEST TO WIN! Would ace-reporter Clark Gable tear out the front page for that and hold everything for a re-plate?

The word "news" is composed of the initials of north, east, west, and south – news from all quarters, see, STOP THAT!

*The Plain People of Ireland: What?*  
*Myself: Biting your nails.*  
*The Plain People of Ireland: Sorry.* (O'Brien 2003, 55-56)

As Ceccarelli said, treating words like things is a natural human activity and is what comic figures do most of the time. What we call pun, or play on words, or satire, or irony, draw on the basic mechanism of unlocking words from their encrusted meaning and placing them in completely different settings and situations, digging their literal meanings, playing with sounds and spellings: this is the radical unsettling that opens up the doors of the finite provinces of meaning, where we can eventually do whatever we want without worrying too much about the consequences. Calling Brian O'Nolan a conspirator, then, to me is awarding him the role of captain player, the one who sets the rules by breaking the rules of paramount reality, so that others can play at reorganizing them. The building of a culture in common owes much to humour for the possibilities it creates, and we must only thank comic figures like Brian O'Nolan who mastered language and literature for the widest public to engage in this foundational social activity.

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# The Uncanny Mother in Edna O'Brien's “Cords”, “A Rose in the Heart” and “Sister Imelda”

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*Abstract:*

This essay examines the issue of a dual nature of mother and mother-daughter relationship in Edna O'Brien's “Cords” (1968), “A Rose in the Heart” (1978) and “Sister Imelda” (1981). O'Brien's mother-daughter scenario uncovers a distressing picture of a dilemma between mother and daughter concerning intimacy and separation or oneness and individuation. The ‘phantomic’ presence of a mother/maternal figure in three stories serves as, paradoxically, a source of both empowerment and disempowerment resulting from women's role of subservience under patriarchy. As identified by Heather Ingman or Helen Thompson, an approach to evaluating women's psychological developmental process may be useful in this respect to illuminate such problematic mother-daughter complex in a motif presented with O'Brien's typical negative narrative of domestic romance. This familiar yet alien, the Freudian uncanny, metaphoric mother appears powerless yet monstrous to the daughter who has attempted every effort to bury alive the ghosts in the past memories intertwined with this mother in her struggle towards individuation. The dual conflicting image of a loving and devouring mother is perhaps associated with an inherent culture of women's abjection and individuation under patriarchy in western society.

*Keywords:* Abjection, Devouring mother, Edna O'Brien, Mother and daughter, Uncanny

## *1. Introduction*

Edna O'Brien's mother-daughter narrative, like many of twentieth-century Irish women's writings dealing with this theme, focuses on the apparent ambivalence of the bond between women as an outcome of specific character-

istics of the contemporary Irish domestic context. Heather Ingman has identified Julia Kristeva's concept of a preoedipal identification involving "maternal abjection", as a potentially useful theoretical framework against which to seek to understand the generally negative representations of mother-daughter stories produced by modern Irish women writers (Ingman 2007, 69). This mother-daughter motif may also be considered against the identification by André Green of what he termed the "dead mother complex", the one linked to a traumatic experience of an emotionally distant (or, dead, in Green's term) mother in childhood (Thompson 2010, 33). O'Brien illustrates a powerful and also terrible mother figure in these three stories – "Cords" (1968), "A Rose in the Heart" (1978) and "Sister Imelda" (1981), in which a *ghost* mother is omnipresent throughout the whole plot<sup>1</sup>. Each of these three stories centres around the daughter's friction with the mother which, for one or other reason, is triggered by an ambivalence towards her emotional dependence upon and separation from the mother. O'Brien's mother in these stories is an uncanny figure, a ghostly reminder whose presence or reappearance triggers buried memories of a dismal past<sup>2</sup>. O'Brien seems to have a preference for themes which explore in a tragic way the impact of a daughter's separation and alienation from her mother, which demonstrate the incapacity of the daughter to escape definitively from an internal prison created by her past, symbolised by the omnipotent mother who is, in some way, always with and within her.

Helen Thompson has pointed out Edna O'Brien's intent to expose the trauma and psychological damage caused to young women by the Catholic Church's socialisation process of young women in the 1950s (Thompson 2010, 22). O'Brien describes in a persistent way the impact of compulsory motherhood in a context in which the Catholic iconography of the Virgin Mary, the nationalist emblem of Mother Ireland, and the Constitution of the state all intertwine to make motherhood in Ireland a sacred domain for women (*ibidem*, 23). This 'sacred space' for women is usually a repressed and depressed one in O'Brien's stories. Despite the scarcity of love in her stories, O'Brien insisted in one interview that her major concern is with loss as much as with love in her stories: "[l]oss is every child's theme, because by necessity the child loses its mother and its bearings. And writers, however, mature and wise and eminent, are children at heart. So my central theme is loss – loss of love, loss of self, loss of God" (O'Brien 1984a, 38). Indeed, O'Brien admitted that being a writer-in-(self-)exile has helped her psychologically distance herself to the degree neces-

<sup>1</sup> The publication date is the original date for each individual story to be released to the public. "Cords", "A Rose in the Heart" and "Sister Imelda" first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1968, 1978 and 1981.

<sup>2</sup> "The uncanny", *Das Unheimliche* "the opposite of what is familiar" in German, here refers to a Freudian concept which denotes something can be both familiar yet alien, leading to a feeling of such being uncomfortably strange or even terrifying.

sary to be able to write about this preoccupying theme (Eckley 1974, 93-94). A further preoccupation of O'Brien seems to be the residual guilt and shame which stems from the family legacy. For the context and the effect of which, O'Brien's narrative is in effect, according to Balzano, a neuro-narrative in which "the inner landscapes of the brain reflect the narrator's contemporary locus of self-discovery" (2006, 94). O'Brien's scenario reveals the daughter's revulsion and/or resistance towards the mother in an attempt to distance herself from a symbol which signifies conformity and powerlessness. The haunting omniscience of a "demon mother" consumes the essence of the woman/daughter's life; and in effect, simply the presence or even the recollection of this mother reopens an inner wound again and again (Thompson 2010, 22). The woman/daughter is trapped inside her own prison constructed by a guilt and shame incubated in a culture in which she, and also O'Brien herself, was born and bred. Invariably O'Brien's stories tend to depict human relationships entangled in a web of patriarchal doctrines reinforced and endorsed by Catholicism in Ireland. An ambivalence in women's identification process emerges and re-emerges throughout O'Brien's stories, and this ambivalence is itself a likely block to development of a fully-fledged female agency. This essay will concentrate in particular on the ambivalent aspects of the maternal presence in the three Edna O'Brien stories – "Cords", "A Rose in the Heart", "Sister Imelda" – from the perspective the impact which a culturally and socially constructed abjection has upon the process of women's identification and individuality.

## 2. *A thorny rose in the heart*

A haunting-mother-abjection in particular is evident in O'Brien's "A Rose in the Heart"<sup>3</sup>. Set in the first half of the twentieth century, this novella narrates a desperate mother-daughter symbiosis represented in a typical O'Brien's microcosm of an old, backward and isolated Irish rural community. O'Brien's women, as those under patriarchy described by Kristeva, tend to build their sense of identity in part around a sense of disgust, abjection, towards femininity. The abjection of mother is, according to Kristeva, inherent in western culture<sup>4</sup>. At a personal level abjection is, as argued by Kristeva in

<sup>3</sup> This story, later titled "A Rose in the Heart of New York", was collected in *Mrs. Reinhardt* (1978), *A Rose in the Heart of New York* (1979), *A Fanatic Heart* (1984) and the most recent short story collection *The Love Object* (2013), which bears the same name as the 1968 collection. However, it did not include the story "A Rose in the Heart".

<sup>4</sup> Another key proponent of French feminism, Luce Irigaray, also observes and argues that western culture is based on the inevitable murder of the mother. Irigaray argues that in classical myths, daughters such as Antigone have to juggle between choices of identifying with the patriarchy's laws and obliterating the mother, or with the mother at the expense of exclusion and self-annihilation. See Irigaray 1991, 36-47.

*Powers of Horror* (1982), an unconscious repression of infantile impulses, a compulsion to expel those which are unclean and improper, an urge to differentiate and therefore exclude what is Not-I, the *Other*, during the process of individuation<sup>5</sup>. The abjection process is apparently more difficult for women than men due to the fact that what the female subject attempts to reject and expel is in effect part of her 'self', her femininity and sexuality. The female subject cannot abject this Other without, at some level, abjecting herself. Kristeva argues that we constitute our subjectivity in a patriarchal domain, the symbolic order, by exerting the primitive chaotic mass which is associated with the maternal as abject, as well as waste and what we consider to be unclean, useless or even harmful (Coughlan 2006, 176). O'Brien's women often feature such self-loathing and revulsion towards their sexuality which also dictates women's destiny, and consequently, women's daring to transgress the tabooed domain of sexuality is highly punitive in O'Brien's works.

The first female character, the woman/mother, in "A Rose in the Heart" illustrates some characteristics of such an abject woman. Oddly enough, two central female characters in this story, the mother and the daughter, are nameless. There is no trace of personalised identification for these women. O'Brien's heroines in some of her stories are presented with no individualised identity, perhaps mirroring a fragmented reality of female agency (or rather, lack thereof) for Irish women. The setting and background in the story "A Rose in the Heart" is a gloomy one – the cold dark December night (close to Christmastime) in a remote place in rural Ireland. It is supposed to be festive time for family reunion and celebration with warmth of lights, food and laughter, but instead it paints a picture of desolation and despair: the cold, dark rooms inside a "solemn lonesome" house, the rotting smell of apples in the "Vacant Room", and the shadow of previous two tragic deaths of children in the family (O'Brien 1984b, 375). Then the readers are taken into the dark blue room where the story begins. A woman is in excruciating labour while

<sup>5</sup> The first object a child experiences is usually the person who nurses the child, the pre-oedipal mother, whom a child needs to separate oneself from in order to step into the next stage of development through which a separate identity, termed subjectivity by Kristeva is then created. Since abjection is something that disturbs and threatens the defined boundary, identity and order, this vulnerability of the Self is forever dogged by the uncannily abjected Other. Kristeva argues this step is required to enter into the realm of the Symbolic Order (language) under the Laws of the Father. This inefficient and incomplete attempt to break completely from the primal bodily impulses associated with the maternal are argued by Kristeva as likely both to return to haunt the subject as well as to produce an abject desire to fuse with the Other. This results from a fear of dependence on the mother which threatens the subject with "dissolution and engulfment" (Ingman 2007, 69). This clumsy break from the maternal body runs a risk of falling back "under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva 1982, 13). The risk of being taken back to the pre-oedipal state throughout one's life remains perpetual as it is "under way, is never absolutely clear" (Kristeva 2000, 21).

her husband is busy cooking a goose in the kitchen. There is, however, no joy anticipating the coming of the new born from the alcoholic “paralytic” husband and the deeply distressed mother in pain (*ibidem*, 377). The vivid graphic description of a woman’s labour, her “torn flesh that was gaping and coated with blood” is in juxtaposition with a piece of cooked gooseshank her husband “was carrying and remarking on its being unappetizing” (*ibidem*, 378). It is in fact her fourth childbirth and two earlier births had ended in death of the baby. It seems for the woman that this flesh-tearing childbirth is the punishment, rather than reward she receives for her womanhood. This woman, a mother herself, is presented as an abject figure revolted both by her own sexuality and the patriarchy which controls her life. Marina Warner argues that this association of sexuality and punishment and the emphasis on women’s “torn and broken flesh” implies “the psychological obsession of the religion with sexual sin” (Warner 1976, 71). A biblical reference<sup>6</sup> is suggested through the woman’s childbirth pang and her subjugated role as a wife:

Why be a woman. Oh, cruel life; oh, merciless fate, oh, heartless man, she sobbed.... She had been prized apart, again and again, with not a word to her, not a little endearment, only rammed through and told to open up. When she married she had escaped the life of a serving girl, the possible experience of living in some grim institutions, but as time went on and the bottom drawer was emptied of its gifts, she saw that she was made to serve in an altogether other way. (O’Brien 1984b, 376)

O’Brien emphasizes the mother’s physical experience of pain and injury which, as Amanda Graham argues, is in turn experienced as “the culminating point in a history of sexual degradation” (Graham 1996, 17). The revulsion of the woman in labour is a response, perhaps, more to her own femininity and destiny than to her husband’s unsuccessfully cooked gooseshank, bits of the breast of which was torn off and looked wounded, just like “the woman [herself] upstairs, who was then tightening her heart and soul, tightening inside the array of catgut stitches, and regarding her whole life as a vast disappointment... she was a vehicle for pain and for insult” (O’Brien 1984b, 379). The mother’s own disappointment soon turns to the new-born child. Initially she refuses to give a name to this ugly child she is far from proud of. Furthermore, the woman herself, like her daughter, is never mentioned by a personal name, and the individual identity is blurry and blocked. Perhaps the mother projects onto the child, who is also a girl, a negative memory of her unhappy marriage, the painful birthing

<sup>6</sup> *Genesis* 3: 16: “Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee”. From the Jewish Virtual Library. Available at <[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bereshit-genesis-full-text](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bereshit-genesis-full-text)> (05/2017).

process as a result of an unpleasant sexual experience and her destiny as a woman (Malpezzi 1996, 356).

Later the mother changes her attitude, turning instead to idolise the child in a strange mystical way:

[The child's] very ugliness disappeared. It seemed to drink them in with its huge, contemplating, slightly hazed-over, navy eyes. They shone at whatever they saw. The mother would look in the direction of the pram and say a little prayer for it, or smile, and often at night she held the candle shielded by her hand to see the face, to say pet or tush, to say nonsense to it. It ate whatever it was given ... The food was what united them, eating off the same plate, using the same spoon, watching one another's chews, feeling the food as it went down the other's neck ... When it ate blancmange or junket, it was eating part of the lovely substance of its mother. (O'Brien 1984b, 380)

The daughter's infantile primary instincts in vision, smell and taste, especially food consumption and satisfaction of physical hunger, are closely associated with emotional ties to the mother. The daughter's starvation for the mother's emotions is presented through depictions of mother's feeding and sharing food with her, of the smell of her mother's makeup, of her mother's clothes and of her presence. Here in particular the routine of food sharing between the mother and the daughter is almost performed like a kind of mystical religious ritual. The rite of celebrating the sharing of bread and wine in Christianity commemorates the passion of Christ, offering to share his flesh and blood with those who belong to him. In this story there is an analogous passion, that of the mother's martyr-like suffering in agonising childbirth, offering her body and flesh to be burst apart for the coming of the child, and later she sacrifices to save everything for the child (eggs for breakfast, tuition fee for a boarding school, a small gift food parcel from a tight-budget home). The mother feeds and fills the child with food as well as her love, "the lovely substances" of her. The child, at one point, shows her fear of losing the mother by rejecting food from other people while her mother is away. When her mother eventually returns home, the mother and the daughter reunite by baking a cake and eating together – "she [the daughter] never tasted anything so wonderful in all her life" (*ibidem*, 384). Here the mother and the child always seem to connect through a sort of food-feeding ceremony. The child seems to immerse herself in a state of oneness with the mother, a state of chora<sup>7</sup>, in which she finds "[h]er mother's knuckles were her knuckles, her mother's veins were her veins, her mother's lap was a second heaven, her mother's forehead a copybook onto which she traced A B C D, her mother's body was a recess that she would wander inside forever

<sup>7</sup> Before any abjection process, the infant is immersed in a state which Kristeva terms chora, a "non-spatial, non-temporal receptacle of drives where being is undifferentiated" (Ingman 2007, 69).



and ever, a sepulcher growing deeper and deeper" (*ibidem*, 380). They are inseparable in a harmony of oneness.

Nevertheless, this emotional dependence on the mother, in Kristeva's theory, is somehow also damaging for the daughter by blocking her progress towards individuation. The daughter has no friends and she does not need any because her cup is full. Her mother is "the cup", the holy grail, to her but subconsciously she also fears and imagines her mother "a gigantic sponge, a habitation in which she long[s] to sink", and yet simultaneously, is afraid to be choked and drown (*ibidem*, 388). In fact, the daughter's subsequent desperate separation from the mother is a painful procedure. The perpetual, clumsy, break with the maternal body from its pre-oedipal period is tragic for this daughter. She feels she "was being milked emotionally" starting to fear she would be consumed metaphorically by this abject mother (O'Brien 1984b, 399). This fear is clearly manifested in one of the daughter's dreams in which she attempts to murder the mother in order to terminate the mother's suffocation of her. Kristeva argues that women's individuation is always painful and negative because it is difficult not to evoke a self-disgust towards herself during the process. In the daughter's matricidal dream, she soon realises what she has tried to do to the mother is self-destructive because she is in turn abjecting/expelling part of herself, which is exactly "this little insect that [she's] trying to kill" (*ibidem*, 394). The break with the mother proves to be bleak and hopeless for this daughter. The daughter may never escape from the impact of this clumsy break from the mother even after the mother's death.

At the end of the story the daughter returns to the family house for her mother's funeral. At the chapel where her mother's coffin is kept she experiences something uncanny. "It was unfinished", the fingers and mouth of the corpse seem to move and one eyelid is not fully shut as if her mother "is not dead, she has merely visited the other world" (*ibidem*, 403). The "signs of horror", as explained by Kristeva, involve revulsion and abjection against bodily waste (in this case the mother's corpse) and the death taboo represents anxiety about the threat to identity due to its transgression across defined/undefined boundaries (Kristeva 1982, 65-69; Rooks-Hughes 1996, 90). The fear of being haunted by the mother is expressed by the feeling that the connection between them is "unfinished", just as her corpse which was once human and now non-human evokes a horror involving the dead's invading the space of the living (Malcolm, Malcolm 2008, 438). Her mother's corporeal death does not break the spell on her, and she is forever haunted by the ghost of this demonic mother. After the mother's death, the daughter is disappointed to discover that the only souvenir left to her by her mother is money instead of anything personal which might assist in the process of final closure. The daughter is trapped in a world starved of love, which also drowns her. The daughter's unsuccessful separation from the mother, or rather her being abandoned by the mother, has built yet another prison for

her, who is walled in a house of silence as if it has “died or [has] been carefully put down to sleep” (O’Brien 1984b, 404). This solemn lonesome family house becomes once more a desolate abyss of desperation. The ultimate silence is, in fact, death. The story ends in the daughter’s total desperation without the hope of being saved.

### 3. *The twisted cords*

Published a decade before “A Rose in the Heart”, O’Brien’s “Cords” narrates a young woman writer exiled in London where she pursues a “sinful life” disapproved of by her mother, the circumstance of which is strikingly similar to that of O’Brien herself who also left home to start a new life in London where she started to write around the age of late twenties. Published at an interval of ten years, O’Brien’s “Cords” and “A Rose in the Heart” seem to represent a reverse sequel of a typical O’Brien mother-daughter scenario<sup>8</sup>. O’Brien’s archetypal uncanny devouring mother in “Cords” reappears in “A Rose in the Heart” with much more detail about the suffering of the mother, her bond with the daughter and her ultimate end of life. O’Brien’s characteristic anonymity of characters in her works also features in “Cords”, one of her earlier stories produced in the late 1960s. In “Cords”, only one of the two central characters, the daughter Claire, is clearly named. All other characters, including her mother, her father, her lovers, her Bohemian friends, remain ‘faceless’ in the story. The nameless mother in particular, a devoted, strong-willed yet sacrificial, subservient Irish wife and mother, now is a characteristic motif in O’Brien’s work. The story title of “Cords” implies “invisible strings” attaching the mother and the daughter to each other. This may also recall a first string connecting mother and daughter, the biological one – the umbilical cord which connects foetus and placenta, and provides nutrition from the maternal body. In the story, invisible “Cords” which seem to bind closely the mother and the daughter might also imply a net, a stifling trap in which love is displaced by pain and suffering. The daughter fears that she may in some way replicate her mother’s destiny. The cords of destiny, like the omnipotent mother, are terrifying. This daughter vigorously fends off her mother whom she perceives as a source of disempowerment due to the mother’s hopelessly subjugated life, a common theme in O’Brien’s as well as other modern Irish women’s mother-daughter stories.

<sup>8</sup> The characters and storyline of “Cords” and “A Rose in the Heart” in many ways mirror some of the true events of in O’Brien’s life, whose mother also had worked as a maid in New York just like the one in “A Rose in the Heart” as well as being loving but controlling as the one in “Cords” and “A Rose in the Heart”.

This daughter in “Cords” may also be read as one who suffers from what André Green has termed “the dead mother complex”, which Helen Thompson has suggested to be a typical O’Brien Irish mother-daughter motif (Thompson 2010, 33). The notion of the “dead mother complex”, originally a pathological term for a psychotic disorder used by the French psychoanalyst André Green, refers to an infantile depression in which the mother is self-absorbed as a result of a loss, in other words, is emotionally dead<sup>9</sup>. The victim then has “acute conflicts with those who are close” and suffers from a lack of capacity to love (Green 1986, 149). The victim compensates for this wound in various ways, such as turning to “intense intellectual activity” or “artistic creation” (*ibidem*, 160; Doane, Hodges 1992, 58). The “dead mother” is not quite dead, according to Green, she has “enormous, if not monstrous power”, consequently, the child “takes measures to ‘bury her alive’ so that [the mother] remains in the child’s psyche as a ‘cold core’, a ‘black’ void associated with mourning” (Green 1986, 146, 150; Doane, Hodges 1992, 58). The victim/subject (child) never seems to shake off the omnipotence of the emotionally dead mother and is unable to withdraw emotionally from the resultant trauma. This sense of being in loss may be related also to the feeling of abjection which Kristeva regarded as referring to a state of having “lost or never to have found the belief in one’s own existence or being” (Buren 2007, 24). The daughter in “Cords” appears to suffer a trauma resulting from memories of childhood associating with an abusive father and a powerless, also emotionally dead, mother in this respect.

In “Cords”, once again, the daughter demonstrates signs of a self-object figure like many characters in O’Brien’s stories. They tend to suffer disastrous relationships, and undergo extreme fear and anxiety throughout their lives, perhaps because the wound/trauma from a terrifying experience in their childhood is never fully healed. Readers are slowly introduced to the story through fragments of flashbacks from the daughter’s buried memory revealing a dismal past associated with her mother and home in rural Ireland. Despite the daughter’s contempt for her past, she cannot help letting herself be taken back again and again to relive the nightmarish moments. The story starts with a seemingly promising, warm reunion of the mother and the daughter after one year without contact between them. The setting is not in local, ru-

<sup>9</sup> The mother, as André Green argues, is not physically dead but is not emotionally available due to her own bereavement. The child experiences this self-absorption as a catastrophe, a wound from which the child develops negative ‘primary narcissism’ connected with feelings of emptiness (Doane, Hodges 1992, 58). This feeling of emptiness “carries in its wake, beside the loss of love, the loss of meaning” as if the dead object (mother) draws the child toward a “deathly, deserted universe” (Green 1986, 150, 167). According to Freud’s definition, primary narcissism is the “exclusive self-love”, the “libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation”. For more see Freud 1914, Green 1986, Doane, Hodges 1992.

ral Ireland but cosmopolitan England. The story starts by painting a picture of two contrasting worlds, physically and mentally, which have already separated them. The daughter, Claire, has run away from her mother's world and her past to dwell in a way which her mother belittles as being wicked and sinful. Claire has, from the mother's point of view, lost her path, and "[become] different: she[']s lost her faith, and she [mixes] with queer people and [writes] poems" in which one could "detect the sin" and they "seemed more wicked" (O'Brien 1970, 115). The artistic creation is seen by the mother as a deviant libidinal force which the mother is clearly devoid of. This creative force, is considered by Green to be a compensation for a child's loss of love. On the surface, Claire as a writer/artist seems to lead a glamorous life in a big city. Underneath the glossy veneer of Claire's life, however, she always seems to be disturbed by an unknown fear resulting in a sense of insecurity and obsessive traits. Perhaps deep down Claire never escapes the ghost of her past. To make things worse, the presence of the mother makes concrete and real all the buried darkness – "[s]ince her mother's arrival every detail of her childhood kept dogging her. Her present life, her work, the friends she had, seemed insubstantial compared with all that had happened before" (*ibidem*, 126). O'Brien does not give away direct clues about Claire's past but fragments in her flashback reveal Claire clearly suffers from a kind of emotional starvation which never seems to be quenched in her life.

Claire's failed relationships and constant (almost compulsive) brief, shallow social acquaintances suggest an inability to be intimate and to love. This impotence in love, as Green has argued, may be a tell-tale sign of a wounded mind from childhood. Claire as a child had to experience trauma on various levels: avoiding abuse by her violent alcoholic father and being scapegoated, surviving the hardship of poverty and the destructive impact of one crisis after another. Her fear is encapsulated in a flash of memory associating with her mother's low and dramatic voice in a crisis like an alarming siren. The mother is preoccupied with her own suffering. She is convinced "[she] was a good mother. [She] did everything [she] could" (*ibidem*, 125)<sup>10</sup>. Claire is apparently trapped in a "black void", a space in which soft feelings are replaced by mourning associated with mother. It seems there is "no one she [trusts]", and she always frightens men away by recalling "the treacherous way the lovers vanished" (*ibidem*, 124-145). A depressing instead of joyful portrait of a mother-daughter interaction is presented throughout the story; for example, the mother sees a daughter "who'd changed, become moody", while Claire focuses on mere "seconds of tenderness",

<sup>10</sup> Although there is no clue to suspect that Claire has been sexually abused by the father, Edna O'Brien frequently depicts a dysfunctional Irish family with an absent, invalid, often alcoholic and controlling father in her stories. O'Brien's daughters often blame their mothers for not doing enough to protect them from the demon father.

“crushing silences”, her mother’s appearance of “a tombstone, chalk white and *dead* still [emphasis mine]”, her mother’s “old, twisted, bitter” face (*ibidem*, 116-126). The peculiar lack of deep emotions and intimacy is apparent in Claire’s relationship with people including her mother and vice versa. The mother at first appears to be a loving, caring old-fashioned countrywoman. She brought her daughter a taste of home – food and souvenirs handmade by her. Similarly her daughter also tries hard to please her mother by providing food which is to her mother’s taste if not hers – “these foods she herself found distasteful” (*ibidem*, 117). However, the initial intimacy between the mother and daughter is short-lived. Soon enough the daughter’s perception of her mother’s judgemental remarks and criticism about her sinful life trigger in the daughter a state of abjection due to a sense of internalised shame. Even when the mother refrains from mentioning the past, in fact the mother is reliving ‘the past’ through sharing pain apparently the only commonality remaining between them and the only basis on which they can share communication. This mother herself, to the daughter, signifies pain, suffering and darkness. One incident in the story reveals a clue about Claire’s phobia, that is, her unspeakable fear of the colour red. This daughter recalls that once she had to suck up the blood from her cut fingers injured by a laser blade on a shelf<sup>11</sup>. The colour, clearly associated with blood and pain, reminds her of her vulnerability as a child: “she would suddenly panic and cry out convinced that her sweat became as drops of blood. She put her hands through the flaps and begged the masseuse to protect her, the way she had begged her mother, long ago” (*ibidem*, 127). The mother may or may not have responded to her, but perhaps the mother was not always available in time or did not react effectively enough when Claire was in need. Sharing the mother’s pain, such as a disturbing description of the toe operation from the mother, seems to be all that is left for Claire to take from her mother. The story ends by the mother insisting on an early departure from her visit. The point of separation seems to bring relief to both. However, the invisible cords of the past, binding them together on the basis of shared pain and trauma, seem unlikely ever to be released.

#### 4. *The surrogate love object*

One of O’Brien’s most controversial stories, “Sister Imelda”, appears to evoke a motif of the uncanny state of oneness with a primordial maternal entity, an immersion into a state of *jouissance*, a Kristevan term referring to

<sup>11</sup> This event strangely reappears in “A Rose in the Heart” in which O’Brien contrasts this distressed wounded girl Claire in “Cords” with the one showered in maternal love in “A Rose in the Heart” in which the mother sucks the child’s cut fingers “to lessen the pain and licked to abolish the blood and kept saying soft things until the child was stilled again” (O’Brien 1984b, 380).

bodily pleasure in *chora*, the period when mother-infant bond and closeness is established. Notwithstanding, “Sister Imelda” presents us with an enigmatic, mother-like figure, combined with religious mysticism and, perhaps, a hint of sexual ambiguity, or a seduction of a kind of sublimated erotic and maternal love in her relationship with the girl in the story. This story has certainly aroused a great deal of interest among critics concerning another dimension – traces of sexual attraction between women<sup>12</sup>. O’Brien may describe a general fact of life in a convent school during that time in Ireland. O’Brien’s interest in writing about an ambivalent and ambiguous, sometimes even troubled, relationship between women from different generations prevail in this story as in other of her works. “Sister Imelda” may be read as one of O’Brien’s more ambiguous texts in which she deals with the repressed desire of the daughter for the mother within a buried female/maternal terrain. The repression of the maternal refers to the experience in which the familiar becomes uncanny as a result of “the effacement of separation and the realization of desire... the deep primeval desire to go back to the womb” (Balzano 2006, 101). The narrator in “Sister Imelda” is not blood related to this nun Imelda, yet she develops a daughter-like idolisation and idealisation of this maternal figure which recalls this unspoken identification with a preoedipal desire for the mother. Mary Vicinus suggests that in a boarding school environment, age difference in the teacher-student relationship plays a crucial role for both parties in enhancing a “anticipatory pleasure”, a “maternal and erotic love subsumed under religious duty” (Vicinus 1984, 605; Thompson 2010, 158). This “maternal erotic love”, reliance in Kristeva’s term<sup>13</sup>, denotes a maternal passion as well as vocation (Kristeva 2014, 72).

The setting in “Sister Imelda” is an isolated prison-like space — a convent school which seems to be a standard part of O’Brien’s topographical repertoire in her works. The emblematic psychological prison and exile-like life (away from home), which O’Brien herself experienced so deeply as a writer whose work was once banned in Ireland, appear to reemerge in many of her works. The noticeable “preoccupation with guilt and shame” throughout

<sup>12</sup> Neither having denied nor admitted her intention in the story, O’Brien own interesting comment in a 1996 interview was: “almost every girl who goes to a convent falls in love with a nun and wants to be a nun” (Pearce 1996, 7). The main character, also the narrator of the story “Sister Imelda”, is described to be “too dotty or naive to conceal [her] sexual feelings [for Sister Imelda]” (Moynahan 1985, 34). It demonstrates “slight bewilderment and no overtones of adult knowingness” (Glendinning 1982, 456). It is questionable if the narrator’s feelings are “illicit and sublimated” (Maitland 1982, 25). For further see Glendinning 1982, 456; Maitland 1982, 25-26; Moynahan 1985, 34.

<sup>13</sup> This term, according to Julia Kristeva, refers to a kind of “maternal eroticism”, a state of urgency of life energy which translates the libidinal forces into a capacity to maternal tenderness (Kristeva 2014, 72).

her works reappear in several of O'Brien's stories including "Sister Imelda" (Balzano 2006, 94). In "Sister Imelda", the central, yet once again nameless, character narrates a story from her own first-person point of view regarding her "locked up" life in a convent and her encounter with the nun, known as Sister Imelda (O'Brien 1984b, 137). She paints a picture of a milieu in which a group of young, naive, inexperienced women are being educated by a rigid sect of older women to exert strict control over repressed emotions and desires in conformity with a specific religious doctrine. This walled-in enclosure of nuns in a womb-like convent school is in the foreground of the story which describes "its high stone wall and green iron gate enfolding us again, [it] seemed more of a prison than ever... and my friend Baba and I [the narrator] were dreaming of our final escape, which would be in a year... Convents were dungeons and no doubt about it" (*ibidem*, 124, 134). Teachers and pupils in the convent function like a family unit, and also refer to one another as family such as Mother or Sister yet without the intimacy of personal emotions and feelings which are inherent in the typical nuclear family unit. The convent schoolgirls in "Sister Imelda" must not "give way to tears" and are forbidden to let out cries when washing in cold water at night since "baths [are] immoral [and forbidden]" (*ibidem*, 136, 138).

The focus of the narration soon switches to the girl and her mystical intimacy of her friendly relationship with a young nun, Sister Imelda, who had just joined the convent. A sense of ambiguous emotion, passion, pleasure, mixed with a sense of dread and ultimate loss, runs through the text. The narrator defers to two essential female role models in her school life – Sister Imelda and her friend Baba. They appear to represent contrasting yet not mutually exclusive role models for this girl in the story. The nun, a symbolic bride of Christ, and a replica of an idolised and idealised mother figure, the Virgin Mary, leads a life "unspotted by sin" (O'Brien 1984b, 125). Yet Sister Imelda in some way subverts the cliché of what a nun may be expected to represent. Unlike the other emotionally remote and aloof nuns in the convent, Sister Imelda's eyes are certainly different, "full of verve", there is her more bouncy walk, she shows "more excitement in the way she tackled teaching" (*ibidem*, 124-125). Compared to her friend Baba whose bolder, wilder nature may be categorised as that of a secular sinner, by contrast Sister Imelda's seeming austerity in food, emotions and pleasure of all sorts becomes elevated for the narrator to a mysterious terrain of attraction which implies both thrill and pleasure. The girl is both attracted to and thrilled by the nun when they share a secret moment together, or exchange gifts, and this combines with the nun's very human demeanor when she reveals her impulsiveness (her rumoured fierce temper), her recklessness such as when she broke off a chrysanthemum for the girl to smell, her manner of holding chalk like a cigarette and the way she "[sat] on the edge of the table swaying her legs. There was something reckless about her pose, something defiant",

as opposed to a image of humility, one of the celestial virtues (*ibidem*, 129). The girl, who is far away from her mother and home, sees the nun Imelda as a surrogate love object bringing back an infantile sense of security and satisfaction which has been always provided by the closeness of a bond with the maternal entity. This mysterious Heimisch infantile connection seems to be uncannily hinted in the first gift from the nun to the girl showing a picture of “a mother looking down on the infant child” (*ibidem*, 128).

Sister Imelda is introduced to the girl, and readers as a figure of mystery with an unknown past but retaining a few traits of her once secular existence in the world into which the girl is initially eager to step. Soon the girl changes her wishes and decides to follow the vocation of a nun, following in the footsteps of her idolised mother Imelda. It is not unusual for a child to attempt to copy what a mother does. The girl even tries “as accurately as possible to imitate her [Imelda’s] handwriting” (*ibidem*, 135). However, the price of following this mother’s step may be a huge one, in this case, permanent repression of individual freedom and emotions. It is also possible the girl regards Imelda as her secretly idealised surrogate mother whose underlying unorthodoxy of mannerism and behaviour can even be regarded as rebellious and subversive by comparison to the girl’s own mother who is subservient to an ill-tempered father back home. What the girl observes and rejects is a submissive role of Eve as she sees in her own mother, and by contrast, this surrogate mother Imelda is the “antagonistic, energetic form of Lilith” (Balzano 2006, 103)<sup>14</sup>. However, the paradox lies in the fact that what the girl attempts to reject and forget is what she also secretly, subconsciously desires or furthermore, what she simply cannot turn her back on; that is, the yearning, a repressed desire to return to the maternal. Imelda’s pastry and the smell of baking in the kitchen bring the girl back to a familiar place – home, the mother to be exact, despite her rebellious thoughts to reject the latter and all she represents: “I wonder if she had supplanted my mother, and I hoped not, because I had aimed to outstep my original world and take my place in a new and hallowed one” (O’Brien 1984b, 130). Nevertheless, the girl wishes to be free from her mother and home and instead finds a surrogate within the convent. What’s more, the girl still cannot escape ultimate submission and repression if she follows the nun’s conformed, desexualised life. It seems under patriarchy, whether it is in or outside the family and the church, a woman’s prescribed role as wife and mother is inevitable and inescapable: “[l]ife was geared to work and to meeting men, and yet one knew that mating could only lead to one’s being a mother and hawking obstreperous children out to the seaside on Sunday” (*ibidem*, 142).

<sup>14</sup> Lilith, Adam’s first wife, is the demon and goddess according to Talmudic tradition and legend. Refusing to be considered his inferior, Lilith left him and was consequently expelled from Eden. For more see Hurwitz 1980.



The depictions of the nuns in the convent and Sister Imelda are peculiarly presented in paradoxical, even blasphemous images ironically at odds with their sacred vocation. The nuns, Sister Imelda among them, are described to emerge from their cells into a chanting prayer room “like ravens, to fling themselves on the tiled floor of the chapel” (*ibidem*, 131). The raven simile here not only describes the black gown of these nuns but may also symbolise stagnation and death<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, it is even suggested that Imelda may be identified as a Luciferian figure, a light-bearer, in the story in which the girl gave Imelda a flash lamp as a gift to express her love (Balzano 2006, 98). Apparently Sister Imelda’s familiarity with smoking and her interest in cookery makes her at ease near fire, and she “must have liked cookery class, because she beamed and called to someone, anyone, to get up to a blazing fire... It was hot, because her spit *rose up and sizzled*” (O’Brien 1984b, 129; emphasis mine). The image of such evokes a room with a red hot stove and heat, possibly also an allusion to the infernal flames of hell<sup>16</sup>. Then comes an odd scene in which the nun indulges in the pleasure of feeding the girl sweet tarts. Feeding as well as the association with food is the primal pleasure in which a child forms a bond with its mother during the chora<sup>17</sup>. Sister Imelda seems to enjoy this motherly bonding experience through the act of feeding the girl: “she watched me eat as if she herself derived some peculiar pleasure from it... She was amused” (*ibidem*, 130).

The association of food with emotion between the nun and girl is a recurring theme throughout the story. This association is also a metaphor for the living conditions in the convent. In the convent, “food [is] the source of the greatest grumbles”, and the girl suspects the nun is “overmortified herself by not eating at all” (*ibidem*, 125-126). The girl’s friend Baba gorges the remaining tart and get jealous about how the nun favours the girl. The food satisfaction is scarce in the convent, therefore, on holidays back home, the girl indulges herself in food-based self-gratification. The nun later seems to distance herself from the girl by turning down her offering of an iced queen cake. When the girl tries hard to subdue her tears in this situation out of

<sup>15</sup> Ravens, according to Carl Jung, is a symbol of dark side, an inner self, of psychology. In Norse myths, the Valkyries are said to ride as ravens to claim souls from the dead bodies in a battlefield. There is a similar description about the war goddesses Morrígan (the phantom queens) in Irish mythology, who appear in a form of ravens at the battlefield. It may be not foreign to connect the ravens with the mystical unknown (such as death) due to raven’s high intelligence as well as their role as scavengers consuming flesh from dead bodies. The raven’s cackle utterance “cras cras” was compared to a sound in Latin referring to “tomorrow”. For Jung’s exploration on symbols and archetypes, see Jung 1969.

<sup>16</sup> The most impressive literary work which presents a vivid photographic description about Hell perhaps is Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* in which depicts the heretics are sent to a fire punishment in hell.

<sup>17</sup> The warmth of body heat, the heartbeat, soft skin touch, mother’s milk and fluids (such as tears) are all mixed up in a child’s primordial impulses of oneness with its creator/mother.

fear of revealing her emotion for the nun in public, she left a cup of milk untouched. Milk is, certainly, the substance which has the most direct association with feeding and the maternal. After the girl gives the nun some bananas as a gift of condolence for a personal tragedy involving the nun's brother, she receives an orange from the nun in return. Oranges, as well as the colour orange, resemble the colour of fire and light, and can take on various positive as well as negative symbolic associations such as the cardinal sin of 'gluttony', and thus may be another metaphor relating to the characters' preoccupation with the nexus between food and emotion in this story<sup>18</sup>. The vice of gluttony (*gula*) refers to an act of overindulgence which may also indicate the choices these young girls (the narrator and Baba) might be tempted to make in their life. In the last scene the narrator is horrified to see Sister Imelda again on a busy bus. Imelda's presence brings back the girl's guilt about how she broke her promise to Imelda. She, now a college student, is on her way with Baba to meet men in Howth. She admits putting on too much makeup for which "even the conductor seemed to disapprove" and tries to wipe off the lipstick out of shame when she has a glimpse of the nun on the bus (*ibidem*, 142). The girl is about to make a journey, far away from a way of life of austerity but one which has potential to lead to indulgence, especially in sexual desire. The ties with this surrogate mother are doomed. They were not "fully realised" in the past and will never be in the future (*ibidem*, 143).

### 5. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated a perspective to review the over-glorified yet problematic motherhood in three Edna O'Brien's mother-daughter stories. This sublimated form of womanhood is in particular presented in a culture defined by patriarchy and Catholicism. The mother in the story, just like the homeland to the exiled writer, still has monstrous power in every way upon the woman/daughter who is so desperate to escape the suffocating environment and the fate which befell her mother. O'Brien's melancholy women/daughters remain blocked at the threshold of the social arena in which they seek compensation for lost communion with their mothers, and yet, trapped in a kind of emotional no man's land, have to pay the price for "romantic dreams of oneness premised on an unmediated, and thus deadly, maternal union" (Summers-Bremner 2010, 3). This uncanny maternal figure, powerless yet devouring, appears to manifest herself in various aspects displaying a terrifying and tantalisingly seductive power on the younger woman/daughter in O'Brien's stories. Typically, O'Brien's daughter tends to turn into a self-object

<sup>18</sup> For more colour and food association with religious cardinal sins see Soza 2009; Toussaint-Samat 2009.

figure burdened with guilt and shame incubated from society, the dominant culture of which stresses repentance and abjection under patriarchy.

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# Satire and Trauma in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract:*

*The Butcher Boy* (1992) is the third novel by Northern Irish author Patrick McCabe. It tells the story of 12-year-old Francie Brady and is set in the small town of Clones, in western County Monaghan, Ireland in the early 1960s. The town was badly hit economically by the partition of Ireland in 1921 because of its location on the border with County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. *The Butcher Boy* emphasises the significant influence the instability of the community during the 1960s, a time of rapid change and ethnic and political violence, has on this dysfunctional Brady family. These political and economic circumstances are very relevant for our discussion because the Bradys, as part of this small community, suffer from some post-traumatic consequences derived from these circumstances, which affect their psychological state and identity in very negative terms. This paper focuses on how McCabe recreates Francie's post-traumatic effects of such a difficult childhood and upbringing through formal literary devices characteristic of both trauma fiction and satire rhetoric, and to what effect the Irish writer uses them.

*Keywords:* Childhood, Identity, Patrick McCabe, Rhetoric of satire, Trauma

## 1. Introduction

*The Butcher Boy* (1992) is the third novel of the Irish author Patrick McCabe. It tells the story of a young boy, Francie Brady, whose father Benny is a bitter alcoholic and whose mother, Annie, frequently abused both verbally

<sup>1</sup> The research on which this paper is based was funded by research projects reference numbers APPI17/13 and APPI17/06. This line of research is in tune with the objectives of the University Centre for Irish Studies BANNA/BOND and Research Group GRID (Representaciones de Identidades en Textos Literarios y Fílmicos en Habla Inglesa). I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr Alwyn Harrison for his helpful thoughts, comments, and suggestions.

and physically by her husband, often considers suicide, and is committed for a time to a mental hospital. *The Butcher Boy* is narrated by Francie himself and outlines the daily life of his dysfunctional family, so defined because it does not perform normally and has various members who behave or act outside social norms. The boy often retreats into a fantasy world and his imagination is fuelled by television – aliens, communists and the atomic age – which allows him to escape the reality of his abnormal family<sup>2</sup>. After his mother's death, Francie finds a job at the local abattoir, where he shows a flair for killing pigs. The end of the novel reveals how Francie's sense of identity has shifted, affected by his fantasies and the daily, frequently violent, experiences in his dysfunctional family: he has drifted from being a manic fantasist to a murderer who kills his neighbour Mrs Nugent as if she were another pig in his slaughterhouse<sup>3</sup>.

*The Butcher Boy* is set in a barely concealed version of the small town of Clones, McCabe's home town in western County Monaghan, in the early 1960s. During his childhood there, McCabe was witness to the region's rapid modernization and internationalization, and the novel reflects the upheaval of this social and political transition. County Monaghan, part of the Border Region, was badly hit economically by the partition of Ireland in 1921 because of its location and was earmarked for economic development by the Irish government. The creation of the border left Clones with no railway at all and deprived it of access to a large part of its economic hinterland for many years. McCabe himself has stated that: "the world that I write about, which is a world of noise and clamour and excitement... an interacting community... The families were huge, and they couldn't afford to feed them because they were poor. So the kids were out all day every day, and you know, wearing shoddy enough clothes. But they were tremendously vital" (Lebargy 2013, 135). Francie and his friend Joe are two of these tremendously vital children. *The Butcher Boy* emphasizes the significant influence of the instability of the 1960s, a time of rapid change and ethnic and political violence, on the dysfunctional Brady family living in a society hidden or ignored by the official image of Ireland presented by the media and the government<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the aforementioned television programmes, the specific historical references to North American television, Hollywood "B" films and the Cuban Missile Crisis that appear in the novel also affect Francie's sense of identity, shifting from being a normal boy to feeling somehow influenced by all these examples of violence from outside.

<sup>3</sup> Francie's parents, however, seek to forsake their environment not only through mental alienation, but by aspiring to an existence no longer controlled by external conditions, an existence situated in imaginary or unconventional locations appropriate to their eccentric temperaments. This is why Benny is constantly drunk or playing the trumpet and Annie frequently visits a mental hospital.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the term "dysfunctional family" in this context, see Jeffers 2002, 151 and Praga 2016, 101.

*The Butcher Boy* is a novel that depicts the *other Ireland*, an Ireland of hidden memories, damaged childhoods and destroyed psyches very far away from the Valera's cosy homestead, contests of athletic youths and laughter of comedy maidens ... Violence runs through the novel from beginning to end, under the mask of loneliness, alcoholism, murder, marginality or homelessness, perhaps the most powerful feeling of the story, and an ill luck the characters seem to inherit. It is not surprising that the word "home" is something unattainable for the Brady's in a period of Ireland in which cosy homesteads were bastions of moral purity, places where the children of the nation would be cherished and nourished. Home, in *The Butcher Boy*, however, becomes a thoroughly pathologized site. (Praga 2016, 101)

To my mind, all this political, social and economic turmoil are the direct cause of the apparently post-traumatic disorders presented by the main characters of McCabe's novel, affecting their psychological state and identity in very negative terms. The following study of *The Butcher Boy* focuses on how McCabe presents the effects of traumatic childhood through formal literary devices characteristic of both trauma fiction and satirical rhetoric, and on the aspects of Irish society thus criticized. Here is an example of the ways in which the aforementioned post-traumatic effects are formally translated into the novel:

Something else broke crockery or something and then ma was crying: Don't blame me because you [Francie's father] can't face the truth about yourself, any chances you had you drank them away! ... But it wasn't all over and when I [Francie] stopped listening to the cars I'd hear him: God's curse the fucking day I ever set eyes on you! The next day ... her face was red and patchy and hot like she'd been sitting bent over the fire only there was no fire. (McCabe 1992, 6-7)

Here, McCabe's novel mirrors the daily lives of this dysfunctional family at a formal level by using third- and first-person narrative and stream of consciousness with little punctuation and no separation of dialogue and thought. Regarding satirical rhetoric, *The Butcher Boy* emerged in the early 1990s, a decade that witnessed a distinct shift in Ireland's willingness to face its past. Although traditionally silent when confronted with controversial social problems, Ireland began to "speak out" in the 1990s with a new openness that was most evident in controversies given broad coverage in the media – particularly those focusing attention on the suffering of children and other marginalized citizens. The 1990 election of Mary Robinson as President was pivotal to this transformation, for it symbolized a hunger for change and a consequent renegotiation of Irish identity. People began to question the government, institutions, and social attitudes, and did so persistently, as they had never done before. McCabe's narrator's uses a particular rhetorical strategy of the satirical apparatus – irony – to question the British Crown's neglect of Clones and of Ireland as a whole:

The fountain wasn't frozen it was spraying away goodo on the Diamond so I sat down beside it for a while. There was one thing I knew about that fountain. They had put it there for Queen Victoria the same time they built the Jubilee Road in honour of her visit to the town that year. Except for one thing – she never came. (McCabe 1992, 103)

Another issue relevant to the novel is the fact that, from the 1990s onwards, the Irish began to question the Catholic Church and its significant historical influence on the Irish state, which was institutionalized after the Republic of Ireland's independence. In *The Butcher Boy*, McCabe draws the reader's attention to one particular issue: priests' molestation of children in "industrial schools" run by the Church. During the course of his internment, Francie is molested by one of the priests, who asks him to dress up as a girl:

Sit up here now, he says and took me on his knee ...

I could hear Tiddly rooting about behind the big armchair and the crackling paper of a parcel. His fingers were all over the place as he fumbled with the twine and tried to open it.

Let me, I said.

O, said Tiddly.

Tiddly's eyes were the size of jam pot lids. I swooned.

O father it's lovely!

It was a woman's bonnet with a long white ribbon dangling down.

I felt like laughing my arse off but poor old Tiddly wouldn't have liked that biting away at the skin of his mouth oh Francis.

... He puts his arm around me you've no idea how much I love you Francis he says in the nights I even dream about you. I want to know everything about you.

... I don't like you any more Tiddly.

... He [Bubble, another priest] said Father Sullivan was a good man. I said nothing.

... But he didn't have to worry about that. As long as he left me alone and minded his own business I wouldn't say anything about old Father Big-Mickey I mean Tiddly. Now he was gone I didn't give a fuck. (*Ibidem*, 89-95)

This transgressive act, reported in ludicrously grotesque terms, reveals a regime that was crude and bestial, and was hidden by the Catholic authorities. In writing about this serious and controversial issue using formal devices to depict trauma – including fragmentation, dislocation, and repetition – and rhetorical strategies, such as irony and wit, McCabe gives Ireland's silenced children a voice, through Francie.

McCabe's story shows how the demonization of marginalized citizens, like Francie and his parents in this small community, can take root inside a child. Francie suffers certain traumatic consequences of such demonization, manifested in a sense of betrayal and self-loathing. These feelings are very strong in him because he and his family are removed from their community.



In fact, what they hate most is being different from the other members of their community, since difference brings about abuse and cruelty. *The Butcher Boy* shows how this sense of alienation and external abuse affects a young child, driving him to violence, crime, and, ultimately, insanity.

In my view, McCabe's novel makes a case for the damaging internalization of certain assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze in one of the most vulnerable members of society: a child<sup>5</sup>. Francie sets up a struggle with the narrow community in which he lives, embodied by Mrs Nugent and her son Phillip, who are viewed as complicit with the outside gaze. Francie dwells upon this:

I was thinking about Mrs Nugent standing there crying her eyes out. I said sure what's the use in crying now Nugent it was you caused all the trouble if you hadn't poked your nose in everything would have been all right ... *She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England* and she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of me what else would you expect from a house where the father's never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he's no better than a pig. You needn't think we don't know what goes on in this house oh we know all right! Small wonder the boy is the way he is what chance has he got running about the town at all hours and the clothes hanging off him it doesn't take money to dress a child God love him it's not his fault but if he's seen near our Philip again there'll be trouble. There'll be trouble now mark my words!

After that ma took my part and the last thing I heard was Nugent going down the lane and calling back *Pigs - sure the whole town knows that!* (McCabe 1992, 2-4; my emphasis)

Francie's patterns of behaviour and relationships with other characters like the Nugents are distorted in form and meaning, and reveal that Francie does not feel part of the larger community, effectively turning him into "the Other". Here, *The Butcher Boy* deals with recurrent themes like identity and religion, and the traumatic consequences for Irish children of a period of rapid change and ethnic and political violence. The quotation above is relevant from a formal perspective because the use of the term "pig" is an example of satirical rhetoric, that is, the animalization of human beings. As Scarlata notes, "The epithet of 'pig,' recalling a long English tradition of cruel anti-Irish caricatures, sticks to Francie for the rest of the story, often as a marker of difference between his family and the Nugents" (2005, 234). Thus the term "pig" hints at the fact that, during the Troubles – the ethno-nationalist

<sup>5</sup> Due to the novel's concern for Francie and his danger of being forgotten by institutions, and by Irish society at large, *The Butcher Boy* shares many aspects with Pier Paolo Pasolini's novel *The Street Kids* (1955) and corroborates some of the ideas on "social determinism" discussed by the latter in his social writing. I wish to express my gratitude to one of the referees for their detailed revision and suggestions here.

conflict in the North of Ireland that began in 1968 and ended with the Belfast “Good Friday” Agreement of 1998 – the gaze from outside was identified with the English gaze. The above quotation shows McCabe’s interest in tackling the issue of the relationship between the two types of community living in the Border Region: that formed mostly by Protestants, who consider themselves British or identify more with the British, and that mostly comprising Catholics who consider themselves Irish, like the Bradys. Although the association between the Nugents and England is pervasive in the novel, it is only part of Francie’s distorted projection. This does not mean that the Nugents themselves feel linked to the United Kingdom<sup>6</sup>. The fact that Mrs Nugent’s statement, “*Pigs – sure the whole town knows that!*” is in italics makes me think that Francie’s imagination is at work here again.

At this point, it would be interesting to comment on the relevance of the chosen theoretical tools. According to Whitehead, “The rise of trauma theory ... has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to *how* and *why* it is remembered. This raises, in turn, the related issues of politics, ethics and aesthetics” (2004, 3; my emphasis). Whitehead argues further that: “Trauma fiction relies on ... a number of key stylistic features” as modes of reflection or critique (*ibidem*, 84). In this regard, McCabe conceptualizes traumatic experiences and represents them in *The Butcher Boy* through a self-conscious deployment of repetition (at the levels of language, imagery, and plot) and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice because the language needed to describe the traumatic effects of violence and abuse in 1960s Ireland is not available to a child like Francie.

Besides these formal devices, McCabe also deploys several methods of the rhetoric of satire in his novel. According to Clark, McCabe is a “dark satirist” with a “modern interest in the psyche, in man’s troublous inner life” (1991, 7). This interest would lead him “to exaggerate the dark side of human nature, to shock the audience with scenes of the startling, the disturbing, the unnatural, and the absurd”. Some of the devices McCabe uses “to cripple[e] and unhinge[e] his literary form” (*ibidem*, 103) are fantasy, detachment, dystopia, and scatology. Such “darkling artistry”, Clark continues, “cannot help but alienate its audience and upset the bourgeoisie; indeed, it is thus that the traditional satiric artist, treating serious subjects, gains serious attention” (*ibidem*, 7). The excerpt I have just analysed serves as an example of “double-voicedness” (Vice 1997, 45), which refers to “the presence of two distinct voices in one utterance” - that of the character who is speaking, and the indirect intention of the author. As shall be explained later, all these aspects transform the work under discussion into an example of satirical or “dialogical” (Holquist 1990, 181) discourse.

<sup>6</sup> As one referee of this essay rightly pointed out, “On the contrary, their home furniture, traditional food and music are often ridiculed by the narrative voice as Kitsch Irish”.

In what follows, I shall explore how McCabe draws on all these methods of depicting trauma and satirical criticism of people and institutions by using a veil of indirection in *The Butcher Boy*. In doing so, I shall clarify the ways in which McCabe mirrors at a formal level certain post-traumatic effects derived from living in a dysfunctional family in a violent atmosphere in one of the most vulnerable members of society, and to what effect the writer does so.

## 2. *Methods of depicting trauma and the rhetoric of satire in The Butcher Boy*

In a very insightful essay, Patten argues that the period from the 1950s to the 1970s saw novelists put particular emphasis on historical revision in their fiction, and which “had clear affinities, too, with Ireland’s ongoing political process of enquiry” (2006, 263). Within this context, novelists like Patrick McCabe, who were born during this period “in which Ireland experienced most acutely the effects of the country’s failure to keep pace with modernisation and secularisation” (*ibidem*, 263-264), put intense effort into “chronicling the insecurity of this period”<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, *The Butcher Boy* “depicts the pressures outlined above in terms of communal crisis and individual psychosis” (*ibidem*, 264) and, thus, Francie embodies “the repression and claustrophobia of Irish life, ... [he is] driven by the desire to reach beyond it to alternative identities derived from popular music, comic books, cinema and television. His novels convey the trauma of fractured or incomplete historical transition” (*ibidem*, 264). This might explain why Francie’s behaviour towards Mrs Nugent is violent throughout the novel. He considers her responsible for the fragmentation of his family and, by extension, for all that is rotten in the small town of Clones, which is Francie’s whole world. The quotation below shows how Francie’s post-traumatic disorders have their origin in Mrs Nugent’s behaviour in general, as a representative of the outside world. She acts as a catalyst for Francie’s descent into madness:

Mrs Nugent ... lay into ma about the comics and the whole lot and I could hear ma saying *yes yes I know I will of course!* and I was waiting for her to come flying up the stairs, get me by the ear and throw me on the step in front of Nugent and that’s what she would have done if Nugent hadn’t started on about the pigs. (McCabe 1992, 4)

Francie and Joe offer to return the comics they have stolen from Mrs Nugent’s son, Philip, but she does not listen. She interferes constantly in her child’s affairs. From that moment on, Francie sets himself at war with Philip’s mother

<sup>7</sup> Film director Neil Jordan, who adapted *The Butcher Boy* into a feature film of the same name in 1997, acknowledged in an interview conducted by McCabe that he “experienced the world of *The Butcher Boy*” (McCabe 2015, 238).

for putting her nose into his family's business. When the first-person narrator claims, "She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England", this link to England appears to explain her patronizing attitude towards the Brady family; she considers it to give her the right to be judgemental - an attitude adopted by neighbouring countries following the partition of Ireland.

As the excerpt above shows, Francie's conflicting psychological states can be observed not only in his distorted patterns of conduct and interaction, but also in the language he uses. His discourse presents the impact of all these traumatic experiences by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse and the narrative is characterized by repetition and indirection:

I'll bet you never heard a record as good as this Francie she says. What's it called ma I says its called The Butcher Boy she says come on and we'll dance. ... We'll stop now ma I said but away we went again.

I wish my baby it was born  
 And smiling on its daddy's knee  
 And me poor girl to be dead and gone  
 With the long green grass growing over me.  
 He went upstairs and the door he broke  
 He found her hanging from a rope  
 He took his knife and he cut her down  
 And in her pocket these words he found  
 Oh make my grave large wide and deep  
 Put a marble stone at my head and feet  
 And in the middle a turtle dove  
 That the world may know that I died for love.

It was a good song but I didn't know what was going on in it. When it was over she says what do you think of that Francie - he went upstairs and the door he broke he found her hanging from a rope! He wasn't so smart then the butcher boy was he. She starts telling me all about it but I didn't want to hear any more. (McCabe 1992, 19)

Francie and his parents act out their predicament in a continuous quarrel, by means of an indirect use of words. Francie and his parents' dysfunctional lives show the alienating effects of external abuse and social constraints in tragicomic and, sometimes, absurdist terms. The passage above expresses nostalgia, sadness, anxiety, anguish, and a sense of fear and helplessness by means of a hybrid of first-person narrative and stream of consciousness with minimal punctuation and no separation of dialogue and thought. In examining the state of identity in the novel, Gauthier observes that: "The reader is constantly reassessing Francie Brady's psychological instability and is never quite sure to what extent Francie's perceptions are delusions or are incisive commentary on the narrow community in which he lives" (2003, 197).

Besides these literary devices, McCabe also uses other techniques to shape post-traumatic disorder. He deploys several rhetorical devices of satire, such as fantasy and detachment, yet also dystopian imagery (Clark 1991, 139-147) and “scatology” (*ibidem*, 116-130). McCabe conducts his satirical attack by incorporating such devices and, in doing so, undertakes an indirect critique of politics and institutions, including literary convention. He achieves detachment through fantasy and this rhetorical device allows him to downgrade the reader’s perception of reality in *The Butcher Boy*. Below is the moment in which Francie enters Mrs Nugent’s house without permission and imagines that she and her son Philip are pigs and their house is a farmyard:

When I finished my snack I went upstairs to see if I could find Philip’s room. No problem ... I found a lipstick in one of the drawers and I wrote in big letters across the wallpaper PHILIP IS A PIG ... Mrs Nugent. Its [*sic*] your responsibility as a sow to see that Philip behaves as a good pig should. I’m leaving it up to you. She nodded ... I am a pig said Philip. I am a sow said Mrs Nooge. Just to recap then I said. What do pigs do? They eat pig nuts said Philip. ... No, I said, the answer I’m looking for is - *they do poo!* ... Right come on up here Philip and show the class. ... At first Mrs Nugent was shy about what he was doing but when she saw the great effort he was making she said she was proud of him. And so you should be I said. Harder, Philip, harder!

He went at it then for all he was worth and then there it sat proud as punch on the carpet of the bedroom, the best poo ever ... Well done, Philip, I cried, you did it! ... Now its [*sic*] time for Mrs Nugent to show us how well she can perform. Can she poo as well as her son Philip? ... but I’m afraid that wasn’t what happened at all. (*Ibidem*, 61-63)

McCabe turns to a series of strategies to present the Nugents as though they were pigs, mere caricatures, by using fantasy, exaggeration, and distortion. The narrator uses caricature and animal imagery to undermine the dignity of his victims, and uses repetition of the word “pig” to articulate his scorn. In doing so, McCabe represents a violent “gaze” which makes of Francie the victim of the social disturbances of the writer’s childhood.

With regard to caricature, the physical particularities or defects of Mrs Nugent and Francie’s relatives are exaggerated for critical purposes. Benny Brady’s fondness for pilchards is pushed to grotesque extremes:

Da ate pilchards when he went on a skite. The flies were buzzing round them. There was curdled milk and books thrown round all over the place and stuff pulled out of the cupboards ... da was standing there staring at me. There were red circles round his eyes and I could smell him. *You*, was all he said. I didn’t know what he meant. But he told me. He meant *you* did it, what happened to ma. I says what are you talking about what happened to ma. (*Ibidem*, 42-43)

Benny is portrayed in a very negative manner through McCabe’s use of caricature. However, the reductive tendency of McCabe’s satire is also

achieved through other means: the comparison of characters (the Nugents and Francie) with animals like pigs, the animalization of human beings, and the use of scatology. Take as an example the moment in which Francie is caught having defecated on Mrs Nugent's carpet as if he were a pig. McCabe seems to delight most in the filthiest and most disgusting scenes in *The Butcher Boy*. He repeatedly introduces scatological, excremental, and grotesque details and places both Francie and Mrs Nugent in the most embarrassing situations. O'Mahony rather coyly describes *The Butcher Boy* "as an arena for burlesque humour and biting satire" (2003). McCabe the satirist places people in indecent situations and expresses an utter delight in them. In doing so, he uncovers our – or, more specifically, Ireland's – silenced fears and pains, and makes them public. Mr Nugent shouts at Francie: "This time I'll see to it you're put where you belong. And you'll clean up that before you leave here with the police and the walls too for my wife's not going to do it" (McCabe 1992, 63). It is at this point that Francie gives up his fantasies and reality hits him hard.

As observed, McCabe, as satirist, surveys general and specific social behaviours in order to articulate an attack upon the vices and follies that derive from them. Scatology, as a rhetorical technique, amplifies the impact of the satirist's denunciation by means of disparaging and denigrating the dignity of the human condition. This is why scatology takes for comparison the trivial, or worse, the ugly and repulsive, like the figure of the pig or else Benny's passion for pilchards.

The attribution of animal features to human beings has always been a means of expressing humour, scorn, and degradation, as other Irish authors like Jonathan Swift and Flann O'Brien have shown in their novels. This rhetorical strategy questions the superiority of the human race and presents a grotesque image of our most cherished values and codes. It is connected with questions of indirection and irony. Thus, Francie's parents and he himself are addressed as pigs, which Francie does not like. But, later, he seems to be happy to be associated with the pig, as, for example, when he asks Mrs Nugent to pay the pig poll tax and calls himself "Francie Pig the Toll Tax Man" (*ibidem*, 13). The Irish child puts himself in the most embarrassing situations only to hide the attack behind a veil of apparent incongruity. Here, animals like pigs are shown to make the same mistakes and show the same pettiness as human beings. In this way, McCabe favours indirection to the detriment of explicitness and direct confrontation. By using fantasy and animal imagery, McCabe the satirist dissimulates his subjective judgements beneath an image of pretended objectivity and impartiality. In doing so, he indirectly condemns child abuse in Ireland during the Troubles.

Besides scatology, Francie also dreams of children's television series, science fiction films, games of cowboys and Indians, etc. There is sustained reference to these dreams throughout *The Butcher Boy*. Fantasy is deployed in a

sustained manner and the story that results will be clear to the reader already familiar with the sources on which McCabe draws. Francie alludes to other texts: "Your man comes at Green Lantern I says. Next thing bam! A big giant hammer comes flying out of his ring and splatters him. And that's only Green Lantern. There's far more than him that could do even better things than that!" (*ibidem*, 47). Francie's fantasies fuelled by comics about cowboys and Indians help him create his own imaginary existence in Clones, transcend the disturbing experience of acknowledging his family conflicts, and cope with the external restrictions imposed upon him. By means of these peculiar narrative devices, McCabe has the internally divided Francie use not only action, but also the energy of his mind to express his condition as an Irish child in the Border Region in the 1960s.

Ideological changes cause utopian preconceptions to collapse, and so, anti-utopian or dystopian narratives arise. This is due to the great influence of the technological and scientific revolution Europe experienced in the 1960s. Generally speaking, all these changes had a very positive popular reception, which may be why all the aforementioned references are so cherished by Francie.

It may be the case that McCabe views such scientific progress and the advent of capitalism and American culture less positively than most Irish; perhaps this is one of the reasons why he depicts them in a particularly sinister manner in *The Butcher Boy*, a very dark fiction. The novel contains many elements of dystopian fiction that are absorbed by Francie from television – aliens, communists and the atomic age – until his father breaks it into pieces. Dystopia reflects the horrors of war or socio-economic crisis. In this sense, *The Butcher Boy* is an example of literary dystopia that feeds on the reality of Ireland in the 1960s and its actual experiences, such as priestly child abuse or small communities like Clones abusing certain outlying members like the Brady family. In this way, McCabe constructs an outlandish world, one of metaphysical anguish for a child, like Francie, provoked by all the external restrictions imposed upon his being.

Obviously, readers recognize that science fiction stories are unreachable and improbable scenarios. With the intergalactic wars, lunar settlements, and extra-terrestrial contacts of science fiction that feature in Francie's inner world, McCabe situates the child in a clear dystopic setting where he is the victim of his parents' violence, a notable lack of parental skills, and alienation from his community. Francie's goal is to achieve autonomy outside his small world, and to transcend his suffocating routine in the small town of Clones. This is why he runs away to Dublin, where he feels much more at ease.

Francie rebels against the institutional machinery of his time because he does not feel comfortable with the Catholic ruling class. McCabe constructs an eccentric character who is willing to perform an extreme type of subversion or resistance to social conformity in its strangeness and rejects the

conventional desires for wealth, power, education, and fame. The outcome is an experimental novel that mirrors at the formal level the dilemmas of Irish children in the Border Region during the 1960s.

To my mind, McCabe creates the figure of Francie to represent “the other” or “others” on the stage of the public square of Clones. By laughing at himself and at others throughout the novel, Francie reveals ideological constructions – of religion, for example – and human relationships as false, because they are formed/deformed by the unhealthy social situation of Ireland. In line with Kristeva’s notion of “carnival” (1980), McCabe is carrying out a carnivalesque and subversive negation of the official culture of his time in Clones<sup>8</sup>. To achieve this, Francie is made to enact repetitive tragicomic situations in the public space using fantasy, like his going to the fountain which was specifically built for the English queen. The experience of traumatic situations and the conflictual relationships between Francie and his own imagination, and between the community of Clones and the Brady family represent the relationship between the British on the border and the Irish inhabitants of Clones.

Having said that, children resort to using different strategies to cope with the effects of traumatic experiences and circumstances<sup>9</sup>. When Francie was younger, he would go back to an earlier period of his life and hallucinate or dream of being breastfed by Mrs Nugent:

Mrs Nugent was standing over me. Yes, Philip, she said. I know that. I’ve known it for a long time. Then slowly she unbuttoned her blouse and took out her breast. Then she said: This is for you Francis. She put her hand behind my head and firmly pressed my face forward. (McCabe 1992, 60)

As the story evolves, however, Francie becomes more nihilistic. He loses his parents’ company and that of his best friend Joe. Francie cannot find positive ways to compensate for these losses and starts to rebel against his small community and to conduct himself in distorted ways. This partly explains, for example, why he keeps his father’s corpse on the sofa of his living room, why he consumes alcohol, and why he behaves eccentrically, wildly, and rudely in front of his neighbours. In order to cure his conflictual psychological state, which is due to a lack of self-worth and self-esteem, it would have been more appropriate to teach Francie’s father parental skills, than to send Francie to a Church-run home for wayward boys. In fact, this is where

<sup>8</sup> On the “carnival” aspects of McCabe’s novel, see Scarlata 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Although McCabe is best known for his mostly violent and darkly humorous novels set in contemporary Ireland, such as *The Dead School* (1995), *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), or *Emerald Germs of Ireland* (2001), he has also written books for children, like *The Adventures of Shay Mouse* (1985).



Benny was forced to go by his parents when he was younger, which affected his own psychological stability to a great extent. Francie's new situation in the home is terrible because, far from helping him to achieve stability, he is subjected to physical abuse by certain dictatorial teachers. By the time the aforementioned molestation occurs in the novel, Francie has already re-evaluated his relationship with the Catholic Church and forces one of the main religious representatives of the youth home to let him go or he "might talk".

Psychology studies<sup>10</sup> reveal that accepting traumatic experiences has more positive long-term consequences than rejecting them. But when one is just a child, like Francie, one tries to avoid pain by all means. This is why Francie is at ease playing at cowboys and Indians with his blood brother Joe. He is most happy in Dublin, away from home, far from his community, or working in the abattoir, the only place where he feels he has a purpose in life and where his work is valued and acknowledged.

McCabe seems not to be concerned about whether Francie's actions are right or wrong. Like many children and young people who experienced the Troubles, Francie becomes very negatively influenced by external forces and community prejudices. *The Butcher Boy* reveals the consequences of post-traumatic disorders when Francie makes himself noticed in public. This trauma is why he constantly makes a fool of himself in front of his neighbours and claims to witness apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, when one is as young as Francie, one does not consider the consequences of one's actions. Perhaps the most extreme example of the animalization of human beings in *The Butcher Boy* occurs when Francie returns home and resumes his job at the butcher's. One day, while on his rounds, he calls at the Nugents' house. Mrs Nugent answers and Francie forces his way in:

I started to shake and kicked her I don't know how many times. She groaned and said I didn't care if she groaned or said please or what she said. I caught her round the neck and I said: You did two bad things Mrs Nugent. She didn't answer I didn't want to hear any answer. I smacked her against the wall a few times there was a smear of blood at the corner of her mouth and her hand was reaching out trying to touch me when I cocked the captive bolt. I lifted her off the floor with one hand and shot the bolt right into her head *thblok* was the sound it made, like a goldfish dropping into a bowl. If you ask anyone how you kill a pig they will tell you cut its throat across but you don't you do it long ways. Then she just lay there with her chin sticking up and I opened her then I stuck my hand in her stomach and wrote PIGS all over the walls of the upstairs room. (McCabe 1992, 195)

In this harsh description of Francie's assassination of Mrs Nugent, his attribution of porcine features to her is a source of dark humour, scorn, and

<sup>10</sup> On this point, see Thorne and McLean 2002.

degradation. “She groaned”, because pigs groan, in surrender and annoyance. This rhetorical device, the use of animal imagery, aims to question the superiority of this woman whose visit to England led her to adopt a patronizing attitude towards the Brady family and present a grotesque image of her British values and codes. McCabe’s use of devices such as fantasy and animal imagery in the extract above is intended to hide the attack behind a veil of apparent incongruity. Here, the narrator, as a satirist, feels at ease because his attacks upon specific people like Mrs Nugent, or the British institutions she stands for, are veiled by this animal façade. A key issue for this satiric narrator is that he gains indirection to the detriment of explicitness and direct confrontation. In doing so, this fantasy passage indirectly contributes to highlighting the sense of detachment which satire conveys.

After this terrible scene, Francie puts Mrs Nugent into the cart with which he transports offal and meat waste, covering her body with it. Throughout the book, Francie holds Mrs Nugent to responsible for the fragmentation of his family, his separation from his friend Joe, and, by extension, all that is rotten in his small world. In assassinating Mrs Nugent, Francie feels liberated from the source of his pain.

Francie is not a traditional character, but the embodiment of conflicting psychological states. In an attempt to negate Mrs Nugent’s existence, Francie butchers and buries her under the abattoir offal. Since, as Wooden (2016) notes, “Professing belief in the resurrection of the dead and affirming that the human body is an essential part of a person’s identity, the Catholic Church insists that the bodies of the deceased be treated with respect and laid to rest in a consecrated place”, what Francie does to Mrs Nugent’s body is the negation of her identity. Francie is thus able to renegotiate this doctrine and his own existence. This may be why he casually resumes his rounds and makes his way back to the abattoir, where he is apprehended by the police. Francie’s mischievous nature makes him lead the police on a wild goose chase in the search for Mrs Nugent’s body, and to escape for a time, but he is recaptured and eventually imprisoned after revealing the whereabouts of her dismembered corpse. At the end of the book, Francie builds up an imaginative life of his own, first as a holy Irish boy and then as a butcher boy. Inspired by the protagonists of the comics he reads and his television heroes, Francie creates a fictional existence in Clones, transcends the traumatic experience of acknowledging his loneliness, and copes with the external restrictions imposed upon him in 1960s Ireland. This is the reason why Francie spends his time playing with water in a public fountain that was built long ago in honour of an English queen who never visited, why he imagines that he is a comic-book hero, and claims to witness apparitions of the Virgin Mary:

One day Bubble took me up to his study and said to me: I’m glad you’re learning manners.

Yes Father, I said.

... but I wasn't listening to a word he said ... After that they put me serving Mass. What a laugh that was ... It was around that time I started the long walks and the holy voices. Bubble says to me what are you doing going on all these long walks down to the low field by yourself? I told him I thought Our Lady was talking to me. I read that in a book about this holy Italian boy ... I knelt on the soggy turn for penance ... She had a rosary entwined around her pearly white hands and she said that it gladdened her that I had chosen to be good. I said no problem, Our Lady. (McCabe 1992, 75-77)

Here, Francie sets up a dialogue with the Virgin Mary<sup>11</sup> that is respectful towards her, but mocking towards the priest who molests him. The last two quotations examined reveal that Francie ridicules not only the English gaze, but also the Irish Catholic gaze. He is a child hero who spends his time contemplating, playing with the few objects he possesses (knives, a bolt gun, a cart, etc.), and builds up a fantasy life as a butcher boy. His double-voiced discourse and the verbal absurdity of the dialogues in which he engages the other characters undermine his post-traumatic disorder, which is based on a fixed social status in this Irish setting. Francie becomes a genuine creator of fiction. He decides his own ending while acting out on the stage of the public square, which constitutes a reflexive affirmation of being: the fiction that Francie creates in his own story.

Unlike Francie, who is immortal in his own head because his fantastic possibilities are endless, his parents are mortal, since they are stuck in the real world and die there. They contain the hope of redemption, yet the suffering of Francie is infinite in its absurdity. Francie's mother and father see death as an alternative that can end both physical and mental distress. Francie's mother, who is tied to her husband, feels that she has been divested of her identity and suffered a lifetime of betrayal. She is unable to cope with the life that has been imposed upon her by her society. I agree with McWilliams when she writes:

Women in McCabe's novels emerge as victims of a national tyranny whereby the national is always assumed to be feminine and is made to bear the burden of imposed meanings - for McCabe, true liberation lies in the breaking down of the familial, religious, and cultural orthodoxies of Irish national identity preserved and perpetuated in such images. (2010, 399)

This might explain why, when Francie leaves home, his mother can no longer cope with her situation at home and commits suicide. Francie's father, unable to bear her loss, drinks himself to death.

<sup>11</sup> Singer Sinéad O'Connor's performance as Francie's hallucination of the Virgin Mary in Jordan's film adaptation is significant given O'Connor's outspokenness about child abuse in Ireland and her own use of this metaphor in her song "Famine": "I see the Irish as a race / that's like a child that got itself bashed in the face". For further discussion, see Cullingford 2002.

Further evidence of Francie's post-traumatic disorder is his penchant for changing names. The importance of names as a means of representing identity and individuality is of crucial importance in *The Butcher Boy*. Here the processes of naming and renaming serve as a strategy to reveal the extreme invisibility of the experiences of children living in dysfunctional families, as was commonplace in Ireland during this period. The main characters are defined by the ecclesiastical discourse as pigs and degenerates, that is, as examples of a moral transgression that threatens the purity and sanctity of the nation. For example, Francie's father's alcohol consumption and his mother's madness and depressive character are conceptualized as an unnameable reality that has to be left out of History. Francie's change of name means that he can no longer be identified as a member of the Brady family in censorious Catholic Ireland: he calls himself Francie, then "pig", and, at the end of the novel, "Mr Carruthers". This last name implies that he no longer wishes to be associated with the Bradys. In this way, Francie's individual identity is annihilated: he becomes known to others as "pig" and, finally, as "the butcher boy". In calling him and his parents "pigs", Francie's neighbours deprive them of their identity. When Francie adopts the name Carruthers on his first visit to Dublin and, later, after his parents die, he changes his name again, for "the butcher boy", and forces himself to break with his past life.

The psychology literature shows that a person suffering a post-traumatic disorder needs to be valued by his community in order to recover and, thus, gain a positive view of life and other people<sup>12</sup>. Francie does not receive support either from his parents or his neighbours. He is the scapegoat of his community. When he becomes an orphan, he tells his father's doctor about the times he was molested in a youth home, but the doctor ignores his emotions and needs. When Francie goes to Joe's boarding school in County Donegal, he conducts himself in a grotesque manner as a means to draw attention to his lack of self-worth and self-esteem, yet he is rejected there too. Francie is in desperate need of empathy from his community and from Joe, but all these characters prioritize their own need "to survive" in this religious educational environment. Joe's own "survival" is thus more important than his sense of solidarity with his friend. Francie receives no support from his community, who turn their backs on him, and his psychological state worsens considerably, and rapidly, until he commits murder.

As observed, Francie goes through continuous invalidation of his identity, yet he remains resilient and opens his eyes to the harsh reality. At the beginning of the novel, when he escapes from his family and his small-town community to Dublin, and calls himself Carruthers (McCabe 1992, 19-20), Francie rediscovers his identity through re-founding it: "I am Mr Carruthers". This act of self-affirmation marks the end of his journey from unconditional acceptance of the Catholic doctrine and its degrading conceptualization of dysfunctional

<sup>12</sup> On this point, see Folkman *et al.* 1986.

families to the definition of his own self and the renegotiation of his Catholic identity. However, the wounds are too deep to forget and the end of this journey will not be the end of his pain. The narration of *The Butcher Boy* does not allow the reader to forget the devastating power of this boy's experiences, even when he manages to escape them or both geographically in space and in his own head.

Because of the black comic tone, the narration does not present Francie as a victim. He is a child victimized by a social, political, and religious system that exploits, annihilates, and silences him, but he is a survivor. Despite his terrible experiences and the subsequent bereavement, pain, and psychological effects of molestation on a young child who has already been the scapegoat for dysfunctional parental and community conduct, Francie is resilient and manages to escape. Since the publication of the novel, other storytellers have made the voices of Irish children heard through fiction and film - for example, Peter Mullan's film *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) or Evelyn Conlon's novel *Not the Same Sky* (2013). *The Butcher Boy* is a book of denunciation, but also an exercise of memory acknowledging the hundreds of thousands of Irish children who have been either forgotten or silenced by Ireland's official History. By naming Francie's reality and transmitting his silenced experiences, *The Butcher Boy* openly challenges not only the official image of Irish childhood, but also the official history of Ireland.

### 3. Conclusions

This article has examined the relevance of various key stylistic devices that stand out most prominently in fiction dealing with traumatic situations and which are used in very specific ways in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. More specifically, I have investigated the role of repetition (of language, imagery, and plot), and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice as major mechanisms giving voice to traumatic experiences in the novel. McCabe takes the story to its extreme possibilities, presenting a drama of conflict, murder, and suicide. In doing so, he conceptualizes and represents the effects of traumatic experiences on Francie's sense of identity, mimicking its symptomatology at a formal level: "*The Butcher Boy* recreates specific historical instances of trauma in Ireland, such as Ireland's neocolonial status, identifying split identity and non-conformism as outcries of a nation colonised by a post-colonial state, the 'unbalanced state' of Ireland and Irish identity, the instability of the community during the sixties, ... etc." (Gauthier 2003, 196-212).

This article has also analysed McCabe's use of satirical rhetorical strategies, such as fantasy, detachment, animal imagery, and scatology in order to present and condemn historical ecclesiastic child abuse in Ireland. As we have observed, as a child, Francie does not have the full control of language he would need to express all the traumatic effects of his dysfunctional ex-

istence. McCabe uses all these literary devices to present the story from a child's perspective, and thus cannot use sophisticated language to simply describe Francie's life. This is why McCabe has the child adopt the identity of the butcher boy, a lone outsider battling against tradition and convention. Francie gets no positive appreciation of his pain either from his family or his community, because there is no such thing as community in his town. He is rejected by all its members, who consider him and his family to be pigs. Francie is a victim of the system and his self-loathing drives him to become another boy: first, Mr Carruthers, a cartoon character; second, a holy boy; third, a butcher boy. It is only in the slaughterhouse where he works that Francie finds some reinforcement or recognition from society, and feels that he and his work are positively valued.

When his parents die, Francie makes of his job the centre of his life. However, the traumatic experiences he has suffered for so long have already affected the values that motivate his patterns of conduct and social interactions with the other members of his community. A direct consequence of these experiences is that Francie confuses the context of practice, and no longer knows where his professional skills as a butcher are appropriate. He thus ends up butchering Mrs Nugent as if she were a pig in her living room, the place where the Irish family traditionally gathers.

Childhood trauma hovers over Irish consciousness, a great tragedy that has been suppressed and remains strangely unacknowledged. In *The Butcher Boy*, Francie and his trauma within an incomplete, dysfunctional family serves as a metaphor for the sickness of the nation. McCabe, as satirist, ultimately shows concern for the freedom of the writer as a searcher for truth, and "his satiric practice becomes highly rhetorical and nonmoral too" (Terrazas 2016, 70). McCabe's satiric practice aims to make the reader face Ireland's tragic absurdities in the absurd conduct of Francie.

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“That name is a wealth to you”:  
The Necropolitics of the Great Famine, and the  
Politics of Visibility, Naming and (Christian)  
Compassion in Joseph O’Connor’s *Star of the Sea*

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*Abstract:*

The paper discusses Joseph O’Connor’s novel as an investigation of a necropolitical event par excellence – the Great Famine. The mass production of dead bodies through poverty, starvation and disease is coupled with O’Connor’s struggle against necropower via the politics of visibility and naming of the victims, which results in the transformation of the necropolitical “acceptable losses” into Butlerian “grievable lives”. Naming the novel after the Virgin Mary, moreover, O’Connor engages in a complex relationship with Christianity: critical of the officials’ role in maintaining poverty, he does not negate the radical potential of the doctrine of inclusive love.

*Keywords:* Compassion, Joseph O’Connor, Necropolitics, The Great Famine, Visibility

*1. Introduction*

Joseph O’Connor’s 2002 novel is set in the last month of the “Black ‘47” on a coffin ship bearing the name of *Star of the Sea*, an epithet of the Virgin Mary: bearing, also, in equal parts hopeful and dying Irish passengers to the New World. In numerous narrative flashbacks, the novel visits the “death worlds” (Mbembe 2003, 40) of famine-struck Ireland: cast primarily in terms of the failure of compassion, *an Gorta Mór* and its effects on both the human and social tissue are nonetheless vividly detailed. Unlike “old Ireland” that is left behind already in the subtitle of the novel, moreover, its lethal class divisions remain. Replicated on the ship, they result in the Steerage becoming a “death world” in

its own right, with the starving and diseased “Common Passengers” dying on a daily basis. Their names, after the initial efforts by the Captain to note them down, are repeatedly “duly struck off the Manifest” (O’Connor 2005, 164).

O’Connor depicts the national trauma – which, as all traumas, resists being contained by words – and attempts both its genealogy and correction. It is only as correction that one can interpret O’Connor’s politics of visibility/naming in relation to the sufferers; his narrative re-fleshing of the bodies that were too quickly de-fleshed, reduced to bones, and made invisible and nameless, both in the historical past, and in the much-contested, though few, histories. Moreover, O’Connor’s imaginative raising of the dead – rather than burying them properly, as Aidan O’Malley argues<sup>1</sup> – runs parallel with the examination of the necropolitics that killed them and the promotion of empathy, compassion and solidarity. While necropolitics is never named as such – Mbembe’s influential essay appeared a year after the novel – it is, indeed, necropolitics whose mechanisms and procedures O’Connor examines and reflects in the seemingly postmodern pastiche form of the novel. The mechanisms and procedures range from the anthropological machine, lethal poverty, the death worlds and the blurred social roles they foster to the prison-industrial complex, mirrored in the literal policing of class boundaries on the ship, complete with (prison) bars, and the role of the law in sentencing a million people to death. The form of the novel, therefore, is not merely stylistically postmodern, as expected in generally self-conscious neo-Victorian fiction, nor does it only reflect the difficulty of finding the accurate language for trauma – the difficulty expressed succinctly by Grantley Dixon’s insight that “[th]e best word for death is death” (O’Connor 2005, 129). Rather, the illustrations from popular and scientific magazines; the excerpts and caricatures of the Irish from *Punch*; and the reproduced entries from the 1847 *Anthropology* that one finds scattered throughout the novel exemplify the mecha-

<sup>1</sup> O’Malley insists that it is precisely “the unburied dead” who haunted the contemporary witnesses the most, as well as O’Connor: “For contemporary witnesses, such as the Cork artist James Mahony who was commissioned to provide an illustrated report on the horrors wracking Ireland for *The Illustrated London News* in February 1847, nothing spoke so clearly of the disintegration of the frayed fabric that held this society together than its inability to take care of its dead. Perhaps the most powerful embodiment of the population’s distress in his account was the figure of a harrowed woman he encountered in Clonakilty begging for the means to bury the dead baby she still carried. Indeed, as he later notes, this inability to accommodate the deceased had destroyed the essential *cordon sanitaire* between the living and the dead, so that in hovels one found “the dying, the living, and the dead, lying indiscriminately upon the same floor” (quoted in Kissane 1995, 115). In short, the boundary that gives life its basic definition was crumbling. ... Inscribed throughout Star of the Sea’s history of this period is the suggestion that accommodating, and showing hospitality to, in particular, contemporary immigrants might be a way of working through the trauma of the famine, mourning it, and finding places for its unburied dead” (O’Malley 2015, 132, 152).

nisms where by populations are racialized as sub-human and animal like, and eliminated. The murder mystery frame narrative also calls attention to the seeming paradox of modern necropolitics. While one man's violent death is investigated as a murder with the aim of identifying the killer, the deaths of millions are not even a bureaucratic problem. O'Connor seems to be deliberately contrasting Captain Lockwood's initial meticulous recording of the names of the Steerage dead with the well-known fact that "accurate records were not kept of those who died [during the Famine]" (Kinealy 2001, 10).

Significantly, the dehumanizing constructions of the Irish as "Caucasian nigger[s]" (O'Connor 2005, 294); the nightmarish depiction of the Victorian prison as the place where ethnic conflicts are re-enacted through physical violence and rape; and the piling up of the de-fleshed, diseased and dead human bodies are juxtaposed with the letters of those who were lucky enough to escape to the United States. Against the horror of famine, hope is affirmed as a sign of humanity. With these excerpts depicting America as a land of equality, a nod is given to the more positive outcome of the Famine, the vast extension of Irish diaspora, as Avril Doyle put it in 1995 (quoted in Kinealy 2001, 1), though this is the positivity which the harrowing journey itself does not easily suggest. It seems, therefore, that O'Connor is not only invested in bringing the dead to life – naming them and making their bodies and their suffering visible – but in making sure their humanity, too, is visible, recognized, and acknowledged. Most significantly, an Anglo-Irish landlord, a traditional villain in the Famine narratives, is given such treatment. This corresponds with the general Christian, compassionate ethos of the novel, expressed succinctly by David Dark: "[w]e wrestle not against flesh and blood, the apostle Paul instructs. We struggle instead against the mechanism, the principalities and powers in which people of flesh and blood are caught up and used up, often pitted against each other, and directed to act against their own thriving" (2016). One such mechanism can be termed necropolitics.

## 2. *Necropolitics/The Politics of Visibility*

Achille Mbembe introduces the term "necropolitics" as a corrective to Foucault's biopower, which he deems insufficient "to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective" (2003, 12). This "subjugation of life to the power of death" (*ibidem*, 39) is both highly specific and universal. While he locates its operations primarily in the "the plantation and the colony" (*ibidem*, 40), Mbembe also sees it at work in contemporary world in general: "the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to

conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (*ibidem*, 40; italics in the original).

Necropolitics, in Mbembe's definition, is thus oriented towards the physical destruction of the enemy via weapons, under conditions of war. Therefore, he focuses on the topography and the devastating socio-psychological effects of occupation:

To live under late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of 'being in pain': fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes every night from dusk to day-break; soldiers patrolling the unlit streets, frightened by their own shadows; children blinded by rubber bullets; parents shamed and beaten in front of their families ... bones broken; shootings and fatalities – a certain kind of madness. (*Ibidem*, 39)

As such, necropolitics seems an odd analytic tool with which to discuss O'Connor's rendition of the Great Famine, especially when we bear in mind that O'Connor himself appears to be treating the Famine primarily as a failure of compassion, empathy and love – those traditional Christian virtues emphasized by the title of the novel. Ironically, perhaps, it is Foucault's account of the transformation of power in modernity which, at first sight, seems a much better choice. Namely, the deaths of an approximately million Irish men, women and children during the 1845-1852 period occur precisely in that historical shift from the power of the sovereign to "let live and make die" to the "making live and letting die" of the modern, democratic nation-states. The Irish are not killed; no weapons are deployed; there are no curfews, no "soldiers patrolling the streets", no "shootings and fatalities" (*ibidem*, 39). They are, moreover, clearly allowed to die – by the British government, their (Anglo-)Irish landlords, their neighbours and, in the novel, their own brothers. Yet Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is indeed useful for the discussion of *Star of the Sea* for several reasons, the first one being his account of how necropolitics functions to produce the living dead inhabiting death worlds – a description that applies to certain sections of O'Connor's novel with eerie precision<sup>2</sup>. Another reason is Mbembe's insight into the confusion regard-

<sup>2</sup> I have in mind paragraphs such as this one: "Nothing has prepared him for it: the fact of famine. The trench-graves and screams. The hillocks of corpses. The stench of death on the tiny roads. The sunlit, frosted morning he had walked alone from the inn at Cashel to the village of Carna – the sun shone, still, in this place of extinguished chances – and found three old women fighting over the remains of a dog" (O'Connor 2005, 130). Nicholas Mulvey's letter/suicide note to his wife also depicts a death world: "The town was a dreadful sight, I could never forget it; with a multitude half dead and weeping as they walked through the streets. Worse again to see those for whom even weeping was too much effort, and they sitting down on the icy ground to bow their hands and die, the best portion of life already gone out from them" (*ibidem*, 39).

ing the fundamental lines in the population subjected to necropower: “under conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred” (Mbembe 2003, 40). *Star of the Sea* details the genuine blurring of these, and other fundamental lines – between mercy and punishment, love and murder, for instance, especially in the relation between parents and children. Nicholas Mulvey drowns his own daughter to spare her the pain of dying from starvation; Dixon mentions “[t]he man arrested on the outskirts of Clifden accused of devouring the body of his child” (O’Connor 2005, 130) – the child that, too, was loved. The third reason why Mbembe’s necropolitics is a much better analytic choice than Foucault’s biopolitics is precisely Mbembe’s insight that necropolitics is mass murder disguised as war – we only need to recognize poverty as a too-often unacknowledged weapon of mass destruction, directed at the “surplus population” (*ibidem*). It is a well-known fact that only the poorest Irish died of starvation; another well-known fact is that Ireland never stopped exporting food during the Famine. Finally, the fact that Mbembe discusses slavery as “one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation” (2003, 21), and focuses on the plantation and the colony – i.e. the role *race* plays in the distribution of death in places and “states of exception” – is also valid for our discussion of *Star of the Sea*. From the very start of the novel, O’Connor calls attention to what Giorgio Agamben termed “the anthropological machine” – the mechanism for “the production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman” (Agamben 2004, 37). In its modern incarnation, the machine functions by “animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: Homo alalus, or the ape-man” (*ibidem*). For Agamben, “the Jew ... the néomort and the overcomatose person” (*ibidem*) are the examples of the machine animalizing human beings. Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, necropolitical animalization is inseparable from racialization and criminalization. As such, it is evident in the creation of the African, but also the Irish. It is no accident that O’Connor begins his novel with the illustration from *Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, which depicts three human heads in profile, labelled “The Irish Iberian”, “The Anglo-Teutonic” and “The Negro”. There is an exaggerated similarity between the ape-like first and the third profile. In addition to quoting the historical documents, O’Connor suggests this African-Irish connection by making *Star of the Sea* a former slave ship; one of the narrators, moreover, lets it slip that after the 1847 voyage was over, “she was bound for Dover Docks ... there to finish out her days as a hulk for convicts” (O’Connor 2005, xxv). The racialization of the Irish as “Caucasian nigger[s]”, furthermore, is not limited to scientific treatises and serious magazines such as *A Journal of Civilization*. O’Connor, for instance, quotes the 1862 edition of *Punch* which identifies the Irish poor as “The Missing Link”. The entry states in a mock-scientific manner that

[a] creature manifestly between the gorilla and the Negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal ... (xv)

Racialized as a sub-human “Negro-type” (*ibidem*, 287), “a Caucasian nigger” (*ibidem*, 294), the Irish is not only animalized (“she’s as hale as a Connemara pony”, Lord Kingscourt describes his Irish nanny (*ibidem*, 7), but also brutalized, as the anthropological machine does more than merely distinguish between man and animal: it produces the crucial difference between (human) life and (animal) death. Thus the killability of the Irish poor during the Famine is made possible by the twin traditions of animalizing the human enemy (racializing “the African” as “a beast” in particular<sup>3</sup>) and the everyday killing of the animals – the practice so mundane it is practically invisible. The link between animalization, killability and race in the country that “was in effect a colony existing in close physical proximity to the richer colonial power” (Neal 1998, 5) is even more pronounced if we bear in mind that, as Mbembe puts it, “[i]n the eyes of the conqueror, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension” (2003, 24; italics in the original). Quoting Hannah Arendt, Mbembe continues, “[t]he savages are, as it were, ‘natural’ human beings who lack the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, ‘so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder’ ” (*ibidem*). Nothing betrays the identical attitude towards the Irish better than Disraeli’s famous remark that “the British State was able to provide accurate statistics on the numbers of pigs and poultry consumed, yet it did not attempt to keep a record of the deaths of its people” (Kinealy 2001, 10).

Yet, unlike Mbembe, and in keeping with Christine Kinealy’s influential interpretation of the Famine, O’Connor more directly connects the necropolitical practices with economy. Kinealy, as Frank Neal summarizes, concludes that during the Famine “laissez faire economics triumphed over compassion” (1998, 6). O’Connor’s Grantley Dixon, too, makes an assessment that is easily applicable to the twenty-first century’s neoliberalism: “[t]he name of the economic system within which the catastrophe is occurring is very well known indeed. It is called “The Free Market” and is widely revered” (*ibidem*, 18). Moreover, Dixon identifies it explicitly as a war which distributes life and death. “Its *nom de guerre* is ‘Laissez-Faire’; which preaches that the lust for profit may regulate everything: including who should live and who should die” (*ibidem*; italics in the original).

<sup>3</sup> See Scott 2007, for further discussion of the cultural/ scientific racialization of the African as “a beast”.

Another important facet of O'Connor's novel is its depicting how necropolitical, *laissez-faire* animalization and brutalization intersect to produce the disposability of the (dead) Irish bodies – at this point it is perhaps worth noting that Henry Giroux referred to necropolitics as “biopolitics of disposability” (2006). The novel piles up dead bodies: terrifying in their materiality, in their physical histories of dispossession, these bodies are nonetheless quickly disposed of – in the water. Alice-Mary Duane, the daughter of Mary Duane and Nicholas Mulvey, is drowned by her father. Named and unnamed “common passengers” who die of starvation and the starvation-related illnesses – on the ship bearing the name of the Virgin Mary – are dropped in the ocean. The symbolism of the water in the novel, which is deeply imbued with Catholic imagery and references, is too great to be ignored. Whereas holy water is used in many Christian rites of blessing, symbolizing purification, the waters swallowing/obliterating the victims' bodies are ultimately holy in the sense that they receive the abject(ed) people and bodies that are not welcome anywhere else, including the promised land, America. Placing the diseased and dead bodies in (close proximity to) the water, moreover, O'Connor dramatizes “the famished body's radical estrangement from the everyday social world” (McLean 2004, 126). But water and disposability are joined in the great project of modernity as well. As Jenna Brager writes in the midst of the latest “refugee crisis”,

[t]he oceans are full of bodies – the waters speak of the necropolitical creation of disposable classes that are subject to vanishing. The boundaries are made clear, between the privileged class of the human and its other. The ritual of body disposal, which prevents or makes ghosts, is at the foundation of political community. ... The water is full of evidence, and that which is dumped as trash reemerges to haunt us, demanding justice. (2015)

In this context, it is no accident that the Famine is almost universally regarded as constitutive of both Irish and British modernity. Avril Doyle, for instance, claims that the Famine is where “modern Ireland was born” (quoted in Kinealy 2001, 1); Stuart McLean suggests that “[t]he spectacle of Irish destitution both grounds and menaces the contrapuntal fashioning of an emergent British modernity” (2004, 69). On a more general note, Avery Gordon, too, states that “[h]aunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import” (Gordon 2008, 7).

It is in response to such disposability, and the inevitable loss of empathy in the face of such effectively distributed death, that O'Connor engages in the politics of visibility/naming and the promotion of solidarity. The phrase “politics of visibility” is inspired by the work done by Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore in *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*, where they ask the following:

What can account for the fact that certain bodies are hyperexposed, brightly visible, and magnified, while others are hidden, missing, and vanished? We believe there are dimensions of corporeal visibility and erasure that need to be charted and interpreted, for intellectual and political reasons, and we attempt to do so here. Interested in social processes and conditions of local and global stratification, or the many ways in which the world's people are unequal, we investigate in this book the traffic *between* and *among* visible, invisible, and missing bodies. ... we find ourselves longing for these missing bodies and for stories about them". (2009, 3; italics in the original)

Starting from the definition of visibility as "a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness" (Gordon 2008, 15), Avery Gordon, furthermore, notices that "[i]n a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful result" (*ibidem*, 16). It is precisely these missing, disposable, and improperly buried bodies that Joseph O'Connor's novel makes visible. The novel also provides stories about them, and names them carefully in an attempt to fight the namelessness of the necropolitical animalization and mass dying. Thus O'Connor's novel is what Avery Gordon would call a ghost story: "stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities" (*ibidem*, 17). It is quite fitting, therefore, that one of the prominent characters in *Star of the Sea* is at first known simply as "The Ghost".

Yet *Star of the Sea* is not limited to the naming of the de-fleshed bodies ravaged by hunger (syphilis, corporal punishment in prison): it is invested in the act of re-fleshing the bodies, by visiting them in the happier, fuller past. As in almost every other neo-Victorian novel, the re-fleshing of the bodies in *Star of the Sea*, the visibility of suffering, and the naming of the victims are politically motivated. The author's narrative choices seem oriented towards giving the agency (back) to the silenced historical others. As in almost every other neo-Victorian novel, too, the production and destruction of the disposable surplus "others" is recognized as the fact of modern life – "these novels create uncanny affinities between the way we live now and the way they lived then", as Saverio Tomaiuolo writes (2016, 129). O'Connor ends his "Introduction" to the novel reproducing the words and dates from a Connemara tombstone, which was erected on the grave of a young man who died in the Vietnam War. Even though it is the dead, and not the living, who, as Antigone claims, "have the longest demands", O'Connor does not shy away from the explicit conclusion that in their demand to be witnessed, the dead speak for the living as well. "People like my characters all existed at the time. More to the point, they exist now, too" (2005, x). Moreover, the demand is not only that the dead be remembered, named and mourned – O'Connor, following Horkheimer and Adorno, calls for "the conscious horror of destruc-



tion” as well. “Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope” (quoted in Gordon 2008, 19).

### 3. *Necropolitics and Legible Bodies*

In “Necropolitics”, Mbembe asks: “What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?” (2003, 12). While O’Connor engages in the politics of visibility and naming as a counterforce against the necropolitical animalization/disposability of anonymous lives and bodies, he answers Mbembe’s questions by documenting the wasting of bodies by poverty, disease and starvation. Although not limited to the pauperized tenants – Lord Merridith’s “being eaten through by syphilis” (O’Malley 2015, 144), for example, is rendered in terrifying hints – O’Connor’s examination focuses primarily on the conveniently forgotten and invisible. The human body in the necropolitical order of the Great Famine is represented as wounded, and finally slain, by all the physical and social aspects of systemic poverty. For instance, the steerage poor, who are kept alive almost exclusively by hope and prayer, are depicted as abject – rotting and stinking. Their abjection, moreover, is uncontainable, and it is spilling over into the inanimate world: “[r]otten food, rotten flesh, rotten fruit of rotting bowels, you smelt it on your clothes, your hair, your hands; on the glass you drank from and the bread you ate. Tobacco smoke, vomit, stale perspiration, mildewed clothes, filthy blankets and rotgut whiskey” (2005, xxiii). At the very beginning of the novel, an incident is recounted where an old woman dies while boarding the ship, and her children beg the Captain to “take her to America anyway” as “[n]o means were available to pay for her burial” (xxv). The old woman’s body is already reduced to “little more than an agglomeration of rags” (*ibidem*), but death is not the end of poverty’s grip on the body. Namely, when the pious Captain offers a compromise – wrapping the dead woman’s body in one of his blankets and dumping it in the water once the ship leaves the port – the following happens: “[i]t was later recounted by the Fourth Engineer, who against all advice had been moved to assist them, that they [her sons] had disfigured her face terribly with some kind of blade, fearful that the current would drift her back to Crosshaven where she might be recognized by her former neighbours” (*ibidem*). O’Connor reads this as the enduring stigma of poverty, the symptom of the “shame [that] lasts longer than life” (*ibidem*). It is, however, possible to interpret it as the metaphor for the trauma caused by the Famine, and its unburied, restless, and disfigured ghosts – a point made by O’Malley, Kinealy and Neal. All three call attention to the somewhat surprising fact that “so little professional scholarship has been devoted

to such a catastrophe, occurring as it did, in the heart of the British Empire” (Neal 1998, 2), concluding that the Famine was “ignored, marginalized or sanitized by generations of professional historians” (Kinealy 2001, 22). It is precisely this attitude, moreover, that has resulted in subsequent outbursts of haunting. But before we start turning the unburied woman into a metaphor, we have to bear in mind that what O’Connor is depicting is first and foremost the body that suffers necropolitical poverty and starvation. The disfigurement is an act of protection, invoking Mbembe’s blurred lines as well.

It is perhaps no accident that in the novel where men are murderers and suffer violent deaths, it is women who are associated with the slow death from starvation more closely than men. When Pius Mulvey, the Ghost, boards the ship, he emphatically avoids all women as they seem to embody the dispossession of poverty and death more visibly than men. “He could not be around the women, especially the younger ones. Partly because it pained him to see their emaciated faces: their lightless eyes and skeletal arms. The awfulness of their hope, the way it was burned into them: a brand of absolute dispossession” (O’Connor 2005, 25). The absolute, gendered dispossession of poverty is revisited in a traumatic scene recounted by Nicholas Mulvey in his suicide note, when a “wretched old woman” asks him for food and then, as he has none, begs him to kill her. All her sons are gone, she explains, and there is nobody to do the deed for her. “All I could think of to do was to lift her up and carry her with me along the way”, Mulvey writes. “This I did. Christ be my judge, Mary, she weighed as a pillow, but even so, I could barely carry her” (*ibidem*, 40). Mbembe’s “death-worlds” seem like an accurate description: the muddled lines between murder and kindness are there as well. Nicholas himself is dying; a strong man, he finds it nearly impossible to carry the much-reduced weight of another, though on his return he will manage to drown his daughter and kill himself.

Still, O’Connor does not suggest that a male body is somehow exempt from the pain associated with various forms of dispossession. The terror of starvation, for instance, is recreated vividly by Nicholas: “[b]ut then the cramp came back, harder than before – Christ stand between us and all harm – like a blacksmith’s iron aflame in my guts. I thought my time had come to die but it stopped, then, and I could feel myself weeping for the pain of it” (*ibidem*, 41). Nicholas’s brother, Pius, also weeps from pain in his prison cell, having received two hundred lashes for saying “I didn’t hear you” to the prison guard (*ibidem*, 196). Newgate is at that time enforcing the infamous “silent system” by the “progressive” Governor (*ibidem*, 195), and speaking is a punishable offence.

The (wounded and slain) human body in *Star of the Sea* is thus represented as a gendered material reality which endures necropolitical dispossession in all its manifestations, from social isolation and imprisonment to starvation and death. The treatment of the human body under conditions of

legal necropolitics<sup>4</sup> detailed by *Star of the Sea* is similar to the one depicted in Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony" (1919). In this story, the law is tattooed into the body of the convicted person until death, for several hours. The body functions as a canvas for the law that ultimately destroys it, but the law is not even understood. Kafka's narrator states explicitly that the convict does not even speak the language in which he is sentenced to death. Yet death is only one outcome of the necropolitics of the Famine/poverty. O'Connor rightly connects poverty with social death as well, with the frustrated desires, denied appetites and the de-fleshing of life itself. Unlike life, however, it is bodies that are legible and it is they that bear most clearly the traces of necropolitics, as individual, material histories of penury:

The hills of Connemara abounded with such men. Bent, dead-eyed, ancient brothers who shuffled through life with the cross of loneliness on their backs. They limped into Clifden, laughed at by girls, to Midnight Mass on a Christmas Eve. Virgin old donkey-men with womanly faces. They reeked of their isolation, of stale piss and lost chances. (2005, 89)

Yet, as already stated, O'Connor does more than detail the de-fleshing of bodies and lives through poverty and the Famine. He also re-fleshes them, and shows them filled with sated desires and appetites. This is particularly noticeable in the depiction of the love affair between David Merridith, the future Lord Kingscourt, and Mary Duane, his future governess. Before the two are revealed to be half-siblings and the incestuous affair is ended, their sexual encounters (dubbed "Winchester College Football" [*ibidem*, 68] by the lovers) are depicted by O'Connor as the source of deep, fleshly joy. The appetite, moreover, only grows with satisfaction: "[a]t night she lay in bed she shared with two of her sisters, waiting for them to stop whispering and finally fall asleep, so her fingertips could begin their delicious imitation of David Merridith's caress" (*ibidem*, 72). The joys of the sated hunger are there as well, especially in David Merridith's memory of what is in effect the quintessential scene of Irish rural poverty. "He

<sup>4</sup> Kinealy calls attention to the role played by the 1838 Poor Law. "Modelled on the English amended law of 1834, the Irish version was deliberately more draconian with no right to relief existing and relief only being provided within the confines of a workhouse. Nor did the Irish Poor Law include a Law of Removal. The differences between the two Poor Laws made it clear that poverty in Ireland was to be treated more harshly than elsewhere and that the Irish poor were even less deserving than the undeserving English poor. Inevitably this attitude shaped responses during the Famine. The point was made on a number of occasions that if the Famine had occurred in England, the political response would have been more generous, as was the accusation that the poor of Ireland were unjustly and unnecessarily being subsidized by the industrial classes in England" (2001, 95-96). In one of the novel's many scenes dramatizing the insurmountable gap between the Anglo-Irish Lords and their poor, David Merridith offers as his contribution to the relief for the Famine victims the fact that he fought to *relax* admission into poorhouses.

liked the way her [Mary Duane's] mother would empty the great black cauldron of potatoes straight onto the table. He loved to eat potatoes with his small, bare hands, licking the butter from his knuckles like a puppy" (*ibidem*, 53).

The rare scenes of the joys of the sated bodily appetites serve as a foil against which the terror of the Famine plays out: both the slow decay of the individual body and mind, and the necrosis of larger social tissues. The readers are reminded of the complexity of human beings and social networks, and the horror of necropolitics which erases that complexity, sentencing its victims not only to death, but also to invisibility, silence and obscurity.

#### 4. Compassion

In *Star of the Sea*, O'Connor engages in the politics of visibility and naming as a measure against the dehumanizing, abstracting murder operations of (colonial) necropolitics, but also against the self-defeating Irish custom to close the doors on the dying. The "collective memory of the Famine", as Ian Baucom notes, "repeatedly approaches and draws back from images of corpses buried in canvas sacks rather than in coffins, of bodies left to rot in collapsing cabins" (quoted by Melissa Fegan in Kohlke and Gutleben 2011, 324). Naming is particularly invoked – already in the Introduction, where O'Connor discusses the continuity between the past and present necropolitics, and the fact that victims and perpetrators have names, such as, for instance, Lieutenant Corporal Peter Mary, dead at twenty-two in Vietnam (2005, xi). To borrow terminology from Judith Butler, the named and narrated lives of the Famine dead are in the course of the novel revealed to be "grievable lives" (Butler 2004, 15-38). Moreover, while claiming, just like Butler, that "mourning means attesting to a life" (Weil 2012, 103), Kari Weil calls attention to the "link between mourning and naming". "[A] proper or successful mourning", she explains, "depends on the ability of the living to name and so to reconstruct the identity of the dead along with a place and moment of death" (*ibidem*, 104). In addition to proper burials, the uncounted and anonymous Famine dead are denied proper and successful mourning, so the novel grants them this as well.

Yet O'Connor's artistic and political engagement does not stop at raising the dead for them to be mourned – the work of mourning has its own pitfalls, as Saidiya Hartman has demonstrated<sup>5</sup>. His ambition is not only

<sup>5</sup> "[T]he work of mourning is not without its perils, chief among these are the slippage between responsibility and assimilation and witnessing and incorporation. Can we mourn for those lost without assuming and usurping the place of the dead, and yet recognize that the injuries of racism tether us to this past? Does mourning necessarily entail the obliteration of the other through identification? Can we mourn the dead without becoming them?" (Hartman 2002, 771-772).

to re-member the Famine dead, to recognize and acknowledge their posthumous humanity; it is not merely to expose the politics of invisibility of certain suffering/dying bodies which enables the hypervisibility of some others. O'Connor raises the Famine dead for the sake of promoting solidarity, compassion and empathy in face of effectively (brutally) distributed death, both then and now. Not only that: if possible, O'Connor is Christianizing the Famine, by highlighting the instances of "astonishing suffering" (2005, v) being coupled with astonishing grace; by infusing the dying with divinity. Jurgen Moltmann's famous passage from *The Crucified God* (1993) encapsulates the ideology behind O'Connor's difficult feat. Having quoted Elie Wiesel's account of the execution at Auschwitz –

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. 'Where is God? Where is he?' someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment for a long time, I heard the man call again, 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows ...'. (Moltmann 1993, 273-274)

– Moltmann concludes that "[a]ny other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon" (*ibidem*, 273-274). While a very dangerous and superficial reading of this passage might suggest that it offers divine justification for the hanging, it has to be noted that God is decidedly with the dying boy, and not with the SS. The SS officers are clearly Godless.

The novel, needless to say, abounds in Christian allusions and references. At the same time, it is highly critical towards the official religion and its appointed practitioners, who are represented as complicit with the necropolitics of the Great Famine. Though he does not tackle Providentialism<sup>6</sup> and its role in the Famine, O'Connor writes that in the first days of the voyage, "in the afternoon the Methodist minister would recite a few uncontroversial words on the quarter dock or read aloud from the scriptures" (2005, xxvi). On the ship where the boundaries between the rich and the poor (the living and the dying) are guarded by quasi-police officers and actual bars, the words from the Bible have to be chosen carefully so as not to be controversial – otherwise the First Class passengers might be reminded that they are failing in their duty towards the poor (or worse, the poor might be inspired to rebel, in Christ's name). The unnamed Methodist minister thus

<sup>6</sup> At the very beginning of the novel, though, O'Connor quotes Charles Trevelyan's proclamation that the Famine is "a punishment from God for an idle, ungrateful and rebellious country; an indolent and un-self-reliant people" (2005, xv).

appears to be trafficking in the kind of Christianity that Carl Gregg terms “one of control ... one to hold people down ... an opiate to pacify people into compliance”. The minister is, therefore, merely “[p]ractic[ing] safe texts” (2015). Against this – and in the context of the imperialist racialization of the Irish as sub-human “Caucasian niggers” – O’Connor sets the explosive pronouncement that “Jesus Christ was probably a Negro, Grace! His skin was the color of tobacco, Grace!” (2005, 328). While Grantley Dixon, who utters these words, is himself plagued by the guilt over the slave-owning ancestors and the slave-created wealth he has inherited, his exclamation does point to “[th]e radicalness of the Gospels, usually missed by those who are privileged by houses within empire”. The radicalness lies in the fact “that the Jesús narratives are anti-colonial literature about a native resident displaced by the invading colonial power” (De La Torre 2015, 27). Needless to say, it is as anti-colonial literature that the Gospels resonate most strongly with the plight of the displaced Irish, who are fleeing the margins of the empire, victimized by its necropolitics.

There is yet another use of the religious imagery and symbolism: to set against the inhuman mechanism of necropolitics the narrative of common humanity, which includes both suffering and the desire not to go through it alone. This aspect is introduced very early in the novel, when David Meridith remembers his son’s teething, and how the child wanted his father to be near, to stay with him in his moment of pain. Lord Kingscourt translates this common childhood experience into the language of religion – “[I]like Christ in the garden. Watch with me one hour. The heart-rending smallness we finally want” (O’Connor 2005, 12). From page 12, therefore, O’Connor is building on a simple argument, which is nonetheless radical in its implications: it is this common humanity – the inevitability of suffering and the desire for companionship – that should be the source of active compassion. It is in support of this argument that O’Connor scatters memorable instances of mercy saving lives, and the denial of it destroying the innocent, throughout *Star of the Sea*. David Merridith’s father, for instance, sentences a man to death in 1826. Decades before the Famine, the poor are hungry, and this man, “an evicted tenant of Commander Blake of Tully”, “had stolen a lamb from the Commander’s meadow and fatally stabbed the gamekeeper who had tried to arrest him” (*ibidem*, 60). Juxtaposing, Dickens-like, the human law and the law of God<sup>7</sup>, O’Connor continues:

The accused had five children; his wife was dead. Even the gamekeeper’s wife pleaded for clemency. What the man had done was a terrible thing but one day his God would have to be faced. One day we would all have to face our God. There had been too much killing in Ireland already. (*Ibidem*)

<sup>7</sup> Remember, for instance, the death-sentencing scene in *Great Expectations* (1861).

But mercy is not granted by the imperious judge; the man is hanged, “his body dumped in a quicklime grave in the yard” (*ibidem*). One denied act of mercy only results in more innocent deaths. “His children were sent into the almshouse at Galway, as, within the month, were the gamekeeper’s children. And the seven children fathered by killer and victim were buried in the same pit-grave before the year was through” (*ibidem*).

Nicholas Mulvey drowns his daughter and kills himself on Christmas Eve, being denied address with Commander Tully, having walked “for three days and nights” (*ibidem*, 40) for that purpose only. Half-dead with fatigue and starvation, Nicholas observes, from a distance, Tully’s servants covering the Commander’s horse with blankets, as it is a cold night (*ibidem*, 42). Yet the lethal acts of denying mercy are juxtaposed with poignant instances of compassion and solidarity. Sometimes they save lives; sometimes they come too late for that, yet give animalized people a human death. The latter is to be found in the instance of Nicholas Mulvey carrying the old woman, who dies in his arms after “utter[ing] the Rosary that she and I might live this night” (*ibidem*, 40). Unlike the majority of the Famine victims, “the wretched old woman” (*ibidem*, 39) even gets something resembling a proper burial. “I laid her down and covered her as best I could with stones” (*ibidem*, 40), Mulvey continues in his suicide note/Christmas card. A deeply pious man and a former priest, Nicholas, however, reproaches himself for not saying a prayer – “I should like to say that I knelt and said a prayer but Jesus forgive me I did not” (*ibidem*). But he offers compassion and companionship – that heart-rending smallness that we all want in the end – and acts as a true Christian. Wiesel’s and Moltmann’s God hanging on the gallows, sharing in the throes of a dying young man, is to be found in this instance of final compassion, too. Yet Mbembe’s blurred lines in death worlds come to mind, also, once we remember that this man will kill his own daughter a few hours later, as an act of parental protection.

Despite his initial choice of “uncontroversial words”, the Methodist minister, too, behaves as a true Christian by the end of *Star of the Sea*’s dreadful journey. Namely, he and Captain Lockwood decide to stay on the ship, demonstrating solidarity with the poorest passengers who are not allowed to disembark for the next seven weeks, out of fear of infection. By staying with the pauperized Irish, who are further dehumanized by being treated as the source of contagion, the Methodist minister repeats the gesture of St. Francis and the early Franciscans. As Richard Beck highlights, they were “known for their care of lepers, living among and caring for that ostracized, unclean and marginalized community” (2016). Beck then reaches the logical conclusion, which can be equally applied to the instances of compassion in *Star of the Sea*: “[w]hen the Franciscans lived with leper colonies they were doing more than liturgically desiring the kingdom, *they were becoming the kingdom*” (*ibidem*, italics added). This is what is meant by O’Connor’s “Christianizing

the Famine” – the necropolitical event par excellence is not only analysed in terms of its genealogy, mechanisms and outcomes; it is also shot through with the scenes of the astonishing suffering of the innocent, and the rare but emphasized instances of human/divine generosity in the widest sense of the word. In keeping with O’Connor’s politics of naming, moreover, it is at this moment of solidarity that the minister is finally named: “Henry Hudson Deeds of Lyme Regis” (2005, 386).

Of course, one has to tread carefully here; otherwise Christianity might easily slip into what it has been for centuries – an apologia for the status quo of injustice, dispossession and suffering of countless surplus others. Indeed, many have warned against this, including, most recently, Judith Butler. It is precisely Christian attitude to poverty that she finds problematic. Against the neoliberal version of responsibility, she writes,

there is also the Christian version, which underscores the need to care for the poor, a moral maxim that never really questions why there has to be poverty of this kind at all. In other words, in the second instance (and Hegel makes this claim in his “Natural Law” essay), if the maxim to provide for the poor is considered universal and timeless, then it presupposes the eternity of poverty, and even becomes an alibi for its persistence. The solution to this is not to reverse the maxim – “don’t care for the poor”! – but to shift the entire problem of poverty to the socio-economic and political level, where we can ask why and how poverty is being augmented at such alarming rates, and how it can be countered. (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 106-107)

While absolutely correct on poverty being both an economic and a political issue, Butler, however, works with the distorted meaning of charity. She is neither alone, nor to be blamed for this; according to José Miranda, the confusion between “justice”, “charity” and “compassion” began as early as the first Greek translations of the Old Testament (Miranda 1974, 17). This confusion resulted insignificant distortions of the Christian maxims: the original struggle for social justice was replaced with inequality-perpetuating charity, and the radical meaning of Christian inclusive love was dulled.

O’Connor seems to share the notion that “[i]f the Christian hope is reduced to the salvation of the soul in a heaven beyond death, it loses its power to renew life and change the world” (Moltmann 2004, xv). This radical belief is conveyed most forcefully in the scene where Mary Duane saves the life of Pius Mulvey. Pius is Mary’s former lover who left her pregnant and penniless; he is also her brother-in-law, responsible for the eviction of her family and the subsequent deaths of her husband and daughter. Mary, just like Mary Mother of God and David Merridith’s mother<sup>8</sup>, shows love to the particularly unde-

<sup>8</sup> Lady Verity’s behaviour offers the alternative solution never taken up in 1845-1852: in 1822, when potato murrain hits Connemara, she establishes “Model Farm Soup Kitch-



serving by including him in her family – by naming him as her own blood. Yet she names her dead daughter too, in what is perhaps the clearest expression of the novel's politics of visibility/naming and compassion.

Pius Mulvey on his knees, begging for his life. Mary Duane above him, shaking with tears; for she wept that night on the Star of the Sea, as perhaps only the mother of the murdered child can weep. Nobody ever drew Alice-Mary Duane, whose ruined father snuffed out her agonized life. Her mother wept as she uttered her name. 'Like a prayer', as many of the witnesses said.

And as the name was uttered, some began to pray; and others began to weep in sympathy. And others again who lost children of their own began to utter their children's names. As though the act of saying their names – the act of saying they ever had names – was to speak the only prayer that can ever begin to matter in a world that turns its eyes from the hungry and the dying. They were real. They existed. They were held in these arms. They were born, and they lived, and they died ...? If it was mercy – and I simply cannot say what it was – whatever made Mary Duane show it may only be guessed. Wherever she found it can never be known. But she did show it. She did find it. When the moment of retribution rolled up out of history and presented itself like an executioner's sword, she turned away and did not seize it. (O'Connor 2005, 374-375)

Turning away from the sword, from "the subjugation of life to the power of death" (Mbembe 2003, 39), including the sinner/criminal in the family<sup>9</sup>, in the metaphorical and literal meal-sharing – this is the radically loving and

en" (O'Connor 2005, 55) for the starving. Even more importantly, she sends her husband's men to find Commander Blake's evicted tenants – the people living, animal-like, in the woods, "or in 'scalpeens' of turf-sods on the side of the road" (*ibidem*, 56). "They could come and be fed at the manor, she said. Nobody hungry would be refused. It was a time for all Galway to stand together" (*ibidem*). The solidarity founded in love and the recognition of humanity in the people who are dehumanized into "white-faced, lurching phantoms" (*ibidem*), culminates in her death. "Just as the blight was ending", Lady Verity catches famine fever and dies – her final act of solidarity with the impoverished. But just as poverty's grip on the humiliated body does not end with death, Lady Verity's death does not mean she's excluded from the family of her tenants: in a scene whose emotional impact is equal to Mary Duane's final acceptance of Pius Mulvey, the tenants, old and young, men and women, utter the Hail Mary in Irish during her funeral – the prayer is described as "[g]rowing in volume, swelling like a wave, echoing against the granite wall of the church ..." (*ibidem*, 58). The plea, addressing "Holy Mary, Mother of God" to "pray for us sinners" – *Anois agus ar uair ár mbáis* – "Now, and at the hour of our death", spoken from the living throats of people united by love and grief, is, moreover, subtly but powerfully contrasted with the Reverend Pollexfen's "sombre words of the psalms" (*ibidem*).

<sup>9</sup> See Melissa Fegan's 2011 paper, "That heartbroken island of incestuous hatreds: Famine and Family in Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea*" for a detailed discussion of the novel in the context of "the family of nations" and Ireland's place in it, both in the nineteenth and in the twenty-first century.

radically inclusive Christianity which Mary Duane practices. But the question remains, how is this individual choice translated, if at all, into social practice? Moreover, what are the implications of saving bare lives in the severely stratified society? Lady Verity's soup kitchen, after all, keeps the poor alive – and poor. The common objection levelled at the promotion of Christian compassion for the poor is the recognition of the systemic production and maintenance of poverty by, *inter alia*, the higher classes' compassion and charity. As Matthew Snow points out, charity in particular is an expression of “individualized culture of giving” preventing all the parties involved from “challenging capitalism's institutionalized taking” (2015). The promotion of compassion connects O'Connor with Dickens – it is no accident that the great novelist makes a cameo in one of the chapters – and is therefore susceptible to the same objections levelled at his sentimental and humanitarian approach to crisis. Yet, O'Connor's novel achieves more than exclaim “[d]ead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day” (Dickens 1993, 551). O'Connor, of course, does not shy away from that kind of engagement. This is demonstrated explicitly in the Introduction, and most memorably in the final encounter between Mary Duane and Pius Mulvey. On the other hand, it is perhaps worth remembering John Caputo's take on charity. “If we ask someone whose life is dedicated to the feeding the hungry, why they do that, they would be dumbfounded. Because the hungry are hungry – why would you even ask?” (Jones 2015). But an equally important question has to be – *Why* are the hungry hungry?

O'Connor's novel unites Butler's emphasis on the investigation of poverty with Caputo's instinctive charity, showing how amidst the necropolitically engineered tragedies, lives are sometimes sustained by small mercies. Particularly touching are the two brothers on the verge of death, who “were never done offering their rations to the children of the steerage; singing patriotic ballads when their comrades were low” (2005, 26). The good Englishman, Captain Lockwood, torn between his duties to the Employer, the Silver Star Shipping Line Company, and his human and Christian duties, goes a step further. After the ship arrives in New York, here signs from his post, and goes to live in Ireland “in solidarity with the Irish famished” (*ibidem*, 396). Grantley Dixon continues, “[h]e and his sisters and brothers of the English Quakers – he always insisted gently on his preferred word, ‘Friends’ – saved hundreds and possibly thousands of lives” (*ibidem*). The life-saving actions, as usual, are not ostentatious. “They built homes, roads, drains, a school; paid their workers fairly and treated them with respect” (*ibidem*). In addition to the astonishing suffering suffused with divinity, the turning away from the sword and the grand narrative of common humanity, Christianity here offers yet another framework – the practical, community-building one.

Significantly, O'Connor's persistent parallels with the contemporary socio-political situation led both Aidan O'Malley and Melissa Fegan to read the novel primarily as criticism of the modern Irish racist and anti-immigration politics.

Lockwood's belief that the 'frightened stranger' would be welcomed in a wealthy Ireland has been resoundingly disproved. ... The 'incestuous hatreds' which made an Irish Protestant such as David Merridith an 'Englishman born in Ireland' in the nineteenth century, have been transferred to more vulnerable internal and external others in twentieth- and twenty-first-century 'multicultural' Ireland. (Fegan in Kohlke and Gutleben 2011, 340)

O'Malley makes a similar point: "[i]nscribed throughout *Star of the Sea's* history of this period is the suggestion that accommodating, and showing hospitality to, in particular, contemporary immigrants might be a way of working through the trauma of the famine, mourning it, and finding places for its unburied dead" (2015, 152). Fourteen years after the publication of the novel, this suggestion is all the more valid.

##### 5. "Never let people forget what we did to each other": Conclusion

In the "Introduction" to the novel, Joseph O'Connor states that he hopes the novel "celebrates the solidarities which fill life with joy: friendship, loyalty, home, commitment, the bravery of the emigrant, the indomitable boldness of human desire. *Star of the Sea* has been read in different ways, but to its author, at any rate, it is simply a story about love" (2005, ix). This paper has read the novel in one of those different ways – as a genealogy and an attempted correction of a historically specific instance of what Achille Mbembe termed necropolitics. The Great Famine has been interpreted as a necropolitical event par excellence, directed at the (section of the) Irish population that was thoroughly animalized, criminalized and racialized as "Negroes turned inside out" by the imperial centre throughout the nineteenth century. In this novel, moreover, the necropolitical mass production of dead bodies through poverty, starvation and disease is coupled with O'Connor's simultaneous struggle against necropower, against indifference, against forgetting – against death itself. In addition to locating the birth of modern Ireland in the silent empty hills of Connemara and the (holy) waters of the Atlantic Ocean, O'Connor is invested in raising the dead so that they could be seen, named, remembered and mourned. In the context of his insistent parallels with contemporary necropolitics – which, too, traffics in mass death, silence, the invisibility and the anonymity of its victims – seeing, naming, remembering and mourning the victims of the Great Famine are not only highly emotional responses, but political actions as well. It is precisely in response to necropolitics that O'Connor builds his novel on the politics of visibility and

naming, attempting to transform the necropolitical “acceptable losses” into Butlerian “grievable lives”. Moreover, by giving the novel the title *Star of the Sea* – one of the many names for the Virgin Mary – O’Connor engages in a complex relationship with Christianity. Critical of the religious officials’ role in maintaining poverty, he does not negate the radicalness of the doctrine of inclusive love, seeing in it the potential for saving lives, in direct opposition to the production of disposable races, classes and bodies. The genealogical investigation of necropolitics, therefore, is intersected with the instances of memorable compassion and (occasionally) life-saving mercy; disconcertingly, also, with the Moltmannesque scenes of “astonishing suffering” suffused with divinity. The national trauma, which, as Kinealy, Neal and O’Malley agree, was marginalized, sanitized, re-written and silenced, is in this novel simultaneously Christianized, humanized, and depicted in all its physical and social brutality.

Ultimately, with the words of Captain Lockwood, “Never let people forget what we did to each other” (O’Connor 2005, 396), O’Connor returns both death and salvation to the level of interpersonal relationship – the most intimate and arguably the most important one, especially in the context of modern impersonality and mass destruction of anonymous victims. Whether or not compassion is an adequate answer to necropolitics (it is not) is, perhaps, the wrong question: the correct question should be – does it save lives? If the answer is yes, then it is weapon enough against the neoliberal and necropolitical distribution of death along racial, gender and class lines, which continues unabated.

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# Writings





## Shades of a Writing Life. Encounter with Mary O'Donnell

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It is a great honour for *Studi irlandesi* to have the opportunity to publish some new poems and stories by Mary O'Donnell, whose voice is one of the deepest, most sensitive, resonant and effective in contemporary Irish writing. This happens at a very special moment, as 2017 also marks the publication of the first full-length critical study on the poetry and fiction of Mary O'Donnell, the volume edited by María Elena Jaime de Pablos, *Giving Shape to the Moment: The Art of Mary O'Donnell, Poet, Novelist and Short-story writer*, due to come out very soon with Peter Lang.

Mary O'Donnell's first poetry collection, *Reading the Sunflowers in September*, goes back to 1990 and her latest, *Those April Fevers*, was published in 2015. Besides seven collections of poetry, Mary O'Donnell has written four novels, *The Light-Makers* (1992), *Virgin and the Boy* (1996), *The Elysium Testament* (1999) and *Where They Lie* (2014), two collections of short stories *Strong Pagans* (1991) and *Storm over Belfast* (2008), and has participated in the collective comic crime novel *Sister Caravaggio* edited by Peter Cunningham (2014). She has been involved in translation projects, has written critical essays and has been a drama critic for the *Sunday Tribune*. Besides having presented a number of literature programmes for the radio, Mary O'Donnell is also involved in teaching creative writing, an experience she describes in the volume edited by Anne Fogarty, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, and Eibhear Walshe, *Imagination in the Classroom* (2013).

Her voice is rooted in the present of contemporary Ireland and the wide spectrum of her creative interests has a counterpart in the wide range of issues and topics raised in her poetry and fiction, from the impact of the passing of time and the ageing female body, the role of women and their elision from history, to family reunions, intergenerational misunderstandings, social change, environmental concerns and the process of artistic creation. Such thematic richness makes Mary O'Donnell difficult to classify as a writer, but is consistent with the linguistic exuberance of her writing, the careful research of the exactness and precision of words, whose essence is a carrier of significance. In the "Introduction" to her 2006 poetry collection *The Place of Miracles* O'Donnell defines poems as capable of replacing ordinary speech: "When feeling fails in ordinary speech to do the work of being human, sometimes a poem steps into the void". Therefore the power of words is unique, "they are my light burden, my alchemist's bag, usually open" (xiii).

*Studi irlandesi* now publishes four poems – “Those Prostitutes in Cuba”, “Heron and the Women”, “Unlegendary Heroes”, “The Kitchen Girl’s Pumpkin” – and two stories – “La Mer” and “The Path to Heaven”. The latter first came out in 2016 in the anthology *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women from the North of Ireland*, and the poem “Unlegendary Heroes” forms the title poem of her 1998 collection. In fact, themes connected to the role of women, together with the impact of universal experiences on the individual, the ghosts of the past and social change, not to mention – more recently – the process of ageing, are interspersed among these texts.

The poem “Those Prostitutes in Cuba” exploits exotic setting to shed light on the constant difference between the sexes and the double standards of behaviour that still exists in the twenty-first century. Reporting the account of the encounter of a probably middle-aged man (“he said”) with prostitutes in Cuba, the speaking voice expresses her envy: “I thought – against my own sex – how / enviable his freedom”, “It could never happen / to a woman my age”. Animal imagery enhances sexual encounters that are never openly expressed, female kittens turn into male tigers in mutual enjoyment in which no violence is perceived – “two tiger men / who would not wound”. The desire of the “vitality” of the prostitutes merges with the dream of a *ménage-à-trois* in “a dusky room” where the sunlight acts as a disturber. The reference to Matisse, who made colour the crucial element of his paintings, is an oblique reference to creativity capable, like the sexual act, to give birth to the completely absorbing “riotous world / within and without”.

Also “Heron and the Women” presents an overt implication to writing and to artistic creation. The bird of the title acts as a spectator of the world below caught in the everyday stillness of the morning “on the far side of the canal”, he hears “female voices” contrasting with his silent flight, “above / the careless spirals of words”, a movement that is parallel to the spiral movement of the flying heron. Embedded with a variety of symbolic features – “Ancient symbols appear” – the heron is a solitary creature, whose movement recollects the process of writing, by itself a solitary action. Explicit references to “a page” that remains “unread”, to “wet inks” and “a script” highlight the natural detail of the canal as “vellum” on which the heron as a would-be artist can leave his mark.

“Unlegendary Heroes” is one of Mary O’Donnell’s most personal and paradigmatic poems. Introduced by a quotation from Patrick J. Duffy’s *Landscapes of South Ulster* (1993), the poem is anticipated by a further paratextual element, a list of great men in rural areas whose names have remained in local history for their small heroic deeds in everyday life, among them, being able to perform something extraordinary like mowing “one acre and one rood Irish in a day” or being “a great oarsman”. To this list Mary O’Donnell counterpoints a list of unheroic figures in everyday life, women who have performed extraordinary deeds like washing “a week’s sheets, shirts / and swaddling, bake bread and clean the house / all of a Monday”. Among the various unrecorded and forgotten names of women who were extraordinary for their strength, also women endowed with creativity and artistic inclinations appear, “Cepta Duffy, Glennan, / very good

at sewing – embroidered a set of vestments / in five days” or “Mary Conlon, Tullyree, / who wrote poems at night”.

Artistic creation is also embedded in the fourth and last poem, “The Kitchen Girl’s Pumpkin”, in which the unnamed kitchen girl, simply referred to as “she”, makes experiments with the plants and “studies the crop”, in order to create something extraordinary, when she “composes extraordinary soups / for the long table upstairs”. The “santoku knife” that appears at the end of the poem is an allomorph for a pen, creation and creativity are linked to conception and birth, as “The mother plant lies shrivelled, / puckered as an umbilical cord after birth”, just like a woman who has just given birth, prostrated by her “hefty youngster”. Careful details of work in the kitchen garden follow the line of the unheroic deeds of “Unlegendary Heroes”, performed in the private world of domestic labours.

In the two short stories published here Mary O’Donnell returns to the issues of the impact of history and social change that mark her fiction. Indirectly recalling her 2014 novel *Where They Lie*, which deals with the challenging and disturbing topic of the “Disappeared” during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the short story “La Mer” sheds light on the very recent terrorist attack in Nice in July 2016 through the focus on the strong bond of friendship among women. The setting alternates between Ireland and France, the world of everyday life and the better elsewhere of “une petite vacance”. This is emphasised by the iterated use of expressions in French, ranging from single words or phrases (*maison secondaire, chez elle, la belle France, politesse bijou*) to full sentences (*Je vais tourner la page, Going for our promenade soon. It’s 14th July, fireworks tonight!*). The choice of characters in italics marks the distance not so much between the two different language systems, rather between the ordinary and the upsetting extraordinary. At the same time the text plays with the subtext “of the French writer Colette, whom we admired for a certain witty feminine intelligence”, a writer with a multiple career, evoked in the opening paragraph.

The impact of History takes the shape of the “19-ton truck” crushing into “The hundreds of revellers, their children, who had drifted carelessly along the Promenade des Anglais, which we three friends knew and loved – no, adored – a place of whole, affectionate histories, destroyed in seconds”. The conclusion of the story leaves our doubts unresolved as the speaker touches on the question of just who is writing the pages of history: “Once, it was the Germans who inscribed the worst on the text of history. Now, the others are writing our texts before we have even imagined them”.

German history is in the background of the second story, “The Path to Heaven”, in which the issues of immigration and foreign labour, and domestic violence in contemporary Ireland are set against the memory of the concentration camp of Sobibór in World War II. The protagonist is a writer, Lauren, who employs the Polish young woman Kalina as a cleaning lady and slowly gets involved in her life of deprivation and violence. Kalina comes from near Sobibór, a subtext that provides the story’s title: “These helper Jews accompanied the people about to be gassed as they walked along a path in the forest, later referred

to as “The Path to Heaven”. The path to Heaven is a metaphor for Lauren’s attempt to find a way out for Kalina’s life of violence, ready to pay for her journey home and relieve her of the burden on her daily endurance. She is thus creative in Kalina’s life, she tries to change the plot, juxtaposing the “path to Heaven” of the Holocaust and Kalina’s path to Heaven, split between the new possibility of escape and the desire to remain. The character of Kalina recalls the figure of the crippled girl from Eastern Europe in O’Donnell’s poem “Girl from the East, Palmerstown traffic-lights”, said to be “at war with deficit” for her physical, social and economic condition. Kalina conveys again O’Donnell’s concern with immigrant figures in Ireland, and her condition is similar to a lot of women like her, “with two children, no money, limited English”.

*Studi irlandesi* is grateful to Mary O’Donnell for considering the Italian scene and for offering the readers of the Journal the possibility to encounter the wide spectrum and perspective of her poetry and fiction. A special word of thanks goes to the publishing houses and journals that have granted permission to republish O’Donnell’s work: “The Path to Heaven” originally appeared in the anthology *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women from the North of Ireland*, ed. by Sinéad Gleeson (New Island, Stillorgan 2016, 268-279); “Those Prostitutes” was originally published in *The Café Review* (28, 2017, 18). “Heron and the Women” was originally published in *RAUM Poetry* (1, 2016, 16). “Unlegendary Heroes” was originally published in *Unlegendary Heroes* (Knockeven – Cliffs of Moher, Salmonpoetry 1998, 22-24). All reprinted with permission from the copyright owners.

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##### **Translations:**

*To the Winds Our Sails, Irish writers translate Galician poetry*, ed. by Mary O’Donnell and Manuela Palacios, Knockeven - Cliffs of Moher, Salmonpoetry, 2010.

## Four poems and two stories

*Mary O'Donnell*

“Those Prostitutes in Cuba”

For JS

They were like two kittens, he said,  
snuggling up to him,  
they were fun and they liked him.

I thought — against my own sex — how  
enviable his freedom to fall in  
with such company, then breakfast

with them afterwards, heartily, admiring  
their health, their strong teeth, that  
vitality. It could never happen

to a woman my age, two tiger men  
who would not wound, the three of us  
so human in a dusky room, sunlight

stealing through the slats in colours  
from Matisse, the riotous world  
within and without.

“Heron and the Women”

Quiet and still,  
those mornings when walkers  
suddenly pounce, with dogs  
ripping muscular through the wind  
on the far side of the canal.  
Female voices,

he hears their heat as  
if released.  
He is a study in grey  
a match for the silence  
absent in their words.

When they see him,  
it's too late. He has lifted,  
spread his wings  
against gravity, above  
the careless spirals of words.

Sometimes,  
they witness the grace  
of wing-tilt and wind,  
the dangling twig legs.

Ancient symbols appear,  
as on a page,  
to remain unread,  
wet inks of a script dropped  
from above as he flies,  
to settle only, when dogs  
are restrained,  
and the canal is vellum.

“Unlegendary Heroes”

‘Life passes through places.’  
– P.J. Duffy, *Landscapes of South Ulster*

*Patrick Farrell, of Lackagh, who was able to mow  
one acre and one rood Irish in a day.*

*Tom Gallagher, Cornamucklagh, could walk 50  
Irish miles in one day.*

*Patrick Mulligan, Cremartin, was a great oarsman.*

*Tommy Atkinson, Lismagunshin, was very good at  
highjumping – he could jump six feet high.*

*John Duffy, Corley, was able to dig half an Irish acre  
in one day.*

*Edward Monaghan, Annagh, who could stand on his  
head on a pint tumbler or on the rigging of a house.*

– 1938 folklore survey to record the local people  
who occupied the South Ulster parish landscape.

\* \* \*

Kathleen McKenna, Annagola,  
who was able to wash a week's sheets, shirts  
and swaddling, bake bread and clean the house  
all of a Monday.

Birdy McMahan, of Faulkland,  
walked to Monaghan for a sack of flour two days before  
her eighth child was born.

Cepta Duffy, Glennan,  
very good at sewing – embroidered a set of vestments  
in five days.

Mary McCabe, of Derrynashallog,  
who cared for her husband's mother in dotage,  
fed ten children,  
the youngest still at the breast during hay-making.

Mary Conlon, Tullyree,  
who wrote poems at night.

Assumpta Meehan, Tonygarvey,  
saw many visions and was committed to the asylum.

Martha McGinn, of Emy,  
who swam Cornamunden Lough in one hour and a quarter.

Marita McHugh, Foxhole,  
whose sponge cakes won the First Prize at Cloncaw Show.

Miss Harper, Corley,  
female problems rarely ceased, pleasant in ill-health.

Patricia Curley, Corlatt,  
whose joints ached and swelled though she was young,  
who bore three children.

Dora Heuston, Strananny,  
died in childbirth, aged 14 years,  
last words 'Mammy, O Mammy!'

Rosie McCrudden, Aghabog,  
noted for clean boots, winter or summer,  
often beaten by her father.

Maggie Trayner, Donagh,  
got no breakfast, fed by the nuns, batch loaf with jam,  
the best speller in the school.

Phyllis McCrudden, Knockaphubble,  
who buried two husbands, reared five children  
and farmed her own land.

Ann Moffett, of Enagh,  
who taught people to read and did not charge.

“The Kitchen Girl’s Pumpkin”

Next year, she promises  
to experiment with the plants:  
one for the glasshouse, the rest  
in open garden, taking their chances  
in vagrant soil.

She studies the crop,  
a single bright yellow gourd,  
flesh that yields to her fingernail  
but does not break; hollow sound  
when she taps it with her knuckle,  
its life-dense weight.

The mother plant lies shrivelled,  
puckered as an umbilical cord after birth,  
exhausted by this hefty youngster  
that glows brazenly through morning fog.

At night, on her narrow settle,  
she feels only solid heat,  
her dreaming mind already harvests seeds  
scoured loose by a santoku knife,  
composes extraordinary soups  
for the long table upstairs.



## “La mer”

We’d always called ourselves ‘Les trois amies’. It was our little joke, and played on the self-consciously amused tone of the French writer Colette, whom we admired for a certain witty feminine intelligence. It was a question of accepting the incongruities of the world, of knowing paradox and inconsistency. Like most of our generation, we believed there was no single truth. It remains perhaps the only thing we share in common with the younger generation we sometimes sense snapping at our heels, believing that we have deprived them of some undefined text of rights.

A bond forged at university meant we never strayed very far from one another’s ideas, despite gaps of geography. When we would meet up again, there usually followed a debriefing in Conza’s pretty cottage on one of Dublin’s mysterious terraces. Although we were born in the same Catholic county and baptised with furiously defining names – my name-burden is Eucharía, while the other two trudged through childhood as Assumpta and Concep-ta – we took command of our destinies and the question of how the world would view us, and conflated our ghastly names to the secular monikers of Ria, Asta and Conza. We considered ourselves rather clever.

There was, in fact, a fourth party to the friendship, but for some reason we never became ‘Les quatre amies’. The other woman, Bernice, I had never known so well, nor she me, the result being that any attempts to turn ourselves into a four-wheeled vehicle of friendship floundered from the start. But if I wasn’t with Asta and Conza, and she was, they also referred to themselves as ‘Les trois amies’. So, this interchangeable, flexible arrangement persisted over the years, and I imagine will always do so. When I am with Asta and Conza, we are the three friends who appear in one another’s texted photos to this one or that one, and when she is with them and I am not, the triangle of friendship continues, even if in a slightly different shape and at a slightly different angle. Our triangularity is not equilateral, because we are each so different from one another.

On July 10, Asta and Bernice had travelled to Argentat to join Conza in the *maison secondaire* which she and her siblings had bought some years before. It was to be *une petite vacance*. A break with Conza never failed to lift spirits, and as usual there was need for some spirit-elevation, given that Bernice’s twin daughters had just left for Australia for God knows how long, and Asta had recently sold her cherished apartment in Cannes. These were big upheavals, and Conza – ever a mender of foul and depleted spirits – had invited them *chez elle* for a week. To say that I envied them would be an understatement. Being with Conza, one felt truly cared for. Her house nestled in one of the

most beautiful and unknown parts of *la belle France* in an ordinary town with its ordinary, but so pretty, streets. The Dordogne flowed massively beneath its several grand bridges, thick-watered, shimmering and gleaming in the shifting light. Her house was settled unobtrusively on a terrace and did not belong to a specially-built holiday scheme. *Au contraire*, dear Conza had managed to recreate the kind of provincial home she had had growing up in Ireland, a little smaller, but no less charming, with geraniums and nasturtiums tumbling in pots, and gentle walls of lemon and apricot colours.

On one side of her lived the family of an elderly Comptess. That house was painted in terracotta shades, with white shutters and small, lace-draped windows. The arrival of the ninety-year old Comptess, down from Paris, usually propelled her middle-aged bachelor twin sons to a flurry of gardening and lawn-trimming prior to the moment when her sleek limousine hummed quietly into position outside the front door. At first, she had held some reserve with Conza, but our friend's gift of innate *politesse* appeals to the more conservative French. Inevitably, the Comptess went so far as to offer her (and hence us, when we were there) the use of their *bijou* swimming-pool, which her sons had cleared of algae and water-beetles just before her arrival. Other friendly gestures came in the form of fresh eggs, ceps, and home-made jams, because the Comptess usually set to work immediately, happy to be free of Paris and its intense atmospheres, as she described them, and patê, jam and other delights would emerge at intervals from the next-door kitchen for us to sample.

That year, I had just had a holiday, but in Croatia. There should be no 'but'. There was nothing Oliver and I enjoyed more than a little swimming, some languid snorkeling, all in the clearest and cleanest of waters, as well as late-evenings dreaming over glasses of rich, red Degarra in the yacht we occasionally hired. But as I confided to Asta and Conza, no matter what, it was not France, the only country in the world that we loved without question. No matter where we travelled – and Oliver had already spent fifty days away from Ireland on business that year – there was always something lacking, that indefinable feeling of *bien-être* which went hand in hand with the land that is France.

Back in Ireland, Oliver and I were slightly depressed. The holiday sunshine had done us good, we'd been thousands of miles away from the niggling problems of our own lives – for example, our son, living with a woman who has never read a book, who told us brazenly that she *had* a book, but hadn't got around to reading it. She liked books, she even told me once, but preferred magazines. She made no bones about the fact that she wanted to make money, and worked sixty-hour weeks doing so. We should, I suppose, be pleased about that. When we married we moved into an unfurnished house, with no table or chairs, although we had a bed. At least we had a good bed. Between us, we

too eventually worked fifty and sixty hour weeks as Oliver's fine arts sales room thrived and buyers were sucking up the contents of every old ascendancy pile that came on the market around 2005, not to mention all the abstract art they could handle that would match a particular colour-scheme. *Puif!* as the French might say, with a hint of a shrug.

As for me? He supported me as I wrote Celtic noir thrillers and then made the money that covered the rental of yachts and out of the way, air-conditioned villas. Mostly though, I paid for our 'France habit', as I called it. I had to be in France in order to feel well. Even with imperfect French, I could go there with Asta and Conza and, as we evolved once again into *les trois amies*, I could feel the cells of my body regenerating. Or was it the cells of my mind? Renewed, I would then return home to Oliver, to my yellow-walled study with its tumble of books, to the Pierre Bonnard postcard pack which I never seemed to use as I enjoyed looking at the pictures so much, to my framed print of Matisse's *Nu Drapé*, and the problems of the next novel. *Je vais tourner la page*, I would tell myself, I want to move on. And I could move on, because of having gone to France.

At intervals during the day of July 14, I received photos from both Asta and Conza as they progressed through the hours in Argentat, with Bernice. *Les 3 amies!* Asta exclaimed around midday via a jubilant image of herself, Conza and Bernice at the market, all three bearing newly purchased, polka-dotted tote bags, and wearing happy, relaxed expressions. During the afternoon, another image popped up, this time from Conza herself: *Le troisième pont!!* I smiled at this, remembering the occasion I'd stopped on the third bridge of our cycling route with Conza and Asta, propping our bikes before taking a few pictures to forward to Bernice, who was in Ireland. I replied immediately with an equally joyous blast of French: *Ha, voila les trois amies encore! Comme la photo est adorable, tout le monde est heureux et souriant... bisous a vous et a les autres. Souhaitant que je pourrais être avec la bonne compagnie de vous! Ria xx*

Later that day, Asta texted me a gay *Going for our promenade soon. It's 14th July, fireworks tonight!* As if I didn't already know this? I thought of them then, remembering other occasions when I'd been in France – once near Toulouse, once driving though Sarlat and missing my turnoff away from the town on my journey back to a rented farmhouse outside Belves, and yet another time in the *quartier Latin* – and the great celebration which gripped the country when fireworks were lit and light and colour inscribed the evening sky, and the aroma of barbecuing meats – succulent beef, young goat, wild boar – became the fireworks of earthy appetite – the thing that defines France for me – and food was good, and it was good to eat, and to drink, because this was the gift and pleasure of living on our fragile earth. I couldn't resist texting Conza in my stricken French just then: *Bonjour Conza et tout*

*le monde a l'Argentat! J'espère que toutes va bien entre les trois gentilles filles! Have fun ce soir. Bisous, Ria x*

And within minutes, her reply: *Merci beaucoup Ria. Nous sommes tres bien . . . le soleil recommence a briller donc Asta est tres contente!! Bernice est parti hier pour Nice pour une rendezvous mysterieuse :) Asta et moi allons a la quai pour voir le feu d'artifice plus tard ce soir. C'est dommage tu n'es pas ici avec nous mais peut-être, la prochaine fois?? Bisous, C.* Being Conza, she attached a little French flag to mark the occasion, and left me to mull over Bernice's rendezvous in Nice, which I suspected to be of a romantic nature.

In Ireland that evening, we sweltered in an unexpected heatwave, not helped by the copious glasses of rosé I'd imbibed. Oliver was spreadeagled in shorts, his belly folding gently over the waistband as he sipped an icy beer. On impulse, he switched on Sky News.

There it was. Disaster in Nice. A 19-ton truck. The hundreds of revellers, their children, who had drifted carelessly along the Promenade des Anglais, which we three friends knew and loved – no, adored – a place of whole, affectionate histories, destroyed in seconds.

The world knows what happened. Oliver's eyes grew moist as he absorbed what he was hearing and seeing. My tears also leaked free as I beheld Hotel Negresci in the background, where *les trois amies* (both versions of us) had occasionally drunk cocktails and discussed our mutual concerns; I watched a man fleeing determinedly, his small son plastered tightly against his chest. It was the same rolling image, over and over, likewise on Al Jazeera, and on France 24. What voyeurs we became, I thought then. And yet, there seemed to be no choice.

Then I remembered. Bernice. *Elle est parti hier pour Nice.* Immediately, I texted the two in Argentat, but in English. No reply. Being an hour ahead, they'd obviously gone to bed after the local celebrations. Early the next morning, my text zoomed off again. It was no time to play at French. We were not part of *France profonde* and never would be. We were dilettantes. I knew that. *So shocked and saddened here by the terrible news, is Bernice okay? Oliver and I shed tears last night. He has great mems of being there with friends. They played Charles Trenet's La Mer on radio this morning as a salute. Asta x.* Indeed, Charles Trenet's joyful voice had turned my cheeks to a glaze of tears. I shook my head in despair at Oliver, who nodded, his lips sealed as if swallowing the burden of so much feeling. There was no point in falling to our knees in prayer, jack-knifing back to religion, because prayer did not help people like us. What had happened, was achieved. The wickedness of the

world had triumphed. Everything, laid bare. It was not time to pray, but to think: what next? How to go on?

Meanwhile in Argentat, my two friends and their neighbours were in a state of uproar, if despair can be termed uproar. I believe it can. The Comptess was prostrate in bed, Conza texted, while her sons sat despondently beside a row of heavily-fruited tomato plants. More commentary ensued, in English, this time from Asta. *O Ria, it's so awful. Only heard it this morn. It could be Cannes. Haven't caught up with Bernice yet, which worries us, but we are hopeful . . . sitting in le petit beau jardin now with a cup of Earl Grey tea in glorious evening sun . . . trying to catch up with it all and take a breath! But still need to hear from Bernice!!*

Asta was right. It could well have been Cannes, which she had only recently vacated by selling her airy holiday apartment in the city's ethnic area. *Les trois amies*, both versions of us, had occasionally decamped to there to spend time with Asta, whose French was as perfect as one's French can be. When we drove out in a rented car, the arrangement had, as usual, a tripartite aspect: Asta drove, I played map-reader, and Conza, who usually sat in the back with maps, books and Google, provided astute but relevant historical information. We would meander up into the Alpes Maritimes, stopping for lunch in out-of-the-way restaurants which seemed tacked precariously onto the side of sheer enough mountains, or occasionally pausing at that oddity of the modern world, a Marian shrine in the middle of nowhere. There were early mornings in St Paul de Vence before the great heat engulfed us, and galleries, and art, which I couldn't afford but bought anyway. And sometimes there were small tensions, as even among the best of friends, over such matters as how far to walk, or where to dine (Conza had specific culinary interests and occasionally liked to track down a good vegetarian restaurant, always difficult in France). But all in all, we pulled well together, and small, inconsequential, yet to us amusing things happened, which on the dark of a wintry January afternoon in Dublin we would recall and chuckle over.

Nevertheless, I still felt I had to text Conza, who after all is the centre of our web of friendship. *Ah, Conza, quels horreurs à Nice!*, I wrote. *As tu entendu parler de Bernice encore? Je suis totalement triste, Oliver aussi. Ooh la la, a case of 'au revoir les enfants', non? Ria x* To which immediately, and gratifyingly, came the response: *Merci Ria . . . oui, nous sommes tous en état de choc ici. Quelle horreur! Conza x*

To our relief, Bernice phoned Conza around midday on the 15th to say she was safe. She'd left Nice alone and on impulse that evening. Perhaps the fact of the journey was true, but I doubt if she was alone. She'd then caught

a train to Menton, where she'd stood on the shingled beach, (she said), with the yellowing town behind her as the local fireworks flushed through the sky. Everything was fine, she assured Conza, she was safe, and moreover she had heard from her daughters in Australia. They were apparently missing her. So she wasn't so sad as she might have been. Her daughters' love was apparently holding her safe in the middle of calamity.

The strange thing was that I, Conza, and Asta were all homesick in the indefinable, stomach-sickening, deeply-troubled way of those who have lost what I can only call a heart source. The French now needed compassion and more, if the ghastly wound, the rupture, was to heal.

We will always be sick, as if with love, for the France we once first encountered through Colette, Camus, and de Beauvoir, through Racine and Molière, and for me especially through the delicious theories of Henri Bergson, and the revelations of Flaubert, not to mention the miserable musings of Georges Bernanos's provincial curate. This is not showing off. These were the dead writers who fed me, as if through a funnel, towards France.

Now the passage of time itself seems strangely snagged, as if discontinued. As Bergson might suggest, everything has already happened anyway. Life is like a ball of wool, very dense, and we live through all of it, moving along the single thread of yarn that unravels with our lives. Somehow, you could say that the wickedness of Bastille Day in Nice had already happened. We just had to catch up with it, to experience the horrible knot that would drag us all to a standstill.

*Les trois amies* will continue to be such. We will visit France again and again, attempting, just by being there, to undo the repugnant marks of terror in a place misunderstood by its enemies, who are profligate and can never know what they desecrate. Once, it was the Germans who inscribed the worst on the text of history. Now, the others are writing our texts before we have even imagined them.

#### "The Path to Heaven"

It had been a beautiful autumn. She was glad not to live in Poland, where her housekeeper Kalina reported that snow had fallen. There were other reasons not to want to be in Poland, of course. She sometimes strolled and kicked her way around the garden and through the fallen leaves, encircled by a wall of tree-fire. Trees which she and her husband planted years ago were now mature. Their ground was hidden in a hollow far below the distant motor-

way from which morning commuter traffic droned. A gravel path led to the bottom end, and through a break in the ancient wall that enclosed a forest.

Kalina came on Tuesdays. Sometimes her face was bright and happy. She looked like a girl and not a mother of young daughters. She would chatter about the weather. *Very nice day!* or *In Poland now minus ten degrees . . .*

With her movement and smile, she carried a fragrant energy into the house. But sometimes, with hair pulled sharply into a thin, high, ponytail, she could look severe and sharp. There were grey circles beneath her eyes, and a worried pucker nicked the smooth skin between her eyebrows. Dressed in a worn, pillied fleece and tight jeans, she looked careworn. Lauren sometimes wanted to console her instead of having her clean the house. But it was part of the unspoken contract. The Irish woman employed, the Polish woman worked.

Sometimes she would listen from her study to the sound of the vacuum-cleaner on the stairway. They often talked together, usually while Kalina vacuumed.

She felt a certain guilt at having another woman do work she herself was not willing to do. She also felt guilt as a writer, because people, including Kalina, thought writers were wealthy, but sat at home and gazed at their navels during the day before heading out to quaff wine at some merry evening book-launch.

Each week, Lauren had already sorted the laundry herself, folded and smoothed it before Kalina's arrival. She removed all underwear except her husband's vests. The only items Kalina had to iron were his vests and shirts, then the sheets and pillow-cases. He changed his shirt every day, and was size 52, so these were large garments.

Kalina never took a break for tea, never accepted a biscuit. She would laugh and say she had to watch calories after having two babies. *Children such work! And I still breast-feeding.* At this, she would make a sucking gesture with her mouth, and smile shyly.

Even so, suspicion found its way into Lauren's thoughts. She could even isolate quite precisely its portal of entry. Three times during her first encounter with Kalina's partner, he informed her that in Poland he was once a Physics lecturer, but that now, he had no work. He loomed in their doorway with a parchment face and thick hair threaded with grey. He was serious and unsmiling, but, feeling at a loss, she offered sympathy and the hope that his chances would improve. From what Kalina told her in the ensuing months, he seemed selective about the work he would do. He would certainly not clean houses and offices, as Kalina did. Instead, he stayed home seeking work on the online job sites every day that offered opportunity after opportunity, yet none for him. He also minded their two infant girls. He disliked this. It was not a man's work.

Once, she asked Kalina if he prepared some lunch for her when she arrived home. But he was too busy reading and researching, then minding the

children as well. Kalina laughed incredulously at Lauren. Her partner often reminded her that she was a cleaner, but that he was a man of science.

Lauren was as old as Kalina's mother in Sobibór, Poland, but according to Kalina, she was glamorous and much younger looking than her mother. Sobibór lay close to where the borders of Belarus and Ukraine nudged against Poland. It was also the name of one of the more secret extermination camps during Nazi occupation. Lauren had never heard of it. The familiar list of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Belsen, Dachau, Mauthausen and Buchenwald sprang immediately to mind, but Sobibór?

Kalina's family remembered the time of the camp, but nobody talked about it any more. Her grandmother would like to, Kalina confessed, but her parents were modern Polish people. They avoided such talk.

From week to week the women discussed different topics. Men, education and children, cultural differences between Ireland and Poland, the fashion for tattoos and body art, and whether or not Kalina should have herself sterilised. Lauren already understood that this last subject was out of the question for Kalina's partner, and it intrigued her that some couples still played Russian Roulette in the bedroom.

He was a good man, Kalina would insist, as if to defend him. *Sometimes, I think he depressed.*

One night, Lauren had a monochrome dream, devoid of people. It unfolded like a grainy movie, with cloud shadows, muffled sound, unclear forms and tilting, unstable buildings.

Everything was indistinct, but she was in the scene, walking through fog along a narrow, rubble street, watching in fear as the tops of the buildings curved and tilted, waiting to be crushed beneath the falling bricks. She felt terrified, and woke with a jolt. Her dream was recomposing what she already knew about terrible histories, projecting it into the space left open by Kalina's comments about Sobibór a few weeks before. She tossed and turned, imagining the place which Kalina's parents didn't want to discuss. Her husband ground his teeth in his sleep beside her, then turned, pulling the bedclothes with him. She lay still, but her eyes remained wide open in the dark as she recalled the horrific elements of the dream.

The following morning, she opened up her laptop. Her grey eyes darted rapidly down the screen. *Sobibór*: built in 1942, dismantled after a prisoner revolt in late 1943. Almost a quarter of a million people died there. Jews themselves prepared other Jews for the gas chambers, collected shoes, advised them to tie the laces together so that the pairs would not get lost, Jews also removed the bodies afterwards. These helper Jews accompanied the people about to be gassed as they walked along a path in the forest, later referred to as 'The Path to Heaven'. Even though the path was surrounded by barbed wire, the tube-like, green and bucolic final walk gave hope to the unwitting people, who believed that they were going to have a shower after their arduous train journey.



Lauren paused to look out the window, allowing her gaze to fall on an almost leafless birch. Birds were still singing though it was late in the year. She imagined the birdsong of Sobibór, the verdant, fertile summer of that year, the faint glisten of hope in people's minds as they trekked along, thinking this camp was not going to be so bad, after all. They had been welcomed on the station platform. And now, they could shower. The soldiers had seemed quite civilised, considering the things one heard. Everything would be all right.

She tried not to dwell on the next part. It was the same in all the camps of death, and just over seven decades ago, Kalina's very young grandparents would have sensed all what was happening. They would have inhaled the infamous, sickening smell, it would have been part of their everyday breathing. They would have *known*. Everybody must have known that the second railway track, which forked away from the main station track and into the camp, was not a picnic site after a sight-seeing trip.

Autumn deepened into early winter. It was the end of November. The first Sunday in Advent had passed and Lauren resumed an annual ritual of lighting a candle on the breakfast table. She wasn't religious, but anticipation gripped her as days darkened, as twilights became cobalt with cloud, and bare branches and stems conversed with frail light. Kalina was due at ten.

Over breakfast, the couple discussed Christmas arrangements. Their son and daughter would fly home from London. There would be bedrooms to have made up, a tree to bring in, and gifts to buy. She felt the sheer privilege of all their lives. Her books were selling, and her husband was starting to think about retiring from his legal firm. There were still good years ahead.

That morning, her husband sat beside her in his slightly too-tight shirts (there would be a diet after Christmas, she knew), and the prospect of seeing their children for a week of news and mischievous modern cynicism filled them both with happiness. She poured herself another coffee as he cleared up the breakfast dishes and put them in the dishwasher.

By mid-morning, although Kalina was already in the house, she hadn't popped her head around the study door as she usually did. Lauren sighed critically at what she'd just written. It was going to be a day in which she'd have to force herself to stay put, to somehow drive sentence to follow sentence, when she'd rather catch a bus to the city to chat with friends in some bookshop cafe, an espresso and a glass of water to hand. She sloped down the long hallway – tracksuit bottoms and loose sweater – past yellow walls on which vivid blue plates hung above a book-case, and pushed the door open.

Kalina didn't look up. She was mopping the floor, and stared downwards, as if absorbed by the tiles. No, she didn't want a cup of tea, thank you very much. No, she was not hungry either.

She leaned on the mop and turned to Lauren. *Very tired today. Children awake all night.* She shook her head hopelessly, and continued to mop the floor.

Lauren moved towards her, reaching to put a hand on her shoulder. As she did so, Kalina released the mop handle, which fell to the ground with an ear-splitting sharp crack. Tears sprang to her eyes, and she hastily withdrew a tissue from her jeans pocket. *You must not tell anybody! I – embarrassed – you must not tell anyone!*

There had been an argument about money and about who did the most work.

*He get angry with me all the time . . . then he say that I friends with other mens – and last night –* Here she paused and shook her head. Her voice dropped again. *Something bad . . . he do something very bad to me. Children do not see, but he hit me. And then . . . hit me again in our bedroom . . .*

Lauren sounded calm as she asked where he had struck her.

*On my back. Only on back. Three times. I have mark today. Red mark. I tell him I never looks at other mens. Never! I would not do that. But he say he don't believe me. And after, he not say sorry either.*

Lauren, while wanting to jump into the car and rip his head off, could still hear his voice intoning the words *I am Physics Lecturer*. Brutus addressing the crowds from the steps of the Roman senate building. It was laughable that occasionally, she had pitied him because she knew how eggshell brittle egos could be, including her own.

She tried to form a plan. What could Kalina do, with two children, no money, limited English? Something must now happen because something had happened *then*, the night before.

Lauren's sense of consequence rose to a spike of insight. Feeling suddenly inspired, she gripped the girl by both shoulders and looked her in the eye.

'Would you like to go home to Poland for a few weeks? Stay with your mother? You could bring the children.'

She'd pay for the flights, and make something happen. It was hard to know what Kalina thought of the idea. She hesitated, then spoke.

*Thank you Lauren. I think about it. Nobody else help me – you are good friend when I have trouble,* she whispered.

She drove Kalina home. The girl waved goodbye before disappearing in the front door of the semi-detached rental. Lauren glimpsed Kalina's husband through the big front window, bent over a computer. He kept his head down, as if he hadn't heard Kalina coming into the house.

A week passed.

*I think – I want go home. I take children and return to Poland.*

The atmosphere in Kalina's house hovered on a scale of frost to permafrost, and the only voices that spoke were those of the children.

'If you're sure, give me dates and I'll book the flights.'

Later that day, she told her husband that Kalina needed their help.

'Are you fucking crazy?'

His glasses slid down his nose. He had just come in from work and was opening envelopes, glancing at the contents, and dropping them quickly on

the kitchen table. His expression was quizzical, and his unclipped auburn eyebrows danced as he reacted to Lauren's news.

'What's wrong with the idea?' she pressed. 'I want to help her.'

'Everything. You're going to make things far harder for her. Mark my words, they'll kiss and make up and then they'll both see you as a relationship destroyer. I have only one word,

Lauren. *Don't.*'

Now he was bending down over the kitchen bins, lifting and tying plastic sacks.

'I've told her I'll help her.'

'Well *un*-tell her. Tell her I won't allow it, she'll understand the cave-man approach. She probably hasn't grasped that Irish women aren't under the thumb of the lord and master any more, so tell her I've said no.'

He disappeared out the back door, rubbish sacks in hand. A vile wind blew in as he left.

'It's assault and battery,' she said as he came in the door again, wiping hands on jeans.

'There's the police and free legal aid if she wants to take it further.'

'Fuck it, but that's the kind of attitude that allowed six million Jews to be gassed during the last war.'

He stood stock still and regarded her. 'What in God's name has that got to do with anything? We're talking about a man who gave his wife a clip on the back –' He paused and turned to the wine-rack. 'And you're talking *Holocaust*? Are you joking?'

She fell silent. A 'clip on the back'? How annoying he could be, how thick. How could he not understand her reference to the Holocaust?

He eyeballed her. She stared back. Was that a shiver of amusement she detected in his eyes?

'I can help her.'

The words slithered out as her throat began to constrict with tears of frustration. She left the kitchen. A moment longer, and she might have walloped him, in itself a turn of events she was not entirely at ease with. She stood glaring at books on the hall shelf, without actually seeing any titles. From within the kitchen came the sound of a bottle of wine being uncorked, the thin clink of a glass. She slammed the door to her study.

Kalina had mentioned a date on which to travel. Thursday of the following week, when she knew that her partner would be in a day clinic. He was having his annual colonoscopy, she said. Immediately, Lauren began to scan online for flights to Warsaw, and hence to Sobibór. One way or return, she wondered. She could hardly take a decision like that without first consulting Kalina, so she decided to wait until the following Tuesday, two days before the flight.

She would book Kalina and her daughters onto a morning flight the following week. She could choose to do this, and there was no better motive than to remove a younger woman from danger, whose children were also at risk.

That night, she removed herself from the bedroom and slept in her daughter's room. Her husband could be glib and trivial about the situation, it was all in a day's work to him, an argument on paper, but he had to realise that there was something at stake, a principle of assistance to others which she was about to uphold.

When Kalina arrived on Tuesday, she pulled the kitchen door behind her, shrugged off her jacket. Lauren, smiling, wanted to talk about the flights. To her surprise, Kalina hesitated. Lauren peered closely at her. The girl looked, if anything, radiant.

*Everything much better, Lauren. I talk to him. He talk to me.*

Her eyes were bright, and Lauren could see that a new joy flowed through Kalina as if a healing river had overflowed its banks and saturated her soul. She said nothing for a moment. Her thoughts, which had been smooth and definite, were now choppy with judgement.

'So, you're going to stay?'

She knew the answer even as she asked the question.

Yes, she was going to stay. They had big talk, and she think that her partner depressed. *Very depressed. I tell him I not his enemy, that I his friend. True friend.*

'And did that help?' Lauren asked.

*He make promise he never hit me again. He say sorry.*

Despite this latest, promising turn of events, she felt disappointed by Kalina. It was just as well she hadn't booked the flights. So what had she expected? A decisive air-strike against the enemy? She hoped Kalina understood the significance of what she had been about to do for her. She felt slightly acidic about it all, about the 'big talk'. Did a man who beats his partner once ever really gain the self-control not to have the urge to do it again?

'I'm glad you've made it up. And I'd miss you if you went away,' she said, which was the truth. Then, an afterthought. 'He will see a doctor? It sounds as if he might need an antidepressant.'

At this, Kalina shook her head firmly. *No antidepressant. Bad for health. He a strong man. He feeling better already, now that we happy again.*

So they'd sorted it out. And her partner's body was such a temple that it could not be polluted by a chemical that might make him feel a little better. Oh, something had happened all right, but not in the way she'd imagined.

'So you're okay now?' she asked.

*Oh yes, yes, we definitely okay, thank you Lauren. I love him. He a good man, and I know that.*

Later, Lauren told her husband what had happened.

'Didn't I tell you?' he said mildly. 'These things have a way of sorting themselves out.'

'I still think we should get involved when something is wrong,' she said, 'but yes. You were so right.'

She considered how much better the alternative outcome she had openhandedly offered Kalina. But now, there would be no dramatic rescue and dash to Dublin airport and on to Poland for Kalina and her children. Her partner wouldn't be left to regret his unkindness and violence. There would be no grand style justice and retribution. This time, he got to kiss and make up.

That night, she removed herself once again from the bedroom, and slipped into her daughter's bed. In some way, her husband had offended her, but she could not quite explain how, even if he had asked. She kept thinking about all those who knew things but said nothing, the ones who silently accompanied others, believing they had no choice. The Jews had walked with fellow Jews along Sobibór's 'Path to Heaven', to the end of a forest road that was dewy and green, and bursting with bird-song. She thought of Kalina, and what might lie ahead. How she seemed to have brushed aside her partner's bruising blows, and how readily she embraced a future with him, staking her entire life on the path he was offering. And Lauren's grievance grew in the dark like an unpleasant forest fungus, not at herself, but towards Kalina, who failed to recognise that although help sometimes comes, it comes but once.

Then she slept deeply, like a traveller who had found rest without having reached the long-sought destination, but for whom everything was clearer. Her dreams still puffed and swelled as she slept, as the great starry skies orbited above the roof of the house, above the still, night garden with its secret nocturnal foxes and badgers. In her childlike, resting position, legs tucked up, fingers curled, her mouth made a small map of saliva on the pillow.

E N D



# Voices





## The Forgotten (Irish) History of the Mexican-American War: An Interview with Pino Cacucci

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### *Abstract:*

The text presents an edited transcript of an interview with Italian writer Pino Cacucci conducted in Gijón, Spain, on July 13th, 2016. The subject of the interview is his latest novel, *Quelli del San Patricio* (2015), about a group of soldiers, mostly Irish Catholic immigrants, who deserted from the US Army during the Mexican-American War (1846-48) and under the leadership of John Riley formed a military unit, the Saint Patrick's Battalion, to fight with the Mexicans. He mainly discusses what got him interested in the San Patricios, the process of turning history into narrative fiction, the criticisms the novel might raise for not being entirely faithful to historical fact, and the parallelisms that can be drawn between nineteenth century Irish emigration to the US and the current refugee crisis in Europe.

*Keywords:* Cacucci Pino, Irish emigration, Mexican-American War, Riley John, Saint Patrick's Battalion

Born in Alessandria in 1955, Pino Cacucci is a graduate in DAMS (*Discipline delle Arti, della Musica e dello Spettacolo*) from the University of Bologna. An anarchist sympathizer in the 1970s, he took an active part in the Italian 1977 Movement. In the early 1980s he lived in Paris and Barcelona and first started to travel to South America. He soon became taken with Mexico, where he settled between 1984 and 1989. Although Cacucci returned to live in Italy in 1990, he has continued visiting Mexico regularly ever since.

Cacucci published his first novel, *Outland rock*, in 1988. More than twenty novels have followed since – among them, *San Isidro Fútbol* (1991), *In ogni caso nessun rimorso* (1994), *Demasiado corazón* (1999) and *Mahahual* (2014) –, as well as journalistic articles, short stories, essays, travel books, cookbooks and theatrical plays. His novels are usually about forgotten, de-

feated and/or controversial historical figures, which he aims to rescue from oblivion and ignominy by showing that there is much more to them than what has come down in history. Also a screenwriter and a prolific translator, he has turned into Italian about ninety Spanish and South-American titles.

His latest novel, *Quelli del San Patricio* (2015), is set in the Mexican-American War, fought between the United States and Mexico from 1846 to 1848. Sparked by the latter's refusal to recognise the Republic of Texas, which split up from Mexico in 1836 and was annexed by the United States in 1845, and sold much of its territory to the US, the war was a series of humiliating defeats for the poorly trained, ill equipped and poorly led Mexican troops, which could do little against the invading armies from the north. In early 1848, with Mexico City in the hands of the Americans, the Mexican Government agreed to sign the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty, which ended the war and set the Rio Grande as a border between the US and Mexico, and therefore gave the US control over extensive areas of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, Wyoming and Colorado.

*Quelli del San Patricio* focuses on the historical figure of John Riley (b. 1817-1818), a native of County Galway who arrived in Texas as a US Army private, deserted in April 1846 and eventually became the leader of the Saint Patrick's Battalion, a recognised military unit in the Mexican Army made up of former US artillery and infantry – mostly Catholic Irish who had immigrated to the US following the outbreak of the potato blight in Ireland and defected to Mexico in the course of the Mexican-American War. Widely praised for their bravery in battle, the San Patricios fought their last stand at the Battle of Churubusco in August 1847, where a majority of them was either killed or captured. The captured were then court-martialled and about 50 were found guilty of desertion and hanged. Having deserted a few days before war was declared on Mexico, Riley, however, was lashed, yoked and branded with a D for deserter. After the war, he was discharged and allowed to remain in Mexico, where he died around 1850.

What follows is an edited transcript of the interview Pino Cacucci kindly granted us while he was in Gijón, Spain, to present the Spanish edition of *Quelli del San Patricio, Los del San Patricio* (2016), at the 29th *Semana Negra* book festival. The Italian writer discusses what got him interested in the San Patricios, the process of turning history into narrative fiction, the criticisms the novel might raise for not being entirely faithful to historical fact, and the parallelisms that can be drawn between nineteenth century Irish emigration to the US and the current refugee crisis in Europe.

*MO: The first question I would like to ask is how did you, an Italian writer from Alessandria, get interested in a story that happened about 170 years ago on the other side of the Atlantic and, more specifically, in Mexico, a country with little Italian immigration?*

C: I guess it comes from my passion, my love, for Mexico. I've been visiting Mexico most of my life. I lived there for a while and I've suffered the illness of being in love with the country for over thirty years, although it seems there has been more tragedy than joy there lately... Anyway, a visit to Mexico is always interesting.

Mexico is a country where memories are kept very much alive. I first heard about the San Patricios a long time ago, as the Mexican-American War and especially the Saint Patrick's Battalion are commemorated annually in Mexico City. I soon grew very curious about the memory of the Irish in Mexico. In the capital you can also find a bust of John Riley, a plaque bearing the names of many San Patricios who were hanged and, in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, the Wall of Honour, a wall of national heroes, among them the Saint Patrick's Battalion. Besides, they have turned the former Convent of Churubusco, where the Irish battalion fought their last stand, into a museum about the foreign invasions of Mexico, the Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones. Most of the space in the museum is dedicated to the Mexican-American War and there are one or two rooms about the Battle of Churubusco, a diorama, flags, weapons... At some point I started to spend quite a lot of time in the museum. I got access to several texts there and began to think about how I could tell the story of the San Patricios.

I've always felt an attraction for the history of Irish rebellion. I saw potential for a very interesting story in how the rebelliousness of the Irish against the English turned into insubordination and desertion from the United States Army, and enrolment in the Mexican Army. They could have started over anywhere in Mexico, but they chose to fight with the Mexicans against the Americans.

I spent years, at least ten, doing research – I was always unsatisfied, I always felt something was missing. In the meanwhile, I got plenty of help – you can find this at the end of the book – from friends such as Paco Taibo II and his brother Benito, who got me books about the Mexican-American War, especially reports and memoirs by Mexican officers, which give every detail of the battles. These books came in handy to reconstruct the events of the battles, which have been largely ignored by US historians, as they are not convenient for them.

In the course of my research I learned that it's very likely that John Riley was not hanged with the other captured San Patricios because someone managed to prove that he had deserted a few days before the United States declared war against Mexico and, as a consequence, he couldn't be accused of wartime desertion. Back then, desertion was punished with execution by a firing squad, but the San Patricios were hanged to make them die a more painful death. I also learned that John Riley may have died in Veracruz in 1850, as there is a record in the parish register of the port of Veracruz for the death of a Juan – they called him *Juan* in Mexico – Reley, an Irishman who died *borracho*, that is, who died as a result of drunkenness.

I think there is a very strong symbolism in John Riley. He went through hell and was the only survivor of a battalion which was also a group of friends in life and in death; however, he couldn't get over the war and took to drinking mescal, which led him to an early death. This gave me the opportunity to make occasional shifts in narrative voice and make John Riley the narrator of part of his own story.

Eventually, I came round to writing the book. The release of *San Patricio*, an album by The Chieftains and Ry Cooder, gave me a big push to get down to writing. I thought, "Ah, the story is coming out! I have to buck up my ideas before someone else does. I already have everything I can possibly get about the San Patricios. I'm going to shape it into a novel so that I can tell about their emotions, their sufferings, their humiliations...".

*MO: Regardless of how interesting you may find the story of the San Patricios, why would you say it can be relevant to modern readers in Italy, Spain or anywhere else? Did you have a target in mind while you were writing the novel?*

C: Most of my books are about finding forgotten history, digging the past and showing that there are things that have been forgotten but are worth being told and known. Over the years, my readers, although they are not that many, have proven to be eager to know these stories from the past, the point of view of the defeated. Victors shape history in their own image, whereas the defeated are usually denied a place in official history.

Also, I believe my books are very contemporary. In this specific case, we are dealing with emigration from Ireland, which over the first half of the nineteenth century found itself in a situation very similar to that of countries in Africa and Asia today, for instance, Syria. The country was under English rule at the time; it was not a god that sent the famine. It was English rule that imposed the monoculture of flax in Ireland. When the blight destroyed the potato crop, up to a million Irishmen and women died of starvation. I see something universal there – pretty much the same thing is happening now.

There is as much racism today as there was in the nineteenth century, although this is also forgotten history. It's quite hard to imagine that back then, when the Irish started to arrive in the US, they were treated as many African immigrants and Syrian refugees are being treated in Europe today. The Irish were met with hostility and things often heard today, like "they come to steal our jobs", were also common then. What jobs could they possibly steal from the Americans, who were already more well-off? The Irish had to live in slums. There are many details that point out that other peoples are going through what the Irish went through, and that gave me a strong motivation to tell how the Irish were treated in this period.

*MO: It is obvious that you did extensive historical research for the novel. However, the book is not, nor intends to be, a historical essay. Following up on*

*this, I would like to know if 1) you would label it as revisionist history, and 2) when writing historical fiction, you ever draw a line between, say, modifiable and non-modifiable facts.*

C: “Revisionist” is an ambiguous, even dangerous, term. I would say that *Quelli del San Patricio* is untold rather than revisionist history that has to be told. I don’t think I did anything extraordinary. I am not a historian; I don’t have access to every source. Still, I have used the novel form to tell a story that had been forgotten, erased out of history, deemed as inconvenient.

Once I reached a point where I started thinking, “Well, it’s been a ten year search and I’ve got plenty of materials to write about. It’s about time to try to flesh them out into a story”, I had to start considering to what extent the story would be faithful to the historical events I was pretty sure were factual. As I said before, after going through thousands of pages of reports and memoirs of Mexicans who took part in the war and essays by contemporary intellectuals that only Mexicans can read, as they haven’t been published in other countries, I felt I had everything I could possibly need to reconstruct the battles in detail.

I didn’t have as many details about the everyday of those men, though. For example, Patrick Dalton did exist in real life. We are certain that his name was that, he was hanged and was John Riley’s best friend. Then, it seems that John Riley had a Mexican partner. We know neither her name nor how the relationship unfolded. Still, several sources confirm that Riley did have a partner and suggest that he may have lived with her in Veracruz the final two years of his life. Therefore, I had to invent a character. Knowing that guerrilla warfare was extensively used by the Mexicans, I also intended her as a symbol of guerrilla struggle. The Americans preferred to call the Mexican irregulars “bandits” rather than “guerrilla fighters”; however, the word “guerrilla” soon caught on in Mexico. Besides, there are some accounts that say that there were many female fighters in the guerrillas. They inflicted losses on the American invaders, sometimes heavier than those inflicted by the Mexican Army. I used all this information to create the character of Consuelo, who is a female guerrilla fighter.

*MO: Is the name Consuelo (“solace” in Spanish) intended to be symbolic?*

C: Yes, I think so. She was John Riley’s solace, wasn’t she? Some texts mention a Maria, but Maria is often used in Mexico as a placeholder name for any woman. I don’t know if her name was actually Maria, maybe...

I believe I had to allow John Riley to have his own voice so that I could put in the book all the things he had to go through to survive and make a living. He arrives in the US with an inner rebelliousness against the English and the military, and yet he enlists in the army because there is no other way

to make a living. These events are real, we know they occurred, but I have taken some liberties with them.

Funnily enough, I set down to putting the novel together while the son of a couple of friends was doing a course at University College Cork in Ireland. When he was back in Italy for the holidays, I would tell him what I was doing and he would ask “How can I help you? Do you want me to get you materials for the book there?” The Saint Patrick’s Battalion is commemorated in Ireland, but unfortunately there are few texts available there.

He had met a professor of Gaelic at University College Cork. I already knew that speaking Gaelic was forbidden in the US Army at the time, mainly because no one else could understand what the Irish were saying when they were talking among themselves. The prohibition was total and when someone was caught speaking Gaelic, they were punished with lashing. I decided that I wanted to make them talk among themselves, swear and insult in Gaelic. I wanted them to say things like “We gonna kill you all!” and “Yo mama’s such a slut...” in Irish.

My friend came up to the professor with a list of swear words, insults... He stared at him as if he were crazy. “Who on earth wants to know how to say ‘Yo mama’s such a slut...’ in Gaelic?”, he said. My friend explained that an Italian writer was writing a novel about the San Patricios – which also seemed pretty weird to the professor – and wanted to give them an authentic voice. He gave me quite a comprehensive list of phrases, swear words and insults in Gaelic. It seemed to me that it would add realism to the novel.

*MO: As far as I know, the novel has not been published in English yet, has it?*

C: No, not yet. They’re trying to get it published in English. It’s difficult, though.

*MO: I would like to address now some of the criticisms I think the novel might raise in Ireland and among the Irish diaspora. The first criticism would have to do with the language issue. In the novel you seem to suggest that for Riley and his men the straw that broke the camel’s back was the prohibition on speaking Gaelic. However, the few accounts of these events published in Anglo-Saxon countries insist that the desertion of the San Patricios was ultimately motivated by religion. Why did you decide to make a bigger emphasis on the linguistic rather than the religious issue?*

C: To tell you the truth, I just didn’t realise I was making a bigger emphasis on the linguistic issue. I believed it was just one detail among many. I can’t deny that religion was important, but I’m not so sure that it was the main motive for rebellion. As I see it, racism comes first. The Irish arrive in the US and are met with racism. Then, they join the US Army and keep being

treated with racism, are regarded as foreign Irish, rather than proper American, soldiers. Besides, they're Roman Catholic, whereas the official religion of the US Army is Protestantism – a legacy of the Puritans. The Irish are forced to follow the Protestant services and forbidden to attend Mass. Once they get to Texas, they're punished when they go to a Catholic Church – provided that they are able to find one that hasn't been burned down yet. Besides all this, there is the prohibition on Gaelic. Maybe it has ended up being the main motive for rebellion in the book, but I intended it to be one of many.

*MO: As a reader, you get the impression that there certainly was racism in the army against the Irish, but many times you do feel it was based on language.*

C: I may have placed emphasis on language because I did want to remind the reader that English was not the mother tongue of these men. The English language was imposed in Ireland by English rule. When they got to the United States, the Irish weren't allowed to speak Gaelic either. As a consequence, it might seem that I believe that language was their main motive for desertion – I don't. To me, it definitely was one of many motives, one of many humiliations they had to endure and above all, a by-product of racism. Also, I guess we can assume these young men brought over from Ireland a tendency towards rebellion and, once they got in the army, they wouldn't shut up when told to; they would be looking for trouble; they would stand up to American officers.

*MO: Indiscipline has remained a recurrent problem in the United States Army. I may be wrong, but I think it was a rather contentious issue during World War II and the Vietnam War.*

C: Yes, that's true. We should take into account that, in the mid-nineteenth century, most soldiers in the American Army hadn't even been born in the United States. They were Polish, German, Italian... – a medley of nationalities. Maintaining discipline in an army where ten languages are spoken must be difficult, right? Maybe that's why the punishments were so harsh.

*MO: Getting back to the possible criticisms Quelli del San Patricio may get, another could be that the novel somehow overestimates the importance of the pre-Famine Irish emigration to the United States and the failure of the potato crop in 1816-17. As a matter of fact, it sometimes is as if many of the social changes the Great Irish Famine set in motion in the late 1840s – e.g., massive emigration from Ireland, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice in the US... – were already in full swing twenty or thirty years earlier. In a way, some might feel that you underestimate the enormous impact of the Great Famine on both sides of the Atlantic.*

C: On the one hand, I wanted to include that in the book. On the other hand, I didn't want to devote many pages to the two Irish famines, so in the end I decided I would make Riley reminisce briefly about his childhood in Ireland. I was rather more interested in telling how, once they came of age, these Irish men emigrated to escape starvation. Then, they decided to defect out of a combination of pride, dignity and protest against the mistreatment of the Mexicans. I also wanted to tell how, when they came into contact with the reality of Mexico, they realised they had a lot in common with the Mexicans beyond Catholicism.

Even nowadays, though there hasn't been much Irish immigration to Mexico, the Mexicans feel they have something in common with the history of Ireland, the way the Irish mix with other people, the Irish warmth... I don't know. The Mexicans just couldn't communicate at an intimate level with either the Americans or the English, and even less with the Germans. They could with the Irish.

This direct contact convinced them that something had to be done against what the US Army was doing to the Mexicans. Well, the few contemporary American historians that chose to tackle this issue tell that the Irish would desert from the US Army because they were always drunk, fell in love with Mexican *señoritas* (i.e., prostitutes), stayed with the Mexicans and eventually the Mexican Army coerced them to fight with them. However, I don't think things were that simple, that filthy, that common. They didn't decide to ruin their lives just because they fell in love with a *señorita*. I'm sure there were deeper, stronger motives, which were sparked by contact with Mexico.

*MO: One last possible criticism I would like to bring up has to do with the character of Captain Aaron Cohen, a Jewish graduate from West Point who shows sympathy and respect for John Riley and his men. To me, it works really well as a character, but I fear that some will find him anachronistic, inspired more by classic Hollywood films than by historical evidence. Why did you choose to make him Jewish? I don't know; he could have been an assimilated Irishman...*

C: Consuelo and Aaron Cohen are the main characters I invented. I made him Jewish because I feel Jews must have endured their own share of humiliations in the American Army, although Cohen comes from West Point. We know that a majority of generals in the invading army did not come from The Academy; they were slave owners, had enormous estates in the South and regarded West Point graduates as Hooray Henrys who did know everything about war, but nothing about sweat and blood. Zachary Taylor was one of these generals.

We also know that at the Battle of Churubusco, when the last seventy-two San Patricios had already run out of ammunition and were fighting with their bayonets, an American officer, a captain of the US Army, put up a white handkerchief on the point of his sword, stood before his soldiers and said, "Enough is enough. This is unfair slaughtering, they can no longer defend



themselves”. This event recurs in several texts – even in Mexican accounts. Come to think of it, for the San Patricios it would have been much better to be killed by shrapnel there than be hanged, wouldn’t it? Anyway, the event shows that there were officers with a conscience in the US Army. I took this and built on it to flesh out a character that may well be anachronistic, but allowed me to give another point of view.

I wonder how many were thinking back then, “We’re doing things that are wrong; however, if I chickened out and let others do this job, it’d be worse. I’m working within the system to change it”. It’s like many police officers – they think they’re one of the good guys, they see corruption and violence, and yet, they stay in because they know that, should they quit, someone worse would join the force. It was very symbolic to me. It was a temptation I couldn’t resist. If I could have made him Italian, German... , I would have. However, making him Jewish gave me the chance to give that point of view. Still, Cohen doesn’t stay friends with Riley; they fall out in the end, don’t they?

*MO: At the end of Quelli del San Patricio, you mention that Irish music gave you a push to get down to writing the novel. However, as I was reading it, the Irish-American filmmaker John Ford kept coming to my mind. I think that some parallelisms can be drawn between the novel and Ford’s films, especially the Cavalry Trilogy (Fort Apache, 1948; She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, 1949; Rio Grande, 1950), Sergeant Rutledge (1960), The Man who Shot Liberty Valance (1962) and Cheyenne Autumn (1964). More specifically, I would say you hold rather similar views about American expansionism, the dual nature of the US Army, the role of the Irish as subalterns of WASP colonialism, the blurry lines between legend and fact... Even the opening scene, with Riley and Cohen riding across the Texan landscape, is very Fordian. Did you use Ford’s films as a reference while writing Quelli del San Patricio?*

C: Even though I am an avid consumer of films, I didn’t think of John Ford while writing the novel. If I did, it certainly wasn’t conscious! I did see his films several times when I was young; I grew up with them. It’s interesting. Maybe they have remained in my mind. I’m quite sure that more recent films have influenced the novel, though. *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Dances with Wolves* are still fresh in my memory, as in general is the “revision” – yes, between inverted commas – of the Western genre Hollywood has made over the last twenty years or so. I guess the opening scene in *Quelli del San Patricio* comes from one of these films.

*MO: Getting back to the topic of American expansionism, I found it interesting that the term “colonialism” itself is not mentioned until very late in the book. You often hint that the Mexican-American War is a colonial war, but “colonialism” seems to have been carefully avoided, doesn’t it?*

C: Yes. Without much thought, I went for the term “conquest”. Mexico had already been subjected to conquest by the Spanish, by Hernan Cortes. The Mexican-American War meant for Mexico a return of the conquistadors, and a conquest worse than that of the Spanish four centuries before. The term “colonialism” is more recent. In fact, I don’t even know if it was used back then. I consider “colonialism” a rather dangerous, very political term. For Mexico, I prefer to use “conquest” and “conquistadors”, as the Mexican-American War was a war of conquest which eventually evolved into a type of colonialism which is still alive and well. In many aspects – especially commercial, but also cultural – today’s Mexico is a colony of the United States.

*MO: I would like to ask you now about your narrative technique. I find that unlike other authors, who just allow the characters to speak in dialogue, it seems important to you to let the main character address the reader through occasional first-person accounts. It is important in *Quelli del San Patricio* and also is in *Without a Glimmer of Remorse*, which has recently come out in Spain. Why?*

C: I often try in my books to get into the head of the main character. In *Quelli del San Patricio*, this device gave me the chance to get to know Riley’s most intimate memories as a young Irishman, as an emigrant and, at the end, as a defeated man, constantly surrounded by the ghosts of his friends. I could have said, “OK, John Riley went through this and that”; however, I felt that if I allowed Riley’s own ghost to – albeit briefly – look back on his life, I would endow the character with a soul and the story would be more intense.

*MO: I know it’s been quite a long time since you wrote *Without a Glimmer of Remorse*. Still, would you say that Jules Bonnot and John Riley have something in common?*

C: Yes, sure. Bonnot and Riley, like other characters in my books, are expected to be read as almost universal symbols – symbols that can be found at different times in history, even today. I wrote *Without a Glimmer of Remorse* thinking of many people of my generation who got involved in suicidal armed struggle in the 1970s. I found a strong symbol of this in all the people who got into anarchism out of desperation, frustration, mistreatment and rebelliousness rather than revolutionary ideals in the early twentieth century.

I wanted to give them dignity, tell the reader, “Look, these are the newspaper accounts of Bonnot’s crimes. They present him as a desperate criminal who robs banks. Now I want to tell you that his father worked like a slave at the foundry and that he was born unlucky, was a very sensitive person and wanted to leave poverty. Also, I want to tell you, dear reader, that Jules Bonnot could have been successful in life because he was a natural with motors, but he just wasn’t allowed to”. I tell the reader that, sometimes, when we judge

a criminal quickly and demand their imprisonment or even their execution, we ought to consider that there may have been a time when this person tried to do something good and failed because of the circumstances. We should wonder whether their circumstances made them a criminal.

I wanted to convey Bonnot as a symbol of what happened in Italy about forty years ago. For example, in the 1970s, not every extreme-left militant was a natural born killer. They weren't fanatics who planted bombs in the streets to kill innocent people. I believe they were anti-systemic people looking for revenge rather than real political change, although some in the Red Brigades were actually craving for an impossible revolution. How can you expect to start a revolution in Italy, in Europe, in the 1970s? That was utter madness – even more so because many of them were educated people, they weren't brutes who had been born violent. Still, they were utterly and completely wrong.

In these stories, I try to tell that, sometimes, beyond what you see in the newspaper lies a hopeless life that deserves to be known because a heightened sensitivity may lead you to do outrageous things that may be mistaken for cruelty.

*MO: Finally, are you planning to return to Irish topics shortly?*

C: Not at the moment, but who knows...I've always been interested in Ireland, although truth be told, my knowledge of the country is pretty shallow. I don't really know much about Ireland beyond what I've researched for *Quelli del San Patricio*.

The book has given me the chance to meet a young professor who teaches Irish and English Literature in Rome and Perugia and spends long periods in Dublin. He's trying to get me invited to Ireland. He came back from Dublin in May and gave me a flag of the Saint Patrick's Battalion, a green flag with a harp and the motto *Erin Go Bragh* underneath. It's still made and sold in Dublin.

It's really difficult to find a publisher to work with in Ireland. There aren't many *Irish* publishers there – most books sold in Ireland are actually published in Great Britain. I really hope *Quelli del San Patricio* will give me the opportunity to get published there. I have a big problem with the language, though. My English is limited and I get really frustrated when I'm unable to hold a conversation.

### *Acknowledgments*

We wish to express appreciation to Daniel Alvarez-Prendes of Hoja de Lata Editorial and the staff at the Hotel Don Manuel, Gijon, Spain, for their help in this interview. It goes without saying that thanks are especially due to Pino Cacucci.

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## Recensioni / Reviews

Lorenzo Bosi, *Vite di lotta armata. Storie di attivismo nella Provisional IRA*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2016, pp. 104. € 11. ISBN 9788843085811 (paperback).

Lorenzo Bosi's *Vite di Lotta Armata* explores the lives of 25 activists that joined the Provisional Irish Republican Army (hereinafter PIRA) in Northern Ireland, during the early years of the Troubles in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this short volume, Bosi brings together more than a decade worth of his research on the republican movement in Northern Ireland, proposing a coherent theoretical framework and a nuanced methodological approach to investigate issues that are too often left to sensationalistic treatment by the media, or superficial assessments by political authorities. Why do people join armed groups? How do they maintain their commitment to the armed struggle? Why do they leave armed groups and what are the long-term consequences of their involvement with clandestine groups? These are the three key questions that *Vite di Lotta Armata* attempts to address, devoting a chapter to respond to each of these questions.

The original data utilized in this volume consist of semi-structured in-depth interviews to 10 women and 15 men that joined the PIRA in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1972. These interviews were conducted by the author in 2007 and 2008 in Northern Ireland. While this booklet provides a rich historical context of the conflict in Northern Ireland (see chapter 1), its ultimate goal is to deliver a socio-political analysis of the lives of these activists, rather than sketching their biographical accounts, or even proposing a prosopography of PIRA activists. In particular, Bosi systematically examines the connections between the micro, meso and macro level of analysis, inspecting how the lives of the activists (micro) were affected by the group dynamics inside the PIRA (meso), as well as by the evolving context of contentious politics in Northern Ireland (macro level). The interplay among these levels is not unidirectional though, as activists and paramilitary groups also shaped the political context and the overall trajectory of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The starting point of Bosi's analysis is to investigate how people join armed groups for different reasons and through different recruitment mechanisms; in doing so, he convincingly argues that, contrary to popular explanations of terrorism, there is not a single pathway to 'radicalization', let alone the existence of an elusive 'terrorist personality' or profile. From a rigorous

examination of the interviews, the second chapter identifies three different pathways to join the PIRA: ideological, instrumental and solidaristic. The first pathway – *ideological* – is characterized by an early political socialization within the republican ideological and political tradition; recruitment occurs principally through family members that had previous engagement with armed republicanism. In the second pathway – *instrumental* – previous participation in both conventional and nonconventional politics convinced activists that in the context of closed political opportunities, the use of political violence was the only effective method to achieve their political goals. In this pathway, recruitment operates especially through previously established network of activists, rather than family members already involved in republican paramilitary groups. Finally, the most common pathway identified by Bosi is the third one – *solidaristic* – the result of socialization to diffused violence in local *enclaves*, fueled by a shared commitment to defend their communities from violent attacks by loyalists and security forces, in which recruitment was mostly based on peer relationships at the neighborhood level.

Notwithstanding the different routes that activists undertook in entering the PIRA, the third chapter reveals that, once inside the organization, these original paths lost their relevance. Interestingly, similarities in the activists' commitment seemed to overshadow whatever previous motivations or recruitment networks pulled them into embracing a clandestine organization like the PIRA. In particular, Bosi details how the shared perception of the effectiveness of the armed struggle in winning the 'Long War' kept the militants inside the PIRA. Dense networks of solidarity and militancy with fellow PIRA members and the local communities they aimed to defend cemented the activists' commitment to the armed struggle. The years during which many of the interviewees were detained as political prisoners seemed to have further strengthened, rather than weakened, their loyalty to the republican cause.

In chapter 4, Bosi discusses how, by the mid-1980s, the activists' faith in the armed struggle started to vanish, ultimately resulting in their exit from the PIRA, but not an altogether abandonment of their political activism. In fact, one of the notable long-term effects of activism in the PIRA is their ongoing involvement with republican politics, even though with a very different focus and types of activities. The former PIRA members interviewed for this research project are in fact renewing their involvement with achieving social and political change in Northern Ireland through their work, as well as political and social activities in their local communities.

The overall account of former PIRA members' involvement in the armed struggle contained in this booklet is remarkable both for its nuance and analytical clarity. Bosi's approach is firmly situated in the tradition of social movement scholarship that treats political violence not as pathology or the result of violent ideologies, but rather as one of the possible strategies political actors can employ, under certain circumstances, in certain political contexts.

This rationalist view of political violence, often emerging in the interviews conducted by Bosi, should not be exaggerated though. Reading the rich excerpts from the interviews, one should not question the genuine belief many of the former PIRA members showed towards the perceived effectiveness of the armed struggle as the only method to achieve a reunited Ireland (and vice versa, as a key motivation to exit from the PIRA, as soon as political violence was seen as no longer productive). Nor should we summarily dismiss these accounts as self-serving rationalizations of past choices; however, we should also underline how the immediate local context, in-group dynamics and dense solidarity networks may have fostered and shaped those beliefs, ultimately affecting the activists' decisions to leave. In fact, many other republican paramilitaries decided *not* to abandon the armed struggle at that time. A fascinating comparison between these two groups, those who remained and those who left the armed struggle, was unfortunately outside of the scope of this study. But it is certainly an intriguing avenue for future research to identify possible differential pathways *vis-à-vis* leaving or staying in a clandestine organization. These research questions and types of analysis could (and should) be applied outside of the context of the Troubles.

Overall, *Vite di lotta armata* contributes both to the social movement literature on activism in armed groups and our understanding of the PIRA and its members. From a comparative research perspective, I wished that this book devoted some pages discussing how the valuable insights from this project might apply to other contexts of violent conflict. Nevertheless, the contributions of *Vite di lotta armata* need to be translated into English, as this volume deserves a wider audience among scholars of the conflict in Northern Ireland and, more generally, contentious politics.

Gianluca De Fazio

Donato di Sanzo, *Oltre le barricate. Storia, politica, religione e l'Ulster della pace*, Roma, Aracne, 2016, pp. 140. € 10,00. ISBN 978-88-548-9681-9.

*Oltre le barricate. Storia, politica, religione e l'Ulster della Pace* di Donato di Sanzo si inserisce nel filone storiografico che affronta la complessa 'questione nordirlandese' libero dalle logiche militanti che hanno connotato gran parte degli studi sui Troubles<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Importante punto di riferimento di un filone storiografico che cerca di superare le logiche di parte che hanno caratterizzato la lettura delle vicende nordirlandesi è il testo di P. Naso, *Il verde e l'arancio. Storia politica e religione nel conflitto dell'Irlanda del Nord*, Torino, Claudiana, 2006.

Basato su una solida ricognizione bibliografica e arricchito dalle interviste dei principali protagonisti, riportate integralmente in appendice, il libro ricostruisce la recente storia dell'Ulster ripercorrendo la paradossale parabola che dagli scontri armati della fine degli anni Sessanta arriva al 'governo degli opposti', formatosi in seguito al responso delle elezioni legislative del 2007 e caratterizzato dalla sorprendente convergenza delle ali estreme del sistema politico nordirlandese.

L'intento dell'autore è palesato fin dal titolo: scavalcare le barricate al fine di analizzare criticamente le etichette religiose, politiche ed etniche, usate principalmente dalla stampa, ma non solo, per semplificare e schematizzare il conflitto generatosi in quella che Paolo Naso ha efficacemente definito "una delle esperienze di società multiculturale più negative e fallimentari della storia contemporanea" (9).

Il libro è diviso in quattro parti. La prima è caratterizzata da una prospettiva diacronica attraverso la quale l'autore ripercorre gli snodi principali di un conflitto secolare, che affonda le radici nella divisione religiosa tra la cattolica Irlanda e la protestante Inghilterra e trova il suo momento fondativo agli inizi del XVII secolo, quando i primi gruppi di coloni scozzesi e protestanti raggiunsero le coste nord-orientali dell'isola per poi penetrare nell'Ulster, seguendo lo schema della *plantation*.

Fin dalle prime pagine è chiara la scelta interpretativa tesa a ridimensionare la prevalenza del fattore religioso come chiave di lettura privilegiata del lungo confronto/scontro tra Inghilterra e Irlanda del Nord e fornire, invece, una visione d'insieme, frutto dell'equilibrata combinazione di diverse categorie interpretative. Nel corso della storia nordirlandese la sfera religiosa si è pericolosamente intrecciata con quella politica ed economica, molto spesso con il prevalere di quest'ultime due, generando un graduale e articolato processo di emarginazione socio-economica della minoranza cattolica.

Il secondo capitolo del libro, dedicato ai Troubles, si apre proprio con la descrizione proposta da Fionnbarra O'Dochartaigh – animatore del Movimento per i diritti civili nordirlandese e tra i fondatori della Northern Ireland Civil Association, intervistato dall'autore nel 2009 – della condizione nella quale viveva la minoranza cattolica nordirlandese alla fine degli anni Sessanta. L'intento dell'autore è quello di evitare una superficiale cronologia degli eventi militari e di scavare a fondo nelle condizioni economiche, sociali e politiche che alimentarono l'escalation di violenza.

Estratti delle interviste dei protagonisti, opportunamente inseriti nella ricostruzione degli eventi, arricchiscono l'analisi sui momenti cruciali dello scontro militare e politico senza, tuttavia, generare uno scivolamento in letture di parte. Particolarmente interessante risulta, inoltre, la ricostruzione del ruolo delle chiese e del difficile cammino ecumenico, inizialmente



limitato alle gerarchie ecclesiastiche e ad un piano prettamente teologico e successivamente apertosi ad una valorizzazione delle esperienze concrete di dialogo, avutesi a livello pastorale nella aree a più forte concentrazione di settarismo. L'evoluzione del processo ecumenico, frutto dello sforzo congiunto delle due chiese teso a superare la concezione del settarismo come fenomeno strettamente religioso e ad indagare con l'applicazione di criteri scientifici e sociologici il peso di fattori di natura politica, etnica, culturale, economica.

Nella terza parte del libro *Di Sanzo* disamina il delicato e non ancora concluso processo di pace inserendolo in una dettagliata e lucida ricostruzione del quadro politico che gli fa da sostegno e allo stesso tempo da cornice. L'autore, a chiusura del capitolo, apre profondi interrogativi sugli imprevedibili esiti del 'governo degli opposti' e propone nuove e originali prospettive di ricerca, di natura più sociologica che storica, sulla natura attuale del rapporto tra le due comunità che sembrerebbe ancora fortemente impostato sulla base di una "segregazione di fatto" (Di Sanzo 2010, 26) operata per mezzo di diffidenze reciproche e usi e costumi consolidati nel corso del conflitto.

L'ultima parte rappresenta il vero nucleo tematico del volume. Le conclusioni sono affidate alla destrutturazione delle coppie dicotomiche più frequentemente usate per ridurre le cause del conflitto a schemi rappresentativi basati su contrapposizioni nette: cattolici-protestanti; irlandesi-britannici; nazionalisti-unionisti; repubblicani-lealisti. La più significativa tra queste è indubbiamente quella di matrice religiosa.

A riguardo, l'autore smonta completamente la tesi, diffusa negli anni Sessanta e Settanta per esigenze di cronaca, della guerra di religione, facendo leva su due importanti obiezioni: richiederebbe un coinvolgimento diretto delle chiese ufficiali nel conflitto, che invece si impegnarono in direzione opposta, ovvero in una graduale opera di avvicinamento ecumenico, e comporta una non considerazione delle diverse sfumature che connotano la società irlandese in tema di appartenenza religiosa e di autorappresentazione delle persone di tema di spiritualità.

Le interviste ai principali protagonisti di tali vicende, riportate in appendice, completano il quadro descrittivo, restituendo la dimensione umana di una delle pagine più complesse e drammatiche della storia europea contemporanea.

*Oltre le barricate* rappresenta un contributo importante per la comprensione delle vicende che hanno funestato la storia nordirlandese nella seconda metà del secolo scorso e le lacerazioni sociali che le hanno generate; un riuscito tentativo di analisi in profondità della società nordirlandese per ricercare al contempo radici ed effetti del conflitto e dimostrare la parzialità di tesi che si fondano su schematizzazioni e semplificazioni della realtà.

*Giovanni Ferrarese*

Dieter Reinisch, *Die Frauen der IRA: Cumann na mBan und der Nordirlandkonflikt 1968-1986*, Wien, Promedia Verlagsges, 2017, pp. 224. € 20,00. ISBN 978-3-85371-423- 2.

2016 marked the Centenary of the Easter Rising, one of the most important events in recent Irish history. The anniversary has not only generated considerable interest in the uprising against British Empire rule in Ireland, but also spawned a large number of relevant publications concerned with the event and its commemoration by the modern Irish state and the Irish people.

Among various aspects of the 1916 rising covered not only in books but also in news reports, magazines and on television was the role of women – both their participation in the event and the reasons for their being neglected in commemorations of the event.

Dieter Reinisch's book *Die Frauen der IRA: Cumann na mBan und der Nordirlandkonflikt 1968-1986* (The women of the IRA: Cumann na mBan and the Northern Ireland Conflict 1968-1986), is not, as the title makes clear, concerned with the Easter Rising, although the first lines of the book mention this "most important date of the Irish republican calendar" (9). Rather it examines the role of Republican women and their primary organisation, Cumann na mBan, during (roughly) the first half of the most recent major conflict in Ireland, the so-called Troubles. Still, the history of Cumann na mBan and indeed Irish history as a whole during these years remains deeply entwined with 1916.

The founding of Cumann na mBan predates the Eastern Rising and the organisation continued to play an important role after the so-called 'revolutionary decade' from 1913 to 1923, which is now being revisited and studied with renewed interest as we live through the 'decade of centenaries'. But much of Cumann na mBan's more recent history is all but forgotten. This is not only due to dwindling numbers from the 1930s onward, but also to political and social reasons, the same ones that have obscured the memories of women's participation in the Easter Rising.

Accordingly, Reinisch's study of the group in the years between 1968 and 1986, is not exclusively an illustration of Irish republican politics, but also offers interesting insights into the situation of Irish women in politics and society, the issue of women's rights and the role of women in armed conflict.

The book, which bases its findings on over two dozen interviews Reinisch conducted with active and former members of Cumann na mBan, is an important addition to the existing publications on the subject, as most of them cover only a relatively short period of the group's existence, usually the previously mentioned 'revolutionary decade' and at the most the 1930s and 40s. Reinisch outlines the present state of research in the first part of his book before reaching the main topic and naming the relevant publications. Considering the fact that Reinisch's book was published in German, it stands

virtually alone, with only one other relevant work on the subject, *Töchter des Terrors: die Frauen der IRA* (2011) by German journalist Marianne Quoirin-Wichert, which Reinisch acknowledges in this part of his study.

After giving a rough overview of Irish history, specifically the history of the Anglo-Irish wars and conflicts all the way from the twelfth century to the outbreak of the Troubles, which despite its necessary contraction manages to guide even readers not well versed in Irish history through the issues, the main part of the study begins with the presentation of first-hand accounts of former and present members of Cumann na mBan.

In five chapters he outlines the history of Cumann na mBan and has the women involved narrate parts of it themselves in their own words. These sometimes very personal accounts in addition to historical facts and documents make for a very fascinating read for anyone interested in the topic. The 1969 Official/Provisional split in the Republican Movement and Cumann na mBan's position in this, the changing profile of the membership and the changing nature of its activities due to the outbreak of war in the North, the relationship of Cumann na mBan and the Irish Republican Army, including the attempts to marginalise the women's organisation by the male IRA leadership and finally the discussion among women over their role in the struggle are among the topics covered here.

The last point is maybe the most interesting one raised in the book: the question of what role Cumann na mBan has played – and on a smaller scale still plays – in terms of linking national liberation with women's liberation. Whether Cumann na mBan as a separate organisation offered women protection and a chance to play a self-determined part in a dangerous phase of recent Irish history or if it limited them, both in their social role and ability to act as men's equals in the struggle.

The book, with an entire chapter devoted to 'gender and memory', gives no definitive answer and neither do the statements of the women interviewed, who hold very different views on the matter. Still it is an important question which could be applied to various other societies, places and times.

While the focus of the book ends with the second great split in the Republican Movement in 1986, some concluding remarks cover the activities of Cumann na mBan since then. Contrary to various claims the organisation still exists today and still partakes in politics as part of what is commonly referred to as 'dissident republicans'. As Reinisch points out, it remains to be seen what the future holds for Ireland, especially the North in the face of 'Brexit' and other developments and whether the women of Cumann na mBan will play a role in them that merits further study.

For those with an academic or personal interest in modern Irish history and politics in general or specifically in Irish Republicanism, Dieter Reinisch's book is highly recommended reading.

*Kaan Orhon*

Aidan Doyle, *A History of the Irish Language: From the Norman Invasion to Independence*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 320. GBP 24,19 (paperback) ISBN. 9780198724766.

Exploring the connections between language, culture, politics and religion from c. 1200-c. 1920, *A History of the Irish Language: From the Norman Invasion to Independence* is a refreshing contribution to discussions about the role Irish played in the formation, retention and suppression of communal and individual identity. Aidan Doyle boldly concludes this study by stating his “Hope is that the perspective on the history of Irish and English offered by this book will contribute to and enrich ... one aspect of Irish identity in the twenty-first century” (272). However, given the vogue for studies of Irish that emerged with the publication of Philip O’Leary’s *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation* (1994), Ciolla Christó’s *The Irish Language in Ireland: From Goidel to Globalisation* (2005) and Brian O’Conchubhair’s *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge* (2009), what new insight does Doyle bring to the study of the Irish language?

Tracing the introduction of several language systems to Ireland, Doyle considers the correlation and relationship between the Irish and English languages, and the Irish- and English-speaking communities. Emphasising the perspective that languages do not emerge or exist in isolation, Doyle notes, “The history of Irish is intimately bound up with the spread of English in Ireland. This in turn is the result of a complex array of political, cultural, religious, educational, and sociological factors” (3). Accompanying his descriptive analysis of changes in lexicon, morphology, phonology and syntax, Doyle provides an examination of an often overlooked aspect of historical sociolinguistics; namely the development of multilingual features of Irish.

In his introduction, Doyle establishes the foundation of his study and defines linguistic terms, such as dialect and bilingualism. Moreover, he defends his lack of discussion on Primitive Irish (before 600), Old Irish (c. 600-900), and Middle Irish (900-1200), by noting that “A proper treatment of Old and Middle Irish would require a separate study” (8). Following his somewhat brief introduction, chapters two, three, four, five and six are divided into two sections; an overview of cultural and social factors that impacted the development of language, and a discussion of the key linguistic trends of the given period. Chapters seven, eight and the conclusion focus on the revival and the modernisation of Irish from 1870-1922. As several important cultural and linguistic changes, coupled with the efforts of nationalist groups to strengthen the use of Irish, occurred during this period, Doyle’s considerable attention is understandable. However, these final chapters are not divided into two sections like others, and this structural change is somewhat puzzling. Among the chapters presented, a number are particularly noteworthy; “The Anglo-Normans and their heritage (1200-1500)”, “The Tudors (1500-1600)” and “A New language for a new nation (1800-70)”, for example.

Doyle begins his study by examining early Modern Irish and the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland, its linguistic and cultural impact. Justifying this decision, Doyle argues that the end of the twelfth century “Is regarded as a defining moment in Irish history, witnessing ... the arrival of a new group of invaders, who brought with them a language that was eventually to dislodge the one spoken until then” (7). In his discussion on the evolution of standard and non-standard examples of classical Irish, Doyle foregrounds that despite the Gaelisation of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, English did have an effect on the formation and shaping of Irish. Although this chapter does consider a number of external influences on the development of Irish, the lack of attention given to the fluidity of influences between Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and Ireland during this period is notable.

Moving forward, in his exceptional chapter, “The Tudors (1500–1600)”, Doyle examines the impact of the Renaissance and early Reformation on the use and formation of Irish, as well as the way the Renaissance brought education and a broader international perspective to the elite of the island. Doyle argues:

In 1485, at the beginning of the Tudor era, we can distinguish three linguistic communities in Ireland. The first was the Irish-language communities. Ethically speaking there were two kinds of Irish speakers; the Gaeil/Irish, and some members of the Sean-Ghaill/Old English. Then there was the English-speaking community. This was made up of some Sean-Ghaill/Old English, and of the Nua-Ghaill/New English. Finally, there was a bilingual community. Bilinguals tended to come from the Sean-Ghaill and the Gaeil. Very few of the new Tudor officials or planters learned Irish. (40)

In clarifying the delineations of Irish, here, Doyle stresses the development of the bilingualism and diglossia of Irish. Briefly discussing the innovative changes in spoken and written forms of Irish and the increased prominence of translations, Doyle astutely asserts “Those who went through their formal education of the poetic schools were able to understand, and to some extent reproduce, the fossilized grammatical forms” (56) of previous periods. Most significantly, Doyle sensitively acknowledges that during this period, the status of Irish declined dramatically and this is reflected in the wider spread use of code-switching and diglossia.

In chapter six, “A New Language for a New Nation”, Doyle examines the important role that growing anti-British sentiment and Irish nationalism had on the status of Irish. Demonstrating, with mixed success, that among native Irish speakers, there were mixed attitudes towards English; this stems largely from the economic opportunities it provided and the negative attitudes resulting from mass immigration. Doyle argues that during this period, attempts were made to document and revitalise Irish largely by academic groups. Consequently, the status of Irish moved from being a primarily rural but widely spoken language, to a language only spoken in the outlying areas

of the country. By focusing on the structure of Irish orthographic reforms, various borrowings and the emergence of neologisms for technology and science, Doyle illustrates how this produced “an enrichment of the colloquial language with a whole spectrum of borrowing, some of which were to survive into the twentieth-century dialects” (158).

This study may have profited from being more balanced with regards to structure, as Doyle devotes three chapters to the nineteenth century. As a result, a number of chapters appear to be hurried, too brief and lack critical impact. Similarly, more consideration to the reciprocal influences of Scots and Welsh on Irish would have been welcome. These issues aside, this study is written in a clear and concise manner that avoids over theoretical and technical jargon; as such, it will appeal to general readers, students and scholars with limited knowledge of this subject. However, linguists may find the lack of rigour and standardised renderings of pronunciation guides, as well as the absence of a detailed analysis of grammatical and philological changes to Irish over time frustrating. The inclusion of a brief, and relevant, glossary of linguistic terms, the ‘further reading’ lists presented at the end of every chapter, and a small number of maps demonstrating linguistic use are welcome additions. Therefore, Doyle makes an important contribution to the study of the history of the Irish language and Ireland itself.

*Robert Finnigan*

Hedwig Schwall (ed.), *Yeats, staeY, Yeats. Yeats Reborn*, Leuven, EFACIS – The European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies, 2015, pp. 44 + 117. NPG. ISBN 978-9-0823-0237-0.

In several respects this publication is a remarkable and unusual book. It has, as the editor writes, ‘a box structure’ measuring 28 x 21 cm. It folds out left and right; the two ‘wings’ are of the same size. Individually, both open to the left; spread out the entire book measures more than one meter in width. One needs a large desk with ample work space to read it; the reason for this arrangement will be explained below. The book was published in 2015 by EFACIS, the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies in Leuven (Belgium) as part of a larger and promising enterprise which will eventually include two new periodicals, a Yeats journal (unnamed and unpublished as of April 2017) and *RISE: Review of Irish Studies in Europe*. Of the latter two issues have been published in 2016-17. They are freely accessible at <<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/rise>>. The project has installed a website (<<http://www.yeatsreborn.eu>>), on which further translations of poems as well as of six plays and prose pieces will be made available. Moreover, the translators will be asked to contribute ‘post-translation reports’.

The first part of *Yeats Reborn* has 44 pages and includes the title page, publication details (verso) and a table of contents for both parts. This is followed by the texts of 32 poems, taken from the *Variorum Edition*. The second part of 117 pages comprises an introduction by Hedwig Schwall (9-25), translations of the poems into 21 languages, and notes on the 51 translators. The names of a few of the translators are familiar to Yeats scholars, e.g., Charles I. Armstrong, Grigorii Kruzhkov, and Hedwig Schwall, the editor herself, but many are new to me. Many poems are translated more than once, the top scorers being “A Coat” and “Leda and the Swan” with nine translations each. The target languages are (in alphabetical order): Castilian, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, Gaelge, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Swedish, and Turkish. Several European languages are missing, among them: Albanian, Bulgarian, Danish, Estonian, Frisian, Galician, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, and Ukrainian. Translations of Yeats poems into all of these languages are, however, known to exist. Of course, this list of omissions is not meant as a criticism of the project; as it is, *Yeats Reborn* is a formidable achievement.

The poems are arranged chronologically according to the dates of publication, as given in the *Variorum Edition*. They are, in the editor’s words, “among Yeats’s finest” (p. 5) or ‘core poems’ and were chosen with a view towards diversity of forms and themes, preferably the themes of “birth, death and rebirth” (*ibidem*). They include several of the most popular poems (according to the amount of attention which they have received), such as “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, “Easter 1916”, “Among School Children”, “The Second Coming” and “Sailing to Byzantium”. There can be no quarrelling with the choice, considering that not every Yeats poem invites a translator’s efforts. Still, I would have wished to see translations of “The Fisherman” and “Beautiful Lofty Things”.

Originally, the volume was planned as a bilingual edition, with English texts facing the translations. But this proved to be highly impractical in view of the diversity of versions for any given text. Hence the ‘box structure’ which allows both parts to lie open side by side and to enable a reader to compare. The question, however, who this reader might be is not easy to answer. It is certainly not enough to be conversant in English and in one’s native language; one has to be well aware of what I would call the poetical qualities of the target language. I am able to recognize the merits of the three German versions which, although unrhymed, appear to me to be quite adequate in their attention to rhythm, tone, and imagery. I would not undertake to do the same for the French, Dutch, and Italian translations, although I can read the languages to some extent. Significantly, the polyglot editor had recourse to a host of advisors, two in fact for each language, to judge the qualities of the translations that were submitted.

Rhythm, tone (or sound-scape), and imagery are three of the aspects dealt with in Hedwig Schwall's introduction, where they are related to a discussion of recent theories of poetry translation. Naturally, these aspects will differ from language to language. A translator, attempting to preserve the various qualities of a poem, is confronted by the necessity to decide what is adequate or acceptable in the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the target language. The editor's correspondents, anticipating post-translating reports, provide sufficient material to highlight the pitfalls but also the rewards of translating Yeats's poems. The metrical conventions of a target language may run counter to Yeats's basically iambic prosody. Syntax, vocabulary, and associative imagery ask for individual solutions. In a foreign cultural context, a poem may lose some of its meaning, when translated literally. In part, Hedwig Schwall's summaries read like a primer of poetry translation, designed to guide other translators. They also implicitly formulate a problem: What is needed is a comprehensive study of Yeats translations, of their possibilities, but also of their contributions to an understanding of his poems. *Yeats Reborn* provides numerous examples of this mutual elucidation.

Translating Yeats's poems is a flourishing branch of Yeats studies, but it has not yet received the critical attention that it deserves. In order to show the dimensions of the task I append a representative selection of book-length translations of the poetry (translations in periodicals and anthologies are legion); the order is alphabetical by language and then by year of publication.

### **Bulgarian**

*Кръвта и луната: Поезия. Проза (Krvuta i lunata: Poeziia. Proza)*, Sofia, Narodna kultura, 1990, pp. 304.

*Blood and the moon*, translated by Vladimir Trendafilov.

### **Castilian**

*Antología poética*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1984, pp. 232.

Translated by Enrique Caracciolo Trejo.

*Antología poética*, Madrid, Siruela, 1991, pp. 429.

Translated by Manuel Soto.

*Poesía escogida*, Bogotá, Áncora, 1996, pp. 111.

*Selected Poems*, translated by Nicolás Suescún.

*Los cisnes salvajes de Coole*, Barcelona, DVD Ediciones, 2003, pp. 185.

*The Wild Swans at Coole*, translated by Carlos Jiménez Arribas.

*La torre*, Barcelona, DVD Ediciones, 2003, pp. 165.

*The Tower*, translated by Carlos Jiménez Arribas.



*Antología poética*, Barcelona, Lumen, 2005, pp. 354.  
Translated by Daniel Aguirre.

*Encrucijadas*, Madrid, Bartleby, 2006, pp. 65.  
*Crossways*, translated by Ibon Zubiaur.

*Antología poética*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Losada, 2010, pp. 411.  
Translated by Delia Pasini.

*La escalera de caracol y otros poemas*, Ourense, Ediciones Linteo, 2010, pp. 206.  
*The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, translated by Antonio Linares Familiar.

*Poesía reunida*, València, Editorial Pre-Textos, 2010, pp. 822.  
Translated by Antonio Rivero Taravillo.

### **Catalan**

*Trenta-quatre poemes*, Barcelona, Edicions dels Quaderns Crema, 1983, pp. 95.  
Translated by Marià Villangómez Llobet.

*L'espasa i la torre*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 2005, pp. 118.  
*The Sword and the Tower*, translated by Manresa Ní Ríordáin and Albert Roig.

*Irlanda indòmita. 150 poemes de W. B. Yeats*, Barcelona, Edicions de 1984, 2015,  
pp. 478.  
Translated by Josep M. Jaumà.

### **Croatian**

*William Butler Yeats: Nobelova nagrada za književnost 1923*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga,  
2001, pp. 335.  
Edited by Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, various translators.

### **Czech**

*Slova snad pro hudbu: Výbor z poezie*, Praha, Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury hudby  
a umění, 1961, pp. 144.  
*Words for Music Perhaps: A Selection from the Poetry*, translated by Jiří Valja.

### **Dutch**

*Al keert het grote zingen niet terug*, Sliedrecht, Wagner & Van Santen, 1999, pp. 176.  
*Though the Great Song Return no More*, translated by Jan Eijkelboom.

*De mooiste van William Butler Yeats*, Tielt, Lannoo-Amsterdam, Atlas, 2000, pp. 158.  
*The Finest of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Koen Stassijns, various translators.

### **Estonian**

*Luulet*, Tallinn, Eesti Raamat, 1990, pp. 160.  
*Poems*, translated by Ants Oras and Märt Väljataga.

**Finnish**

*Runoja*, Porvoo, Helsinki Söderström, 1966, pp. 212.

*Poems*, translated by Aale Tynni.

*Torni ja kierreportaati: Valikoima W. B. Yeatsin runoja*, Helsinki, Basam Books, 2015, pp. 244.

*Tower and Winding Stair: A Selection from W. B. Yeats's Poetry*, translated by Jyrki Vainonen.

**French**

*Choix de poèmes*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1975, pp. 255.

Translated by René Fréchet.

*Cinquante et un poèmes*, Bordeaux, William Blake & Co., 1989, pp. 243.

Translated by Jean Briat.

*Quarante-cinq poèmes de W. B. Yeats*, suivi par *La résurrection*, Paris, Hermann, 1989, pp. 219.

Translated by Yves Bonnefoy.

*Les cygnes sauvages à Coole*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1990, pp. 179.

*The Wild Swans at Coole*, translated by JeanYves Masson.

*Derniers poèmes (1936-1939)*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1994, pp. 190.

*Last Poems*, translated by Jean-Yves Masson.

*Michael Robartes et la danseuse. Suivi de Le don de Haround Al-Rachid*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1994, pp. 93.

*Michael Robartes and the dancer*, followed by *The gift of Harun Al-Rashid*, translated by Jean-Yves Masson.

*Les errances d'Oisín suivi de La croisée de chemins, La rose, Le vent dans les roseaux*, in *Poèmes de jeunesse I, 1889-1899*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2003, pp. 351.

Edited by Jacqueline Genet, various translators.

*La tour*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2002, pp. 159.

*The Tower*, translated by Jean-Yves Masson.

*Responsabilités*, précédé de *La vieillesse de la reine Maeve, Baile et Aillinn, Dans les sept bois. Les ombres sur la mer, Le heaume vert et autres poèmes: Poèmes de jeunesse II, 1900-1914*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2003, pp. 335.

Translated by Jacqueline Genet.

*L'escalier en spirale et autres poèmes*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2008, pp. 218.

*The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, translated by Jean-Yves Masson.

*Après un long silence*, Rennes, La Part Commune, 2013, pp. 192.

*After a Long Silence*, translated by Guy Chain.

**Gaelige**

*Byzantium: Athghabáil ar Rogha Dánta*, Indreabhán, Conamara, Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1991, pp. 135.

Various translators.

**German**

*Werke. 1, Ausgewählte Gedichte*, Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1970, pp. 315.

*Selected Poems*, edited by Werner Vordtriede, various translators.

*Ein Morgen grünes Gras: Gedichte*, München, Luchterhand, 1998, pp. 165.

*An Acre of Green Grass: Poems*, translated by Andrea Paluch and Robert Habeck.

*Die Gedichte*, München, Luchterhand, 2005, pp. 463.

Edited by Norbert Hummelt, various translators.

**Greek**

*Μυθολογίες και οράματα (Mythologies kai oramata)*, Athina, Gavriilidis, 1992, pp. 199.

*Mythologies and Visions*, translated by Spyros Iliopoulos.

*Ποιήματα (Poimata)*, Athina, Morfotiko Idryma Ethnikis Trapezis, 1994, pp. 61.

Edited by Mariliza Mitsi, various translators.

*70 ερωτικά (70 Erotika)*, Athina, Vivliopoleion tis "Estias, 2000, pp. 293.

Translated by Spyros Iliopoulos and Maria Sidiropoulou.

*Ποιήματα (Poimata)*, Thessaloniki, Ekdotiki Thessalonikis, 2005, pp. 53.

Translated by Maria Archimandritou.

*Ποιήματα του William Butler Yeats (Poimata tou William Butler Yeats)*, Athina, Ekati,

2011, pp. 110.

Translated by Michalis Papantonopoulos and Thomas Tsalapatis.

**Hungarian**

*Versek*, Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 1960, pp. 244.

Translated by Benjámín László *et al.*

*William Butler Yeats Versei*, Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 2000, pp. 352.

Edited by Győző Ferencz, various translators.

*A költő esdeklése (Válogatott versek)*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2001, pp. 125.

*The Poet Pleads: Selected Poems*, translated by Gábor Erdődi.

**Italian**

*Quaranta poesie*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965, pp. 112.

Translated by Giorgio Melchiori.

*Le opere: Poesia, teatro, prosa*, Torino, UTET, 1969, pp. xxviii, 690.

Edited by Salvatore Rosati, various translators.

*Racconti, liriche*, Milano, Fabbri, 1969, pp. 256.  
Translated by Giuseppe Sardelli.

*Poesie*, Milano, Mondadori, 1974, pp. 336.  
Translated by Roberto Sanesi.

*La torre*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1984, pp. 299.  
*The Tower*, translated by Ariodante Marianni.

*I cigni selvatici a Coole*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1989, pp. 301.  
*The Wild Swans at Coole*; translated by Ariodante Marianni.

*La scala a chiocciola e altre poesie*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2000, pp. 503.  
*The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, translated by Ariodante Marianni.

*Le ultime poesie*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2004, pp. cxvi, 509.  
*Last Poems*, translated by Ariodante Marianni.

*L'opera poetica*, Milano, Mondadori, 2005, pp. clxii, 1654.  
Translated by Ariodante Marianni.

*I cigni selvatici a Coole: Poesie irlandesi*, Bagno a Ripoli (Firenze), Passigli, 2008, pp. 160.  
*The Wild Swans at Coole*, translated by Alessandro Gentili.

*La bellezza vivente*, Firenze, Passigli, 2001 [i.e., 2011], pp. 207.  
*The Living Beauty*, translated by Leone Traverso.

*Il vento tra le canne*, Milano, Corriere della sera, 2012, pp. 228.  
*The Wind Among the Reeds*, translated by Alessandro Gentili and Leone Traverso.

*La rosa del mondo e altre poesie d'amore*, Bagno a Ripoli (Firenze), Passigli, 2013, pp. 142.  
*The Rose of the World and Other Love Poems*, translated by Alessandro Gentili.

*L'artificio dell'eternità: Saggi sull'arte*, Milano, Edizioni Medusa, 2015, pp. 223.  
*The Artifice of Eternity: Essays on Art*, translated by Rosita Copioli.

*Verso Bisanzio: Poesie*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2015, pp. 251.  
*Sailing To Byzantium*, translated by Dario Calimani.

### **Kurdish**

*Mîrîn Nîqutî Dilê Firokevanekî Îrlandî. Guldesteyek ji dîwanên William Butler Yeats*,  
Istanbul, Sî, 2002, pp. 109.

*An Irish Airman Foresees his Death: A Romantic Poem from the Poetry of William  
Butler Yeats*, translated by Kawa Nemir.

### **Latvian**

*The White Birds: Selected Poems / Baltie putni: Dzejas izlase*, Riga, Neputns, 2015, pp. 204.  
Edited by Jānis Elsbergs, translated by Kārlis Vērdiņš *et al.*

**Polish**

*Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1987, pp. 168.  
*Selected Poetry*, translated by Ludmiła Marjańska.

*Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987, pp. 248.  
 Edited by Ewa Życieńska, various translators.

*Wiersze wybrane*, Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1997, pp. xcvi, 274.  
*Selected Poems*, edited by Wanda Rulewicz, various translators.

*Sailing to Byzantium. The Tower / Odjazd do Bizancjum. Wieża*, Kraków,  
 Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004, pp. 48.  
 Translated by Czesław Miłosz.

**Portuguese**

*Poemas de W. B. Yeats*, São Paulo, Art Editora, 1987, pp. 176.  
 Translated by Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos.

*Os pássaros brancos e outros poemas*, Lisboa, Relógio d'Água, 1993, pp. 124.  
*The White Birds and Other Poems*, translated by Laureano Silveira and Maria de Lourdes  
 Guimarães. Revised and augmented edition: Lisboa, Relógio d'Água, 2012, pp. 191.

*Poemas*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1994, pp. 159.  
 Translated by Paulo Vizioli.

*Eight for Brazil from Ireland*, Dublin, Department of English Language Studies:  
 European College of Management – ECM, 2012, pp. 22.  
 Title from cover. A student project at the Department, conducted and edited by Mark  
 Edmund Hutcheson, containing translations into Portuguese by eight different  
 translators.

**Romanian**

*Versuri*, București, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1965, pp. 288.  
 Translated by Aurel Covaci.

**Russian**

*Избранное стихотворения лирически и повествователен (Izbrannye stikhotvoreniia  
 liricheskie i povestvovatel'nye)*, Moskva, Nauka, 1995, pp. 408.  
*Selected Lyrical and Narrative Poems*, ed. by A. P. Sarukhian and others, various translators.

*Роза и Башня (Roza i bashnia)*, Sankt Peterburg, Simpozium, 1999, pp. 556.  
*Rose and Tower*, edited by G. M. Kruzhkov, various translators.

*Тайная Роза (Tainaia Roza)*, Sankt Peterburg, Universitetskii Press, 2000, pp. 224.  
*The Secret Rose*, translated by Andrei Mashinian.

*Плавание в Византию (Sailing to Byzantium / Plavanie v Vizantii)*, Sankt-Peterburg,  
 Izdatel'stkii Dom Azbuka-klassika, 2007, pp. 304.  
 Translated by G. M. Kruzhkov.

*Винтовая лестница (Vintovaia lestnitsa)*, Moskva, Knizhnyi klub knigovek, 2012, pp. 396.

*The Winding Stair*, translated by G. M. Kruzhkov.

*Стихотворения (Stikhotvoreniia / Poems)*, Moskva, Tekst, 2015, pp. 448.

Translated by Grigorii Kruzhkov and others.

### **Serbian**

*Kula*, Beograd, Beogradskii izdavačko - grafički zavod, 1978, pp. 248.

*The Tower*, translated by Milovan Danojlić.

*Ja sam iz zemlje Irske*, Beograd: Udruženje izdavača i knjižara, 1999, pp. 120.

*I am of Ireland*, translated by Milovan Danojlić.

*Izbor 50 pjesama (1889-1939)*, Zagreb – Sarajevo, Synopsis, 2010, pp. 136.

Translated by Muharem Bazdulj.

### **Slovene**

*Izbrano delo*, Ljubljana, Cankarjeva založba v Ljubljani, 1983, pp. 224.

*Selected Works*, translated by Venó Taufer.

*William Butler Yeats*, Ljubljana, Založba Mladinska Knjiga, 1993, pp. 196.

*Selected Poems*, translated by Venó Taufer.

*Zbrana poezija*, Ljubljana, Književno društvo. Hiša poezije, 2014. 2 vols. planned.

Translated by Nada Groselj.

### **Swedish**

*Han önskar att hans älskade vore död: 52 dikter / presenterade av Kaj Attorps*, Stockholm, Lind & Co., 2001, pp. 134.

*He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead*, edited by Kaj Attorps, various translators.

*Ett kristalliskt rop, Dikter i urval*, Lund, Ellerströms förlag, 2012, pp. 235.

*A Crystalline Cry*, translated by Ann-Kristin Åklint.

*Tornet*, Stockholm, Brombergs, 2012, pp. 98.

*The Tower*, translated by Thomas Sjösvärd.

*Valda dikter*, Täby, Humana Scribo, 2014, pp. 141.

*Selected Poems*, translated by Gunnar Artéus.

### **Turkish**

*Her şey ayartabilir beni*, Istanbul, Sözcükler, 2014, pp. 102.

*All Things Can Tempt Me*, translated by Cevat Çapan.

### **Ukrainian**

*Лірика (Liryka)*, Kyiv, Dnipro, 1990, pp. 216.

Edited and mostly translated by Oleksandr Mykolaevych Mokrovol's'kyi.

*Klaus Peter Jochum*

Arianna Antonielli and Mark Nixon, eds, *Edwin John Ellis's and William Butler Yeats's The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical. A Manuscript Edition, with Critical Analysis*, Firenze, FUP 2016, 743 pp., ISBN 978-88-6453-340-7, €23.90

Nearly half a century has passed since scholars took up the massive challenge launched by a leading British expert in Victorian literature, Professor Ian Fletcher, with his project, the aim of which was to disseminate W.B. Yeats and E.J. Ellis' *The Works of William Blake*. The work, which was published in 1893, was only given a mild reception by Victorian readers, though it sought to establish the importance of the British visionary poet, painter, and print-maker's works and aesthetics well beyond nineteenth-century England, in line with Fletcher's ideas.

Scholarship on Yeats has been keen to supplement criticism of his plays and poems with a range of cross-disciplinary investigations focused on his life and activities. It is with the aim of extending coverage in this field that one can approach the Series of the manuscript editions by Yeats. Under the General Editorship of Phillip L. Marcus, J.C.C. Mays, Stephen Parrish, Ann Saddlemyer, and Jon Stallworthy, from around the mid-1990s onwards the editions of Yeats' manuscripts published by Cornell University Press have filled this gap, quickly gaining notoriety and fulfilling the requirements of academic rigour. The Cornell volumes consist of manuscript editions and typescripts in revised form, proof sheets and miscellanea from Yeats' early drafts to the finalised, published versions of his works, with appendixes including new and often unpublished material. In some cases, the Series (which includes editions edited by well-known scholars such as Richard Allen Cave, Jared Curtis, Richard J. Finneran and Ann Saddlemyer) presents the only extant editions of certain manuscripts, and as such it remains an invaluable tool for students, scholars, and literary critics interested in Yeats' artistic development. In the aftermath of this long-lasting academic tradition, another important and unique volume which complements scholarship on Yeats has recently been published by the Firenze University Press: *Edwin John Ellis's and William Butler Yeats's The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical. A Manuscript Edition, with Critical Analysis*, edited by Arianna Antonielli (University of Florence) and Mark Nixon (University of Reading).

In this ambitious project, the editors offer us the manuscript of Ellis' and Yeats' joint project on Blake, currently held at the University of Reading and Dublin National Library. The manuscripts of *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical* are held by Special Collections of the University of Reading: this collection is entitled "Papers of Edwin John Ellis" and includes correspondence and typescripts written by both E.J. Ellis and W.B. Yeats, paintings and drawings, prints, and sundry papers. Other relevant documents are held at the National Library in Dublin (MSS NLI 30,289 and 30,584) and

include 22 pages of manuscript notes, three manuscript pages, as well as three galley proof pages with corrections regarding Blake's illustrations. Antonielli and Nixon's abridged edition is the result of seven years of research, writing, and editing that began during Antonielli's research leave in the UK in 2009. Having found out that the Yeats-Ellis' manuscripts were wrongly catalogued entirely under Ellis' collections (perhaps, due to a restructuring of the Reading library catalogue after a fire) Antonielli contacted Associate Director, Archive Services Guy Baxter, who put her in touch with Nixon. Though a Beckett expert, and currently director of the Beckett International Foundation, Nixon warmly accepted the challenge, boosted by his expertise in manuscripts and manuscript editions, and a common interest he and Antonielli shared in digital humanities, and digital publishing more specifically. While they were in search of access to the rights of the manuscripts, they reached A P Watt United Agents (established in 1875) as regards Yeats' work, but could not find a counterpart for Ellis – as indicated in a disclaimer in the volume, one great grandchild of Ellis' donated his entire collection to the University of Reading Library.

Scanning all the material collected as a result of Antonielli's chance finds lasted a week, with her colleague managing the material, which was held in Dublin (around 30 folia). The two scholars were finally given permissions for all sources, though the manuscripts that were included eventually in the co-edited work by FUP relate to *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical*. The development of the book project saw Nixon mostly engaged with the Introductory section(s) and Antonielli surveying the actual manuscript transcriptions. The result is an eponymous work that make their collaboration unique on several grounds, when compared with the project undertaken by the Cornell group: to begin with, the fact that Yeats' prose is treated for the very first time in manuscript edition, allowing scholars to track a similar process as that undertaken by the Ithaca, NY, publishers regarding Yeats' drama and poetry; secondly, the presence of two distinctive voices (Ellis' and Yeats') kept distinct by the editors throughout the 700-page-long book – for instance, by providing details on the colour of ink used for corrections, etc. – so that readers are able to ascertain with clarity which note is attributable to which of the two editors-authors; finally, the invaluable support offered by Antonielli and Nixon's extensive Bibliography, adding a more in-depth analysis of the processes, contexts, and contents of the experience and the progress of the research and of the researchers as they moved through what is known by experts as the "Quaritch" collected works by Blake.

In the end, what is unique in the collaborative work by Antonielli and Nixon is both an academically sound enquiry into Yeats' and Ellis' text and an up-to-date trans-disciplinary, cross-media critical edition that foregrounds the scientific value of scholarly dissemination online: this is the 'digital' Yeats of/for the 2000s.

*Samuele Grassi*



Alberto Belletti, *Chiesa Cattolica e nazionalismo irlandese. Leone XIII, l'episcopato gaelico e il leader protestante Charles Stewart Parnell*, prefazione di Paolo Nello, Roma, Aracne editrice, 2014, pp. 239. € 14. ISBN 978-88-548-7332-2.

Un'opera italiana di storia irlandese dell'Ottocento finalmente seria ed esauriente, scritta da un giovane studioso italiano che alla conoscenza della storiografia dell'isola unisce una ricerca archivistica che gli ha permesso di attingere a fonti di prima mano. Il periodo trattato è quello, per quanto riguarda la politica, della lotta per l'*Home Rule*, della cosiddetta Guerra per la Terra e della *New Departure* (l'alleanza tra nazionalisti costituzionali e indipendentisti repubblicani), quando sotto la guida carismatica di Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) tra gli anni Settanta del diciannovesimo secolo e il 1891 il nazionalismo irlandese sembrò ricomporsi in un movimento di massa che in relativa armonia riusciva a unire a una azione politica e parlamentare incisiva una mobilitazione sociale dai caratteri molto meno legalitari. Per quanto riguarda la religione, è il periodo del papato di Leone XIII, il cui inizio venne a coincidere in Irlanda con la morte dell'arcivescovo di Dublino, cardinale e delegato apostolico Paul Cullen (1803-1878), che aveva riformato la Chiesa cattolica irlandese e cercato di inocularle la sua avversione pregiudiziale verso ogni forma di nazionalismo irlandese, visto come necessaria anticamera della distruzione della Chiesa e di ogni ordine sociale. Ma, come nota il Belletti quando descrive l'operato del prelado ultramontano, "Sarebbe eccessivo credere che Cullen abbia esercitato un controllo totale sulla Chiesa d'Irlanda. I sacerdoti irlandesi avevano un forte 'spirito di corpo', che in buona parte si era venuto a creare all'interno dei seminari in cui si erano formati, il più importante dei quali era quello di Maynooth; Cullen invece era per molti aspetti un 'estraneo' nel suo paese. Anche se il titolo di Delegato apostolico dava a Cullen prerogative che valevano su tutta l'isola, vi furono momenti in cui gli altri vescovi si dimostrarono in grado di tenergli testa" (41). Il che contribuisce a spiegare come dopo la sua morte la maggior parte del clero e dei vescovi irlandesi invece sostennero organicamente il movimento nazionale di Parnell, giungendo quasi a scontrarsi al riguardo con il Vaticano, come illustra Belletti con dovizia di particolari.

L'autore illustra la storia irlandese precedente al periodo da lui trattato (con attenzione particolare ai suoi temi) con rara capacità di sintesi e notevole accuratezza (Capitolo I, "Chiesa e Irlanda nel tardo Ottocento", 21-50). Inquadra anche bene il pontificato di Leone XIII nel quadro transnazionale dell'agire politico del Vaticano e della Chiesa<sup>1</sup>. Belletti porta per mano il lettore attraverso il suo intricatissimo ginepraio, rendendogli però possibile il capire le cose con grande chiarezza. E davvero di ginepraio si tratta, dal momento che qui si intrecciano gli interessi e le volontà politiche di una istituzione transnazionale che non era (e

<sup>1</sup> Sempre nel Capitolo I, in pp. 21-26, e poi, naturalmente, nel resto del volume.

non è) solo politica, la Chiesa cattolica, con quelli di una Chiesa nazionale che certo faceva parte della prima, ma che comunque cercava di mantenere e accrescere la propria influenza sulla popolazione della propria isola, e con quelli di una potenza imperiale, l'Inghilterra o Regno Unito, che era allora pressoché egemone nel mondo, e con quelli dei nazionalisti irlandesi, legalitari o indipendentisti che fossero. Con bravura l'autore riesce a illustrare per ogni tappa del percorso l'interazione complessa di questi quattro attori (viene un po' trascurato un quinto, ritornato con prepotenza in primo piano dal 1885 in poi, cioè l'Unionismo irlandese; ma è giusto nell'economia dell'opera, dal momento che allora poteva essere considerato più come appendice di politiche inglesi che come attore autonomo).

Belletti racconta la crescita del movimento di Parnell in tutti i suoi vari fronti (politici e sociali, parlamentari e di mobilitazione popolare), notando come fin dagli anni Settanta alcuni membri della gerarchia episcopale dell'isola (Thomas Nulty vescovo di Meath e Thomas William Croke arcivescovo di Cashel) spezzassero il fronte degli anatemi di Cullen e lo sostenessero (a dispetto del fatto che Parnell non fosse cattolico), e descrivendo le prime reazioni romane e quelle del governo britannico (Capitolo II, "Parnell leader del nazionalismo irlandese", 51-74).

L'autore descrive poi nei dettagli come il sostegno ecclesiastico irlandese al movimento parnelliano diventasse maggioritario e organico, e come il Vaticano, interessato a creare migliori rapporti con l'Inghilterra anche per via della *Question romana*, per la prima volta intervenisse per disciplinare la Chiesa cattolica irlandese con la circolare all'episcopato dell'11 maggio 1883: la reazione del clero irlandese fu tale che il Vaticano acconsentì nel 1885 – *obtorto collo* – alla nomina di un sostenitore di Parnell, William Walsh, quale arcivescovo di Dublino (Capitolo III, "L'alleanza clerico-nazionalista", 75-104).

La sconfitta del primo progetto di legge sull'*Home Rule* e l'aggravarsi delle condizioni degli agricoltori portò al lancio, da parte del partito di Parnell e della Lega per la Terra, del cosiddetto *Plan of Campaign*, una forma di autoriduzione degli affitti da parte dei fittavoli. Dai tesi negoziati informali tra Santa Sede e nuovo governo britannico (conservatore e unionista) scaturì la decisione vaticana di inviare in Irlanda il vescovo Ignazio Persico perché indagasse sulle condizioni dell'isola, contro la volontà dell'episcopato irlandese (Capitolo IV, "Verso l'intervento di Roma", 105-146).

Poi Belletti giunge al vero acme del volume, la condanna da parte del Santo Uffizio del *Plan of Campaign*, emessa il 18 aprile 1888: come e per quali motivi di politica internazionale (leggasi rapporti con l'Inghilterra) essa fosse stata concepita, contro i suggerimenti del 'Commissario apostolico' monsignor Persico, e quali reazioni essa suscitò da parte dell'episcopato irlandese, del clero, del laicato cattolico, e, naturalmente, del movimento nazionalista di Parnell. E come qualche settore del *Deep State* britannico (come diremmo ora) cogliesse l'occasione per cercare – senza riuscirci – di 'incastrare' Charles S. Parnell con false accuse (Capitolo V, "Il decreto del S. Uffizio", 147-188).

L'ultima parte è dedicata alla triste fine della vicenda di Parnell, stroncato dallo scandalo del divorzio della sua amante di lunga data, intollerabile nella società vittoriana dell'epoca, e ancor più dalla puritanissima Chiesa cattolica irlan-

dese. Il rifiuto di fare un passo indietro da parte del leader nazionalista causò la frantumazione del suo movimento, cui seguì la sua prematura morte (Capitolo VI, “La caduta di Parnell”, 189-214).

A conclusione del volume Belletti dà uno sguardo al periodo posteriore, fino a oggi, dopo avere riassunto brillantemente il ruolo storico di Parnell: “[Parnell] era riuscito a tradurre in una consistente forza politica la rappresentanza parlamentare del suo paese, a condizionare gli equilibri politici britannici, ad incanalare nella direzione da lui voluta l’influenza della Chiesa; ma soprattutto era riuscito a dare al proprio popolo un forte orgoglio nazionale. [...] Parnell non era cattolico, ma dovette ben presto rendersi conto che, per porsi alla testa di un popolo come quello irlandese, era necessario conquistare l’appoggio della Chiesa” (215). La domanda finale dell’autore è se il deciso ‘non pronunciarsi’ di Benedetto XVI e del cardinale Gasparri riguardo all’Irlanda tra il 1916 e il 1922, o “via del silenzio” (226), fossero il frutto del sotterraneo conflitto tra episcopato irlandese e Vaticano degli anni Ottanta del diciannovesimo secolo. Certamente, bisogna rispondere. E nel pontificato successivo a quello, anche se Belletti non lo menziona, quel passato conflitto fu la causa dell’inazione del da poco eletto papa, Pio XI, di fronte alla molto più aperta disobbedienza e insubordinazione dell’episcopato irlandese in occasione della visita del 1923 del legato apostolico monsignor Luzio sullo sfondo della guerra civile irlandese del 1922-23 (questa volta con parti invertite, giacché la Santa Sede cercava di mitigare la feroce ostilità di quell’episcopato, proiettato in direzione del proprio potere temporale, verso i repubblicani) (“Conclusione”, 215-226).

L’unica, minuscola pecca si riscontra nel libro di Belletti sono due piccoli errori di traduzione: un “Burke è stato ripagato non oltre i suoi meriti” (184), che dovrebbe essere invece ‘Burke abbia avuto ciò che si meritava’<sup>2</sup>; e un “omicidi e offese” (186), che dovrebbe essere invece ‘omicidi e crimini’, o ‘omicidi e reati’<sup>3</sup>.

Il volume di Belletti è un’opera solida, ben strutturata, e di rara efficienza didattica, essendo pensata per un pubblico italiano: nulla è dato per scontato o già saputo, tanto riguardo alla storia irlandese, quanto riguardo alle istituzioni e ai termini ecclesiastici. Un davvero bel libro sul contrastato rapporto tra nazionalismo e Chiesa cattolica irlandesi, e un contributo importante alla (scarsa) bibliografia italiana sull’Irlanda.

*Carlo Maria Pellizzi*

<sup>2</sup> L’originale inglese riportato dall’autore (*ibidem*, nota 75) è infatti “Burke got no more than his deserts”.

<sup>3</sup> L’originale inglese (*ibidem*, nota 77) è “murders and outrages”. Nel contesto irlandese del XIX e XX secolo il termine “outrages” non significa ‘offese’, o ‘oltraggi’, ma, appunto, ‘crimini’ o ‘reati’.

Colin Barr, Michele Finelli, Anne O'Connor (eds), *Nation/Nazione: Irish Nationalism and the Italian Risorgimento*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2014, pp. X-245. € 40. ISBN 978-1-906359-59-1.

Una nuova pubblicazione accademica sui rapporti tra Irlanda e Italia nell'Ottocento è sempre la benvenuta, dal momento che prima di questa in più di sessant'anni ve n'erano state soltanto altre tre<sup>1</sup>. Questa opera collettanea ha avuto come spunto iniziale – per quanto non dichiarato – il convegno intitolato *Britain, Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento* organizzato dall'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Londra nell'ottobre 2011, in occasione del centocinquantesimo dell'unità d'Italia, cui erano presenti alcuni degli autori dei saggi che la compongono. Nel suo insieme, come indica correttamente il sottotitolo, l'accento posto nell'opera è sul come i nazionalisti irlandesi vedessero il movimento di unificazione italiano, più che sul come i personaggi del Risorgimento vedessero l'Irlanda e il nazionalismo irlandese. I dodici saggi (più la Introduzione) che compongono il volume sono di carattere, di interesse e di valore disuguali. Uno di essi (quello di Jennifer O'Brien) era stato già pubblicato nella prestigiosa rivista *Irish Historical Studies*<sup>2</sup>; un altro, quello di Ciarán O'Carroll, in un altresì prestigioso volume sullo Irish College di Roma<sup>3</sup>.

L'Introduzione di Anne O'Connor e Colin Barr mette correttamente in rilievo la sostanziale insularità, o eccezionalismo (e, forse, anche, provincialismo) di gran parte della storiografia irlandese, cui è sempre mancato l'interesse per un contesto internazionale che andasse oltre il limite dei paesi anglofoni (Inghilterra, Scozia, colonie e *dominions* britannici, e, naturalmente, gli Stati Uniti d'America), a dispetto dell'esistenza (in ogni data epoca) di “a common set of issues, a wide variety of interactions, and a surprising level of influence between the European centre and its western-most periphery” (1). Ambizione dell'opera è quindi di “raise both the Irish and Italian scholarly gaze, and to suggest the potentialities of further attention, not only for their mutual

<sup>1</sup> R.D. Edwards (ed.), *Ireland and the Italian Risorgimento: Three Lectures by Kevin B. Nowlan, R. Dudley Edwards, T. Desmond Williams*, Dublin, Italian Institute in Dublin – Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1960; G. D'Angelo, *Italy and Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Contacts and Misunderstandings Between Two National Movements*, Athlone, St. Paul Publications, 1975, [anche nella sua versione italiana, Giovanni D'Angelo, “Italia e Irlanda nel XIX secolo (Contatti e malintesi fra due movimenti nazionali)”, *Storia e politica*, XV, 3, luglio 1976, 393-438]; e Carlo Maria Pellizzi, “Ibernia fabulosa: per una storia delle immagini dell'Irlanda in Italia”, *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* 1, 2011, 29-119 (l'esistenza di quest'ultimo studio sembra però del tutto ignota a tutti gli autori dei saggi contenuti in *Nation/Nazione*).

<sup>2</sup> J. O'Brien, “Irish Public Opinion and the Risorgimento, 1859-60”, *Irish Historical Studies* 34, 135, May 2005, 289-305.

<sup>3</sup> C. O'Carroll, “The Papal Brigade of St Patrick”, in D. Keogh, A. McDonnell (eds), *The Irish College, Rome and its World*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2008, 167-187

histories, but for the wider European context. For Irish historiography at least, this remains an unfamiliar road” (2). Gli autori forniscono una brillante rassegna sullo stato degli studi storici irlandesi che negli ultimi due decenni abbiano cominciato ad affrontare un contesto europeo per gli eventi irlandesi in modo più, o meno, soddisfacente, analizzando i vari periodi di studio e i diversi campi storiografici e mettendo in luce in ogni caso i motivi che possono aver favorito una maggiore o minore apertura a temi transnazionali da parte degli storici. Si sottolinea anche come vi sia stata (oltre a un legame e a un dialogo culturale oggettivo tra i due paesi) una indubbia interazione ideologica tra i movimenti nazionalisti di Irlanda e Italia, anche se per vari motivi il rapporto fu, nel diciannovesimo secolo, generalmente conflittuale<sup>4</sup>.

Il saggio di Michele Finelli, “Intersections: The Historiography of Irish and Italian National Movements”, ha di che lasciare un po’ perplessi. Egli sostiene che rispetto ai tre interventi degli storici irlandesi sui rapporti tra Irlanda nazionalista e Italia risorgimentale pubblicati nel 1960 il saggio di Giovanni D’Angelo del 1975 “did not add anything new to the debate” (17) (in realtà D’Angelo metteva in piena luce – cosa che i tre studiosi irlandesi non avevano fatto – l’avversione dei principali personaggi del nostro Risorgimento all’idea stessa di ‘nazione’ irlandese). Secondo il Finelli Giuseppe Mazzini sarebbe stato grande amico dell’Irlanda, pur non riconoscendone la natura di nazione, e il povero Camillo Benso conte di Cavour nel 1843 “obviously could not foresee the great tragedy that was to begin just two years after his book first appeared – the Great Famine of 1845-50” (19). Peccato che Carlo Cattaneo, altro personaggio risorgimentale e nazionalista italiano, l’avesse invece prevista benissimo, pur senza avere (come anche Mazzini e Cavour) mai messo piede in Irlanda. Poi Finelli rimanda agli ovvi contatti ambientali tra mazziniani, garibaldini e repubblicani irlandesi (in particolare tramite la penna di John Mitchel) nell’emigrazione americana post-1849, e addirittura fino al 1900 (visita di Amilcare Cipriani a Dublino da Maud Gonne, in una situazione completamente diversa rispetto a cinquanta anni prima), e descrive come un “curious item” (21) i ritagli di giornale del 1888 relativi alla polemica sulla questione dello Home Rule tra una delle muse di Mazzini, Emily Ashurst Venturi, e uno dei suoi seguaci inglesi, Peter Taylor, depositati presso la Domus Mazziniana di Pisa. Un’altra copia dello stesso medesimo ‘curious item’, con le correzioni autografe ai propri articoli della Venturi,

<sup>4</sup> A. O’Connor e C. Barr, *Introduction*, alle pp. 1-16 del volume recensito, da cui sono tratte le citazioni. Gli autori nominano il modenese Augusto Cesare Marani, professore universitario di Italiano a Dublino, tra gli esempi di interscambio meramente culturale tra Italia e Irlanda: se avessero letto il saggio di *Studi irlandesi* succitato avrebbero saputo che per più di due decenni egli era stato il rappresentante dell’organizzazione di Mazzini in Irlanda e che in seguito (nel 1862), con cambio di casacca, divenne console del Regno d’Italia a Dublino (vedi “Ibernia fabulosa”, cit., 53-54 e nota 52).

è però presente nella National Library of Ireland di Dublino. Il Taylor era diventato un acceso Unionista, mentre la Venturi, sostenitrice di Gladstone, voleva far credere che Mazzini, se fosse stato vivo, avrebbe appoggiato lo Home Rule irlandese. Il Finelli cerca di dare ragione alla Venturi, affermando anche che il Mazzini dopo il 1848 si sarebbe completamente disinteressato della questione irlandese, mentre un esame accurato della *Edizione Nazionale* degli scritti mazziniani lo avrebbe reso edotto del fatto che non solo non se ne era disinteressato, ma che fin sull'orlo della tomba continuò a ripetere, anche fuori contesto, che l'Irlanda non era una nazione, e che pertanto non aveva diritto ad alcuna indipendenza o autogoverno. Il Finelli, dopo avere nominato se stesso in terza persona, come Giulio Cesare, ed avere anticipato il contenuto di altri saggi che compongono il volume, insistendo nel voler evocare una mai esistita, immaginaria vicinanza tra nazionalisti o repubblicani irlandesi e mazziniani italiani, conclude riportando un brano sulla solidarietà per i loro 'fratelli irlandesi' del Partito Repubblicano Italiano del 1924, ben cinquantadue anni dopo la morte di Mazzini e dopo una guerra mondiale che aveva mutato i rapporti tra Italia e Inghilterra.

Il saggio del professore americano Roland Sarti, intitolato "Giuseppe Mazzini, Father of European Democracy?", risponde in modo decisamente affermativo al punto di domanda del proprio titolo. Diciannove ventesimi di esso sono dedicati a dimostrare dottamente tale tesi, con afflato agiografico (tanto che alla fine uno si chiede, perché non anche Padre della Democrazia planetaria? o di quella galattica?); solo un ventesimo (per la precisione: una pagina) a illustrare le opinioni di Mazzini sul nazionalismo irlandese. Ma, a differenza del Finelli, Sarti si attiene a ciò che è comprovato dagli scritti del Mazzini stesso, cioè la sua avversione per il nazionalismo irlandese tanto nella sua forma riformista quanto in quella indipendentista repubblicana, e ha l'onestà di darne due assai realistiche giustificazioni: "By that time [1844] he was completely alienated by Irish support for the papacy, which in his view put the Irish movement on the wrong side of history. He may also have wished to avoid offending his English supporters on whom he relied for financial and political support" (49). Il saggio di Sarti e quello di Finelli fanno comprendere come mai la pubblicazione del volume sia stata finanziata dal Comitato Nazionale per le Celebrazioni del Bicentenario della nascita di Giuseppe Mazzini.

Si cambia felicemente passo col bel capitolo del giovane studioso italiano Alberto Belletti su padre Gioacchino Ventura e la sua orazione funebre per Daniel O'Connell ("Father Gioacchino Ventura and Daniel O'Connell's Funeral Oration"). Il sacerdote teatino siciliano Ventura (1792-1861), che ebbe un ruolo ideologico rilevante nel biennio rivoluzionario 1848-49, aveva compiuto un percorso analogo a quello del francese Lamennais: da 'tradizionalista' ultramontano a capofila catto-progressista della sua epoca. Il Belletti ripercorre con attenzione il percorso religioso e politico del Ventura,

notando gli elementi di continuità tra le sue teorizzazioni precedenti e la sua svolta liberale. Nella prima fase, apparentemente ‘progressista’, del pontificato di Pio IX il Ventura venne incaricato di stendere l’orazione per la messa funebre del leader nazionalista cattolico irlandese O’Connell, morto a Genova nel maggio 1847 mentre si recava a Roma. Il testo dell’orazione, in cui si esaltava O’Connell per avere messo in armonia, nel corso di tutto il suo percorso politico, la libertà politica e la lotta per la democrazia con la religione, la ‘resistenza passiva’ (ovvero il rifiuto di obbedire a ciò che sia contro la legge di Dio) con la ‘obbedienza attiva’ (ovvero la ferma protesta espressa però tramite mezzi legali e non violenti) ebbe grande influenza sugli eventi italiani del 1848. Esso venne immediatamente pubblicato in innumerevoli edizioni italiane (che il Belletti indica scrupolosamente) e in numerose traduzioni in altre lingue. L’autore segue poi gli ulteriori sviluppi del percorso del Ventura, con la sua ulteriore radicalizzazione dopo la svolta anti-rivoluzionaria di Pio IX nel 1848.

Il saggio di Ciarán O’Carroll sulla brigata papalina di volontari irlandesi reclutata nel 1860 per difendere il papa dall’invasione piemontese (“The Irish Papal Brigade: Origins, Objectives and Fortunes”) è di estremo interesse per i lettori italiani, dato che tale episodio è stato da noi quasi dimenticato. O’Carroll descrive come per iniziativa della Chiesa irlandese un migliaio di cattolici irlandesi si recassero in Italia per difendere lo Stato pontificio, sfidando il Governo britannico, illustrando i dettagli e i passaggi della vicenda e tutte le fasi e gli aspetti della mobilitazione cattolica per la difesa del papa in Irlanda, e segue poi le disavventure dei volontari in Italia, ove (si sospetta per disorganizzazione congenita) l’esercito pontificio non mantenne le promesse che erano state loro fatte in Irlanda. Ciononostante gli irlandesi si batterono con onore contro l’esercito unitario, e poterono tornare in Irlanda per intercessione inglese dopo essere stati fatti prigionieri. O’Carroll nota come la motivazione religiosa dell’impresa si intrecciasse, tra i volontari e nel paese, con quella nazionale, e come la realtà italiana venisse in Irlanda filtrata dalla percezione cattolica e nazionalista.

L’interessante capitolo di Anne O’Connor (“‘Giant and Brutal Islanders’: The Italian Response to the Irish Papal Brigade”) considera invece lo stesso episodio della brigata pontificia irlandese nel 1860 dalla prospettiva opposta, cioè quella delle reazioni alla presenza irlandese da parte della stampa liberale e democratica italiana del tempo. L’autrice mostra gli epiteti affibbiati dagli organi di stampa risorgimentali agli sfortunati volontari irlandesi, rappresentati come bestiali e brutali selvaggi e come mercenari stranieri al servizio della tirannide (nelle interpretazioni più benevole da lei riportate, spinti ad arruolarsi dai loro preti perché morti di fame in patria). La O’Connor però non rileva come gli stereotipi razzisti applicati agli irlandesi soprattutto dalla stampa governativa cavouriana fossero con ogni probabilità mutuati direttamente dalla stampa inglese coeva. L’autrice sottolinea come le motivazioni

dei volontari irlandesi fossero non solo religiose, ma inestricabilmente legate a un'affermazione nazionale: "The Irish who fought in Italy were neither there for personal gain, nor were they guided merely by pious self-sacrifice: a firm national agenda underpinned their presence on Italian soil. These nuances were not countenanced by the Italian nationalist press which viewed the troops as a group of unfortunate miscreants who, spurred on by greed or ignorance, were standing in the way of Italian dreams of unification" (106).

Il saggio di Jennifer O'Brien ("Irish Public Opinion and the Risorgimento, 1859-60") studia l'opinione pubblica irlandese riguardo al Risorgimento italiano nel biennio 1859-60, notando come gli eventi italiani venissero reinterpretati esclusivamente secondo le preoccupazioni interne irlandesi, e come la divisione tra nazionalisti irlandesi (in maggioranza cattolici) e unionisti irlandesi (in maggioranza protestanti) facesse sì che in modo all'apparenza paradossale i primi si opponessero aspramente al nazionalismo italiano, visto come minaccia contro la religione e il papato, mentre i secondi, al contrario, lo sostenessero con altrettanto zelo. La O'Brien nota come, da parte dei primi, "The English were accused of hypocrisy for championing liberty in the pope's dominions while withholding it from the Irish" (115). L'autrice descrive minuziosamente anche il sostegno unionista e protestante al Risorgimento, notando la differenza tra i protestanti evangelici, che vedevano la lotta contro il papato in termini del tutto religiosi, e quelli più moderati, per cui si trattava invece in primo luogo di una questione politica. La O'Brien dà ampio spazio e considerazione anche agli altri temi in seguito considerati dagli altri capitoli del volume, come la brigata papale irlandese. Nella chiusa l'autrice nota che "Irish public opinion on the Risorgimento divided along the religious fault-line, largely because of the involvement of the papacy. [...] The Irish tendency to view the Italian struggle for unification as primarily a religious issue shows the extent to which religion dominated mid-nineteenth century Irish mindsets" (126).

Il capitolo di Colin Barr sul cardinale Paul Cullen e sull'immaginario cattolico irlandese riguardante l'Italia ("Italy and the Irish Catholic Imagination, 1826-70") è di estremo interesse tanto per la storiografia irlandese, quanto per quella italiana. La personalità di Cullen (1803-1878), irlandese della contea di Kildare, si può dire incarnasse infatti in sé un rapporto strettissimo tra Irlanda e Italia: "Italy was the central issue of his life" (151). Visuto in Italia, a Roma, dal 1820 al 1849, prima come seminarista, poi come sacerdote e docente, dal 1832 come giovanissimo rettore del Collegio Irlandese, Cullen è il prelado cattolico irlandese più importante del diciannovesimo secolo. Nominato prima, nel 1849, arcivescovo di Armagh e primate di tutta l'Irlanda, poi, nel 1852, arcivescovo di Dublino, la più popolosa diocesi irlandese, divenuto a riconoscimento della sua opera il primo cardinale irlandese nel 1866, l'ultramontano Cullen compì quella che è stata definita la 'rivoluzione devozionale' della Chiesa irlandese, riuscendo finalmente a uniformarla del tutto a criteri rigorosamente tridentini. Cullen aveva vissuto



il crollo del potere papale nel 1848 e la conseguente Repubblica romana di Mazzini e Garibaldi, derivandone la convinzione che ogni nazionalismo, ogni tendenza liberale o democratica, avrebbero in qualsiasi paese fatto trionfare le sette segrete e l'idra rivoluzionaria contro Dio e contro la Chiesa. Colin Barr mette in luce come l'opera di Cullen, giunto in Irlanda dopo la dissoluzione del movimento di O'Connell, si sia diretta a contrastare la ricostituzione non solo delle forme di nazionalismo irlandese repubblicane e indipendentiste, ma anche di quelle riformiste e legalitarie, con la costante accusa di essere la stessa cosa di Mazzini e Garibaldi, e nemici di Dio. Come dimostra Barr l'azione di Cullen ebbe un effetto decisivo non solo su come i cattolici irlandesi considerassero da allora il Risorgimento italiano, ma sulla stessa politica irlandese: "If it is impossible to disentangle the Irish Catholic church from the political and social life of mid-Victorian Ireland, it is then equally impossible to untangle Ireland from Italy, and Irish from Italian nationalism – even if the more advanced Irish nationalists despaired of the link, and even if the Italians themselves never quite realised what was going on" (151).

Il saggio di Andrew Shields (" 'That Noble Struggle': Irish Conservative Attitudes Towards the Risorgimento, c. 1848-70") considera le prese di posizione riguardo al Risorgimento italiano (di entusiastico appoggio) dei Conservatori irlandesi degli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta dell'Ottocento, che erano in maggioranza protestanti e che in seguito, dagli anni Ottanta, sarebbero stati assorbiti dal movimento unionista irlandese: "Irish Conservatives could envisage the Risorgimento as representing a continuation of a struggle in which they had already played a leading role at the Battle of the Boyne" (172-173).

Il bel capitolo della studiosa spagnola Marta Ramon ("Irish Nationalism and the Demise of the Papal States, 1848-712") considera come la decisa condanna del Risorgimento italiano da parte del clero cattolico irlandese influisse sulla battaglia interna al nazionalismo irlandese, tra riformisti legalitari e repubblicani indipendentisti: "for both constitutional and Republican nationalists, attitudes to Italian affairs were primarily an extension of domestic debates" (187).

Molto interessante il saggio di Emanuela Minuto ("The Reception of Thomas Moore in Italy in the Nineteenth Century"), che esamina la fortuna del poeta nazionalista irlandese Thomas Moore in Italia. Con grande accuratezza l'autrice ricostruisce la storia delle traduzioni e delle edizioni italiane di Moore dal 1815 in poi, e intraprende una periodizzazione dei diversi approcci alla sua opera, scoprendo fonti in genere ignote a chi in Italia si occupa dei rapporti storici fra essa e l'Irlanda. I nazionalisti italiani fecero di Moore, per tappe successive, l'esempio di ciò che avrebbe dovuto essere un 'poeta della Nazione'.

Il capitolo di Donatella Abbate Badin ("Female Agency in the Risorgimento: Lady Morgan's Role and Impact") rivela il ruolo giocato dalla scrittrice protestante irlandese Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan per matrimonio

(1778-1859), nei rapporti del nazionalismo italiano con l'Irlanda. Nazionalista irlandese, ma aristocratica e residente a Londra, Lady Morgan fu instancabile nel sostenere la causa nazionale italiana presso l'opinione pubblica britannica, nell'assistere gli esuli italiani nelle isole britanniche e nel corrispondere con molti nomi celebri del Risorgimento.

Il saggio di Emer Delaney ("Women in the Risorgimento and the Irish Independence Movement: Rhetoric and Reality") non si occupa di rapporti italo-irlandesi, ma compara le (poche) donne combattenti nel Risorgimento italiano con le irlandesi che combatterono tra il 1916 e il 1923, cercando di analizzarne teoricamente il ruolo seguendo le categorie della femminista Anne McClintock.

*Nation/Nazione* è quindi un libro necessario e interessante, che in varie delle sue parti contribuisce innovativamente alla conoscenza storica dei rapporti tra Irlanda e Italia nell'Ottocento, e che comunque fornisce spunti di riflessione e di dibattito.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

James Stephens, *L'insurrezione di Dublino*, a cura di Riccardo Michelucci, traduzione di Enrico Terrinoni, Milano-Firenze-Napoli, Menthalia, 2015, pp. XXV-125, illustrato. € 12. ISBN 978-88-977-7404-4

Lo scrittore irlandese James Stephens (1880-1950), autore tra le altre opere dei due bei romanzi fantastici *The Crock of Gold* (1912) e *The Demi-Gods* (1914), più volte tradotti in italiano, viene spesso confuso in Irlanda, a causa di questo suo reportage o diario della Rivolta di Pasqua, con il suo omonimo James Stephens (1825-1901), insorto nella prima rivolta della Giovane Irlanda nel 1848, poi fondatore e leader della Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.), organizzazione segreta esistita dal 1858 al 1924, che fu per quasi tutto quel periodo la occulta spina dorsale del movimento repubblicano e indipendentista irlandese. In realtà i due omonimi non erano nemmeno parenti.

Pur essendo profondamente coinvolto nella cosiddetta Rinascita Gaelica del primo Ventesimo secolo e personalmente amico del poeta Thomas MacDonagh (uno dei sette firmatari della Proclamazione della Repubblica Irlandese e uno dei leader della I.R.B. e della rivolta del 1916, in seguito a essa fucilato dagli inglesi), non risulta che lo scrittore James Stephens – allora impiegato alla National Gallery di Dublino – abbia mai avuto un ruolo attivo nella politica rivoluzionaria dell'epoca, sebbene ne conoscesse almeno di vista tutti i protagonisti.

Il diario di Stephens della settimana sanguinosa che vide il 24 aprile 1916, lunedì dell'Angelo, i rivoltosi proclamare la Repubblica Irlandese nell'ufficio centrale delle Poste di Dublino, e poi la progressiva e alquanto dura repressio-

ne della rivolta da parte delle forze armate britanniche, con i capisaldi degli insorti nella città bombardati dalle cannoniere inglesi dalla baia e dal fiume, con il seguito, nelle settimane successive, delle corti marziali a carico dei rivoltosi e della fucilazione, uno o due al giorno, dei leader dell'insurrezione, fu uno dei primi resoconti degli eventi pubblicati al tempo. A differenza, ad esempio, dello *instant book* pubblicato dal giornale *The Irish Times*, il resoconto di Stephens è personale e poco mediato: ignaro all'inizio che la rivolta fosse scoppiata, Stephens cominciò a chiedere informazioni agli astanti, descrivendone le reazioni. Cosa che continuò a fare nel corso di tutta la settimana insurrezionale: pur essendo emotivamente coinvolto (simpatizzando più con gli insorti che con gli inglesi, soprattutto perché gli insorti stavano dimostrando di avere grande coraggio), riferì da fedele cronista i mutevoli sentimenti della popolazione civile, anche quando le loro voci erano del tutto contrarie ai ribelli repubblicani. Al suo diario o reportage Stephens aggiunse, per la pubblicazione, tre appendici: una sulla personalità dei leader della rivolta (tra i quali il suo amico Thomas MacDonagh), una sui rapporti tra movimento dei lavoratori e insurrezione (dal momento che lo Irish Citizen Army, milizia armata sindacale guidata da James Connolly, era stato una delle due componenti principali della ribellione), e una sul futuro delle questioni irlandesi.

Al giornalista Riccardo Michelucci, esperto e appassionato di cose irlandesi, va il merito di avere voluto che si facesse di quest'opera una traduzione italiana. Il Michelucci ha scritto in proprio opere storico-politiche sull'Irlanda contemporanea, e ne ha tradotte altre. Tra le prime, una *Storia del conflitto anglo-irlandese* che sarebbe decisamente utile al pubblico italiano, perché densa di informazioni ignote ai più, a dispetto del suo essere apertamente schierata a favore dell'indipendentismo repubblicano<sup>1</sup>; e, da ultimo, un libro su Bobby Sands, il militante repubblicano prigioniero immolatosi come protesta tramite sciopero della fame nel 1981, seguito da altri nove prigionieri<sup>2</sup>. Tra le traduzioni italiane, di recente una di un'opera del noto scrittore Brendan Behan, già volontario dell'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese<sup>3</sup>, e oggi quella del romanzo storico di Patrick Lynch, giovane narratore irlandese<sup>4</sup>. Michelucci ha contribuito con una densa introduzione ("Lo scrittore testimone dei sei giorni che sconvolsero l'Impero britannico", V-XVII) alla traduzione

<sup>1</sup> R. Michelucci, *Storia del conflitto anglo-irlandese. Otto secoli di persecuzione inglese*, Bologna, Odoya editrice, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> R. Michelucci, *Bobby Sands. Un'utopia irlandese*, Firenze, Edizioni Clichy, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> B. Behan, *Brendan Behan's New York*, New York, Random House, 1964; trad. it. di R. Michelucci, *Un irlandese in America. La New York di Brendan Behan*, Roma, 66th and 2nd editrice, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> P. Lynch, *Red Sky in the Morning*, London, Quercus Publishing, 2013; trad. it. di R. Michelucci, *Cielo rosso al mattino*, Roma, 66th and 2nd editrice, 2017.

italiana del libro di Stephens, opera del bravo Enrico Terrinoni, e ha aggiunto una sua traduzione della poesia di William Butler Yeats dedicata alla Rivolta di Pasqua ("Easter 1916"), e i dati biografici dei sedici ribelli giustiziati (105-124). Abbiamo quindi una edizione italiana pregevole di una delle fonti imprescindibili sull'insurrezione irlandese del 1916.

*Carlo Maria Pellizzi*

## Libri ricevuti / Books received

Kieran Allan (with Brian O'Boyle), *Austerity Ireland. The Failure of Irish Capitalism*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 187. GBP 13. ISBN 978-0-7453-3401-1.

Arianna Antonielli, Mark Nixon (eds), Edwin John *Ellis's* and William Butler *Yeats's*, *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical. A Manuscript Edition, with Critical Analysis*, Firenze, Firenze UP, 2016, pp. 743. € 23.90. ISBN 978-88-6453-340-7.

Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 4: 1966-1989*, ed. by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, Lois More Overbeck, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2016, pp. 838. GBP 29.99. ISBN 978-0-521-86796-2.

Pat Boran (a cura di), *Fluendo, ancora. Poeti irlandesi sulla poesia irlandese*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2010, pp. 268. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-25-9.

Pat Boran, *Natura morta con carote. Poesie scelte 1990-2007*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2010, pp. 484. € 20. ISBN 978-88-96263-37-2.

Pat Boran, *La prossima vita*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Ferrara, Kolibris, 2014, pp. 216. € 12. ISBN 978-88-96263-75-4.

Lorenzo Bosi, *Vite di lotta armata: Storie di attivismo nella Provisional IRA*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, pp. 102. € 11. ISBN 978-88-430-8581-1.

Eva Bourke, *La latitudine di Napoli*, trad. it. e introduzione di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2010, pp. 218. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-33-4.

Eva Bourke, *Piano*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2011, pp. 247. € 12. ISBN 978-88-96263-59-4.

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Weight of a World of Feeling. Reviews and Essays*, ed. by Allan Hepburn, Evanston, Northwestern UP, 2016, pp. 456. USD 49.95. ISBN 978-0-8101-3156-9.

Paddy Bushe, *Risuonare nel silenzio. Poesie scelte e inediti*, introduzione di Bernard O'Donoghue, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2011, pp. 430. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-46-4.

John F. Deane, *Piccolo libro delle ore*, trad. it. di Roberto Cogo, Bologna, Kolibris, 2009, pp. 246. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-12-9.

Patrick Deeley, *Le ossa della Creazione*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, prefazione di Umberto Fornasari, Bologna, Kolibris, 2010, pp. 216. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-28-8.

Maria Grazia Dongu, *Making History di Brian Friel. Un palco per narratori di storie*, Pisa, ETS, 2016, pp. 92. € 10. ISBN 978-88-467-4657-3.

Theo Dorgan, *Ellenica*, trad. it. e cura di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2011, pp. 150. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-48-8.

Paolo Febbraro, *Leggere Seamus Heaney*, Roma, Fazi, 2015, pp. 191. € 17.50. ISBN 978-88-7625-686-8.

Adrian Frazier, *The Adulterous Muse. Maud Gonne, Lucien Millevoye and W.B. Yeats*, Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 2016, pp. 320. €20. ISBN 978-1-84351-678-1.

Ray Givans, *Tolstoj innamorato*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2011, pp. 178. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-44-0.

Seamus Heaney, *Poesie scelte*, trad. it. e cura di Erminia Passannanti, Oxford, Mask Press, 2013 (2007), pp. 123. GBP 16. ISBN 978-1-4922-9500-6.

Seamus Heaney, *La livella a bolla d'aria! The Spirit Level*, trad. it. e cura di Erminia Passannanti, Oxford, Mask Press, 2013 (2012), pp. 103. GBP 10.80. ISBN 978-1-4716-1176-6.

Seamus Heaney, *Poesie. Scelte e raccolte dall'autore*, a cura di Marco Sonzogni, saggio introduttivo e cronologia di Piero Boitani, Milano, Mondadori, 2016, pp. 1194. € 80. ISBN 978-88-046-6315-7.

Marguerite Helmers, *Harry Clarke's War. Illustrations for Ireland's Memorial Records 1914-1918*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2015, pp. 264. € 29.99. ISBN 978-07165-3308-5.

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake. Libro terzo, capitoli 1 e 2*, trad. it. e cura di Enrico Terrinoni e Fabio Pedone, Milano, Mondadori, 2017, pp. 347. € 24. ISBN 978-88-04-66963-0.

James Joyce, *Pomes Penyeach/Pomi un penny l'uno/Poesie una pena l'una*, a cura di F.R. Paci, Torino, Nuova Trauben, 2017, pp. 66. € 12. ISBN 978-88-993-1214-5.

Barry Keane, *Irish Drama in Poland. Staging and Reception 1900-2000*, Bristol-Chicago, Intellect Ltd., 2016, pp. 174. GBP 65/USD 93. ISBN 978-1-78320-608-7.

Brendan Kennelly, *The Essential*, a cura di Giuliana Bendelli, trad. it. di Rosangela Barone, Giuliana Bendelli, Melita Cataldi, F.R. Paci, Milano, Jaca Book, 2017, pp. 287. € 18. ISBN 978-88-16-41397-9.

Thomas Kinsella, *Appunti dalla terra dei morti*, trad. it. e introduzione di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2009, pp. 129. € 10. ISBN 978-88-96263-00-6.

Thomas Kinsella, *La pace della pienezza. Poesie scelte 1956-2006*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Ferrara, Kolibris, 2015, pp. 458. € 15. ISBN 978-88-99274-20-7.

James Clarence Mangan, *Il mio cuore è un monaco. Poesie*, a cura di F.R. Paci, Torino, Trauben, 2014, pp. 230. € 20. ISBN 978-88-669-8015-5.

Mary Montague, *Tribù*, trad. it. e cura di Chiara De Luca, Ferrara, Kolibris 2014, pp. 228. € 12. ISBN 978-88-96263-90-7.

Dominique Morel (sous la direction de), *Oscar Wilde. L'impertinent absolu*, catalogue de l'exposition - Petit Palais, Paris, 28 septembre-15 janvier 2017, Paris, Paris Musées, 2016, pp. 255. € 39,90. ISBN 978-2-7596-0327-5.

Peggy O'Brien, *Spiando i ranocchi*, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Bologna, Kolibris, 2010, pp. 178. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-20-4.

Anne O'Connor, *Translation and Language in Nineteenth-Century Ireland. A European Perspective*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 242. GBP 96.29. ISBN 978-1-137-59852-3.

Éamonn Ó Dónaill, *Gaeilge gan Stró. Beginners Level. A multimedia Irish language course for adults, Baile Átha Cliath, Gaelchultúr*, 2011, pp. 214. € 34.95. ISBN 978-0-9563614-4-8.

Fintan O'Toole (ed.), Catherine Marshall, Eibhear Walshe (associated eds), *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy/The Irish Times, 2016, pp. 336. € 29. ISBN 978-1-908-9969-23.

Dieter Reinisch, *Die Frauen der IRA. Cumann na mBan und der Nordirlandkonflikt 1968-1986*, Wien, Promedia Verlagsges, 2017, pp. 208. € 20. ISBN 978-3-85371-423-2.

Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr Beckett. Letters from the Publisher*, ed. with an introduction by Lois Oppenheim, curated by Astrid Myers Rosset, Tuxedo Park, Opus, 2016, pp. 480. USD 32.95. ISBN 978-162316-070-8.

Donato di Sanzo, *Oltre le barricate. Storia, politica, religione e l'Ulster della Pace*, Roma, Aracne, 2016, pp. 140. € 10. ISBN 978-88-548-9681-9.

Gerard Smyth, *La pienezza del tempo*, prefazione di Thomas McCarthy, trad. it. di Chiara De Luca, Ferrara, Kolibris, 2012, pp. 418. € 15. ISBN 978-88-96263-68-6.

Grace Wells, *Quando Dio fu richiamato altrove a cose più importanti*, trad. it. e cura di Chiara De Luca, Ferrara, Kolibris 2013, pp. 184. € 12. ISBN 978-88-96263-83-9.



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Mary O'Donnell is a poet, short story writer, and novelist. Her seventh collection of poetry, *Those April Fevers*, was published in 2015. Other collections include *September Elegies* (2003), *Unlegendary Heroes* (1998), and her selected poems, *The Place of Miracles* (2006). Fiction includes the novel *Where They Lie*

(2014) and *The Elysium Testament* (1999). Her first novel, *The Light-Makers* (1992) will be re-issued by 451 Editions in summer 2017. Among her awards are the James Joyce Ireland-Australia Award, the Listowel Writers' Week Fiction Prize, the Fish International Short Story Prize, as well as a residency at the Irish College in Paris (2012). She was co-winner of the Irodalmi Jelen Award for Poetry in Translation (Hungary) in 2012. She currently teaches Poetry at Galway University's School of Creative Writing and has a special interest in the translation of poetry. She is a member of the peer-elected arts organisation Aosdana. For more information about her work visit: <www.maryodonnell.com>.

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Laurence McKeown is a former Provisional IRA prisoner, 1981 hunger striker, and activist. He received an Open University Degree in prison and went on to conduct a PhD at Queen's University Belfast. His thesis was called *Unrepentant Fenian Bastards*; it was later published under the title *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (2001). He also co-edited a book with recollections of former Irish republican prisoners. McKeown is now a playwright and film-maker. He recently returned from the National Arts Festival in South Africa, where his play about dealing with the past, *Those You Pass on the Street* (2014), was performed. His most recent play, *Green and Blue*, will be performed as part of the Dresden Arts Festival in June 2017, and the feature film he co-wrote, *H3*, will also be screened at the festival.

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Coordinamento editoriale del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali  
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