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COVER MARCO VANCHETTI



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Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Arianna Antonielli, Samuele Grassi

Minorities
in/and
Ireland

edited by
Patrick McDonagh



Introduction

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As recently as November 1988, the then Minister for Justice, Gerry Collins, speaking in *Seanad Éireann* during the Second Stage of the Prohibition of Incitement to Racial, Religious or National Hatred Bill, remarked that Ireland was “essentially a homogeneous society” and “despite our membership of the European Community and, therefore, our close relationship with a number of societies which are becoming increasingly multiracial, the racial structure of this country is unlikely to change significantly for some time to come”¹. As a result, Collins argued that the “legislation we are now debating may not appear to have the same immediacy for us as for some other countries” (*ibidem*).

For some minorities such as Ireland’s Traveller community and gay community², among others, however, there was an immediate need for such legislation, yet, they found themselves excluded from the original bill introduced by Collins. Only after considerable lobbying from the opposition benches and NGOs did Collins relent and include the Traveller community in the bill, but he steadfastly defended the exclusion of sexual orientation. It was not until he was succeeded as Minister for Justice by Ray Burke in 1989 that sexual orientation was included in the bill. The bill’s passage and subsequent signing into law by President Patrick Hillery was heralded as historic, signifying Ireland’s commitment to the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, it was the first time in the history of the state that a positive piece of legislation had been enacted for Ireland’s gay community, all the more significant at a time when sexual activity between males was a criminal offence. Furthermore, it sent a strong message that Ireland would not tolerate hatred against individuals because of their race, colour,

¹ *Seanad Éireann* debate, 121, 9, 30 November 1988, “Prohibition of Incitement to Racial, Religious or National Hatred Bill”, 1988, Committee Stage (Resumed).

² I use gay community in this context as this was the term commonly used in the 1980s, which referred to gay and lesbian individuals, rather than the more contemporary term LGBT community, which refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the Traveller community or sexual orientation³. In other words, the bill gave recognition to the existence of a number of minorities in Ireland who needed to be protected from discrimination; in itself a welcome development within a so-called “homogenous society”.

Whereas Collins viewed Ireland as a homogenous society in the late 1980s, this is certainly not the case today. A look at the 2011 census reveals that 544,357 non-Irish nationals were living in the Republic of Ireland, an increase of 143% since 2002, representing 199 different nations⁴. In a country once renowned as a stronghold of Catholicism, the decline in the percentage of individuals who are Catholic was also significant. Whereas the proportion of the population who were Catholic declined, the twenty years between 1991 and 2011 saw significant increases in the non-Catholic population driven by “not only growing numbers with no religion but also large increases in the religions of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia”⁵. This was a period in which Ireland came to be a popular destination for many immigrants, mostly attributed to the impact of the “Celtic Tiger”. Crucially, this period marked a reversal in a long trend in Ireland’s history when emigration, rather than immigration, was the norm.

The 2011 census results led Deirdre Cullen, a senior statistician with the Central Statistics Office, to state that “Ireland has become an increasingly diverse society over the past decade and the different nationalities that make up the population of Ireland have an increasingly important impact on the economy and society”⁶. Pilar Villar-Argáiz maintains in her introduction to *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* that this change is now reflected in Irish literature, noting that “one of the key developments in twenty-first-century Irish literature has been the rise to prominence of literature written by (and about) ethnic minorities from diverse origins, as a result of the unprecedented influx of non-Irish migrants to the Republic during the Celtic Tiger boom years”⁷. *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities* offers a strong defence of the merits and fruitfulness of exploring themes such as minorities and dissident identities, something this issue seeks to further build upon.

The change in Ireland’s demographics has coincided with a transformation in Ireland’s reputation as one of being a socially conservative society dominated by the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, to one of Ireland being a leading exemplar for human rights and tolerance throughout the world. This was most epitomised by the 2018 repeal of the eighth amendment of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, which had placed a constitutional ban on abortion since the divisive referendum of 1983, and the 2015 marriage equality referendum. The results of both referendums signalled a new dawn in Ireland’s history; the emergence of a more tolerant and accepting society in the twenty-first century than that which had preceded it. Speaking after

³ Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1989/act/19/enacted/en/html>> (05/2020).

⁴ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 6 Migration and Diversity – A Profile of Diversity in Ireland”, 4 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/PR_xxxx_Profile_6_Migration_a...pdf> (05/2020).

⁵ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 7 Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers – Ethnic and Cultural Background in Ireland”, 18 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile_7_Press_Release_Religion,_Ethnicity_and_Irish_Travellers.pdf> (05/2020).

⁶ Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Results, “Profile 6 Migration and Diversity – A Profile of Diversity in Ireland”, 4 October 2012, <https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile6/PR_xxxx_Profile_6_Migration_a...pdf> (05/2020).

⁷ Pilar Villar-Argáiz ed., (2018), *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 10.

the 2018 referendum, Leo Varadkar, then Ireland's *Taoiseach* and first openly gay man to hold that office, described the referendum result as "Ireland's second chance to treat everyone equally and with compassion and respect"⁸. A similar tone was expressed in Enda Kenny's (*Taoiseach* from 2011-2017) speech following the 2015 referendum, in which he stated that "with today's Yes vote we have disclosed who we are – a generous, compassionate, bold and joyful people. Yes to inclusion. Yes to generosity. Yes to love, and Yes to equal marriage"⁹. Anecdotally many have remarked that the 2015 result represented more than simply Irish society granting LGBT citizens access to the institution of marriage but also it symbolised Irish society expressing its acceptance of LGBT citizens. Two years earlier, in another seminal moment in Ireland's history, Kenny had taken to the floor of *Dáil Éireann* to apologise on behalf of the Irish state to women sent to Magdalene laundries. In the intervening period between the 2015 marriage equality referendum and the 2018 abortion referendum, Ireland passed other legislation which furthered its new reputation as a more tolerant society, namely the 2015 Gender Recognition Act and the 2017 recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority.

For many individuals who grew up in twentieth-century Ireland, however, words such as compassion, respect, inclusion, generosity, equality, expressed in both Enda Kenny's and Leo Varadkar's speeches, are words which they may not have associated with Ireland. For those who found themselves in the position of being in the minority, whether because of their race, ethnicity, creed, language, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or simply because they did not conform to the restrictive social norms of the period, i.e. those who engaged in sexual activity outside marriage, unwed mothers, children born outside of wedlock, sex workers, divorcees, etc., words such as cold, intolerant, stigma, lonely, isolated, shame may have more accurately summed up their views of Irish society.

Whereas today Ireland celebrates its newfound reputation as a tolerant and inclusive society on the international stage, there is much still to be explored in terms of how Ireland has undergone such a dramatic transformation in a relatively short period. In reality, this transformation is the direct result of the efforts, struggles and sacrifices of individuals who refused to succumb to years of marginalisation, hostility and othering, and instead confronted and challenged a system which treated them as second class citizens simply because they found themselves in the position of being in the minority or marginalised for daring to ignore social norms. While not every individual who was part of a minority community found themselves isolated, discriminated or shunned, many more did, and they had to fight to have their voices heard and respected. They had to fight to broaden the very definition of what constituted "Irishness" and who could claim to be "Irish".

It is within this context that the tenth issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* focuses on "Minorities in/and Ireland". In thinking about "Minorities" the call for papers adopted a broad perspective to include, but not limited to, those who did not fit or conform to societal norms, i.e. sex workers, those sent to institutional homes, members of the LGBT community, but also those who found themselves in the minority based on their race, disability, ethnicity, creed, membership of the Traveller community, migrants/refugees/asylum seekers, and linguistic minorities. "Minorities in/and Ireland" sought to bring minorities in from the

⁸ "Speech by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar following the declaration on the Referendum on the Eighth Amendment", *MerrionStreet.ie*, 27 May 2018, <https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Speech_by_An_Taoiseach_Leo_Varadkar_following_the_declaration_on_the_Referendum_on_the_Eighth_Amendment.html> (05/2020).

⁹ "Speech by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D. on the Marriage Equality Referendum", 23 May 2015, <<https://www.finegael.ie/speech-by-an-taoiseach-enda-kenny-t-d-on-the-marriage-equality-referendum/>> (05/2020).

periphery and bring them to the fore to address issues such as how have minorities/marginalised communities sought to make their voices heard in Ireland; what strategies have they adopted to bring about social, political and cultural change; where were the sites of these efforts taking place; how have representations of minorities evolved over time; and what does it mean to be Irish. The essays included in the tenth issue represent a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds and methodological approaches such as literary studies; theatre/drama studies; disability studies; queer studies; and history.

“Minorities in/and Ireland” comprises ten essays divided up into four sections: “Queer Representations in Literature”; “Home and Away: Notions of Irishness”; “Theatre and Minorities’ (In)Visibility”; “Resilience: Travellers and Magdalene Survivors”, which broadly address issues such as: the representation of LGBT individuals, exiles, migrants, and refugees in Irish literature; LGBT migrants and political activism; the role of theatre as a medium of giving voice to minorities like Ireland’s Jewish community and those with disabilities; and the resilience of Ireland’s Traveller community and survivors of Magdalene Laundries. The essays are not confined to one period, instead, they span from the late 1800s to the present day, covering both the North and South of Ireland as well as regions outside Ireland.

The first section, “Queer Representations in Literature”, comprises three essays by Zsuzsanna Balázs, Anna Charczun and Seán Mac Risteaird. Broadly all three essays focus on the changing representation of queer identities or non-normative subjectivities in Irish literature against the backdrop of Irish nationalism, strict social and sexual norms, and the influential and powerful position of a puritanical Roman Catholic Church. Balázs paper explores W.B. Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1889) and Edward Martyn’s *The Heather Field* (1899) to emphasise the extent to which the mainstream cultural framework of the supernatural was adopted to express same-sex intimacies in code. In contrast, Charczun’s and Mac Risteaird’s essays explore the emergence of more open and explicit same-sex themes in Irish literature in the latter years of the twentieth century. Charczun’s essay discusses the works of two leading Irish lesbian authors, Mary Dorsey and Emma Donoghue, who, she contends, have pioneered overt rather than covert “lesbian desire to Irish literary fiction”. Mac Risteaird continues this theme but with a focus on the emergence of Irish-language literature which seeks to “reflect queer Irish-language lives”. Through an analysis of texts by Micheál Ó Conghaile and Pádraig Standún, Mac Risteaird maintains that both authors pioneered bold new themes in Irish-language literature, thereby introducing themes that Mac Risteaird maintains spoke to, and for, a community within a community and for a minority within a minority. The juxtaposition of Balázs’ essay with that of Charczun’s and Mac Risteaird’s provides readers with an insight in how authors in one period had to adopt certain strategies to covertly write about queer identities compared to more recent years when the issue of queer identities can be much more explicitly and overtly discussed in Irish literature.

The second section, “Home and Away: Notions of Irishness”, encompasses three essays by Daryl Leeworthy, Rania M Rafik Khalil and Kaitlin Thurlow. Broadly all three essays explore, within different contexts and periods, what it meant to be Irish or what constituted “Irishness”, and related to that the notion of “home”. The essays explore a multitude of actors such as members of the LGBT community, migrants/emigrants/immigrants, and refugees/asylum seekers as a means to deconstruct the aforementioned concepts. The section begins with Daryl Leeworthy’s essay on gay Irish migrants and their impact on LGBT politics in 1980s London. Leeworthy’s essay is particularly welcomed in an area of Irish historiography that is still in its infancy and provides a strong defence of the importance of adopting a transnational approach

in writing queer history. Rania M Rafik Khalil, in contrast, focuses on the experiences of the returned Irish migrant and asylum seekers/refugees in her postcolonial analysis of Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) and Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994) and *The Cambria* (2005). Khalil's essay offers an insight into perceptions on migration from Ireland and the difficulties of immigration to modern-day Ireland. In doing so, Khalil brings to the fore questions of who is Irish and who is not. In a similar vein Thurlow's focus on two contemporary novels, Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* (2015) and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018), sets the stage for exploring the difficulties of belonging as a person living in exile. Thurlow contends that both novels represent a move by contemporary Irish authors to revisit the concept of exile to reveal "how issues of racism, poverty and exploitation hold a mirror to social problems in a rapidly evolving nation". All three essays are particularly timely during a period in which borders and the free movement of people are proving to be highly contested issues on the world stage.

The third section, "Theatre and Minorities' (In)Visibility", comprises two essays by Barry Montgomery and Monica Randaccio. Combined Montgomery's and Randaccio's essays offer an analysis of how the medium of theatre has been used by minorities as a means to give them a greater voice and representation, while at the same time drawing attention to the issues that directly affected them, issues often neglected by mainstream society. Through a study of the Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic Society and the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society, Montgomery traces the emergence of an increasing Irish Jewish population and Irish-Jewish cultural voice in the first half of the twentieth century. Montgomery's essay seeks to establish the extent to which theatre provided a public voice for Ireland's Jewish community. Similarly, Randaccio's paper provides a historical study of the development of disability theatre in Ireland. Randaccio's paper moves from its historical evolution in Ireland to explore how it has been portrayed in the work and activism of Kaite O'Reilly *Face On: Disability Arts in Ireland and Beyond* (2007); Yvonne Lynch, a practitioner and academic; and Rosaleen McDonagh, a Traveller, actress, and playwright with a disability.

Randaccio's paper provides a nice segue into the fourth and final section, "Resilience: Travellers and Magdalene Survivors", which concludes with a focus on two groups that, for many years, have been treated as second class citizens and until only recently have seen efforts by the state to acknowledge the wrongs of the past: Ireland's Traveller community, and survivors of the Magdalene laundries. Both essays by Micháel Ó hAodha and Erin Costello Wecker provide an insight into the resilience, determination and tactics of these individuals as well as the wrongs inflicted by an uncaring/judgemental state and society. Ó hAodha's paper, through an exploration of *Ortha an Ghreama*, contends that one means by which Irish Travellers resisted their demonisation as the "negative other" was through symbolic inversion in folk narratives. This tactic helped to portray Travellers in a non-prejudicial light, thereby challenging the negative images commonly associated with them. Costello Wecker's case study analysis of the victim's advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) takes Enda Kenny's February 2013 apology to the women of the Magdalene laundries as the basis to contextualise the JFM's transition from restorative justice to transitional justice. In doing so, Costello Wecker stresses the limits of Kenny's apology while at the same time reinforcing the importance of "listening" to the voices of marginalised groups and the implications of failing to do so. A central focus of Wecker's paper is the innovative strategies adopted by marginalised groups like JFM to amplify their voices in their quest for justice.

This issue seeks to build on the emerging scholarly literature which acknowledges and studies the impact and contribution of minorities on the development of Ireland, Irish society and Irish studies. In doing so, such efforts help to deconstruct the very notion of Irishness. It

is through the efforts of the subjects discussed in this issue that Ireland today can claim to be a more tolerant, progressive and diverse society. Much more work is required to contextualise their contribution fully. In saying that, while Ireland has become a more tolerant and accepting society for many, we should not become complacent. There are more struggles still to be fought to bring about a truly equal society. In particular, we should not forget our brothers and sisters languishing away in direct provision centres throughout Ireland today. This issue should act as a reminder of how important it is to respect minorities and to promote equality, respect and the defence of basic human rights when introducing policy and laws. During a period in which right-wing populism has seen a considerable resurgence, the stories discussed here remind us of how dangerous/disastrous a politics of othering and demonisation can be. Now, more than ever, we need to stand up for the rights of minorities.

I want to conclude by thanking all the authors and anonymous reviewers for making this issue possible. I want also to thank the General Editor Fiorenzo Fantaccini, Journal Manager Arianna Antonielli, and Dieter Reinisch for their constant support and guidance from start to finish. It has been a pleasure to work with everyone involved, and it has been a process that I will look back on with very fond memories. Thank you all.

Patrick McDonagh

*Queer Representations
in Literature*



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"What secret torture?"¹: Normativity, *Homoeros* and the Will to Escape in Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* and Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field*

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Abstract:

This paper offers a dramaturgical and comparative analysis of W.B. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1889) and Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field* (1899) in light of their representation of the tension between the queer and the normative. I focus on characters who feel different and the unease of the normative discourse which insults them and perceives their existence as a threat for traditional family values and as a cause of the family's unhappiness. This tension between the queer and the normative is also what creates spaces that allow new ways to think about gender and sexuality in these plays. I also argue that playwrights like Yeats and Martyn associated with the Revival and the Irish Literary Theatre often used the mainstream and widely accepted cultural framework of the supernatural to express same-sex intimacies in code and to offer a discourse of legitimation for non-normative subjectivities. Both Martyn's and Yeats's plays emphasise the pressure normalcy imposes on stigmatised individuals and the resulting desire to escape to find alternative ways of love, intimacy and happiness. I will refer to the works of contemporary queer theorists including Jack Halberstam, Heather Love, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Didier Eribon, José Esteban Muñoz and Sara Ahmed to demonstrate that these plays can offer "a rich archive of queer historical structures of feeling" (Love 2007, 24).

Keywords: failure, *homoeros*, normativity, supernatural, Yeats

Queer failure [...] is more nearly about escape and a certain kind of virtuosity
(J.E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 2009)

1. Yeats and Martyn: the Pressure of Normative Sexuality, Queer Feelings and the Supernatural as Escape

It might seem unusual to address the theme of *homoeros* in the works of two playwrights who have been strongly associated with

¹ Yeats 1953, 253.

Irish nationalism, conventional and idealised forms of desire and in Martyn's case, celibacy and religious conservatism. Yet many of Yeats's remarks in his *Autobiography* and correspondence suggest that both of these playwrights felt pressured by conventional notions of sexuality and family, and their drama reflects the resulting anxieties and restlessness². Yeats was very much aware that the plays he and Florence Farr were arranging for the season of avant-garde drama in London in 1894 – including *The Land of Heart's Desire* – and later for the inauguration of the Irish Literary Theatre were “studied insults” (2002, 384) for the regular theatre goer, as Yeats explained in his letter to John O'Leary on 28 March 1894. Their insulting nature was due to their implication of homosexual desire, gender reversal and explicit *eros*, which, as Nicholas Grene has pointed out, “were proximate to violence for bourgeois nationalist audiences” (2004, 86). Indeed, both Yeats's and Martyn's drama abounds in homosocial bonds, sexually ambiguous diction, and subverted gender roles. Most of their characters become specimens of excess transgressing boundaries of masculinity and femininity and exhibiting a kind of “gender exorbitancy” (Valente 2011, 172) that characters of authority representing a bourgeois code of value try to contain in the plays. Heather Love once claimed about Walter Pater's works that they offer “a rich archive of queer historical structures of feeling” (2007, 24), and I wish to argue that this is true for Yeats's and Martyn's drama as well.

This paper explores the tension between the normative discourse and non-normative characters in Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* and Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field*. I use the terms normativity and non-normativity here to refer to the dramatic clash between the conventional/traditional and the unconventional, excluded, dissident or marginalised, which constitute the two main contradictory types of impulses in Yeats's and Martyn's plays. In the works chosen for discussion, the framework of the supernatural can also work to sharpen the tension between characters who safeguard the traditional family and characters who wish to escape from that world as they find it oppressive and insulting. I believe this also helps create spaces for queer readings today, as these plays can help deal with the invisible violence and insults of (hetero)normativity imposed on people who “inhabit norms differently” (Ahmed 2014, 148). Dramatising the tension between the queer and the normative works to deflate the grand narrative of normativity in general, along with its cult of moral prudery and bourgeois respectability, and thus critiques the outdatedness of certain social and theatrical performances. As Susan Harris explained, such Irish plays displayed contemporary cultural anxieties both about the New Woman and the queer man: the threat that they will refuse their social roles and thus heterosexuality as well (2017, 46). What happens in these plays can be accurately described by what Sara Ahmed has called queer feelings: “Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us” (2014 [2004], 155).

The Land of Heart's Desire and *The Heather Field* were written in the realist narrative tradition which is normally in conflict with feminist and queer readings due to its reliance on notions of fixed identity, yet these plays demonstrate that realism is not always a prison for women and non-normative subjectivities, or at least the realist drama written by Yeats and Martyn displays a resistance to the conventional tendencies of realism (Lapointe 2009, 81), similar to Henrik Ibsen's plays. As Gibson Cima has explained, “[f]or late nineteenth-century audiences accustomed to the conventional codes of melodrama, realism made those codes seem strange, for in realism the female actor exceeded the womanly characters or styles of performance behaviour the audience had grown to expect. And in that excess, that visibility, lay power” (1993, 12-13).

²The first part of this essay looks at Martyn in light of Yeats's observations about him rather than looking at Yeats through Martyn's perspective.

Coding illicit desire through the supernatural was common in Irish plays written around the end of the nineteenth century by Yeats, Martyn, John Todhunter and Florence Farr. In the 1890s, Yeats’s relationship with theatre was primarily informed by occult performance. Yeats was drawn towards the art of *travesti* from the earliest days in Bedford Park observing Florence Farr’s virile roles: his fascination increased in the nineties thanks to his interest in the occult and new theatre. Moreover, the magician Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers with his wife Moina performed dressed-up Isis rituals in Paris, where Yeats often visited them. Yeats was influenced by gender-crossing pantomime shows in Dublin and London as well, and by two *travesti* productions in particular: William Poel’s production of *Everyman* in 1901 and Sarah Bernhardt’s role as Pelléas in *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1904. This helps explain why gender fluidity is mostly associated with the supernatural in Yeats. Esoteric science conceives of the human as bisexual, and in fact, as Janis Haswell has demonstrated in her article “Yeats’s *Vision* and the Feminine”, Yeats’s search for his Daimon through ritual performance was a search for the feminine in himself (2012, 291). Harris has also observed that in Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, “the supernatural elements obscure the more troubling aspects of female desire” (2017, 48), while Katharine Worth noted that “the supernatural involves an ambiguous sexuality and was thought of by Yeats as open to a performer of either sex” (2013 [1978], 41). For instance, the Angel in *The Hour Glass* was first envisioned as a woman and Dervorgilla in *The Dreaming of the Bones* might also, Yeats thought, be played by a man (*ibidem*).

There is an equally significant connection between fairies and marginalised subjectivities within Irish culture and literature. Charlotte McIvor discusses this connection with regard to George Moore’s novella “Albert Nobbs” in which Alec, the narrator’s fictional interlocutor claims: “A woman that marries another woman, and lives happily with her isn’t a natural woman; there must be something of the fairy in her” (qtd. in 2013, 98). Fairies also carry an ambiguous double-meaning, thus helping to obscure homoerotic contents: “The ‘fairy’ here represents *both* an alibi that allows resumption of heteronormativity *and* the zone of an alternative queer reality” (*ibidem*). As McIvor further explains, by the 1920s, fairies had an established association with both Irish queerness and rural Irish heteronormativity (*ibidem*). Besides McIvor, Angela Bourke also stressed the queer potential of the fairy in that fairies belong to the margins and “their constant eavesdropping explains the need sometimes to speak in riddles, or to avoid discussion of certain topics” (qtd. in *ibidem*). Yeats’s drama in fact abounds in such metaphors of marginality – these are usually symbolic figures which appear in the subtexts of Yeats’s plays or offstage, thus on the margins of the texts, such as the white Unicorn of *The Player Queen*, the Great Herne of *The Herne’s Egg*, the white heron of *Calvary* or the wind-like shape-changing women of the Sidhe in the Cuchulain plays. These symbols pervade Yeats’s drama and they often appear impenetrable, obscure, ambiguous, visible and invisible at the same time, but always strongly associated with forms of desire that society and the other characters in the plays label as dangerous and deviant. Just like the fairies, these other supernatural figures could also be called “quare signifiers” (McIvor 2013, 99) and “metaphorical erotohistoriographical archives” (*ibidem*).

Thus for Yeats, characters belonging to the supernatural realm were not steadily gendered and allowed gender fluidity. Joseph Valente has also discerned the androgynous spirit of Yeats’s famous hero Cuchulain and his relationship with the feminine occult (the women of the Sidhe), which could reflect Yeats’s transition from Celticism that celebrated the feminine imagination to the use of more masculine elements in his work but it also mirrored “his critique of cramped sexual traditionalism of his nationalist compeers” (2011, 175). It is therefore important to acknowledge the role of the supernatural in coding illicit desires and taboo topics, and in the plays it will function as a symbolic space of possibilities and alternative happiness towards which

the protagonists will aspire to escape the oppressive atmosphere of the normative family. However, in my dramaturgical analysis of the plays in the second half of this essay, I will discuss the supernatural only as a useful framework, but my focus will be on queer structures of feeling.

My reading wishes to dialogue with Susan Harris's and Michael Patrick Lapointe's research in particular, who both argued that Yeats's and Martyn's plays "introduce[d] ciphers of *homoeros* into the modern Irish theatre at its inception" (Lapointe 2009, 74). Besides Harris and Lapointe, Adrian Frazier and Eibhear Walshe have also emphasised the latent homoeroticism of the Irish Revival and the Irish Literary Theatre. What is more, Walshe has observed that "[i]t is only with the project of cultural nationalism (and the simultaneous emergence of the emblematic figure of Oscar Wilde) that the homoerotic becomes more possible, and at the same time, more threatening in the formulation of an indigenous Irish literary identity" (1995, 147-148). Even though I build mostly on Harris's and Lapointe's research, I apply a slightly different approach in this study in that I re-examine Yeats's and Martyn's scripts through the lens of contemporary queer theorists' ideas of queer negativity, exploring queer structures of feeling in the plays, such as melancholia, broken intimacies, anxiety, sense of displacement and the will to escape. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love calls these "bad feelings" (2007, 13) or "feeling backward" (4), and highlights the affective power of representations of queer experience as suffering, which is a way of countering stigma by incorporating it: "These feelings are tied to the experience of social exclusion and to the historical 'impossibility' of same-sex desire" (*ibidem*). Or, as Jack Halberstam phrased it, such negative feelings work "to propose a relentless form of negativity in place of the forward-looking, reproductive, and heteronormative politics of hope that animates all too many political projects" (2011, 106).

Even though I mention some biographical details, the aim of the article is to provide a dramaturgical analysis of the play texts to open them up for contemporary interpretations, instead of treating them as mere biographical or historical objects. I use the word normativity in this essay in the sense in which Ahmed describes heteronormativity in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, according to which (hetero)normativity "functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape." (2014 [2004], 148). The basis of this sense of public comfort is the traditional family and respectability to which people need to conform in order to experience a "sinking" feeling (*ibidem*). However, the protagonists of the plays, Mary Bruin and Carden Tyrrell, will experience discomfort with normative family roles – they choose to fail in their domestic roles and become failures for their family. As Ahmed continues, "[q]ueer subject, when faced by the 'comforts' of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable (the body does not 'sink into' a space that has already taken its shape). Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled" (*ibidem*). Yeats's and Martyn's protagonists display an existential anguish which signals their unease with the normative family that wants to see them happy in their roles as wife and husband. In this respect, they could be described by what Ahmed has called "affect aliens" (2010, 30) in "Happy Objects": "the family sustains its place as a 'happy object' by identifying those who do not reproduce its line as the cause of unhappiness. I call such others 'affect aliens': feminist kill-joys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants" (*ibidem*). Fintan Walsh has also applied the term "affect alien" in his essay on the affective power of cross-dressing and Panti Bliss, pointing out that the phobias of dissolution or non-identity lead to the production of such affect aliens "whose daily lives are policed by hatred, fear, shame, rather than just legislation" (2009, 64).

The connection between failure and queer subjectivities has been explored in depth most notably by Halberstam and Love who explain how capitalism and normative society make everyone who differs from them believe that they are failures. Love emphasises that "same-sex

desire is marked by a long history of association with failure, impossibility and loss. [...] Homosexuality and homosexuals serve as scapegoats for the failures and impossibilities of desire itself” (Love 2007, 21). Halberstam later added that “all desire is impossible, impossible because unsustainable, then the queer body and queer social worlds become the evidence of that failure, while heterosexuality is rooted in a logic of achievement, fulfillment, and success(ion).” (2011, 94) Martyn’s and Yeats’s plays were very much ahead of their time and reflect key tenets of queer studies today because they dramatised the tension between the discourse that defines what counts as happiness and failure and people whom it labels as embodiments of social failure and the cause of unhappiness for others. Yet, as Harris has discerned, “[i]t is in this realm of failed re/production that Irishness and queerness meet” (2017, 7).

For *homoeros*, I use Lapointe’s definition which makes it clear that it is much more than simply same-sex desire and sexual acts: it implies sexually ambiguous diction and “a plurality of sexual categories, of expanded, yet often vexed, notions of love and male [or female] friendship, and of emotional and spiritual yearning for another member of the same sex. These relational discourses, sometimes marked by an intimacy or intensity usually associated with most standard configurations of heterosexual romance, are also, at other times, marked by anxiety and hostility” (2009, 89.) This ambiguity around the nature of relationships in the plays is crucial and evokes instances of the epistemology of the closet. As Patrick Lonergan has explained in his recent book *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, prioritising ambiguity in meaning over precision in Irish plays can create spaces that can allow new ways of talking about difference, sexuality and gender (2019, 147).

Yeats clearly understood that some people, including himself and especially Martyn, might not feel comfortable and free in certain social structures and roles created by what we today call (hetero)normativity. For Yeats, the strange, the unconventional was always a source of attraction, interest and sympathy which he represented in most of his works. Yeats sympathised with people who differed from the norm and could not fulfil their desires because of some absurd obstacle created by society or the state, as dramatised most notably in *The Dreaming of the Bones* in which the love between the ghosts of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla is impossible because the Young Man refuses to forgive them for the sin they committed centuries ago by putting the needs of the body (desire) before the nation. At the time of the composition of his early plays, Yeats was frequently in the company of unconventional people, such as George Moore, Martyn, W.T. Horton, William Sharp (aka Fiona Macleod) and the occultist Florence Farr, the British artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, and the magician Samuel Liddell McGregor Mathers. Yeats also felt different and had anxiety because of the pressure of normative sexuality, which informed his first-hand experience of performance alongside his occult experiences. Yeats also often criticised both the Irish and British governments for airbrushing non-normative individuals like Oscar Wilde, Charles Ricketts and Roger Casement from their frameworks of recognition. On 2 December 1936, Yeats wrote an outraged letter to his friend Lady Dorothy Wellesley, criticising those people and institutions who used Casement’s homosexuality to shame him:

But suppose the evidence had been true, suppose Casement had been a homo-sexual & left a diary recording it all, what would you think of a Government who used that diary to prevent a movement for the reprieve of a prisoner condemned to death? Charles Ricketts & Lawrence of Arabia were reputed homo-sexual suppose they had been condemned on a capital charge some where [*sic*], what would you think of a profession [*sic*] who insured their execution by telling the middle classes that they were homosexual. [...] I can only repeat words spoken to me by the old head of the Fenians years ago. ‘There are things a man must not do even to save a nation’. (2002, 6737)

Moreover, Yeats was also alert to his friends' anxieties with sexuality which, in fact, he also shared. There is a very interesting passage in his *Autobiography* which demonstrates that Yeats indeed felt pressured by normative sexuality that "mocked at any other life" (1972, 72), as he put it. Yeats was unable to conform and desperately wanted to escape, but he felt entrapped by his love for Maud Gonne. Thus Yeats could sympathise with the anxiety of some of his friends because he also felt different from normative masculinity – unlike his friends, he was never able to engage easily with other women. He even wished to give encouragement to young boys so that they would not feel shame about their difference, because Yeats knew by his own experience how normativity embodied by his friends, especially by the British poet William Ernest Henley, mocked everyone who differed from them. In fact, what Yeats distances himself from in this passage is not simply normative masculinity, but toxic hyper-masculinity which mocks those who are not able to get over an unrequited love and engage in casual sexual relationships with other women. Instead, Yeats identifies himself with a more tender, anxious and melancholy form of masculinity here:

I was tortured by sexual desire and had been for many years. I have often said to myself that some day *I would put it all down in a book that some young man of talent might not think as I did that my shame was mine alone.* [...] *Normal sexual intercourse does not affect me more than other men,* but that, though never frequent, was plain ruin. *It filled me with loathing of myself;* and yet at first pride and perhaps, a little, lack of obvious opportunity, and how *love kept me in unctuous celibacy.* When I returned to London in my twenty-seventh year I think my love seemed almost hopeless, and I knew that my friends had all mistresses of one kind or another and that most, at need, went home with harlots. *Henley, indeed, mocked at any other life.* I had never since childhood kissed a woman's lips. At Hammersmith I saw a woman of the town walking up and down in the empty railway station. I thought of offering myself to her, but the old thought came back, 'No, I love the most beautiful woman in the world'. (71-72; my emphasis)

This passage is followed by Yeats's admiring description of Eva Gore-Booth and Florence Farr both of whom Yeats perceived as queer (Harris 2017, 36). It is also here that Yeats explains that he put his own unfulfilled desire in *The Land of Heart's Desire*, but he imagined that Gonne was taken from him by a girl, not a man, and possibly fantasising the seduction of Gonne as a woman, thus queering his desire for her: "I began to write *The Land of Heart's Desire* to supply the niece of a new friend, Miss Florence Farr, with a part, and put in it my own despair. I could not tell why Maud Gonne had turned from me unless she had done so from some vague desire for some impossible life, for some unvarying excitement like that of the heroine of my play" (1972, 72-73). Yeats also uses the ambiguous phrase "vague desire for some impossible life" (73) which can refer to a spiritual experience but also to a forbidden form of desire. The longing for this impossible life and this unvarying excitement for the unknown and the uncertain once again recall Ahmed's and Halberstam's definitions of loss and failure associated with queer desire, but they also resonate with Heather Love's ideas of impossible love, as Love observed the connection between homosexual love and loss: the link between love's impossibilities and failures and at the same time the "wild hopes for its futures" (2007, 23).

Yeats's perception of Martyn was even more interesting. Martyn was known as a celibate, who opposed physical comforts, criticised the institution of marriage, felt ill at ease in the company of women but who was also greatly influenced by androgynous Greek ideals of beauty thanks to his Oxford education. As F.S.L. Lyons explains, Martyn's mother urged him to find a wife, but his reaction was to choose an "impenetrable bachelorhood" (1964, 12) instead. His mother convinced him to buy a luxurious ancestral mansion in Tulira "to make it fit to receive the ideal wife" (*ibidem*), yet Martyn used the house to receive his intimate friends. His

contemporaries, including Yeats and Moore in particular, noticed that “he was afflicted lifelong with some unexplained psychological anguish” (Lapointe 2009, 76). In his *Autobiography*, Yeats also claimed that he knew he must have much in common with Martyn (1972, 101). Yeats sensed that what hurt Martyn was his repressed desire for his own sex, and wondered “[w]hat drove him to those long prayers, those long meditations, that stern Church music? What secret torture?” (1953, 253) Yeats also refers to homosexuality when he talks about Martyn’s close friendship first with the homosexual Count Stanislaus Eric Stenbock and then with Moore, which also recalls the ambiguous bond between an old lecher and a saint in the subtext of his play *The Cat and the Moon*³:

I have observed in other abnormally virtuous men a tendency to choose friends for the sins they themselves had renounced. Martyn had a good intellect, moderate and sensible, but it seems to me that this intellect has been always thwarted by its lack of interest in life, religious caution having kept him always on the brink of the world in a half-unwilling virginity of the feeling imagining the virginity of his body. He had no interest in women, and Moore would accuse him of a frustrated passion for his own sex. ‘I believe,’ he said to him once, ‘you think sexual intercourse between men more natural than between women.’ I wonder if Moore invented the answer. ‘Well, at any rate it is not so disgusting’. (1972, 118-119)

In fact, Yeats was in a similar half-unwilling virginity until the end of his 20s, as the previous passage has illustrated, so he indeed had much in common with Martyn. Yeats therefore sensed in Martyn a constant desire to escape from his strict religious world and the social expectations that wanted to see him as a married man. Strikingly, he made a similar observation about Wilde in *A Vision* “B”: “I find in Wilde, too, something pretty, feminine, and insincere, derived from his admiration for writers of the 17th and earlier phases, and much that is violent, arbitrary and insolent, derived from his desire to escape” (2015, 112). Yeats also recalled that Martyn “once said the majority of souls are lost through sexuality, had his father’s instincts through repression or through some accident of birth turned, as Moore thought, into an always resisted homo-sexuality” (1972, 119).

Yeats also sometimes mentioned Martyn in the context of transvestism and gender fluidity: “in Martyn the sterility is complete, though unlike Moore he has self-possession [originally “charm”] and taste. He only fails in words. *It is as though he had been put into the wrong body*” (271; my emphasis). In another passage he mentions Martyn with regard to a tale about changes of gender, which was recounted by William Sharp when he told Yeats and Martyn how he had discovered Fiona Macleod in himself, and Yeats noted that this story raised much unease in Martyn:

I found Martyn full of derision over some tale he had told after dinner the night before to Martin Morris, now Lord Killanin, an unsympathetic hearer, and himself. He had been somewhere abroad when he saw the sidereal body of Fiona enter the room as a beautiful young man, and became aware that he was a woman to the spiritual sight. She lay with him, he said, as a man with a woman, and for days afterwards his breast swelled so that he had almost the physical likeness of a woman. (129)

This reaction evokes Erving Goffman’s ideas of identity ambivalence in his 1963 book *Stigma* in which he explains how stigmatised individuals often support the standards by which they are judged as outcasts and freaks: “The stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence

³ See Lapointe’s discussion of this play in his essay about *The Heather Field* (2009) and Alexandra Poulain’s article (2018).

when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. [...] In brief, he can neither embrace his group nor let it go" (1963, 108). The story of William Sharp and Fiona MacLeod raised a profound interest in Yeats as well, who was eager to know all his life what secret the figure of Fiona stood for in Sharp's life. Yeats describes that one day when he was with Mathers in Paris, he began shivering, which "was associated in [his] mind with William Sharp and Fiona Macleod" (1972, 105). Yeats then continues: "It is strange, but my mind was full of Sharp and Fiona till this moment" (106).

When Yeats watched *The Heather Field*—which is about the affectionate bond between four male characters and the suffering of the main protagonist because he had to marry a woman—Yeats said he thought of Martyn's personal life while watching it: "Mrs. Martyn's attempts to find a wife for her son came into my head" (1953, 253). Yet nationalist critics, such as this anonymous reviewer in *Sinn Féin*, were disgusted with Martyn's play: "We tire [...] of Mr. Martyn's weak men and strong women [...] Martyn can do large things in drama, and does not do them because he lets a little devil compounded of perversity and sentimentality run away with him" (qtd. in Lapointe 2009, 82). Even though the play was considered by many as a bad play, Yeats was enthusiastic about it and claimed that "[o]ne passage especially was the most powerful dialogue in modern drama" (1972, 122). *The Heather Field* was also performed together with Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* in May 1899 in the Ancient Concert Hall in Dublin, inaugurating the Irish Literary Theatre, and since Farr played the bard Aleel (Countess Cathleen's lover), two very homoerotic plays opened the new theatre.

Yeats, therefore, took sides with this disruptive kind of Irish drama, which Harris called a peculiarly queer Irish dramatic tradition (2017, 19): Yeats was not intimidated when his *Land of Heart's Desire* failed in London in 1894 due to its portrayal of desire between women. What is more, as Harris has explained in detail, his establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre was a response to this failure and hope to find in Ireland more tolerant audiences: "We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art can succeed" (Gregory 1914 [1913], 8-9).

Casting Farr in the role of Aleel as the Countess's love interest was part of this project. This performance included intimate love scenes between two women on stage and continued and strengthened the homoerotic aesthetic initiated by *The Land of Heart's Desire*, as in this play two adult women confessed their love to one another on the stage. In one scene for instance, Farr-as-Aleel reaches in vain for the hands of the Countess but panics as those hands seem to have over-dared: "When one so great has spoken of love to one / So little as I, though deny him love, / What can he but hold out beseeching hands, / Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly / They have overdared?" (Yeats 1982, 27) This is also a break-up scene, in which the Countess sends away Aleel, forbidding him/her to look, since looking means loving, as Father Hart also observes in *The Land of Heart's Desire*: "To look is but to love" (67) The Countess thus tells Aleel:

I kiss your forehead.
And yet I send you from me. Do not speak;
There have been women that bid men to rob
Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples

Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
 That they might sift the hearts and wills of men,
 And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
 That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
 And silently, and do not turn your head.
 Good-bye; but do not turn your head and look;
 Above else, I would not have you look”. (28)

This scene resonates strikingly with Love’s description of queer performativity and shame, according to which “queer performativity [is] a gesture of approach followed by a blushing withdrawal” (2007, 59). Love claimed that this dual movement of approach and withdrawal runs through Pater’s work, yet it can be traced in *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart’s Desire* as well. Muñoz discusses such performative ephemeral gestures in *Cruising Utopia* and contends that they are able to “transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public culture” (2009, 67).

Yeats uses the word ‘queer’ in *The Land of Heart’s Desire* to describe the fairy people outside the house – invisible to the audience – who try to lure the newly-wed Mary Bruin to their realm, and Martyn also applies ‘queer’ to describe his protagonist Carden and his intimate male friends. Yeats mentioned this word multiple times in his letters as well in the sense of ‘strange’ and ‘outside the norm’ but with more positive connotations. He also applied ‘queer’ to unconventional/unorthodox people like Ezra Pound, George Moore, Frank Fay and even Lady Wilde. Yeats sometimes employed ‘queer’ to describe his own works too – for instance, in a letter to Edmund Dulac on 13 January 1934, Yeats noted about *The King of the Great Clock Tower*: “The dialogue is in prose but there are lyrics & I think good ones. I think the whole thing is dramatic & queer. [...] It is a better stage machine than any other of my dance plays” (2002, 5994). This remark is striking given that the play was to some extent informed by Wilde’s *Salomé* and created an even more transgressive version of the Salome-story in which the severed head sings.

In Yeats’s time, the word ‘queer’ was used both in the sense of ‘outside the norm’ and sexual deviance. It was in fact John Douglas the 9th Marquess of Queensberry, the father of Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie, Wilde’s lover), who first used it as a slur in 1894 in a threatening letter to Alfred Montgomery after his eldest son Francis had presumably committed suicide fearing the consequences of his relations with Lord Rosebery: “Now the first flush of this catastrophe and grief is passed, I write to tell you that this is a *judgement* on the whole *lot of you*. Montgomerys, The Snob Queers like Rosebery [...] I smell a tragedy behind all this and have already got *Wind* of a more *startling one*” (Ellmann 1988, 402). As Ellmann explains, “[t]he conviction that one son had died in a homosexual scandal resolved Queensberry to make sure that the second [Bosie] did not die in the same way” (*ibidem*). In either sense of the word, ‘queer’ always has a political significance. As Judith Butler has explained in “Critically Queer”: “‘Queer’ derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time. In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts ‘queer’” (2000, 169). As we shall see, in Martyn’s *The Heather Field*, this is exactly what happens: characters safeguarding the family will use ‘queer’ to insult and pathologise those who differ from them and to form a homophobic social bond against the “queer lot” (1966 [1899], 36).

2. *Anxiety, Normativity and Same-Sex Intimacies in The Land of Heart's Desire and The Heather Field*

In my dramaturgical and comparative analysis of the chosen plays, I focus on two aspects in particular: unease with the traditional family structure and escape to the supernatural, to reading books and to affectionate relationships with members of the same-sex. This will to escape manifested in the protagonists' behaviour is also a will to disturb the normative world. These plays are also full of words expressing motion (riding, dancing, running), a desire to move away and beyond the world that insults and entraps them. In both plays, the characters who offer consolation and an image of freedom for the ones who feel ill-at-ease with conventional ways of living, will continuously insinuate these characters' potential differences, evoking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's ideas of the epistemology of the closet and mirroring contemporary gossip about Martyn's repressed homosexuality: "After all, the position of those who think they *know something about one that one may not know oneself* is an excited and empowered one" (1990, 80), and this performance of closetedness is always marked by the speech act of a silence (3).

In Yeats's play the setting immediately indicates Mary's unease with the roles assigned to her by society and family: she is standing by the door, reading a book, also signalling her liminal position and her desire to escape. This play uses the supernatural to stage "the complexity and fluidity of female desire" (Harris 2017, 43), and Martyn's play achieves the same with male desire. Mary's mother-in-law Bridget complains to Father Hart that Mary is not following the example she represents of womanhood and motherhood: "She would not mind the kettle, milk the cow, or even lay the knives and spread the cloth" (Yeats 1982, 54) and "[s]he is not a fitting wife for any man" (60), which is the same accusation that Carden gets as a failed husband in Martyn's play. These speech acts are performative and they work to let Mary know that she is the cause of the unhappiness of the entire family because of her failure to reproduce its traditions and line. Yet this play draws attention to the fact that the same formula cannot make everyone happy, which is very similar to Ahmed's discussion of the way the 'happy' family marks the consciousness of those whom it identifies as the cause of its unhappiness (2010, 44-50).

Reading also raises suspicion in the other characters, as it indicates a lack of interest in domestic activities traditionally assigned to women: Bridget, Maurteen and Father Hart all highlight the book as a disturbing object. Father Hart warns her: "You should not fill your head with foolish dreams. What are you reading?" (Yeats 1982, 55) Mary replies she is reading about a woman who was lured into the Land of Faery: a kinder and more tolerant world where nobody gets godly, grave, crafty, and bitter of tongue (*ibidem*), meaning authoritative, know-it-all, manipulative and insulting like her family members. Maurteen commands her to put down the book – this urge to prevent Mary from reading is similar to Martyn's play where the family wants to prevent Carden from visiting the heather field as it brings him to a different world where he can finally fit in.

Mary wants to escape from this dull house and get the freedom she has been denied, to follow her own will: "What do I care if I have given this house, / Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue, / Into the power of fairies?" (61). She begs: "Come, fairies, take me out of this dull house! / Let me have all the freedom I have lost; / Work when I will and idle when I will!" (*ibidem*) The fairy child – who is in fact older than anyone else – promises Mary a kiss and through that kiss freedom and escape from what Mary calls her captivity: "You shall go with me, newly-married bride, / And gaze upon a merrier multitude. / [...] Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood, / But joy is wisdom, time an endless song. I kiss you and the world begins to fade" (69). Ahmed mentions this desire "to leave a certain world behind" (2010, 47) as one of the reasons why the 'happy' family associates everyone who is different from them with a life doomed to be necessarily unhappy. For instance, when the Fairy child appears at the door,

Maurteen and the others immediately assume that she is unhappy because she seems to have no family, hence he lets her in. Maurteen stresses that he (the family) is happy, so everyone around them should also be happy, which is an expression of intolerance for unhappiness and disruption disguised as benevolence and care: “Being happy, I would have all others happy, / So I will bring her in out of the cold” (Yeats 1982, 63). This is the same reason why he also commands Mary to put away her discontent, but without any interest in the causes of her melancholia.

Mary is also weary of her husband’s “drowsy love” (61), but it is only Shawn who takes her anxiety seriously: “Do not blame me; I often lie awake / Thinking that all things trouble your bright head” (*ibidem*). This is a beautiful moment of understanding between them, and Mary calls him the great door-post of the house and herself the branch of quicken wood, but she also tells him that she cannot hang upon the post this branch, meaning she cannot make him happy: “O, you are the great door-post of this house, / And I the branch of blessed quicken wood, / And if I could I’d hang upon the post / Till I had brought good luck into the house” (61-62). Similarly, Shawn claims that he wishes he could be the one who could give her this maddening freedom and bewildering light (62). It is also interesting that Mary does not explain why exactly she cannot make Shawn happy: her failure to conform to conventional social norms remains unexplained, it is marked by silence, which increases the sense of closetedness in the play.

Yet once Shawn mentions that no power can break their marriage, the fairy child interrupts him and sings about “the lonely of heart” and of a happier land, implying that there are other forms of happiness beyond marriage between a man and a woman. She identifies Mary as her kind whose place is elsewhere: “There is one here that must away, away” (63). Mary transfers some objects through the door to this supernatural realm, which, as Harris observed, never return (2017, 40), thus similar to the world of queer people and other socially marginalised subcultures, it is a space that is real yet invisible, or as Leo Bersani has put it, “[i]nvisibly visible, unlocatably everywhere” (1996, 32).

Father Hart gives a very reductive explanation to Mary’s anxiety with her role as wife, hoping that Mary will one day merge into the normative family and society, and will become like the rest: “My colleen, I have seen some other girls, / Restless and ill at ease, but years went by / And they grew like their neighbours and were glad / And gossiping of weddings and of wakes” (Yeats 1982, 56). This is also an expression of hope that Mary will one day get assimilated into the normative family and social structure in which it is easy to supervise and control individuals. What also vexes characters representing normativity is pensive and melancholy women and men, hence Bridget’s remark that Mary is “old enough to know that it is wrong / To mope and idle” (*ibidem*). Maurteen also observes that Mary is repressing something, she is hiding among her dreams like children from the dark under the bedclothes, hence he implores her to put away her “dreams of discontent” (59). In “Happy Objects”, Ahmed mentions this kind of demand as characteristic of the normative family which defines what happiness should be: the demand that people should let go of certain histories which cause melancholia, yet Ahmed highlights the transformative power of such ‘bad feelings’ (2010, 50). Features like melancholia, pensiveness, dreaming and too much interest in books and the arts have long been associated with the threat of homosexuality for normativity. In fact, melancholia can provide a powerful framework to examine the ungrivable losses and hurts associated with marginalised and stigmatised subjectivities. Even though queer critics often argue against treating this link as an essential one, Didier Eribon, Sara Ahmed, Heather Love, David Eng and Judith Butler⁴ have

⁴ For more information on melancholy gender and refused identification see Judith Butler (1997), whereas for racial melancholia see D.L. Eng’s monograph *The Feeling of Kinship* (2010). Eribon’s memoir *Returning to Reims* (2013 [2009]) also explores the connection between melancholia, queerness and change of class.

all discussed the validity of this connection. As Eribon has observed, “there exists a specifically homosexual ‘melancholy’” (2004, 36) which is part of the process of ego-formation caused by “the loss of heterosexual ways of life, ways that are refused and rejected (or that you are obliged to reject because they reject you)” (37). Or, in Ahmed’s words, “the unhappy queer is made unhappy by the world that reads queer as unhappy” (2010, 43).

The family sees the Fairy child and her kind as the evil Other, yet Mary claims they are also children of God, introducing a voice of tolerance and equality into the narrative of hostility and othering. It is only Mary who describes the people outside the house as ‘queer’: “A little queer old woman dressed in green” (Yeats 1982, 58) and “[a] little queer old man” (60). Since Mary is the only character who is truly interested in and attracted to this world, her use of ‘queer’ gives the word a more positive connotation, seeing difference and strangeness as full of potential and possibility. Moreover, the Child displays an age unorthodoxy – like Woolf’s Orlando, she lives without age: she can put on womanhood anytime as if putting on a dress, and Maurteen notes that it is strange that so young a girl loves old age and wisdom so much. She claims that she is “much older than the eagle-cock [which is] the oldest thing under the moon.” (68) The strangeness of this figure and Mary’s interest in her raise panic in the others, and they hope the crucifix and the priest will protect them.

But the Child is terrified of the crucifix, and gets Father Hart to put it away by gently “caressing him” (66), which borders around another sexual taboo regarding children and the clergy. Once the crucifix is gone, Mary’s seduction begins through dance. The fairy child asks everyone if they love her, and suddenly turns to Mary: “And do you love me too?” (67). She promises Mary to give her more than her husband can, implying that she can offer just as much or even more to a woman than a man. Everyone replies yes to her question, as they see her as a child not a woman, but only Mary understands, as Harris so accurately pointed out, “how many different kinds of love might be implied in that question” (2017, 42), hence she answers “I do not know” (Yeats 1982, 67). I believe it is important that Mary’s reaction is neither fully dismissive nor affirmative, but hesitant. Unlike anyone else, Mary feels embarrassed by the fairy child’s question not just because it is very straightforward, but because in their relationship, it might imply romantic, physical love. Promotion photos for the performance published in *The Sketch* also reveal more about the ambiguous relationship between the two women, as the fairy child’s hands lay on Mary’s body and she looks intensely in her eyes, which Mary allows but her body and confused facial expression displays that she is in a state of transition and hesitation⁵. Yet, as Harris revealed, “[t]he assumption of childhood innocence protected spectators from recognising the play’s adult aspects.” (2017, 44).

Mary is torn between the two worlds: Father Hart warns her to “think of this house and of [her] duties in it” (Yeats 1982, 69), while the fairy begs her to come away otherwise she will never escape from domestic duties and will become like the rest. It is also notable that the prospect of growing like the rest is used both by Father Hart and the fairy but with a very different emotional content: for Father Hart, becoming like the rest is the ideal future for Mary, while the fairy child depicts this as the worst thing that can happen to Mary. The fairy begs her:

Stay and come with me, newly-married bride,
For if you hear him *you grow like the rest*;
Bear children, cook, and bend above the churn,

⁵ See these photographs in Susan Harris’s book (2017, 43).

And wangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
 Until at last, grown old and bitter of tongue,
 You're crouching there and shivering at the grave". (69-70; my emphasis)

She also promises Mary that unlike her family, she will love her as she is: "I keep you in the name of your own heart" (70). This part of the play is a dramatic competition for Mary's love and attention between Shawn and Father Hart and the fairy child, in which Mary rejects marriage, motherhood and the Church too. Since Yeats himself admitted that he put his own despair of desires in this play, Harris stresses that "the battle for Mary Bruin's soul is inevitably framed as an erotic competition" (2017, 40-41). This fairy child is a queer force also because she is "an anti-reproductive force" (42) which takes women away from their conventional duties as wives and mothers. Father Hart also laments that people like the fairy child are dangerous as they divert people from the normal, traditional path: "And day by day their power is more and more, / And men and women leave old paths for pride / Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart" (Yeats 1982, 72).

At the end of the play, the fairy child is standing by the door just like Mary at the beginning: Mary begins trusting her, and begs her to take her to the people of her kind "who ride the winds, run on the waves, / And dance upon the mountains" (71) and who are thus "more light / Than dewdrops on the banner of the dawn" (*ibidem*). The child calls her "little bird" and Mary calls her "Dear face! Dear voice!" (*ibidem*). When the seduction is complete, Mary dies but it is implied that her soul was taken by the fairy child to a kinder world which does not label her as a failure. From Mary's point of view, the fairy child serves as a medium through which Mary can find her own voice and place in the world, which recalls feminist and queer bonds of entrustment. The relationship between the fairy child and Mary is very similar to what Lucia Re described as feminist entrustment: "The feminist relationship of entrustment (*affidamento*) is one in which an older, and usually more powerful and authoritative woman facilitates, through dialogue and friendship, a younger woman's access to a stronger sense of self and of her social and symbolic value as a subject and as a woman, which will allow her, in turn, to express herself, and engage in other creative practices of signification" (2015, 354). This bond between older and younger characters appears in many of Yeats's works given his relationship with women who were half of his age, such as Iseult Gonne and his wife George Hyde-Lees.

Bonds of entrustment pervade Martyn's *The Heather Field* as well, in which four male characters express unease with traditional familial roles, yet they offer each other emotional support to counter the insults of normativity. As Harris explains in *Gender and Modern Irish Drama*, in this play "[ea]ch character is given an androgynous sidekick who shares the protagonist's vision and professes unconditional love for his doomed companion" (2002, 42). Harris's analysis does not focus on the homoerotic bonds of the play, therefore I wish to discuss these aspects. The characters' difference in Martyn's play is represented by their admiration for the heather field where they can listen to the waves and wind, thus the invisible land of acceptance is similar to the Sligo-setting of *The Land of Heart's Desire*. The play is also full of over-sentimentalised expressions of love between these men which almost appear to be romantic love scenes expressed through the safe frameworks of brotherhood and friendship, similar to the safe innocent childhood motif of Yeats's play. The young Miles tells his brother Carden: "There is no one in the whole world I love as well as you" (1966, 26) and the child Kit exclaims to Carden: "I love you. Oh, you don't know how I love you, father" (53). Just like in Yeats's play, the younger characters of *The Heather Field* portray a profound admiration for old age and wisdom. They also emulate each other like the women of Yeats's play. As Adrian Frazier pointed out in his

study on the homosociality of the Irish Revival, emulation was a very homosocial act between Martyn, Moore and Yeats too (1997, 21-25). In fact, strong bonds between men have been one of the main tropes of Irish dram – Patrick Lonergan has stressed the presence of “the Irish male double act” (2019, 137) in the Irish theatre tradition, as in Yeats’s *On Baile’s Strand* and *The Cat and the Moon*, or in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. But emotional relationships between three or four men are also frequently dramatised, as in Martyn’s play or in Yeats’s *Calvary* between Christ, Judas and Lazarus⁶.

The way Martyn describes Carden and the way he behaves and talks transgress conventional boundaries of masculinity. By appearance, he conforms to social conventions of masculinity, as he is a “powerfully built man” (1966 [1899], 21) and talks about practical business issues. Yet his gestures are marked by tenderness towards the other male characters: as soon as he enters, he smiles at his friend Barry Ussher and expresses his anxiety caused by the fear of losing him and his support: “No, you must believe in me, and inspire me with heart” (22). Harris notes that since “the play depends on the audience’s sympathizing with Carden” (2002, 42), it is surprising that the play was received much more positively than Yeats’s *The Countess Cathleen*. Even though Carden’s masculinity is unconventional in the play, the play’s first performance was more or less successful because Martyn built Carden into the position of an idealist through his mystical connection to the land and through the opposition between him and his wife (44). This means that for nationalist audiences it was acceptable that Carden chose the love of the land instead of a physical relationship with his wife, refusing the needs of the body for an ideal, which yet again illustrates how the mystical and the supernatural can work as a shield for homoerotic contents.

The tender relationship between the play’s male characters is constantly criticised and mocked by the five characters who represent normativity: Carden’s wife Grace, two doctors, and Lady and Lord Shrule who care only about money, appearances and order, and who ridicule the world of art and books that the four male characters cherish so much. Grace complains to Lady Shrule that Miles “is certainly amiable, but vexes me occasionally with his foolish admiration for my husband” (Martyn 1966 [1899], 36). She also observes about Carden’s close relationship with his best friend Barry Ussher that “[w]hat you two have to say perpetually to each other puzzles me” (29). She expresses his concern to Lady Shrule too: “Yes, and to have that fellow Ussher, too, dropping in to complete the mutual admiration society! Oh, I always disliked him” (36). Grace is also afraid that these bonds will provide a bad example to the child Kit, hence she calls two doctors to try to heal and pathologise Carden.

Just like Father Hart trivialises Mary’s anxiety, Grace reduces Carden’s unease with normative life to imaginary sufferings: “Really it becomes too provoking when you begin talking about those imaginary sufferings and aspirations of yours. What on earth have you to suffer? You are in good health are you not? Were you not more than fortunate to have married as you did? Have you not independent means? What can a man like you aspire more to?” (31). This very much resembles the way discourse uses insult to mark the consciousness of queer people, which Eribon sees as performative utterances:

Insult is more than a word that describes. It is not satisfied with simply telling me what I am. [...] That person is letting me know that he or she has something on me, has power over me. First and foremost the power to hurt me, to mark my consciousness with that hurt, inscribing shame in the deepest

⁶ For a queer reading of Yeats’s *Calvary* see my latest article “Yeats’s Queer Dramaturgies: Oscar Wilde, Narcissus, and Melancholy Masculinities in *Calvary*” (2020).

levels of my mind. This wounded, shamed consciousness becomes a formative part of my personality. [...] In any case, insult is a performative utterance. Its function is to produce certain effects—notably, to establish or to renew the barrier between ‘normal’ people and those Goffman calls stigmatized people and to cause the internalization of that barrier within the individual being insulted. (2004, 16-17)

Grace’s remarks about Carden have the same function as what Eribon has defined as insult. It is also a gender reversal in the play, as the woman plays the role of the normative authority here. Grace also insinuates that Carden is mad simply because he is different, which, in fact, will indeed make Carden believe he is mad. This is how interpellation and insult work: making the insulted believe he insults the world and not vice versa. Carden points this out too: “Ha – ha – I suppose people of her type think everyone who differs from them, mad” (Martyn 1966 [1899], 32). Grace mocks any other life, as Yeats would have phrased it. Carden also articulates how normativity controls and molests people and denies the rights of those who do not wish to obey: “It is really too bad that I should be molested thus perpetually with unsolicited advice. All my acquaintances seem to consider it incumbent upon them to interfere in and direct my affairs just like their own. One would think I had no right to do anything” (41). Carden also expresses his desire to escape: “I will live my life as I want, and I will take dictation from nobody” (*ibidem*). Grace complains to the doctors and the Shrule family that Carden “always seemed to me odd and ridiculous: for he never cared for society, never went to races, dances, or tennis parties, you know, like other people” (34). She continues calling Carden and his family queer people: “He is such a queer creature. You cannot imagine how strange his ideas are” (35). Lady Shrule agrees: “He never loved you, Grace. He is a terrible man. These Tyrrells were always a queer lot” (36). They also observe that Carden has no interest in women at all, even though Lady Shrule thinks “it is impossible that a man can exist without loving some woman” (35). This lack of interest in activities traditionally assigned to men and Carden’s indifference towards women signals that he is different from normative notions of masculinity.

But friendship, brotherhood, reading and the heather field offer consolation for these insults. When Grace arrives, Carden’s reaction is annoyance and he begins reading. Carden tells Ussher and Miles that “two friends such as you ought to compensate for what I have to bear from others” (42). The heather field offers a similar escape from what Carden calls his life of pain and unrest as a husband: “Oh! There is magic in those mountain breezes! [...] I hear in its waves those voices floating back to me” (45). Yet Carden explains this to the doctors who immediately diagnose him as mad, as he claims that for him his current life is only a dream, and his real life is there in the heather field: “Miles, I often think that my life of pain and unrest here is only a dream after all” (27).

It is his most intimate friend Barry Ussher who tries to save him from the medical discourse and calls him away: “Really, Carden, I don’t see what you gain by discussing your ideas with people who can neither understand nor sympathise with them. Come, come away” (46). It is also Ussher who reproaches Grace for her plan to pathologise Carden and the child Kit, and compares Carden to Joan of Arc and Socrates to stress that there is nothing abnormal about him: “Did not Joan of Arc declare she heard voices calling on her to accomplish a work which proved to be one of the most wonderful and practical in history? Was not Socrates firmly convinced that he was in the habit of receiving admonitions from his daemon?” (48). Ussher also summarises the cruelty of normativity which wants to contain the unconventional behaviour of people like Carden: “To take him away from all that he loves—his free life on the mountain, his intimate delight in nature, his interests and occupations without which life would become for him meaningless—can you understand the cruelty of this?” (50). Ussher also warns Carden

that it is dangerous to go to the heather field, which Carden sees as a betrayal of their bond of entrustment and finds their disheartening attitude the most unbearable (41): “What do you mean? Are you too going to join the enemy?” (55). This recalls the protagonist Cumhal’s lines in Yeats’s “The Crucifixion of the Outcast” in which Cumhal is mocked and crucified by everyone because of his effeminacy: “Outcasts, have you also turned against the outcast?” (1908, 19). In Act III, in which Carden is already tamed and domesticated, not daring to visit the heather field anymore as he is watched by the medical gaze of the doctors and police officers, Miles and Ussher form an alliance to defend Carden: “Oh, I know you [Grace] have much to endure, but I cannot remain here and listen to such denunciation of what my brother holds nearest to his heart” (Martyn 1966 [1899], 62).

Ussher appears as an older, more authoritative figure who has managed to escape and who can thus serve as a teacher for the younger Miles. Ussher teaches him through his stories about Carden’s difference, which recalls bonds of entrustment between older and younger people. Ussher also employs ambiguous diction – for instance, he reassures the anxious Miles: “I fear I also find difficulties cultivating the tastes that are congenial to me” (17). But to Miles Ussher embodies freedom: “Well, in any case you seem able to live as you please. You have always means to travel, and never want for anything” (18). Yet Ussher suggests that he has lost happiness when Carden married Grace and hints at the ambiguous relationship between him and Carden which was broken by Carden’s marriage. This marriage appears as the greatest grievance/betrayal in their relationship, which Ussher calls a strange and unnatural choice and sees it as a betrayal of their intimacy: “Grace would probably have made an excellent wife for almost any other man, but for your brother—well, it might have been better if he had never thought of marriage at all” (18-19). Miles does not understand what he is referring to which increases the sense of closetedness in the play: “Well, you see, Carden and I had been intimate so long. We had been brought up together in fact, so that I fancy I understand him better than anyone” (19). Ussher continues his nostalgic recollections: “Oh, he always did so fascinate and interest me. What poetry he put into those days of my youth—the days that are dead” (*ibidem*). It is also Ussher who describes Carden as an inherently dissident man: “Ah, foolishly his wife and her friends thought they were going to change Carden to their model of a young man, but a latent, untamable nature was not to be subdued. Its first sign of revolt against suppression was when he began his vast work in the heather field” (20).

When Ussher and Carden bring up Carden’s marriage at the beginning of the play, it becomes clear that it is a painful point for both men and has decreased the intensity of their intimacy. Carden blames Ussher’s warnings about the marriage for his unhappiness, which leads to a heated quarrel between them. First, Ussher gets angry and wants to leave: “I was wrong ever to have interfered with my advice. Never will I do so again” (23). But then the stage direction indicates that he changes to a more tender and emotional tone and says: “I hope, Carden, at least I may never be to you the cause of ill luck” (*ibidem*). Towards the end when Carden shows signs of madness, he believes he is ten years ago when he was about to marry Grace despite Ussher begging him not to, and he re-enacts the scene but decides to take Ussher’s advice not to marry (64). Carden’s marriage to a woman is a trauma for both men. It pervades Martyn’s play and marks the relationship between its sensitive and sentimental male characters with an atmosphere of unrealised potentials, closetedness and failure. These moments in the play evoke Love’s ideas of broken intimacies and moments of failed or interrupted connections, and she maintains that this impossibility of love is part of queer historiography (2007, 24).

Ussher also serves as a mentor for Kit who also falls in love with the heather field and keeps asking his father to come out with him to enjoy it. He is also obsessed with flowers, described as

pensive looking and wears a sailor suit. The young Kit and the older Ussher have an interesting conversation about masculinity, as Kit understands that he will only have rights if he becomes a man. This passage also plays with the ambiguous connection between becoming a man and becoming masculine, and it can be interpreted in both ways:

Kit (*with impatience*): Oh, how I wish I were a man.

Ussher: Alas, are you not much better as you are? Why do you want to be a man?

Kit: Because then they could not prevent me from doing what I like. I should be a sailor and find out what is beyond the great sea father and I are always looking at from the heather field. (Martyn 1966 [1899], 39)

When Carden asks him if he brought flowers from the heather field, he answers ambiguously: “They have not yet come out” (63), implying also the repressed, unrealised aspects of Carden’s life who cannot go to the heather field anymore, as he is watched by doctors and police officers. But the play ends with Carden and Kit holding hands watching a rainbow above the heather field talking about man’s speechless desires: “Oh, mystic highway of man’s speechless longings! My heart goes forth upon the rainbow to the horizon of joy!” (66). This is very similar to the final scene of Act II which ended with Miles and Carden embracing one another, uttering each other’s name (32). *The Heather Field* is therefore very much about accepting loss: Carden has lost the world from which he wanted to escape – the normative family and social roles with which he could never identify – but by the end of the play he also loses the heather field which offered consolation for his life of suffering as a husband. In a way, his intimacy with Barry Ussher is also lost because of his marriage, yet this bond is not fully broken, even though it has to remain unfulfilled and marked by a history of regrets, shame and hurts which Carden tries to transform into an alternative form of happiness through bonds of friendship. In the words of Muñoz, “[t]o accept loss is to accept queerness” (2009, 73) and it does not mean hiding in the closet or disappear, but “to veer away from heterosexuality’s path” (*ibidem*), which Carden clearly achieves in his own way even though he is forced to remain within the family.

3. Conclusion

These two plays and their ‘affect alien’ protagonists can thus convey queer structures of feeling and demonstrate the importance of histories that hurt. As Ahmed phrased it: “A concern with histories that hurt is not then a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return. If anything we might want to reread melancholic subjects, the ones who refuse to let go of suffering, who are even prepared to kill some form of joy, as an alternative model of social good” (2010, 50). Mary’s and Carden’s social marginality can indeed mirror the experience of queer historical subjects and is able to speak to contemporary queer subjectivities as well, who inhabit norms differently and who have to bear the pressure imposed on them by normativity. These two plays subvert conventional gender roles and portray complicated same-sex intimacies through the safe frameworks of the supernatural, brotherhood, familial bonds and childhood, all of which work to obscure the more complex desires closeted in the texts. The relationship between characters of the same-sex and the transformational energy that arises from these intimate relationships also speak to the importance of queer bonds of entrustment in coming-out narratives. Thus *The Land of Heart’s Desire* and *The Heather Field* can be read as love letters to anyone who feels different from the norm, who has difficulty in living up to the social expectations that restrict their freedom, and who refuse to become like the rest despite the inevitable consequence of becoming failures in the eyes of normative society. Through Carden’s

and Mary's unease and unrest, the plays reveal how restrictive society's notions of success and happiness can be for some people. What counts as failure for the rest of the characters becomes an alternative success story for Carden and Mary: their victory lies exactly in becoming a failure for the family, in unbecoming⁷ respectable wives and husbands. Both Carden and Mary put pleasure and their own interests in front of national and social considerations, and replacing production/reproduction with pleasure is a crucial non-normative queer strategy (Harris 2017, 24). Because of these topical messages about difference and the pressure of normativity, it does not seem an exaggeration to call these plays queer dramas.

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⁷I use this word here in the sense that Jack Halberstam applies it in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011, 2): to intentionally refuse or fail to become something that is expected by society.

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Can I Write About It Yet?: The Influence of Politics on Literary Representations of Lesbians in Irish Women's Writing

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Abstract:

The paper explores how lesbian representation evolves in a specifically Irish context. It examines selected texts of Mary Dorsey and Emma Donoghue, who were the leading lesbian authors of the last decade of the twentieth century, and whose writing entered Irish lesbian writing into a new stage of referring to lesbian desire in an open manner, thus entering lesbian fiction into the canon of Irish literature. The article analyses Dorsey's and Donoghue's lesbian works in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as well as the political atmosphere and the religious secularity of the Republic of Ireland, which prevented these works from coming out sooner, and whose characters are not only openly lesbian, but also occupy central spaces of their respective narratives.

Keywords: lesbian *Bildungsroman*, lesbian continuum, lesbian existence, *semiotic chora*, transnationalism

1. Introduction

The staggering advance of Irish lesbian rights and politics is quickly becoming an area of interest to many scholars. The Republic of Ireland, which, up to the late twentieth century, was a cradle of Catholicism, and where there was no place for discussing the topic of sexuality, let alone its 'deviant' forms, has transformed unchangeably in the last thirty years. This article will discuss how lesbian literature of Ireland was a fervent companion of the changing laws and legislations at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, that at first decriminalised and later equalised same-sex couples. It will also outline how factors such as the failing influence of the church and the increasing openness within Irish society accommodated the emergence of a lesbian subject that was excluded

from the pages of Irish fiction, and how a new reconciliation of multiple identities was formed alongside the concurrent publications of lesbian works at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Beginning with the year 1989, when the Republic was in the midst of David Norris's fight to decriminalise homosexual acts, an amendment that came into life in 1993, the article will discuss the literary activism of Mary Dorcey, who prepared the literary scene for the forthcoming changes. In her ground-breaking collection of short stories, *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1989), her short story "Scarlett O'Hara" (1990), and her only novel *Biography of Desire* (1997), Dorcey openly introduces the concept of lesbian desire, passion, and identity, with her lesbian heroines occupying central spaces of their respective narratives.

The article will then analyse three works of Emma Donoghue, *Stir-fry* (1994), *Hood* (1995), and *Landing* (2007), and map out the development of lesbian narrative towards and around the second decade of the twenty-first century, as well as the same-sex marriage referendum of 2015, whilst noticing trends in contemporary lesbian writing that contributed to the emergence of a non-stigmatised lesbian sexuality. This will be achieved by an analysis of the most prominent in that period of time narrational techniques, such as lesbian Bildungsroman, Rich's *lesbian existence* and *lesbian continuum*, and transnationalism, that aided Irish lesbian writers in entering the lesbian subject(s) and the historical presence of lesbians into the canon of Irish literature, which has been hitherto largely dominated by male heteronormative writing.

In 1977, David Norris, a lawyer and an active campaigner for homosexual rights, took a court action challenging the validity of sections 61 and 62 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, established by the British Parliament and continued by the Irish Free State following its foundation in 1922, which criminalised sexual activity between men, be it in private or in public, and for which penalties varied between three years of imprisonment and a life sentence. Norris argued that the sections invaded several of his rights, including his right to privacy, which should have been secured by the Constitution. After having lost the case both at first instance before the High Court and on appeal before the Supreme Court, Norris filed a complaint before the European Court of Human Rights stating that the Irish law violated his right to privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights. He won the case in 1988. Sections 61 and 62 of the 1861 Act, and section 11 of the 1885 Act were repealed and amended by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993, that made offences of buggery illegal only if committed with a person under the age of seventeen, or who is mentally impaired, in order to maintain protection for the young and the vulnerable.

Parallel to Norris's case, between 1973 and 1993, many gay and lesbian movements rose to power and achieved general recognition. The Lesbian Movement itself gained more members each day and made itself seen within the society, thus strengthening the visibility of lesbians. Lesbian activists fought alongside gay men in order to achieve the same rights, understanding, acceptance, and their rightful place amongst Irish society. Organisations, services, and unions for gay men and lesbians of Ireland began to be formed, amongst them the Sexual Liberation Movement (1973), the Irish Gay Rights Movement (1974), as well as telephone befriending services for gay and lesbian individuals such as Tel-A-Friend (1974) or Dublin Lesbian Line (1979).

Mary Robinson actively supported David Norris, and in later course became his attorney. At the age of twenty-five, Robinson was the youngest law professor in Ireland. She was a campaigner for human rights and fought vigorously to improve the position of women and to abolish laws prohibiting homosexuality. In the early 1960s, during her stay in Paris, she came

across homosexuality for the first time: “I was astounded because I hadn’t even heard that it was possible. And yet through literature and lifestyle in Paris, it was something that I took on board with great interest at the time” (O’Leary, Burke 1998, 20). Therefore, her 1967-graduation address was aimed at the necessity of changes that needed to take place in the Irish law; in this speech, she targeted issues that were not spoken about out loud before: divorce, contraception, suicide and, most importantly, the position of women in Irish society. She believed that these issues could be resolved by changing the law and overthrowing the old laws that were instigated, in large measure, by the Church: “I was very angry at a lot of what the Church stood for at that time, at how religion could become power-play and oppressive, undermining the true sense of spirituality and the true ethical norms and standards that are the highest reaches of the human mind” (19). Her involvement was initiated in 1977 when she served as a legal advisor for the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform. She became the President of the Republic of Ireland on 3 December 1990 and held her post until 12 September 1997.

In 1988, the European Court ruled that the law criminalising same-sex activities was contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular Article 8, which protects the right to respect the private life. In 1992, one year before the final decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland, Robinson invited the representatives of Irish Gay and Lesbian community to *Áras an Uachtaráin* (the official residence of the President of Ireland), which David Norris saw as a sign of “the final act of acceptance, [...] being welcomed into the Irish family at last” (107). Robinson’s involvement in Norris’s case, followed by her presidency, have not only had a significant input into Ireland’s European politics, but have also influenced the lesbian narrative in terms of a new-found openness with which lesbian authors could textualise their desires. I notice a perceptible correlation between Robinson’s presidency and lesbian fiction that has emerged during that time; it was a time of change, and lesbian writers began to celebrate and pay tribute to lesbian love through their voices that were no longer to be threatened by neither the censorship nor the law.

2. Merging of social, national, religious, and sexual identities

The following section outlines and emphasises the tension between national and sexual identities, which not only highlights the difficulty of concomitantly identifying as lesbian and Irish, but also shows how this identification affected the lesbian fiction of the Republic of Ireland in terms of a consecutive development of a lesbian subject.

Even the individual nation-state as an object of analysis in itself is problematic. The search for one’s national belonging is often owed to the notion of nationalism. However, nationalism, in its hegemonic form, can also indoctrinate and dominate people’s thinking and behaviour to such an extent that certain groups, which do not fit into its invented idea of national harmony, are frequently excluded. Nationalism, therefore, can also sometimes be seen as the main cause of creating problems for identifying with one’s national belonging, or indeed, being refused a place in the national imaginary. With the precise case of Ireland in mind, I find Partha Chatterjee’s contributions especially valuable. He constructed a division between imperial nationalism and the political nationalism that was created by anticolonialist nationalists long before separating from the imperial power. Postcolonial nationalists segregated their culture into two domains – material and spiritual. Firstly, they ‘imagined’ the nation into being in the spiritual sense before readying it for the political contest. The spiritual domain bears essential markers of cultural identity and it is associated with family, ancestry, culture, and religion. Furthermore, the spiritual domain, in opposition to the material domain, is considered feminine and is associated with the domestic

sphere (see Chatterjee 1993, 126). The material domain, on the other hand, is associated with the economy, technology, science, and statecraft, which is gendered as masculine. Whereas the coloniser proved its superiority over the material domain of the culture of the colony, and the post-colony agreed on the need for modernity (although still rejecting the colonial rule), the greater has become the need to preserve the spiritual sphere from any alien intrusion. Nationalists in postcolonial nations, in assuming that lesbian desire is a Western invention, instantaneously rejected it and perceived it as an invasion of the spiritual sphere of national culture. This type of nationalism could be classified as hegemonic nationalism, with its aggressiveness, chauvinism, fascism, and discrimination against minorities (see Wirth 1936, 725-729).

Some scholars, however, shed a different light on this issue. Benedict Anderson, for instance, who unlike certain Marxists, is of an opinion that nations and nationalisms are products of modernity that were invented in the West and later forced upon the rest of the world, understands nation as an imagined community, a value that cannot be defined strictly by speaking the same language or having similar beliefs of living within the country's borders. He purports that nationalism is a policy of threatened upper classes and the way of governments to control nations, initiated through, inter alia, popular mass media and compulsory education. He also states that the idea of an imagined community is based mainly on the common social identity that, through its deep psychological bond, creates a feeling of a "horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991 [1983], 7), and that this factor precisely is used for State control. As there is no space for LGBTQ+ individuals within the modern imagining of the nation state, this control of population and its numbers, therefore, can also often be exhibited in an exclusion of sexual minority communities. Therefore, the insularity of Irish nationalism, which, despite secularism, was further served by the authoritarian Catholic Church, can be seen as one of the reasons why lesbians refused self-identification as Irish and chose to be perceived as communal, however oppressed, rather than national members in the past.

National identity, on the other hand, often refers to a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language. Developing Anderson's opinion, that nations, nation-ness, and nationalism are difficult to define, I want to highlight the role of the Catholic Church in Irish nationalism, and how the Church interfered not only with the political sphere, but also with the spiritual aspect of Irish culture. The two modern versions of Irish political nationalism can be distinguished into Irish Catholic or Republican nationalism and Irish Protestant or Unionist nationalism. Religion has always had a major influence on the community. Lesbian identity especially, "is a rapture to the morality brigade attached to conservative agendas" (Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk 2014 [2005], 63). Kathryn Conrad recognises the fact that Irish orthodox Catholicism has always demonised homosexuality; therefore, homosexuality was always troubling for the notions of nationalism and "Irishness" (2004, 125). She also instances David Lloyd who states that until recently, both colonial and the New Irish State excluded homosexual and lesbian narratives from the field of literature (*ibidem*). Therefore, I will be examining how the 1993 decriminalisation of homosexual acts has influenced the retraction from their previous actions.

The Catholic religion was a forming element of Irish identity and it played an important role in forging the unity that was necessary for nationalism's attainment in Ireland. Thus, "Catholicism was successfully conjoined with Irish nationalism [...] by the need for nationalism to have some widely accepted source of identity in society" (White, Thurschwell 2013, 48). Therefore, the Catholic Church and nationalism have become, until recently, reliant on each other and through the Church's interference in nationalistic politics, it became two inseparable and co-dependent institutions.

Ireland, with Catholicism as its main religion, opposed largely to any threats to the notion of 'the ideal family' that is to be consisting of a man and woman, husband and wife. Therefore, minorities, and in particular gay men and lesbians, were being demonised as anti-Irish. Having said that, it is understandable in what measure lesbians must have been stigmatised to identify themselves as Catholics and as Irish, since they had to overpower the two, closely intertwined, dominant forces: the Catholic Church, and the nation-state. Even though the Catholic Church is losing its power over the domestic, political, and public spheres of Ireland, the Republic is slowly shifting into post-religiousness. Presently, Ireland is thought to have entered the new millennium with an open-mindedness characterised by its younger generation. In the 1990s, however, it was a different matter. Political representatives, manipulated by religious authorities, were still under the influence of their predecessors' actions and continued to be in opposition to any changes, the perfect example being the opposition to the amendments of sections 61 and 62 of the Sexual Offences Acts.

In addition to the complexities of self-identifying one's nation, sexuality, and religion, the major impact of self-recognition was ignited by the sense of social identity. A person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or a group, therefore, dictates one's social identity. Consequently, a common social identification that is held by a group of individuals forms a social group. Therefore, persons who are similar to each other and fulfil group expectations are included within this group whereas, consecutively, those who differ are excluded and are thus perceived the abject members of the discriminated group: outcasts. Likewise, a lesbian circle or religious community or a group, welcome those similar to them and, respectively, refuse others. Furthermore, according to Tajfel and Turner, there exists a continuum between personal and social identities, and "shifts along this continuum determine the extent to which group-related or personal characteristics influence a person's feelings and actions" (1986 [1979], 298). The self becomes assimilated to the perceived within the group stereotypes and, therefore, is more likely to exhibit behaviours typical of that group that, as a result, influences behavioural intentions of the self. Therefore, on the assumption that Irish Catholics form a wide social group, one's self-identification with this group dictates the development of certain social identity. This can be translated into an unconscious and mutual hatred towards sexual minorities that only began to disappear under the influence of the process of transmigration and its advancements on human rights, resulting in creating grounds for multiplicitous acceptance. This identity merging is Donoghue's metaphorical emotional stir-fry that, in *Landing*, is presented by the use of cultural dislocation.

3. *Breaking the tradition: A Noise from the Woodshed by Mary Dorcey*

The first Irish lesbian author to underline and challenge the above difficulties was Mary Dorcey, who, upon the most significant time for Irish sexual minorities, revolutionised Irish lesbian fiction when she published her collection of short stories entitled *A Noise from the Woodshed*, where she deploys the Kristevan techniques of the *chora* and the *semiotic* in order to make the subject of lesbian desire more explicit. I recognise this collection as the turning point leading Ireland into an era of contemporary lesbian writing. When asked to summarise the most striking characteristics of Ireland at the time of her growing up, Dorcey replied:

Silence. Repression. Censorship. [...] Nuns and priests everywhere. [...] Censorship of books and films. Fear and suspicion surrounding anything to do with the body or the personal life. The near total repression of ideas and information. A Catholic state for a Catholic people. (O'Carroll, Collins 1995, 25)

Mary Dorcey was born in Dublin in 1951. Whilst living in Paris she first came across women whom she suspected to be lesbians. After her return to Ireland in 1972, she began to attend meetings of the Irish Women's Movement, served as a founding member of Women for Radical Change, Irish Women United, and the Irish Gay Rights Movement. She is viewed as a forerunner of the lesbian and gay rights movement and the precursor of lesbian writing in modern Ireland. Dorcey writes poetry that "is informed by the struggle to articulate lesbian sexuality" (Monahagan 1996, 37) and, indeed, her writing celebrates lesbian love because it is "so exciting, so passionate, so time-consuming, so addictive, that once started there will be no getting people away from it" (O'Carroll, Collins 1995, 31). However, she is known mainly for her groundbreaking collection of short stories *A Noise from the Woodshed* that was awarded the Rooney Prize in 1990.

Subjects of Dorcey's collection of short stories are stigmatised Irish women – battered wives, victims of homophobia, patriarchy, religion. "All of the stories reflect the tensions in Ireland between the older values of the conservative and primarily Catholic state and the newer feminist theory and practices that Dorcey and her fellow activists sought to promote" (Casey 2006, 64). Furthermore, Dorcey's stories portray the transition of Irish women from ordinary housewives to passionate lesbians. "A Noise from the Woodshed" is the opening story of the collection with the following stories addressing the themes established in the title story. "A Noise from the Woodshed" has been "chosen to open the collection because it depicts both in its form and content the rush of possibilities open to women when they leave the well-worn path of social expectations far behind" (65). Dorcey's attitude towards Irish society is evident in her writing. She uses the second-person narrative and thus allows her readers to become "the experts of the mass media [to] transmit the required values" (Dorcey 1989, 157): "Of course there are other possibilities. [...] All of these things have happened and will again to you and others in this place or that. Any of them probable, none remarkable in itself" (176-178). Dorcey's stories, therefore, not only highlight the historical presence of lesbians, but state evidently that the personal is political, and that by changing the society's views her lesbian fiction can also change those of individuals:

The traditional border-lines between psychology on the one side and political and social philosophy on the other have been made obsolete by the condition of man in the present era [...]: private disorder reflects more directly than before the disorder of the whole, and the cure of personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of the general disorder. (Marcuse 1970 [1955], 21)

This approach is also adapted in the later course by other Irish lesbian writers in their struggle to stabilise the position of lesbian relationships in private and political spheres of Ireland. 'A Noise from the Woodshed' represents the beginning of the new era. It is considered to be a groundbreaking story as it addresses the often-disruptive lesbian desire within the domestic sphere. Norris's victory the previous year had impacted Irish lesbian writing in a considerable measure. Since 1993, lesbian fiction in Ireland commences to portray women working and living together, forming women's communities and engaging in political work. This image resembles strikingly Zimmerman's concept of Lesbian Nation, where lesbian lovers dream of "the possible world in the making" (Dorcey 1989, 9). It is important to emphasise that I use the term Lesbian Nation to portray an imaginary lesbian mecca rather than the actual concept itself, since lesbian separatist groups have largely failed because of their utopianism and exclusive whiteness with no place for multiculturalism and diversity amongst lesbians. Although in "A Noise from the Woodshed", this place is only just beginning to be visible through "where a

window might have been if there had been a window” (6). The story is a statement of *lesbian existence* long before now, as “there had been other noises before” (15). Characters of the story question whether “it had just begun or if it might have been going on [for longer but people] might [...] not have noticed” (*ibidem*). The presence of the taboo that veiled lesbian sexuality until now is emphasised by the sounds of lesbians making love, a sound previously unheard of in Irish fiction. Dorcey’s voice, the metaphorical “startling noise” (*ibidem*), brings to the surface women’s hidden desires whilst breaking away from the tradition of heteronormative writing and openly introducing lesbian desire to Irish literary fiction. Furthermore, the nationality of the two lovers is an implication that it is time Ireland followed successes of the United States in approaching an understanding of lesbian desire and sexuality. Dorcey’s detailed description of women’s lovemaking, as well as an implication of an ever-existing lesbian presence, which began to be reiterated in the works of Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O’Brien and Edna O’Brien, challenged the hitherto prevailing covert references to same-sex female desire.

The use of unconventional narrative is transcended into other stories from the collection. Dorcey shifts between second- and third-person’s narrative whilst, as in the case of “The Husband”, deploying the male narrator to portray his wife’s lesbian affair. Throughout the stories, there is an observable sense of impatience; the noises from the woodshed are escaping their confined, “unlit spaces” (133). Lesbians are “coming clear from years of camouflage [...] every day casting off layer by layer the outworn pretences: weakness, passivity, dependence on men – centuries of artifice sloughed away – the quick, vital core released” (137). Their independence is being regained, they are crossing fearlessly borders of homogenous and heteronormative territories to announce their presence, as “anything is better than being ignored” (58), anything is better than being “up to [their] knees in decaying refuse [...] alone, lonely and lovelorn” (16). The irrepressible need for change in societal attitudes becomes apparent in Dorcey’s use of language, where the Kristevan semiotic and symbolic realms are intertwined. What lesbians used to express through their bodies has now found a way to be articulated through their writing.

“A Noise from the Woodshed” can be most accurately analysed with the use of the Kristevan *semiotic chora* and *thetic break*. Julia Kristeva reformulated Lacan’s theory of the imaginary and the symbolic orders by making a distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Whereas the symbolic represents communicative, patriarchal discourse, and is “the horizon of the ‘universal’ bond with other members of [the] group [that] is rooted in the signs and syntax of [a] national language” (Kristeva 1984, 268), the semiotic is not limited by the structure of language and is “transverbal: it is made up of archaic representatives of drives and the senses” (269). The semiotic is characterised by non-verbal communication that comprises of tone, gesture, and rhythm, and is linked to primary processes and the bodily drives which Kristeva observes to be mainly anal and oral. The symbolic includes the traces of the unconscious from the earlier semiotic phase prior to the constitution of the subject through the acquisition of language. Drives are instinctual and pre-lingual body impulses or instincts, which Freud has reduced to two primary drives: the life and the death drives. The life drives primarily seek pleasure, although the reality principle, as opposed to the pleasure principle, may cause the pleasure to be diminished or postponed as it considers reality. The death drives, on the other hand, are the instincts to return to the quintessential state of being that precedes birth. Essentially, both life and death drives can be seen as a flow of impulses that are accumulated in the chora, which derives from the Greek word for a womb. Therefore, Kristeva forms her argument that a child’s acquisition of language and the use of the symbolic communication is a reflection of observed gestures, behaviours, and speech, and the child develops ways of communication that are no longer connected with its mother’s or his/her own body. Thus, the *chora*, the flow of energy

from the bodily drives, is disrupted as the child ceases to communicate through an inarticulate expression of its drives, which become repressed, and acquires the ability to use language upon its emergence into the symbolic world of culture. However, as I argue later, traces of the semiotic remain as the subject shifts constantly between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Similarly, lesbian writers leave the confines of silence, which in writings of their predecessors was exhibited by covert references to lesbian desire, and shift, metaphorically speaking, towards the symbolic communication and open representations of lesbian sexuality and existence. The consequence of this inevitable emergence of lesbian themes and characters in Irish female literature, similar to an entry of the child into the symbolic, is the Kristevan *thetic break*. The pulsing rhythms of Dorcey's prose fade, as lesbians try to develop ways of verbal communication within society. As lesbians cross the threshold of symbolic communication, they are forced to verbalise their existence through the convention of symbolic discourse that is accepted socially. And just like the child prior to the symbolic – whose early articulations are pre-symbolic and pre-verbal babblings – lesbians herald their coming with first holophrastic utterances in the form of incoherent and unintelligible noises (from the woodshed), similar to the child who develops early gesticulation until he or she learns the way to communicate through the use of language. Since the return to the semiotic, despite the consciousness' constant movement between the semiotic and the symbolic, lesbians seem to emit an infant's babble in the earlier stages; symbolic communication is not yet defined by linguistic structures and it no longer resembles the hypnotic rhythms of the *chora*. Before lesbians learn how to communicate with the wider society, and if I may allow myself a presumption of their being allowed to communicate their existence to the wider society, they are limited to noises that are yet not verbally clear. This presumption can also explain the covert references to lesbian desire in the past, since the kinetic functional stage of the semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign and verbalised linguistic communication.

Moreover, since the semiotic, as it is anterior to sign and syntax and has no social signification, lesbians, who cultivate the marginal and unspoken, must enter the patriarchal symbolic structure, which is a social effect, a phase of social identification and, therefore, linked to social laws pertaining to patriarchal power and social constraints. Lesbians' basic drives become removed and are further constrained by the social code as they enter into mainstream society – their *thetic break* is characterised by voicing needs other than those of pleasure. The hitherto prevailing social establishment is disturbed, or even subverted, as lesbians begin to seek social recognition. As lesbian articulations affect dominant/hegemonic forms of language and symbolic structures in order to accommodate lesbian difference, the semiotic disrupts the symbolic more generally, and the language of the social order and of lesbians is transformed, as lesbians begin to communicate openly their existence to the larger social world. Therefore, Dorcey's use of symbolism, such as the presence of reoccurring themes of water, is used to signify the turning point in Irish history, a time of change, starting with Norris's victory that granted the final decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland. The river's flowing water represents a cleansing process for Irish lesbians, there are now no boundaries to keep lesbian desire covert, there are "more and more women [...] crossing the river, [...] the thing is catching, infectious" (Dorcey 1989, 12-13).

Following the success of her first collection, Mary Dorcey published another short story – "Scarlett O'Hara" (1990). Within its pages, she mentions lesbian activism, the attitude of Irish society towards lesbians and the crucial timing. Despite the fact that her contribution of prose into Irish literary canon is not prolific, she is considered to be an influential and much-admired writer of this form. In "Scarlett O'Hara", Dorcey aims at denying reductive stereotypes and clichés present in Irish society of the time. The phrase "time [which is] of the essence" is repeated several times throughout the story; it is an analogical time to introduce lesbians amongst ho-

mosexual stereotypes and to emphasise their existence in spite of general beliefs: “We don’t use that word [gay]. [...] That’s the men’s expression. We say lesbian” (Dorcey 1990, 204). Mary Dorcey explains her approach in an interview with *Irish Literary Supplement*, where she considers “writing about the lives of women who are involved with other women” (Weekes 2000, 18) as challenging current stereotypes of lesbian literature. She is of an opinion that “writing about gay sexuality in certain clichéd forms has become popular, [...] [whereas] writing outside those conventions is still threatening” (*ibidem*). As in her previous stories, Dorcey comes to present her audience with an introduction of (and to) lesbian desire. Her character speaks openly about issues that circumvent in Irish society when considering the topic: “the nation [is no longer able] to turn a blind eye, let [lesbians] to get on with it as long as [they keep] it quiet” (Dorcey 1990, 184); the hitherto prevailing silence is now disturbed by the noises from the woodshed. Dorcey, therefore, continues a new tradition, which does not acquiesce to the hitherto prevailing restrictions concerning the marginal presence of lesbians within the narrative; lesbian desire begins to occupy a central space.

The decriminalisation, however, did not leave the power relations intact. The conflict between marginalised groups and the ruling institutions often resulted in the loss of power of the latter. Foucault argues that “every intensification, every extension of power relations to make the in subordinate [marginalised groups] submit can only result in the limits of power” (1984, 225). Indeed, at the threshold of Ireland entering the twenty-first century, the support for these institutions was supported rarely, as the State had lost its authority to silence and conceal the subject of lesbian sexuality that began to arise with a heightened frequency.

4. *The narrative of post-decriminalisation: Emma Donoghue – queering the Bildungsroman*

From this point onward, I shall refer to writings by Irish lesbian authors as post-decriminalisation lesbian fiction, as I would like to emphasise and make a clear distinction between pre- and post-decriminalisation narrative. Simply, whereas the pre-decriminalisation texts were subject to censorship and, therefore, references to lesbian desire had had to be covert, works published around 1993 were accessible to the general public. The following section will discuss the methods that Donoghue deployed in her fiction in order to portray the shift from a covert to over lesbian existence.

The best portrayal of the initiation of this transition can be seen in Emma Donoghue’s short story, “Going Back” (1994a). Although at the time there were (and, in fact, still are) places in rural Ireland where lesbian sexuality was frowned upon and not spoken of, despite its regular appearances in media and popular culture, Emma Donoghue’s story does not concentrate primarily on these negative feelings. Simply, it pays a tribute to the change in Irish law and (the underway) change in the way of thinking in the majority of Irish society – or at least its urban communities.

Emma Donoghue was born in Dublin in 1969. Her mother is a primary school teacher, and her father, Denis Donoghue, a literary critic. Alongside Mary Dorcey, Donoghue is considered an exemplar of contemporary Irish lesbian fiction. In accordance to Jeffers’s categorisation of Irish 1990s novel, Donoghue “magnifies gender construction and sexual preference; [her writings] often present formerly marginalised groups or individuals: gays, children, battered women, the urban poor” (Jeffers 2003, 2). She has created her lesbian writings in various genres, including the short story, the coming-out novel, the psychological novel, the historical novel, and the campus novel. She has successfully established Irish lesbian and, to some extent, Catholic identities within her works.

Donoghue's short story, "Going Back", portrays two Irish immigrants in London: a lesbian – Cyn, and a gay man – Lou. The story touches upon many feelings that young gay men and lesbians of Ireland experienced at this time. In many conversations that the two characters have, they often mention Ireland, mostly reminiscing about their unhappiness. Donoghue, however, does not limit herself to describe only those feelings. The story illustrates difficulties of coming out, the first female president of Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church, and most importantly, the decriminalisation of homosexual acts. It demonstrates the pretences that the two characters had to keep to be "respectable" and for their "reputations [to be] saved" (Donoghue 1994a, 208). The fact that Cyn has not returned to Ireland once since she left in 1980, implies that her attempts to come out in her youth were unsuccessful, therefore, she has made the decision to emigrate. Lou, however, visits his parents on a regular basis, where he lives a lie and is not willing to reveal his sexuality, as this has already caused his withdrawal from a seminary. Yet he is the one who insists that Ireland is changing, and that Cyn and he should revisit and witness its "growing up" (221). Cyn, whose name most likely derives from her cynical approach, is dubious. She does not feel that she would ever fit in: "I felt more of an exile for twenty years in Ireland than I ever have in the twelve I've been out of it" (211). She comes to terms with losing her national identity for a greater cause – her sexual identity. Furthermore, Cyn states that she does not remember ever having been asked if she wants to be Irish in the first place, which can be seen as an exemplification of a mutual refusal of national identity. This seems to be an unexceptional matter when dealing with diasporic identities; an individual's sense of hurt transcends into hate towards one's country of origin. Even though Cyn admits that, as a lesbian, she was "never illegal" (220), the stigma and the feeling of being the society's outcast still pervades in many lesbians¹. The story leaves the two characters on the verge, permitting them the choice whether to go back or not. However, it also leaves them filled with hope and, just like in "Scarlet O'Hara" the feeling of an imminent time of change, as "Dublin has its very own Pride March now" to celebrate the decriminalisation of homosexuality (*ibidem*), and "a female president up in the Park" (221).

I consider this story to be a sort of prelude to Donoghue's next two novels, as all three works have been written at a breaking moment for Irish lesbian writing upon its entrance into the stages of gender and sexuality realisation. Moira Casey argues that "Going Back", *Stir-fry* and *Hood* "directly engage with the cultural climate in Ireland surrounding homosexuality at that historical moment" (2011, 67). *Stir-fry* and *Hood* address Irish lesbians at the point of coming out, however, under different life circumstances of their protagonists. Whereas *Stir-fry* is a coming of age/coming out novel, portraying its heroine Maria moving to urban Dublin to attend a higher education institution, and eventually also discovering her sexual identity, *Hood* is an account of a middle-age lesbian, Pen, who is grieving a death of her love partner. The fictive exploration of a contemporary Irish lesbian identity had been the most innovative feature of Donoghue's first two novels. This section will, firstly, analyse *Stir-fry* from the perspective of a lesbian *Bildungsroman*, before moving to on to discuss the psychological elements contributing to the more overt of lesbian desire in *Hood*. Furthermore, the below analysis will also exemplify how *Stir-fry* and *Hood* are ingenuous portrayals of a transparent lack of acceptance within Irish society towards lesbians, thus creating particularly difficult circumstances for their main characters to not only be accepted, but also to accept their own sexualities.

¹What Cyn refers to is the political invisibility of lesbians, as the before-mentioned acts 61 and 62 of Irish Constitution only criminalised homosexual acts between men.

Bildungsroman is a term signifying the novel of formation or education. The subject matter of the novel is the development of the protagonist's (typically gendered male) growth and character in the passage from their childhood or youth into maturity (Gazda, Tynecka-Makowska 2006, 87). The process of development usually involves the recognition of the protagonist's identity (Träger 1989, 70) or a development of an artistic consciousness that leads to the creation of a fully crystallised personality. *Bildungsroman* shows the spontaneous development of the individual against the background of a certain era, where the process of educational and intellectual development of the protagonist is often influenced by certain institutions or other characters that are often distant to the protagonist and stimulate the hero according to their intentions (Gazda, Tynecka-Makowska 2006, 87-88). The protagonist undergoes many trials and enters various environments where he/she meets new people whose influence can be either harmful or beneficial. In the classical type of *Bildungsroman*, identity is defined as the individual selfhood that is achieved through growth and social experience. Wilhelm Dilthey, who had introduced the term to the critical vocabulary by employing it in the 1870-biography of Friedrich Schlegel, and then popularising it in *Poetry and Experience* (1985), had specified five essential components of *Bildungsroman* that include the author's personal experiences, the protagonist's gender, individualism or uniqueness, and psychological maturation that culminates in their full self-realisation of the self's potential². In the 1990s, there appeared a modern type of the genre that, as it introduces sex into discourse and makes it its central theme, transformed the traditional genre into a sexualised *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist's maturity is achieved through accepting his/her sexuality. In *Stir-fry*, the qualities of the traditional and sexualised *Bildungsroman* have been transfigured to accommodate and promote the lesbian context, thus creating the lesbian novel of development, or the lesbian *Bildungsroman*, which, according to Sally Munt, "has an explicit pedagogic function, to instruct the reader in the complexity and contemporaneity of lesbian identity" (1988, 17). The genre, therefore, which traditionally portrays the psychological development and the process of self-discovery of the main character, at the same time subverts the heterosexual discourse of the heteronormative *Bildungsroman* by focusing on the heroine's sexual development and the self-realisation of her lesbian sexuality. Furthermore, there is a close connection between the previously discussed concept of national identity and *Bildungsroman*, as the reformulation of the genre, which is typically gendered as male, enters and introduces the topic of lesbian sexuality that defies the hitherto prevailing hegemonic notions of Irish literature.

Maria, *Stir-fry*'s heroine, is a conjectural lesbian whose initial loneliness in the heteropatriarchal society is induced by her deliberate lack of heterosexual friends, excluding her college peer, Yvonne, as well as by her dissimilarity to the majority of female society, which is manifested in her negative feelings towards men, "men-repugnance" (Donoghue 1994b, 27). Predictably, as a *Bildungsroman* protagonist, Maria moves to Dublin to receive higher education. Her geographical journey from countryside to the city symbolises her movement away from Irish patriarchy towards the lesbian world where the process of coming-out provides "a point of exit from mainstream heterosexist culture" (Jay 1978, 28).

To present the blinding contrast between the traditional and the lesbian versions of *Bildungsroman*, I will use Jennifer Jeffers's reformulation of Dilthey's five constituents of the

² In terms of Irish literature, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) by James Joyce is an exemplary model of masculinist *Bildungsroman*. Joyce, in portraying his protagonist's development, strictly follows the tradition whilst adhering to the five essential components of the genre. Furthermore, this masculinist tradition is exhibited in the very title itself.

genre. Firstly, the young protagonist of *Bildungsroman* is traditionally a male, whereas in *Stir-fry* we are dealing with a female protagonist. To adapt this element, the protagonist of *Stir-fry* negotiates gender difference and experiences gender inferiority. Furthermore, Maria's journey concentrates on her adolescence and education, much like in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, that results in an affirmation of her sexuality. Secondly, the protagonist usually presents an individualism or uniqueness. This quality is again transferred into a lesbian context, as Maria's uniqueness is portrayed through her refusal to engage in heteronormative behaviours. Her individualism is especially vivid when compared to Yvonne, who is the voice of homogenous and homophobic Irish patriarchal society. This contrast is strengthened when Maria changes her physical appearance by cutting her hair, the act of which in particular, is seen by Yvonne, for whom looking 'straight' is of great importance, as a stereotypical feature of lesbian sexuality. Maria's atypicality also involves articulation of her difference in terms of sexual preference. She is "wedged into that [...] abject space [...] of being neither heterosexual nor homosexual" (Jeffers 2002, 98). Therefore, her uniqueness is revealed further by the inadequacy of her first lover (a male), which creates a sense of her inability to decide on her sexual desire (195), and, in effect, delays the promulgation of her sexual preference. Thirdly, the author's personal experiences influence the narrative, and indeed "Maria's eventual coming out colludes with the novel's biographical element" (92-93). Donoghue textualises female desire against the heteronormative tradition of writing. Her rejection of silence that she manifests by writing an openly lesbian fiction, presents her protagonist's uniqueness, as well as her own. Fourthly, the protagonist must undergo a psychological maturation, a journey, to, fifthly, come to the full self-realisation of one's potential. Maria's achievement of psychological maturation, followed by her development, allows for her "movement [...] from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty" (94), which is portrayed in her final realisation of her sexuality. Therefore, Maria's journey is completed, her coming of age/coming out process has established her as a mature character, who is conscious of her (sexual) identity.

Regardless of the classification, however, whether *Stir-fry* is categorised as the lesbian novel of development, the lesbian *Bildungsroman*, or the coming-out novel, it generates larger implications for literature and gender studies, and questions the properties of the genre, whilst exemplifying the transformation of the narrative to accommodate and prioritise the lesbian context. Furthermore, the possibility to reformulate *Bildungsroman* shakes the foundations of all literary genres, and thus, literary theory in general. It opens prospects for the creation of new, and the obliteration of old, literary genres. Just as the term *queer* is impossible to define in strict terms, queering any literary text defies the possibility of its precise categorisation. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Ireland allowed for the emergence of more than just openly lesbian texts – it permitted lesbian writers to initiate the formation of a new Irish literary canon that is not obligated to follow conventions of the previously prevailing hegemonic and male-dominated literary tradition.

Leaving aside the problem of categorisation, another important factor is Maria's emergence from the closet that, to this day, is "a defining structure for gay oppression" (Sedgwick 2008, 7). This action symbolises the knowledge that this emergence imposed upon the society. The knowledge requires reaction: to know is to acknowledge. Donoghue's novel, therefore, is a representation of an undeniable, however ignorant, acknowledgment of lesbian presence within Irish society.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable shift in the narrative from the previous stages. Donoghue concentrates on the processes of Maria's emotional and psychological development whilst presenting other features of *Bildungsroman*. The events, for which Donoghue deploys the third-person narrative from Maria's point of view, are presented in an objective manner

without the use of subjective comments. Events are depicted in a simple way with the use of dialogues, and the narration is not in any way experimental, as if Donoghue did not intend to distract the readers' attention from the social and psychological problems – the protagonist's emotional stir-fry, discussed in the novel by introducing innovative techniques. In this way, she stresses the importance of these problems and aims to present them in an authentic manner by referring to everyday language in an Irish context.

Post-decriminalisation Irish lesbian fiction has shifted its narrative to address other issues than those before the decriminalisation. It is concerned primarily with the process of coming out, presenting the individual's perennial struggle of self-discovery and self-realisation (although this process can never be complete or final). There are no covert references to lesbian desire; it is here, in the open, unwary of society's reaction, and facing courageously the consequences of its emergence. The course of leaving the closet is prevalent in the works of the first half of the 1990s³. Donoghue tries to avoid the conviction that lesbophobia is brought upon lesbians by themselves. Valentine argues that to come out of the closet is to call it simultaneously into being; paradoxically, "coming out of the closet does not demolish it but threatens to reinforce the closet's prevalence, thus reinforcing the marginalisation and invisibility of homosexuality in society" (2002, 157). Furthermore, Maria's emergence from the literal and metaphorical closet can be understood, at this particular stage in Irish lesbian writing, as representing the end of an enforced silence of Irish lesbians:

Maria's hand skimmed across the polished wood of the wardrobe, which was interrupted with scratches. She tried the intricate metal handle, half of which came off in her hand; as she was fitting it back into its hole, the door swung open. [...] Shutting her eyes, Maria let her fingertips follow the clothes [...] Perhaps ten minutes passed in this way, with her breath getting deeper and the slow boom of the heart the only sound. Then Maria reached under her nightshirt and touched herself for the first time since she could remember. [...] [At] the sound of a key in the front door . . . bending low, she slid out of the wardrobe without too much disturbance, and shut it softly behind her. (Donoghue 1994b, 183-184)

Hood (1995), Donoghue's next novel, other than presenting lesbian identity from a slightly different perspective, seems to be continuing the individualities of her characters, and is, just as *Stir-fry*, concerned with the process of coming out of its protagonist. However, Donoghue shifts her plot into a darker sphere, where her main character, Pen, grieves the death of her long-term partner, Cara. Pen's coming out seems to be more advanced than in the case of *Stir-fry*, as Pen has already undergone the first two stages of lesbian identity development process, therefore, her self-identification as a lesbian is already completed. Her process of coming out, in this instance, is taking place on other levels, as she discloses her sexual identity to her friends, family, colleagues, and incidental members of society. Pen's story of development is complex; unlike Maria, she does not achieve maturity or sexual realisation but, instead, faces difficulties of coming out in an austere Irish Catholic environment. Furthermore, Pen's identity development is parallelised with the process of grieving, where the stages of the grieving process can be identified in accordance with those indicated by Kübler-Ross (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance).

The plot of *Hood* plays a minor role and is dependent on the psychological experiences of its heroine. Psychological motifs are related closely to social and moral elements as Pen is

³ In Donoghue's *Hood* (1995), Pen's metaphorical sexuality is also closeted by hiding a "Technically a Virgin" badge in her wardrobe.

entangled in various relationships and social dependences. The action is a sequence of psychological events to which other events are subordinated. Additionally, the fact that the plot is condensed within a space of a week makes Pen's experiences more vivid, and the consecutive stages of grieving that she encounters can at times be observed within one paragraph. Through encapsulating the plot and its events in short spaces of time, as Pen is forced to return to work only three days after Cara's death, Donoghue emphasises the need for a formal recognition of lesbian partnerships in state institutions. Additionally, Donoghue's attempt to illustrate lesbian individualism is portrayed in Pen's resistance to being identified with lesbians, Cara's friends, when she attends Cara's wake, and her further refusal to their invitations, as Pen seems to be resisting all these social practices in order to maintain her individuality.

As opposed to Donoghue's first novel, *Hood's* protagonist is a much older and insular character. However, there is a noticeable continuation of the plot and the characters from *Stir-fry*⁴. Whereas Maria's disentanglement evolved around her process of coming out, the plot of *Hood*, despite Pen 'leaving the closet' on many other levels, "appears to advocate lesbian integration in mainstream Irish society, not through a denial of difference, but through mutual understanding and acceptance" (Quinn 2000, 164). What is more, Cara's death is used as a metaphor to present "a cry against homophobia on the part of heterosexual society and separation on the part of the lesbian community" (164-165). *Hood*, by denying Pen to grieve Cara openly, repudiates lesbian otherness by intersecting elements of theory and fiction that refer obliviously to traumatology, and concomitantly protesting silently against Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act.

5. *Transnationalism in Emma Donoghue's Landing (2007)*

Landing is significantly different in comparison to Donoghue's previous lesbian novels, as it openly portrays a transnational love affair between Irish Síle and Canadian Jude, who overcome the distance in order to be together. The novel, as opposed to Donoghue's writings from the nineties, does not deal with the process of coming out; instead, it moves onto discussing a lesbian relationship in transnational scenery that refers to the heightened interconnectivity and multiple interactions that link people across the borders of nation-states. The influence of the transnationalism on the narrative of the novel is indicated in the initiation of the main characters' relationship that takes place at the airport, in, as Casey observes, "a sort of in-between state" (2011, 70). Whereas in the mid-nineties, the process of coming out was of great interest to writers and readers, over a decade later the narrative has made a substantial shift into the modern world. Donoghue observes that "lesbian writing is not particularly known for its stylistic or structural experimentation; we're getting noticed for the new things we're saying, not for how we're saying them" (Thompson 2003, 175). Consequently, this is exactly what she does – she experiments with new themes that have occurred in lesbian existence in Ireland, by portraying present attitudes and making a noteworthy comparison to twentieth-century Ireland. Irish society is no longer portrayed as homo- and lesbophobic; as an alternative, Donoghue's characters move freely around the globe, making love and attending gay weddings. Male homosexuality, lesbian sexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality merge, forming a sense of long-awaited equality and happiness. Having said that, the aforementioned interdependence does not exclude racist and homophobic events that still make their appearance in the twenty-first-century Irish society of *Landing* (Donoghue 2007, 186-

⁴ Cara replaces the polygamist butch Jael from *Stir-fry* and, equally, monogamist femme Ruth is replaced by Pen, the main character of *Hood*.

191). These, however, are of a minor importance to the plot's development and are ridiculed by its characters (35), as the novel primarily "problematizes both points of origin and assumptions about whiteness and Irish identity" (O'Toole 2013, 139).

In the past, many Irish lesbians, at some point in their lives, have felt the need to emigrate, mainly to the UK, on the grounds of their sexualities.⁵ This trend is now in full reversal, with many displaced Irish diasporans returning to Ireland. Ireland has noted an increased tendency for its emigrants to return to their roots, particularly between the mid-1990s and 2000. "When we were at college, [...] didn't it seem like everyone we knew was moving [away from Ireland]? But then the minute the Boom happened, most of them came rushing home" (Donoghue 2007, 292). Additionally, there is a contradistinction in the number of LGBTQI+ community members' rural to urban migration. Whereas it is still widely considered that, as Síle observes, "queers should head for the biggest city they know and stay there" (231), it is of a clichéd nature with many gay men and lesbians moving to rural parts of Ireland. Although "nothing's spelled out" and their neighbours would "rather not receive a wedding invitation", they "get on grand" (*ibidem*) and are generally accepted. In order to accentuate Landing's globalised nature, Donoghue places her characters "doing the time zone tango" (238) between Dublin, Ireland and Ireland, Ontario. This wordplay diminishes the feeling of great distance and makes the world a smaller place, a place in which distances and borders do not exist, where her characters are "citizen[s] of the world" (301).

The novel, therefore, is best analysed from the perspective of transnationalism. The term 'transnationalism' seems to be accurate in terms of assigning a new, imaginary space without the use of territorial claims and borders, as it concentrates on issues of mobility and border-transcending processes, whilst emphasising the fluidity of movement. Transmigrants, similarly, are "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" (Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc 1995, 48). In *Landing*, national boundaries are being displaced as Jude and Síle travel continuously in order to decide on their final destination. The choice here, contrary to previous reasons for migration, depends strictly on one's emotional attachment to the place of origin rather than old-fashioned patriotism. Mr Donohoe, in his August 2014 statement for *The Irish Times*, observes that in

old ideas of patriotism, such as blind loyalty and unquestioning obedience do not sit well with [the Irish], and for good reason. History shows that powerful institutions like church, state or business must be challenged and scrutinised, so that they work for the common good, and not their own interests. To do otherwise can lead to scandal, corruption or dysfunction. (Collins 2014, n.p.)

Transnationalism in *Landing* is a result of the interconnectedness of the world as a consequence of global capitalism. It emphasises here the emergence of social process in which two women establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Donoghue "explores [...] the subject of desire across distances of various kinds: generational, cultural, [and] even spiritual" (Brownrigg 2007, n.p.). Despite the fact that the importance of immigrant groups in transnational activities has been limited, it is nevertheless significant in terms of development prospects for nations and communities. Transnationalism, especially contemporaneously, does indeed play an irrevocably crucial role in hybridising processes of contemporary societies. Síle

⁵ The 1995 GLEN/Combat Poverty research demonstrated that 60% of Irish emigrants for the reason of their sexuality (Connolly, O'Toole 2005, 186-187).

and Jude, therefore, become representatives of the new generation of queer transmigrants that Donoghue has written in “an attempt to critique or reshape the homeland” (O’Toole 2013, 139). I must stipulate that when I refer to transnationalism, I have in mind the creation of a new social space and “the ways that the everyday practices of ordinary people, their feelings, and understandings of their conditions of existence, often modify those very conditions and thereby shape rather than merely reflect new modes of urban culture” (Smith 1992, 493). This is especially true in a lesbian context, where the power relations are being shaped in resistance to dominant hegemonic and patriarchal power structures, and where the transnational subjectivity is often acquired through the rejection of the concept of affiliation as the basis of identity. Here, I would like to return to the previously discussed theory of Benedict Anderson who, with his notions of ‘imagined communities’ and ‘print capitalism’, seemed to have reached out far into the future. The influence of the print in the era of capitalism, strengthened by inventions of the twentieth century, such as telecommunication and technology, as well as rendering of, and resistance to, the nation-state in the phase of globalisation, seem to be at the centre of the novel’s long-distance relationship. General assumptions about national belonging, as well as identity, ethnicity, and sexuality, are reversed through its cosmopolitan, lesbian, and of an Indian-origin main character, Síle.

Furthermore, transnationalism is perceptible in the language of the novel. Donoghue equips her characters with the means of modern communication, information technology, and cheap air travel, to emphasise the existence of glocality and its influence on transnational queer subjectivity, as well as general perception and reception of lesbians. An ease with which the long-distance relationship between Canada and Ireland is pursued, implicates positive impacts of the era of the Celtic Tiger and a sudden improvement of Irish economy that resulted in globalisation. Civil society is to be understood here as “the voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions that form the basis of the functioning society” (Murphy 2009, n.p.) that at the local level are responsible for community’s developmental processes. The Celtic Tiger, Ireland’s participation in the EEC (later the European Union) affairs and opening its borders to allow fluid migration of workers, resulted in the creation of hybrid cultural identities. All these issues have been included in *Landing* that shows the contemporaneity of Irish society through the eyes of its excursionist, Síle. The borders between various identities and labels in *Landing* become fluid as its characters change their sexual preferences (Donoghue 2007, 42), geographical locations, and marital statuses. Donoghue reports intrinsically issues afflicting Ireland of the time – racism, homophobia, and paedophilia in the Church.

Although I discuss *Landing* from a transnational point of view, when approaching an analysis of its characters, it is vital to make a distinction between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Whereas the plot of the novel is a result of transnational movements, to classify Síle as an economic migrant would be a major misconception, because although transnationalism was used initially to describe movements, it now refers largely to economic migration. Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is characterised by a more sophisticated border crossing. Bauman enables new insights into distinguishing these two terms by deploying the images of the tourist and the “vagabond” (1998, 93), where the latter refers to transnational people and the former represents intellectual individuals who demonstrate “an openness towards divergent cultural experiences” (Hannerz 1996, 239). Since Síle’s dislocation is voluntary and dictated by the country of origin of her partner, as well as influenced by the nature of her employment and the Celtic Tiger that transformed Dublin into a successful metropolis, she can be most accurately analysed with the use of a cosmopolitan lens. This approach, permitting to distinguish these two adverse definitions, allows for a clearer understanding of the consequences of transnationalism on the Irish lesbian narrative. Undeniably, the increased influx of immigrants, as well as returning

Irish nationals, has played a crucial role in the shaping of the lesbian narrative of Ireland. The progressive way of perception of sexual minorities is the biggest victory of the transnational movement for the Irish LGBTQI+ community, as the hitherto prevailing Irish insularity gives way to the Europeanised general mentality and lesbian authors follow their foreign predecessors in portraying their characters as inclusive sexual citizens of the world.

Despite Donoghue's own migration in 1990, I do believe that it is "the timing of the essence" (Dorcey 1990, 204) that contributed to the rapid development of lesbian writing in Ireland. In terms of transnationalism and allegoric references to Ireland's development, as well as being influenced by her own diasporic experiences, Donoghue creates two parallel settings that seem to be interdependent of each other: Dublin, Ireland and Ireland, Ontario. In this instance, however, Donoghue, quite ironically, portrays the Canadian town of Ireland as a representation of rural Ireland in the future context. Concomitantly, Donoghue's characters can be interpreted as the representation of two different Irelands. Whereas Jude symbolises the old Ireland, the cosmopolitanised Síle, with her neoliberal feminist approach, is an embodiment of the new globalised Ireland. Themes present in *Landing* are a reflection of Irish societal behaviour concerning homosexuality and lesbian sexuality. Transnationalism, through its unreserved flow of information and ideas, has allowed for a modernised and acceptant perception of lesbians within Irish society. This shows how the influence of geographical movement on representations and engagement with sexual identities. As I argue elsewhere, queer global movement allowed for the development of Irish lesbian fiction in a direction of an overt presence of lesbians on the pages of Irish lesbian writings, as it juxtaposed lesbian experiences in and of Ireland (Charczun 2019, 94-95). Furthermore, a transnationalistic approach in *Landing* emphasises the need to abolish the domination of a Western modernity that marginalises non-Western sexualities. The cultural heritage of Síle represents a challenge against the predominance of a Western hegemonic model of sexuality politics. In this way, Donoghue insists that the inclusion of diverse sexual identities in lesbian discourse is necessary to achieve a more-inclusive international queer community that will enable lesbians to see themselves as a part of a global community, where their commonalities will not be denied by race and nationality alone (Altman 1996, 84).

Transnationalism seems to also have changed Irish people's attitude towards Catholicism, as its absence in Donoghue's novel is highly noticeable. In fact, Ireland is already seen by some as a post-Catholic, or post-religious country. In the 1970s, almost ninety percent of Irish Catholics attended Mass at least once a week. Today, this number has decreased by sixty-five percent. In addition to this, in Dublin itself, only two or three percent of self-described Catholics go to church on a regular basis (Potter 2011, n.p.). I need to emphasise, however, that these numbers refer only to practising Catholics as, according to the Central Statistics Office, there are in Ireland still nearly four million registered Catholics, of whom over three and a half million are Irish (Census of Ireland 2011). Deborah Potter has also noticed an accelerated decline of the Irish Catholic Church. Whereas the cause of this cannot be ascribed to only one factor, such as the Church's sex scandals in recent accusations clerical paedophilia, it is, however, an undebatable end of the alternative religious society within Ireland, an alternative state within the state. The Church's influence has begun to wane further with the decreasing number of Irish Catholic Priests. In 1984, there were 171 ordinations, whereas twenty-two years later, in 2006, the number has plummeted drastically (McFadden 2014, n.p.). According to the Irish Catholic Directory (2008), if current trends continue, Ireland could lose over sixty percent of its priests by 2028. This shows the disappearing homophobic tendencies in Irish national culture, which in the past used to be incited by the preaching of the Catholic Church.

6. Conclusion

The narrative of Irish lesbian fiction has undergone an unrecognisable transformation; in the short space of just over twenty years, the authors have begun to not only discuss lesbian desire openly and fearlessly - they are celebrating lesbian love with a newly found courage and aim to discuss lesbian lives from a different perspective to the one from twenty years ago. This transformation is an effect of a variety of factors, ranging from the reconciliation of multiple identities, the battle to decriminalise homosexual acts, and a deployment of a plethora of intertextual narrational techniques to represent the hitherto minoritised lesbian sexualities and identities. Whereas at the end of the 1980s lesbian fiction dealt predominantly with the subject of coming out, the first decade of the twenty-first century experienced an over presence of lesbian desire on the pages of Irish lesbian fiction by Mary Dorcey and Emma Donoghue.

While Ireland has only recently granted equal marriage rights to same-sex couples (May 2015), the development process of the Irish lesbian novel seems complete. However, with the final stage now provisionally achieved, Irish lesbians face other challenges, away from the literary field alone. It is the role of the authors to record their experiences during those turbulent times of their fight for equality, and to enter lesbian existence into the canon of Irish literature, where lesbian desire will be spoken about not only in an open manner, but also with the sense of an immeasurable pride.

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Coming Out, Queer Sex, and Heteronormativity in two Irish-language Novels

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Abstract:

It has been nearly 30 years since Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “Queer Theory” in a special edition of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* (1991). Since then, Queer Theory has evolved and changed, becoming an interdisciplinary in-vogue “methodology” that questions the subversive and the different. The social, cultural, and literary landscape of Ireland has also changed in those 30 years, a country that was once seen as a place where “homosexuality has occupied an uncomfortable place” (Conrad 2001, 124). This paper will discuss the literary texts of two Irish-language writers, Micheál Ó Conghaile and Pádraig Standún, who both reflect these shifts in attitudes in contemporary modern Ireland. Both writers unpack public and private expressions of identity, sex, and heteronormativity in their work. Bringing bold new themes to a language that was once perceived to be linked to nationalism and the Catholic Church, both Ó Conghaile and Standún engage with queer themes in their literary works, which have largely gone unnoticed by English language critics. This paper will seek to flesh out how these Irish-language writers spoke to, and for, a community within a community and for a minority within a minority. Discussing both *Sna Fir* (1999; *Amongst Men*)¹ and *Cion Mná* (1993; *A Woman's Love*), I will explore how queer identity has intersected with Irish-language literature and will question how these texts interact with broader cultural phenomena such as coming out, queer sex, and heteronormativity.

Keywords: Gaeilge, Gender and Literature, Irish Queer Fiction, Micheál Ó Conghaile, Pádraig Standún

1. Introduction: Queering and Queering Irish-Language Identity and Literature

Éibhear Walshe (1997) posits that literary production, including the novel, became a tool to assert national difference between Ireland and England throughout the revival period (late nineteenth to early twentieth century). A coherent masculine identity was at the heart of the revival's aims which Walshe terms as “masculinist nationalism”. Masculinist nationalism, informed

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are mine.



by a variety of images and mythology of identities (Nic Dhiarmada 1998), was at the heart of the revival period. In the past number of decades, however, Irish-language writers have begun to disrupt this narrative and are now speaking to transgressive, and oftentimes challenging, themes such as the coming out narrative, queer sex, and non-normative sexual behaviour and identities. Micheál Ó Conghaile and Pádraig Standún, two Irish-language writers, both engage with and chart queer identities and love in two important texts: *Sna Fir* (Ó Conghaile 1999) and *Cion Mná* (Standún 1993). While *Sna Fir* deals with a queer man in his twenties navigating his sexual desires in urban spaces, *Cion Mná* deals with two queer women's blossoming relationship in rural spaces. Before looking at both texts, I will provide a contextual survey of how the voice and tone of Irish-language literature changed from a masculinist one during the revival to a more diverse and complex one in contemporary literary works in the Irish-language.

Literature in Irish was not always so anxious to maintain what I would see as a masculinist normative identity. Interestingly, the bardic poetry of the sixteenth century was layered with homoerotic themes and imagery (McKibben 2010). The Early Modern period of Irish (1200-1650), saw the emergence of eloquent, professional poetry as a form of early modern public relations. The land of Ireland represented through poetic imagery, was an ongoing motif in this period. Lacey (2008) points out that male bards were oftentimes seen as symbolically married to their chieftains. Poetry, as mentioned by McKibben, would serve as a tool to counteract "in potent terms of emasculation, penetration and dissolution" (2010, 7). This was on the back of the Act for the English Order, Habit and Language (1537) that sought to create an English colony of Ireland. Bards were obliged to maintain the link to the Irish political elite through praising their chieftains as their primary function. This relationship included praise of "the patron's undeniable sexual potency [...] an additional proxy for leadership confirming the poet's own homoeroticism as merely conventional in an institutionalized structure" (McKibben 2010, 174). Although very much a poetic conceit, the poetry of this era was markedly homoerotic and conveyed an anxiety about English colonialization.

The Irish cultural revival (beginning in 1884) was noted by Máirín Nic Eoin as one of the most important intellectual movements in Ireland (1982, 25). What the revival sought to deliver and promote was the idealisation of Irish identity through a cultural tradition in order to set itself against British cultural identities (Woods 1998, 42). This was achieved through the promotion of the Irish language, the arts, sport, and political movements. The trajectory of the liberalisation and contemporising of Irish-language literature can be traced back to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In "Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish Identity", Kathryn Conrad (2001) explores the manner in which non-normative historical figures were handled in Irish history. Looking at Oscar Wilde, Roger Casement, Eva Gore-Booth, and Kate O'Brien, Conrad dissects the social and political history of Ireland under the spectrum of non-normative identity and the manner in which they were treated with disdain by a Catholic Nationalist Ireland. Until recently, queer history was often ignored in various social historical accounts of Ireland (Lacey 2008, 6). The development of queer sexuality and social movements in Irish history is a complex one; from a suppressed homosexual subpopulation to the emergence of a significant trans rights movement. Non-normative sexuality, and any transgressors, were treated with a disdain which stemmed largely from various inherited colonial laws or from Catholic dogma (Ferriter 2009, 6).

The 1937 Irish Constitution saw the family unit being immediately positioned as an important institution and was enshrined as a legally protected entity which would create a coherency of normative lives and solidify gender roles for the new Irish Republic (Conrad 2001). From the foundation of the state, nationalism and conservative political and religious

beliefs went hand in hand. Any outward threat to the family unit was marked with anxiety and resistance. Homosexuality was seen as a foreign import, or as something which came “from foreign hands” (Lacey, 2008). Homosexuality was not seen as a native or normal state of being or identity. Ireland, as a nation, strived to build a puritanical society, in order to remain safe from homosexuality. Homosexuality was categorised neatly as either a crime, a disease, or as a sin (Aldrich, Wotherspoon 2001[2000], 9). However, a more pluralist, inclusive society emerged from this era, which saw Irish attitudes and policies change having been influenced by international events and contexts (see Rose 1994 [1993], 10). The Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York inspired the establishment of gay and lesbian organisations and movements in Ireland, which in turn championed the creation of a more socially inclusive, pluralist Irish society through the decriminalisation of sexual activity between males in 1993 (Bowyer 2010, 57), and the successful marriage equality referendum in 2015.

Through centuries of the British colonisation of Ireland, the Irish-language has indeed recognised homosexuality and queer identities as real phenomenon. De Brún (2017), discussing an essay by Nicholas Williams published in the 1970s, explains that homosexuality was rarely mentioned in the literature of the language. However, in Daithí Ó Luineacháin’s (1997) dictionary of sexuality, the writer lists several native words for non-normative sexual identities, including *cigire tónach* (bottom inspector), *buachaill baitín* (batty boy), and *Muireann i mbríste* (a woman called Muireann in trousers). While the terms appear to be derogatory, they prove that non-normative sexuality was indeed an acknowledged and known phenomenon. Attempts at linking the Irish-language with a queer urban community was seen in the early nineties with the establishment of GAA (Gaeilgeoirí Aontaithe Aeracha / United Gay Irish Speakers). Woods (1998), in her anthropological and sociolinguistic study of the group, saw its establishment as an attempt to overthrow the cultural and ideological hangover of nineteenth century conservatism in relation to homosexuality. Interestingly, Ohno (2002) describes how the marrying of queer and Irish-language cultures is a natural one; both communities are minorities in the country, and both have fought, or are fighting, for community rights. This contrasts with the views of literary and social commentators such as Ciarán Ó Coigligh (1993, 24), who suggested that homosexuality as a phenomenon only included 1% of the population and therefore was “undeserving” of such critical and social attention. However, more recently we see the establishment of the group Aerach.Aiteach.Gaelach. This group, founded by poet Ciara Ní É, aims to develop interdisciplinary works that will celebrate Irish language LGBT+ speakers across Ireland.

Much like the social movements detailed above, Irish-language literature has gone on a “transformative journey” (Ó Siadhail 2010, 145), running parallel with major societal developments in the Republic of Ireland. Ní Chléirchín (2004) notes how Irish-language poets became outward-looking due to the INNTI movement. INNTI was a literary magazine founded by a group of young poets in University College Cork, who began dissecting themes and issues during the “Year that Rocked the World” (1968) according to Ó Dúshláine (2011, 7). Irish-language literature has counted queer writers such as Micheál Ó Conghaile and Cathal Ó Searcaigh in its contemporary canon, while others such as Pádraig Standún, Pádraig Ó Cíobháin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, spoken-word poet Ciara Ní É, Alex Hijmans, and Proinsias Mac a’ Bhaird have represented queer love in their literary works through the medium of Irish. This new dawn in Irish-language literature contrasts greatly with the literature of the twentieth-century revival, which centred on traditional novels based on perceived normative relationships. Therefore, this paper will look at two prominent queer novels, both from the 1990s, that seek to reflect queer Irish-language lives.

2. Micheál Ó Conghaile: *Queer Eye for the Irish (Language) Guy*

Faighimid pictiúr gléineach de bheatha inmheánach, de shaol síceach más maith leat, Ghaeltacht Chonamara faoi mar atá sí i láthair na huaire. Ríomhann sé a n-intíreachas dúinn le súile tiorma. Fadhbanna a chuid carachtar, ní fadhbanna bochtaineachta ná easpa airgid iad (cé nach maifí nach bhfuil a leithéid ann), ach fadhbanna pearsanta síoraí an duine – amhras agus botúnacht agus féinaithne agus féinmheas [...]. (Tittley 1987, 42)

We get a depiction of internal life, of the psychic life, if you will, of the Conamara Gaeltacht as it is today. He discusses the parochial with clear intent. With regards to his characters' problems, they are not ones of poverty or a lack of money (though they are indeed there), but the personal problems of the person – the doubt and the awkwardness of self-awareness and self-respect [...].

Micheál Ó Conghaile, one of the Irish-language's most well-known and prolific contemporary writers, was born on the now abandoned Gaeltacht (Irish-Speaking) island of Inis Treabhair in County Galway in 1962. Now recognised for his experimental expressions of queer experience in his literary works, Ó Conghaile displayed an interest in writing and literature from a young age (Ó Siadhail 2005, 55). Literature provided Ó Conghaile with a much-needed release from island life that allowed him to explore and feed his imagination (Mac Con Iomaire 2000, 31). As Ó Conghaile began to write, he made the decision to write through the medium of Irish. As a native speaker of Irish, Ó Conghaile felt that this would be a natural direction for his work. Ó Conghaile later founded *Cló Iar-Chonnachtin* in 1985. This is now Ireland's largest private Irish-language publishing house (Ó Siadhail 2010, 147). Ó Conghaile wanted to support the development of Irish-language literature and to offer a platform for less well-known writers who were writing through the medium of the language (Bord na Gaeilge 1990, 4). As both publisher and writer, Ó Conghaile saw the development of contemporary Irish-language literature which dealt with new and exciting thematic explorations, that challenged conservative assumptions others made about the language (Ó Conghaile 2003, 229).

Ó Conghaile's publishing company gave both academic scholars and creative writers the opportunity to publish their works for both international and national audiences. His own creative and academic work sees the development of his craft and his coming of age as a writer. His first collection of short stories, *Mac an tSagairt (The Priest's Son)*, published in 1986, dealt with a variety of societal issues, including suicide, abortion, and separation. The short story as a literary genre was envisaged by Pádraig Mac Piarais to be the most appropriate form of creative expression for the Irish-language[,] as it mirrored traditional storytelling (Ní Dhonnchadha 1981, 51). *Mac an tSagairt* was celebrated for its rich handling of themes and its self-confident and realised style (Ní Dhonnchadha 1987, 28). Ó Conghaile then went on to publish a collection of traditional Irish songs in his 1986 *Croch Suas É! (Sing up!)*, as well as a collection of poetry in *Combrá Caillí (The Hag's Conversation)* in 1987, a medium that the writer has since abandoned. His undergraduate training in history gave him the skill set to undertake a study of the social history and cultural links between Conamara and the Aran islands in 1988. His short story collection *An Fear a Phléasc (The Man that Exploded)* gained a great deal of critical attention. Breathnach and Ní Neachtain (2010, 65) note that the seeds of this text were well and truly planted in *Mac an tSagairt* and that these seeds come to fruition in this effort. Throughout this collection, the writer creates in some of his stories a queer and often surreal world where he unearths gay cruising, gay rape, and the coming out narrative. Here we encounter a brave new voice in Irish-language literature. Ó Conghaile then went on to what could be assumed to be a companion collection in 2003 with *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire (The Man that Doesn't*

Laugh), which similarly addresses themes ranging from anonymous gay sex to issues surrounding mental health. Other efforts include the 2001 novella *Seachrán Jeaic Sheáin Johnny* (*Jeaic Sheáin Johnny's Wanderings*), which deals with an elderly traditional singer falling in love with a young song collector. With that, Ó Conghaile then went on to write three plays *Cúigear Chonamara* (*The Conamara Five* 2003), *Jude* (2007), and *Go dTága do Ríocht* (*Thy Kingdom Come* 2009). His three plays deal with various themes including cross-dressing, coming out, and parental control. More recently, Ó Conghaile has refocused his attention on the short story with the publication of *Diabhláocht Dé* (*God's Devilment*) in 2015 and has returned to the novella in *Sa Teach seo Aocht* (2019; *In this House Tonight*).

However, this paper seeks to consider how Ó Conghaile has disrupted the Irish literary canon through concentrating on queer themes and motifs in his writings. Máirín Nic Eoin has described Ó Conghaile's style as both distinctive and recognisable (2005, 363) as he engages with thematic content not regularly seen in the Irish-language literary canon until recent times. Ó Conghaile fleshes out some of his most noteworthy themes in his award-winning novel *Sna Fir*. Ó Siadhail (2010) has described the text as a queer *Bildungsroman* of Irish-language literature. This paper will focus primarily on *Sna Fir* and how Ó Conghaile disrupts the *status quo* in relation to sex and sexuality throughout the text.

3. Pádraig Standún: *The Renegade Priest*

Scribhneoir é an Standúnach nach leasc leis an rud atá ar intinn aige a rá go poiblí. Dearbhaíonn sé go bhfuil sé de dhualgas air é seo a dhéanamh fad is a bhíonn an t-inspreagadh beo ann. (Ó hEanáchain 1991, 6)

Standún is a writer that doesn't regret saying what is on his mind publicly. He confirms that it is his responsibility as long as the motivation is still alive within him.

Pádraig Standún is both a novelist and Catholic priest who writes provocatively on contemporary issues, which include queer themes, in his work. Born in Castlebar, Co. Mayo in 1946, Standún has become one of the most prolific novelists in contemporary Irish-language writing. His play *Uisce ina Fhiona* (*Water into Wine*) was shortlisted by Ó Conghaile's Cló Iar-Chonnacht's literary awards, and an English language film based on his novel *Súil le Breith* (translated by the author as *Lovers* 1983) was produced as *Budawanny* (1987). Standún has spent time as a parish priest in various Gaeltachtaí over the years including in An Cheathrú Rua, in Inis Meáin, and in Inis Oírr. He took leave from his religious vocation in 1990, in order to focus on his writing. Standún has led what some might argue is a non-normative life, living with a woman and even helping with the rearing of his partner's children (Ó Muirí 1992, 28). He says "I had a life unlike many priests, in so far as I was a husband in every way but on paper and a father to a daughter who came into my life as a young girl [...]" (*ibidem*). Therefore, it is clear that Standún is happy to push through the strict religious parameters laid down by the Catholic church and has been nicknamed *Sagart an Ghrá* (*Priest of Love*) (*ibidem*).

In the account of his years as a parish priest, discussed by Ó Muirí (*ibidem*), writing and his ministry are the most important things in Standún's life. The intellectual cradle of Standún's work has been said to be firmly rooted in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth where Standún trained as a priest (Ó Ceallaigh 1998, 340). His ability in discussing sensitive, and often controversial, themes could be seen as an attempt to destabilise the national narrative (Ó Conchubhair 2005). Standún's first novel, *Súil le Breith*, was described by Ó Siadhail as "the story of Fr. Tom

Connor and his pregnant lover and housekeeper, Marion Warde, against a backdrop of a rural community struggling to survive” (2010, 146). In *A.D. 2016* (1988) Standún again uses the voice of a priest who is on pilgrimage to Dublin during the centenary of the 1916 rising, seen in *Súil le Breith* (1983). *Ciocras* (*Eagerness* 1991) again used a priest as a main character and questioned the dogma of celibacy. *An tAinmí* (*The Anvy* 1992), saw a shift in Standún’s style to include the supernatural, depicted as a crude animal terrorising the local community. In 1993, *Na hAntraipeologicals* (*The Anthropologists*), looked at how Gaeltacht communities are subjected to outside academic study and how this affects the community. However, in the same year Standún published *Cion Mná* (*A Woman’s Love*), which Ó Siadhail describes as a novel where “the lesbian relationship between the fictional Chief Executive of Údarás na Gaeltachta, the state’s agency for Gaeltacht industrial and community development, and her housekeeper, while also exploring issues of local politics, spousal abuse and community rights” (2010, 147).

Since the publication of *Cion Mná*, Standún has written six other novels dealing with various themes relating to religion, sex and sexuality, and contemporary Irish life. However, no other novel in Standún’s body of work deals so directly with queer love and the themes that surround it. Although there has been some critical attention for the book, particularly by Ó Siadhail (2010), a queer reading of the text has yet to be undertaken.

4. *Coming Out: Compulsive Confession and Foucault*

The coming out narrative is seen in both literature and society as an empowering but oftentimes dangerous disclosure. Davies (1992) in “The Role of Disclosure in Coming Out Among Gay Men”, explains the importance of coming out by giving language to identity and desire. Coming out sees queer people moving “out” from the privacy of the closet. Foucault theorizes how sexuality and sexual acts are often compulsively confessed and are, in this way, “outed” (1978, 59). We confess our crimes, our sins, our thoughts, and our desires routinely through narrative-building in both life and art. Culturally, this form of confession, and compulsion to confess, is rooted largely in the relief of outing oneself. This particular desire, or compulsion, is “*ingrained in us*” (60; emphasis added). Confession has played a major role in the history of sexuality, and it is the sexual act and the “thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of pleasure that animated it” (63) that reinforces shame of identity. This form of compulsive confession is seen in how queer people are policed by external forces (doctors, teachers, priests etc.). Both Micheál Ó Conghaile and Pádraig Standún, in *Sna Fir* and *Cion Mná* respectively, deal with the coming out narrative in starkly different ways.

Sna Fir follows the coming of age of John Paul Mac Donncha, a young man from the Conamara Gaeltacht. Ó Siadhail notes that Ó Conghaile’s novel captures the “experiences of a range of situations, from casual nocturnal sexual encounters in the Phoenix Park [...] to Dublin’s gay bar and private club scene; the queer community in London; [and] his first long-term homosexual relationship” (2010, 149). John Paul’s sexual and emotional encounters with the queer community in Dublin and London rehearses the ongoing coming out narrative in queer people’s lives. Coming out is not shown as a singular event in Ó Conghaile’s novel, but as an ongoing process. The protagonist not only comes out to each man he has a sexual encounter with, but also repeatedly to himself. Interestingly, in one such sexual encounter in Dublin’s Phoenix Park, John Paul meets with Seán, a young man who relies on John Paul to guide him through his first experience of cruising. However, Seán’s nervousness and anxiety over whether or not God is angry with them because of their behaviour is clear from the outset. John Paul and

Seán's encounter shows the need to identify and recognise humanity in the queer world. John Paul's befriending of Seán for guidance over the sexually-charged atmosphere of the public space shows how the coming out narrative is never a linear process, but always an ongoing outing of oneself, even in anonymous spaces like the public park.

Cion Mná handles the coming out differently, while representing queer women in stark terms for the first time in Irish-language literature. Interestingly, Standún's novel was published the same year as the decriminalization of male homosexuality in Ireland, reflecting the changing national discourse in relation to sexuality and identity in contemporary Ireland. The coming out narrative is displayed in the relationship between Therese, the CEO of Údarás na Gaeltachta, and her home-help, Bridie. Early on in the text, we begin to understand Therese as a hard-working and no-nonsense character, leading to her nickname *Thatch* (echoing Margaret Thatcher). Unlike John Paul and Seán in *Sna Fir*, Therese and Bridie's relationship is mainly rooted in private spaces, behind closed doors, and is not as sexually-charged. Bridie, upon leaving with her young son Caomhán an abusive relationship, finds refuge in Therese's employ in the Gaeltacht. Both characters slowly begin to develop a deep (at first) platonic relationship, which is initiated when a vulnerable Bridie explains to Therese what had happened to her in England. The theme of coming out slowly comes to a head throughout the text, as Bridie first refuses her identification as a queer woman, only eventually to feel empowered and embrace her attraction to Therese:

Is maith liom thú. Tá tú go maith dom, do Chaomhán. Ach ní leispiach mise. Níl aon chlaonadh mar sin ionam. Is maith liom fir, cé go mbíonn an ghráin agam orthu mar gheall ar rudaí a tharla, má thuigeann tú mé [...] Is maith liomsa fir freisin. Níl a fhios agam céard is leispiach ann. Tá a fhios agam céard a chiallaíonn sé, ar ndóigh. Ach ní airím aon chlaonadh faoi leith i dtreo na mban seachas na fir. Ach is fearr liom thusa ná duine ar bith ar an saol. (Standún 1993, 128)

I like you. You are good for me, for Caomhán. But I'm not a lesbian. I don't have that inclination in me. I like men, although I sometimes hate them for things that have happened, if you understand me [...] I like men as well. I don't know what a lesbian is. I know what it means, obviously. But I don't feel that inclination towards women instead of men. But I prefer you than anyone else in this world.

The confession of queer identities and desires in Ó Conghaile's and Standún's work is depicted throughout both texts. While sexual desires and non-normative secrets are something that the queer character has "written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away" (Foucault 1978, 43), it is through the coming out narrative that queer people find their voices. The characters coming out to themselves, or coming out to their communities, are important parts of the queer narrative depicted in both texts. The compulsion to come out and to confess consolidates and confirms queer identity in both novels. While the emotional response of the coming out narrative is handled differently in each text, it is clear that coming out is an important part of making sense of the queer experience. Queer sexual experience, however, experienced in both public and private settings, is explored in both novels. While the coming out narrative is inextricably linked to that of sexual acts, both authors deal with queer themes in bold new ways.

5. *Inside Out: Sex in Public and Private Spaces*

Ó Conghaile and Standún depict queer sex in both public and private spaces in both of these novels. While *Sna Fir* depicts various public and private sexual encounters that John Paul

has in Dublin and in London, *Cion Mná* depicts sex in terms of abuse, shaming, but eventual celebration. The contrasting depictions of sex shows how Irish-language literature has engaged with the spectrum of sexual experience. In *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London*, Turner (2003) notes how queer communities have frequently been silenced. The narratives of queer communities, whether sexual or otherwise, are an important part of community-building. Warner and Berlant say that “sex is everywhere present” (1998, 546), and this social ubiquity is seen in the works of both writers dealt with in this essay. However, each novel depicts sexual encounters in different ways with diverse emotional backdrops in both *Sna Fir* and *Cion Mná*. These encounters offer representation(s) of queer people in Irish-language literature. Its place in its canon allow us to problematise and question ideas around sexuality, gender, and power more broadly in both Irish-language and general Irish studies.

In Ó Conghaile’s *Sna Fir*, we see various representations of public sexual encounters (namely anonymous sex in cruising areas) throughout the text. Hammers, describes the aim of cruising as an act which has the “intent, mobility, possession of the gaze” (2008, 56). John Paul frequents public parks and cemeteries in search of sexual gratification. This leads to him being insulted and jeered by a group of teenagers outside the Phoenix Park’s gates who say “*Another one of them. Queer as fuck [...] Definitely, see the bent cut of him [...] Going off now to get himself queered*” (Ó Conghaile 1999, 121). In the safety of the dark park, John Paul can find sexual relief with other men in public spaces. Ó Conghaile, however, goes on to include a reference to the gay sauna scene in Dublin when John Paul visits *Club 99*. We see that John Paul often struggles with his identity as a queer man from Conamara and this acts as an undercurrent in the character’s motives. The anonymity of the city, however, affords him the opportunity to carve out queer experiences in these sexually-charged spaces which would be accessible in his Gaeltacht hometown. De Brún in “History Repeating Itself: Men, Masculinities, and ‘His Story’ in the Fiction of Micheál Ó Conghaile”, notes that Ó Conghaile’s overarching theme that he frequently returns to is of the forbidden (2017, 22). In *Club 99*, he wonders how anyone would know that he isn’t from Dublin, that he wasn’t born and raised in Dublin. Through befriending Jό, an older man he meets in the park, John Paul is able to find the sauna in order to have sex. Once there he uses a fake name in order to protect his identity, even in this anonymous place for sexual gratification. The sauna, however, brings the queer community together: “saibhir is an daibhir an bocht is an nocht” (“wealthy or poor, poor or naked”) (Ó Conghaile 1999, 63). John Paul then embodies a sense of anonymity, that he is no longer from Ceathrú na gCloch, that by being naked and by using a false name and surname, that he is now part of the community, he is now part of a queer community:

An ghal theasa bhrothallach [...] a théann siar i mo bhéal le gach anáil fhliuch the. Braithim coirp gan aithint im ghaobhar amhaill is dá mbeinn i marbhlann. Tosaíonn siad ansin ag snámh timpeall orm mar a bheadh ag eitilt thart go héadrom ciúin taibhsiúil. Mar a bheadh ag gluaiseacht go han-mhall chuile thaobh faoi pháicíní. Samhna sa duibheagán, cheapfá. (67)

The hot sultry steam [...] that hits the back of my throat with each hot wet breath. I feel a body I don’t recognise near me as if I was in a morgue. They start to swim around me flying softly, gently, ghostly. As if they were slow moving ghosts. Sauna in the abyss, you could reckon.

While public sex is also discussed at length in *Cion Mná*, Standún approaches the topic from a different perspective. John, Bridie’s abusive husband, visits a pornographic cinema after his release from prison for battery. Describing John’s masturbation in the cinema shows us how Standún depicts sexuality in public spheres. However, it is his handling of queer sex

that underscores the importance of this novel. While one could argue that Bridie and Therese's relationship is a by-product of the volatile relationship Bridie has with John, it is clear that Bridie is queer but unable to identify with lesbianism, let alone understand it. Their first sexual contact, after drinking on Christmas Eve, is a source of anxiety for Bridie. Therese's initial kiss, while the pair waltzed to Perry Como, was returned by Bridie. Interestingly, it was Bridie who took Therese by the hand and brought her to bed. Standún, however, unlike Ó Conghaile's use of detailed and colourful language to bring sexual acts to life, does not describe in detail the couple's first sexual encounter. *Cion Mná's* handling of the sexual encounter is de-sexualised and seen as a key moment of intimacy and romantic love in the novel. We see Standún portraying the couple going to bed together. The "silencing" of lesbian sexuality is noteworthy, as it shows how Standún's efforts lack realism compared to those of Ó Conghaile. Bridie eventually begins to regret their sexual encounter and takes away from it by saying that it was "an t-aonchaoi a bhfuil mise in annmoghra a thaispeaint" (Standún 1993, 127; "the only way I can show my love"). Bridie's ongoing relationship with Therese would suggest that there is more at play than imbedded homophobia:

Feileann an saol seo do ch'aon duine againn. Tá mise in ann Caomhán a thógáil in áit atá compóir-teach. Tá tusa mar chineál máthar aige chomh maith. Bhí trioblóidí againn araon le fir. Ach ní hin le rá gur leispiach mise. (*Ibidem*)

This life (set-up) suits everyone. I can raise Caomhán in comfortable place. You are like a mother to him as well. We both have had troubles with men. But that is not to say that I'm a lesbian.

Queer sex, therefore, is represented in two starkly competing ways in each novel. While Ó Conghaile examines the bodily desires of John Paul in a hormonal and charged way, Standún's characters come with more baggage. In the lesbian relationship of Therese and Bridie, there is a lack of urgency to their sexual needs, which contrasts greatly with John Paul's relationships with other men. The ongoing struggle to carve out one's place in society – that of being queer and Irish – is underscored by multiple examples of heteronormativity in both novels. The pervasive and all-encompassing pressure of heteronormativity steers the desires, motives, and language of both texts throughout.

6. *Heteronorms and Heteronormativity*

While heteronormativity, and heteronorms more generally, have been frequently discussed in literary and cultural discourses in Irish Studies, the phenomenon has rarely been analysed in the context of Irish-language literature. Warner (2000 [1999]) discusses normality and norms as a way to blend in, or as a way to avoid "visible difference" from the status quo. Both he and Berlant in "Sex in Public" (1998) define heteronormativity as the institutions of intimacy, where heterosexuality is ideologically regarded as natural and privileged in society. Heteronormativity, as a socially constructed phenomenon, is arranged as a means of protecting privilege. Heterosexuality, however, is seen as coherent, and oftentimes compulsory in society (see Rich's 1980 "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"). Heteronormativity, therefore, is seen as a power that controls social norms and the coherency of gender, sexuality, and desire. In both *Sna Fir* and *Cion Mná*, heteronormativity and heteronorms influence the motives and decisions of their characters.

In *Sna Fir*, John Paul moved from the confines of his rural home in the Conamara Gaeltacht to Dublin, in order to fully experience queer life and to flee the confines of heteronormativity

in rural spaces. While at university, he wishes he could undertake research on homosexual love in Irish-language literature, even mentioning Pádraig Standún as a possible case study. He sees that there is a sense of loneliness in Irish-language literature and studies more generally. He expresses this when he says “Cá bhfuil fáil agamsa i litríocht na Gaeilge ar bheirt fhear agus iad ag spallaíocht le chéile ag tórramh nó oíche airneáin [...] ag titim i ngrá lena chéile agus ag gáire go hard” (Ó Conghaile 1999, 84; “Where can I find in Irish-language literature two men flirting with each other at a wake or at a night of storytelling ... falling in love with each other and laughing aloud”). He recognises how queer love isn’t represented in Irish-language literature or in his home community of Ceathrú na gCloch. It is in Dublin, however, that John Paul is able to overcome the heteronormativity of Ceathrú na gCloch and to experience queer sex and love properly. Furthermore, the heteronormativity of John Paul’s family is also emphasised time and again at the beginning of the novel, setting the scene for his escape to Dublin. John Paul’s younger brothers, Oisín and Jason, for example, presume that John Paul’s trips to Dublin are to see a girlfriend. These assumptions eventually motivate John Paul to “imeacht liom as an *nGoddamn place seo*” (25; “to take myself out of this Goddamn place”). The urban space of Dublin gives him the necessary anonymity to overcome heteronormativity. John Paul is seen as a sexual exile in Dublin’s fair city, a space where he can fully experience his sexuality. It is John Paul’s exile that shows how heteronormativity controls and influences queer lives, where escaping is the only means to survive.

Standún’s *Cion Mná* deals with heteronormativity in the context of family. While Therese and Bridie’s relationship is the central theme of the text, the cause and nature of homosexuality and being queer is questioned throughout. Therese, while explaining her lesbianism to Bridie, describes the sexual abuse she encountered as a child at the hands of her father. She describes how Wednesdays were particularly challenging, as her mother would be at bingo. She remembers how unwell she would feel due to her father’s abuse, reflecting on her First Communion day (Standún 1993, 58). This troubling account of abuse is used to explain her sexual orientation, underpinned by the desire to be normal. Through this very “unnatural” sexual behaviour, Therese rejects heteronormativity. She goes on to explain that sexuality and sex were never discussed in her family, and that without her sisters she would have believed her first period was the result of her father’s abuse “gurgortú a bhaindíom” (47; “that it was an injury”). This contrasts with Bridie, who rejects her queerness for much of the novel and blatantly accepts heteronorms in dialogue with Therese. She is clearly anxious that their blossoming relationship would have a negative effect on Caomhán, as he would be raised outside of the coherency of heteronormativity. This contrasts with Therese’s view on queer men but also underscores her ideas on toxic masculinity more generally:

Má iompaíonn féin, cén dochar? Bíonn formhór acu an-mhúinte agus béasach le mná. Ní thuigim féin cén mhaith a dhéanann an iomarca fearúlachta, an t-íomhá *macho* sin a bhíonn ag fir. Ceapann roinnt mhaith acu nach fir ar bith iad muna dtugann siad corrléidhce do bhean agus do ghasúr, nó go deimhin d’fhear eile. (90)

If he changes, what harm? Most of them are very mannerly and polite to women. I don’t understand what good too much masculinity, and the *macho* image has for men. Some of them don’t think you’re a man unless you give the odd slap to a woman and to a child, or, indeed, to another man.

Heteronormativity is time and again highlighted as an important theme in both *Sna Fir* and *Cion Mná*. While both texts deal with varying levels and experiences of heteronorms and heteronormativity, they also highlight the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. Warner and Berlant have posited that “to be against heteronormativity is not to be against norms” (1998,

557). This is seen quite clearly in both texts. While the primary characters transgress and try to move beyond heteronormativity, they recognise the power it has on them as queer individual. Their sexual transgressions, however, stand out in Irish-language literature as themes that are not often drawn upon in the canon.

7. Conclusion

Irish-language literature has been associated regularly with nationalism and with the idealisation of traditional Irish cultural identity. However, it is clear that transgressive queer themes have been discussed and portrayed in various Irish-language texts since the nineties and beyond including Cathal Ó Searcaigh's *Teach an Gheafra* (2018), which deals similarly with queer love in Irish-language literature. Coupled with the ongoing liberalisation of attitudes around sex and sexuality in Ireland, we have also seen the emergence of outward-looking contemporary Irish-language writers. Ó Conghaile and Standún both tackle queer narratives in varying ways and excavate the coming out narrative, queer sex, and heteronorms and heteronormativity in distinctive ways. While Standún's portrayal of lesbian love in *Cion Mná* is often troubling, this was the first time lesbian love had been depicted in such a way through the medium of Irish (Uí Anluain 1997, 23). Although other critics such as Ó Coigligh (1993, 25) note that it is "personal difficulties" that lead both characters to transgress heteronormativity, the text could be seen as a predecessor to Ó Conghaile's *Sna Fir*, where queer love is celebrated further as "úrscéal mór homaighnéasach na hÉireann" (Breathnach, Ní Neachtain 2010, 68; "Ireland's big gay novel"). Both texts, however, deal with queer themes in Irish-language contexts, paving the way for other writers to further develop and reflect on this theme in future texts.

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*Home and Away:
Notions of Irishness*



Rainbow Crossings: Gay Irish Migrants and LGBT Politics in 1980s London

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Abstract:

This article explores the involvement of Irish activists in the LGBT civil rights movement in 1980s London. At its core is a reconsideration of Mark Ashton, the charismatic figurehead of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) as portrayed in the 2014 film *Pride*. Despite Ashton's Northern Irish background, very little attention has been paid to his Irishness: scholarship has tended to focus on the 1984-1985 British miners' strike instead. Here, I set Ashton alongside two other activists – Paud Hegarty, the manager of the Gay's the Word Bookshop, and the playwright Colm Ó Clúbhán – to suggest that the role of migrants in gay life and grassroots politics in London in the 1980s was not a coincidence but rather suggestive of the transnational character of the LGBT civil rights movement.

Keywords: Ireland, LGBT, London, Migration, Politics, 1980s

In January 1988, Margot Farnham, a researcher for the Hall-Carpenter Archives, interviewed several lesbians and gay men living in London capturing on tape their experiences growing up queer and how their lives had changed. Amongst those interviewed was Glenn McKee, a thirty-year-old from Downpatrick who had arrived in London in 1976 as a student (Farnham, Marshall 1989)¹. “I wanted to come to London”, he explained, “to come out as gay, and I deliberately planned it that way”. McKee, later a clerk in the House of Commons, initially struggled to find a place in the burgeoning gay movement in London because of his disability – McKee had been born with Morquio syndrome. “I got the feeling”, he told Farnham, “they couldn't cope”. Going to clubs and bars was worse, “you could see rejection on everyone's face”. It was a trip to Dublin in 1978 which shook McKee from his anxiety. Meeting other Irish people, who were themselves gay and lesbian, prompted

¹ The interview is contained in Farnham, Marshall (1989, 189-203). The original recording is held at the British Library, Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive, C456/58.

him to rethink his life. “At the end of finals”, he thought, “do [I] want to come back to Northern Ireland and go into the closet forever?. He answered himself in the negative and resolved not only to come out of the closet more forcefully, but never again to go back in” (192-193).

McKee’s resolution led him to join the fledgling Gay’s the Word bookshop in 1980, to join the Irish Gays in London (IGIL) group after its formation in 1981, the gay befriending group Icebreakers, and to participate in the national gay conferences in the Republic of Ireland in the early 1980s². He also wrote (McKee 1979) for the *Gay Left* journal produced by the London-based Marxist-liberationist Gay Left Collective between 1975 and 1980. These activities, McKee reflected, not only gave him the gay friends for which he had yearned, they also taught him that Irish groups in the LGBT civil rights movement were, at the time, in his view (Farnham, Marshall 1989), “much more internationalist than British groups” such as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE). Members of IGIL certainly took a strong interest in what was going on in Northern Ireland: in 1981, together with the banner of the gay community in Brixton, the group’s banner was carried on a Troops Out march through the centre of Belfast, and there were regular exchange and information meetings with activists from the principal Irish and Northern Irish LGBT civil rights groups including the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), the Irish Gay Rights Movement, and the National Gay Federation (since 2014 the National LGBT Federation)³.

One of those Glenn McKee would have met, through his work at Gay’s the Word and involvement in IGIL and Icebreakers, was Derry-born Patrick ‘Paud’ Hegarty (1955-2000). Having initially arrived in London as a zoology student at University College (UCL), Hegarty soon involved himself in the gay community in Brixton (including its short-lived radical newsletter *Gay Noise*), Icebreakers, IGIL, and joined Gay’s the Word as a staff member in 1983⁴. During the 1984-1985 miners’ strike, Hegarty provided space at the bookshop for meetings of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), led by another Northern Irishman, Mark Ashton (1960-1987) of Portrush, and insisted on the right of that group’s members to make bucket collections on the pavement outside the shop window. As one member, Colin Clews, recalled “the police had other ideas. Clearly unimpressed by a bunch of leftie poofs collecting for those subversive miners, they regularly threatened us with arrest if we didn’t stop” (Clews 2017, 121). To avoid arrest, LGSM members would take refuge in the bookshop until the police had passed. Hegarty was himself no stranger to this dance of disobedience. In September 1980, for instance, he was one of six men arrested for “insulting behaviour” at a demonstration against the horror film *Cruising* starring Al Pacino, which activists alleged contained a homophobic message. Hegarty had given his male companion, Gareth Thomas, a goodbye kiss⁵.

On the surface, the meeting of three gay men from different parts of Northern Ireland in a bookshop in central London in the early 1980s might be described as coincidental and of modest historical interest. This is not the case. Their meeting points to a little explored but significant aspect of gay life in Britain and Ireland between the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967 and decriminalisation in the Republic of Ireland in

² Both Icebreakers and IGIL met at Gay’s the Word in this period. Some of their activities are discussed in the pages of the Gay’s the Word *Newsletter*, which was first published in 1980. A small amount of archival material for IGIL, deposited by Glenn McKee, is held as part of the Hall-Carpenter Archives at the London School of Economics.

³ *Outta Control* (1981).

⁴ After a period of training at the Giovanni’s Room bookstore in Philadelphia (Hermance 2014), Hegarty became manager of Gay’s the Word in 1985 and remained in post until 1997.

⁵ *Gay Noise* (1980).

1993⁶. Namely, the political and organisational role of migrants in the development of LGBT politics. As has increasingly been recognised by scholars, the LGBT civil rights movements which developed in Britain and Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s were sympathetic with each other and worked closely together to achieve their aim of legal reform and sexual equality. However, given the “methodological nationalism” of British and Irish LGBT historiography, fields of scholarship which have tended to react primarily to circumstances in their respective national contexts and in urban settings, the persistence of international and transnational dimensions has been neglected⁷. The present article offers one form of response – a series of linked biographies of individuals and institutions which emerged out of the gay Irish community in London in the 1980s.

Thus, at the core of what follows is a study of Mark Ashton, the Northern Irish communist and gay activist, who came to posthumous public attention following his portrayal by Ben Schnetzer in the 2014 film, *Pride*, together with institutional biographies of those organisations to which he was attached. The stress here is on each individual’s Irishness – and especially a gay Irishness – as intersected by their experiences as migrants (and in McKee’s case as a disabled person); as well as on the transnational character of the movements to which the activists were attached. Although much of the history of LGSM, for example, is now well understood, there has been far less commentary on its engagement with the Irishness of several of its core members – including Mark Aston. What did it mean to LGSM, for example, to hold a St Patrick’s Day party, as they did at Ashton’s flat in March 1985? What did it mean, also, that many of the organisations to which members were otherwise attached, including Switchboard and Gay’s the Word, had similar Irish leanings? And to what extent did the presence of Irish activists in the LGBT movements in London in the 1980s prompt wider recognition and understanding in the British LGBT movement of the struggle for equality and civil rights across the island of Ireland?

1. Towards Transnational Queer/LGBT History

Given the alignment of gay history and the revisionist new queer history with national borders, existing historiography of LGBT experience in Britain and Ireland offers an imperfect guide to answering these questions. Gay migration has not been a major focus of study, except insofar as those living in rural and industrial areas moved to urban centres (such as London and Manchester) as part of a normative coming out process (Houlbrook 2005; Brown 2015; Brown, Browne 2016). Yet as Tomasz Sikora has rightly suggested, following the work of Andreas Wimmer and Nina Schiller Glick (2002), the “nationalization” of this past “may inadvertently risk a reterritorialization of the free transnational flow of queer ideas and may ultimately contribute to a ‘homonationalization’ of queerness” (Sikora 2014, 2). In the present context, ideas may be supplemented by people. The geographer Jon Binnie has suggested that region and therefore regionality can offer a counterweight to the national and to the metropolitan, by drawing “critical attention to important geographic differences in gender and sexual politics in regional contexts” (2016, 1631). Sympathetic findings can be found in borderlands studies, wherein the stress lies on the agency of those living in non-metropolitan communities (often in marginalised circumstances). As I have argued elsewhere (Howell, Leeworthy 2018), those living on the industrial or, for the periodisation of the present article, post-industrial frontier,

⁶ Similar legislation was implemented in Scotland in 1980 and Northern Ireland in 1982.

⁷ I am grateful to Dr Catherine Baker for pointing me towards “methodological nationalism”. A useful overview of its application can be found in Chernilo (2011) and Sager (2016).

for instance, do not automatically absorb metropolitan culture in place of making their own – that is a “metropolitan fallacy”. Instead there is a compromise: the result is a nuanced synthesis observable on its own terms without, as Cantú (2009) has noted, homogenising the cultural experience of the borderlands.

There is much to be gained from an engagement with the transnational turn in queer geography, wherein space and mobility better theorised and considered than in equivalent historical disciplines. In their work on feminism and transnational LGBTQ politics in Poland, Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse (2012) utilise the term ‘transnational’ in favour of ‘global’ or ‘international’ since it enables recognition of the fact that “many activists [are] mobile across national borders and orientate themselves to multiple locations in different states” (2012, 445). For instance: London and Dublin. As Glenn McKee explained to Margot Farnham, “I think a lot of Irish people here [in London] want to keep links with back home” (Farnham, Marshall 1989, 194). We may complicate this dual orientation still further, as do Binnie and Klesse, and as is appropriate when discussing Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century, with the insight of Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (1997) who suggest that genuine transnational solidarity is possible only in such circumstances as activists reflect on postcolonial power relations. Such solidarities were (and are) not easily made or sustained, particularly in periods of social, cultural and political hostility, but represent an important convergence between hostility towards a racial/ethnic/religious minority and homophobia.

To be Irish in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, was often to be viewed through a prevailing lens of suspicion, even if the likelihood of arrest or other personal disruption because of terrorism was minimal (Hickman, Walter 1997). Perpetuated by the media, sustained by the general public, and exacerbated by the Northern Ireland Troubles, this suspicion had its roots in much older racialised stereotyping of the Catholic ‘Other’ – the counter figure through which British identity was shaped (Soroan 2012; MacRaild, 2013, Dawson, Dover, Hopkins 2017). And had been, as Linda Colley has famously argued, since the eighteenth century (1992). Thus for gay migrants from the island of Ireland, the question became an existential dilemma of whether to be a gay person in Ireland, when male homosexuality was still illegal, or be an Irish person in Britain. Such dilemmas have not been limited to the Anglo-Irish experience, of course. Without overstating the equation – given the specific othering of Muslims across the West since the 9/11 attacks in 2001 – there is a parallel in contemporary Islamophobic discourse which tends to construct Muslims as sexist and homophobic. In the ideological and discursive margins of a discourse of assimilation versus integration, gay Muslims face the dilemma of becoming, as Fatima El-Tayeb and others have discussed, “gays who cannot be properly gay” (Perez qtd. in El-Tayeb 2011, 88; El-Tayeb 2012; Baker 2016; Peumans 2017).

To fully appreciate the impact of migration and transnational solidarities on the LGBT movement in Britain and Ireland – at the local as well as the national level – and the dilemmas involved for migrants, then, it is necessary to step outside of the traditional national alignment of LGBT/queer historiography and to focus our attention instead on the world beneath. This does not necessarily mean abandoning the insights offered either by the politically-orientated and comparative work of foundational scholars such as Jeffrey Weeks (1977, 2007) or the social and cultural implications of human sexuality as a kaleidoscope of possibility which is the main thrust of contemporary queer history as pursued by Matt Houlbrook (2005) and others (Lewis 2013). Indeed, I have argued (Leeworthy 2019) in favour of a synthesis, and see no reason to set that synthesis aside. Yet, by problematising the nation, either through regionality or through marginality and migration, we can move beyond the metropolitan fallacy and recognise that which was common to gay experience regardless of origin and that which introduced a differ-

ential – be it age, race, gender, ethnicity, language, or religion (the list is by no means intended to be exhaustive). We can also recognise and reach an understanding of lines of solidarity and the transnational contexts in which the LGBT civil rights movement developed and operated. It was, after all, never entirely limited by national borders.

2. *Contexts*

Until the 1950s, the legal repression of male homosexuality was largely uniform across Britain and Ireland – with the prevailing legal statutes having been passed by the Westminster Parliament for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1861 and 1885. Although independence in 1922 saw Irish statutes steadily diverge as a result of acts passed by the Oireachtas, there was no immediate attempt by any Irish administration to alter the legal proscription of male homosexuality – for better, or worse – although the Carrigan Committee on morality had recommended a stiffening of punishments in its 1931 report (Hug 1998). In fact, whereas the 1935 Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Dáil's legislative response to the Carrigan Committee's report, altered the (heterosexual) age of consent from sixteen to seventeen, its primary focus was on prostitution and the 'defilement' of young women (Finnane 2001; Smith 2004). Much the same situation prevailed in Northern Ireland, where the Northern Irish parliament, created in 1922 as a result of partition of the island of Ireland, likewise made no attempt to overturn or revise earlier statutes. It raised the age of consent in Northern Ireland from sixteen to seventeen in 1950, thereby creating uniformity across the island of Ireland, but a clear distinction with England and Wales, and Scotland, where the age of consent stood at sixteen⁸.

The commonalities of proscription across Britain and Ireland began to break down after the Second World War, most notably with the publication (in the former) of the Wolfenden report on homosexuality and prostitution in 1957. In response, the first private member's bill to decriminalise homosexuality in England and Wales, albeit partially, was presented to the Westminster parliament in 1960. From the Liberal and Labour benches, there were already indications that, in the event of the Conservative government losing power, legislation would be passed which aimed at creating a more permissive society (Jenkins 1959; Bloch 1999). Dissent from the only Scottish representative on the Wolfenden Committee – James Adair – led to the exclusion of Scotland from reformist legislation in this period and Westminster generally did not intervene in Northern Irish affairs until the dissolution of the province's Parliament in 1972. This meant that when the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1967, for the first time since 1885 proscription of homosexuality differed in England and Wales as compared with Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland. Liberalisation of English law, even on the relatively modest terms of the 1967 Act, encouraged a gay migrant's trail from the island of Ireland to major cities in England – most notably London. As the Northern Irish activist, and later Ulster Unionist politician, Jeffrey Dudgeon recalled,

Most of the talent was literally on the point of departure, having a little courage to dabble locally just prior to fleeing to London, where the grass was reputedly greener and certainly more often cropped. (2008, 139)

⁸ I have adopted, here, language which makes clear the distinction between the jurisdictions of England and Wales, on the one hand, and Scotland, on the other, rather than to describe them collectively as Britain. This better reflects the legal distinctions made possible in the late-twentieth century.

For those who did not leave Ireland, or who were on their way to the boat, Dublin offered a modest version of London's burgeoning lesbian and gay nightlife, and had done since the Victorian period, with pubs such as Bartley Dunne's and Rice's, both near St. Stephen's Green, a noted cruising area, clearly established as 'gay friendly' by the 1950s. It was, wrote the prominent Irish gay rights campaigner, David Norris, "a notorious haunt of the homosexual *demi-monde*" (2012, 79). However, it was not until 1979, with the opening of The Viking, that the Irish capital had its first openly gay bar⁹. The George, Dublin's second gay pub, opened in 1985. Such landmarks – of place as well as time – illustrated the lingering impress of an older generation on contemporary attitudes. In other words, the contextual connections between the 1950s and the 1970s are obvious – and were to the those who experienced them at close quarters.

It was a similar story in Belfast, a city with gay nightlife at least as old as that found in Dublin, which had various cruising spaces dotted around the city centre and the docks, and gay friendly pubs such as DuBarry's and the Royal Avenue (Leitch 1965; Dudgeon 2011)¹⁰. The outbreak of the Troubles at the end of the 1960s and the imposition of a curfew in the city centre meant that owners of pubs, clubs, and hotels took a more relaxed attitude – famously, if somewhat exaggeratedly, the only people likely to be in Belfast city centre at night in this period were British soldiers and gay men cruising for sex. The curfew also encouraged Belfast's emerging punk scene, for instance (Duggan 2010; Duggan 2012). Out of this more relaxed attitude – and economic need – came the city's first gay-run venue, the Chariot Rooms, run by Ernie Thompson and Jim Kempson. It was a similar story of accessibility in other parts of Northern Ireland. By the late-1970s, *Gay News* was advertising several hotel bars outside of Belfast known to be 'gay friendly' or where the newspaper was itself on sale. These included the Park Tavern, Balmoral Bar, the Northern Counties Hotel, and the Country Club, all of which were in Portrush; the Bodega in Portadown; and the Gluepot in Derry¹¹.

Most post-war emigration from the island of Ireland, regardless of sexuality, was prompted by economic circumstance, of course, but gay men and women also undoubtedly felt the impact of a repressive system of social silence, antipathy, and state censorship of information (Ryan-Flood 2015), particularly in the Republic. The steady emergence of sociological study and memoir in Britain in the 1950s, for example, was met with a wall of censorship. Michael Schofield's pioneering research study, *Society and the Homosexual* (1952), Donald Cory's *The Homosexual Outlook* (1953) and Peter Wildeblood's *Against the Law* (1955) were all banned, as was the latter's sequel *A Way of Life* (1956). To ensure the complete absence from Ireland of Wildeblood's memoir, in which he declared that "I am a homosexual" and which was part of the cultural environment leading to the Wolfenden proposals, the Irish censors also banned the 1957 paperback edition. Literature, whether from the United States, such as Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1949) or James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1957), or from Northern Ireland, notably Maurice Leitch's 1965 novel, *The Liberty Lad*, with its overt discussion of gay life in Belfast, was outlawed¹². Film and television were both subject to notable state interven-

⁹ The Irish Gay Rights Movement opened the Phoenix Club on Parnell Square in 1976 which was the first gay community centre in the Republic of Ireland. It hosted discos, a telephone befriending service (Tel-A-Friend), and meeting spaces for Dublin's gay and lesbian community; see Patrick McDonagh 2017.

¹⁰ Tom Hulme's forthcoming work on the queer history of Belfast in the early part of the twentieth century will advance our understanding considerably. My thanks to Tom for several discussions on this theme.

¹¹ This is based on a reading of the 'gay guide' published in *Gay News* from 1972 onwards, venues outside Belfast begin to be mentioned in 1974.

¹² I have based the detail in the present paragraph on a reading of the library catalogue of Trinity College Dublin, which provides annotation where a book was placed on the banned list.

tion, with local authorities in Northern Ireland often intervening to prevent the showing of films passed by the film censors in London (Barber 2016).

3. *Writing the Gay Dilemma*

For young gay Irishmen, then, London may have seemed like nirvana compared with circumstances at home, but it was by no means a hotspot of liberty and free expression. This duality of expectation and reality can be understood readily from the contribution to the pamphlet *Out For Ourselves* (Boyd 1986) made by the dramatist and poet Colm Ó Clúbhán (Colm Clifford), who left Ireland for London in 1973. At first, he wrote, he felt free in London and free to be openly gay, but he soon encountered prejudice from all sides. Towards the end of 1978, *Gay Left*, the magazine of the Gay Left Collective, published an article by the Northern Irish activist Jeffrey Dudgeon – the first in its pages to deal with Ireland. Adopting a stridently unionist position, Dudgeon argued that in the North radical feminism (and by extension gay liberation) was “gaining strength partly as radicalism abandons the dead-end of Republicanism” and that “direct rule [from London] has been a liberating experience in many ways”. He concluded, with a knowing nod to circumstances in the Republic, that “rampant nationalism is literally the death knell for gay liberation” (Dudgeon 1978, 30). It was a controversial statement and for readers such as Ó Clúbhán seemed entirely predicated on the assumption that the perfect solution for the LGBT community in Ireland was to “re-join the union” (Boyd 1986, 91).

For Ó Clúbhán and others of the diaspora living in London, Dudgeon’s overture took a slightly different turn, evolving into the central dilemma of whether to be a gay person in Ireland or an Irish person in England, or to reject the binary entirely. “I was gay”, Ó Clúbhán wrote, “and Irish society was what I’d spent nineteen years hovering on the edge of [...]. The idea of having to face all that again was too much” (Boyd 1986, 92). He said much the same to *Out*, the Dublin-based gay youth magazine, in 1985: “I can list forever the oppression of Irish people living in England, yet I cannot live in Ireland” (*ibidem*). To escape both, Ó Clúbhán fled to Barcelona, where he lived for a period before returning to London – he remained there for the rest of his life. “I linger on”, he reflected of his life in the latter, “because it’s the place I’ve learned to survive in” (*ibidem*). But the tensions which had prompted him to leave and try his luck in post-Franco Catalonia had little dissipated on his return:

Once the glamour of having more than one bar and gay centre to choose from wears off, there is the reality of having to survive in a foreign country. And not just any foreign country, but England. (*Ibidem*)

Responding to his situation and keen to explore his gay Irishness, Ó Clúbhán began writing short stories, poems, and eventually plays (Madden 2018). There were book reviews for *Gay Left*, too, acting in much of the drama presented by the Brixton Faeries (which he had helped to establish), and close involvement in the filming of *Nighthawks* – Ron Peck’s landmark 1979 study of gay life in contemporary London (Cook 2014)¹³. At that time, Ó Clúbhán was a ‘stalwart’ of the Brixton gay squats in Railton Road, and the scenes which he filmed depicted the successful pick up of the film’s central character, Jim, a gay teacher played by Ken Robertson. The two then returned to the squats. As Cook notes, these scenes “represented something more

¹³The theatrical work of the Brixton Faeries is documented in the papers of Ian Townson, which are held as part of the Hall-Carpenter Archive at the LSE – HCA/TOWNSON. The collection also includes several photographs of Colm Ó Clúbhán.

challenging [...] they [the squatters] paid much less attention to passing as straight” (2011, 106). Although cut from the final print of *Nighthawks*, Ó Clúbhán’s contribution was included in Peck’s 1991 film, *Strip Jack Naked*, as a posthumous tribute following the actor’s death from an AIDS-related illness in 1989. Without the squats, the cultural and political milieu of South London Gay Liberation would not have been as vibrant or as long-lasting, and without them it also seems unlikely that Ó Clúbhán would have moved into agit-prop theatre as a means of expressing his Irishness, his gayness, and his gay Irishness.

The Brixton Faeries, which included another Northern Irish emigré, Terry Stewart, came together in 1975 with the intention of putting on a piece of agit-prop street theatre at that year’s Gay Pride festival¹⁴. The performance was titled *Mr Punch’s Nuclear Family* and was a skit on the classic Punch and Judy puppet shows of the Victorian and Edwardian period. It ended with the slaughter of the liberally-minded Judy and the couple’s gay son, Sonny, by the conservative and patriarchal Mr Punch. Other figures in the performance included John Bull and Britannia – their presence was intended to make an anti-capitalist statement alongside the commentary about sexism and homophobia. The play was first performed at the Gay Community Centre in Railton Road. A subsequent, albeit edited performance took place in the playground of the nearby Effra Parade Primary School. Subsequent plays included *Tomorrow’s Too Late* in 1977, a reply to the banning of *Gay News* from the newsagent and bookseller W. H. Smith; *Minehead Revisited* created in 1979 in response to the Jeremy Thorpe trial and the lurid presentations of homosexuality which emerged as a result. The last major production by the Faeries which Ó Clúbhán was involved with was *Gents* from 1980, a celebratory look at the life of gay men which was set in a public lavatory and was intended to explain the reasons for cruising and cottaging.

Following the dissolution of the Brixton Faeries theatre group in the early 1980s, Ó Clúbhán moved into radical theatre of a different kind signalled most directly in the plays he wrote for the Irish Gay Theatre Group in the mid-1980s: *Friends of Rio Rita’s* in 1985 and *Reasons for Staying* in 1986¹⁵. Both starred Jim MacSweeney, who had come to London from Cork in 1982 to study drama. As he explained to the Cork *Echo*, “I was young, free and single [...] going to the theatre, dancing, living in bedsit land, squatting in flats”¹⁶. In 1989, having got the acting bug out of his system, MacSweeney began working at Gay’s the Word bookshop, taking over from Paud Hegarty as manager in 1997. Given their origins, the two plays written for and performed by the Irish Gay Theatre Group were endowed with a clear sense of queer Irishness and the dilemmas that being both gay and Irish and an emigrant involved: the latter play included a discussion of the Declan Flynn murder in Dublin in 1982, posing the question of, as Ed Madden notes (quoting from the play script), what it meant to be Irish and gay at that time:

Ask Cormac what happens to queers in that sweet mist-bedecked country where the uilleann pipes cut a note through the lark infested clear air. (2015, 108)

¹⁴ Stewart had left Belfast for London in 1975. He was involved in the Troops Out Movement and lived in the Brixton squats.

¹⁵ A third play, *The Rip in the World*, was performed at the Theatre Centre in London, on 7 November 1987. This, however, was separate from the work for the Irish Gay Theatre Group and dealt with themes of child abuse and children’s homes; see Norma Cohen 1987, 31. Ó Clúbhán was introduced to the Theatre Centre by Noel Greig (1944-2009).

¹⁶ *The Echo* (Cork), 24 June 2019.

The early performances of *Reasons for Staying* were staged during Irish cultural festivals such as Feile Na nGael in January 1986 and the event organised by Battersea and Wandsworth Irish Group at the Battersea Arts Centre in March 1986 before transferring to the famous Oval House Theatre¹⁷.

Perhaps more so than *Reasons for Staying*, *Friends of Rio Rita's*, Ó Clúbhán's first play for the Irish Theatre Group, had very clear autobiographical elements, and examined the experiences of two men – Finbarr and Mick – who had left Ireland (in part) to escape persecution for their sexuality but who found their lives in London bound up with the British reaction to the Troubles and rising anti-Irish hatred¹⁸. As the play's poster, put it:

Being gay and Irish in London; as gay men we are outside the Irish community and as Irish men what has the gay sub-culture to offer us? We explore while the unacknowledged war goes on. (Ó Clúbhán 1985)

The title leant on Brendan Behan's character of the same name from his 1958 play *The Hostage*, and, Ó Clúbhán explained to *Out* magazine in 1985, was intended to be an Irish twist on the gay-identifying, American phrase "friends of Dorothy". Although there was undoubtedly a secondary twist: The Oval House had opened as a theatre in April 1930 with a staging of the musical *Rio Rita*. In the course of the later play, as Madden (2018) suggests, Ó Clúbhán invited audiences to consider which identity was to be the more fundamental: a politicised Irishness guided by an active response to the Troubles and to racism, or a gay Irishness which seemed to lack a radical framework. Publicity photographs showed a moustachioed Ó Clúbhán sat on a bench alongside the fresh-faced MacSweeney, the former reading a copy of the Sinn Féin weekly newspaper *An Phoblacht*, the latter a copy of the London LGBT newspaper *Capital Gay*. Neither paper seemingly at all aware of the other – the ideal metaphor for the gay Irish migrant's dilemma.

4. A Good Gay Defence Organisation

It was into this already well-established, albeit complex and nuanced world of gay liberation, Irish activism, and gay Irishness, that Mark Ashton stepped on his own arrival in London in 1978. Popular perceptions of Ashton have largely been shaped by the hit film *Pride* (2014) and his involvement in the featured activist group Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM). Indeed, he has emerged as a latter-day hero, venerated in memorials across Europe from Onllwyn to London and Paris. Yet there has been almost no attention given to Ashton's Irishness or to his relationship with the gay Irish milieu in 1980s London. The film, in fact, attenuated Ashton's links to Northern Ireland, with just one line of dialogue in the script referring to the character's origins. This is unfortunate but by no means unexpected, reflecting the easier transition of many migrants – including Ashton and Ó Clúbhán – into the gay community than into the diasporic one. Historians have similarly overlooked Ashton's Irishness, focusing their attention instead on the convergences between class solidarities, leftist politics (Ashton's communism was similarly left out of the film) and the links between the members of LGSM and women in the South Wales Coalfield (Robinson 2007a; Kelliher 2014; Leeworthy 2016; Robinson 2019).

¹⁷ *The Stage* (London), 24 April 1986; for earlier performances see: *The Stage*, 22 August 1985, 28 November 1985.

¹⁸ In the original staging, Finbarr was played by Ó Clúbhán, Mick by MacSweeney.

But what ought to be made of Mark Ashton's Northern Irish background? Born in Oldham, near Manchester, in May 1960, Ashton grew up in the small, seaside town of Portrush, County Antrim. Largely overshadowed by the nearby university town of Coleraine, Portrush had the typical character of a seaside resort: relatively busy during the summer, quieter during the winter months when facilities aimed at tourists shut down or shifted to serve the student population. Yet this was hardly a sleepy provincial community. In fact, students introduced into the area topics and ideas which would perhaps not otherwise have reached the northern coast of Ireland in the early 1970s except as newspaper tittle-tattle: not least women's liberation and gay liberation. In 1972, students in Coleraine and in Derry, some thirty miles to the southwest, established branches of the Sexual Liberation Movement (SLM) – the local equivalent of Belfast's Gay Liberation Society which had emerged in 1971, or London's Gay Liberation Front of October 1970¹⁹. In the autumn of 1973, Coleraine hosted Ireland's first conference on sexual freedom (McDonagh 2019). And, as noted earlier, towns such as Portrush began to develop gay-friendly bars by the mid-1970s – as did the city of Derry.

Mark Ashton was, of course, still in school when the conferences and gay rights groups came into being in the mid-1970s, but they were well-established by the time he began studying at the Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College in Coleraine in about 1976. Although it is not clear the extent to which he was aware of, or, indeed, engaged with the gay civil rights movement before he left Portrush for London, or whether he was aware of the gay friendly bars in his home town, but they were there all the same²⁰. Ashton left Northern Ireland when he was eighteen, arriving in a London which was seemingly far away from the virulent homophobic of Ian Paisley's Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign and from the street thuggery of the Democratic Unionist Party, which, even after partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland in 1982, continue to harass and target gay rights meetings²¹. London was far away, too, from the worst of the violence of the Troubles. But, having grown up in their midst, Ashton could hardly forget the Troubles or, in his more politically radical phase in the mid-1980s, the impact of aspects of Northern Irish life that had so marked his childhood, such as hostile policing. As he put it in the credit sequence of *Framed Youth*, the pioneering film produced in 1983 by the London Lesbian and Gay Youth Project, the police were not necessarily what the popular imagination thought them to be:

I used to be very naïve. I used to think, you know, here's our boys in blue who are coming along to save us from being mugged in the streets and protect [us] from being burgled. I came down with a bang very quickly. I realised that the police were not actually your friendly little bobby on the beat, at all, in fact they were very dangerous people. Frightening people. I am very frightened of the police. Not because I've done anything wrong, but because they actually convinced me I am doing something wrong when I know for a fact I'm not.

Such an observation might well be a reflection on the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland as much as on the Metropolitan Police in London – although neither force is directly named.

Other comments Ashton made on film in this period can similarly be connected, it seems to me, not only to the convergence between class and sexuality, but also to his Northern Irish

¹⁹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 April 1974.

²⁰ One close friend at the time later recalled that “the two of us began the process of coming out, first to each other, then our friends” (*Coleraine Times*, 10 September 2014). This pre-dated their mutual departure for London in 1978.

²¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 July 1979; 22 October 1983.

roots²². In *All Out: Dancing in Dulais*, the memorial film made in 1985 by members of LGSM who had previously been involved in the Lesbian and Gay Youth Film Project, Ashton reflected on the need for a “good defence organisation”:

We’ve got a gay community, we need a good gay defence organisation – that’s what CHE [the Campaign for Homosexual Equality] should be. The miners and workers in general need defence organisations, and that’s what unions are. And what this strike is about, is about smashing those defence organisations and smashing their unions. And I’m not going to stand up for that because you start on that and there’s no stopping it.

Although it was unsaid, here, at least, Ashton undoubtedly had a variation of this statement involving the Troubles – in fact, one of the various subgroups within the Communist Party of Great Britain in the mid-1980s, which was somewhat hostile to Ashton’s Eurocommunist politics, recorded him as having been “thoroughly contemptuous of [an] anti-republican stance and opposition to the armed struggle”²³. It is equally possible that Ashton’s position on the Northern Ireland question shaped LGSM’s response as a whole. Early in its existence, LGSM received a letter from the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA) asking to affiliate and offering an individual membership fee in the name of Tim Bishop²⁴. At the end of September 1984, members of LGSM discussed this request at their fortnightly meeting but ultimately rejected it on the basis that they were a London support group and that the best mechanism for NIGRA to support the miners’ strike was through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), based in Dublin. The membership fee, which NIGRA had already sent, was returned²⁵. What was perhaps unknown to LGSM at that stage was that the ICTU, and the public sector union SIPTU, in particular, was itself providing financial support to South Wales – much of SIPTU’s funding, ironically, went to the Neath, Dulais, and Swansea Valleys Miners’ Support Group just like LGSM’s donations²⁶.

Although affiliation from NIGRA was rebuffed, Irish and Northern Irish members of LGSM did find themselves connecting their Irishness and their support for the miners all the same – the group did provide a message of solidarity when the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Solidarity group was formed just before Christmas 1984 and a warm welcome to visitors from the group in the spring of 1985²⁷. The Dublin LGBT community’s first act was to send money to the miners via LGSM. On their trip to Onllwyn in October 1984, LGSM were taken to various sites including to the nearby village of Banwen, reputed birthplace of the patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick. That trip then provided the inspiration for a fundraising event in March 1985: a St. Patrick’s Day meal held at Ashton’s flat in London. The idea had also been his. As the minutes recorded, “Mark suggested a St Patrick’s Day lunch for the miners (said saint being born in Dulais valley!)”²⁸. A céile was subsequently added to the proceedings. The surviving

²² Note, for instance, his attempts to build links between the Communist Party and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (Hall-Carpenter Archive, London School of Economics, HCA/LGCM/7/50/Folder 2).

²³ *The Leninist*, 20 March 1987.

²⁴ LGSM Minutes, 9 September 1984.

²⁵ LGSM Minutes, 23 September 1984.

²⁶ The links between SIPTU and the support group based in Onllwyn were fostered by Hywel Francis and Ally Thomas, from Wales, and Francis Devine in Ireland. Francis and Devine knew each other through their mutual work on labour history. My thanks to Hywel for discussing these links with me.

²⁷ LGSM Minutes, 2 December 1984; 31 March 1985. In the former meeting, “the group expressed its gratitude to comrades in Dublin for such a fine gesture of international lesbian and gay solidarity”.

²⁸ LGSM Minutes, 10 March 1985.

flyer, now held as part of the LGSM records at the People's History Museum in Manchester, was full of typical imagery: tricolour, harp, and shamrock. It read: "Irish members of LGSM invite you". By implication, this indicates that Mark Ashton was not the only Irish member of LGSM, although he was the most prominent and influential – there were, in fact, several from different parts of the island, north and south.

Robert 'Monty' Montgomery, a cycling enthusiast and one of those responsible for LGSM's sponsored ride from London to Onllwyn over Easter 1985, joined LGSM in August 1984 but was an old friend of Ashton's from Northern Ireland. The pair had studied together at catering college in Coleraine and embraced the emerging punk scene.²⁹ This led them towards the clubs and bars in Derry, where they got to know the members of the punk group, The Undertones. A photograph in Michael Bradley's memoir, *Teenage Kicks* (2016), for example, shows Montgomery and Ashton together with the band in a back lane off Lisburn Road in Derry in 1978. That was the year the band recorded their most famous track at the Wizard Studios in Belfast, with funding from the BBC Radio DJ John Peel – who held 'Teenage Kicks' to be his all-time favourite song. It was also the year that, having completed college, 'Mark and I jumped on the first boat out of Northern Ireland, set sail for Liverpool and ended up in London'.³⁰ Whilst living in London, Montgomery did become involved in political activity, alongside Ashton, and in addition to LGSM, but on a much smaller scale: Montgomery later left London for Australia.

Reggie Blennerhassett, on the other hand, who can be seen in *All Out: Dancing in Dulais* reflecting on the impact of LGSM's work and the, in his words, "super" visit to Onllwyn, was born in Sligo in the west of Ireland. As he explained in oral testimony recorded in 1987, he knew that he was gay from a young age. Moving from Sligo to Dublin, where he studied at the College of Commerce in Rathmines, Blennerhassett nevertheless remained in the closet until he emigrated to London in 1982. As he later put it, he left "basically because I was gay and the thought of another four years in Ireland filled me with despair" (Tierney 2015). Soon he found himself working in a pub and, as he recalled in 1987, had his first affair with another man not long afterwards – the man was an American he met in Soho. Blennerhassett was another who joined LGSM after its formation in July 1984 – he did so, with his partner Ray Aller, in September 1984 after meeting Mark Ashton at a pub in central London³¹. In the aftermath of the strike, Blennerhassett worked as finance officer at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre: "it was the early 80s, I'd just moved from Ireland, and I thought it was amazing", he explained in 2016³².

In a real sense, these young men were living the patterns of life that Colm Ó Clúbhán was writing about in his drama, embracing a queer way of being – and of being Irish – that was impossible at home. For Ashton, this involved drag. For a time, as his friend Richard Coles (2014) recalled, he was employed as a barman at the King's Cross Conservative Club – although Ashton turned up for work in full drag. A look complete with polka-dot skirts and a Lily Savage-style blonde beehive wig. Robert Montgomery similarly recalled that

Mark hung out with people like Boy George, Marilyn, Phillip Salon, he frequently cross-dressed, living as a woman for about six months when we shared a flat on Ladbroke Grove. He never left the house unless he was in full drag, and he was totally convincing. Morning ritual was getting out of bed,

²⁹ *Coleraine Times*, 10 September 2014.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Blennerhassett's experiences were recorded as part of the Hall-Carpenter oral history project in 1987 (British Library, C456/57).

³² Christobel Hastings 2016.

consulting his book of Hollywood glamour portraits and choosing a look for the day. He had his eyebrows shaved off and would with the quick flick of an eyebrow pencil have the look.³³

But, as in *Friends of Rio Rita's*, politics began to intervene. Prompted in part by a visit to Bangladesh in 1982, but no less by bouts of unemployment, Ashton became the activist made famous by cinema. In addition to LGSM, Ashton was active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)'s gay section, the Young Communist League, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the anti-apartheid movement, and the protests against Ronald Reagan's visit in June 1984 (as part of the G7 Summit). The list is not itself exhaustive, but as one obituary recorded Ashton "was always to be found in any of the gay contingents which took part in the large marches and mobilisations [...]. He took part in all the early battles between the printers and the Murdochs and Shaha of this world, and from Warrington to Wapping he was always there"³⁴. This meant mixing with a variety of leftists, with as many different ideological and theoretical positions as could be managed. Even a formal political party such as the CPGB was riven with competing factions. Outside of the CPGB's Eurocommunist and Stalinist (or 'tankie') tendencies, there was a leftist spectrum containing the International Marxist Group, Militant, the Spartacists, the Socialist Workers' Party, the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and the Revolutionary Communist Party – most of them known by an alphabet soup of three letter acronyms.

On their own terms these groups could dominate an activist's life and political outlook, but they were all minor (to say the least) in comparison to the mainstream Labour Party and often more obsessed with theoretical righteousness than winning support from the wider public. In an obituary of Ashton published in March 1987, for example, one hard-line faction within the CPGB complained that he was "a political opponent and was hostile to Leninism" and that LGSM had been "limited because it was not under disciplined, ideologically correct and clear sighted communist leadership"³⁵. Ashton was seen by the hardliners as an opponent precisely because he had sided with the reformist, Eurocommunist group, with its ideas of cross-community alliances, rather than because he was a member of an organisation or party outside of the CPGB. LGSM itself mirrored and reflected the diverse range of opinions on the left and included communists like Mark, members of the Socialist Workers' Party, Militant, Labour Party activists (often from the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights), and those who were unaligned but otherwise politically motivated and interested. This coalition was always fragile and one of the striking aspects of LGSM's work was the fact that many of the potential divisions were kept to one side for so long.

In fact, whilst the strike was on-going, the diverse politics underpinning and represented in LGSM tended not to be outwardly expressed – at least until the end of 1984 – although they clearly impacted upon the internal discussions the group had each week. It was at that point, the strike entering into its ninth month, that Lesbians Against Pit Closures (LAPC) was formed³⁶. As Nicola Field recalled, the internal environment, which was dominated by men, had much to do with the decision to break away, although it was initially reasoned as a means of increasing representation of women and fundraising in women-only venues. "I saw men tearing into each other remorselessly on points of political theory at meetings. I could see that it was a very

³³ *Coleraine Times*, 10 September 2014.

³⁴ *Capital Gay*, March 1987.

³⁵ *The Leninist*, 20 March 1987.

³⁶ LGSM Minutes, 16 December 1984.

unforgiving environment and you would have to be completely unaligned and rise above it to cope with being there” (Tate 2017). LAPC redirected their support towards a different mining community and a different coalfield – Nottinghamshire – thereby setting out a separate identity. For all the distinction, however, and the presented hostility in the 2014 film *Pride*, the two groups did work together and often carried their banners side-by-side at rallies and marches.

Only as the miners’ strike came to an end, in March 1985, and minds turned towards the aftermath and to the consequences of a year-long industrial dispute, did LGSM begin to engage directly with wider political themes. This engagement was apparent in their involvement with the London-Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities and LGSM’s own self-organised conference. The former was intended as a continuation of the lines of solidarity which had been developed between LGSM and the South Wales NUM; the latter reflected more clearly LGSM’s own internal political debate. Held in 1985, the conference included workshops on anti-imperialism, Ireland, and HIV/AIDS, and featured a performance, at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, of Stephen Gee and Nigel Young’s 1982 drama, *Shoot*, which was itself about the experiences of gay men in Ireland³⁷. The performance – in practice, a ‘rehearsed reading’³⁸ – provided a direct connection back to the Brixton Faeries, with which Gee was involved as an actor, musician, and director. Given the play’s themes, it was also part of the wider representation of Ireland and Irish alienation by gay theatre in London in this period. Unfortunately, the workshops themselves were not documented and no further detail appears in LGSM’s own archival records held in Manchester³⁹.

5. *Beyond LGSM*

One of those for whom LGSM was a constant but equally tangential presence between 1984 and 1985 was Paud Hegarty, the assistant manager and then manager of Gay’s the Word, where the group met between September and October 1984. The group collected money outside the bookshop, however, throughout the strike. Hegarty did not join LGSM, in the sense of attending its meetings, but was protective of the rights of group members to collect outside the bookshop and quarrelled with the police when they threatened to arrest those rattling buckets (Clews 2017). In the second half of the 1980s, then a member of the Communist Party, Hegarty wrote for *Marxism Today*, the theoretical journal of the Eurocommunists, contributing articles on HIV/AIDS (Hegarty 1986) and book reviews (Hegarty 1988) on novels such as Alan Hollinghurst’s 1987 breakthrough *The Swimming Pool Library*. As bookshop manager in this period, he was likewise often called upon to give talks about the aims and objectives of a specialist LGBT bookshop and the hostile environment which had led to the Defend Gay’s the Word campaign⁴⁰. And in 1989, he joined a range of voices including the director Derek Jarman, drag artist Lily Savage, and singer Jimmy Somerville, in signing the “Our Right to Speak” manifesto – a response to the libel action launched by the *New Statesman* against the *Pink Paper*⁴¹.

³⁷ The play had previously been performed at the Oval House Theatre in June 1982. Young was an active member of LGSM and Gee, a journalist for *Capital Gay*, who had grown up in a mining community himself, was a sympathetic observer.

³⁸ LGSM Minutes, 3 March 1985.

³⁹ Although it seems probable that there was some overlap, at least in Mark Ashton’s contributions, with the work of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League. For instance: Hall-Carpenter Archive, London School of Economics, HCA/LGCM/5/43.

⁴⁰ *Kensington News*, 25 February 1988.

⁴¹ *New York Native*, 20 May 1991.

The antagonism between the *Pink Paper* and the *New Statesman* had its origins in an article published in the latter in September 1989. Its theme was ostensibly an attack on what the journal regarded as “an intense and damaging campaign against orthodox treatments for AIDS”⁴². That is, on the then most common drug used in combatting HIV/AIDS: AZT, which had become available on prescription in the UK in 1987. But AZT had a range of side-effects such as headaches, nausea, and muscle fatigue, which made individuals feel worse taking the medication than they were without it⁴³. For some in the LGBT community, these side-effects were sufficient to maintain the campaign for better medication, rather than settle for the harshness of AZT. One of those who was active in that way was Cass Mann, a nightclub owner who was the primary target of the *New Statesman*’s 1989 article. The *Pink Paper* stepped in to support the “Positively Healthy” campaign (as it was known)⁴⁴. The *New Statesman* then embarked on legal action claiming that the *Pink Paper* article was defamatory and libellous. The case was eventually thrown out by the High Court, although in a separate action in 1992 the *Pink Paper* settled out of court with the original author, Duncan Campbell⁴⁵.

In the 1990s, in the aftermath of the Defend Gay’s the Word and the Our Right to Speak campaigns, with the implementation of Section 28, and the continuing battle against HIV/AIDS, Britain’s more progressive media began to engage more sympathetically with LGBT matters. For some in the LGBT community it seemed evocative of a guilty conscience: even *W. H. Smith*, which had banned *Gay News* not much more than a decade earlier, was exploring ways of tapping into the ‘pink pound’. As Hegarty explained to the *London Times* in August 1993, when the newspaper sought to understand the trend,

I think the liberal establishment is crippled with guilt in the light of AIDS and a right-wing, anti-gay backlash, people in the media see a debt to the gay community. They demonstrated against and failed to stop Clause 28 and feel they owe gay people something because of their contribution to the media. These are people who define themselves by their liberal consciences.⁴⁶

He also spoke out against the commercialised notion of a metropolitan queer lifestyle writing, as Frank Mort has noted, in socialist magazines against London becoming “an alienating and individualised pleasuredrome” (1996, 165). This had been a theme of Hegarty’s personal political activity for years: combining leftist ideals with a clear sense of what LGBT life could be – and in the minds of some activists, should be.

The organisation which exemplified Hegarty’s twin beliefs in liberation and socialism was Icebreakers, a gay socialist befriending – and in many cases ‘be-partnering’ – society established in the mid-1970s out of which grew *Gay’s the Word* and through which activists as varied as Mark Ashton on the one hand and Jim MacSweeney on the other could meet and get to know each other⁴⁷. As MacSweeney recalled in a recent interview for the London-based lifestyle magazine *Attitude*, it was through Icebreakers that he met “friends [...] who continue to be

⁴² *New Statesman*, 29 September 1989.

⁴³ *The Independent on Sunday*, 2 May 1993.

⁴⁴ *The Pink Paper*, 16 September 1989; 7 October 1989; 28 April 1990.

⁴⁵ *The Pink Paper*, 29 June 1990.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 11 August 1993.

⁴⁷ My thanks to Lisa Power for discussing various unwritten aspects of Icebreakers, Switchboard, and related organisations such as Dykes and Faggots Together (DAFT) with me – not least the possibility of ‘pulling’ through attending Icebreakers!

among my closest”⁴⁸. In addition to their meetings, Icebreakers ran a telephone advice service and proclaimed themselves as a “collective of gay men dedicated to bringing about the end of civilisation as we know it”⁴⁹. To achieve that aim, Icebreakers held joint events with activists from Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Sexism, for example, organised popular discos at the Fallen Angel, and held discussion meetings at Gay’s the Word about various topics, including equalising the age of consent. They were an offspring of the liberation ethos of the early 1970s and provided a bridge not only between various phases of the liberation movement in Britain, but also a transatlantic link to the United States and Canada through cross-advertising.

6. Conclusion

I began this article with a series of questions in mind, the most important of which aimed at an examination of the relationship between Irish activists and the LGBT civil rights movements in London in the 1980s. The fact that the lead figure in LGSM was from Northern Ireland, that the managers of Gay’s the Word bookshop for almost its entire forty-year existence were (and are) from the island of Ireland, and that some of the leading figures in the vibrant gay liberation cultural scene in South London in the 1970s and 1980s were Irish, may well be a coincidence. But I do not think so. The experience of being a young gay Irish (or Northern Irish) migrant to London in the 1970s and 1980s provided plenty of encouragement to be active in the struggle for civil rights, however modest that participation turned out to be. Not every activist, after all, was as politically committed as Mark Ashton or Paud Hegarty. In the absence of fuller research, any direct conclusions as to the extent of the impact of Irish involvement in the LGBT civil rights movement in London must inevitably be tentative: in other words this is not a coincidental aspect of the 1970s and 1980s but a potentially rich seam of subjectivity which deserves fuller exploration.

The act of recovery has, of course, useful historiographical implications, too, not least that the study of migrants and transnational solidarities allows for – even encourages – a move beyond the instinctive methodological nationalism of LGBT/queer history. And, albeit with a different group of activists than those examined here, the instinctive westernism of that same historiography. In other words, we can and should contemplate and theorise transnational histories of what was, ultimately, a transnational lesbian and gay civil rights and liberationist movement (albeit complicated by a variety of differential factors). It still is. And it is with this thought that I wish to end. In recognising and considering the relationship between gayness, migration, and the tensions between assimilation and integration, and by bringing the transnational into the writing of LGBT/queer history, historians can catch up with our geographer colleagues, and begin to gain an even richer sense of the politics of gay and lesbian liberation – the latter will require careful consideration given the relative absence of organisations dedicated to lesbian liberation, particularly within minorities – and the lived experience of LGBT people. Therein lies an LGBT/queer history which is inclusive of differential characteristics such as race, gender, and religious identities, and which is made from the bottom up.

⁴⁸ *Attitude*, 4 January 2019.

⁴⁹ *Gay Christian* 31 (February 1984).

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Ireland Is My Home

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Abstract:

The representation of outsiders is a common theme in Irish drama as a method to interpret and reinterpret Irish national identity. More recently, Irish theatre has explored the meaning and experiences of the “new Irish” (Salis 2010, 43). This paper, through a postcolonial analysis, compares the experiences of the returned Irish migrant in Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) to the fragility of tolerance exhibited toward the “other” by the native Irish in Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994) and contrasts asylum to the celebration of Irish residency in *The Cambria* (2005). The analysis highlights perceptions on migration from Ireland and the complications of immigration to modern-day Ireland. The notions of home, Irishness and citizenship are explored against a backdrop of racism, othering and multiculturalism.

Keywords: Asylum, Immigrants, Irish drama, Postcolonial theory, Refugees

1. Introduction

In recent years, Irish theatre has started to bring to the forefront forgotten memories of colonialism, emigration, and national identity within a variety of dramatic contexts. Simultaneously, Irish theatre has expounded the experiences of the displaced, traced changes that have significantly affected Irish society and offered to make sense of the new definitions of Irishness within a global context. Brenna Sobanski (2016) and Ronit Lentin (2002) reference this to the widespread notion of multiculturalism. A review of the dramatic works about emigration in Irish theatre shows that there is a number of plays that concentrate on the problems of those who departed from Ireland and romanticise about the land, among which, is Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* (first produced in 1985). Wei H. Kao points out that:

The mass emigrations since the mid-nineteenth century are not regarded as a pleasant chapter in history; [...]. It could therefore be claimed that the increasingly large quantity of Irish plays written since the mid-twentieth century on migrant experiences reveals implicit but deep-rooted anxieties over this historical trauma. (2015, 65-66)

Michael Higgins and Declan Kiberd (1997) further explain that exile, emigration, and the return to a transformed homeland have always been part of the Irish national experience. Plays which tap into the wider area of immigrant experiences, however, came into prominence in the 1990s, among them is Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* (first produced in 1994). Meanwhile, the economic success of the Celtic Tiger reversed the flow of migrants from outward to inward; this shift in the identity of the Irish nation is captured in plays such as O’Kelly’s *The Cambria* (2005). According to Emilie Pine emigration has been extensively over-used in Irish dramatic works (2008, 312); the theme is still repeatedly revisited in scholarly works creating new linkages to help modern audiences acquire a more profound understanding of the traditions of Irish theatre in a modern context. Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* depicts a postcolonial nation’s infatuation with the American dream in the 1960s and the struggles of the returned emigrant to a changed homeland. Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* on the other hand, depicts the experiences of an illegal Ugandan immigrant seeking asylum in modern-day Ireland, while *The Cambria* an exceptional multifaceted play, celebrates the Irish citizenship of an Afro-American fugitive slave as well as the deportation of a Nigerian asylum seeker.

This paper, through a postcolonial analysis and reference to Homi Bhabha’s (2004 [1994]) Third Space theory, compares the experiences of the returned Irish migrant in Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* to the fragility of tolerance exhibited toward the “other” by the native Irish in Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!*, situating both the returned migrant to a changed homeland and the asylum seeker in the same position in terms of acceptance by the native Irish. It also brings forth the question of “who is Irish” and who is not based on long standing definitions of Irishness. The paper also contrasts the complications faced by immigrants and refugees in making Ireland their home to the celebration of Irish residency in another O’Kelly’s dramatic work: *The Cambria*. The analysis revisits the long-held perceptions on migration from Ireland to the United States in the early 1960s in order to evaluate the degree of change that has affected the Irish nation since in accepting outsiders. Moreover, the paper discusses the impediments globalization has inflicted on Ireland which have resulted in witnessing a growing number of outsiders seeking immigration to the land. The dramatic works accentuate the experience of being “unhomed” (Kao 2015, 68). The notions of home, Irishness and citizenship are investigated against a backdrop of racism, othering and multiculturalism. The comparative analysis hopes to raise awareness around the necessity of tolerating change within homogeneous societies effected by the dissolution of the concept of home for many around the world as wars over land and dominance continue in different parts of the world conjuring a new form of colonialism. The paper makes way for further research in relation to Irish drama and current world affairs as they inevitably strike at the core values of what constitutes Irishness.

2. *The Returned Migrant to a Changed Homeland*

Conversations on a Homecoming “[...] not only sets the disillusionment of the Galway characters against the recollection of their 1960s idealism; dramatically, it contrasts the longings of those who haven’t escaped with the chastened regret of the returned émigré who found even less away than left behind” (Roche 1995 [1994], 146). Michael Ridge, a returned emigrant from

America, post the 1960s is forced to deal with the decay into which his hometown has fallen. Throughout the play, he searches for an alternative home, and the pub The White House, which he co-founded before leaving Ireland, is the alternative. For him, the pub is “refuge” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 11). Celebrated initially as a success story of Irish emigration to America, Michael is unable to sustain this false image and is quickly marginalised by his old friends. Tom asserts his power over Michael by reminding him that: “I was always a better actor than you, better at everything” (80). This antithesis between Tom and Michael lasts throughout the play reflecting a binary opposition of power between the native Irish and “[t]he returned wank” (31). Michael’s return to Ireland is primarily a wistful search for identity. Emira Derbel explains that the return to the homeland often remains a necessity for the displaced emigrant because it is an expression of the longing to “reestablish [the] connection with the nation” (2017, 121). Michael in *Conversations on a Homecoming* is repeatedly hounded to answer the question: “what brought you back?” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 11). Nicholas Grene argues that Michael “comes back in the hope of finding again the hope with which he started” (2006 [2004], 207). Junior, a local at the pub sums it up in one word: “Nos-talgia!” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 311). The Greek definition of the word is the combination of sorrow and a return journey to the homeland. According to Emilie Pine, the nostalgia which prompts the returned emigrant to yearn for what is familiar and traditional is contradicted with the traumatic reality of finding that the home which they “half remembered, half imagined” (Pine 2008, 311) is no longer the place it once was. Poised between despair and hope, Michael’s attempt to refit within the local community is futile. His unease with the Galway community is an indication of the widening breach between what used to be and how things are. Hence, for the returned emigrant “the homeland is a place of trauma” and in turn, the returnee is often considered “a disruptive figure” (322).

Kao argues that the local community’s discomfort with Michael’s return is a reflection of the state of Ireland as a nation. Like Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel, Michael in Murphy’s play, is a witness of things changing and “becoming what they ought not to be” (Friel 1990, 2). Michael’s prolonged absence in America causes Tom to accuse him of being an outsider who wants to claim territory “You came home to stay” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 51), “I think we have *another* leader” (50). The hostility which the Galway residents exhibit towards Michael at the pub heightens as they get drunk. They are apprehensive of his transformation and the knowledge that “strangers [are] comin’ in to run the town” (65). The pub, apart from being a refuge for Michael, serves as an “in-between space” (Kao 2015, 72), a space where postcolonial resistance to all that which is foreign is in display and where Michael’s national identity is re-evaluated. Michael is traumatised by the experience of returning to a changed homeland, and the play highlights that the returned emigrant is both an internal and external outcast. Additionally, the interrelated ideas of belonging further complicates his understanding of home leading to what Dermot Bolger calls “internal exile” (1986).

The imperial invention of domination of ‘the other’ is practiced by Tom to emphasise his superiority over Michael who is referred to by the Galway community as “The returned wank” (Murphy, 1993 [1985], 31). As Mária Kurdi suggests, the strain displayed between the Galway townsfolk and Michael is reminiscent of the tension and suspicion previously exhibited by the native Irish towards the imperialist when the advent of visitors often proved to be a cultural and economic invasion resonating with multiple perils for the native population (1999). Ireland is depicted in Murphy’s play as a nation that has carried forward into its present the imperialistic practices of the coloniser; subversion of power is an attempt to push Michael into internal exile and consequently back to the host nation: “I’m not sure what I came home for, but I think I’m finding out” (Murphy 1993 [1985], 59).

Examined through Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory, the hostility of the Galway community in *Conversations on a Homecoming* reveals the shifting nature of the nation's postcolonial identity in a globalised world. Fetson Kalua explains that a shift in rituals often leads to the formation of "culturally invisible zones" (2009, 23) hence necessitating "the emergence of border spaces" (*ibidem*) or what Bhabha calls liminal spaces. Consistent with Bhabha's definition of liminal spaces, Edward Said uses the term to refer to the connectedness of the "culturally invisible zones" (1984, 23), where he makes the link between the individual and the universal or in other words, between the local and the global.

Richard Pine (2014) explains that in this context, Ireland is both familiar and foreign to Michael; he finds himself "in-between home and homexilation" (Derbel 2017, 121). Unable to conform to the new invisible cultural structures of his homeland, Michael is confined throughout the play to a border zone – the pub. The pub plays a vital role in serving as a transit area between the present and the past; it is a dynamic space where Michael attempts to recover from the trauma of emigration and come to terms with his multi-faceted Irish identity. The play inevitably opens up the discussion around the question of what is Irishness and how is it defined within the new parameters of postcolonialism. By narrating his experience in the third person, Michael underscores the pain and demoralisation he experienced as both an emigrant in New York and as a returned Irishman to his homeland: "No! No! This isn't it at all! This kind of – life – isn't it at all" (Murphy 1993 [1985], 28).

John Walsh points out that "traveling away from home allows the traveler to view the site of belonging with a fresh eye, while making a genuine case about the effects of loss of all familiar recognitions" (1999, 30-31). Edward Said concurs with Walsh that the returned exile sees "things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual [...] there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (Said 1994, 44). This "plurality of vision" (55) is configured in Michael's knowledge of two cultures, the American and the Irish temporarily setting him apart from the rest of the Galway community. Bill Ashcroft *et al.* bring to the surface the hidden polemics around inclusion and exclusion in postcolonial spaces. Ashcroft *et al.* emphasise that 'the other' is often perused for the "essential cultural purity" (2004 [1989], 40), or in Michael's case, he is outcast because he now lacks what constitutes true Irishness in terms of a modern postcolonial Ireland. The theatrical performance of *Conversations on a Homecoming* allows the audience to review Michael's status as a returned emigrant and determine whether his romanticised Irishness makes him Irish enough to be re-accepted into the local community. The play, however, fails to give a clear definition of what constitutes Irishness in modern day Ireland, and the question is left open for audiences to ponder on amidst the adversity in deciding whether to leave one's home, remain or go back (see Kao 2015). Murphy's play repeatedly and implicitly asks the question "who is to inherit Ireland?" (Kiberd 2001, 81).

3. *Illegal Immigration – A Postcolonial Dilemma*

Post-1970s numerous people flooded to Ireland. Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh *et al.* reflect on the social and demographic changes which have taken place in modern Ireland, explaining that "We have tens of thousands of immigrants among us for the first time in history" (2007, 69). The unfamiliar faces of immigrants and asylum seekers scattered across the nation have left many of the native Irish aghast. Edward Said claims that this social change in Ireland is due to the "remarkable prosperity in the Celtic Tiger era" (1984, 49). Ní Éigeartaigh *et al.* recount on behalf of Declan Kiberd that despite the influx of immigrants in Ireland, "yet they seem all but invisible in our contemporary literature. Maybe it will take thoughtful writers a few more years

yet to work them into the script” (2007, 69). While Kiberd’s words may ring true, Irish plays like the ones written by Tom Murphy explore the cultural construction of the Irish identity from the perspective of the diaspora. Other dramatic expressions of the immigrant experience are depicted in Donal O’Kelly’s work. The disillusionment and displacement found in Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* are echoed in O’Kelly’s dramatic piece *Asylum! Asylum!*. O’Kelly attempts to use the imaginative space of the theatre to generate a sense of cross-cultural solidarity between the new Irish or today’s immigrants and the native Irish. Similarities between them may not be immediately apparent, but they ultimately share experiences of being dislocated; the arrival of new immigrants to Ireland and their struggles remind the native Irish of the pain of emigration and the difficulties that came with the attempt to return home. *Asylum! Asylum!* exposes the tactics of illegal immigrants and the anti-immigrant violence that comes with forcible deportation from Ireland. It also examines the collective self-image of the Irish which has been destabilized by the implications of globalisation. Additionally, Ireland’s relationship with Europe is presented as an anchor in a rapidly changing multicultural milieu; this relationship is also the framework against which the events unfold.

Asylum! Asylum! is constructed around the 1991 Bucoro incident in Northern Uganda reported by Amnesty International, relaying the horrors of repeated abductions, torture and killing of civilians by the Ugandan National Resistance Army. Joseph, a Ugandan asylum seeker, eagerly tries to obtain refugee status in Ireland. The first scene opens with his *status* already determined; he is being deported. Refusing to go back to Uganda, Joseph attempts to jump off the plane. Arrested, he claims asylum. Joseph’s dilemma in the play is sandwiched in the middle of the broken relationships of an Irish family. The Gaughrans as a family are affiliated with official government roles in Ireland and signify the larger Irish community. Leo is an immigration officer, Mary, his sister has a law degree and their recently widowed father, Bill, has retired from the service of the Church. As the outsider in the play, Joseph ironically catalyses the dormant tensions between the Gaughran family members and highlights their divisiveness around immigration within a wider national context. Amidst these social and legal complications, Joseph is determined to make Ireland his home by finding links between his world and the Irish. Any links or commonalities which exist between the immigrant and the Irish are often an attempt by the immigrant to “insert themselves into the portals of historical memory; [...] [or]embrace the idea of cross-cultural affinity through displacement to create sympathy [...] on the basis of a universalized human condition” (King 2007, 63). This “notion of a shared sense of affiliation” Jason King explains, “appears much more self-evident to immigrants in Ireland than to [the] Irish” (*ibidem*).

Invited to take refuge in Bill’s home as he files for asylum, Joseph discovers that both the Irish and the African cultures bear a similarity in valuing the worth of conceiving stories. Jason King takes this point of storytelling a step further by highlighting that African asylum seekers confronted with detrimental procedures across Europe tend to create credible stories (66). Bill, representing the older Irish generation who still remember the traumatic experiences of emigration and the potato famine years sympathises with Joseph. Unlike his son Leo, Bill is able to see the commonalities between the past traumatic experiences of the Irish and the trauma of dislocating experienced by the new Irish/illegal immigrants. Both Joseph and Bill share their experiences of suffering under historical and political events. Like Ireland, Uganda under British colonialism had been forced to adopt English, the language of its “former colonist” (Kurdi 1999, 227). Bill recalls the North Strand Bombing: “May 1941. Mammy gave me a terrible clatter for standing up at the window. The sky was lit by flames. ‘Get back in under the stairs’, she said. [...] I want to tell you this. I don’t want it buried with me” (Murphy 1993 [1985],

156). In turn, Joseph feels safe enough to recollect and recount the brutality he witnessed and experienced in his homeland to the Gaughran family:

The soldier lit the straw himself. He lit it at four different points. The straw blazed. The logs began to smoke. [...]. Lumps of burning soil fell through the logs onto the men in the pit. They screamed and coughed. Except the older man. He just moved his lips and looked at me. [...] The soldier took my passport led me to the part of the school where the roof still was. Smoke followed us. They strung me up *Kandooya* because I didn't burn the straw. (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 143)

This act not only carries forward the Irish tradition of storytelling, but temporarily suspends the contradictions and incongruities that so deeply divide the Gaughrans “into indiscriminate existence” (199). The brief unity among the Gaughrans is juxtaposed against Ireland's self-dividedness over the nation's immigration policies. At the same time, recounting past trauma and sharing pain unifies the black and the white making the experience of pain human and universal, it dissolves the “status of in-betweenness” (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 199).

Immigrants in contemporary Irish society are “always envisioned under the sign of the ‘alien’” and their achievements “permanently undermined” (King 2007, 65; Said 1984, 49). This fragile relationship between the host nation and the new Irish is reflected in Leo, who as an immigration officer is convinced that Joseph's story is “emblematic of third world immigrants” which becomes enmeshed within an ever “great[er] web of deception” (Ugba 1999, 123, 76). Leo warns his sister Mary, a lawyer who has been assigned Joseph's appeal case for asylum against these tactics: “Six months to work on that one, Joseph. I'll hand it to you. It's the best I've ever heard. [...] it won't get you asylum. Unless you can produce proof. And that'll be impossible I'm willing to bet, isn't that right, Joseph!?” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 144). In order to fulfil the selfish reasons of survival, Ugba argues that many illegal immigrants “lie” (1999, 235). The émigré's capacity to devise fascinating and absurd narratives of discrimination and persecution is a most essential survival tactic. He further explicates that this is “a normative reaction for undocumented aliens who must live exclusively by their ‘wits’” (109). Leo relentlessly explains to Mary that his restrictive attitude towards Joseph “[...]is not hatred! It's ordinary streetwise commonsense!” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 144). Mary is appalled by her brother's inhumanity: “Jesus Christ! Have you no shred of humanity left?” (*ibidem*). The division over Joseph's calamity breaks the family up. Symbolising Irish immigration law, Leo is left to wrestle with the consequences of his family's acceptance of an illegal African immigrant seeking asylum in their family home. Donal O'Kelly masterfully utilises Leo and Joseph as signifiers to represent “two diametrically opposed concepts, Afrocentrism as against Eurocentrism” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2004 [1989], 40). They stand for imperialism and decolonisation. On a more complex level, this dichotomy can be interpreted as a representation of the search for “cultural purity” (*ibidem*). Introducing the Ugandan asylum seeker to his sister, Leo says “He says it's Joseph Omara. No apostrophe. (*Mary has to laugh*)” (O'Kelly 1996 [1994], 125). The subtle cynical joke is a nod to the racial difference and the shared understanding between the brother and sister of what constitutes Irishness. Leo's antagonism to Joseph's plea for asylum makes him use his job as immigration officer to deny the latter “sanctuary” (Kurdi 1999, 228). Additionally, Leo's own failed attempt at immigrating to another European country in search for better prospects break him. The demeaning treatment he receives in Europe for being Irish prompts his return back home, making him all the more determined to enforce expulsion practices against Joseph.

On another level, the inter-racial romance plot embedded in the play between Mary and Joseph signifies the transcendence of cultural differences as a metaphor for reconciliation;

however, it can also be easily interpreted as a portrayal of the widespread Irish anxieties towards “miscegenation” (King 2005a, 32). Patrick Stephen Dinneen highlights that Ireland cannot be Irish without cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. Accordingly, the theme of interracial romance, although is a common theme in a number of Irish immigrant drama, the romantic subplots either falter at the prospect of the protagonist’s deportation or are unconsummated marriages of convenience because of cultural differences. Dinneen further argues that with foreign cultures come “foreign modes of thought, foreign ideals [...], foreign customs, foreign manners, the spread of all that is debasing” (2018 [1904], 42).

In Act III, Pillar, another immigration officer and Leo’s mate, takes charge of the last stages of action in deporting Joseph. His aggressiveness and forceful nature cut off any means by which Joseph could attempt to integrate into society. He uses the deportation strategy which Europe calls “Operation Sweep” (O’Kelly 1996 [1994], 153) to expel Joseph by force:

I have orders to forcibly deport your Ugandan. [...] Do you know what that means, Mary? (*Pause.*) It means bursting into your father’s house with five officers, a belt, a mouth tape and binding, pinning the Ugandan [...] parceling him up, taking him to the airport and strapping him to a seat on a plane back home. It’s a messy untidy business. (154)

Pillar justifies his brutality by explaining Ireland’s situation in Europe with regards to allowing in immigrants and asylum seekers: “It only takes one leaky section in the walls of Fortress Europe and the flood of immigrants will pour in and swamp the Continent. [...] Europe thinks we’re leaky. [...] They’re seen as chancers to be made an example of” (153).

In short, post-independence Ireland is resistant to foreign penetration for fear of failing to safeguard the borders of Europe and of meddling with fundamental values that constitute Irish heritage. Pillar fails to understand Mary’s behaviour towards Joseph: “What the fuck do you see in him!? Are you blind to the fact he’s a chancer!?” (155). The play is, in many ways, an attempt to explore what it means to be Irish from the perspective of the immigrant, in this instance, an African illegal immigrant. On the other hand, Pillar and Leo stand for the nation as it fights to preserve its Irishness. There is strong emphasis throughout the dramatic text that it is the Irish State’s obligation to withhold the privilege of citizenship in order to regulate the policies related to residency and ensure that privileges are distributed fairly in terms of welfare and labour. In *Asylum! Asylum!* the fray of domestic ties is set aside to give priority to the predicaments of “escape, arrival and departure” at a time when “the borders between home and world [have] become confused” (Sweeney 2008, 284; Bhabha 2004 [1994], 9). The work raises awareness about illegal immigrants and Irish citizenship highlighting the challenges of being unhomed. As the title indicates, there is an imbalance of power permeating throughout. *Asylum! Asylum!* reintroduces the binary opposition of black and white as well as the colonial and the postcolonial in a modern context. It is however one of several examples of dramatic works that situate immigrant issues and Irish cultural encounters in a global context.

4. *Citizenship. A Nation’s Identity*

The Cambria by Donal O’Kelly was commissioned initially to be performed on St. Patrick’s Day in 2005 in Dublin with the aim of “rebranding” (Sweeney 2008, 281) the nation’s identity and reflect the changes in the Irish social fabric. New expressions of Irish identity are explored in *The Cambria* that stand in antithesis to the notions of immigration in *Asylum! Asylum!* and in stark contrast to the idea of home in *Conversations on a Homecoming*. The opening scene

sets the pre-text: a young Nigerian asylum seeker is awaiting deportation at the airport in the present-day Ireland; this is embedded within the narrative of a historical trans-Atlantic voyage of the African-American fugitive slave, Frederick Douglass who flees America after having published his autobiography as part of an anti-slavery campaign. The narrative is implanted at the start of the permanent cultural, political and demographic change in Ireland, 1845, the year of the Great Famine.

There are limited works that document the relationship between Ireland and trans-Atlantic slavery, *The Cambria* being an exception. Among the few scholarly publications that examine this relationship is the work published by Nini Rodgers in 2007 and Fionnghuala Sweeney's work published in 2008. Like *Asylum! Asylum!*, *The Cambria* traces the shift from homogeneity to multiculturalism. Fionnghuala Sweeney explains that

the arrival of the new Irish constitutes the most significant challenge to the republican narrative of democratic commitment, [...] and the historical emergence of the state as a structural embodiment of centuries of resistance to colonialism and empire, by raising difficult questions regarding the Irish relationship to other countries. (2008, 281)

The historical trans-Atlantic voyage signifies a search for identity and raises awareness about varieties of Irishness. Ultimately, the predominant message is the prevalence of Irish citizenship as the decisive factor upon which identity is constructed (283). At the same time, *The Cambria* asserts the moral responsibility of the nation towards individuals claiming asylum or financial distress by placing the dilemma centre-stage. The play "in Brechtian terms" prompts at some point "a consequential moral response" (*ibidem*) from the audience beyond the theatre space. Collette, Patrick's teacher in the opening scene exclaims: "Fredrick Douglass came to Ireland. On a ship. Called The Cambria [...] if Frederick Douglass [...] came to Ireland NOW" (O'Kelly 2005, 4). The statement highlights the importance of reviewing which elements constitute Irish identity today. Ireland in *The Cambria* is home, a destination projecting republican idealism as it commemorates the flight from oppression in search of freedom, economic prosperity, and political identity. Immigration, in this context becomes the global resolution to financial and civil problems. Symbolically, Frederick Douglass's journey stages the responsiveness of past generations in contrast to current Irish outlooks on foreign settlement and refugee appeals.

The reciprocal engagement of subjects in a nation, according to Sweeney, is what forms the individual and collective identity (2008, 285). The play features ten characters played by only two actors on the stage and an Irish population on the dock who receive the fugitive slave. This minimalist technique supports Sweeney's point of view on reciprocal engagement of subjects in a nation. *The Cambria* makes no "attempt at naturalistic effect"; Collette and Vincent symbolic for the "Irish every-man and woman" (*ibidem*) play a variety of roles ranging between different races and genders. There are no distinctive signals that indicate the shifts in identity except the symbolic use of hats. Sweeney explains that this morphing and crossing of racial boundaries is an emphasis on the multiplicity of identity and its fluidity. Contemporary Irish theatre, in this respect, engages with and debates rigid definitions as well as refuses to rigidly circumscribe individuals within the parameters of traditional notions of nationality. Reality, however, may prove this to be untrue, many of today's immigrants find themselves unable to substitute their old identity for a new one that reflects the values and ideals of the host nation. This view derives from Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory where the immigrant, in an attempt to integrate into the social life of the host nation, is in fact trapped within a liminal space. The transient space is an invisible border that can never be crossed without a complete shedding of the origin, an

often all too painful journey that can psychologically break an individual. The sense of loss experienced by the refugee and the *status* of being unhomed lead to a fear of loss of identity. The result is either a distorted version of being Irish or a completely new configuration that is not even remotely connected to the traditions and values of Ireland. O’Kelly grasps these truths by confining the young Nigerian asylum seeker to the airport, a point of departure and arrival leaving the young man in limbo. Similarly, Frederick Douglass for most part of the play is trapped on a ship metaphorically making a trans-Atlantic journey in search of who he is.

The opening scene shows Collette recounting her efforts in trying to convince Immigration that Patrick should be granted citizenship underscoring the irony of his receiving a “B in Honours History” from Daniel O’Connell’s school (O’Kelly 2005, 3). Like Mary in *Asylum! Asylum!*, Collette’s efforts to support the citizenship of an African asylum seeker in the present-day Ireland fail. In parallel, O’Kelly dramatises the psychological complexity of denying one’s identity captured through the symbolic nagging of a little girl, Matilda who is convinced that Frederick Douglas is a minstrel and begs him to perform to make them laugh. Each encounter is a strike at Douglas’s identity carrying a streak of racism for his black colour:

MATILDA: Do you sing and dance?
 FREDERICK: Em – not normally.
 MATILDA: Oh yes you are. (7)

The identity crisis becomes more complex when Solomon, another Afro-American slave on the ship, recognises Douglass’s true identity and taunts him for traveling incognito:

FREDERICK: Stop calling me – Frederick Douglass!
 SOLOMON: What’s wrong Freddie? It’s your name, isn’t it? (24)

In denying his own name, Douglass denies his past and all that he stands for in his autobiography. Significantly, the temporary denial takes place aboard the ship – a dynamic liminal space where he shifts personae to ensure his survival and safety. Much like the tactics of the illegal immigrant in *Asylum! Asylum!* where Joseph must live by his wits and scavenge the streets for economic sustainability, Douglass protects his freedom by appropriating the identity of a minstrel. Douglass’s character is established on a series of denials and the need to put safety first before identity. Ironically, he is travelling with a copy of his autobiography, an embodiment of his whole self, past and present as he heads towards a brighter future in Ireland.

In Section 4 of the play, while the choir ladies sing, Douglass contemplates about Ireland as his new home: “I face my future. Of freedom. I am racing towards it. Paddles chant my advance in the fastest vessel known to man. The Cambria” (23). Douglass’s arrival to Ireland as a free man is an enactment of the impossible being possible. As he lands on the docks of Queens-town, a free man, Frederick Douglass is greeted by Daniel O’Connell, music and a welcoming Irish crowd: “A howling cheer of unbelievable volume reverberates around the valley. It echoes back from the mountains [...]. Then echoes again from the mountains behind until the very land of Ireland seems to roar in welcome for me” (49). The play ends on a positive note with Douglass describing Ireland for what it truly is for those who wish to make it their home: “I can truly say I have spent some of the happiest days of my life since landing in this country. [...] the entire absence of prejudice against me, contrasts so strongly with my bitter experience [...] that I look with wonder and amazement on the transition” (*ibidem*).

5. Conclusion

The three dramatic texts examined in this paper are all critiques of present-day Ireland and are considered within two contexts: nationally and globally. According to Christopher Murray, the evaluative parameters for Irish plays must and foremost be driven by a sound understanding of the “Irish dramatic tradition” (2010, 1). Concurring with this view, it is important to point out that the dramatic works under study depict the complex relationships which the Irish have with America, Europe and Africa. The Irish fascination with the American Dream is satirised in Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* by focusing on the failings of the returned emigrant both at home and abroad. Ireland’s relationship to Europe is codified in it being a reference point for all its policies in relation to job security, immigration laws, and human rights within the European Union in *Asylum! Asylum!* and partly in *The Cambria*. Hints have also been made at Ireland’s relationship to other postcolonial nations such as Uganda and America once a slave-trading nation under British colonial rule.

In this analysis, Ireland is presented as a home in three different contexts foregrounding the idea of being unhomed as another major theme that raises complex discussions. Murphy’s Michael is nostalgic about an Ireland he no longer recognises while Joseph in O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!*, as an African, is unable to seek asylum and make a home for himself in postcolonial Ireland. Frederick Douglass significantly in *The Cambria* finds the true definition of home as he contrasts life in America to the life he makes in Ireland. Each of the main characters demonstrates the pain of being unhomed in accordance with Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space. Homi Bhabha and Edward Said emphasise that the displaced and the alienated will always get caught in the in-betweenness of the invisible cultural structures of the new homeland; Michael is confined to the pub as a space of refuge and Joseph claims sanctuary in the immigration officer’s family home. Joseph and Michael consequently are forced to occupy a border zone; the difference here is that Ireland *is* Michael’s homeland. The commonality between Michael and Joseph is their “homexilation” (Derbel 2017, 121). Of further significance to this discussion is that both Michael and Frederick Douglass make trans-Atlantic voyages to Ireland, but they each experience the land differently. The returned emigrant coming back from America in the 1960s is shunned by his countrymen, while the run-away slave flees who flees from oppression in America in 1845 claims to live his happiest days on the soil of the Republic.

Home is both a psychological and a physical space, the plays magnify the intricacies of belonging within a geographical place as well as engage with the older notions of home and identity. The painful memories of displacement bring the discussion round to the fact that the native land is often a place of suffering and the host nation often unwelcoming. The psychological pressures that come with estrangement are expressed in the dialogues of the main characters exposing the difficulty of survival outside of Ireland and the toil they endure to infiltrate the tight social Irish fabric which is rooted in a deep history of Celtic ideals and traditional beliefs. Fear of newcomers from abroad is exemplified in the resistance of the native Irish towards the returned emigrant and the dividedness about accepting the new Irish as human beings in need of political refuge and economic sustenance. They are perceived as a threat to all that constitutes Irishness. This post-colonial defiance is substantiated by Bhabha and Pine as being common in post-colonial spaces. This, however, is reversed in O’Kelly’s *The Cambria*. Although the play ends with the acceptance of a fugitive Afro-American slave as an Irish citizen, it leaves the audience to speculate on the possibilities that enunciate around this immigrant dilemma if it were to take place today on the shores of Ireland.

Pointedly, the dramatic texts are illustrations of the struggles of male protagonists in search for freedom, economic prosperity and political identity; by making Ireland their home, they attempt to take their place in the world and as such redefine the terms of Irish identity and the nation's relationship to the rest of the world. All three dramas raise the question, "who is to inherit Ireland?" (Kiberd 2001,18) and highlight important issues related to emigration, immigration, and identity in a postcolonial nation within a global context, but at the same time warn audiences about the dangers of shoving the outsider into a liminal space forcing them to become the other. This all too dangerous act divides societies and allows hatred, discrimination and racism to manifest in otherwise peaceful existences. A need to enforce legal policies that regulate immigration, refugees and asylum can blind policy makers across nations to the need to respond to humanitarian crises. It is, however, important to emphasise that this is not a call to nations to forsake precautionary measures against illegal tactics to occupy land or have leaky borders that would give way to charlatans who seek economic prosperity. Notably, the dramatic texts discuss these issues which have either been neglected or often cause distress when remembered.

It is fair to conclude that the analysis has revealed a variety of Irishness and has made significant links between past emigrant experiences to current day immigrant and refugee sufferings. It has also engaged with the redefinition of Irish identity within a global context highlighting the implications of multiculturalism on Irish society as well as how it is perceived by outsiders. The divisiveness of the Irish nation over immigration and asylum pits the nation's fear of newcomers against its obligation to respond to global calamities. Moreover, the notion of home is manifested in ways that give way to new understandings of the complications of dislocation within one's own homeland which is further explicated by the feeling of being unhomed in the host nation. Within these dramatic works, Ireland is forced to conform to the demands of globalisation as it plays host to individuals who have either forgotten what it means to be Irish or immigrants and refugees of different nationalities who seek to claim Irish citizenship for a more stable and prosperous existence.

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Empathy in Exile: Edna O'Brien, Donal Ryan and the Contemporary Irish Novel

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Abstract:

This paper explores how empathy and exile are represented as narrative strategies in Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea*. I argue that post-Celtic Tiger economy novels of the recent past are turning to a more global, universal and empathic Irishness in order to shed light on the problems of nationhood, gender and identity. Both authors use poetic forms of literary mythmaking, fairy tale or fable to imagine future possibilities, they employ free indirect style to inhabit a character's inner state of mind and use collective witness testimonials and self-reflection in order to engage with the present. This study links research on narrative empathy with spatial, post-colonial and feminist theory to propose innovations in contemporary Irish fiction.

Keywords: Alterity, Empathy, Exile, Narrative Strategy, Post-Celtic Tiger

We encounter the stranger in others in order to uncover
the hidden, untransacted parts of ourselves.
Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988)

1. Introduction: Roots of Disconnection, Multiculturalism and Transnationalism in the Contemporary Irish Novel

In a 2018 review of *Connect*, Julian Gough made a “public apology to Anne Enright and John Banville and Colm Tóibín” (Conroy 2018, 2) to reconcile a statement he had made about novels with regressive or nostalgic themes set in Ireland. To amend this assessment and address what he saw as the current “crisis of meaning”, Gough decided to write the book that he had wanted to read. In *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years (1990-2018): Gender, Bodies, Memory*, Susan Cahill points to the controversial 2010 blogpost, when Gough asserted, “If there is a movement in Ireland, it is backwards. Novel after novel is set in the nineteen seventies, sixties and fifties. Reading award winning Irish literary fiction, you wouldn't know television had

been invented” (2011, 6). In *Connect*, Gough reflected on this “crisis of meaning” in order to write about underlying issues of entrenched tribalism, social isolation, seismic shifts in institutional power and the influence of technology on our lack of ability to communicate and empathize with others.

Along with problems of social connection, Ireland has had to readdress the issue of identity and belonging in the wake of the 2004 Citizenship referendum. In an attempt to reinforce a more “monocultural” Ireland, the nation became “hosts to foreign guests” states Pilar Villar-Argáiz in her introduction to *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* (2014, 5). The nation became more polarized in its views towards an influx of immigrants seeking asylum and employment in a downturned economy. From 1995 to 2000, more than 250,000 people immigrated to Ireland, including European Nationals and political refugees, causing a new reversal of emigration. These strains began to divide the twenty-first century debate over interculturalism into an opposing dialectic (5). As presented by Declan Kiberd, one side argued a more liberal model of the immigrant’s representation in contemporary Ireland, a model as one that is a more “inclusive and empathic” (6). Critics of this inclusive point of view challenge the negative effects of globalization with hostility, xenophobia and exclusion of diasporic communities and argue against the notion of Ireland as hospitable, welcoming nation. As writers address contemporary social issues in an attempt to grapple with the “crisis of meaning” and with the “failure to connect”, the issue of immigration presents a way to empathically respond. Turning to the “other” as a catalyst of self-reflection and re-imagining of identity, Irish authors are writing from a place that is firmly grounded in the present.

In this essay, I focus on two contemporary novels that foreground the subject of the exile who is navigating trauma. In order to confront the present challenges of multicultural Ireland and the UK they employ empathic, multi-faceted and innovative narrative strategies to address problems of nationhood, gender and identity. In Donal Ryan’s *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018) and Edna O’Brien’s *The Little Red Chairs* (2015) the authors take up the complexity of the global immigrant and refugee’s experience to shed light on the problems of reconciliation with the past and of the difficulties of belonging as a person living in exile. Indeed, they exemplify how contemporary Irish authors have revisited the concept of exile, (and self-exile) to grapple with how issues of racism, poverty and exploitation hold a mirror to social problems in a rapidly evolving nation.

2. Narrative Empathy and the Exile

Colum McCann is perhaps the most prominent of contemporary Irish writers associated with employing empathy as a narrative strategy in his work. In his selection of essays, *Letters to a Young Writer* (2017), McCann argues against the advice “write what you know” as a way to encourage writers to form a more outward exploration of lived experience. “The only true way to expand your world is to inhabit an otherness beyond ourselves”, he contends, “There is one simple word for this: *empathy*. Don’t let them fool you. Empathy is violent. Empathy is tough. Empathy can rip you open. Once you go there, you can be changed” (12). For the skeptic who might misinterpret empathy as nostalgia or sentimentalism, he advises new creative writers to seek out source material from something or someone they don’t yet know. McCann’s recent novels, *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and *TransAtlantic* (2013), apply his own advice as a directive in order to “weave together the stories of several characters told from various perspectives and in different authorial voices” (Lovell 2013, 3). To write fully from another perspective, he had to insist on embodying their frame of mind. McCann has described empathy as “the ability to step

with agility and decency into the shoes of someone else. The ability also to find ourselves in the stories of others” (O’Neill 2018, 4). By emphasizing “agility” and “decency” in embodying this form of perspective taking, McCann suggests a more urgent form of imagining another’s inner world, one with a robust and respectful deference to another’s experience, especially towards the exile who is in a precarious or traumatized circumstance.

Recent studies of empathy’s application to narrative form borrow from new research on neurology, psychology and narratology. Though first developed in theories on aesthetics and art historical analysis, empathy and its inclusion in literary criticism served as a way to provoke altruism and other prosocial behaviors in the reader. According to Suzanne Keen, in a “Theory of Narrative Empathy”, “the word empathy is a relatively young term, entering English in the early twentieth century as a coined translation of the German word *Einfühlung*. Aspects of empathy have been described by philosophers since the days of Adam Smith and David Hume under the older term sympathy” (226). Recent translations of late nineteenth century German essays also support our understanding of “the impact of spatial forms, and our readiness to describe aesthetic objects in terms drawn from the vocabulary of human moods and emotions” (Wilkinson 1995, 417). Keen describes empathy as “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (Keen, 208). What do O’Brien and Ryan do in these two novels to motivate a “spontaneous sharing of affect” (*ibidem*)? To borrow from Keen, empathy is provoked by placing us in the mind of the narrator, by witnessing another’s emotional state or in other words to stand in his or her shoes.

The intersection of Irish local identities with the influx of exiled immigrant characters in each novel offer a space for empathy to transpire as characters begin to heal through shared narratives of suffering. O’Brien and Ryan offer an empathic rendering of the complexity of moral life in a shifting the unstable global space of the exile. Like Colum McCann’s weaving together of authorial voices, they center on rich collection of characters brought together through the circumstances of fate. In *From a Low and Quiet Sea* this complexity is encapsulated in the character Farouk’s reflection: “if you observe a man closely and properly you’ll eventually come to know the shade of his soul. No soul is brilliant white, save for the souls of infants. But there are men alive who will do evil without pause, who are without mercy, and there are men alive who would rather die than harm another, and all of the rest of us fall somewhere in between” (Ryan 2018, 13).

In this essay, I examine how the two authors employ three similar empathic narrative strategies in their structure. Both novels enter into the realm of poetic language by using a form of literary mythmaking, fairy tale or fable in order to imagine future possibilities. The authors weave a collection of polyphonic third-person and first-person narratives to fully develop the individual major characters while the role of minor supporting characters (who are often displaced or marginalized) are rendered equally in their attention to detail. Lastly, the central characters begin to restore their fractured lives through shared narrative and witness testimonials as an empathic strategy to confront and heal their own traumas.

In *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, Ryan uses a free indirect style to portray a displaced and traumatized Syrian doctor. With this narrative strategy in the first section of the novel, “Farouk”, Ryan intimately places us in the mind of a man in a precarious state. In *How Fiction Works*, James Wood elaborates how this technique functions in the novel: “Through free indirect style, we see things through the character’s eyes and language but also through the author’s eyes. We inhabit omniscience and partiality at once” (2008, 11). According to Wood, through dramatic irony we can anticipate how a life altering decision awaits as Farouk is subjected to a series of

violent images. This begins to happen when “a gap opens up between the author and character, and the bridge – which is free indirect style itself – between them simultaneously closes that gap and draws attention to its distance” (*ibidem*).

In *The Little Red Chairs*, Edna O’Brien employs a similar narrative strategy with her protagonist, Fidelma, who resolves the complications of her own exile and banishment from her homeland by encountering and engaging in empathic testimonial sharing with war torn refugees. In both cases, shared encounters with exiled persons suggest the authors’ conscious engagement with representing those facing global displacement.

Edward Said expresses the complexity of representing the exile in his essay, “Reflections on Exile”, when he describes the transitional nature of space and the alienation of leaving one’s home. Within this space, the refugee, one who has little or no control of his circumstances, experiences alienation and lives in suspended animation. “Exile is life lived outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal, but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew” (2000, 186).

In a 2004 review of *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, Michael Kenneally notes author Patrick Ward’s exhaustion with the term “exile” as a literary trope. The exile “needs to be broadened to accommodate such iterations as emigration, migration, displacement, banishment, and expatriation” (146) and often fails to critique the inherent causes of these issues such as colonization and mass emigration. Ward suggests that the exile is inherently woven into the fabric and historically rooted into Irish aesthetic expression. “For hundreds of years, the consequences of dislocation, banishment, wandering and negotiating ‘otherness’ have been a central if not *the* defining factor in the Irish experience” (150). With a focus on the Irish emigrant in this critique, these novels begin to offer a new way of negotiating the identity of the other.

Acting out the difficult circumstances of traumatized persons reveals the ways in which affect and empathy are narrated, how characters address their exile, fail to assimilate and hang adrift in identity in limbo between the past and a difficult to imagine future. Within open and closed spaces their sense of time and their identities are malleable and permeable. They oscillate between an attitude of skepticism and a longing for inclusion. Said describes how assimilation is complicated by the exile’s relation to space. “Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience” (Said 2000, 185).

3. *Narrative Strategies in The Little Red Chairs*

O’Brien’s novel begins with the story of Fidelma, a 40 year-old woman who lives in a small fictional Irish village named Cloonoila. A self-described healer/sex therapist, Vladimir Dragan, arrives as a mysterious blow-in and gains the trust of the village with his alluring, mystical sensibility. Fidelma’s stagnant marriage to the much older Jack is upended by this “unwelcome newcomer”. She finds herself in the vulnerable position of falling under his spell and confesses to him that she longs to have a child after two failed pregnancies with Jack. Vlad’s healing nature causes her to overlook his occasional outbursts.

En route to visit the grave of William Butler Yeats, Vlad is abruptly arrested in front of the village onlookers. What she doesn’t know is that Vlad is in fact a war criminal hiding in plain sight, a character O’Brien based on the life of Serbian general Radovan Karadžić. Unfortunately, Fidelma discovers the secrets of his past too late. In her review of the novel, “Healing and Horror Sit Side by Side in *The Little Red Chairs*” Annalisa Quinn outlines how the author subtly reveals the dark side of his character by hinting at his violent nature. Also known as “Vuk” a Serbian

nickname for wolf, Vlad perplexes his landlady by reading the poems from his journal which are full of images of bullets and strapping wolves. Puzzled, she expects him to write more in the style of his supposed literary hero, Yeats who leans towards the style of “wandering waters in the pools of Glencar” (Quinn 2016). With Vlad, O’Brien set out to explore how good and evil can coexist within one person. The complexity of this duality is revealed through narrative. Quinn argues, “Vlad is more than just a monster in a mask, who smiles [...] and is a villain. He *does* heal his patients, and this duality reveals the way evil can coexist with grace and empathy [...] His healing hands are also butcher’s hands” (*ibidem*).

Fidelma and Vlad’s affair turns out to short lived, and the drama is compounded by the scandal of Vlad’s arrest in Cloonoila. His comrades arrive to seek revenge with a traumatic assault resulting in the loss of her pregnancy. Fleeing to London, her only recourse is to immerse herself in a community of hidden immigrants who work as night cleaners at a bank. At a safe house community centre, Fidelma comes to terms with her own binary feelings of shame and guilt by witnessing other’s traumatic personal testimonials. Her remorse seems to pale in comparison to those who are the victims of genocide and violence. But she, too, has experienced a despicable trauma and begins to repair her life in this community of exiles.

Recent scholarship on O’Brien’s earlier novels map out a new way of addressing the theme of failed romance scripts and how they have evolved in her work. Elizabeth Weston’s 2010 article “Constitutive Trauma in Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girls* Trilogy: The Romance of Reenactment,” reads O’Brien’s novel through developments in trauma theory, “turning life into a reenactment of the past rather than a process of change” (83). Often framed as a *Bildungsroman*, *The Country Girls* upends the trope of coming of age development with the two protagonists, Caithleen (Kate) and Baba who fail to develop agency as young adults as they cycle through unfulfilling relationships. By this reenacting of childhood traumas, Caithleen narrates the cycle of “escaping a violent alcoholic father and unhappy mother [...] trying to repair the pain of unmet childhood needs through losing herself in a relationship with a caretaking man, which ends in disaster every time” (*ibidem*).

In *The Little Red Chairs*, O’Brien challenges this notion of Irish women reenacting a series of romance scripts Weston lays out in her analysis of *The Country Girls*. Fidelma endures her own traumas and enacts a way to rewrite the failed double romance disaster script of her mature husband Jack and the sex therapist, healer and war criminal Vlad. She begins to embody a sense of agency by immersing herself in a new community of migrants who are attempting to start over in their new home. Though London may have at first provided escape for Fidelma as a way to flee a shameful and violent episode in her past, she finds a kind of humble redemption living among like-minded souls who are reconstructing a new beginning.

In her new life, she leaves behind the relative comfort and identity as a former shop keeper and wife. By extracting herself from her former life, she erases her identity as member of the Cloonoila community. As a night cleaner, Fidelma becomes invisible, anonymous and unattached to her former self. With the assistance of two references from home, she slowly embarks on a new found identity at her new job. Window and surface cleaning acts to wipe away the ingrained dust covering of her former self. In this passage, she catches herself in a state of transformation: “In her blue tunic and her hair drawn back severely, [her friend] Dara would hardly recognize her now. Not that she looked in mirrors, but occasionally, she caught sight of herself in one of the big windows that looked out onto the Thames, the water a sheet of dark at night” (O’Brien 2015, 175). Time, for Fidelma, like the exilic sense of space, becomes as Edward Said suggests “decentered, contrapuntal” (Said 2000, 186). In the chapter fittingly called “Dust”, she tries to hold on to her transient cleaning job despite a number of arbitrary obstacles placed in front of her by petty supervisors: “[...] she endured everything, so as to cling onto this job. She forgot

to eat, she forgot to pray, she forgot the seasons, although once, snow drops appeared in her mind and she reckoned that she must have sighted clumps of them, under trees in the part, milk-white, with their mantles of drooping green” (O’Brien 2015, 185-186).

4. *Realism, Folklore and Myth*

In her examination of Irish women writers and the short story, Elke D’hoker detects underneath Edna O’Brien’s prevalent style of realism “a thin veneer covering an underlying symbolic structure, which dramatizes recurrent psychic patterns and processes” (2016, 147). In her analysis of the author, “Edna O’Brien’s Desiring Subjects”, D’hoker, quoting Sinéad Mooney outlines the underlying “archetypal patterns that are contained in the myths and fairy tales of Western culture” (*ibidem*). This structure is explored further in a number of chapters in *The Little Red Chairs*. At the outset of the novel, O’Brien overlays the description of the village setting with intertextual references to folklore in order to set a mysterious and ominous tone. An epigraph from the Serbian saga, *The Mountain Wreath* opens the novel, “The wolf is entitled to the lamb” (O’Brien 2015, 1). The introduction in the first chapter, “Cloonola” (3) borrows from the text of the ancient epic, Gilgamesh to draw a parallel to Vlad: “The dirt of his travels, Gilgamesh washed from his hair, all the soiled garments he cast them off, clean new clothes he put on” (*ibidem*). By the time he makes his way to the village, this curious traveler takes the form of the mischievous shapeshifter, “The Pooka Man”:

[...] there would be those who reported strange occurrences on that same winter evening; dogs barking crazily as if there was thunder, and the sound of the nightingale whose song and warblings were never heard so far west. The child of a gipsy family, who lived in a caravan by the sea, swore she saw the Pooka Man coming through the window at her, pointing a hatchet. (4)

Ron Rosenbaum, in his *Smithsonian Magazine* review of *The Little Red Chairs* notes the author’s uncanny twist on a creature from Irish folklore. A Pooka Man is “a precursor of terrible tidings [...] sometimes a reversal in fortune for the better – but not often when he has a hatchet in his hand” (2016). O’Brien’s use of myth and folklore upend how narratives of evil circulate and morph as they are embodied in human form.

Throughout the novel, myths and fairy tales re-appear and often work as a device to assist in enacting an alternative future or an imagined possibility for minor characters experiencing trauma or displacement. Little goes right for Fidelma until she befriends a young undocumented immigrant named Mistletoe. As she begins to become familiarized with her own routine, she empathizes with Mistletoe’s isolated existence. The two begin to stage getaway fantasies by creating a series of whimsical drawings imagining exotic scenes of the two together as “voyagers setting out for distant places” (O’Brien 2015, 199). They record the titles of their stories, “Mistletoe and Fidelma on their way to China with scenery replete with pagodas and palm trees” (*ibidem*) and establish an unlikely bond of friendship through a generative experience of shared narrative. Mistletoe’s drawings are later discovered by her protective father who fears his daughter is being brainwashed. This imagining appears as an intrusion on the father and causes him to abruptly sever their relationship. Fidelma suffers the loss just as deeply as Mistletoe. O’Brien describes how the lights dim on their ability to imagine an alternative future, “At the very last moment, Mistletoe turned and waved. It was a wan wave, identical to when they first met, a wave bringing the curtain down on their world of make-believe” (210). As the relationship is severed, her empathic connection with Mistletoe compounds Fidelma’s grief over losing a child and leaving her more vulnerable and wary of trusting others.

In “Strangers in Our Mist”, his review of O’Brien’s novel, James Wood suggests that the local in fiction has become more global, even in a small somewhat cloistered Irish village. Though the novel begins in Ireland it soon begins to broaden in scope to link smaller, individual perspectives into larger network of global interconnectedness. A gauze of provincialism may distract the reader at the outset. Wood argues that through these familiar seeming characters, we can relate to the unfamiliar more empathically. “*The Little Red Chairs* is obviously about displacement and immigration, obviously about the toll of war and its murderers and victims, it is also about how the tentacles of globalization reach everywhere, even into the corners of provincial Ireland” (2016, 11). He notes that through adeptness in writing in a realist fashion, “O’Brien pays sympathetic attention to many different lives, from ordinary Irish villagers (the priest, the nun, the draper’s wife) to refugees, migrants, and displaced workers in London” (2). In her late style, “Her novels [...] no longer scandalize, but they have retained their deeper, authentic radicalism: they commit themselves to exploring the lives of women as gambles on freedom and acts of rebellion” (3). Furthermore, Wood reminds us, O’Brien retains empathy for the supporting roles of women, a descriptive animation of minor characters and a “brilliant ear for offhand description, the kind that immediately situates us in a location, or in a consciousness” (4). An example of Wood’s characterization is the description of one of Fidelma’s allies, Sister Bonaventure. The nun is described as both whimsical and practical at the same time. “She wore a navy skirt, navy jumper, black stockings and good strong black shoes for the journeys she made to isolated places, up by roads and bog roads, where she wouldn’t dare risk her little Mini, her chariot of freedom” (O’Brien 2015, 6-7).

5. *Women and Narrative Spaces*

Fidelma’s disconnected existence in London leaves her with a desire to seek the companionship of others in similar circumstances. At a community centre, she eventually finds this support. O’Brien describes the space as full of “the flotsam of the world, unable to go home, wherever home is” (203). Through group discussions, an opportunity arises for the women to bear witness to stories of their fractured lives. Fidelma’s story begins by hinting at the late capitalist repercussions of Post-Celtic Tiger depression affecting both urban and rural Ireland: “Many things have changed for the better, more so in the cities; in the countryside there is a lot of prejudice and they crave scandal as if it were nectar” (*ibidem*). Details of her circumstances seem trivial compared to the stories of a collection of refugees, some of whom were survivors and victims of Vlad’s genocidal war in Bosnia. Reluctantly, she shares her shame to the group in the form of a confession:

I ruined things for my husband and for our reputation, by being faithless. It turned out that a new man came amongst us in the guise of a prophet, but he had done an appalling thing, had ordered and orchestrated thousands of deaths, in his own blighted land. I feel that by having been with him I am an accomplice to those appalling things. I feel a guilt that is, if you like, counterfeit guilt and so I stand accused. On my last morning, I stood on a hillock outside the convent, where I had been given shelter after my downfall, and spoke to the landscape itself, saying I wanted to cleanse my house, my soul, myself. (215)

This confession, though complicated by her own feelings of complicity with evil, suggests Fidelma’s willingness to confront the past and develop agency in a space in communion with refugees escaping their own traumas. Her guilt as a fallen woman in this space begins with personal narrative. Testimonial sharing dissipates her shame by initiating a form of self-healing.

She develops a tentative sense of confidence through sharing her experience, perhaps O'Brien's acknowledgement that women's voices are evolving into a more prominent role as storytellers and writers. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd offers some historical perspective for what underlies her motives: "In the literature of the emerging nation, woman reverted to being a site of contest rather than an agent of her own desire. This created a 'double colonialism' that Irish women experience in the private sphere as well as the public" (qtd. in Weston 2010, 105). Kiberd's assertion provides context for the complexities of Fidelma's situation and elicits empathy for Irish women who are "twice victimized" (*ibidem*).

In the wake of Mary Robinson's presidency in the 1990s, Irish women writers grappled with themes of social change by writing in a neo-gothic style, staging their novels in familiar, domestic settings. Anne Fogarty describes this as a type of domestic horror, a desire for mobility and a quest for escape from the home. Underlying this thematic turn was the notion that women were far less likely to be political or financially empowered by the Celtic Tiger boom that followed. She argues the neo-gothic novels written during this period "invariably concentrate on taboo subjects and use their symbolic resources to probe the fundamental anxieties of a culture" (Fogarty 2000, 81). In *The Little Red Chairs*, neo-gothic themes re-occur in a new treatment of the domestic space, the community centre, where women are extracted from their isolation in the home. Scandalous secrets are exposed outside the home allowing for empathic narrative sharing among the dislocated.

Within the last fifty years, women's writing has found a more generative place in Ireland in the documenting of personal narratives and witness testimonials. Anne Mulhall argues that articulation of experiences democratizes auto-biographical writing and offers an inclusive form for articulating the feminist concept of the how the "personal is political" (2018, 383). In her essay "Life Writing and Personal Testimony, 1970-Present", women's voices and access to representation are varied by class and other forms of institutional power. Mulhall points to Gayatri Spivak's observation of witness testimonial as form of expression that crosses boundaries of class: "As distinct from autobiography, testimony is the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to the less oppressed other" (384). In a culture where women's voices have been "subordinated and silenced, life writing has emerged as a form for transformation and inclusion" (383). In *The Little Red Chairs*, Fidelma's testimonial sharing among refugees offers an opportunity for her to empathize with other exiles. Opening up about a shared trauma is a way to articulate and uncover her own inner conflicts by speaking of the shame and feelings of inadvertent complicity with Vlad's past crimes. Opening the doors of expression where women's voices are "vividly represented [in] spaces and places, in tandem with identity themes [...] work out boundary-crossing potentials for connection, communication, and change" (Keen 2006, 228). Fidelma finds acceptance for herself and a newfound identity in the community centre. In the final moments of the novel, she feels she is no longer an exile. "I am not a stranger here anymore" (O'Brien 2015, 293) she shares in the final chapter, "Home".

6. *Narrative Strategies in From a Low and Quiet Sea (2018)*

In *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, Farouk, Lampy and John are all in their own way exiled and searching for home and belonging. Donal Ryan's choice to foreground Farouk at the outset of the novel is an example of what Edna Longley describes as the Irish writers' move towards a "cultural coexistence rather than cultural exchange" (qtd. in Estévez Saá 2014, 80). Reading a news article inspired the author to write a fictional story from the perspective of a Syrian doctor who loses his wife and daughter on a harrowing boat passage. Farouk, who at

great risk convinces his wife that they must leave Syria and pays a shifty character to transport them to safety on an overcrowded boat. Ryan suggests within Farouk's harrowing story there is an empathic pull of human connectivity. The novel opens with a striking parable: "If a tree is starving, its neighbours will send it food. No one really knows how this can be, but it is. Nutrients will travel in the tunnel made of fungus from the roots of a healthy tree to its starving neighbour" (Ryan 2018, 3).

While crossing the Mediterranean Sea, Farouk's wife shares an ominous fable with her daughter about a king who tries to court a suitor with jewels and other amusements. Indifferent to his charm, she becomes more interested in feeding a small bird who visits her window sill. The king decides to hire an archer to kill the bird and all birds obstructing his path. Farouk, uneasy about his wife's unusual choice of a soothing bedtime story, comforts his daughter by telling her it's only a fable, "Its moral is how useless it is to blame others for things not being as we'd like them to be" (29). A passenger then informs the passengers, "There are no life jackets on this boat. There is no captain. There is no crew. There is nothing on this boat but us" (30). Adrift in the sea, Farouk's family and the other passengers are in an indeterminate void. The boat, formerly a space of potential and hope, waivers and trembles on the open sea. Gaston Bachelard in his essay "The Dialectics of Inside and Outside", included in *The Poetics of Space*, aptly describes how we experience a feeling of disorientation in the precarious border between home and the unknown. "Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility" (1964 [1958], 218). Farouk and his family have entered into the space of the exile who have become as Edward Said's describes "[...] nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" (Said 2002, 186). Ryan's inclusion of fables in Farouk's story can be employed to imagine alternative futures other than the instability and the reality of his trauma in the moment. After the boat tragedy, he begins to revisit the bird fable in order to construct a new narrative of survival. "Farouk enjoyed the telling of the story. Each time he told it something new occurred to him, some different meaning [...]" (31).

Ryan's narrative strategy in *From a Low and Quiet Sea* differs significantly from the polyphonic style of one of his first novels, *The Spinning Heart*. In his 2017 article, "Ruined Futures: Gentrification as Famine in Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Literature", Jason Buchanan describes the novel as one that "unfolds via twenty-one first-person narratives [to] provide a patchwork picture of post-Tiger life" (62). *From a Low and Quiet Sea* is paired down to three main characters, all men, who readers may not anticipate intersecting. After Farouk's story, told in the third-person, we next shift to the 23 year-old Lampy, who is unable to actualize or even envision a future for himself. Lampy is the most realized character in the novel and Ryan utilizes free indirect style to place us closer to his motivations and inner conflicts. His actions are frustrating as he can't seem to get out of his own way. Yet as readers, we are privy to his inner conflicts and the obstacles that impede him, especially the advice he receives from his grandfather, Pop, and a failed relationship to a girlfriend, Chloe, who leaves him behind in frustration.

In *The Spinning Heart*, characters have difficulty imagining a future in the rapidly declining economy of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Buchanan argues that fiction during this period re-enacted some of the themes of social and economic paralysis of the mid-nineteenth-century Irish famine. The novel depicts a place where "rituals and routines are disconnected from a grounded relationship to the space on which communities construct their identities. Ideas of home, space, nation, and community are reduced to a system that uses land as a mechanism to accumulate capital" (53). In his latest novel, Ryan engages with the inherited repercussions of Ireland's "ruined futures" more closely. By depicting the intersection of unlikely strangers

drawn into despair by the circumstances of fate, he begins to include and empathize with the displaced “other” who is trying to make a foothold in Ireland’s precarious economy.

7. *Fairy Tales, Thisness and Order*

In the next section of the novel, Lampy innocently reminisces about his love connection through a fairy tale. “The first conversation he’d ever had with Chloe was about the three little pigs” (Ryan 2018, 60). In this scene we witness Lampy’s naïveté, as Chloe impresses him with a riff of alternative endings to the *Three Little Pigs*, seeming to prefer the most fatalistic of the lot. Lampy is seduced by her audaciousness and falls quickly into infatuation. He fails to see how Chloe’s ability to write her own preferred ending of a story foreshadows his own life’s trajectory which leads to frustration and disappointment.

Chloe and Lampy’s relationship is short-lived and he attempts to deny the devastation of his wounded heart. She leaves their village for a brighter future at Trinity College and naturally finds a more compatible mate. We wonder, was he being manipulated by Chloe when she breaks off her relationship with him? Ryan’s free indirect style draws us into the character’s inner thoughts describing bodily details to intimately engage the reader with his emotional state of mind. When Lampy thinks of Chloe he catches himself in a state of despair: “He was stopped on the stairs now, halfway down, and the knuckles of his left hand were white from the force of grip on the bannister. The thought of Chloe always stopped him, paralysed him” (61). After the breakup, Lampy is speechless: “There was a lump in his throat, an actual lump, and it was blocking his windpipe, it seemed because he was having trouble breathing properly; his heart was beating hard and irregular in his chest [...]” (63).

We can empathize with his humiliation when Ryan focuses on the minor details acutely felt in Lampy’s mind and body. As he pleads with Chloe to take him back after running into her at a take away counter, he is outnumbered by a number of her family members and friends who try to diffuse the situation. This compounds his isolation and desperation. In *How Fiction Works*, James Wood describes the concept of “thisness” as “any detail that draws abstraction toward itself [...] or any detail that centers our attention with its concentration” (2008, 67). The emotion of the scene is rendered in Lampy’s run on, inner monologue and lack of bodily control as he slips on a ketchup sachet:

Her brothers stood between them in the chipper, blocking him, saying, Come on Lamp, don’t be stupid, we don’t want to fall out with you. And he took a swing at the eldest lad and missed, and he slipped on a ketchup sachet someone had opened and dropped, and he’d hopped off the floor of the chipper and the whole place laughed at him, and he saw from the ground that Chloe was standing near him and she was looking straight ahead and she had her hand to her face and her friend had her arm around her, as though to protect her, and he was saying, Chloe, please, just come outside with me a minute [...]. (Ryan 2018, 64)

Wood traces this idea of “thisness” or *haecceitas* from the medieval theologian Duns Scotus.

Ryan’s “concentration” on the ketchup sachet in this scene draws us from the abstraction of the mind into a concrete form of “thisness”. The scene continues to compound his humiliation as he ends up in an altercation with a foreign worker who tosses him out on the sidewalk. We begin to empathize with his heightened state of anxiety. During this expulsion, he describes his humiliation, “he was saying something in a high-pitched voice and Lampy couldn’t make it out so he swung again and missed again and the chipper lad had him in a chokehold and he was out the door and in to the street and he was falling, falling” (*ibidem*).

Lampy later reflects on a time when he returned home and overheard his grandfather, Pop, downstairs on the phone chastising Chloe's mother about the whole affair. In this scene, we learn how protective Pop is of Lampy: "He thought of the day Pop rang her mother. What possessed him?" (65). Frustrated, he hurriedly interrupts the call and lashes out at Pop who "was on his back foot, wordless now, embarrassed suddenly, and Lampy nearly hit him but he caught himself in time, and instead he said I'm not your boy Pop. I'm not your boy. And he left those words between them and he went out the door, and his grandfather didn't call him back" (65-66).

The question of the identity of Lampy's father underlies the secrets that paralyze the two characters in this chapter. Lampy's frustration and Pop's inability to legitimately act in the role as a parent are a central conflict in the novel. What we learn in the penultimate section of the novel is how Lampy, John and Farouk intersect. In the only first-person testimonial, "John", Ryan shifts the tone again in the third section. Though it is not clear why these narratives are separated, we become immersed in each man's story. Ryan's use of both free indirect style and first person narrative are central to his empathic treatment of each man's struggle.

"John" begins with a self-reflective confessional as a way to seek redemption. "This confessional is fine and wide [...]" he proposes, suggesting we are about to embark on a long, sordid and self-indulgent passage through the far reaches of his mind, "Bless me father, for I have sinned. I'll tell you them in order, one by one, and the roll of them is short, though each one might be made of a hundred parts or more" (105). One of reasons for his need to unburden himself stems from the trauma of losing his beloved older brother, Edward. This formative relationship and the subsequent loss of his beloved mentor still impacts him in adulthood:

He was beautiful, even I knew that, and I only a wobbling grey gosling in the corner of the field he commanded, adoring him. I knew my parents loved him best and I didn't care; sure, how could it been otherwise? I had a devilish knack for it. (109)

John's first person narrative is as Wood describes "generally more reliable than unreliable". From this point of view, the character "tells us his story from a position of belated enlightenment" (2008, 5). By showing us a long view of his life and in the form of a confessional, we are more intimately acquainted with him as if he is sharing a testimonial.

Reading *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, writer Martina Evans was reminded "of something Sylvia Beach said about James Joyce, 'He told me that he had never met a bore', I don't think Donal Ryan ever met a bore either, because he can blow attractive life in any number of characters, no matter how compromised, mean or dreary" (Ryan 2017). He manages to make unsavory men likable and multi-faceted. Suzanne Keen describes this as "authorial empathy" (2006, 215). With John, where there is little to empathize in how he conducts his life, Ryan uncovers how his hardened exterior is grounded in a buried childhood trauma.

As John experiences turbulence on a flight, he begins to reflect on the consequences of his compartmented and unethical life as a lobbyist. He even qualifies his confessional to God as "offering this not in mitigation but only by way of explanation" (Ryan 2018, 106). He witnessed his father accumulate farmland in order to busy himself out of grief, even if it meant taking advantage of down and out farmers. We see how John takes a cue from observing his father and is driven to be a cold-hearted businessman. By doing so, he associates this direction in his life with a turn away from morality. The indoctrination into and seduction of the lure of capitalism is described in this passage, "I was given a tour of the vaults of a bank one time years later by a man who said he didn't believe in God [...]. He put gold in my hand, that shining standard, a bar of it, and I felt its coldness on my skin, leaking into me (107). The man he calls "the little

alchemist”, sells John the bar of gold for 40,000 pounds. He takes it out from time to time wishing for it to magically become a calf: “standing on my hands, placid and sinewed, graven by some magic from the gold, gleaming in a lightless place” (*ibidem*). Here, John engages a distorted imagined future in a myth of his own redemption.

For Farouk, Lampy and John, fables and fairy tales become an alternative narrative intersecting their own precarious fate, and a way to construct order out of the chaos in their lives. Historically, mythmaking has been a way to create meaning in times of crisis. In his 1923 essay “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”, T.S. Eliot defended James Joyce’s use of Homer’s *Odyssey* as a structural device. He suggested myth is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (5). Representing the contemporary moment in fiction presents a set of analogous challenges. Indeed, the characters are searching for a way to establish control in their uncertain futures and with mythmaking, fairy tale and storytelling, they attempt to envision a future however they can construct it.

8. *Intersections*

In the final section of *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, “Lake Islands”, Pop, also known as “Dixie Shanley,” sets out on a walk where in free indirect style ruminates about his recent conflict and frustrations with Lampy. While opining to himself about his colorful neighbors, Mickey Briars, Ad Foyle and Herbie Grogan, he reflects on the quality that he most values in his grandson, a bond he shares with Lampy more than with his own daughter. “All the stories he had from last night were still untold, except to his daughter, but she didn’t appreciate them, and damped the punchline always down to nothing, because in fairness to the boy he appreciated a good story, he got a kick out of some of the yarns he brought home from Ciss Brien’s or the Half Barrell” (Ryan 2018, 157).

Ryan’s use of the stream of consciousness to render his character’s inner thoughts as well as Dixie’s hyperbolic storytelling are grounded in his ability to tie language to place. He also pays close attention to the humor of the syntax of rural dialects to draw out the specificity of his characters. In an interview written after his novel *All We Shall Know*, which is set in his hometown, in North Tipperary, Nenagh, he elucidates on the specificity of place to render a character’s voice. “I think [humor] often arises from the places my fiction is set and the way people communicate. We retained the syntax and inversions and tendency towards high drama and obfuscation and hyperbole of the Irish language in rural Ireland, and overlaid it to spectacular effect on our English. We speak in stories and play and joke and lie in every sentence [...]” (Ryan 2017).

In the conclusion, Farouk, the widowed Syrian doctor, reappears as a semi-integrated “locum” at the hospital where Lampy’s mother Florence works. He begins an unlikely courtship with her, offering to take her on drives throughout the countryside. This relationship uncovers a divide between the older, more conservative and the younger socially liberal generation’s views towards the immigrant entering Ireland. Pop rewrites how a more traditional nationalist might read the “shadowy other”, Farouk. As he arrives home, he sees two figures seated at the kitchen table and at first glance conjures an idealized image of an Irish family enjoying dinner by the fire. He believes the man sitting with his daughter is his grandson, but as he approaches, he realizes it is indeed Farouk and decides to let Florence have some space. Pop begins to reconcile his idealism about his Irish family hearth scenario at the dinner table and questions his assumptions about the plight of the refugee, his own ignorance and complicity in their exile. This passage suggests a more optimistic, liberal acceptance of another kind of blending of the Irish family:

Every foreigner had a story, a lament, and they had all to be taken with a pinch of salt or, even better, not at all. He wondered how it would go a Ciss's if Florence married a foreign Johnny, after all the jokes cracked he'd heard cracked there and all the jokes he'd cracked himself and all the talk along the years about keeping them out, about there not being space enough for all the maddening hordes [...] The loudest mouths of all were the ones who'd never done a hand's turn their whole lives. (Ryan 2018, 161)

9. Conclusions

As outlined in a number of arguments in this essay, Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea* employ affective narrative strategies by foregrounding exiled characters in a state of instability. With the globalization of Ireland, comprehensive anthologies such as *Literary visions of multicultural Ireland: the immigrant in contemporary Irish Literature* (Villar-Argáiz 2014) reflect this emerging form of representation. Some scholars urge others to include narrative empathy in a discussion of the exile in Irish literature. Katherine O'Donnell's essay in this anthology "The Parts: Whiskey, Tea and Sympathy," analyzes empathy in author Keith Ridgway's second novel. She discusses the history of "Irish empathy for black people" as being a key component in the construction of Irish political and cultural identity (188). The idea of "feeling with" the subject, and more generally the study of affect, she notes, is a dynamic interdisciplinary conversation beginning to evolve in a number of disparate fields such as literature, neuroscience and literary studies (199). O'Donnell urges more scholars to consider feminist scholar Breda Gray's work in this area as a way to employ empathy and affect for an "ethical response" to Irish literary criticism. Gray's essay, "Remembering a 'multicultural' future through a history of emigration: Towards a feminist politics of solidarity across difference" (2004), engages well with Edna Longley's concept of "cultural coexistence" rather than merely a cultural exchange to strive for new possibilities of representation.

As Gray points out, ethical questions arise in the analysis of literature written by authors who represent foreign subjects in their work, especially in the stories of the vulnerable and displaced refugee. However, employing feminist theory modeled on solidarity involves self-reflection. She notes, "empathy can involve identification that assimilates the other into the self, or identification that maintains the distance between the self and the other. When discussing empathy, therefore, the question of identification also arises. Identification as it operates across discourses and cultural differences has been a central concern of feminist theory for some time because of its centrality to politics, solidarity, and action" (421-422). Certainly Ryan and O'Brien's novels demonstrate the role that gender plays in the exile's ability to adapt in their new homeland and complicates our ability to apply fixed identity to another. An ethical response could be adapted for a gendered analysis of both novels. One might ask: had Farouk been a woman in *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, would he be able to imagine a future such as one that he might experience with Florence? We might imagine how O'Brien might re-write Fidelma's character in *The Little Red Chairs* if she were a displaced refugee repairing her life in Ireland.

Identity continues to remain a subject of reflection for writers in a time of transition for postcolonial Ireland. In an interview with Caitriona Moloney, included in Margarita Estévez Saá's article "Transnationalism and Transculturality in Twenty-First-Century Irish Novels", the author Éilís Ní Dhuibhne posited that postcolonial societies are in a continued state of questioning. In her novels, she remarked, this search is central to a postcolonial binary identity and a central theme of the contemporary fiction emerging out of Ireland. "I am interested in the duplicitousness, a split personality of the Irish psyche [...]. Irishness is so dualistic: the duality of the North and South, Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant" (5-6) In *Fox, Swallow*

and *Scarecrow*, she engages with the complications of this dual identity in relation to the other. The novel “resolves to stage national and transnational identities as contacts and clashes feature prominently” (6).

In the article, “‘The best banned in the land’: Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950”, Donal Ó Drisceoil reminds us of the challenges that contributed to issues of self-expression and identity for contemporary writers such as restricted access to publication. “[S]tate censorship that had cast a shadow over the Irish Literary landscape since 1930 eventually began to lift in the late 1960’s” (2005, 146). The backlash against this mostly symbolic “Censorship of Publications Acts” (1929-1967) and the public hearings of the censorship board of the 1960s forged a new path for a younger generation of writers, including Donal Ryan. According to Ó Drisceoil, O’Brien, whose books were banned in Ireland in the 1960s, and McGahern who lost his teaching job after his novel *The Dark* (1965) was published, were instrumental in this cultural shift and its subsequent removal (157).

For Donal Ryan, reading John McGahern’s novel *Amongst Women* (1990) was one of his primary inspirations to become a writer. As he remarked in a 30 March 2017 article, McGahern’s writing had “a particular quality, beyond the limits of empathy, beyond the boundaries of easy explanation” (Ryan 2017). By studying McGahern’s writing style, Ryan discovered a guiding principle for the stories of others in empathy. He suggests the universality of stories come from “common motivations and impulses, to love and be loved, to survive, to propagate, to find meaning for ourselves” (*ibidem*). Reflecting on McGahern’s work, he learned to avoid absolute certainty and appropriation noting: “All fiction is guesswork [...] each of us experiences the world in our own unique way, and none of us can be certain of the quality of the next person’s experience” (*ibidem*).

In the foreword to *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland*, Declan Kiberd provides a historical framework for the continued emergence of what he posits as the “worlding of Irish writing” (2014, xii). However, his assertion that the “worlding of Irish writing” may have started long ago, it gives us a historical underpinning for a re-emergence of empathic representations of the exile occurring in contemporary Irish writing. Kiberd looked toward writers of the past to uncover how this trend is more deeply rooted in the Irish psyche. How is it that writers living in a more monocultural Ireland and “perhaps *because* of this” he writes, “managed to explore alterity?” (xvi). He urges, “If you want accounts of negotiations with the Other, you only have to read *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Castle Racknet*, [...] *Ulysses*, Beckett’s writings and of course those of John McGahern” (*ibidem*). For further accounting of the expression of alterity, he looked for clarification from McGahern himself in order “to explain how a traditional Ireland that seemed monocultural could nonetheless produce so many people able to imagine all sorts of persons quite unlike themselves” (xvi-xvii). McGahern recounted his experience of growing up in Leitrim in the 1940s was in a sense a “rehearsal for emigration” (xvii). In McGahern’s time, Kiberd notes “between 1921 and 1985 one in every two persons born in the Irish state had to leave it” (*ibidem*). Travelling ten miles by bike to another village, had felt like being in a foreign country, McGahern remembered: “The people’s way of walking as well as talking, of holding their heads and moving their bodies – it was all so different that what you knew” (*ibidem*). Perhaps these formative observations had prepared him for an exceptional ability to stand in another’s shoes and write with empathy on the experience of the other?

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Jewish Drama on the Irish Stage: The Socio-Political and Cultural Milieu of the Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic Society (1908-1910) and the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society (1924-1954)

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Abstract:

This essay will conduct an examination into the as yet under-researched history of Jewish drama and theatre in Ireland. It will explore a number of socio-political and cultural contexts pertinent to shared or paralleled Jewish, Irish, and Irish Jewish concerns over language, identity, history, nationalisms, prejudice and oppression. It will also explore direct or implicit engagements and dialogues between various Irish Jewish dramatic societies and non-Jewish Irish movements and societies such as the Irish Literary Revival and the Gaelic League. Ultimately, the research hopes to provide a framework for future studies into Irish Jewish theatre providing a public platform giving voice to Ireland's largest non-Christian minority during the first half of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Gaelic, Literary Revival, Nationalism, Theatre, Yiddish

This essay will conduct an examination into the as yet under-researched history of Jewish drama and theatre in Ireland. The central focus will be on the beginnings of the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society (hereafter DJDS), which had its original incarnation with a run of Jewish operas between 1908 and 1910 as successively the Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic Society (hereafter DJAOS) and Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (hereafter DJAODS). Abraham Goldfaden's *Shulamith, or Daughter of Zion* was the first to be performed in June 1908, followed by Goldfaden's *Bar Kochba, or Son of the Stars* in October 1908. *Haman the Second*, by a different playwright, Shomer (Nahum Meyer Schaikewitch), appeared the following year in January 1909, followed by a reproduction of Goldfaden's *Shulamith* in June 1909, and a further Goldfaden, *The Zauberin; or, the Enchantress*, was staged in April 1910. All

these performances were in Yiddish and staged at the Abbey Theatre. After some sporadic gatherings and performances over the next decade, most notably resurfacing as the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Circle in 1919, the DJDS was formed and ran consistently for some three decades from the 1920s to the 1950s staging plays by notable playwrights in both English and Yiddish. Of its entire history, the 1908 origins of the society and the post War of Independence period of the 1920s provide the richest materials for a fruitful exploration and investigation. The main object will be to place the society and contextualise the plays performed within the socio-political and cultural milieu of Ireland during the early decades of the twentieth century. It will also seek to establish the extent and success to which theatre provided a public voice to Ireland's largest non-Christian minority group of the time.

The main difficulty with this subject area is the lack of primary sources, particularly scripts that are either lost or to date have yet to be recovered. Another issue is that, although there are a few examples of surviving home grown Irish Jewish drama, most of the works performed were cultural imports. But there are still cultural and socio-political contexts against which the advent of Irish Jewish theatre can be examined. There is, for example, evidence of Irish Jewish engagements, dialogues, and disputes with Irish Nationalist movements such as the Gaelic League and causes such as Home Rule. There are also parallels invited by the language question as it pertains to both Irish and Jewish cultural identity, particularly how similarities in the perceived roles in respective languages may have helped rehabilitate the image of Jews, especially in the face of propagandist Irish anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Likewise, there are parallels invited by the choice of Yiddish drama performed, particularly in relation to two of the Abraham Goldfaden works staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1908, which unfold along similar patriotic lines as dramas of the Irish Literary Revival, and indeed also invoked a centuries old Irish nationalist literary tradition of analogy with the Ancient Maccabees, or Jewish rebels against imperialist oppression. The article will conclude with a brief outline, a commentary on dramas performed by the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society throughout the 1920s, and with a brief examination of home grown Irish Jewish dramas, particularly focused on the surviving works of two playwrights, Esther Morris (Mofsovitiz) and Emil Slotover.

Irish Jewish theatre has been afforded some cursory attention within the burgeoning field of Irish Jewish studies. As a cultural phenomenon, however, it has yet to be adequately documented, let alone thoroughly examined, resulting in a somewhat vague and frankly uninterested impression of a very minor theatrical phenomenon operating unnoticed at the margins of Irish society. True, Irish Jewish theatre will never be afforded the elevated position and consideration given in particular to the national theatrical movement of Yeats and Lady Gregory in terms of its overall significance in relation to Irish theatrical history. But as a medium for affording a platform for cultural expression to Irish Jewry alongside its entertainment value, Irish Jewish theatre most certainly warrants greater attention. There are of course reasons behind the scholarly neglect this subject has suffered, not the least being a dearth of research sources and materials. This has led in turn to a degree of indifference, casual assumptions and even inaccuracies in reportages pertaining to society activities. For example, in his pioneering social history, *The Jews of Ireland: From Earliest Times to the Year 1910* (1972), Louis Hyman mistakenly dates the performance of Abraham Goldfaden's *Bar [K]ochba*, one of the earliest society productions, as 1902 instead of 1909. That this is patently wrong requires no more evidence than the fact that the Abbey Theatre did not open its doors until 1904. Hyman accurately dates the performances of Goldfaden's *Shulamith* in 1908 and *Die Zauberin* in 1910, but as his social history draws to a close by 1910, he has little more to say on the subject of Irish Jewish theatre, besides listing the leading cast of *Bar [K]ochba* as a "Mr L. Briscoe taking the title role [of Bar [K]ochba],

Mr Antanovsli as Pappus, the dwarf intriguer, and Miss Minnie Cohen as Dinah” followed by naming the “Rev Simon Steinberg” as director of the 1910 production of *Die Zauberin* (1972, 340).

Ray Rivlin has more to offer, contributing two paragraphs in her *Shalom Ireland: A Social History of Jews in Modern Ireland* (2003) to the DJDS. She notes the formalising of the society by Larry Elyan, and how it “became a feature of Jewish cultural life from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s, when productions became more spasmodic before petering out” (Rivlin 2003, 110). But by far the most significant work on Irish Jewish theatre to date is Irina Rupp Malone’s “Synge, An-sky, and the Irish Jewish Revival” (2014). Malone, for example, argues correctly that Irish Jewish Theatre is a “forgotten chapter” in the history of Irish theatre more generally, and also raises the highly significant issue of alignment between “the Irish Literary and Dramatic Revival and the Yiddish Theatrical Renaissance [as] reverberations of a pan-European phenomenon”, but notes that “they are usually thought of as separate, if not ethnically-pure movements, rather than intersecting cultural trends” (Malone 2014, 17-18). This Malone attributes, at least in part to “the longevity of the myth of national ownership of national drama” which has relegated the “cultural oddity” of Yiddish drama at the Abbey Theatre to the margins of Irish theatre history (17). But most importantly, Malone’s essay illuminates, as she puts it, the “chance to examine a dialogue between two theatrical cultures, each shaped by its own distinctiveness” (*ibidem*), a prospect this essay will in turn continue to explore.

Given that both the Irish Revival and Renaissance of Yiddish theatre, happening concurrently whilst immersed and equally invested in the politics of place (or lack of in diasporic literatures), language, patriotism and identity, it follows that Malone would make the, albeit tentative, suggestion that the younger members of the Jewish Dramatic Society especially were keen to invite parallels and suggest similarities between “their productions and the patriotic drama of the Abbey” (19). There is indeed evidence of this, but Malone is wise in her caution insofar as she does not commit to categorising Irish Jewish theatre as affiliated specifically with Irish nationalism. Irish Jewry had notable Irish Nationalists within its ranks in and around 1908: figures such as the controversial novelist, Joseph Edelstein, author of *The Moneylender* (1908), who as a member of the Gaelic League, the Dublin and County Liberal Association and the Young Ireland branch of the United Irish League, spearheaded the short lived Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association in 1908 alongside Arthur Newman and Jacob Elyan. But the extent to and capacity within which Edelstein was affiliated with the DJAOS remains unknown. He did submit a short note to the editor of the *Evening Telegraph* on 14 October 1908, suggesting some form of official status in his claim to have been authorised by the Jewish Amateur Opera Company president, the Rev. Gudansk, “to state that a portion of the profits derived from the play, ‘Bar Kochba,’ now being played at the Abbey Theatre, will be devoted to the Dublin Distress Fund” (Edelstein 1908, 2).

Edelstein was one of the most prominent political figures on the Irish Jewish political stage, or at least the most publically vocal, and regularly expressed loud support for Irish Nationalism which he implicitly parallels with Zionism, the latter of which was generally endorsed and supported by Irish Jewry. His purportedly official letter on behalf of the DJAOS would thereby associate the dramatic society with Edelstein’s particular brand of Irish Jewish politics. Jewish charity had an important, if often overlooked, history in Ireland. Baron Lionel de Rothschild, for example, had organised a substantial famine relief fund (believed to be in the region of £8,000) in 1847 (see Shillman 1945, 50; Hyman 1972, 119-120). A *Freeman’s Journal* article on the “Jewish Amateur Operatic Society” of 25 August 1908, also highlights the “purely philanthropic basis” upon which the society was formed, and indeed would sustain as

the DJDS from the 1920s to the 1950s. The ethos of the society is thus outlined as pertaining to “some charitable organisation, not necessarily Jewish, such as a hospital, a board of relief for the indigent poor, or to assist destitute Jews in any part of the world”. The example of Telz (Yiddish for Telšiai) in the Kovno region of Lithuania, from which it is reported many Irish Jews derived their ancestry, is given on account of the great fire that decimated the town in 1907 (Anon. 1908h, 5)¹.

Edelstein’s extension of this philanthropy to the Dublin Distress Fund is entirely consistent with the society’s ethos; but it also mirrors his wider political commitment to Irish Home Rule as outlined in Edelstein’s declaration on behalf of the Jewish attendees at the inaugural meeting of the Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association at the Mansion House, Dublin, on 10 September 1908 “to support such measures that will tend to secure for the people of Ireland a full grant of self-government, such as is accepted by the Irish Parliamentary Party, and in general to promote the welfare and prosperity of Ireland” (Anon. 1908i, 2). But Edelstein did not speak on behalf of all Irish Jewry, so the temptation to view his politics as either accurately or fully reflecting the agenda of the DJAOS must be treated with caution, especially when reading the society’s choice of production within any Irish political context. Edelstein had support, but he also had public detractors, such as Dr. Philip Wigoder, who considered affiliation with Irish Nationalism detrimental, if not downright dangerous to Jewish interests or even political security.

Heather Miller Rubens’s essay, “Rebellious Jews on the Edge of Empire: The Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association” (2018) offers a thorough commentary on the conflict and controversies of the dispute in which Wigoder led the opposition to Edelstein’s attempts to commit Irish Jewry to the Home Rule cause. He attended Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association meetings and published letters in the English Jewish Press, most notably “Jews and Home Rule” in the *Jewish Chronicle* (1908a, 21) and “Jews and Politics” in the *Jewish World* (1908b, 16), arguing that “Irish politics are largely a matter of religion, and the danger of religion is only too well known. Hence, the advisability of steering clear, as a religious body, of all local political questions” (cited in Rubens 2018, 99). The issue was not one of dictating political involvement on an individual level, as all individuals were free to pursue their own political interests and inclinations. The opposition was instead to attempts to collectively affiliate Irish Jewry directly with the Home Rule cause. With such an opposition in mind, it becomes apparent that giving Irish Jewish theatre an Irish Nationalist gloss is far from straightforward, even if the subject matter involved strongly invites such parallels. Malone is thus particularly conscious of this pitfall when she speculates on whether the appeal of idealised revolution in Yeats and Lady Gregory’s *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) might have inspired the DJAOS to perform Goldfaden’s patriotic revolution drama, *Bar Kochba; or, the Son of the Stars*, at the Abbey Theatre in October 1908 (Malone, 2014, 19).

But Home Rule was not the only political issue at play. The Goldfaden plays were performed in Yiddish at a time when the language question was highly politicised. Indeed, both Yiddish and Hebrew had been politicised within the pages of the Gaelic League newspaper,

¹ According to available newspaper reports, the DJDS would subsequently donate its proceedings to the “Ukrainian Jews’ Relief Fund” (1922; 1925), in aid of a new Synagogue (1925), the Jewish National (Palestine Restoration) Fund (1926; 1928), the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital on Adelaide Road (1928), the Jewish National Fund and Dublin Talmud Torah (1928), the Jewish National Fund and the new Dublin and National Schools (1934), the Dublin Hebrew Schools and Dublin Ladies’ Charitable Society (1935), amongst undoubtedly others. The scope and consistency of DJDS charity warrants further research in its own right, especially with regard to its contributions to the Jewish Youth Refugee Organisation (JYRO) during the war years from 1938 to 1947.

An Claidheambh Soluis, since the turn of the century. The “Business of the Hour” section of 20 January 1900 edition, for example, expresses indignation that Jews in Ireland have been granted permission by the Board of Education “to introduce the bilingual teaching of English and Hebrew in their primary schools” whilst the teaching of Irish continued to be suppressed, asking, “can any man of Irish blood and feeling do otherwise than rise in revolt against a system that grants to a handful of foreigners and to foreign language privileges that are denied to 700,000 Irish-speaking people, nay, to all Ireland and to the national language of the country?” (Anon. 1900, 712). Similar arguments and complaints would continue to be made over the next number of years. Yet, the staging of four Yiddish plays at the Irish National Theatre over the space of two years appears to have went without comment or objection from within the ranks of the Gaelic League. This is remarkable in itself, not least given the controversies of “Playboy riots” surrounding John Millington Synge only a year prior in 1907. If *An Claidheambh Soluis* was prepared to complain about foreign languages in Irish schoolrooms, one would suspect at least some comment on Yiddish drama being performed on the Irish National Stage.

The fact that no such objection appears to have manifested may be due at least in part to the development of a coinciding political dialogue embraced by both Irish Nationalists and many from within Jewry in general (rather than specifically within Ireland) that placed language at the centre of respective national identities. Hebrew especially would come to appeal to Irish language activists from within the Gaelic League for the parallels it would invite with their own campaign to position the Irish language as fundamental to Irish national identity. This was once more in no small part due to the efforts of Joseph Edelstein, who delivered an address on “The Gaelic League” decrying the decay of the Irish language at the hands of the National School system in November 1907, thereby bringing Irish and Jewish language together on the same political stage. Edelstein lauds the inclusiveness of the association, which he claims welcomes “Protestant or Jew, or even Turk” (Anon. 1907, 7). Edelstein was not the only Jewish voice on the subject. In attendance also, amongst others, were Abraham Weinronk, a 23 year old Russian Jewish emigrant and master baker of Clanbrassil Street, Dublin (1911 Irish census), Elias Weinstock, a 41 year old Russian Jewish emigrant and draper of Longwood avenue, Dublin (1911 Irish census), Edelstein’s 17 year old brother, Hyman Edelstein, who would shortly after immigrate to Canada, becoming a poet and active Zionist in Ottawa.

It is reported that Edelstein’s address was warmly received, particularly his view that exclusion and suppression of the Irish language in favour of English, a “foreign language”, was “detrimental to the best interests of the country” (*ibidem*). Typical debate ensued both arguing that the Gaelic language was “retrograde”, the revival of which a potential cause of “civil strife”, countered by the argument that it “was Liberal policy to support everything that stood for freedom” (*ibidem*). In a curious turn, a named attendee at the debate, Charles Stephens, invoked the “lost tribes” legend to emphasise solidarity between the Irish and the Jews; but a more interesting position was presented by “Mr A. M. Zaaks”, who consolidated the Irish-Hebrew parallel by arguing “no nation could exist without its language”, citing a Hebrew saying that “If we have our language, no one can rule us”. His argument that “a great deal of the solidarity of the Jews was due to the fact that they had preserved a language of their own” (*ibidem*) reportedly received great applause. The fact that this came from the president of the Dublin Young Men’s Zion Mission is of particular significance, given that the DJAOS were most certainly Zionists and were performing the Zionist drama of Goldfaden, even if the nature and extent of the society’s affiliation or sympathy with Irish Nationalist causes is in question.

Indeed, as was the case with Philip Wigoder’s opposition to Edelstein’s efforts to present the agenda of the Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association as generally representative of Irish Jew-

ry, there were dissenters from Edelstein's position. Abraham Weinrock, for example, argued during the meeting that "the prevalence of different languages merely brought disunion among the people" and that "it was antipathy to the English people that was so much against Ireland at the present time". Edelstein responded with an unequivocal statement that "Ireland had every right to cry for her own flag and liberty [and that] National decay followed the loss of a nation's language" (*ibidem*). Edelstein's narrative was subsequently mirrored by the Gaelic Leaguer, Rev. Patrick F. Kavanagh, author of *A Popular History of the Insurrection of 1798* (1898) and a Gaelic League pamphlet, "Ireland's Defence: Her Language", during a League speech in Wexford in July 1908 reported in *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Kavanagh had long argued that language was vital to nationhood, so statements such as "Kill the Irish language and you kill Irish nationality" come as no surprise; but he also argues that "the Irish language in point of antiquity vies with the Hebrew, the oldest of known languages", and that "the Jewish people have preserved their venerable tongue, although they lost the heritage of their ancestors and the temple of their faith nearly two thousand years ago. Hence they have still a distinct existence; they are a nation – though a disinherited one" (Kavanagh 1908, 11). The same he argues is true of the Romany people, but in an unfortunate shift in tone, Kavanagh reinscribes the *otherness* of the alien outsider by asking indignantly, "will the once proud and renowned Irish race, so famed for learning, for valour, for virtue, be inferior in linguistic fidelity to Jew and gypsy?" (*ibidem*). But the discourse would continue and strengthen, a 1909 article on language and Home Rule, "The Language of the Outlaw", citing a lecture delivered the previous year by the Dublin Protestant barrister and author of "The Irish School of Oratory" (1897), John F. Taylor, in which he compares "the position of the Irish language under English rule to the position of the Hebrew language under Egyptian rule", invoking the Irish Jewish analogy in which linguistic suppression becomes a metaphor for oppression (8)².

An Claidheamh Soluis would then go on to reprint an excerpt from a lecture by the German Jewish scholar, Ruben Braining, "Language a National Factor" under the title, "Language and Unity of Race: the Jews and Hebrew" in February 1909. Braining makes almost precisely the same case and series of points for Hebrew as the language of unified Jewish nationhood as Patrick K. Kavanagh does for Irish, arguing that if the Jews "maintained their language [Hebrew] as a living language their people would live" (Braining 1909, 11). Braining also demotes Yiddish to "a jargon which would soon be forgotten" (*ibidem*), a position consistent with late nineteenth and early twentieth century linguistic movements advocating Hebrew as the language of Zion that sparked a language war between champions of respectively Hebrew and Yiddish as the language of the Jewish people. But it is highly unlikely if any general distinction outside of scholarly circles would have been made differentiating Yiddish from Hebrew in Ireland circa-1908 when the first Goldfaden play was staged at the Abbey Theatre. Jews were frequently referred to as "Hebrews", whilst Hebrew and Yiddish, if they could be told apart, would have been viewed simply as Jewish languages. The fact that Hebrew was the medium of religious ceremony and intellectual scholarship, whereas Yiddish was the common tongue of the diaspora would most likely have been lost on most. If there was little differentiation to be made between Hebrew and Yiddish from a non-Jewish perspective, and the language parallel outlined above was indeed pervasive, then it might very well be the case that Gaelic League silence on the Goldfaden performances at the Abbey Theatre was indicative of a shift in narrative that accepted the legitimacy of Yiddish drama on the Irish stage as an expression of Jewish cultural identity that mirrored the same Irish expression of identity through Gaelic drama.

² See Abby Bender, *Israelites in Erin: Exodus, Revolution, & the Irish Revival* (2015) for a full account of the invocation of Egypt as metaphor for oppression in Irish discourse.

If this was indeed the case, and considerably more research would be required to verify such a conjecture, then the shift was highly significant indeed. Currently, evidence either way is circumstantial at best. But to simply assume that several Yiddish theatre performances in Dublin over the course of two years simply went under the radar fails to consider the levels of anti-Semitic rhetoric present in Irish cultural discourse during the period in question, which amounted to much more than crying foul over school language provisions. Indeed, Irish Jewish scholarship has only recently begun to fully challenge the narrative of Irish tolerance in this regard, a narrative centred to a large extent on a correspondence between Daniel O'Connell and the Jewish emancipation leader, Isaac Goldsmid, from September 1829, in which the Liberator thanks Goldsmid for congratulating him on his Clare election. O'Connell voted for the removal of disabilities then imposed upon the Jews in Britain and Ireland that prevented them from holding political office amongst other privileges of citizenship on the grounds that they could not take a Christian sacramental oath. Through O'Connell a parallel and affinity was thus established in which the "Jewish Question" and the "Irish Question" became aligned in an informal coalition jointly campaigning for both Catholic and Jewish emancipation. O'Connell famously encapsulated the spirit of this common cause in his letter to Goldsmid which reads, "Ireland has claims on your ancient race, as it is the only Christian country that I know of unsullied by any act of persecution of the Jews" (qtd. in Shillman 1945, 75).

The "Cyclops" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), set in 1904, is probably much closer to the actual experience of Jews in Ireland during that period, wherein the Jewish Leopold Bloom is subjected to anti-Semitic abuse by the Irish Irelander Citizen who repudiates Bloom's claims to Irish identity. When asked why Bloom was Jewish, Joyce replied with the oft-cited "because only a foreigner would do. The Jews were foreigners at that time in Dublin. There was no hostility toward them, but contempt, yes the contempt people always show for the unknown" (Joyce to Mercanton, qtd. in Nadel 1989, 139). Bloom's birth claim to Irish national identity is thoroughly rejected by the Citizen during a confrontation in Barney Kiernan's pub. His reply, "Ireland [...] I was born here" to the Citizen's question, "What is your nation if I may ask?" is met with the latter's non-verbal but unsettlingly visceral contempt as the Citizen clears "the spit out of his gullet and, gob, he spat a Red bank oyster out of him right in the corner" (Joyce 1922, 317). Joyce's portrayal of the Citizen, generally perceived as modelled on Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association, is typically treated as the author's hostile indictment of "Irish Ireland" nationalism as envisaged by figures such as D.P. Moran and Daniel Corkery. Bloom subsequently complains to the Citizen that alongside his Irish national identity he "belongs to a race too [...] that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant", a race that has been "Robbed [...] Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted" (Joyce 1922, 318).

This was indeed the experience of many Irish Jewish peddlers with similar attitudes and hostilities recounted in Myer Joel Wigoder's autobiographical poem, "Thoughts on My Seventy-Fifth Birthday", part of which recounts his own experiences within that trade in the 1890s:

When first in Dublin I arrived,
 I shed hot bitter tears,
 Penniless in a foreign land,
 I faced the coming years.
 Upon a frugal scale I lived,
 So as to pay my way,
 How hard I toiled that I might earn,
 A few shillings each day.
 I did not scorn to carry a bag,

And deal in humble wares,
My back bent low, I carried on,
Heedless of stones or stares (Wigoder 1935, 155)³

The violence experienced by Jewish peddlers was no doubt the product of anti-Semitic xenophobia combined with the fact that peddlers typically sold their wares on an instalment basis incurring debt amongst members of the native population. This system is referred to in Yiddish as a “wickleh” in Joseph Edelstein’s controversial novel, *The Moneylender* (1908), a work of extreme interest insofar as it is the first in Irish literary history to include Yiddish within its pages.

John Wilson Foster categorises *The Moneylender* as a unique piece of “Dublin slum life” fiction, and the levels of violence and brutalities depicted can be quite harrowing (2008, 179-180). Edelstein intended his novel as a cautionary tale exposing the interconnected evils of Jewish usury in Ireland and Irish anti-Semitism by demonstrating how each can prove to be the product of the other in an endless cycle of misery. This he illustrates through an episode of anti-Semitic violence against the novel’s protagonist, Moses Levenstein, whilst working as a peddler, which subsequently transforms him into a Shylockian stereotype economically exploiting and even terrorising the Dublin poor as a particularly vicious and callous moneylender:

Moses turned and found a small crowd gathered around him, and throwing skins, stones and marbles at him. One fellow of about eighteen years raised his fist and struck Moses about the face ; another pulled his coat; another struck him across the chest with a stick; the smaller lads kept humming a disgusting anti-Semitic song, while Irishmen with clay pipes in their mouths stood by, laughing, jeering, spitting, and taking little or no notice of the cruel, inhumane barbaric treatment being meted out to a human being, who, hunted from Russia, the purgatory for honest men, had come to Dublin to earn an honest living by carrying a heavy load on his back [...]. (Edelstein 1931 [1908], 16)

Edelstein’s object may have been reform, but *The Moneylender* caused considerable controversy and upset amongst the Irish Jewish community because it was perceived as perpetuating and reinforcing the dangerous stereotype of the Jewish moneylender. On the other hand, it also offended Irish Irelander nationalists through its brutal depictions of Dublin slum life and was accused in turn of stereotyping the Irish poor as violent drunks. The novel is quite gothic in its grimness and was undoubtedly a lurid exaggeration of the environment it was representing; and its depiction of quite callous Yiddish speaking Jewish moneylenders stood in stark contrast to the more elevated and patriotic Yiddish opera of Goldfaden.

Yiddish had effectively been the language of the alien other, and speaking it, or even English in a Yiddish accent could invite hostility or ridicule. Yiddish speaking Jews, for example, embody linguistic foreignness in the stories of Joseph O’Connor, which Foster classes as the earliest “Dublin slum life” tales, which were first published in the *Evening Herald* under the pseudonym, “Heblon”, and collected as *Studies in Blue* (c. 1900). But Foster also notes that the casual racism and anti-Semitism experienced by Jewish characters in tales such as “The Jewman’s Pony”, “Gentile and Jew”, and “A Monday Morning Incident”, need to be contextualised within the “larger social maelstrom of Dublin slum life with its drinking, hunger, greed, violence, and marital strife”, and that the Jews of these short tales tend to be “wily survivors” rather than outright villains, as likely to be victims of Gentile criminality as perpetrators (2008,

³Wigoder had composed his memoir, *My Life* (1935), in Hebrew before translating it into Yiddish. The cited edition was then subsequently translated into English by his son Louis E. Wigoder.

179-180). *Studies in Blue* purportedly derives its sketches and vignettes from experiences, anecdotes and reports compiled by the Dublin Metropolitan Police, and are thus representative of the conflicts, tensions, and hostilities existing between Jewish and Gentile communities at the turn of the twentieth century.

Jews have in fact formed a minority population in Ireland for many centuries. Numbers have fluctuated throughout that time, with the most extensive increase in population occurring between the 1880s and opening decade of the twentieth century, during which time Ireland received an influx of immigrants hailing mostly from Lithuania. Cormac Ó Gráda estimates a mere 285 Jews resided in Ireland at the beginning of the 1870s rising to 5,148 in 1911, at which time the Dublin Jewish population tallied at 2,965 (2006, 11). Ó Gráda also lists “peddlers, drapers, shopkeepers and dealers, and commercial travellers” as accounting for 67 percent of employed Jewish males in 1891, 57 percent in 1901, and 49 percent in 1911. He also cites a police report finding “that in Dublin in 1903 about 170 Jews were licensed as peddlers and another 46 registered as moneylenders. The same police report also noted, though it does not support in detail, the allegation that there were other unregistered Jewish moneylenders who lent mainly to the working classes, their only security being that the borrower was working” (49).

Xenophobic and protectionist rhetoric of the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries construed this noticeable increase in the Irish Jewish population as a crisis. In 1893, a nationalist priest, Fr. Thomas Finlay espoused in *The Lyceum* that “the influx of the Jews into Ireland constitutes an economic danger to the industry of the wealth-producing classes” (Finlay 1893, 215-216). Finlay’s anti-Jewish propaganda was then mirrored by Arthur Griffith in the *United Irishman* on 23 January, 1904, a year prior to his founding of Sinn Féin, when in support of Fr. John Creagh’s Limerick Boycott he presents the “Jew” as an alien parasite, a “usurer and a grinder of the poor [who] in Ireland is in every respect an economic evil [insofar as he] produces no wealth himself – he draws it from others” (Griffith 1904, 256). Creagh’s rhetoric is even more extreme in its anti-Semitic xenophobia, going so far as to invoke the ancient Blood Libel in economic terms, depicting the Limerick Jews as vampiric enemies of Christianity carrying the legacy of deicide, the murder of Christ, ritualistically re-enacted through the sacrifice of innocent Christian children. In a sermon, “Jewish Trading: its Growth in Limerick”, which was published in the *Munster News*, 13 January 1904, Creagh insidiously claims that “nowadays [the Jews] dare not kidnap and slay Christian children, but they will not hesitate to expose them to a longer and even more cruel martyrdom by taking the clothes off their back and the bit out of their mouths”. He continues:

Twenty years ago and less Jews were known only by name and evil repute in Ireland. They were sucking the blood of other nations, but those nations rose up and turned them out. And they came to our land to fasten themselves on us like leaches to draw our blood [...] and now the question is whether or not we will allow them to fasten themselves still more upon us, until we and our children are the helpless victims of rapacity. (qtd. in Keough, McCarthy 2005, 35)

Griffith and Creagh both appeal to the pre-immigration past of twenty years prior in their propagandist efforts to demonise Irish Jewry, Griffith arguing that in contrast to the few Jews living in Ireland of that period

Today we have Jewish magistrates to teach us respect for the glorious constitution under which we exist; Jewish lawyers to look after our affairs; and Jewish moneylenders to accommodate us; Jewish tailors to clothe us; Jewish photographers to take our picture; Jewish brokers to furnish our houses; and Jewish auctioneers to sell us up in the end for the benefit of all our other Jewish benefactors. (Griffith 1904, 256)

Similar anti-Semitic propaganda was appearing throughout the Irish press, especially in regional titles. An advert for the Cash Tailoring Company of Capel Street Dublin, “Nailing a Lie: £50 Challenge”, which ran from at least 7 October 1905 to 1 February 1908, mere months before the Goldfaden performance, in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, reads:

Several Gaelic Leaguers and others having complained to us recently that they were informed we employ Jewish labour, we now offer the above to any person who can prove that we are not an exclusively Irish firm, with Irish capital, Irish management, and employing none but Irish labour. (Anon. 1905, 10)

The advert disappeared for nearly three years but would return again on 1 December 1910. Needless to say, propagandist rhetoric of this nature depicting Jews as parasitic alien foreigners, despite the fact that by the opening decade of the twentieth century a new generation of Jews had been born in Ireland incurred a crisis of identity. These perceived incongruities of Irish-Jewish identity were expounded and interrogated in Dublin Jewish journalist and fiction writer, E.R. Lipsett’s much cited 1906 article, “Jews in Ireland”, published in *The Jewish Chronicle* under the pen name “Halitvack”.

Lipsett, however, downplays Creagh’s Limerick boycott as isolated, attributing tensions instead to a mutual estrangement between Irish and Jews, wherein “the Jews understand the Irish little; the Irish understand the Jews less” (Lipsett 1906, 29). Lipsett elaborates further to argue that Ireland can form no concept of the compound “Irish Jew” that does not sound contradictory, either to the native Irish, or to the Jews themselves, whom he claims have been unduly influenced by native cynicism regarding any attempt to identify as “Jewish Irishmen” (*ibidem*). He goes on to argue that the confusion derives from a close native identification of Jews, often anti-Semitic, with the modes and narrowly perceived manner of their trade, either as shopkeepers, pedlars, or money lenders, and with fundamental misconceptions best illustrated by the now hackneyed query, “Are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?” (*ibidem*). Racial *othering* is exposed as rife in the article, with individuals typically identified by the qualifier, “a Jew”, or pejoratively reduced to “Jewmen”. However, the fact that a shift in narrative had occurred, or was occurring on the linguistic front, and particularly within the pages of the Gaelic League press, must have proved significant in terms of perceptions of Irish Jewry. Ironically, it is also unclear the extent to which Yiddish was still spoken or was in decline in Ireland in 1908.

The Goldfaden performances were part of a general artistic revival of Yiddish that in many cases unfolded like the Gaelic and Literary Revivals along patriotic and nationalistic lines. Goldfaden is generally recognised as the father of Yiddish theatre, which he established in the 1870s. His movement developed from humble beginnings into a voice, or “cultural expression of Jewish life”, playing, as Liptzin remarks, “a vital role in the cultural life of the Jewish masses, especially on the American scene” (1963, 33). America, particularly New York, provided a vibrant platform for the evolution of Yiddish theatre, with a Yiddish Revival also occurring in other important cultural centres, such as London. For Dublin to emerge as an albeit smaller, and for a time brief Jewish cultural centre also, indeed one based at Ireland’s National Theatre at the height of the literary revival, speaks to not just to an increasing Irish Jewish population at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also of an emergent Irish-Jewish cultural voice seeking a public platform. This context had not gone unnoticed in the Irish press, a *Freeman’s Journal* article of September 1911 remarking on the performance of Yiddish plays in Dublin as applicable to an address given by the English Jewish philanthropist and baron, Sir Francis Montefiore, on the opening of a Yiddish People’s Theatre in London, in which he discusses the great Jewish contributions to music and stage, and how the new Yiddish theatre movement provides a medium for providing a “true picture of Jewish culture” to the world, whether that

be “scenes from Israel’s great past”, “scenes of Jewish life in Palestine”, or simply “the [domestic] beauty of Jewish home Life” (1911, 7), all of which would become manifest in the productions of the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society, especially in the 1920s. The importance of Hebrew to the Zionist movement is also recognised by the article, and the practical function of Yiddish, which is described as the “Esperanto of the Jew”, varying from country to country, even from community to community, is lauded as “the channel of communication between members of the race sojourning in cities as far apart as Johannesburg and Edinbur[gh], Paris and Tehran” (*ibidem*).

Yiddish theatre had clearly garnered enough interest to shift the narrative at least in a small degree away from propagandist anti-Semitism, and it is clear from aspects of the production that attempts were made to accommodate non-Yiddish speakers in the audience as much as possible shy of performing a translation. The unnamed Jewish correspondent the *Evening Telegraph* review of *Shulamith*, for example, informs us that “a synopsis of the principal event [was] provided on the programme”, but also celebrates the fact that those actually versed in Yiddish were better positioned to appreciate the production’s “candour and fearlessness of expressing opinions” (Anon. 1908d, 2). Newspaper reviews likewise described and contextualised the performances, which, given that scripts are unlikely to have survived, prove as invaluable to research now as they would have been to non-Yiddish speaking interested parties of the time. The same reviews also allow one, I believe, to dispense with the idea that these Yiddish plays were intended principally as expressions of Irish Nationalism. Rather, the choice of Goldfaden especially, was intended to invite powerful patriotic and thematic parallels with Irish Nationalist and literary traditions that could demonstrate or resurrect a longstanding sense of a shared or comparable history existing between Irish and Jews.

One aspect of this most certainly invoked is a very curious literary tradition referred to by Jerold Casway as “Gaelic Maccabeanism”, which began with seventeenth century bardic poets placing the rebel hero, Owen Roe O’Neill within the tradition of ancient Maccabean freedom fighters (2000). This identification of Irish resistance to British Imperialism with an episode of ancient Judaic history was later revived and cultivated in the nineteenth century, first by the extremely popular Irish poet, Thomas Moore, and then by several Young Ireland poets who invoked specific parallels between Erin and Zion. Such parallels and identifications would have stood in defiance to the anti-Semitic xenophobia of Finlay, Griffith and Creagh, harkening instead to the sentiments of Daniel O’Connell discussed earlier. The *Evening Herald* explains how Goldfaden’s *Shulamith* “is founded on a very popular Talmudical legend dealing with the patriotic life of the Maccabean warriors”, while the *Evening Telegraph* places emphasis on the pride Dublin Jewry should take in their “successful revival of old time stories and music [...] eminently characteristic of [Jewish] national history and ideals”, and that the opportunity should be taken to see “this rare display of Jewish talent and [hear] national Jewish music [...] by everyone interested in the welfare of the Jewish people” (Anon. 1908c, 5; Anon. 1908f, 2). The *Evening Herald* Correspondent, “Jacques” also hails “the Yiddish Renaissance in Dublin” and thanks the actors for giving him “an evening of lavish slices out of Jerusalem life in 200 B.C.” (Jacques 1908, 3).

Solomon Liptzin groups Goldfaden’s plays into three categories: his early comedies, “which castigated the follies of ghetto life and preached enlightenment for the superstitious masses”; the second category composed following the 1881 Russian pogroms, which “underscored the vices of excessive enlightenment [and] of overhasty assimilation to foreign ways”; and the third including *Shulamith* and *Bar Kochba*, which constitute “dramas of Jewish national resurgence and Zionist hopes” (1963, 38). The concurrent aligning of Irish and Hebrew as cornerstones of respective linguistic identity on the same political stage in both Irish Jewish and Gaelic League

discourses most likely influenced the choice of which Goldfaden plays were performed, as of all the Goldfaden plays available, the DAJOS chose two from the latter category, and of both, greater emphasis is placed on the rebel thematic of *Bar Kochba*. This is unsurprising as *Shulamith* is more obviously a love story than one of armed rebellion. The male lead, Avisholem (played by I. Shreider, who may have belonged to the Hyman Shreider family, but does not appear in the Irish Census), is identified as a “member of the great family of Maccabeans [...] on his way to the annual festivities held in Jerusalem”, and is costumed in warrior’s garb. But the plot emphasis is on his betrayal of Shulamith (Bessie Fisher), whom he rescues from a well and pledges himself to only to later fall in love with and marry another, Avigayel (Gertie Shillman). Disaster befalls the union with the mysterious and macabre deaths of the couple’s children, one killed and eaten by a black cat, the other drowned in a well, the latter particularly reminiscent of Avisholem’s first encounter with Shulamith. Meanwhile, the abandoned and heartbroken Shulamith, who beset with unwelcome suitors has either feigned or descended into madness, deliriously muttering about wedding vows and a black cat. Upon learning the truth, Avigayel releases Avisholem who is reunited with the restored Shulamith (Anon. 1908g, 22).

Yet despite being a love story rather than one of armed rebellion against oppression, *Shulamith* in terms of its form and themes also invites parallels with the Irish Aisling tradition. Shulamith is the “daughter of Zion”, but also like the Irish Shan Van Vocht, can be read as a feminised embodiment of Zion to whose cause the wayward warrior returns. Indeed, like in the Aisling tradition, Shulamith appears to Avisholem in a dream. Even if such a reading is fanciful or at best a nod to the Irish Jewish analogy, any invocation of this nature can be seen as aligning with for example, the sentiments of Michael Davitt, who attacked Creagh’s Boycott in a January 1904 letter to the *Freeman’s Journal* (5) which recalls his earlier letter to that paper in July 1893, in which Davitt famously writes: “The Jews have never to my knowledge done any injury to Ireland. Like our own race they have endured a persecution the records of which will forever remain a reproach to the ‘Christian’ nations of Europe. Ireland has no share in this black record” (5). Ironically, it is now O’Connell and Davitt who are most cited in a narrative of Irish tolerance toward the Jews, a circumstance that has unfortunately since skewed and glossed over the anti-Semitic attitudes of the aforementioned Finlay, Griffith and Creagh. But the impetus to reinforce dialogue and common ground between the communities was still strongly in evidence in February 1909, five years on from Davitt’s famous appeal, when Padraic Colum was invited to address the Jewish Literary and Social Club on Lombard Street on the subject of the Irish Literary Revival.

The title of Colum’s lecture is given respectively as “The Revival of Irish Literature” in the *Freeman’s Journal*, (Anon., 1909d, 5), “Origin, Progress, and Revival of Irish Literature” in the *Evening Telegraph*, (Anon. 1909e, 2), and “The Revival of the Literary Spirit in Ireland” in the *Irish Independent* (Anon. 1909f, 8). A copy of Colum’s lecture has yet to be recovered, but the language of the aforementioned newspaper reports indicate that the occasion was organised in the interests of reciprocal sympathy for respective causes. For example, in his vote of thanks to Colum, Jacob Elyan declared that “they as Jews must sympathise with the Irish people in the endeavour to revive their language” (*ibidem*). The *Evening Telegraph* likewise reports Elyan’s allusion to “the great part played by the language of a nation in the nation’s welfare” (Anon. 1909e, 2) in alignment with ongoing comparative debates on the centrality of language to both Irish and Jewish national identity. The Jewish Correspondent for the *Evening Telegraph* gives a detailed account of proceedings, noting that the audience was at capacity, and likening Colum’s lecture to a return to “the ‘Beth Hamidrash,’ or House of Learning of the Russian Pale, where we were wont to foregather when anyone was willing to come and expound the words of Law and Wisdom”. The correspondent tells us that Colum reads extracts from the old Irish Sagas,

“in which the tragic exploits of Cahoulán [*sic*] were set forth”, and that rather than delivering a dry, factual account, the lecture showed:

[...] the philosophical side of literature, tracing for us line by line, the different modes of thought which prevailed at different periods in the development of Irish literature; so that we were all impressed by the great beauty of form, of manner, and of matter which is to be found everywhere where the purely Gaelic spirit prevailed. (*Ibidem*)

Of considerable interest is the report that the presumably exclusive Jewish audience had “more than a little knowledge” of Colum’s subject matter hitherto, including the Jewish Justice of the Peace, Maurice E. Solomons, who produced a copy of Colum’s collection of three plays, *Studies* (1907a), and poetry collection, *Wild Earth* (1907b).

The importance of language to national identity raised by Elyan has already been discussed as a vital point of dialogue between the respective revival of Irish and Jewish literary cultures. But Colum’s discussion of Cú Chulainn, the ancient Irish warrior hero, must have also recalled the theme of Goldfaden’s *Bar Kochba* performed a mere seven months beforehand at the Abbey Theatre. Goldfaden’s play blends history with mythology and legend to dramatically recount the Simon Bar Kokhba rebellion against the Roman Empire in 132 CE, which led to an independent Jewish state and war before Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 135 CE resulting in the destruction of the city and temple. Bar Kokhba was not a Maccabee, *per se*, but is generally associated with the three-hundred-year tradition of Jewish armed rebellion beginning with the first Maccabean Revolt of 167 BCE. *Bar Kochba* would have resonated with Irish Nationalism on a number of levels, not least of which being the fact that the titular hero is a martyr and his revolt a failed rebellion. The description of the play’s protagonist in the *Evening Telegraph* would also have struck a chord with Celtic Revivalists due to its echoing of the Irish heroic tradition:

History writes him down as an enthusiast who lays down his life for his people, but legendary myths have been woven around him: he is a strong man whom no chains can bind, no walls enclose, on whom the spirit of kingliness has descended so that the people cannot refrain from bowing down before him, though they have as yet no proof of his greatness; and contrary to Jewish tradition, he is crowned “King of Israel”. (Anon. 1908d, 2)

This is effectively in the spirit and tradition of any number of legendary Irish heroes, from Cú Chulainn to Fionn mac Cumhaill. Treachery, betrayal, prophetic curses, and ghostly encounters also figure prominently in the plot. But ultimately, as noted in the *Irish Independent*, Goldfaden’s *Bar Kochba* “appeals strongly to the patriotic sense of the Jewish race”, the musical score in particular described as echoing “the woes of a people whose strivings and sufferings are among the most tragic in the world’s history” (Anon. 1908k, 6).

Both *Shulamith* and *Bar Kochba* were staples of Yiddish theatre, and both plays are recorded as playing to capacity audiences in Dublin. But they also had a very real, topical political context because of their Zionist sentiments and themes of patriotism and rebellion against oppression outside of potential parallels with the Irish nationalist cause. In particular, as David E. Fisher notes, the play ends with the hero swearing “victory for the Jewish people in the future” in a soliloquy echoing “proto-Zionist sentiments in Russian Jewry during the 1880s” (Fishman 2005, 10). As a result, Fishman continues, the play, “which idealised the ancient Judean uprising against Rome, was taken by the authorities to be a veiled allegory in favour of revolution in Russia” (26). *Shulamith* and *Bar Kochba* are thus regularly cited as instrumental causes in the Tsarist ban on Yiddish theatre in Russia in 1883. The next play to be performed,

however, was not a Goldfaden, but rather, a tragic comedy, *Haman the Second* by Nahum Meyer Schaikewitch (Shomer). Shomer was a prolific novelist and playwright, composing numerous works on Russian Jewish village life for both print and stage. He was immensely popular, due as Jeremy Dauber points out, to his “masterful ability” to give his audience what they wanted: “sentimental, melodramatic fiction packed with juicy murders, star-crossed lovers, wild plot twists, and far-flung settings with, at least arguably, no redeeming educational or literary value whatsoever” (Dauber 2013, 56).

Shomer also brought the ire of fellow Yiddish writers, particularly that of Sholem Aleichem, who attacked the popular author’s dangerous romantic sensibilities and sentimental propensities in an 1888 satirical pamphlet, *Shomer’s Mishpat*, or *Shomer’s Law*. Dublin newspaper descriptions of the production seem to confirm much of this criticism, the play appearing seeped in a combination of high melodrama and low comedy, with an extremely convoluted plot involving a highly unlikely ruse to expose the diabolical and traitorous machinations of a Jew-hating Apostate. The play is modelled on the attempted genocide of the Jews by Haman under the Persian King Ahasuerus c. 483 BCE, as recounted in the “Book of Esther”, which, being at the centre of the Jewish festival of Purim would have been second nature to Shomer’s audience. The action is updated and migrated to the Kingdom of Poland, and the villain in question, the “Haman” of the piece is the Kingdom’s Prime Minister who goes by the name, Clement. This figure is in fact Jewish, originally called Yeffin, who has become a Jew hating apostate who has gone so far as to imprison and abuse his own father, Ossip, whom he keeps as a slave in order to protect the secret of his birth and original faith (Anon. 1909a, 6). The play also re-enacts the pervasive peril and threat of persecution faced by the Jews, whether under the Persians, Poland, the Russian pogroms, or even more topically the Limerick Boycott of John Creagh in 1904. Clement falls in love with and is rejected by the Rabbi’s daughter. He responds by imprisoning the father and daughter and threatening torture and death if they refuse to renounce their faith and convert to Christianity. They hold firm, as the reviewer of the *Evening Herald* notes, “he extends his anger to all the Jews in the land, regardless of whether they ever knew of the offending Rabbi or not” (Anon. 1909c, 4). Clement, like the Biblical Haman, is foiled in his attempts and executed.

The impression given by newspaper reviews, however, was of the Dublin society doing the best they could with ramshackle material. The Jewish Correspondent for the *Evening Herald* seems deeply unimpressed, declaring the characters “incarnations of type, hardly individuals at all”, but reserves praise for the actors, adding, “the strong colours, the stilted characters, the conventional setting, the superabundance of tragedy and comedy and tears – all these had a tiresome effect, and only the liveliness of the artistes kept one from falling asleep over it” (*ibidem*). Familiarity with the Esther story would obviously have enabled the audience to navigate the convolutions of plot, but other themes, particularly that of coerced religious conversion would have resonated politically in 1909 Ireland, given the recent activities of the conversionist London Mission Societies to the Jews. An article, “Jewish Mission Society: Annual Meeting” reporting a meeting of the “Church of Ireland Auxiliary of the London Jews’ Society” in Gregg Hall, Dawson Street, at which the Bishop of Limerick was in attendance, appeared in the *Irish Times*, 29 April 1908. The speaker boasts of recent Jewish converts to Christianity, and expresses hopes that “now that they were able to select missionaries to the Jews from their own people, of their own flesh and blood, acquainted as they must be with the special prejudices that beset the Jews, they might hope for even more rapid results” (Anon. 1908a, 10).

Accusing Jews of prejudice for not converting to Christianity in twentieth century Ireland is as absurd as it is insidious. But alongside the insult there was also the painful heritage of forced apostasy in centuries past. The Church of Ireland Jews’ Society may not have carried the same

threat of violence as the Inquisition had, for example, in Spain or Portugal; but the theme of coerced conversion in “Haman the Second” was a reminder of that history. The Missions even organised an exhibition, “Palestine in Dublin” in May 1908 at the Rotunda to aid in their efforts but were forced to admit that “many Jews were not flocking into the Christian Church” (Anon. 1908b, 7). But they persisted, nonetheless. A sermon “in aid of the Church of Ireland Jews’ Society” was even delivered at St. Andrews on 17 January 1909, mere days before the Shomer performance at the Abbey Theatre. There was clear indignation and resistance to the Missions amongst Irish Jewry, even a united front between Joseph Edelstein and Philip Wigoder, who had only the previous year been at odds over the activities of the Judæo-Irish Home Rule Association. On the issue of Jewish conversion, the two, amongst others, were united, posting the following notice of protest against a meeting of 16 May 1909:

The Mission Societies to the Jews. How They Work! How Many Homes They Have Ruined! Our Duty to the Nation. A public open-air meeting of Jews will be held on the ground adjoining the Grand Canal and facing Martin Street, S.C.R, on Sunday next, 16th inst, at 4 pm sharp to protest against the action of the Mission Societies to the Jews in the endeavours to procure the conversion of our Brethren. Some of their actions will be lucidly exposed by Messrs Joseph Edelstein and Philip I Wigoder. (Reprinted in Edelstein, Wigoder 1909, 5)

Events took a violent turn when Edelstein set up a rival stage to protest the Missions’ Jewish convert, Isaac Luft, who was addressing the crowd in Yiddish. Edelstein was subsequently charged with assault for throwing a tumbler style drinking glass at his rival speaker during a particularly heated exchange in which Edelstein was declaiming, “There never was a converted Jew!” (*ibidem*).

The Dublin Jewish Amateur Operatic Society returned to Goldfaden with a reproduction of *Shulamith* in June 1909, and a further drama, *The Zauberin, or the Enchantress* in 1910, the latter performance receiving considerably less newspaper reportage and analysis, which make the play much more difficult to discuss. *The Zauberin*, however, also closed the curious incursion of Yiddish theatre by a home grown drama society at the Abbey for the better part of a decade, and although considerably more work is required in this field, it does appear evident that the grounds for a public Jewish cultural voice in Ireland, one that also proposed parallels and dialogue with Irish Nationalism, was being laid that would provide a template for the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society, which was formally established in the 1920s. The DJDS staged productions by major Jewish playwrights including Sholem Aleichem, David Pinski, Leon Kobrin, S. Ansky, Abraham Reizen, and Israel Zangwill throughout the 1920s. Many of these productions were once more staged at the Abbey, Ireland’s national theatre, in both English and Yiddish, often produced by the legendary Frank Fay. Alongside these Jewish dramas, the DJDS also staged works by Irish playwrights, some of which from the Irish Literary Revival period, including Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Spreading the News*, Bernard Duffy’s *Special Pleading* and Michael Brennan’s rather dubious *The Young Man from Rathmines*, strongly suggesting efforts being made to dismantle cultural boundaries between Ireland’s indigenous Christian and marginalised Jewish communities.

A second article at the very least would be required to do justice to and offer a similar commentary on the Jewish dramas staged by the DJDS, especially in the 1920s, which saw such productions, amongst others, as Leon Kobrin’s *Der Zeitgeist* performed in March 1923, Shalom Aleichem’s *Der Geht* in March 1924, Avrom Reizen’s *Der Shadchan’s Daughter* in April 1925, David Pinsky’s *Yeshurim* in December 1925 followed by *Forgotten Souls* (first performed by the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Circle in 1919), Israel Zangwill’s world famous *The Melting*

Pot in 1926, and S. Ansky's equally famous supernatural drama, *The Dybbuk* in 1927. Outside Jewish theatrical groups also appeared in Dublin in and around this time, including Madame Itzkovitch's Company, "The Famous Jewish Players", who put on a production of Joseph Markovitch's *Chaveirim* at the Abbey Theatre in June 1923, the Vilna Troupe who performed Max Yordan Mordau's *Doctor Kohn* in April 1924, and Fanny Waxman's Yiddish Repertoire, who performed Segal's *The Rabbi's Widow* in June 1924. Performances in Yiddish by the home grown DJDS were still appearing in the 1930s with M. Segalman's *Shma Isroel* in July 1932, but by 1940 the society ceased performing plays of Jewish interest until a production of Sylvia Regan's *Morning Star*, was staged at the Olympia Theatre in January 1947. The Society would continue in popularity, performing Pinski and Ansky into the late 1940s before petering out in the mid 1950s. Although photographs of many of these performances survive, the same is not true for scripts and so forth (at least not at the time of writing), and newspaper reviews simply do not provide the same level of detail available for the earlier Yiddish productions.

Attention will instead turn in the latter part of this article to the homespun Irish Jewish dramas on record, focusing principally on two playwrights, Esther Morris (Mofsovitz) and Emil Slotover, both of whom having surviving works. Those that do not have surviving works are nonetheless of considerable interest. For example, Ida Briscoe, mother of Robert Briscoe, composed a Purim sketch and pageant called *The Women's Parliament*, which was performed at the Gaiety Theatre in April 1919 amidst the upheaval of the War of Independence in which her son, the future Dublin mayor was active (*Irish Times*, 7 Apr 1919, 7). Briscoe's play was performed alongside works by two giants of Yiddish literature, Sholem Aleichem's *She Must Marry a Doctor* and David Pinski's *Forgotten Souls*. Aleichem's play is a social satire on the clash between orthodox Jewish marriage traditions and modernity, *Forgotten Souls* is a drama on the theme of self-sacrifice in the domestic space. The Irish Jewish poet, Rosa Solomons, was also present and gave a reading of "Gratitude" from her collection, *Facts and Fancies* (1883). Briscoe would also produce a play, *Chanukah* for a Hanukah celebration at the Olympia Theatre in December 1923, to commemorate "the victory of the Israelites under Judas Maccabeus over the Assyrians under Antiochus" (Anon. 1923, 3). Solomons' poem, "The Menorah" was also recited by Doris Zlotover, and the evening consisted of a concert with singing, musical performances and dance.

Other home grown Irish Jewish playwrights to emerge in this period include Stella Rosefield, Joseph Namille, and Joshua Baker, who had their plays, respectively *Dear Lazarus* and *Eloquence Retrained* (the latter a co-authored Yiddish-English Comedy by Namille and Baker) performed at Greenville Hall in February 1925. Lawrence Elyan, a prominent society actor, also produced an English-Yiddish comedy set in a Dublin Jewish home performed alongside Bernard McCarthy's *Cough Water*, a farce set in a Begbawn Dispensary in 1925. But of these playwrights, the only one with material so far recovered is Esther Morris (Mofsovitz), who published three plays, *The Conscript*, *The Matchmakers*, and *The Story of Purim* in a small collection, *Tears & Laughter* (1926)⁴. She had performed in a Yiddish production of Leon Kobrin's *Der Zeitgeist* at the Abbey Theatre in 1923, and had her own *The Matchmakers* performed again at the Abbey in 1925. Both were produced by Frank Fay. Morris writes in the "Preface" of her collection of the difficulties faced by the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society in "securing for production suitable plays of Jewish interest", and of the unsatisfactory recourses "to adaptations

⁴ Esther Morris is the great grandmother of contemporary poet, Simon Lewis, who reimagines the Jewish immigrant experience in turn of the century Cork in his excellent poetry collection, *Jewtown* (2016).

and translations from the originals of Jewish Dramatic Literature” into which the society was forced (Morris 1926, 1).

The Conscript is set in a Russian cottage in 1900. It involves the perilous conscription of a young Jewish man into the Tsarist army. Ó Gráda notes that although there having been a specifically anti-Semitic agenda behind military treatment of Jews in late nineteenth century Russia remains a subject of debate, Jews most certainly did suffer discrimination within that brutal regime, and “images of Jewish boy-soldiers being carried away at the age of twelve and of young draft dodgers fleeing across the border permeate Litvak folk memory” (2006, 27). Rivlin adds that the practice of conscripting Jewish boys into military service had lapsed by 1874, but that all Jewish males were eligible over the age of twenty one, and that as conscription could last from twenty-five to thirty-five years, many wealthy families paid Gentiles to replace their sons, while others hid or adopted false names (Rivlin 2003, 30). Morris’s play is a one act domestic drama in which an elder of two sons, Jacob, due to be married to his childhood sweetheart, Kailia, has been conscripted. The familial father is long dead, and the mother has lost the money she saved to buy at least one of her children out of service in an accidental fire. The younger, Joseph, who also has (albeit unreciprocated) feelings for Kailia performs an act of self-sacrifice by entering military service in his older brother’s place. Joseph is also motivated by viewing this move as his only means of escaping his stifling existence within the confines of the Russian Pale.

The Match Makers, performed at the Abbey, is a comedic take on the Shadchan tradition given a contemporary setting. The setting is the home of a lively unmarried eighteen year old Jewish girl, Maide Bloom, which is visited (unknown to each other) by three match makers, Mrs Katz, Mrs Mebbich, and Mrs Tuvos, all trying to arrange her marriage to a wealthy young American visitor, Harry Fried for commission. Harry, however, scuppers their efforts by taking the modern approach and proposing directly, as has become the way in the States. Maide accepts with her father’s blessing, as he is extremely impressed by the manner in which Harry has inadvertently thwarted the designs of the three disgruntled would be Shadchans. Both plays speak to the modernising of Jewish culture and practice. The third play of *Tears & Laughter*, *The Story of Purim*, is framed, a play within a play, in which a grandmother’s account to her grandchildren of the story of Esther thwarting the intended genocide of the Jews by Haman becomes an acted drama. The play recounts the prejudicial motives of the antagonist, concluding with the Grandmother warning her two grandchildren that although this is an ancient story, that “there are still wicked Hamans in the world, who would harm us Jews today, as in the days of King Ahasuerus, and we must put our trust in the Great God of Israel to protect us” (Morris 1926, 56).

Potentially the most promising Irish Jewish playwright, Emil Gedaliah Slotover, was only five years old when Esther Morris’s *The Match Makers* was performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1925. Born in Dublin in 1920, Slotover was related to the novelist, short story writer and translator, Hannah Berman, and would become an actor and playwright in the early 1940s during World War II, or the “Emergency” as it was known in Ireland. A Trinity College Law graduate, he acted in Lennox Robinson’s production of Bernard Shaw’s *Misalliance* at the Peacock Theatre in February 1942, three months before his own *Wrestling with Angels* was produced at the Peacock in May 1942. Slotover was also a member of the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society, performing in Ivor Novello’s *A Symphony in Two Flats* at the Gaiety Theatre in January 1943. Of Slotover’s three known original works, only one, *On Guard* survives, which is his *Selected Works*, edited by Wendy Saloman. As Saloman writes in her introduction, Slotover was “a seeker of psychological and spiritual truth, beyond orthodox Judaic thought”, *Wrestling with Angels* a “will-versus-con-

science” comedy about a hen pecked husband, and *On Guard* on his personal “conflict between Irish patriotism and sympathy with the allied cause” in wartime Europe (2004, vii-x). The latter goes right to the heart of Slotover’s Irish Jewish identity in which Irish neutrality would most certainly have felt directly at odds with the threat of Nazism.

One would imagine that this was the driving force behind Slotover’s most intriguing work, *The Refugee*, which premiered at the Peacock on 6 April 1943 amidst astonishing controversy that resulted in the play being censored by the Irish authorities. Indeed, most of what is known about *The Refugee* derives from a letter of 1943 from Martin O’Neill of the Garda Biochana in Dublin (reprinted in the *Selected Works*), who provides a synopsis of the plot. The play, set in Dublin, involves Eric, an amnesiac Hungarian refugee, and a Dublin writer, Peter, trying to piece together his forgotten life. But given Ireland’s neutrality, references to Eric’s Jewishness and Concentration camps were expunged, amongst other perceived “anti-German” propagandas, as revealed in a 2002 email from American scholar, Joan Dean (also reprinted), with Slotover being interviewed and the performance attended by Special Branch (Slotover 2004, 156-157). Needless to say, the original script if discovered would be an invaluable research asset. Slotover’s career, however, was tragically cut short when he unfortunately died in a traffic accident in England at the age of 25 in November 1945.

In conclusion, this article has endeavoured to demonstrate how Irish Jewish theatre provided a public platform for Ireland’s largest non-Christian minority of the era that presented an impressive array of home grown and key imported Jewish dramas throughout the duration of its various societies. The presentation of Jewish theatre in Ireland also managed to engage or suggest parallels that negotiated with pertinent socio-political and cultural discourses along lines of language and identity, history and patriotism, prejudice and oppression, which placed it in dialogue with major non-Jewish Irish movements and societies such as the Irish Literary Revival and Gaelic League. This article merely scratches the surface of what is undoubtedly a very rich subject matter, unfortunately hampered by a lack, or loss of original source materials. But what is certain is that the advent of Irish Jewish theatre provides a very interesting, if for too long neglected, chapter in the history of Irish theatre in general. The hope is that the findings presented here will provide a framework for future research, especially into the particular significances of the individual dramas performed against Jewish, Irish, and ultimately Irish Jewish contexts.

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Disability Theatre in Ireland: A Development

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to trace recent developments in Irish disability theatre, primarily in the light of the theoretical debate that envisions disability theatre at the interdisciplinary crossroads of disability studies and performance studies. I will describe how disability theatre in Ireland was portrayed in *Face On: Disability Arts in Ireland and Beyond* (2007) edited by Kaite O'Reilly. In particular, many contributors lament the backwardness of disability theatre in Ireland. In 2012, however, the Irish Arts Council revised and formalised its previous policy, which had been ineffective in supporting artists and audiences with disabilities. In conjunction with Arts and Disability Ireland, their strategic plans brought forth significant changes in Irish disability theatre.

Keywords: disability theatre, early disability theatre in Ireland, minority model, new policies and contemporary disability theatre, social constructed model

I want to tell you about my body. I like my body now, I really do.
Sometimes I think I'm too fat, but I really like living in this body.
I like because I know who I look like...
Rosaleen McDonagh, *Babydoll* (2007)

1. Introduction: Disability Theatre

Disability theatre belongs to the field of Disability Arts and is part of a long and articulated debate that has engaged scholars from different disciplinary perspectives. Ruth Bailey, in discussing *The Beautiful Octopus Club* (1995), one of the latest productions of Heart'n'Soul, an English musical theatre company of people with learning disabilities, briefly describes what disability theatre is. According to her, Disability Theatre happens because of disability, not in spite of it. It wants to introduce theatregoers to contemporary club music and club goes to the world of performance. This new experience, which has not just developed for the sake of being innovative, gives control to people with learning disabilities. This means that every stage of the artistic process is shaped and informed by the culture

and experience of people with learning disabilities. The performers on stage all have learning disability, as do those taking money at the door. So too do many of those moving on the dance floor, doing whatever their own thing is. There is no pressure to conform here. The ambience, access and performances somehow manage to put everyone at their ease.

Disability theatre is therefore about ensuring disabled people are at the centre of the creative process and allowing disability to influence that process. More precisely, it can be defined as theatre “which involves a majority of disabled people, explores a disability aesthetic and mirrors in some way the lives of disabled people” (Morrison 1992). With the maturing of a new aesthetic of disability theatre, the power of placing disabled performers in any narrative, not just one that has a positive disability theme, can be exploited. Moreover, the form and aesthetics of a play is also influenced by disability, while audio description and sign language have ensured that works are accessible to deaf and visually impaired audience goers.

Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander inscribe disability theatre in a more radical and broad view of disability, that is the result of an interdisciplinary approach between disabilities studies and performance studies. In particular, they describe disability as performance in everyday life, as a metaphor of dramatic literature and as the work of disabled performing artists. In everyday life, people with visible impairment “cause a commotion in public space” (2005, 2), surprise and pose questions to others on such a startling physical difference. Disability therefore inaugurates, in our Western rhetorical, literary and visual tradition, “the act of interpretation” (Mitchell, Snyder 2000, 6), which prompts the act of meaning making. Disability as a dramaturgical metaphor instead has to do with identity construction. Drawing on Erving Goffman’s “performance of everyday” (1978, 10) and Judith Butler’s “performativity” (1993, 12), disability is seen as being performed (like gender, sex, sexuality, race and ethnicity) and indeed many disabled artists talk about performing their identities in explicitly self-conscious and theatrical terms. Thus, many disabled artists have turned disability stereotypes and narratives to their own ends. They have transformed a potentially stigmatizing experience into an act of empowerment, but they can run the risk of falling into the trap of another performance, that of able-bodiedness. The manipulation and transformation of stereotypes are important tactics, as the available ‘scripts’ of disability are limited and embedded in cultural imagination. Physical and cognitive impairment serve a narrative as “material metaphor” (Sandhal, Auslander 2005, 3) and give textual abstraction to tangible bodies. These impaired individuals are usually metaphors of social and individual collapse. Among them, to mention but a few, there are: “the obsessive avengers”, who seek revenge against those he considers responsible for his disablement; the “sweet innocent” (otherwise known as “Tiny Tim”), who act as a moral barometer of the nondisabled; “the inspirational overcomer”, “the extraordinary individual” who excels despite her impairment; the “freak”, the ultimate outsider; and the “monster”, whose disfigurements arouse fear and horror¹.

The work of disabled performing artists in theatre, however, has recently drawn inspiration from their own experience, thus rejecting the scripts listed above and challenging trite narrative conventions and aesthetic practices. Disability performance scholar and artist Petra Kuppers testifies that “physically impaired performer has [...] to negotiate two areas of cultural meaning invisibility as an active member in the public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorisation” (2001, 25). The audience assume that the “disabled body is naturally about disability”

¹ For a complete list of disabled characters as metaphors of social and individual collapse see “Representation and its Discontent: the Uneasy Home of Disability in Literature and Films” in Mitchell, Snyder (2000b, 15-46).

(6), as if cultural narratives of disability prevent the artist from trying to communicate anything else. Alternatives to Koppers's binary invisibility/hypervisibility opposition are those that see disability as a social-construction model and as a minority model. Developed especially in the USA during the Civil Rights movement by its activists, the social-construction model "is not situated within pathological individuals in need of medical care and cure (the medical model) but is a fundamentally a social phenomenon" (Sandhal, Auslander 2005, 7-8), locating disability within a society built for nondisabled people. Disability becomes "a disjuncture between the body and the environment. It is the stairway in front of the wheelchair user, or written text in front of the blind person" (8)². Interestingly, those scholars who have worked with the social construction model have shown that the discourse of disability changes according to cultural political, architectural, attitudinal and economic factors. The minority model extends the social construction model premise that disability is a mutable category and the disabled "becomes a distinct minority community that has been excluded from full participation in society because of discrimination in education, employment and architectural access. This community is defined by shared experiences of discrimination and by its vital subculture, including the arts" (*ibidem*). Under these premises, disability theatre becomes a complex object of study and what becomes relevant is how disabled artists perform their identity both in everyday life and in the theatre, how disabled bodies define space differently from able bodies and how disabled people choose to represent themselves in art and social action.

2. *Early Disability Theatre in the Irish Context*

The debate mentioned in the introduction, which spans from the 1980s to the present day, took place mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom. In Ireland, a thorough reflection started later than in these countries. *Face On: Disability Arts in Ireland and Beyond* (2007), which hosted a diverse range of contributions from opinionists, performers and creative artists, represented a first step towards issues of arts and disability in Ireland and it was intended to help broaden the audience and employment opportunities for the work of disabled arts practitioners from Ireland. In the words of Pádraig Naughton, Director of Arts and Disability Ireland, "In initiating this fresh debate on Disability Arts and Culture in an Irish context through this publication, my aim was not to suggest or arrive at a single conclusion, but present a diverse range of contributions" (see Naughton 2007, 7). As he underlined, it should not be "another conference, consultation process or policy document in the first instance, but the unique art making and subject matter that is disability arts itself" (*ibidem*). In particular, a number of essays invited consideration of disability theatre from various perspectives.

Steve Daunt has been involved in Arts and Disability policy and practice since the 1990s. A graduate of Trinity College, he works on a freelance basis and writes theatrical scripts. He has also completed the new Arts and Disability Handbook/Website for both Arts Councils, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. (Daunt 2007, 39)

In "The Dance of Power" he delves into issues of arts and disability from a public policy perspective. He outlines, for example, the delivery of a report entitled *To Enable – A Report on Access to the Arts in Ireland for People with Disabilities* delivered by the Arts Council in 1988, the

² Petra Koppers makes the same remark more recently in her *Theatre and Disability*, 7-8.

establishment of the Forum of People with Disabilities in 1990 and the set-up of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in 1993. However, he also sees how the notion of Social Partnership that ruled the Irish body politic in the late 1980s was detrimental to disabled people:

Government, employers, unions and other sectors of society agree common goals to be achieved in a timeframe. No need for strikes or any other types of agitation. This wider partnership has been reflected in the disability sector where we all seen 'stakeholders' whose job it is to make the difference. From the outside, it gives the impression that everything can be fixed through a lovely corporate strategy [...]. (37)

First, disabled artists were considered either as disabled members of local groups or, if they were skilled, they "became normalised within a greater whole" (38). Second, unlike in Britain, where the disability movement grew hand in hand with the disability arts movements and the art produced reflected this struggle, "the term 'disabled people' in Ireland came to include parents and carers, while the idea of stakeholder threw service providers into the mix. This inevitably led to the strongest rising to the top, or to be more precise, these with the biggest links or power" (*ibidem*).

While Daunt admits that he still had "to keep fighting" (39), he nonetheless acknowledges that the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities was aware that disabled people had cultural rights. A milestone of the new policy of the Commission was one major event: the participation of CandoCo at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1993. CandoCo is a British contemporary physically integrated dance company founded in 1991, which recognises and celebrates the first-person experience of disability according to the minority model. Daunt enthusiastically recalls their performance and the possibility to dance that was granted to him:

'Oh fuck...these guys are dancer' [...] It was the first time that I had seen dance that meant something to me. Forget Darcey Bussell or Nurayev... These were bodies like mine undertaking a full frontal assault on an artform that prided itself on perfect body form. Yupp! I was hooked. I signed up for their workshop and for five days lived the life of a dancer [...] I even purloined the image of a dying swan and made it my own. Counterbalance [the group that grew out of CandoCo] is still there and I'm grateful it *gave me the experience of knowing I could use my body as an instrument, quietly subverting normality*. (36; emphasis added)

Yvonne Lynch, who moved from England to Ireland and had her first encounter with disability when she joined Graeae Theatre Company's theatre-in-education as a performer in 1986, is highly critical of the situation of disability theatre in Ireland (see Lynch in O'Reilly 2007, 40): "now, in 2006, I do not note that there is some dramatic activity in Ireland by disabled people" (2007, 44). She conceded, however, that there are some marginal realities, like Shadowbox, "the first theatre company in Ireland" (*Shadowbox Theatre Company*) that made some stimulating work with actors with intellectual disability, or like Forum Theatre. At that time Forum Theatre "was being used by small groups of disabled artists across the state to demonstrate the discrimination they face that keeps them on the margins of Irish society" (Lynch 2007,44). For her, aspiring disabled artists are marginalised in dramatic production due to the lack of quality training and access to a variety of roles, as they will be always confronted by better trained and more experienced actors 'cripping-up' to get the role. For this reason, many disabled Irish actors are forced to emigrate to the United States or England. Lynch bleakly and sarcastically concludes: "the turbulent history Ireland has had with 'perfidious Albion' shows us that in many ways the devil you know can often be your most essential asset" (46).

The essays by Nabil Shaban and Jenny Sealey, based on their work with the London-based Graeae Theatre Company, show how disability theatre is a political and artistic subversive act

and defies notions of what theatre should be. Nabil Shaban, writer, performer, actor, dramaturg and co-founder of the English Graeae Company with Richard Tomlison, recounts the early history of this company. The company was inaugurated in 1972 and, from the outset, its “shows focused entirely on disability issues, our experience of disability and our perceptions of the non-disabled world’s attitudes towards disability” (Shaban 2007, 66). One of its most successful play, *Ready Salted Crisps* (1974) was a series of “sketches on disabled people’s perception and experience of education [...], the medical profession [...], family, parents, employment and the lack of employment” (*ibidem*). Although retaining the pathos, melodrama and tragedy of these experiences, the show was also light-hearted and humorous and became so popular that it was taken on tour. Shaban recalls that the success the play enjoyed convinced them that they might have contributed “to society in terms of telling their stories in their own words and in terms of their own entertainment values and ability” (*ibidem*) which were not, most importantly, the ‘Perfect’ and the ‘Beauty’, the ‘body Fascist ideals and stereotypes’. Shaban also sees various morals behind the Ancient Greek myth of the Graeae, from which the company takes its name. The Graeae were “three sisters who shared one eye and one tooth between them” (68). In the story of the Graeae, Perseus, unable to force them to tell him the location of three magical objects needed to kill Medusa, steals their eye to blackmail them (see *ibidem*). According to Shaban, the action of Perseus would not have harmed the Graeae “if they had not allowed the negative aspects of their impairment rule their lives and learned to cope as blind or partially sighted people rather than depending on the one eye” (*ibidem*). On the other hand, it is worth noting, as Shaban reminds us, that the three sisters also suggested how disabled people needed to work together and unite to advance in their common cause (see *ibidem*).

This common cause, according to Jenny Sealey, who became Artistic Director of Graeae Theatre Company in 1997, was not an easy journey as it is “fraught with the politics of challenging the representation of disabled people in theatre, the politics of basic access and the politics of theatre as a predominately white middle-class non-disabled male dominated playing field” (Sealey 2007, 71). Thus, both new plays and existing plays by well-known authors addressing disability issues dismantled discrimination and traditionalism. “*Peeling* by Kaite O’Reilly was a new commission exposing the still taboo issues of sex and pregnancy through the stories of three disabled women” (74). Not only did this play “enable the audience to reduce the gap between the disabled/non-disabled experience” from a feminist perspective, but it also explored a new artistic aesthetics (*ibidem*). The play used audio description as a spoken narrative and spoken words were projected on a screen, thereby becoming an interactive source for deaf people (see *ibidem*). If a character was shouting, the words on screen would be large and capitalised or if the actor were speaking as a Greek chorus, the words would be small and lower case (see *ibidem*). Martin Sherman’s *Bent*, whose cast was composed of one character using voice and another using British Sign Language (BLS). They both spoke/signed Sherman’s stage directions to tell the story of the play, which becomes a reminder for the audience that black, gay and disabled people died in the Holocaust (see Sealey 2007, 75).

The play *Babydoll*, a one-woman show performed in 2003 by Rosaleen McDonagh, represents a successful Irish answer to many of the issues raised by Graeae Theatre Company on disability theatre³.

³ Rosaleen McDonagh is a Dublin-based Traveller with a disability who is a playwright, activist and performer. [She] has an Honours degree in Biblical and Theological Studies and a MPhil in Ethnic and Racial Studies from Trinity College Dublin. Her one-woman show, *The Baby Doll Project*, was performed at the Project Arts Centre and other locations and received a Metro Eireann Multi-Cultural Award (MAMA) award. (McDonagh 2007, 87).

The protagonist of *Babydoll*, both a disabled woman and a Traveller, insists on how the educational and religious institutions represented by the Teacher and the Nun (see 78-84), create only 'normalised' space from which her body was excluded. For this reason, McDonagh decided to set her show in a bathroom: "on the one hand as a Traveller woman, having access to a bathroom just wasn't [...] possible; while on the other hand, as a disabled woman, sharing a bathroom in an institutional setting leaves a sense of confusion and fear about what might happen there" (85-86). The bathroom therefore not only becomes the elective space where McDonagh performed her identity as disabled and Traveller in everyday life and the theatre, but also a metaphor of the claim for political and civil rights.

The claim for social engagement within Irish theatre was also made by Shadowbox Theatre Company, which initiated its activities in 1998 and, like Rosaleen McDonagh's activism, represented another answer to British disability theatre. The founders of Shadowbox wanted to make the true voices of Irish lives heard, in particular those who were marginalised and excluded from the Irish stage (see *Shadow Theatre Company*). They wanted to celebrate their disabled neighbours' experiences "– the comedy no less than the tragedy – and creating in the process theatre that was [...] enjoyable and meaningful, both for audience and those involved" (*ibidem*). As their site reports

In 2001 Shadowbox was the first theatre company in Ireland to establish a professional ensemble for Actors with Intellectual Disabilities. Since that time, our ensemble has toured throughout Ireland, encouraging the most diverse audiences to the recognition that artistry is not an intellectual function, but a faculty of our shared humanity. (*Ibidem*)

3. A New Policy for Arts and Disability in Ireland

In 2012, the Arts Council of Ireland reviewed and formalised "its policy and strategy in the area of disability, to reflect developments in provisions and practices and to take account of the requirement of developments in disability and equality legislation" (2012, 7). Although the Arts Council had addressed Arts and Disability over the last twenty-five years, its policy had not been "effective in translating successful interventions into mainstreamed systems for supporting artists and audiences with disabilities" (*ibidem*). In 2005 a short paper was published on the facing strengths and challenges of the Arts Council and its subsequent strategy, *Partnership for the Arts (2006-2010)*, envisaged the recruitment of an Arts and Disability Advisor. However, the initiative was not particularly successful. Following an unsuccessful procurement process in 2007, the Arts Council decided to change strategy. Arts and Disability Ireland (ADI) was identified as a strategic partner that might develop into an effective resource organisation at the national level and that might support the Arts Council in aspects of its thinking and practice. Since then, the Arts Council has worked closely with ADI and other organisations in the sector, has made progress in the area of provision and practice, testing ways to integrate the access agenda both internally and externally, in line with its commitment to public access, participation and engagement in the Arts. Changes in the legislation also favoured developments of a new Arts and Disability policy. These started with the publication of the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, entitled *A Strategy for Equality* (1996), which was followed by the *Equality Act* (2004)⁴ and the *Disability Act* (2005).

⁴ *The Equality Act* (2004) amended the *Employment Equality Act* (1998) and the *Equal Status Act* (2000). The *Employment Equality Act* and the *Equal Status Act* outlaw discrimination in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services and other opportunities to which the public generally have access on nine distinct grounds. These are: gender, civil status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual

A comparison of *Arts and Disability (2012-2016): Arts Council Policy and Strategy* and *Becoming a National Resource: ADI's Policy and Strategic Direction 2011-2016* shows how common terminology is used, especially for the definition of Arts and Disability and People with Disability. The first

is an umbrella term for the connection between the arts and people with disabilities. 'Arts and Disability' embraces a wide range of contexts such as disability arts, Deaf arts, disability-led practice, collaborative practice, artists with disabilities, audiences with disabilities, arts workers with disabilities, access services and advocacy [...]⁵. Consequently, the term 'arts and disability sector' covers 'how people with disabilities participate in the arts as well as the ways in which the mainstream arts sector gives consideration to how people with disabilities engage with their programmes or services'. The term 'Arts and Disability' is inclusive of all artforms, and all genres within any artform [...] (3)

such as (visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture). People with disabilities instead "include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other. Many disabilities, such as dyslexia, are hidden or not obvious" (*ibidem*)⁶. The Arts Council, however, makes clear that it draws clear distinctions between Arts and Disability and other practices: "the following distinctions are offered in the knowledge that understandings about practice constantly shift and evolve in the arts sector and that the Arts Council's current understandings are not definitive". For this reason, "in making distinctions between different practices, the Arts Council focuses on the nature of the practice itself and avoids making assumptions based on the people who are involved"⁷ (4).

orientation, religious belief, and membership of the Traveller Community. Discrimination is described in the Act as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated on any of the above grounds. See Arts Council (2012, 6-9) and Arts & Disability Ireland (2011, 12-14).

⁵ Terminology is important in this context, and for this reason I have decided to give the definition for precision. 'Disability arts' means the personal or collective creative response of people with disabilities to the experience of disability. 'Deaf arts' refers to the creative expression of Deaf culture through sign language. This artform is currently under-developed in Ireland as, unlike in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and elsewhere, Irish legislation does not currently recognise sign language users as a separate linguistic grouping. Consequently, deafness is widely understood to be a disability/impairment. 'Disability-led' refers to the situation in which people with disabilities take leadership roles in all aspects of their arts practice and management, including governance, management, producing, directing, choreographing, conducting, designing and performing. 'Collaborative practice' means that artists with disabilities and their non-disabled peers have equal involvement in the creative process from inception to completion. Artists with disabilities are emerging and professional artists who have impairments, whether or not they choose to address the issue of disability in their work, deliberately decide not to mention their disability or make it part of the marketing of their work. Some believe that knowledge of their disability will influence the interpretation of their work, leading to condescension, and possibly even exclusion from, or discrimination against, their participation in mainstream arts. Access services and advocacy: As well as supporting artists with disabilities, Arts Council's and ADI's involvement with arts and disability issues also includes access services and advocacy, through the provision of information, training, assisted performances (live audio description, captioning and sign language interpretation), and equipment hire to the arts sector to make their programmes and services more accessible to people with disabilities. Arts workers include arts managers, administrators, employees, board members and leaders. See Arts & Disability Ireland (2011, 12-14).

⁶ 'People with disabilities' is here used as in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) and in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2008.

⁷ The Arts Council gives the following example: if the involvement of people with disabilities may be one essential feature of Arts and Disability, it does not define or determine the practice. People with disabilities may choose to engage in different arts practices at different times and in different contexts. They may choose to locate themselves within the practice of Arts and Disability at one time, in Arts and Health or Arts and Older People at

It must be added that in the disability sector, services are in most cases voluntary. If we analyse the historical development of welfare in Ireland, the approach was the traditional portrayal of carers as ‘woman in their place’ that “has led to a deeply contextual landscape of care in which national, local and embodied scales are closely-interconnected” (Power 2010, 219).

Becoming a National Resource: ADI’s Policy and Strategic Direction 2011-2016 (2011) represents a turning point in arts and disability policy. This ambitious strategic plan is very clear in identifying the key challenges to fulfil a vision of an Ireland where people with disabilities can fully experience and contribute to Irish artistic and cultural life and be an integral part of it. Among these challenges there are those related to the disability context: the need to build a critical mass of artists; advocates and leaders with disabilities from across the arts sector and the disability sector; to remove environmental, attitudinal and physical barriers; to make financial progress, despite funding cuts and recession; to bring arts policy to those disability organisations that provide arts activities but have no clear policy positions on the arts; to engage with and learn from social entrepreneurs in order to overcome the disconnection from activism and social changes. Other key challenges are those related to creating connections between the arts sectors and the disability sector: to ensure continuity in policy direction related to involving and including people with disabilities in the arts and to better understand the important legislative developments. In fact, if properly used, equality legislation can be a powerful tool for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the arts. For this reason, ADI’s challenge is to encourage a more cohesive and holistic approach to artistic and cultural policy: “In the past, arts and cultural policy leaned towards a narrow view of arts and disability initiatives, seeing them in terms of civic participation and programming, and oscillating in emphasis between prioritising artists and audiences” (2011, 20). ADI as an organisation therefore has to meet the challenges “to develop its own organisational infrastructure”, its funding base, its commitment “to working with Government and local authorities to implement their arts and disability policy agendas”. In order to achieve these aims, “ADI will adopt a multiplicity of roles, supporting artists and audiences with disabilities and their connections with the arts sector” (21).

ADI illustrates the achieved aims of inclusion, access and opportunities for artists and audiences in a second document, *Leading Changes in Arts and Culture. Strategic Plan 2017-2021* (2017). Artists can profit from the funding scheme managed on behalf of the Arts Council, Arts and Disability Connect, a strategic partnership with Fire Station Artists’ Studios, which has resulted in four residencies, six mentoring opportunities and four commissions for visual artists with disabilities, as well as a co-curated exhibition, *A Different Republic*. In addition, there was the presentation of internationally acclaimed arts and disability works in Ireland, such as Graeae’s *Signs of a Diva*, Robert Softley’s *If These Spasms Could Speak* and Jess Thom’s *Backstage in Biscuit Land*. Visually impaired audiences were supported by audio description and captioning for eight national performing arts and visual arts tours, audio descriptions of exhibition and the launch of a regular monthly programme of audio described and open captioned cultural cinema. Important partnerships started in the field of the arts. Among these, the Arts and Disability Networking partnership between the Arts Council and local authority arts offices, which has had the aim of embedding arts and disability practice outside Dublin, and Ignite, another partnership between the Arts Council and local authorities in Mayo, Galway and Cork, which made to three new commissions worth €60,000 each, led by internationally

another or they may choose to locate themselves in an arts practice that contains no reference to any area of Arts Participation. It must be noticed, however, that the lingering legacy of the medical model continues to be detrimental to equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. See Arts Council (2012, 5).

recognised artists with disabilities. However, in its statement of intent *Leading Changes in Arts and Culture. Strategic Plan 2017-2021*, goes a step further in underlining what place people with disabilities must occupy, not as a separate community but in the wider community. On the one hand, ADI has to respond to an “increasingly fragmented population of people with disabilities” (22), on the other, it envisages that “the clear delineation” (*ibidem*) that existed in the past and described people’s identity and impairment, is constantly changing. “The distinction between different artforms [...] are merging and their contours “will become more blurred” (*ibidem*) in the future. Therefore, “ADI’s work will need to stretch from providing individually tailored solutions to positioning the arts sector to embrace approaches that are universally designed and anticipatory. We want to create an Irish arts and cultural environment that is at its core inclusive and responsive” (23). Significantly, to follow this path means to bring forth “seamless equality” (*ibidem*).

4. *Disability Theatre in Ireland in the Light of the New Policy on Arts and Disability*

Recent disability theatre in Ireland is in part the result of the new policy promoted by ADI’s strategic plans in the attempt to construct a minority model of disability, which has tried to bridge the gap between society and artists and audience with disability. Even if something has been achieved, much remains to be done to achieve a fully accomplished minority model that extends the social-construction model. The priority of the new policy was to overcome what Koppers sees as the invisibility of the disabled person as a member of the public sphere or his hypervisibility, his instant categorisation as a disabled person, as seen above. The blurring of clear-cut distinctions between the artforms has also opened up new possibilities to inclusion, helping actors and audience members with disabilities to share a sense of belonging to the same community and making them feel part of the same cultural environment.

Without any intention of being exhaustive, I will analyse some of the works from the 2007 onwards that, in my view, have better responded to the new challenges envisaged by ADI. The Will Fredd Theatre’s production of *Follow* by Shane O’Reilly, in 2011 was among those works highly acclaimed at the Absolute Fringe Festival in Dublin and praised by many theatre critics. Shane O’Reilly, who is the son of deaf parents, performs a one-man show and provides a deep insight into the lives of deaf people from their point of view (see *Irish Mail on Sunday* 2013). “This play uses a combination of ordinary language and Irish Sign Language (ISL) that makes it possible to appreciate for the first time a show without the need for an interpreter: O’Reilly performs alone, using words, gestures, and signs have become a whole dictionary of creating movement” (*ibidem*). There is also plenty of humour, but the play neither attempts to soften the problem of deafness, nor tries to patronise or sentimentalise it. There are stories within O’Reilly’s story that witness the experience of deafness and the strife to communicate (see *ibidem*). For example, there is the comic story of the difficulties of a group of little deaf children in a deaf-school dormitory that have gotten upset stomachs after eating their own cookery, with the result that the bathroom facilities proved inadequate. Their story has a sad twist when these children are brought to Lourdes and their families later realise that the longed-for ‘miracle’ did not happen (see O’Kelly 2013). “There’s the desperate young father following a garda and trying to explain that he can’t understand when the garda calls to the house and asks if he has two children, only to lead him to a local hospital where nobody understands his anguished incoherence” (*ibidem*). *Follow* is, however, an innovative play that makes use of all the available technology – sound, light and LED captioning – to create a new space for the non-abled body of the actor that can also be

experienced by the whole of the audience at the same time. It allows a hearing audience to experience what is like for the deaf to watch a show through light and vibration (there are speakers beneath the seats) and allows a deaf audience to view a show that has been curated for them from the beginning of the development process. (Kane 2013)

Another important step towards inclusion was the revival of Sebastian Barry's play *The Pride of Parnell Street* in 2011. One innovative aspect of this Fishamble touring production was that, for the first time in Ireland, there was one audio-described and captioned performance in each venue of the tour. Fishamble Theatre Company was also part of the initiative entitled *Turning Point*. At the beginning of 2010, Irish writers with disability were invited to submit short pieces of theatre to Fishamble as part of new writing. The four plays that were selected were *Ellipsis* by John Austen Connelly, *How Very Normal* by Steve Daunt, *Should Have We Gone to Lourdes* by Stephen Kennedy and *Rings!* by Rosaleen McDonagh. Change for deeper inclusion is the common core of these plays. Connelly's *Ellipsis* is written in a Beckettian style and it is a performance of the unsaid. The play portrays a couple "that tries to come to terms with the suicide of their son, whose mental health problems have disabled him from full participation in life" (Keating 2010). Daunt's *How Very Normal* is a conversational two-hander and sets two estranged friends against each other. "[One is] a narcissistic wheelchair-user and [the other is] his taciturn peer who is unable to directly address his former friend's disability or his new aggression" (*ibidem*). "*Should Have We Gone to Lourdes* by Kennedy is a hilarious dialogue between two brothers, one a wheelchair-user, in a brothel in Amsterdam. The exploration of physical intimacy is made more poignant by the physical disability of the central character"⁸ (*ibidem*). *Rings!* by McDonagh breaks the naturalist frame of the previous plays. "The premise of father-daughter misunderstanding narratively anticipates Nora's disability. [Nora is, in fact,] deaf and mute "[and] her thoughts are communicated to the audience by voiceover, [...] caption and signing, mediating the experience of alienation for audience members who have" or have not a disability (*ibidem*).

Another attempt to shorten the distance between the disabled body and the non-disabled body was made by Girl Jonah's *She Was a Knife Thrower's Assistant*, premiered at the Dublin Dance Festival in 2010. Girl Jonah are Caroline Bowditch and Fiona Wright. Individually they have differences, one is Australian, the other is British, one is disabled, the other is non-disabled, but one is the stage double of the other. They dance at the same time. They sing different songs at the same time. This suggestive and provocative work is set in a back-stage dressing room, where through dance, song and spoken word the two performers reflect on a universal theme that is common to people with and without disabilities: the risks we all take and where danger is most likely to come from. In 2017, *The M House*, by the Kilkenny-based Equinox Theatre Company was also the launch event of *Leading Changes in Arts and Culture*, which toured to national acclaim. *The M House* is a dynamic work that celebrates inclusivity and explores the global trend of categorising and labelling people, politically and socially, and then trying to put them under broad headings, 'man', 'woman', 'Irish', right at the time when those categories are becoming increasingly blurred (see *Totally Dublin*). As *Totally Dublin* reports, *The M House* is

⁸ An interesting essay explores the theme of sexuality presented by a professional disabled troupe in Christian O'Reilly's *Sanctuary* by the Blue Teapot Company. Katarzyna Ojrzynska maintains that the play, which showed the disabled body and all its needs, "stirred up a debate on the Irish laws that regulate [the] sexuality [of disabled people]" "Populating the Irish Stage with (Dis)abled Bodies: Sanctuary by Christian O'Reilly and the Blue Teapot Company" (Etienne, Dubost 2017, 234).

a play for anyone who has ever been put in a box / [*The M House* is] an adventure story / It's a satirical look at the legacy of institutional Ireland / It's a scramble to make sense of our one-size-fits-all culture / It's a parable of our times about the treatment of our vulnerable. (2018)

In fact, *The M House* tells the absurd story of seven humans put in a box, which they themselves support, and categorised by the first letter of their name. They are kept there to watch television all day by the APEP, an elusive organisation that offers services for boxing and categorising humans. Its representative is Middleman, who ironically represents the 'ordinary man' and is in charge of the running of the M House. The Ms, however, do not want to watch television all day and manage to be creative and to use their imaginations in that confined space. One night, Middleman orders them out of the box due to a roof leak and he is unmoved that the box will collapse without them to hold them up. As a result, *The M House* is redesigned as a series of self-contained pyramids by APEP that sells this idea as the innovation for the future, an utopian ideal for independent life, but the Ms are not isolated and after a while they manage to escape.

5. Conclusion

Although the works I have mentioned represent a good example that 'the disabled body is not naturally about disability', to paraphrase Petra Kupper's words (2001, 26), the process of access and inclusion is far from being complete. Disability theatre in Ireland has still to move from 'being part of the wider community' to 'being part of the wider community as equal', to become a fully accomplished minority model of disability. When the artists participating in *Turning Point* were asked to discuss their work in relation to their disability, each of them expressed, with different nuances, the desire to be part of a more inclusive society where artists and artists with disabilities were on an equal footing (see Keating, 2010). Steve Daunt is aware of the potential risk to be seen as the new Christy Brown and as just coming from 'a happy, clappy community arts perspective' but, he argues, being defined as a disabled artist is not a bad thing. However, he wants to be judged for his writing, because disability can become an issue only if his work is not good enough. John Austin Connolly's remark is also a plea for equality when he says "all writers are disabled" (*ibidem*) – there are those who are sick, those who are pompous, those who are successful and those who are envious – and therefore every writer is disabled in different ways at different times (see *ibidem*). Stephen Kennedy maintains that the challenges that artists with disability must face are those all artists must face in the contemporary climate of theatre-making in Ireland, such as lack of funding and lack of good theatre facilities (see *ibidem*). Rosaleen McDonagh echoes Kennedy's words and denounces the limited capacity for wheelchair-users in nearly all theatres in Dublin, such as the Gaiety and the Peacock, with the notable exception of the Project Arts Centre that also has accessible dressing rooms and a control room for artists with disabilities. However, for her the big question of disabled artists is still cultural because disabled artists and practitioners want to be heard and respected in their own terms and want to be defined as disabled artists. As she proudly proclaims, "My personal choice is to celebrate my disabled aesthetic. I understand it to be beautiful and perfect as it is. It works as a creative and political tool. It informs my life. My disability spills into my writing" (*ibidem*).

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*Resilience:
Travellers and Magdalene Survivors*



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Ortha an Ghreama as a Lesser-known Irish Traveller Narrative: Symbolic Inversion and Resistance

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Abstract:

Irish folk tradition includes a long-established discourse whereby the formerly nomadic or semi-nomadic group known as Irish Travellers, who comprise a tiny minority within Irish society are depicted not only as quintessential “outsiders” but also as a projective mechanism for the hates and fears of the settled (non-Traveller) community. This essay examines a counter-tradition in Irish oral tradition that rejects these essentialist and reductionist representations and constructs Travellers very differently. This alternative portrayal sets Travellers within a very different discourse, one where they serve as a counter-hegemonic undercurrent in Irish society that remains symbolically central despite attempts at its suppression. This more radical and nuanced discourse, one whereby that which is initially deemed lowly or subordinate is inverted and becomes paramount, is circumscribed within the traditions of symbolic inversion and holy wisdom as long-established in other European countries. This counter-hegemonic discourse is linked to a discussion concerning the philosophical possibilities for a movement beyond the politics of difference that is constitutive of Traveller Otherness or alterity and the potential for a more nuanced or postmodernist theorisation of Self/Other relations.

Keywords: cultural images, Irish Traveller minority, postmodernist, Self/Other relations, symbolic resistance,

Irish Travellers are an ethnic minority who have traditionally lived on the margins of mainstream Irish society. It is estimated that there are about 30,000 Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland with a further 2000 in Northern Ireland. There are also significant communities of Travellers who claim Irish descent living in Britain and the United States. They are distinct from the surrounding population due to a range of differing cultural attributes including family structure, language, employment patterns and a preference for mobility that is inherent in the very ascription they attach to themselves. Recent decades have frequently seen a deterioration in relations between the Irish

Traveller and non-Traveller (“Settled” communities). Irish oral history from the earliest times is replete with references to “fir siúil”¹ and “mná siúil”². Some of these people were bards, musicians or herbalists. Others were tradesmen such as travelling metalworkers, tinsmiths, horse dealers, sieve-makers, journeymen labourers, stonemasons, rope-makers, animal doctors, tailors, circus people and fairground entertainers – to name but a few categories of people. Some people travelled alone while many others travelled with their immediate family or in larger extended family groups. At least some of these people were the antecedents of the group known until recently in Ireland as “tinkers”, now called Travellers. The one element which united all of these different groups was the fact that they were nomadic for all or part of the year. Ireland was a British colonial outpost for 800 years and British chroniclers and historians didn’t make any distinction between Irish Travelling groups (with specific occupations and languages) and other Irish who travelled for a living, tending to assign them under generic headings such as “wild Irish” “masterless men” and “women,” “roving beggars” etc. As a consequence the history of Irish Travellers that has come down to us in the English language is primarily from the “elite” or the “establishment” (British sources) and includes little in the way of information about who the different nomadic groups were in Ireland and how they relate to the people classified under the ascription “Irish Travellers” today. There is a strong likelihood that the group known as “Irish Travellers” today are an amalgam of a range of differing groups that existed in previous centuries. Of the various travelling cultures that did exist prior to this, we know of just a handful where there are references to a separate group culture and language, references which survived in the minority Irish language down to around the 1940s. These include travelling tinkers who spoke Cant or Gammon, travelling stonemasons who spoke Béarlagar and Saor (Stonemason’s Cant), travelling tailors who spoke Tailor’s Cant and fairground and circus people who spoke Parlari and sometimes Romanes (Romani). The harsh truth is that we still know very little about the history or cultures of the various travelling groups in Ireland prior to the twentieth century.

One thing we do know however is that there has been a long history of anti-Traveller prejudice and a range of negative discourses with respect to Travellers in Ireland and abroad and that this discourse infused the Irish storytelling tradition as much as it did other aspects of Irish culture. Narratives that reinforced an anti-Traveller mindset amongst the settled community were common until the 1950s and 1960s and the pre-television and pre-urbanized Ireland, and survived longer in more remote and Irish-speaking areas. These folktales including the “Nail” and the “Pin” folktales – which have been explored by Ó Héalaí (1977 [1974-1976], 1985) and Hayes (2006) amongst others - assigned to Travellers the status of “negative Other” and acted as a justification or validation for their marginalisation from mainstream society. The negative stereotyping, and the reductionist views of Travellers that accompanied these folktales undoubtedly had a significant effect on both the settled and Travelling communities and the fact that storytellers from both communities related the stories (e.g. the Traveller storyteller telling stories that denigrated his own community) only reinforces the fact that these narratives bolstered popular beliefs, influenced a public discourse with an increasingly assimilationist bent and validated the exclusion of Travellers from “mainstream” society. Perhaps the most damaging belief articulated by these narratives is that the alleged wretchedness and poverty of Travellers’ lives was justified because of their alleged misconduct. They “deserve” their punishment because they brought it upon themselves. The marginalization of Travellers from the majority society was “justified” and the assignation of Travellers to the role of “negative Other” bolstered. Trav-

¹ fir siúil (Travelling men, wanderers, lit: “walking men”).

² mná siúil (Travelling women, wanderers, lit: “walking women”).

ellers are portrayed as a negative “Other” because they have disturbed the social order of things. These folktales are seen to serve a similar function to mythic stories of monsters, foreigners or “the stranger [...]” that “frequently operates as a limit-experience for humans trying to identify themselves over and against others” (Kearney 2003, 3). While strong prejudices already existed against Travellers within public discourse for many decades anyway, many would argue that these have been exacerbated further in recent years with increased “tension” between both the Traveller and settled communities (often congruent with societal changes, in a fast-urbanizing society) – as relating to land usage, schooling, housing amongst a range of other issues.

Travellers have resisted attempts at their “mythic” demonization however and unsurprisingly, they helped to propagate narratives which portray themselves in a non-prejudicial light. Irish folk narratives also include a countervailing “mythic” tradition, one that is far lesser-known, which countenance that charity and hospitality be displayed towards Travellers. In this tradition Travellers are frequently seen as “Others” who maintain a certain balance in the majority society by virtue of their “Other” or outsider status as moral arbiters on the actions (e.g. generosity or otherwise) of the majority society. They are also the instigators of a powerful form of symbolic inversion where their “Other” status is shown to be a disguise for their function as “holy people” or shamans. This countervailing narrative tradition is the subject of this essay.

This counter-tradition manifests itself in a story entitled *Ortha an Ghreama* (The Stitch Charm) where Jesus and Mary act as shamans or healers, “outsiders” who morally arbitrate on the actions of the settled community. There are many different variants of this charm/prayer, which is preserved in the form of a story³. Amongst the most common settings for this story is one whereby the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus, in the guise of Travellers, are travelling through the countryside and seeking lodgings for night. Occasionally they are in exile in Egypt or running for their lives from King Herod. They seek lodgings for the night and find “hospitality” refused to them, in most cases by the woman of the house. The man of the house meets them as they are about to take to the road again and he makes a bed of flax for them in the corner of the house or in an outhouse. During the night a terrible pain afflicts the man, and the woman of the house asks the Travellers if they can do anything to save him. Jesus or more often the Virgin Mary provide the cure while reciting the moral-laden “*déilín*”⁴:

A rude wife with a gentle husband
She put the Son of God lying in the flax,
Mary’s Mantle and the Five Fingers of Jesus
to be placed on the site of the stitch when
it is at its most painful. (IFC, Iml. 459: 233)⁵

In some variants of this narrative the backdrop for healing is the Nativity, a cataclysmic event which shapes the future history of the very world itself. The fact that the Travellers in the guise of holy people are refused hospitality when the Saviour of the world is about to be born emphasizes the churlishness of their would-be hosts and is itself indicative of the impor-

³ *Ortha an Ghreama* is one of the most common charms/prayers in the popular traditions of both Ireland and Scotland.

⁴ *déilín* – (Irish: literally “rigmarole”, “sing-song” or “litany”). The *déilíní* uttered in narrative-charms.

⁵ Note on Abbreviations: IFC = Irish Folklore Commission; Iml. = volume (refers to volume number in the Irish Folklore Commission Archive). For example (Iml. 97: 51) refers to volume 97, page 51. These volumes were accessed by hand on the microfiche reels of the IFC Collection as available to students and researchers in the James Hardiman Library, NUIG, Galway.

tance of the virtue of charity. In other variants the context of the Travellers plight is equally profound and urgent. They are the Holy Family in flight from King Herod and in fear of their lives, a situation which makes the refusal of their request for lodgings all the more serious. The charm-story known as *Ortha an Ghreama* can be linked to the “Nail/Pin” stories because in each tale either Jesus or the Virgin Mary act as a moral arbiter who assign a negative “recompense” or punishment – sometimes in the form of a troublesome spouse – to those who are ungenerous towards them when they seek hospitality. It can also be linked to a very old discourse in the Irish folk tradition where the Traveller/beggar is a holy personage in disguise. *Ortha an Ghreama* also directly elucidates the central role that Travelling people played in the healing tradition of Ireland over many centuries. It also links with older ideas of good luck/bad luck and what is often defined as “karma” in other cultural contexts and traditions of symbolic inversion on a cultural and societal level. I also agree that these narratives echo or encompass traits that can be found in a wide range of spiritual traditions, with reference to the “holy fool” – be these traditions Christian, Orthodox, Jewish etc.

An important element of the Russian Orthodox tradition of the “holy fool” or *jurodstvo* in its earliest forms was that the fool purposely does crazy, bizarre, illogical or even (apparently) immoral things so as to somehow acquire thereby greater humility in the eyes of the spectators or followers once unmasked. As evidenced in this discussion of *Ortha an Ghreama*, one of the fundamental tenets of “holy wisdom” as encompassed through symbolic inversion, is the notion of contradiction and paradox as expressed in a para-normal or supernatural context and often through contradictions incorporating wisdom vs. foolishness, purity vs. impurity, veneration vs. derision (on the part of the spectators), humility vs. aggression and tradition vs. wandering or nomadism.) Interestingly, with respect to twentieth-century literature, the theatrical work of Italian playwright Dario Fo – where what is initially deemed lowly or subordinate is inverted and becomes paramount – is probably one of the best modern referents to the tradition of symbolic inversion and holy wisdom, as elucidated in these apparently simple or straightforward folk tales or narratives.

In the following example of *Ortha an Ghreama* there is a slight twist to the normal pattern because the “woman of the house,” in addition to being churlish, is also the recipient of the “punishment” in the form of physical sickness:

Prayer against the Stitch

It was a cold wet night in the depths of winter and heavy snow was beating down... Such a night of cold and rain had never been seen even within the memory of the oldest people. It was an exceptional night without doubt, the kind of night that you wouldn't want the worst of your animals to be out in, never mind a Christian... In the body of the tumult and the wind there was a poor Travelling woman walking slowly along the rough road, a young child by her side... “God's help is always at hand, Mother. I see a light a close to us now. Let's go towards it.” “We must get lodging and a bed from the people of the house”, said the child. There were only two people in the house... The man of the house was a quiet and honest man but that wasn't true of his wife. She was a rough, hard-hearted person. When a knock came on the door, she got up from where she was sitting and opened the door to the Traveller woman. She had no idea beforehand that it would be a Traveller woman at the door. If she had known beforehand, there's no fear that she would have opened the door for her. The Traveller woman greeted her and asked her in the name of the Lord – whether she and the child could come in out of the storm. “We have no place here for Travellers”, said the woman of the house sarcastically. “We have neither a space nor a bed for you. Indeed but it's funny time that you come looking for lodgings. Hit the road now and go somewhere else.”... She was setting off again when the good-hearted man of the house called out to her. “Maybe we can find you a place here somewhere. ...Stretch back there on the flax there in the corner and it will be a sort of a bed for the two of you until morning. She blessed him and thanked him and she came in. He

put on a blazing fire and gave them a good supper... When he had the poor woman and her small child settled in the corner he recommenced with his work but his wife stopped suddenly and announced that she wasn't feeling very well. She said that she suddenly felt very sick. ...She was feeling worse as each moment went by. The poor man was in distress. What would he do? He woke up the Travelling woman and told her the story. The child was awake also and he took great pity on the poor man.

"Mother", he says, "would you not do something for her".

"You do it son", says she, "because you have the power".

The child didn't say anymore. The woman was in a very bad way now and she was screaming and in fits of pain.

"Mother", "would you not do some good for her?" says he.

"You do it son", says she again, "because you have the power".

The child got up then and he went over to the bed where the woman was sick. He put his hand on the spot where the stitch was and he spoke as follows:

"A charm that was worked by Saint Brigid of the Mantle,
A charm that was worked by Michael of the shield
A charm that was worked by God in Heaven
A charm that worked by the twelve apostles
A rude wife with a gentle husband
That put the Body of Christ lying in the flax,
Mary's Mantle against the stitch
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen".

No sooner had He said the words but the woman started getting better and the sickness started easing off. She knew well then who their visitors were, that it was our Saviour, a hundred praises be to Him, and his Holy Mother, and that they were in the guise of Travelling people. She was ashamed and repented then for having been so cruel to them when they asked her for lodgings. She rose and threw herself on her knees in the presence of Our Saviour and his Mother and she asked them for forgiveness. And they forgave her and Our Saviour told her to be good-hearted and free with alms from then on. He told her to always come to the help of the poor when they came calling. She promised Him that she would and she kept that promise until her dying day. (IFC Iml. 26: 147)

Ortha an Ghreama garners much of its subversive narrative power from the "ambivalent" characters who are "holy people" in disguise. The Travellers are representative of a counter-hegemonic undercurrent in Irish society that remains symbolically central despite constant attempts at its suppression. In these narratives, Travellers – in the guise of holy people – rebel against their marginalisation from the dominant discourse through their role in a countercultural healing process that incorporates both the physical and psychic healing of society as a whole. I link this counter-hegemonic discourse with the discourse of a countercultural or subversive rebellion against the exclusion of the "Other" in the form of satirical invective and carnivalesque parody. The hidden or "masked" nature of the Travellers in *Ortha an Ghreama* is indicative of their subversive and counterhegemonic potential.

They are not what they seem and "the ambivalence regarding their 'true' natures is the instigation for a form of subversive resistance, a resistance that insinuates itself exactly at those 'capillary points' of social interaction where Foucault (1970) theorized resistance to take place" (Hayes 2007, 71). This subversive ambivalence can be linked with the concept of "symbolic inversion" as theorised by critics, literary theorists and anthropologists etc. "Symbolic inversion" as defined by Babcock (1978) includes as a central tenet the "surprise" inversion of the "mainstream's" "norms" that is characteristic of the folktale *Ortha an Ghreama*:

“Symbolic inversion” may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political. (15)

“Symbolic inversion”, both derives from and conflates a wide range of cultural analytics today. Consequently, the manner in which I discuss the term here can be read as straddling a range of disciplines and incorporating both past and present uses of the term “inversion” including concepts that are similar or analogous. “Inversion” as defined in cultural studies today intimates a reversal of worldview or the concept of the “world upside down”. This definition appears to have remained constant since the era of the early Renaissance at least, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) citing the meaning of “inversion” as that which is “a turning upside down” or “a reversal of position, order, sequence, or relation” (OED 1978, 1477). In literary culture this reversal of position was often associated with the negation of particular position or argument as explained by T. Wilson in his *Logike* of 1567, “You may confute the same by inversion, that is to saie, tournying his taile cleane contrary” (1567, 20). From the earliest times therefore, inversion has had an intimate link with the concept of negation. Every human experience encompassing a cultural dynamic is imbued with an element of negation as indicated by historian Kenneth Burke (1968):

the study of man as the specifically word-using animal requires special attention to this distinctive marvel, the negative. (419)

Since symbol-using is a central feature of the way in which human beings order the universe, Burke argued it was necessary for us to introduce symbolic elements into our every experience. As a consequence, humans beings find that “every experience will be imbued with negativity” (469). Discussions of symbolic inversion such as David Kunzle’s essay “World Upside Down” (1978), a study of “upside-down” iconography in European broadsheets, demonstrate that the concept of inversion is a very old one. It is a history which dates back to the Greek paradox as written by writers such as Homer, a history which Donaldson describes as “an ancient and widespread one, found very extensively in popular art and literature throughout Europe from classical times” (1970, 21-22). Rosalie Colie (1966), who undertook research into the use of paradox during the Renaissance era, described symbolic inversion or the “world upside down” as one of a range of paradoxical techniques whereby what is “not” may be discussed, though in its strictest logical sense it cannot. Linking symbolic inversion with techniques of paradox she saw inversion as a major convention of paradox, namely that which is actually “impossible” or utopian. Paradox and irony as informed by inversion are seen to play on the margins of meaning, a play that inhabits a free space incorporating the negative. The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1968), who theorized the concept of irony, saw those techniques incorporating symbolic inversion such as paradox, as operating at the limits of discourse. Like Foucault’s “capillary point”, he saw the margin as the locus of a particular energy, a gap between saying and meaning wherein the ironist was negatively free. Colie’s (1966) theorization also located inversion within a position of liminality, a locale where paradoxes could play back and forth across those boundaries that are considered terminal or categorical. Inversion incorporating parody always involves the dialectic according to her theorization. It is by nature self-critical and creative and is always “challenging some orthodoxy, the paradox is an oblique criticism of absolute judgement or absolute convention”, “at once its own subject and its own object, turning in and upon itself” (10, 518). Henri Bergson’s *Le Rire* (1956) theorized inversion as a literary device and identified it as the ancient principle of comedy. Inversion as comedy incorporated surprise and the switching of social roles so that they became “upside-down”. It involved:

a sudden comic switching of expected roles: prisoner reprimands judge, child rebukes parent, wife rules husband, pupil instructs teacher, master obeys servant. (Donaldson 1970, 5-6)

The comic as incorporated in the world of “upside down” appears somewhat frivolous, the “topsy-turvy” coalescing with the slightly anarchic. However, the moral essence of the “upside-down” world incorporates a serious attack on control, on hierarchies that appear irreducible and on those systems that are closed off to the marginal elements in society. Bergson defines this attack as an assault on “the irreversibility of the order of phenomena, the perfect individuality of a perfectly self-contained series” (1956 [1900], 118). Bergson discussed the serious aspect to negation in his essay *The Idea of Nothing* published in 1911. He pointed to the absence of negatives in nature and linked this argument to what later became known as “negative theology”⁶. Bergson’s exploration of negation was taken further by Kenneth Burke who linked symbolic inversion with negation and the negative theology he adduced in the symbolism of religious systems. Burke (1968) identified negation as a function peculiar to religious systems. In his view, God is generally defined in terms of what he is not and religions are often built in antithesis to other persuasions. As symbolic systems go, religions are amongst the most explicitly negativistic of all symbolic systems⁷. Expressions of the deity or the transcendent encompass negative affirmations whose core is paradoxical (e.g. God is infinite, God is incomprehensible etc.) As argued by Burke, the concept of a transcendent realm is an example of a “positive-seeming word for what is really the function of the negative” (1968, 437). Negation as the function of symbolic systems has been theorized extensively by Burke (1961, 1968) and is analogous to the process of symbolic inversion under discussion here. Symbolic inversion as outlined in the folktales and folk-anecdotes under review here encompasses an extension of negation because what takes place is in fact a negation of negative on the part of he/they who is/are marginalized. Burke (1968) refers to this type of inversion or negation as a kind of “aesthetic negative”, “whereby any moralistic thou-shalt not provides material for our entertainment, as we pay to follow imaginary accounts of ‘deviants’ who in all sorts of ingenious ways are represented as violating those very Don’ts” (13). Prior to Burke, Freud had used psychoanalysis as a framework to theories of the concept of negation and came to similar conclusions as Burke as to the indispensable function of symbolic negation in the formation of the human psyche:

By the help of the symbol of negation, the thinking-process frees itself from the limitations of repression and enriches itself with the subject-matter without which it could not work efficiently... the achievement of the function of judgement only becomes feasible...after the symbol of negation has endowed thought with a first degree of independence from the results of repression and at the same time from the sway of the pleasure principle... (1950, 182-185)

The ambivalent and sometime dangerous aura that encircles the concept of negation has meant that studies of symbolic processes, whether undertaken by philosophers, social scientists

⁶ The concept of “negative theology” was once confined to the traditions of mysticism and hermeticism. It is today a fairly common subject of discussion in what is commonly referred to as radical (or the new) theology. Negation as a creative symbolic has been discussed by Cox (1970) who has criticized the tendency of radical theologians to ignore the playful and festive aspects of negation. Cox’s discussion of negation proposed a “theology of juxtaposition”, a discourse which has much in common with Burke’s theorisation of symbolic inversion and its relation to the notion of “aesthetic negation”.

⁷ Burke follows Hegel and Nietzsche in arguing a negativistic nature of religion as a symbolic system. One of the core definitions of man as a moral being encompasses the negativistic according to Burke, citing the prescription “thou shalt not” (1968, 12-13).

or literary critics, have tended to ignore the importance of the concept of negation within cultural systems and the importance of questions such as that posed by Derrida:

what is the relation between the self-eliminating generation of metaphor and concepts of negative form? (1974, 9)

A reluctance to engage with negation is understandable to a certain degree. Any focus on the negative inevitably runs counter to the psychological habits and cultural conditioning we experience in conjunction with the strongly positivist emphases of today's social sciences. An engagement with the negative or that which is considered counteractive is necessary however if we wish to come to a full understanding of the subversive undercurrent within cultural patterns or what Geertz calls those "elements of a culture's own negation which in ordinary, quite un-Hegelian fashion are included within it" (1966, 65). Theorists of the "Other" have identified the process of inversion as linked with those binary divisions which characterize symbolic ordering between "self" and "Other" and between differing peoples and places in a range of political contexts. The "low" "Other" that is the catalyst of symbolic inversion is always a site of contradiction, the site for mutually incompatible representation and conflicting desires. Representations of the "low" "Other" or those lower strata (whether of the body, of literature, of society or of place) are a *loci* of ambivalence, an ambivalence which gives the "Other" its particular subversive energy. The negated "Other" is both desired and reviled, and the subject of debasement and longing. This recurrent pattern whereby the "top" or "self" tries to reject or eliminate the "bottom" or "Other" was constitutive of the evolution of Western society as delineated by Said. The mythical Orient as "constructed" by a Europe intent on the legitimization of colonialism was the locus of a profound ambivalence. The Orientalist strategy depended on "[a] flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand" (1978, 2). Said also made the observation however that:

European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of [...] underground self. (3)

The same ambivalence whereby "top" endeavours to eliminate the "bottom"/"Other" for reasons of status or prestige only to find that it is in some way dependent on this "Other" recurs within different symbolic domains of (especially) bourgeois society, particularly from the period of the Renaissance onwards. Stallybrass and White outline the development of this dynamic of the "low" "Other" as follows:

We find the same constitutive ambivalence around the slum and the domestic servant in the nineteenth century; around the disposal of "waste" products in the city (though not in pre-Renaissance rural culture); around the carnival festivity of popular culture; around the symbolically base and abject animals like the pig and the rat [...]. (1986, 5)

Not alone does the "top" in the symbolic domain attempt to eliminate or reject the "low" "Other". The "top" also actually seeks to centrally include what is symbolically "low" as a constituent within its own (often eroticized) fantasy life. This psychological dependence on those "Others", who opposed and excluded, at the social level has as its end result the construction of a subjectivity that is ambivalent, one where power, fear and desire are fused in a conflictual and elusive fashion. What appears peripheral socially often comes to assume a central dynamic in the symbolic sphere as outlined by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of the Mind* (1964) where he discussed the dialectic of the master and the servant. His classic inversion of the master-servant relationship was the catalyst for a process of self-enfranchisement and the genesis of that form

of negation which he termed the “unhappy consciousness”. The concept of inversion and the symbolic centrality of the “excluded” “Other” has assumed a role of some prominence in anthropological studies in more recent decades, particularly those studies which have analysed so-called “primitive” or “traditional” societies. The earliest of these studies have linked inversion with the classificatory nature of humankind’s systems of symbolic ordering:

For the classificatory body of a culture is always double, always structured in relation to its negation, its inverse. (Stallybrass 1997, 300)

All symbolic inversions define a culture’s lineaments at the same time as they question the usefulness and absoluteness of its ordering. (Babcock 1978, 29)

The *Année sociologique* school of writing encompassing scholars such as Durkheim, Van Gennep and Mauss and Hertz all located inversion within a classificatory framework that incorporated ritualized behaviour or “rites of passage”. Leach (1953) who developed some of Van Gennep’s ideas on symbolic representation associates symbolic inversion with “liminal” events that signal “rites of passage” or “rites of rebellion” such as seasonal or end of year festivities, funerals and other occasions that include rituals or events incorporating symbolic “reversals” (see Gluckman 1965).

Bakhtin has been the primary advocate of the “carnavalesque” concept as a mobile set of symbolic practices and discourses which underpinned social revolt and conflict before the nineteenth century. While Bakhtin championed the “carnavalesque” as a utopian model for social change, some social theorists have remained unconvinced as to its power to impose societal change⁸. Eagleton saw the symbolic inversion that was symptomatic of “carnival” as a relatively⁹ ineffective attempt at the counter-hegemonic:

[...] carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare’s Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool. (1991, 148)

Marx however, identifies ritual rebellion as a positive and significant step towards the development of a revolutionary class consciousness. The argument as to whether the symbolic inversion of the “carnavalesque” is intrinsically radical or conservative will continue amid a necessity for increased historical research into those structural explanations that have been put forward for ritual and/or symbolic rebellion. It is an unnecessary argument in a sense since attempting to classify the carnivalesque along these lines falls into the trap of essentializing the process that is carnivalesque transgression. Stallybrass and White provide a *via media* between both points of view which eschews the modern tendency to essentialize the carnivalesque and politics:

⁸ Sales cites two reasons as to why he considers carnivalesque subversion to be a controlled form of social transgression: “[...] First of all, it was licensed or sanctioned by the authorities themselves. They removed the stopper to stop the bottle being smashed altogether. The release of emotions and grievances made them easier to police in the long term. Second, although the world might appear to be turned upside down during the carnival season, the fact that Kings and Queens were chosen and crowned actually reaffirmed the status quo. Carnival was, however, Janus-faced. Falstaff is both the merry old mimic of Eastcheap and the old corruptible who tries to undermine the authority, or rule, of the Lord Chief Justice. The carnival spirit in early-nineteenth century England as well as in sixteenth century, could therefore be a vehicle for social protest and the method for disciplining that protest” (1983, 169).

⁹ Eagleton is ambivalent about the liberating potential of the “carnavalesque”, describing it as follows: “Carnival laughter is incorporating as well as liberating, its lifting of inhibitions politically enervating as well as disruptive. Indeed from one viewpoint carnival may figure as a prime example of the mutual complicity of law and liberation, power and desire, that has become the dominant theme of contemporary post-marxist pessimism” (1991, 149).

[...] the most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeably transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as catalyst and site of actual¹⁰ and symbolic struggle. (1986, 14)

Irrespective of these various arguments, it is the altering potential of symbolic inversion as incorporating elements of the grotesque and the carnivalesque which I wish to focus attention on here. Symbolic inversion as outlined in *Ortha an Ghreama* can be seen as a form of “negative feedback” (Bateson 1958 [1936], 288), as one of the means by which the cultural system corrects itself. Symbolic inversion as instanced in *Ortha an Ghreama* challenges the classificatory¹¹ worldview and defines a culture’s lineaments at the same time as it questions¹² the usefulness and the rigidity¹³ of the way the world is ordered. It can be seen as a creative form of negation, an important reminder of the potentiality of the *mundus inversus*. It reminds us:

[...] of the need to reinvest the clean with the filthy, the rational with the animalistic, the ceremonial with the carnivalesque in order to maintain cultural vitality [...] the *mundus inversus* does more than simply mock our desire to live according to our usual orders and norms; it reinvests life with a vigor and a *Spielraum* attainable (it would seem) in no other way. (Babcock 1978, 32)

In Irish culture the folktale *Ortha an Ghreama* has at its core a symbolic inversion which carries a profound meaning. The powerful nature of this inversion includes a robust attack on closed systems of control and categorisation, what Bergson referred to as “the irreversibility of the order of phenomena” (1956 [1900], 118). The “marginal” Travelling person is actually a holy personage in disguise. He or she who is denigrated or perceived to live in a “liminal” state is actually central to the symbolic reconstitution of societal structure and meaning.

The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. (Stallybrass, White 1986, 5-6)

The symbolic inversion evident in *Ortha an Ghreama* can be linked with a wider and very wide-ranging discourse in Irish popular tradition where the liminal figure of the Travelling tradesman, poet, shaman or jester, fool acts to “transgress” the normal “categories” of social life and thereby criticise and subvert official hierarchies. This symbolic discourse as evidenced in Irish

¹⁰ It is striking how carnival and carnivalesque transgression coincided with violent social classes (see Thomson 1972; Davis 1975; Burke 1978).

¹¹ Hamnett points out the dangers that accompany the classificatory worldview: “Classification is a pre-requisite of the intelligible ordering of experience, but if conceptual categories are reified, they become obstacles rather than means to the understanding and control of both physical and social reality” (1967, 387).

¹² The Travellers as depicted in *Ortha an Ghreama* are not seen to reject totally the order of the sociocultural world. Instead, they work to remind the story’s audience of the arbitrary condition that is the imposition of order on the audience’s environment and experience. In doing this, they enable the audience to view certain aspects of that order more clearly by virtue of the fact that they have turned this order upside-down or inside-out. In doing so, they echo Nietzsche’s statement: “Objections, digressions, gay mistrust, the delight in mockery are signs of health: everything unconditional belongs in pathology”.

¹³ Marcel Détiene links his questioning of the classificatory with the cultural vitality of our philosophical systems of thought: “A system of thought [...] is founded on a series of acts of partition whose ambiguity, here as elsewhere, is to open up the terrain of their possible transgression at the very moment when they mark off a limit. To discover the complete horizon of a society’s symbolic values, it is also necessary to map out its transgressions, its deviants” (1979 [1977], ix).

tradition has strong affinities with the concept of the carnivalesque as outlined by Bakhtin and encompasses imagery and social satire that is often topsy-turvy, grotesque and excessive. The topsy-turvy discourse of the carnivalesque also has much in common with the elusive figure known as the fool, poet-shaman or trickster as defined by Alan Harrison in his study *The Irish Trickster*:

He [the fool] [...] is sometimes nearly divine, sometimes positively subhuman. He can be the one who emphasizes wrongs through his satire of the social order and he can be the scapegoat who is sacrificed on behalf of that same social order [...] he exists in human society but also in the unknown world outside and by his passage between the two he can help to establish the boundaries between them and increase the area of human knowledge and behaviour. (1989, 21)

This discussion with respect to symbolic inversion, resistance and the Irish folktale *Ortha an Ghreama* serves to highlight the ambivalence that circumvents the figure of the Traveller as representative of a counter-hegemonic undercurrent in society, many aspects of which are rooted in the “philosophical” and subversive laughter of the Renaissance. The “low-Other” in the figure of the Traveller poet-shaman instigates a rupture of the hierarchical and the hegemonic in Irish society, a rupture which serves to regenerate and renew the cosmic and the social into an indivisible whole. This regenerative function takes the form of a subversive rebellion against the exclusion of the “Other” by means of symbolic inversion and an irreverent laughter that dismantles hierarchies, a grotesque and carnivalesque laughter that manages disorder through the comic. In *Ortha an Ghreama* the figure of Jesus plays with a number of roles, a fact which links his character with the archetype of the shaman, “holy fool” or “fool for Christ:”

[...] the shaman becomes the child, whether playfully or seriously, and is able to address people with whom he would normally have avoidance relationships. (Jennings 1995, 109)

His role taking involves a duality and thereby “represents a dialectic between the person and the event or object, whereby each is synthesised within a single expressive form” (Peacock 1968, 172). This new and temporary dramatization of the “betwixt and between” show role inversion as the key to a new process of definition. Bakhtin’s concept of the “carnivalesque” directs attention to the marginal as a locus for transformation, counter-production and the interrogation of established “truths”:

In the world of the carnival the awareness of people’s immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative. (Bakhtin 1968, 10)

Bakhtin’s (1981) theorisation of the carnivalesque incorporated the central concepts of “dialogism” and “heteroglossia” whereby multiple perspectives are presented through a range of contrasting voices, thereby resisting the regularising and totalising tendencies of monologic forces, whether they be literary or linguistic. Bakhtin’s definition of the term “heteroglossia” is particularly appropriate to what happens in the role inversion of *Ortha an Ghreama*, an inversion that reinforces the importance of the polysemous and the necessity for dialogue between worldviews that appear diametrically opposed to one another. Heteroglossia is described as another’s speech in another’s language. Its function is the expression of two diverse viewpoints simultaneously i.e. the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author or narrator. Bakhtin links his concept of “heteroglossia” to the dialogic nature of a Dostoevsky novel in a manner that is analogous to the dual and dramatic nature of the Traveller/Jesus described in *Ortha an Ghreama*:

[The novel] is constructed not as a whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousness as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. (1984, 18)

The dramatic and reinterpreted power of the heteroglossic is due to its enactment of a multiplicity of voices. The paradoxical nature of the dialogic as incorporated in *Ortha an Ghreama* evidences the polysemous nature of symbolic inversion and the potential for a range of dialogues. The ambivalence that accompanies the perversion of order or values is a generic feature of the “marginal” character who disturbs symbolic hierarchies as described by anthropologists who have studied the roles of trickster/clown figures in “primitive” societies. Arden who studied the role of ritual clowns in South American pueblos describes the fear generated by this symbolic ambivalence:

Clowns make us aware through purposeful action that the most dangerous condition of being human is one in which there is no order. Clowns flirt with that most dangerous condition, that which has no precedent or predictable issue. The ultimate immanence is non-order, not disorder or chaos. For all human groups the ultimate taboo is non-order, and the clown plays his proper role when he stands outside of order. (1979, 56)

It is through embracing the ambivalence that a greater understanding ensues between the self and the “other”. Norbeck (1979) theorised the dialogic nature of the relationship between self and others and the dialectic that is framed within the process of symbolic inversion. Role inversions as incorporated in the dramatization of cultural and social values are considered aberrations of everyday behaviour. Norbeck suggests that the opposite ought to be true and periodic role inversions should instead be accommodated within the norms of behaviour. The inversion of normally accepted behaviour through dramatization or the use of narrative makes such events more memorable by “framing them off” from an everyday context (51). The inversions or ritual clowns, trickster and other marginals embody the central paradox of individual role-play and the collective drama. These “rites of reversal” make clear that nothing is as it appears and the society is not as it seems. The pueblo ritual clown works to define the human condition by presenting opposite yet complementary possibilities for human action as outlined by Arden:

It is not that humour and outrageous behaviour as entertainment are unimportant, but the constant potential for the elicitation of non-order – the creation of another way of human being – appears to be unique to their role. (1979, 57)

The symbolic archetype that is the “marginal” works to re-create meaning through role taking or enactment that is the central defining activity of drama itself. The archetype is a “bricoleur” or myth-maker who takes, and develops the things at hand by imaginatively recombining them. He generates “structure” through creating or re-creating the dramatic metaphor and thereby endowing it with personal meaning. His role can, of itself, be seen as a dramatic metaphor since it is a mediating device that connects the unconnected. Louis Hieb succinctly describes the function of the archetype as incorporated in the figure of the ritual clown as follows:

[...] the figure of the ritual clown mediates the oppositions of time and space versus liminality, social structure versus communitas, and reality and seriousness versus inversion and humour. (1972, 165-166)

The power of narratives such as *Ortha an Ghreama* lies in the fact that the symbolic action instituted by the archetype/shaman uses the same features as everyday life but transforms and inverts them. Socially inverted behaviour as evidenced in the dramatic action is understood within the context of sympathetic (or homeopathic) medicine and magic where balance is the “cure” or the state that is desired. The archetype works towards this balance by reproducing those features that are causing imbalance. In the case of ritual clowns, the everyday vices of greed and selfishness are symbolically and vicariously treated by the gluttony and selfishness of the ritual clowns as evidenced in their dramatic roles. In *Ortha an Ghreama* Jesus and Mary in the guise of Travellers are refused lodgings by the hard-hearted “woman of the house”. Although he is often depicted as an “innocent” newborn, Jesus is often reluctant to perform the healing as a consequence of their inhospitable treatment by the “settled” community:

She woke up the child and she said to Jesus,
 “Wouldn’t it be a pity not to heal him.
 “Oh Mother”, says he “if we can let us not to cure him”.
 Herself and Saint Joseph carried the child over so that he was above the sick man. She held the right hand of the child and said the words:

A rude woman with a courteous woman,
 Mary’s Mantle and her Son (the healer of sickness),
 The Body of Christ lying in the flax”,
 And then with the sign of the Cross saying:
 “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. (IFC Iml. 46: 162)

The ambivalent attitude exhibited by Jesus embodies the paradoxical nature of his role as a liminal figure with power who acts not only as a catalyst for symbolic inversion but who also questions the nature of humanity and its shared values and norms¹⁴. Jesus as shaman/trickster is seen to define the human condition by presenting opposite yet complementary possibilities for human action. His reluctance to perform the healing smacks of ambivalence, an ambivalence that emphasises the reflexive aspect of his actions. Norbeck and Farrer (1979) suggest that the human mind functions best when it is operating in a dialectic mode as it is this mode that gives rise to the creative and the spontaneous. Rubenstein (1975) sees play incorporating an ambivalence between “subjective” and “objective” reality as that which is emotionally analogous to aesthetic expression and the formation of a new level of understanding. Turner sees play as a major aspect of liminality. It invigorates the quality of recombining behaviour that occurs in non-ritual situations, strange or bizarre patterns. What was known previously now becomes the unknown and the ordinary becomes exotic. The rules of so-called normal and acceptable behaviour are shattered as outlined by Victor Turner:

¹⁴ Although some variants of *Ortha an Ghreama* suggest that Jesus’ reluctance to utilise his healing powers is a direct consequence of his shabby treatment by his would-be hosts, in others we are told that this is not always the central reason for his reluctant attitude. His reluctance is sometimes tied to the role of the spiritual in his healing. He says that he is in fact not yet ready to perform miracles in the public sphere thereby echoing the *Wedding Feast of Cana* story in the Gospel (“My time has not come yet”, John 2:5): “Out in the night the husband got a colic and at length and at last the mother said to the Son to do some good for the man that left them inside for the night. / ‘My hour didn’t come yet.’ says He, ‘Let you do it.’ / ‘Ah, no’ says she, ‘I’ll not take the rod out of your hand’ / So ‘tis then He started His prayer [...]” (IFC respondent from Kilrush, Co. Clare Iml. 1371: 245).

When elements are withdrawn from their usual settings and recombined in totally unique configurations [...] those exposed to them are startled into thinking anew about persons, objects, relationships, social roles and features of their environment hitherto taken for granted. Previous habits of thought, feeling and action are disrupted. They are thus forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos and the powers that generated and sustain these [...]. (1982, 205)

Rites of reversal incorporating symbolic inversion and role transformation such as that which takes place in *Ortha an Ghreama* present a mediation taking place between two realities, a mediation that is likely to result in a form of humour, a humour that is both ambivalent and frightening. Kealiinohamoku (1980), who studied the social function of ritual clowns amongst the Zuni people, described the humour of the clowns as an essential feature in their creation of a form of “communitas”. Communitas was a consequence of the creation of fresh and new relationships between people who might previously have had little contact. The creativity necessary for the development of this communitas was one which was inextricably linked with humour. Both Kealiinohamoku (1980) and Koestler (1964) saw humour as a necessary consequence of the tension generated by the juxtaposition of two previously unrelated experiences. This tension is resolved through the emotional response of humour which establishes balance and resolves any dissonance. The reflexive humour of inversion or topsy-turvydom is a consequence of a number of situations incorporating the inversion or expectations. These include the most basic individual role transformation (i.e. someone taking on a role and becoming someone else) and the collective inversion of cultural norms generated by shamans and ritual clowns. Mary Douglas defines this humour as a form of drama:

The joke merely affords opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Through drama, licence is given to “play with” accepted modes of behaviour and action, changing them slightly, inverting them totally or even perverting their purpose. (Douglas in Hieb 1972, 191)

In *Ortha an Ghreama* the humour lies in the fact that the audience listening to the story can see/imagine the mistake the churlish settled community is making by refusing hospitality to the travelling holy people. This humour is a form of playfulness that contributes to the establishment of meaning and has strong analogies with Neelands’ and Goode’s categorisation of the notion of playfulness as it occurs in the realm of the symbolic:

We use the term playfulness to describe the basic human instinct to play with the relationships between symbols and their orthodox meanings in order to express or create new possibilities of meaning. Playing with symbol systems, loosening ties between sign and signified, transforming meanings by creating new and fresh symbolic relationships [...] helps us to consider the meaning of our lived experience. (1995, 16)

The response of Jesus to their rejection is sometimes ambivalent¹⁵, an ambivalent and grotesque form playfulness which is designed to drive the moral message of the story home to the audience. Turner sees ambivalence within ritual as crucial to the power of ritual as a function within symbolic systems. In his view – “when ritual loses the capacity to play with ideas, symbols and meanings, and thus loses its “cultural resilience”, it ceases to be a shared agency for collective reflexivity” (1978, 72). Its playful and grotesque aspects are bolstered by the fact that it is the “man of the house” who suffers despite the fact that he has exhibited more kindness towards the Travellers than has his wife:

¹⁵ In a very occasional variant of the narrative-charm *Ortha an Ghreama*, it is actually stated in the narrative that Jesus has deliberately inflicted the pain on the “man of the house” so as to teach his wife a lesson.

“Do something for him”, the Virgin Mother said to Our Saviour, praise be to her always.
 “I won’t”, says he. “The man is alright”, says he.
 She asked him again to do something for him.
 “I won’t”, says he. “The man is alright and his wife doesn’t deserve it. You do it”, says he to the mother,
 great praise be to her forever [...]. (IFC Iml. 1150: 24)

Jesus and Mary as depicted in *Ortha an Ghreama* use both inversion and a form of ritual healing to mediate between their own reality as Travellers and the reality of the world from which they have been excluded. Their role has a dramatic potential analogous to that of a range of other archetypes incorporating the figure of the shaman/trickster/clown who function in an environment incorporating the use of ritual. Their use of a ritual process has a unitary function since it involves not only a “physical” healing but also a psychic healing, i.e. a cultural transformation of the dramatic structure of knowledge. The healing depicted in *Ortha an Ghreama* situates the moral commentary/balance provided by the outsiders/Travellers process within an intersubjective and communal context. Its aim is analogous to that of ritual drama as outlined by Charlotte Frisbie:

Ritual drama, in dealing with life itself, is a process which serves to unite humans with other humans, as well as humans with other-than-humans, the revealed with the unrevealed worlds, the visible with the invisible. (1980, 24-25)

Hieb identifies ritual behaviour as evidenced in the role of the ritual clown as the prerequisite for a sense of “communitas” or a dialogue between the “acceptable and unacceptable, that which is familiar and that which is considered strange” (1982, 185-186). Ritual behaviour imbues many aspects of the healing tradition in Ireland including the healing traditions of those who are considered “marginal” or “outside the norms” of the community, such as Travellers.

In *Ortha an Ghreama* the duality that fuses the temporal and the divine is emphasized through the role of Travellers in “religious” healing and the spiritual iconography that imbues these healing rituals. In many variants on this narrative the Holy Family do more than just function as the “Other” who act as a moral arbiter on the actions of their hosts in the “settled” community. They are also the enforcer of certain Christian tenets including that of punishment for evil that is committed. The Child Jesus is depicted as the enforcer of a moral “retribution” that is both harsh and immediate – i.e. the terrible pain which afflicts the “man of the house”. This links with the popular belief that it is not only in the afterlife that our behaviour will be “balanced”. Whatever measure the giver gives to others in this life is that which they in turn receive either in the afterlife or more immediately in this life. The “recompense” or *gúi* (prayer/wish) of the holy personage in *Ortha an Ghreama* is one that is designed to make the audience think very carefully about the consequences of their actions towards those who seek hospitality.

Ortha an Ghreama

Our Saviour and His mother were going around and they went in to a house and the house was full of flax and the bed they got to lie on was the bales of flax and when they were leaving in the morning Our Saviour put the pain on the father.

“Oh”, says His mother to him, “why did you put a pain on him, wasn’t he very good to us.” “Oh, it will hurt her too,” says Our Saviour, “when she sees him and you can cure him and He said: “Fear séimh ag bean bhorb [...]. (IFC respondent from Bantry, Co. Cork Iml. 809: 403)

That it is the “kinder”¹⁶ of the “settled people” who suffers the physical punishment is part of the “ambiguous” power of the narrative:

[...] “Oh indeed”, said the Son of God. “I’ll give her a fright before daylight comes.” “What will you do with her?” said the Mother.

“I’ll put a pain in the side of the man of the house”, he said.

“Wouldn’t that be a big pity to do that to such a nice courteous man who gave us lodgings?” said the Mother. “You’ll see him jumping all over the house in a minute”, said He. (IFC Iml. 48: 275)

Or

The bed the woman of the house gave them was on the tow that they extract from the flax. The Mother and child didn’t like this as a bed. He [the child] put a searing pain on the man of the house and the man was very sick. (IFC Iml. 1038: 141)

The inversion evident in Jesus’s “strange” behaviour also has strong affinities with the “ordering” function of other shaman-types such as ritual-clowns whose inversions are initially indicative of institutionalized chaos. The “inverted” behaviour of Jesus in his apparently “selfish” allocation of punishment echoes the selfish manner in which the Travellers have been treated. Fyfe describes the strong association between socially inverted behaviour (on the part of the ritual clown) and the context and use of sympathetic or homeopathic medicine and magic:

Balance is the desired state; and imbalance is treated by reproducing those features that are causing imbalance. For example, greed and selfishness within everyday life will be symbolically and vicariously treated by the gluttony and selfishness of the ritual clowns. (1998, 220)

In some variants of *Ortha an Ghreama* Jesus goes further than simply “applying” the punishment and explains the moral reasoning behind his actions:

The Stitch Prayer

“A prayer worked by Mary and her Son,
A prayer worked by Brigid of the mantle
A prayer worked by Michael of the shield,
A prayer that God worked with power,
A rude woman with a kind gentle husband,
That put the Body of Christ lying on the flax last night,
Mary’s Mantle to the stitch.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

When the Virgin and her Son went looking for lodgings they didn’t get it. That is the story. The man said to let her in and the woman of the house said she wouldn’t unless they were prepared to sleep on the flax, and that is what they did to the Virgin in the end. Our Lord inflicted the pain on the man and the Virgin Mary said to Our Lord that they should go back and heal the man, that the man was a good man and why had he inflicted a sickness on him. Our Lord said he had done it to make the woman think carefully about things. (IFC respondent from Caherdaniel, Co. Kerry Iml. 148: 427)

¹⁶ In most variants of *Ortha an Ghreama* it is the “man of the house” who suffers the pain although he has been kinder to the Travellers.

The use of symbolic inversion in order to impart a more profound message also operated as a form of protection for a wide range of Travellers including tinkers, healers, “poor scholars” and other nomadic craftsmen when attempts were made to marginalise them. The inversion of “official” hierarchies which culminates in an ironic dependence on the “excluded” Other has parallels in a much wider and subversive “top-down” discourse in Irish folklore as indicated by the following anecdote:

The Priest and the Travelling Man

There was a Travelling man and one day he was walking along the road and he was passing a church and the parish priest and three men were lifting a big heavy rock near the church. The Travelling man said to them.

“I will give you a hand”,

He did not have a good suit of clothes on him and the priest said to him,

“Off with you, you’re not going to join any company of men”.

“O”, said the Travelling man walking on, and he looked back at the priest, and he said to him, “The One who composed is better than the one who criticised”.

That was to say that it was the Son of God who composed it.

That was when the priest understood what he meant and he said,

“O, that is true”. The priest thanked him (for his words) and asked him for forgiveness and admitted that what he said was wrong. (IFC Iml. 1862: 70)

Some versions of *Ortha an Ghreama* serve as a brief “sermon”¹⁷. In addition to defending those who are considered outside the “norms” of society they often function to impart a specific moral message directly to the story’s audience. At times this moral “tenet” as contained in the narrative is a simple observation on the nature of human existence such as the following:

“A rude husband with a gentle wife, but the Son of God left lying on the flax,

A gentle man with a rude wife, but the Son of God left lying on the flax.”

You never saw a couple – you never saw any pair – that could “get on”

with one another and never have the slightest disagreement”. (*Ar Aghaidh*, 28 Nollag 1938, 6)

On other occasions, the moral precept extols the benefits of those stati in life which appear on first glance to be unattractive, unwanted or “topsy-turvy”.

¹⁷ That the “shabby” treatment given to the Holy Family in *Ortha an Ghreama* was incorporated into the discourse of Travellers and used as a form of symbolic inversion with a certain satirical intent is indicated by the following “reminder” issued by the blind west of Ireland Traveller-poet Anthony Raftery which survived in Irish popular tradition: “When Raftery was going around and looking for lodgings wherever he could find it he called one night into a certain man. And he was the type of man who didn’t have much room in his house. There was a fistful of ferns in the corner of the house – probably for burning – for using in the fire. This man had three young sons. They went to bed and Raftery came in seeking lodgings. Well I don’t have any good place to put you but I don’t want to put you out. You can stay until morning. Raftery said that he didn’t mind so long as he could stay in the shelter of the house. When the three boys were gone to sleep the old man arranged a bed for him on the pile of the ferns. He arranged the bed of ferns so that it was as neat as possible. And when he was getting ready for bed himself, one of his sons spoke in the back of the room. He spoke in a low voice so that Raftery would not hear him. ‘Well’, he says. ‘You’ll hear talk about this bed of ferns yet’, says the son. Raftery overheard him. When the man of the house was asleep Raftery says: “I am fairly well-travelled, / I am always going, walking the country, / I am going through the country and meeting the poor and the naked, / Many’s the place that I have bedded down, / Throughout the breadth of this country and me miserably poor, / And although I’ve walked the whole country / I was never a fern-hen until tonight!” (IFC Iml. 368: 375-377).

The clear implication of the charm-story is that Travellers people are holy personages or that saintly people like Jesus and Mary can be found travelling in the guise of those who may appear poor or downtrodden. While many variants on the charm-story simply end with the punishment of inhospitality, there are others where the “settled” community are seen to realize the consequences of their misbehavior and react with humility and a firm purpose of amendment:

Do bhíos aici go maith ansin cé bhí aici gur bé Ár Slanuighthóir é féin, céad moladh go deó leis agus a Mháthair Naomhtha do bhí ann éide locht siúbhal. Do tháinig náire agus aithreachas uirri i dtaobh bheith có cruaidh leó nuair d’iarradar lóistín uirr. (IFC respondent from Co. Kerry Iml. 26: 147)

(She knew then exactly who they were - that it was Our Saviour himself, a thousand praises forever to him, and his Holy Mother who were there - and that they were in the guise of Travellers. She was ashamed and repentant then because of her cruelty to them when they came seeking lodgings).

Do chuaidh an tinneas ar gcúl agus sin é an am nuair a ainithnuigheadar cé bhí aca. As sin amach do bhí grásta Dé ar bhean an tighé agus a rath ortha [...] (IFC respondent from Dingle Co. Kerry Iml. 1533: 161)

(The pain went away and it was then that they recognized who was there. From then on, the grace of God was in the woman of the house and she benefited from its gifts [...]).

D’éirigh sí aniar as a leabaidh is do chaith sí féin ar a glúinibh i bhfiadhnis a’ t-Slanuightheora agus a Mháthair agus d’iarr párdún air na go h-aithríghtheadh orrtha agus chomh maith do fuair agus dubhairt a’ t-Slanuightheoir léi go brách arís an fhaid mhairfeadh sí gan aoinne d’éiteach fé óstaideacht na h-oidhche ná fé deire a loirgeochadh é ar son Dé is bheith go maith i gcómhnuidhe dá bochtaibh féin is bheith is fóirithint ortha nuair a casfaí chuici iad. Gheall sí dó go ndéanfadh agus do coingibh sí an geallmhaint sin go dtí lá a báis. (IFC Iml. 27: 280)

(She got up out of the bed and she threw herself on her knees in the presence of the Saviour and his Mother and she asked them for forgiveness and they forgave her and the Saviour said to her never to refuse anybody ever again who would seek lodgings for the night or anyone who would seek lodgings in the name of the Lord – and that they should always be generous to the poor in their midst and to look after them when they came across them. She promised him that she would do as he asked and she kept that promise until the day of her death).

Some variants even build on this moral imperative and explain the Christian necessity to exhibit kindness and hospitality towards those deemed poorer or who are without lodgings of their own. The following example recorded from the well-known County Kerry storyteller Peig Sayers indicates that the medieval idea whereby poverty was equated with holiness survived in Ireland well into the modern era:

The Stitch-Prayer

We should never be dishearted or ashamed of poverty. It is a very good thing to be poor, especially for the person who can carry the burden of poverty in a dignified manner. Our holy master was poor and his poor saintly mother, and they are merciful and glorious, and they will help us from the place that they are in now because they were themselves on this earth once. (Flower 1957, 71; my translation)

That the moral imperative of hospitality should be applied to all Travellers and not just those who reveal themselves to be saints or members of the Holy Family is indicated by the following:

A gentle woman with a rude husband,
A prayer for the burning stomach
that the Son of God left lying on the flax.

A man who came looking for lodgings on the night that Our Saviour was born in the stable. The man of the house put him out, even though the woman of the house didn't want that. The (travelling) man was only gone when the man got a terrible pain in his stomach. His wife went after the poor man and this is the cure he gave her. (IFC Iml. 355: 377)

In *Ortha an Ghreama* Travellers, in the guise of holy people are seen as agents of subversion who provide a temporary challenge to the “normal” social order. The Travellers are seen to assume a role which mediates between the story's narrator/audience and their world, one based on the dual process of imaginatively projecting into, and creating a representation of, the world. As a shaman-figure the Traveller takes on an intermediary role incorporating two realities – the Traveller world and the settled world – at once. This role-play on the part of the figure of the Traveller is indicative of a commonality of experience which is real or imagined, a commonality which mediates between people. The ritual drama that is *Ortha an Ghreama* serves to emphasise the commonality of human experience and endeavour, within a framework of differentiated behaviour. It is what Erikson refers to as “separateness transcended and [...] distinctiveness confirmed” (1979, 141). Courtney (1982) echoes Erikson's description of communal drama, a drama which is based on acknowledgement and respect. Courtney argues that ritual drama can function as a meaningful metaphor for the notion of community, rather than of society. While society is predicated on power and status, ritual behaviour as a reflection of community is based on acknowledgement and reciprocity. The topsy-turvy and paradoxical nature of the Traveller- shaman generates an attitude of mind which is reflexive, interpretative and self-conscious. The story's audience is forced to think hard on the symbolic dilemma inherent in the tale and the moral choices which the story's protagonists decide upon. The Traveller-shaman thus echoes Bakhtin's fundamental questioning of the assumption that there is a distinction between the social and the individual. In Bakhtin's (1984) view, the very nature of reality is dialogic and polysemous. It is not possible to separate the “self” from the “other”. From birth to death, – who we are, how we think, what we understand and how we act are all dependent on our present or past relationships with people. Since the human consciousness is social as opposed to individual, it is always imbued with ambivalence. This ambivalence, inherent in the dialogic, generates a tension which strives towards a deeper understanding between “self” and “other”. This tension strives for resolution through the symbolic incorporation of both viewpoints that are both the spiritual and the profane. By symbolically dramatising the societal conflict that takes place between the Traveller and the settled person's worldview the shaman goes some way towards resolving this conflict. The symbolic action which occurs is “the microcosm which irreducibly implies, recalls and reflects upon the social macrocosm.” (Geertz 1986, 13). The Travellers are depicted as ritual figures whose role is seen to incorporate a new reality, one that stresses unity and harmony and mediation between opposites. The symbolic duality inhabited by the Travellers allows society's values to be transformed and endowed with a new meaning, a meaning the imposition of which, Geertz defines as “the primary condition of human existence” (1972, 509). The dual-role of the Traveller figures in *Ortha an Ghreama* has strong analogies with an anthropological definition of role-taking in the rituals of non-Western societies as defined by Courtney where the self is identified with the “other”:

It [...] [the role-play] allows the individual to embody the experience of the “other” within the form of the role; thus the role mediates the subjectively felt experience and the objectively perceived “other”. (1982, 52)

In *Ortha an Ghreama* the Irish travelling and settled communities are depicted in an oppositional framework, an opposition which is reconciled through the ritual figure of the shaman. The depiction of the Travellers is analogous with that of other shaman or ritual-clown figures who “dissolve” their environment and represent a powerful statement of “process”. This statement is predicated on a kind of ritual of rebellion whereby strongly countercultural feelings and ideas are expressed, albeit within a frame of reference which is ritualized and culturally permitted. The liminal phase encompassed in the ritual of the Ortha allows the figure of the Traveller, a figure who is permeated with cultural ambiguity to move from one social position to another. The dramatic metaphor that is the Traveller becomes a shared agent for cultural reflexivity. It incorporates the participants’ (storyteller/audience) felt experience and serves to re-create the categories through which they perceive reality – what Turner refers to as those “axioms underlying the structure of society and the laws of the natural and moral orders” (1968, 7). The ambiguous and reflexive nature of the boundary that the Travellers inhabit is central to the paradoxical role they are seen to play in *Ortha an Ghreama* and is analogous with other similar shaman-type figures. This reflexivity demands that the audience reflect upon both the contrary and complementary sides of the cultural interaction between “settled” and Traveller, a reflexivity which needs unearthing from what appears to be ordinary or commonplace. Handleman, discussing the ritual/boundary role of the ritual-clown in “primitive” society describes this reflexivity which culminates in revelation as follows:

Such boundaries or frames are compatible only with ritual phases which evoke a sense of the sacred that is buried ordinarily within the routine and the commonplace. Such frames, by evoking both the sacred and its contrary, heighten the consciousness of participants to sentiments of holiness. Such frames may be termed “boundaries of transition”, for their concern is less with belief than it is with preparing participants to believe [...] they erase distinctions between the sacred and the secular, and they prepare the way for the advent of the deity. (1981, 338-339)

When the Travellers of *Ortha an Ghreama* are “unmasked” as the holy people they really are, they, like the ritual clowns known as the *capakobam* bring the boundary to the sacred centre thereby erasing societal distinctions. They open the way to the reaffirmation of the world as a unity of interdependent parts by introducing a meta-message that overrides paradox. Leach (1976) links this metacommunicative function with the regenerative power that resides in the limen or those ambiguous interfaces that he sometimes refers to as “dirt”. Handleman defines such power¹⁸ as “the changing of the shape and meaning of the cosmos: if boundaries are altered, then so is the relationship between those parts which these borders order” (1981, 342).

Turner sees the dissolving of boundaries as a primary attribute of liminality. In his view liminality is a medium which functions to shape archetypes or root metaphors into “radically simplified” and “generic” models of the ordinary social order (1974, 202). The interaction between generalised cultural meaning and individual consciousness serves to “validate a conceptual world view by conforming and re-creating extant myths” (Schechner 1981, 103). This re-creation is a function of the anti-structural within the liminal:

The anti-structural model of the social order not only arises within the medium of liminality – it is also an “essential” version of social structure. In other words, its premises are composed of essential values, beliefs, and precepts, about how the world should be constituted [...] Within liminal boundaries,

¹⁸ Willeford who studied the role of the fool in “primitive” society identifies a similarly reflexive function in the “fluid” social role of the fool – “the fool as a borderline figure holds the social world open to values that transcend it” (1969, 137).

the ordinary social order is taken-apart and put-together in an essential version of social structure, viz., anti-structure. (Handleman 1981, 351-352)

While anti-structure includes certain strong sentiments (e.g those of “communitas”) which critique the social structure, Turner (1974) argues that it is the re-amalgamation of anti-structure with social structure that re-invigorates the latter and ensures the regeneration of cosmic (and hence) social order¹⁹. The ritualised²⁰ nature of this renewal validates certain working paradigms for action as outlined by Turner:

In ritual [...] primitive society, reappraises its ideology and structural form, and finds them good. Refractory behaviour and the expression of conflict are allowed, even in some instances prescribed, to release energies by which social cohesion is recognised to be the outcome of the struggle [...] [it is] often a struggle to overcome the cleavages caused by contradictions in the structural principles of the society itself. A struggle may also arise from the resistances of human nature to social conditioning. Or both kinds of struggle may provoke and exacerbate one another. In any case the structure of each kind of ritual betrays marks of the struggle in its symbolisms and enjoined behaviour. (1968, 237-238)

The narrative power of *Ortha an Ghreama* lies in its reflexivity, a reflexivity which is particularly pertinent in a society as traditionally “homogenous” as Ireland. The ritual drama²¹ that is the Ortha is generative of new meaning thereby contributing to the reinvention of culture for the narrator/audience and the healer practitioners who used the Ortha. The Travellers in *Ortha an Ghreama* embody the role of cosmic messengers who attempt to instigate changes of perception and attitude, changes which can transform by means of their collective²² or uni-

¹⁹The rejuvenation of the cosmic order in *Ortha an Ghreama* is as consequence of the Travellers critique of social structure, a critique that incorporates ritual healing. Handleman (1981) has pointed out to the central role of this renewal in the positing of anti-structural sentiment as applied to “primitive” or tribal societies: “[...] the rejoining of anti-structure to social structure [...] renews the latter. This emphasis on the renewal, the rejuvenation, or the regeneration, of cosmic (and hence social) order, often is striking in the calendrical rites of tribal societies, particularly those associated with the solstices and the equinoxes. Anti-structure, in such rites (and in others as well), calls forth the imagery of enduring and valid truths, of a unity of interdependent parts that is monumental in what it subsumes, and of the punctum indifferens, the point(s) of rest which stabilizes and anchors sacred structures in space and out-of-time” (1981, 352).

²⁰It is worth noting the evidence for the resurgence of ritual behaviour in modern times, a resurgence which is often representative of oppositional social and political stances. The women’s movement, movements incorporating various forms of civil protest and the “New Age” Movement, including different groups of New Age Travellers have all deliberately created formalized ritual behaviour as a response to dominant cultural ideologies. A good example of the latter grouping is the Dongas “tribe” of New Age Travellers in Britain which has led the opposition to road-building schemes in various areas of Britain during the 1990s. John Fox, a ceremonial artist and founder of the Welfare State Theatre Company in Britain expresses this new cultural dynamic whereby people in the West wish to emulate the ritual behaviour of many in non-Western societies, rituals which invert and transform the ordinary into the extraordinary: “We are looking for a culture which may well be less materially-based but where people will actively participate and gain power to celebrate moments that are wonderful and significant in their lives. Be this building their own houses, naming their children, burying their dead, announcing new partnerships, marking anniversaries, creating new sacred spaces and producing whatever drama, stories, songs, rituals, ceremonies, pageants and jokes that are relevant to the new values and new iconography” (Fox in Fyfe 1998, 149).

²¹It is generally acknowledged that the Western European tradition has separated drama from other activities in life. The power of involvement whereby personal concerns and social ones are inked with dramatic involvement has tended to diminish or disappear entirely within the cultures of the West. The opposite remains the case in many non-Western or so-called primitive societies. In these societies art (culture), religion and daily life fuse together in drama so that cultural meanings are renewed and recreated “on a stage as wide as society itself” (Diamond n.d., 31).

²²Walens describes the ceremonial rituals of Northwest Coast Native Americans as an attempt to achieve a new and collective awareness that has significance far beyond the confines of the social group: “Through the display of crests

versal significance. Such folk narratives form a discourse where Travellers are seen to subvert their assignation of “outcast” or “negative Other” as incorporated in “anti-Traveller” folktales like the “Nail” and “Pin” legends. At its most basic, the moral imperative of a narrative-charm such as *Ortha an Ghreama* and associated folk narratives is the necessity to exhibit “hospitality” towards all Travellers or those regarded as less well-off or without lodgings of their own. That the *lucht siúil* (Travellers) are often travelling in the guise of holy personages and are in a sense God’s representatives on earth is the sub-text of the narrative. The idea that it is dangerous or unlucky to refuse hospitality to those who request it amalgamates both “medieval” Christian and traditional Gaelic ideas regarding the necessity for charity. Given the narrative and moral thrust of these tales and the central role played by Travellers in the Irish healing and storytelling traditions it is very likely that Travellers themselves had a large role in the promulgation and preservation of this counter-tradition as encompassed in *Ortha an Ghreama*. The extent to which this “subversive tradition”, countering the “negative Other” depiction of Travellers suffused the iconography of both the religious/prayer and traditional healing traditions in Ireland is testament to the strength of these narratives and the importance these “counter-tradition” once held. *Ortha an Ghreama* as promulgated by storytellers in both the Travelling and “settled” communities can be seen as a direct inversion of Traveller ostracisation as incorporated in narratives like the “Nail” and “Pin” legends. In this case, the Traveller is portrayed as a shaman-type figure who incorporates a duality fusing the temporal and the divine. The liminal position inhabited by the Traveller is transformed so that his marginal societal position dissolves. This transformation of the liminal position is indicative of an erosion of the societal distinctions that exist between different groups within Irish society. The Travellers of *Ortha an Ghreama* represent an other-worldly form of order that transforms the temporal and erases distinctions between the sacred and the secular so that the fullness of a new “truth” can be revealed. The transformative dualism evident in *Ortha an Ghreama* is also indicative of one of the folktale’s major functions in the twentieth century as outlined by Marina Warner (1995):

[...] in conditions of radical change on the one hand, and stagnation on the other, with ever increasing fragmentation and widening polarities, with national borders disappearing in some places and returning with a bloody vengeance in others [...] the need to belong grows ever more rampant as it becomes more frustrated, there has been a strongly marked shift towards fantasy as a mode of understanding, an ingredient in survival, as a lever against the worst aspects of the status quo and the direction it is taking. (1995, 415)

Instead of being perceived as sinners/outcasts whose marginalisation is a deserved form of punishment, the Travellers in *Ortha an Ghreama* are indicative of a profound symbolic reversal. They are agents of subversion in the guise of holy people who provide a temporary challenge to the “normal” social order. The Travellers assume a role which mediates between the story’s narrator/audience and their world, a role encompassing the dual process of imaginatively projecting into, and creating a representation of, the world. As a shaman-figure the Traveller takes on an intermediary role incorporating two realities – the Traveller world and the “settled” world – at once. The Traveller emphasises the dialogic essence that is the self, as theorised by Bakhtin:

Northwest Coast ceremonies provided for the expansion of the self and the group beyond the social boundaries and in doing so linked human beings with each other and to the vital forces of the cosmos. Rituals make opposites equivalent: a local house becomes the entire universe, a human being becomes a cosmic being, the past of myth becomes manifest in the rituals of the present. The expansion of the self and the group to equivalence with the cosmos is achieved by the close identification of individuals with the spirit-beings whom they portray in dance and embody in this world” (1982, 23).

To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and thoroughly throughout his life. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (1984, 293)

The Traveller as depicted in *Ortha an Ghreama* is a figure indicative of an attitude of creative disrespect. The symbolic inversion which the Traveller invokes is representative of a subtle yet radical opposition to the hegemonic, the monologic and that which is illegitimately powerful. It is indicative of the fact that the classificatory body of a culture is always double, always structured in relation to its inverse, its negation. It reminds us that culture's most powerful symbolic repertoires are often located at its borders or margins. It echoes Babcock's comments on the centrality of symbolic process in the regeneration of culture:

[...] far from being a residual category of experience, it is its very opposite. What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central, and if we ignore or minimize inversion and other forms of cultural negation we often fail to understand the dynamics of symbolic processes generally. (1978, 32)

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Put Down What You're Carrying: Disrupting Apologia through Rhetorical Tactics of Change

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Abstract:

This article traces the nimble reorganization efforts, from restorative justice to transitional justice, employed by a single victim's advocacy group, the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) campaign, as they participated in a coalition of like-minded organizations to bring about an official apology and enduring justice for the women of the Magdalen Laundries. Offered as an obstacle that was pivotal in spurring transition, Taoiseach Enda Kenny's apology is analyzed as an example of contemporary apologia. This article will argue Kenny's remarks satisfy the goals of restorative justice, but impede transitional justice as the language of his remarks undermine non-recurrence. Thus, the women of the Magdalen Laundries, in collaboration with advocacy groups such as JFM, employ rhetorical silence and extend rhetorical listening as tactics of change.

Keywords: Apologia, Magdalen Laundries, Rhetorical Listening, Rhetorical Silence, Transitional Justice

The former Magdalene women are among the most economically, politically, socially and culturally vulnerable people in Ireland; yet their testimonies are powerful in their demand on us to witness, to understand how we are inter-related, to comprehend what it is to have a body that can feel pain—our own and that of other sentient beings. We can either acknowledge their pain (that is, bring our senses to their experience), or we can avoid it. In avoiding the pain of the Magdalene women, we insist again that we will never turn towards them in an attentive silence, to listen, to make care response. We must know that whatever choice we make determines how we share and shape the future.

Katherine O'Donnell, "Academics Becoming Activists" (2018a)

1. Introduction

Tracing back to the Middle Ages¹, Magdalen² asylums³ in Europe were initially run by religious orders or philanthropic entities with the purpose of offering refuge to women in need. As their namesake suggests, these institutions were inspired by the life of redeemed prostitute, Mary Magdalene. Thus, some of the women seeking shelter were also prostitutes and it followed that perhaps they too could be forgiven through penance. Within Ireland, the first of these institutions was established in 1767 when Lady Arbella Denny opened the doors of 8 Leeson Street in Dublin as a refuge for women with the stated purpose of delivering them “[...] from Shame, from Reproach, from Disease, from Want, from the base Society that ha[d] either drawn [them] into vice, or prevailed upon [them] to continue in it, to the utmost hazard of [their] eternal happiness” (Widdess 1966, 5). Denny’s refuge was a philanthropic enterprise with unique socio-cultural dimensions⁴. Viewed as a prevalent social and moral vice, prostitution disproportionately impacted women with limited education and economic means⁵. Thus, these sites of shelter offered temporary safety while also striving to maintain standards of a decent society by encouraging women to break from vice as illustrated in religious and moral teachings. Similar institutions existed across the globe with locales in the United States⁶, Canada⁷, England⁸,

¹ Rebecca Lea McCarthy charts the evolution of Magdalene institutions noting that “the forced transition from a pastoral to an agricultural society, undermined traditional Irish Brehon Laws” resulting in a waterfall effect of policies and attitudes that limited women’s rights in Ireland (2010, 3).

² Throughout this article two spellings will appear: Magdalen and Magdalene. The variance in spelling represents how the term appears in the published accounts cited herein.

³ Also referred to as institutions, laundries, and houses.

⁴ “[...] the majority of these institutions [...] were operated exclusively by laywomen with the support of managing committees of male and female trustees. It was not until the 1830s that congregations of female religious began assuming control of the Catholic Magdalen asylums. While the Catholic religious—run institutions would continue to operate into the 1990s, the majority of Protestant lay-managed asylums ceased to operate in the early twentieth century” (Smith 2007, 25). See also Preston (2004); McCormick (2005).

⁵ In *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940*, Maria Luddy offers an extensive history of prostitution in Ireland from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. While many women worked in prostitution out of economic necessity, Luddy counters that there is evidence of women actively engaging in forms of resistance – pushing back on a state that endeavored to police and control their bodies and sexuality (2008, 16).

⁶ Founded in 1800, The Magdalen Society of Philadelphia was the first asylum in the United States (Ruggles 1983, 65; Smith 2007, xv). In 1843, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd established their first US-based Magdalene asylum. Between 1843-1899, 37 more Magdalene asylums were established (Jones and Record 2014, 171).

⁷ The first Canadian Magdalen asylum opened in 1848 by the Congregation of the Sisters of Misericorde in Montreal (Currier (1898 [1894]), 595). In 1858, Elizabeth Dunlop and others founded the Toronto Magdalene Laundries with the goal of “eliminating prostitution by rehabilitating prostitutes” (Martel 2014, 56).

⁸ In *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, Frances Finnegan highlights that England opened its first Magdalen refuge in 1758 at Whitechapel. In the next 140 years the number of institutions swelled to over three hundred (2001, 7-8).

Northern Ireland⁹, Scotland¹⁰, and Australia¹¹ to offer a representative but not exhaustive portrait. Post-famine, four female Catholic religious congregations¹² ran the majority of Ireland's Magdalen laundries; but, until 1919 these institutions were also associated with Protestant organizations. Following independence there were ten Catholic run Magdalen laundries in the Republic of Ireland¹³. Documentation of the existence and purpose of such institutions in Ireland is well noted in the historical record of the nineteenth century¹⁴.

Yet, as the twentieth century dawned, and Ireland's independence was unfolding, these sites of refuge shifted to function in increasingly secretive¹⁵ and punitive ways¹⁶. During this time period population demographics also began to shift when "[...] unmarried mothers began to make up a greater proportion of those who entered these asylums" (Luddy 2008, 117). To this point, Mary Merritt's story reveals the generational impacts of Ireland's Magdalen laundries. Born in a Dublin workhouse, Mary was eventually transferred to the care of the Sisters of Mercy in Ballinasloe, Co. Galway and never met her mother. At the age of 16, Mary was caught stealing apples and was sent to the High Park laundry in Dublin where she stayed for 14 years. During this time, Merritt was raped by a priest and gave birth to a daughter, Carmel. Mary was forced to give her baby up for adoption and was then sent back to work at the High Park laundry. Nearly 40 years after she gave birth, with the assistance of British social workers, Mary's daughter found her ("Ireland's Hidden"). In September 2019, at the invitation of The Little Museum of Dublin, Merritt told her story in an installation titled, *You Can Leave at*

⁹According to Amnesty International UK, "The Good Shepherd Sisters ran a laundry and home [...] in Belfast from the late 19th century until 1977 and 1990 respectively. A Magdalene Asylum and laundry was operated by the Church of Ireland on Belfast's Donegall Pass [...] continuing into the 1960s [...] the Presbyterian Church was associated with the Ulster Female Penitentiary in Belfast. In total, Amnesty International [...] identified twelve Mother and Baby Homes or Magdalene Laundry-type institutions which operated in Northern Ireland in the last century" (2017).

¹⁰Linda Mahood offers, "[...] by the middle of the century [...] reform strategies [...] began to shift. Critics of rescue work [...] argued that rescue workers had to do more than merely provide refuges. They incorporated the penitentiary principle [...] as they adopted a more aggressive style and missionary methods" (1990, 103).

¹¹Adele Chynoweth reveals, "The Good Shepherd Sisters ran eight Magdalene laundries in Australia. Hundreds of young women were incarcerated [...] throughout the twentieth century and forced to work, without pay, in the Sisters' commercial laundries. Many of these young women had not committed a crime and were not afforded a legal trial (2014, 176-179). In 2004, the Senate report, "Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children" was released. The report led to a national apology from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull in 2009. (Parliament of Australia 2004).

¹²These congregations were the Sisters of Mercy (SM), Sisters of Charity (SC), Sisters of our Lady of Charity of Refuge (SCR), and the Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS).

¹³They were located at Waterford (GSS), New Ross (SC), two in Cork (GSS and SC), Limerick (GSS), Galway (SM), and four in Dublin at Dún Laoghaire (SM), Donnybrook (SC), Drumcondra (SCR) and Gloucester/Seán MacDermott Street (SCR).

¹⁴See Luddy (1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2001, 2007); Finnegan (2001); McCarthy (2010).

¹⁵James Smith highlights some of the challenges associated with secrecy, "[...] the historical record comes to an abrupt end with the advent of the twentieth century. Because the religious congregations that operated these laundry institutions continue to deny access to records for women entering the asylums after 1900, historians are constrained in what they can say, with authority, about the Magdalen laundries as they developed and continued to operate throughout the past century" (2007, 24).

¹⁶Across the globe harsh conditions existed in Magdalen asylums and while these institutions in Ireland did transition to a more punitive posture, such cruelty was not a uniquely Irish phenomenon (Anon. 1869; Anon. 1878a; Anon. 1878b; Cushing 1944; Campbell J.W. 1948; Mahood 1990; Hoy 1997; De Cunzo 2001; Murray 2004; Smith 2007).

*Any Time*¹⁷. In reflecting on her choice to accept the museum's invitation Merritt declared, "I never received an apology from the church, and I am still angry. I want that apology before I die. And until then, I will continue to speak out" (White 2019).

Also choosing to be vocal, Gabrielle O'Gorman recounts the details of her life in one of Ireland's Magdalen laundries in the documentary, *The Magdalenes*. The film is an educational collaboration between TrueTube and Professor Gordon Lynch; it was produced in association with University College Dublin, the University of Kent, and the Irish Research Council. At the age of 17, O'Gorman details how she was taken to the Sean MacDermott Magdalen Laundry after nuns disapproved of her relationship with a young man. O'Gorman shares how she was able to escape, but was soon found by the Gardaí and was then sent to the Good Shepherd Laundry in Limerick where she was held against her will for two years and a half. O'Gorman outlines the mechanisms of institutionalisation she experienced, such as being forced to wear a uniform and being told her name was now Stella. She recalls being instructed to write letters and feeling unwanted as each went unanswered. Only later did she realise that the nuns never dispatched her correspondence. According to O'Gorman this tactic stripped her of self-control by instilling feelings of isolation and abandonment. In the film, O'Gorman returns to the now derelict building where she was once confined. While wandering the decaying space she denotes how the legacy of institutionalisation "never actually left me" (*The Magdalenes*).

The personal histories of Merritt and O'Gorman serve as important testimony¹⁸ in documenting the lived experiences of the women of the Magdalen Laundries¹⁹. Their retellings also highlight the societal mechanisms that enabled such institutions to operate in the newly independent Ireland. As articulated by Katherine O'Donnell:

The first century of Irish independence was typical of post-colonial states in being marred by endemic poverty, a Border dispute and the assertion of nationalist social and cultural purity projects [...] Women, the working classes and the poor (who ironically had participated greatly in winning independence) suffered inordinately at the hands of those newly established in power [...] Successive Irish governments continued the colonial Victorian apparatus, established post-Famine, which empowered Catholic religious orders to take charge of the welfare of the socio-economically vulnerable. (2018b)

In *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, James Smith provides a glimpse into the prevailing attitudes that enabled the noxious expansion of such institutions. He articulates, "In a society where even the faintest whiff of scandal threatened the

¹⁷ According to museum director Trevor White (2019), the collaboration developed from a desire to ethically showcase a ledger from the High Park laundry that features clients of the largest Magdalen laundry in Ireland and had recently come into the museum's possession.

¹⁸ For additional testimony of the Women of the Magdalen Laundries see also: *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998); *Forgotten Maggie's* (2009); Costello, Legg, Croghan *et al.* (2015).

¹⁹ "The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries" details the following regarding terminology featured in the report "In referring to the girls and women who were admitted to and worked in the Magdalen Laundries and following consultation with them, historical terms, such as 'inmate' or 'penitent', as well as some modern terms such as 'victim' or 'survivor', were avoided, so as not to cause any offence or distress [...]. To avoid distress to any party and to avoid labelling these women against their wishes, this Report uses the terms 'the women admitted to the Magdalen Laundries' and 'the women of the Magdalen Laundries' throughout, as required by the context. This terminology is not intended to obscure historically used terms, to convey a sense of voluntary residence to all cases, or indeed to convey any particular meaning other than to identify in a respectful way the women to whom this Report refers [...]. There were a number of general imperatives in the choice of terminology [...] the Committee sought to avoid language which might in any way label, stigmatise or demonise those concerned" (Department of Justice and Equality 2013).

respectability of the normative Irish family, the Magdalen asylum existed as a place to contain and punish the threatening embodiment of instability” (2007, xviii). From 1922-1996, at least 10,000 women and girls are believed to have witnessed life inside one of Ireland’s Magdalen laundries, which former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny acknowledged as “a dark chapter of Ireland’s history” (2013), one that is characterized by toxic taciturnity and atrocious cruelty.

This article traces the nimble reorganization efforts, from restorative justice to transitional justice, employed by a single victim’s advocacy group, the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) campaign, as they participated in a coalition²⁰ of like-minded organizations to bring about an official apology and enduring justice²¹ for the women of the Magdalen Laundries. Offered as a mammoth obstacle that was pivotal in spurring transition, Kenny’s apology²² is analyzed as an example of contemporary apologia. This article will argue Kenny’s remarks satisfy the goals of restorative justice, but impede transitional justice as the language of his apology undermines non-recurrence. Cognizant that Kenny’s contrition represented a vital step along the winding journey of maintaining a just society, JFM reconfigured from a platform of restorative justice and reparations towards transitional justice. Simply stated, JFM recognized that achieving restorative justice was an important cornerstone to their mission, yet stopping there would expose a potential exit route to the most responsible parties. Such a departure would threaten a return to the values that fed into containing women in the first place. Thus, the women of the Magdalen Laundries, in collaboration with advocacy groups such as JFM, employ rhetorical silence and extend rhetorical listening as tactics of change.

2. Justice for Magdalenes and Justice for Magdalenes Research

In 1993, before the formal establishment of the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) campaign, the three founding members collaborated to restart the Magdalene Memorial Committee (MMC). Initially formed in response to the communal Magdalen grave²³ found in High Park, Dublin on property owned by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the reinvigorated MMC “sought a public funeral for the exhumed women” (O’Loughlin 1993, 4). However, on the morning of 11 September 1993, urns

²⁰ According to O’Donnell, “JFM ran a successful media campaign, building relationships with journalists in trusted national and international publications and broadcast stations which ensured the JFM press releases became news [...]. Gaining public support and trust was further enhanced through strong alliances with four NGOs: Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA), the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), Amnesty International-Ireland and in particular the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCII)” (2018a, 86). Additional advocacy groups that were pivotal in the justice process include: the Irish Women’s Survivor’s Network, Magdalene Survivors Together, and the Magdalene Names Project.

²¹ In 2011, the United Nations Committee on Torture (UNCAT) published a report that compelled Ireland to conduct thorough investigations into the Magdalen Laundries. In 2013, “The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries” was submitted to Dáil Éireann. Often referred to as the McAleese report, in a nod to senator Martin McAleese, who served as Chair for the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries. This committee’s mandate “[...] was to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries. These facts are set out in this Report as the Committee has found them. During this fact-finding process, the Committee also gained a deeper and broader understanding of the Magdalen Laundries and the context in which they operated. The Committee has, in this Report, drawn on all available information and sought to record as comprehensive a picture as possible of the operation of the Magdalen Laundries” (Department of Justice and Equality 2013).

²² Kenny’s apology refers to the speech delivered on 19 February 2013.

²³ A report in the *Irish Press* noted that the exhumation “was believed to be the largest single exhumation in the history of the State [...] the mass exhumation of the private graveyard at High Park Convent, Drumcondra [...] is part of a land sale deal the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in a bid to raise funds to cover convent debts” (O’Connor 1993).

containing the remains of 154 women were privately²⁴ reburied in a common grave in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. MMC member, Margo Kelly expressed anguish over the private interment:

[...] the Catholic Church had an opportunity to begin to make amends [...]. But the same veil of silence that put those women away in the first place was still there. Those of us separated from our mothers feel particular anger and grief [...] we got to Glasnevin too late for the actual service, but we got there in time to see into the grave and to see the urns stacked and to watch the gravedigger fill in the grave. Looking into that grave, the sense of tremendous anger and sadness we had was just incredible, that sense of wasted lives and opportunities. (O'Morain 1993, 10)

While MMC was not able to secure a public burial ceremony at the final resting place in Glasnevin Cemetery, they did hold an open event in Dublin commemorating the women's lives. MMC also campaigned for a memorial bench to be installed in St. Stephen's Green with a plaque²⁵ that was dedicated by President Mary Robinson in 1996 ("Magdalen Women").

Then in 2003, "The Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) campaign was founded [...] by three adoption rights activists, two of whom are the daughters of women incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries for a combined total of approximately 60 years" (O'Rourke 2015, 160). Run entirely by volunteers, JFM was a not-for-profit, victims advocacy group that worked²⁶ on behalf of the women of the Magdalen Laundries. From 2009-2013, JFM was comprised of five core volunteers that included two of the three founding members, Claire McGettrick and Mari Steed as well as James Smith, Maeve O'Rourke, and Katherine O'Donnell. (O'Donnell 2018a, 85).

In May 2013, having achieved their goal of an official apology and a State Redress Scheme, JFM transitioned their energies and focus into Justice for Magdalenes Research²⁷ (JFMR). This shift in purpose is credited in large part to the research of Mary Raftery²⁸. Despite only a brief mention, in a single footnote, within the McAleese report, JFMR attributes their rebirth into an organization focused on research and education to the significance of Raftery's investigations²⁹ into the exhumations at High Park.

²⁴ As documented in the *Irish Times* the reburial was, "[...] attended by about 25 nuns, their chaplain, Father Tony Coote, and a small number of lay people" (O'Kane 1993, 4).

²⁵ The plaque reads "To the women who worked in the Magdalene Laundry institutions and to the children born to some members of those communities—reflect here upon their lives".

²⁶ JFM was awarded the Irish Labour Party's Annual Jim Kemmy "Thirst for Justice Award" (2013) and the Lord Mayor of Dublin's Award (2016).

²⁷ JFMR holds as its mission: "[...] to provide for the advancement of education of the general public by researching the Magdalene Laundries and similar institutions and by providing information and support to the women who spent time in the Magdalene Laundries and their families. We understand that in enabling the public to understand the ideology and contexts that gave rise to such institutions that the Irish people will be more sensitised to contemporary conditions that enable prejudicial discrimination to become established and even part of State apparatus. We have focused on the role of the State involvement in the Magdalene institutions and the human rights abuse that occurred there to make the public aware of how to critique and hold the State accountable even as it seeks to devolve its powers to private organisations" (Justice for Magdalenes).

²⁸ JFMR highlights Raftery's influence on their evolution writing, "In August 2003 the late Mary Raftery published the results of an investigation she had carried out into the exhumations at High Park. Were it not for this investigation our attention would not have been drawn to the additional remains discovered at High Park and the discrepancies in the exhumation applications. In fact, without Mary Raftery, Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) would not exist. Our country is forever in her debt" (Justice for Magdalenes Research).

²⁹ Raftery's research exposed financial and procedural peculiarities central to the sale of land. She explains, "The snag was that the land contained a mass grave. It was full of 'penitents', the label attached to the thousands of women locked up in Ireland's Magdalene laundries [...]. The good sisters did a deal with the developer who bought their land. They split the costs of clearing the mass grave, exhumed and cremated the bodies, and re-buried the ashes in another mass grave. However [...] there were 22 more bodies in the grave than the nuns had listed when applying for permission to exhume. Over one-third of the deaths had never been certified. The nuns did not even appear to know the names of several of the women, listing them as Magdalene of St Cecilia, Magdalene of Lourdes, and so on. The final number so callously disturbed from their resting place was 155. All had died in the service of the nuns, working long hours in their large commercial laundry for no pay, locked away by a patriarchal church and society ruthlessly determined to control women's sexuality" (2011).

3. Restorative Justice

Dating to the 1980s, restorative justice practices have existed across the globe. Countries such as Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the U.K. and U.S.A. all have national restorative justice programmes. According to the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, restorative justice “emphasizes accountability, making amends”, which represent important steps in affirming wrongdoing and establishing restitution for survivors/victims. Central to these goals is the belief that resolution is best achieved through a cooperative process that includes willing stakeholders to come together. Summarised by three central goals, “repair, encounter, and transformation” and four cornerstone principles, “inclusion of all parties, encountering the other side, making amends for harm, and reintegration of the parties into their communities”, restorative justice functions on the premise that atonement is a crucial element to healing (Centre for Justice and Reconciliation).

In 2000, at the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, the Vienna Declaration on Crime and Justice: Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century, called for the “development of restorative justice policies, procedures and programmes that are respectful of the rights, needs and interests of victims, offenders, communities and all other parties”. Continuing to build on the momentum from the Vienna Declaration, in 2002, the United Nations Economic and Social Council supported *Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters*, which encouraged the governments of member nations to establish guidelines and standards for the application of restorative justice programmes in their countries³⁰.

Paul McCold observes, “The evolution of restorative justice as a paradigm is more akin to a process of discovery rather than invention” (2000, 359). For Ireland, the process of discovery started with considerations on the applicability of restorative justice as part of the Criminal Justice Bill 2004 that was signed into law in 2006 (Criminal Justice Act). The conversation continued in 2007 when, The Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights conducted a review regarding the potential benefits of restorative justice in Ireland. The Rapporteur’s Foreword acknowledged that:

[...] Restorative Justice is not intended as an alternative to existing practices. Restorative Justice is not a panacea and is not appropriate for all offenders or for all victims. However...there is gathering international and domestic evidence to suggest that, when a Restorative Justice approach is adopted as part of a broader response to crime, victims and the general public are typically more satisfied with the process and outcome. (Committee Reports)

Further, the report denoted common restorative justice methodologies³¹ as well as how other countries instituted aspects of restorative justice as part of their criminal justice protocol.

While restorative justice is steeped in powerful theory, and often yields meaningful results, it is not without limits. Paul McCold and Ted Wachtel caution against oversimplified assertions that denote a practice is restorative or not. Rather, they suggest examining restorativeness on a spectrum of “fully restorative”, “mostly restorative”, or “partially restorative” as determined by factors such as participation of the victim, agreed upon outcomes and reparations, and offenders voluntary assumption of responsibility and remorse (2002, 117, 119, 120, 138). When restorative justice is evaluated across a range of possible outcomes a level of hybridity emerges.

³⁰ See the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006).

³¹ The report highlighted the following as common restorative justice methodologies: Victim/Offender Mediation (VOM), Conferencing, Sentencing Circles, and Typical Sanctions (traditionally restitution and community reparation).

For marginalised populations a hybrid approach to healing is integral as the journey to justice is dynamically recursive. Thus, JFM was adroit in utilizing restorative justice to accomplish targeted elements of their campaign, while recognizing that in order to foster enduring advocacy a transferal of methodology was imperative – particularly in light of Kenny’s apology as an example of contemporary apologia.

4. *Rhetorical Genre of Apologia*

Dating back to the Greek period and still utilized today, apologia is considered by some as the “most enduring of rhetorical genres” (Ware and Linkugel 1973, 274). Apologetic discourses, particularly those appropriated by persons in public positions, are often characterised by self-defense. Yet within the genre of apologia there is myriad of applications and motivations – in other words apologia is more complex than saying “I’m sorry”. Sharon Downey contends, “[...] apologia has undergone significant changes in form because its function has changed throughout history. Specifically, shifts in function produce five ‘subgenres’ of apologia: self-exoneration, self-absolution, self-sacrifice, self-service, and self-deception” (1993, 42). In her analysis of the subgenres, Downey highlights, “Coincidentally, the discourses clustered in four groups of time [...] the classical, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods³². While the labels denoting these periods roughly correspond to accepted historical periods, they serve primarily to identify expanses of time and do not necessarily reflect events which might have transpired in them” (46). Utilizing Downey’s framework, this section interrogates Kenny’s apology as an example of contemporary apologia that represents one of the obstacles facing minority groups in Ireland. More specifically, the text and delivery of Kenny’s remarks are the exigency that spurred the shift to transitional justice. Relatedly, rhetorical silence and rhetorical listening empower marginalised populations to recast obstacles and leverage them into tactics of change.

Before interrogating Kenny’s apology it is instructive to situate the event within the context of other apologies and redress schemes. In 1999, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern offered one of the first apologies made on behalf of the State to its citizens. Ahern accepted the State’s complicity in the abuse and neglect of children in Ireland’s industrial and reformatory schools when he affirmed, “On behalf of the State and of all citizens of the State, the Government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue” (“Taoiseach Apologises”). Ahern pledged redress for survivors and the following year the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act³³, 2000 (CICA) was passed. From 2000-2009, the Irish Government launched the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002 and the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Amendment) Act 2005³⁴. Ahern’s apologetic discourse is instructive in that he navigates dual

³² Downey offers more specificity regarding the proposed historical periods by revealing, “This classification scheme is designed for ease of reading and organizing the analysis. The classical period encompasses approximately 1200 B.C. to 1 B.C., although the speeches analyzed in this period cover from 430 B.C. to 330 B.C. The medieval period encompasses approximately 1000 to 1700, although the speeches analyzed in this period cover from 1500 to 1670. The modern period encompasses approximately 1700 to 1900, although the speeches analyzed in this period cover from 1780 to 1880. The contemporary period encompasses approximately 1900 to the present, although the speeches analyzed in this period cover from 1950 to the present” (1993, 63).

³³ Also referred to as the Ryan Commission and the findings published in 2009 are often called the Ryan Report after Justice Seán Ryan who served as the chair.

³⁴ Minister Mary Hanafin explained, “The Bill amends the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act 2000 and the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002 and establishes a statutory body to administer a €12.7 million

exigencies. The first exigency is the State's negligence of children in its care; the second exigency is the State's response (apology and redress). Ahern's posturing³⁵ across both exigencies maintains a stance of absolution, which enables restorative and transitional justice processes to develop.

In other instances a posture of justification was assumed where a redress scheme was established without an official apology. On 10 November 2014 the Surgical Symphysiotomy Ex-gratia Payment Scheme³⁶ was established and Judge Maureen Harding Clark, was appointed as the independent assessor and author of the final report³⁷. The Minister for Health, Simon Harris, stated that he was hopeful the payments, totaling €34 million, would offer closure to the women involved, but the government fell short of actually apologising. Without an apology to accompany the report, the findings present as clinical and devoid of concern for the women who endured abuse at the direction of health services. Sinn Féin's deputy leader, Mary Lou McDonald avowed that the report showcased a range of grave injustices while essentially re-traumatising the women who came forward with characterisations that their claims were fraudulent. Demonstrating the severity of failing to apologise, Deputy Eamon Ryan stated, "We have not given what we should have given, an upfront apology, a recognition that what went on was wrong and recompense for the huge damage, loss and pain that occurred over their lives... More than anything else... let us respect, honour and apologise to those women" (2017). Marie O'Connor, spokesperson for Survivors of Symphysiotomy (SoS) asserted, "The payment scheme is an ex-gratia scheme, which does not meet international human rights standards³⁸ because it is based on no admission of wrongdoing" (Morgan and Thompson 2015). Thus, when redress is established without the existence of an apology the chasm between justice and deflection expands.

5 February 2013, on the heels of the publication of the McAleese report, Kenny was presented with an opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of his humanity. However, in stunning fashion the opportunity was bungled with a non-apology³⁹. Hallmarks of a non-apology include

education fund for former residents of institutions and their families" (2005).

³⁵ Ware and Linkugel offer four rhetorical postures within the genre of apologia: "absolution, vindication, explanation, or justification [...] the postures [...] are not completely distinct classifications void of intermediate cases" (1973, 282).

³⁶ Between 1940-1985, it is estimated that 1,500 women in Ireland were subjected to this archaic medical procedure.

³⁷ The Dáil Éireann debate (Vol. 936 No. 2) on Thursday, 26 Jan 2017 featured statements on symphysiotomy. Comments from Deputy Bill Kelleher regarding his role as convenor of the Oireachtas support group and remarks from Deputy McDonald regarding the UN Human Rights Committee's examination of symphysiotomy are particularly relevant in this context (Kelleher 2017; McDonald 2017).

³⁸ SoS first submitted a report to the United Nations Committee Against Torture during the second periodic review of Ireland during "The Convention Against Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" (Survivors of Symphysiotomy 2017a). In 2017, SoS submitted documentation to the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding Ireland's fourth periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In both reports references were made to the "Failure of the State to provide appropriate restitution (Art 14) [...] The sole remedy offered [...] was an ex gratia payment scheme, which failed to provide an effective remedy to survivors, because it was introduced without an admission of, or an apology for, wrongdoing (see O'Keefe v. Ireland) [...] as the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner observed: 'the voices of the surviving victims are not sufficiently heard or respected', and their testimonies 'were reportedly not given a similar weight to written or medical records'" (Survivors of Symphysiotomy 2017b).

³⁹ As noted in the report on "Apologies & Institutional Child Abuse", there are various examples across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland of non-apologetic rhetoric. Examples offered include the criticisms of An Garda Síochána from the Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin (i.e. the Murphy Report) and the "Time to Listen" report from 2003 (Catterall, McEvoy, McAlinden *et al.* 2018, 6).

the use of passive and/or vague language that acts to trivialise the offense and deflect responsibility. Articulating the scope of Kenny's failure, JFM avowed, "The Taoiseach's statement falls far short of the full and sincere apology deserved by the women who were incarcerated against their will in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries" (Collins 2013). McDonald questioned Kenny about the publication of the report by asking, "When does the Taoiseach propose to offer – on all our behalves and that of the State – a full apology to these women?" (Lord 2013a). In this moment, Kenny faced a propitious invitation to proceed with compassion and honesty. Certainly he would be incredulous to posture that McDonald's query was a surprise – it was blatantly obvious that the nation was eager to know the answer to this principal question. Yet, Kenny blundered his chance at *kairos* as he embodied the shock of an unprepared defense attorney who just realised he had lost the case in spectacular fashion. Kenny pivoted to a posture of justification suggesting that the abuses published in the McAleese report are part of Ireland that was marked by "a very hostile and far-off environment in the past" (Lord, 2013a). He continued to marginalise by stating, "To those residents who went into the Magdalene laundries from a variety of ways, 26 per cent from State involvement, I'm sorry for those people that they lived in that kind of environment" (Collins 2013). Kenny's remarks squarely situate him on the offensive; his vague references to "those people" and "that kind of environment" fail to acknowledge the precise and chilling experiences offered by the 118 women⁴⁰ who spoke with the Department of Justice and Equality and whose testimony is included in the McAleese report (Department of Justice and Equality 2013, 929). To this point, Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd insist, "For one who has been humiliated or treated as worthless [...] acknowledgement of dignity and human worth is profoundly significant" (2002, 70). In this way Kenny's non-apology obstructs reconciliation and justice as he fails to recognize individuals who were impacted with his indifference. Thus, utterance does not equate an apology as the non-explicit nature of his remarks serves to minimise the severity of the offences.

Furthermore, the distance and lack of humanity evidenced by Kenny's use of "those people" and "that kind of place", particularly as an offensive ploy, situates the testimony given by the women of the Magdalen Laundries as mere recollections from a marginal sample size. The potential fallibility of memory, the historical stigma⁴¹ associated with the ethos of the women of the Magdalen Laundries, and the natural passage of time, all present as convenient foils for Kenny specifically as they relate to contemporary apologia. In contrast, Smith contends, "The exercise of memory allows those who were previously excluded, marginalized, and forgotten to tell their own histories and to assert their own identities" (2007, 90). Thus, despite his attempt at playing offense, for many people, 1996, the year that marked the last Magdalen laundry being closed is not "far-off" and tangibly resides in their memory and reality. More importantly the

⁴⁰ According to the Department of Justice and Equality, "The women who shared their stories with the Committee included: – 31 women represented by the Irish Women's Survivor's Network (UK); – 15 women represented by Magdalene Survivors Together; – 7 women introduced to the Committee by the Advocacy Group Justice for Magdalenes; – 7 women who made contact directly, on their own behalf, with the Committee; and – 58 women currently living in nursing homes or sheltered accommodation under the care of the Religious Orders [...]. The Committee is fully aware that there are many other women who have not felt able to share their experience of the Magdalen Laundries with it, or indeed with anyone" (2013, 929-930).

⁴¹ In reference to the findings published in the McAleese report, Kenny acknowledged, "That the stigma, that the branding together of the residents, all 10,000 needs to be removed and should have been removed long before this and I'm really sorry that that never happened, and I regret that never happened [...] I'm sorry that this release of pressure and understanding of so many of those women was not done before this, because they were branded as being the fallen women, as they were referred to in this State" (O'Regan 2013).

distance from the occurrence does not absolve wrongdoing – a fact that disrupts an apologist’s attempt to negate wrongdoing or elevate their image. Accordingly, an offensive positionality, one that attempts to excuse institutional abuses as an episode of a time long gone, fails to offer justice at all.

Moreover, the McAleese report received criticism⁴² from organisations including JFM for reporting inaccuracies and for situating the findings within a prejudicial context that hints to qualitative research as prone to inconsistencies. After a thorough investigation of some key findings in the McAleese report, Claire McGettrick conducted research that compared headstones with electoral registers across a single decade to cross reference the median length of stay, which was denoted as seven months. However, McGettrick found that within the decade sampled from 1954-1964, most women at the High Park Laundry were there for a minimum of eight years and that “[...] at least 46% of these women never got out. It tells a completely different story than the McAleese report and the way the figures are presented is frankly misleading and is not respectful of the lived experience of these women” (“Ireland’s Hidden Bodies” 2014). This discrepancy is one of many⁴³ and further depicts the significant limitations of Kenny’s apology as predicated on a report that has shaky ethos and utilizes questionable research ethics.

Kenny’s first attempt at publicly acknowledging the State’s involvement in the Magdalen Laundries categorically congeals with contemporary examples of apologia which are “Concerned principally with clearing their names, contemporary apologists utilized the posture of absolution by retaining the classical pattern of categorical denial and engaging in an in-depth ‘particularization of the charges at hand’” (Ware and Linkugel 1973, 278). To the point of particularisation, Kenny exclaimed, “The women were not subject to sexual abuse. Or physical abuse” which denote a sloppy attempt to particularise and parse out “positives to consider” (Lord 2013a). However, when placed in conversation with the lucid details offered by Merritt and O’Gorman (among many others as well), the opacity of Kenny’s claims amplifies their falsehood despite his attempt to show a less troubling side of the laundries.

Further, Kenny utilized contemporary apologia as a stall technique “[...] contemporary apologia may well have functioned as delay or postponement tactic[s] – a view intimating that time heals, distorts, forgives, and forgets [...]. Contemporary apologia *functioned as self-deception*” (Downey 1993, 58). Given that there was to be a Dáil debate in just a few weeks’ time, Kenny was able to test the waters – and tentatively audit the public’s reception of his narrative – a version of events predicated on the cliché of time as the ultimate healer, which lucidly emphasizes the obstacles that advocacy groups were challenged with overcoming. He suggested “the House should absorb the report and reflect on its findings” (O’Regan 2013). Yet this tactic was assailed by advocates who declared, “We cannot let this lie. There will be a

⁴² Within the McAleese report, Chapter 19, Sections 20 and 21, articulate the underlying prejudice towards experiential knowledge within the context of qualitative research. Section 20 claims: “Because the total number of women who provided direct information to the Committee was limited to a small proportion of all those who spent time in a Magdalen Laundry and as the sample was not randomly selected, it cannot be considered representative. Given passage of time, it is also clear that the sample is biased towards more modern years – the 1940s was the earliest period for which the Committee had access to the direct experience of women who spent time in the Magdalen Laundries” (Department of Justice and Equality 2013, 930). Section 21 states: “The Committee would also note that it did not have the power to make findings of fact in relation to individual cases. Nonetheless, the following stories and experiences are included in the Report, as they were told to the Committee and as the people concerned remember them” (*ibidem*).

⁴³ Mary Raftery’s research counters findings and illuminates gaps left by the McAleese report. (Justice for Magdalenes Research).

Dáil debate in two weeks' time which will provide the elected representatives of this State with yet another opportunity to do the right thing, to recognise the abuse, the suffering and the misery and to put it right" (O'Rourke 2013). Deputy McDonald also refused Kenny's brushoff stating she was, "[...] very alarmed by what you have had to say in the Dáil today [...]. We all understand that the report will have to be studied carefully, but let us not forget that a huge amount of information and testimony, historically verified, was already in the public domain prior to the McAleese committee" (O'Regan 2013). Interestingly, the testimonies referenced are not esoteric documents that never saw the light of day. Rather, the reports were compiled by renowned organisations such as UNCAT and their existence was widely known. Published two years prior to the release of the McAleese report and Kenny's apology, UNCAT's findings⁴⁴ articulate a pattern of abuse and offer protocol for investigation and redress.

By the time the Dáil reconvened on 19 February 2013, Kenny devised a different approach at offering an apology⁴⁵. However according to Downey, post-1960 a couple of "[...] contradictory themes emerged in speeches [...]. On the one hand, rhetors accepted full responsibility for the events in question [...]. On the other hand, ironically, all speakers shifted blame for their circumstances [...]. While these themes are internally incompatible, they suggest a contextual redefinition made more palatable by the morally expected assumption of responsibility" (56-57). To animate Kenny's use of contemporary apologia it is vital to acknowledge that while the public nature of his remarks offer visibility of the State's involvement in the Magdalen Laundries (the rhetor accepts responsibility), his avowal that the State will carry the narrative henceforth undermines the agency of those receiving the apology (shifting blame):

What we discuss today is your story. What we address today is how you took this country's terrible 'secret' and made it your own. Burying it carrying it in your hearts here at home, or with you to England and to Canada, America and Australia on behalf of Ireland and the Irish people [...]. But from this moment on you need carry it no more. *Because today we take it back.* Today we acknowledge the role of the State in your ordeal. (Kenny 2013; emphasis added)

An additional complexity is that by seizing the "story" of the women who were admitted to the Magdalen Laundries, Kenny's apology serves as a rhetorical blockade. By invoking apologia, Kenny vis-à-vis the State, essentially makes a land grab, claiming ownership over the narrative by determining who will carry the story – and who will dictate the terms of the healing and justice processes. In essence, the subtext broadcasts that an apology was rendered and now the "ordeal" is over. Yet such top down directives undermine non-recurrence as necessary to transitional justice because the apology's purpose is skewed to function in the capacity of putting

⁴⁴ "[...] the Committee expressed grave concern at 'the failure by the State party to protect girls and women who were involuntarily confined between 1922 and 1996 in Magdalene Laundries'. The Committee recommended prompt, independent and thorough investigations into allegations of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in Magdalene Laundries; in appropriate cases, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators; and that the State ensure that all victims obtain redress and have an enforceable right to compensation" (Justice for Magdalenes Research).

⁴⁵ According to RTÉ, advocacy groups such as JFM and Magdalene Survivors Together welcomed the apology as did some of the women of the Magdalen Laundries. However, welcoming the apology did not signal the cessation of seeking justice. JFM noted it, "[...] looks forward to the intent of the apology being made evident by the introduction of a system of redress that is prompt, open, fair, and transparent [...] Justice John Quirke [...] must be given statutory powers [...] there must [...] be an independent appeals system [...] Justice Quirke must be properly resourced. The system must be non-adversarial and transparent. It can be private but not secret" ("Taoiseach Enda Kenny Apologises to Magdalene Laundries Survivors" 2013).

the event behind the rhetor, who in this instance is representing the State – which was a key actor in facilitating institutional abuse. An analysis of Kenny’s apology demonstrates how contemporary apologia obstructs the advancement of justice when the rhetor’s purpose is situated in justification and paramnesia. As Smith asserts, “It is important to tell this story because the Magdalen laundries are part of Ireland’s present, not just Ireland past [...]. Telling the story of the Magdalen laundries defies the elision of this history” (2007, xviii-xix). Undeterred in the face of mammoth obstacles, the women of the Magdalen Laundries and groups such as JFM resist usurpation, reclaim the narrative, and reconfigure top down power moves into bottom up advocacy. Such maneuvers disrupt rhetorical devices and rhetors that act to distort or erase. The following sections offer rhetorical silence and rhetorical listening as vital tactics of change employed by resisters such as the women of the Magdalen Laundries and JFM.

5. *Transitional Justice*

Building on the primary goals of restorative justice, namely accountability and redress, transitional justice expands its focus to emphasize human dignity, acknowledgement of violations, and commitment to non-recurrence. Further, transitional justice endeavors to ensure “[...] citizens are safe in their own countries [...] from the abuses of their own authorities and [...] protected from violations by others [...]. Finding legitimate responses to massive violations under these real constraints of scale and societal fragility is what defines transitional justice and distinguishes it from human rights promotion and defense in general” (The International Center for Transitional Justice). Relatedly in 2018, Boston College hosted⁴⁶ a conference titled, *Towards Transitional Justice: Recognition, Truth-telling, and Institutional Abuse in Ireland* (TTJC). The conference highlighted transitional justice as “a more ‘holistic,’ survivor/victim-focused, approach to historic injustice, in part because it combines the four key elements of justice, reparation, truth-telling, and guarantees of non-recurrence” (2018). Ireland’s Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone⁴⁷, opened the conference with a talk titled, “Love’s Pursuit” in which she traced instances where both personally and politically she has turned to the goal of creating “a republic of love”. Quoting Marcel Proust, she read, “Love in this way produces real geological upheavals of thought”, a sentiment that reveals the type of radical readjustment required when strategically traversing from restorative to transitional justice. TTJC encouraged speakers and participants to return to the question, “what are we transitioning from?” Zappone answered by articulating, “we are recovering from a gendered history that has existed since formation of the Free State [...] much of the architecture of past oppression is yet to be dismantled [...] patterns of gender injustice cannot be undone or changed if such injustices are not acknowledged [...] thus, starting from love requires us to image the possible” (Zappone 2018).

⁴⁶TTJC was organised by three of the five key volunteers from JFM, James Smith, Katherine O’Donnell, and Maeve O’Rourke in collaboration with Megan Crotty.

⁴⁷Zappone stated that there is a need “for a truth-telling process for victims and survivors of institutional abuse” (Zappone 2018). However, since those remarks in 2018, she has received criticism from groups such as the Tuam Home Survivors Network which claim Zappone, “[...] has been responsible for [...] a dishonest exercise in respect of the Tuam pit, which has prolonged the agony of survivors and those whose relatives may be buried there, by standing in the way of an exhumation” (Tuam Home Survivors Network 2018). Further polarizing, in 2019, Zappone announced that adopted people would not have automatic access to birth records as birth parents’ constitutional right to privacy needed protection (Libreri 2019).

Witnessing the testimony and truth telling shared by speakers and participants alike, the motifs of listening, believing, and imagining continually surfaced. As a participant, it became clear that the abstract and nebulous qualities of charting a path to healing are best acknowledged in that experiential knowledge and lived experiences are unique—the survivor/victim/resistor experience and thus related discourse communities are not homogenous. Therefore a uniform solution presents obstacles such as enhanced marginalisation and recurrence of stigmatisation. To bolster against such undesirable outcomes, rhetorical silence and rhetorical listening are offered as foundational tactics to fostering justice from a bottom up positionality—a stance that maintains a survivor/victim-focused approach to transitional justice, especially for marginalised populations.

6. *Rhetorical Silence*

The mantra of “see something, say something” is splashed across posters and broadcast over loud speakers in public transit stations, airports, and hospitals. The subtext suggests that utterance equates security, wellbeing, truth telling, and believability. The assumption follows that the mere act of speaking is robust enough to safeguard entire societies; in essence the extrovert’s platitudes are celebrated with diadems. Yet there is also meaning in what is not said – a claim that is examined by Cheryl Glenn who denotes that, “Few documented accounts explicitly demonstrate the usefulness and sensibility of silence, particularly in our talkative Western culture, where speech is synonymous with civilization itself and where silence-as-obedience is frequently rewarded” (2004, xi). Of import, when JFM’s campaign for restorative justice began there were frequent calls from the general public to politicians demanding that the women of the Magdalen Laundries step forward, reveal themselves, and *tell* their story – the refrain that bellowed was tinged with disbelief as people questioned, who exactly are these women?

The decision to speak or remain silent is informed by the knowledge that not all voices are heard, not all truths are believed, and not all silences are equal. Smith articulates:

The majority of these women, as is their right, remain silent about this aspect of their past. Unlike survivors of the industrial and reformatory schools, comparatively few Magdalen women choose to come forward to provide testimony. This suggests that the stigma traditionally associated with these institutions, a stigma rooted in the perception of the Magdalen asylums as a corrective to prostitution, still operates in Irish society today. (2007, xviii)

Across the multitude of ways silence can be exercised, the distinction between choosing silence or being silenced is worthy of exploration. When considering interpretations of silence descriptors such as meditative or introspective often circulate. Yet, the concept of silence as specifically related to women is often misunderstood. Glenn interrogates such mischaracterizations and contends that, “Not surprisingly, silence has long been considered a lamentable essence of femininity, a trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, stupidity, or obedience” (2004, 2). Glenn suggests that there are complexities within conceptions of silence especially in what she refers to as “imposed and tactical silences” (xi) where the latter possesses an expressive power. To this point and within the context of advocacy, silence is a carefully constructed rhetorical position – one that enables the survivor/victim-focused framework of transitional justice to flourish.

Accordingly it follows that the women of the Magdalen Laundries, and organisations such as JFM/JFMR, enact inventive strategies to broadcast their voices – strategies that require rhetorical savvy as many leverage silence in the place of vocalization – their story cannot be carried

by Kenny, the State, or any other entity (despite repeated attempts to do so). Thus, by dictating silence on their own terms they are able to enact a bottom up approach to justice. Such a strategy is vital when facing obstacles such as the sheer force of dominant voices and discourses, which includes those with access to economic capital and those that may leverage their privileged social standing or profession to amplify their version of events. To maintain control, dominant discourses rely on coercion, fear, shame, and isolation. Glenn observes, “For the past 2500 years in Western Culture, the ideal woman has been disciplined by cultural codes [...] a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement)” (1994, 181). So while consistent pressure from the press, the government, and society at large, pressured the women of the Magdalen Laundries to speak – a relentless demand predicated on deconstructing the noisier rhetoric of the dominant discourse to prove their truth – rhetorical silence emerges as a powerful tactic of change that empowers individuals to retain ownership of their personal history. The urge to resituate silence as a potent rhetorical act is explored by Glenn who queries, “[...] when asked to list the three most important components of rhetoric, Demosthenes is said to have replied: ‘Delivery, delivery, delivery’ [...] what if the delivery is silence, silence, silence? How does the delivery of silence unsettle, resist, transform, and enrich our idea of a rhetorical delivery, or the tradition itself?” (2004, 150). Within the bounds of transitional justice, specifically honoring the survivor/victim-focused framework, silence *unsettles* as utterance is sought to soothe actors and bystanders; silence *resists* by reclaiming authorship of experiential knowledge and buffering against dominant entities seeking to co-opt the truth; silence *transforms* calls for reconciliation⁴⁸ into interventions predicated on dignity and healing; silence *enriches* inclusive forms of justice by placing the desires and needs of survivors/victims above all other actions.

To illustrate this point, the first page of the TTJC program features a poem titled, “My People” by Connie Roberts. Roberts’ poetry draws on her experiences growing up in an industrial school in Ireland and she shares, “One way of healing yourself from childhood trauma is to own your own story” (2016). Part of that ownership derives from the autonomy of dictating silence or speech on your own terms. Offering a glimpse into that process, Roberts’ poem is “after Patrick Kavanagh’s ‘My People’ & in response to Caranua⁴⁹ CEO Mary Higgins’ remarks in the *Irish Times* and on *RTE’s Liveline*” (2018). The poem revolves around an unfolding of *cara nua* – Irish for new friend – as it is arranged around a dialogue between people who are recently acquainted. *My People* eloquently tugs on the tension that often accompanies inchoate relationships, but cleverly replaces wonder with distrust – representing a primary obstacle within obtaining transitional justice as the focus shifts away from the needs of survivors/victims. More directly, rather than approaching *cara nua* with receptivity, the stranger is instantly resistive and circumspect – bristling at the presence of deliberate silence – seemingly resentful of the way silence is unpredictable and inconvenient to them. Unique to the context, the poem begins with the stranger’s⁵⁰ uncouth demand to know more about “these people” at once othering the

⁴⁸ Native scholar, Otis Halfmoon, interrogates reconciliation as an inept intervention for marginalised populations. He notes, “You are going to hear the word reconciliation. Reconciliation between our families—of our peoples [...] I am here to say to you that reconciliation is a good word, but if you dissect that word—look into what that word really means [...] in accounting terms for instance, that means the books are balanced [...] But for too many Indian people the books will never be balanced [...] so I introduce another word [...] heal. To heal. That is a simple word, but a very powerful word” (2006).

⁴⁹ “Caranua is an independent State Body set up to help people who, as children, experienced abuse in residential institutions in Ireland and have received settlements, Redress Board or Court awards” (Caranua).

⁵⁰ Roberts noted that she is the poet and Higgins is the stranger. Also, the text attributed to the “stranger” is verbatim from Higgins’ aforementioned remarks.

poet and violating the intentional acts of rhetorical silence previously exercised by marginalised populations. Roberts writes:

“My People”

Stranger: Tell me about these people,
these damaged people.
Is it true that the hole in
them cannot be filled,
that the damage is so
deep it doesn't matter
what anyone does,
it's never going to be enough
to satisfy them, make them feel
cared for, loved, honoured?

Poet: I'll tell you about my people.
They are the bravest people I know.
For 50, 60, 70 years, their bones
have carried the stones of their past.
So, every now and again, they buckle
from the belt of ago.
Can you blame them for wanting
wrongs righted?

Stranger: Ah, now, my new friend,
fair is fair,
don't these people's grievances
suit a narrative,
of the big, bad State?
Of the big, bad, religious?

Poet: O, stranger,
it takes a storm
to raise a
sunken forest,
for the shin-high, petrified
pine stumps to emerge.
It's the winter squall that gifts
the red deer antlers,
the black-mud horse skull
and the wattled walkway. (2)

Roberts demonstrates the unique linguistic power of poetry by highlighting the opposing tensions of the genre. Poetry inhabits a public and performative space, while simultaneously harnessing unspeakable, silent moments, such as a brief pause for breath or the prolonged stillness of meditative reflection. Silence is powerful when enacted on the terms of those previously marginalised. For instance, the silence that the stranger fractures at the opening of the poem represents the willfulness of dominant voices in their desire to control the narrative through demanding answers and accelerating resolution. But rhetorical silence resists by drawing dom-

inant voices closer to the source – requiring them to bend and contort their bodies in an effort to hear – to make meaning – to witness and honor silence as dictated by marginalised voices. By allowing the discomfort of silence to exist as a rhetoric, to nurture its desire to unfurl in the muted rhythms of poetry, and with an absence of cacophonous, explanatory narratives imbued in apologia, the capacity for transitional justice expands through the actualisation of rhetorical listening which performs as a complimentary tactic of change.

7. *Rhetorical Listening*

Situated within a post-apology context, Kenny's declaration that the women of the Magdalen Laundries are free to put down what they are carrying, by surrendering their stories, maintains a persistent pattern of not listening to marginalised populations. Further, this attempted usurpation amplifies the exigency to foster transitional justice, as listening is a desideratum. Feminist rhetorician, Jacqueline Jones Royster, demonstrates a need for speakers, especially whose voices have been marginalised, to be "well-heard" (1996, 38). To achieve this positionality Royster questions, "How do we listen? How do we demonstrate that we honor and respect the person talking and what that person is saying [...]? How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response?" (*ibidem*). The answer to these questions provides the scaffolding necessary to build processes that enable justice to flourish – processes that encourage the exchange of ideas across disparate viewpoints, that facilitate meaning making, and eventually establish understanding and collaboration.

A pivotal shift towards a position of being well-heard occurred on 6 June 2018, when the women of the Magdalen Laundries met for a listening session⁵¹ at Dublin's Mansion House Round Room. The event circulated around three questions, "What should we know about the Magdalene Laundries?", "What lessons should we learn from what happened there?" and "How should we remember what happened?" (O'Donnell 2018b). The listening exercise maintained the survivor/victim-centered approach of transitional justice in that participant responses were situated to inform next steps. To this end, Krista Ratcliffe's framework of rhetorical listening highlights how marginalised groups may utilise a bottom up approach to ensure they are well-heard, especially when confronting significant obstacles. Ratcliffe offers that rhetorical listening "signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to *any* person, text, or culture" (2005, 17). While there are critiques⁵² of rhetorical listening, it is evident that minority and marginalised populations are capable of situating rhetorical listening as a tactic of change – a strategy that accentuates how strategic resistance is calculated and centered on the dignity and immanent value of individuals. Such strategising occurs when events like the listening session create space for marginalised voices to tell their stories, on their own terms, which enables rhetorical listening to happen. Ratcliffe explains, "[...] identifications, especially cross-cultural identifications, are sometimes difficult to achieve. Such identifications may be troubled by history, uneven power dynamics, and ignorance" (1). Thus, when the women of the Magdalen Laundries, or aligned advocacy groups, initiate opportunities for rhetorical listening they disrupt the obstacles that inhibit being heard.

⁵¹ "The gathering of the women fulfills key parts of the Magdalene Restorative Justice Scheme [...] which recommended that women who wished to meet other survivors be facilitated and that survivors of the Magdalene institutions be publicly commemorated" (O'Donnell 2018b).

⁵² Romeo García offers a critique of rhetorical listening, "There is already a tendency [...] to characterize minoritized and racialized communities as communities/sites of resistance simply in terms of resistance. When [...] seen through this lens, their rhetoric is oversimplified and cast as reactionary [...]" (2018, 12). García continues, "It matters how we listen. Ratcliffe is correct, 'resistance is slippery'" (137).

More specifically, the genre of apologia, particularly in a contemporary context, ushers in notions of closure and resolution on the schedule of the rhetor – not the recipient, which denotes an obstruction of transitional justice. To underscore the extent to which the apology was situated in apologia and absent of rhetorical listening a keyword search proves instructive. The entirety of Kenny’s apology is 2,086 words. Derivatives of listen appear only twice (listen and listened). The word understand, or any of its derivatives, is expunged from the text – it never appears; the same is true for gender, communication, and communicate. Of note, story is used twice and stories five times, but truth appears only once. The use of story/stories is quite calculated when juxtaposed by TTJC’s use of truth telling – there is an inherent dilution of veracity in the way Kenny presents the testimony of the women of the Magdalen Laundries. To counter a dominant, dismissive stance rhetorical listening requires that:

[U]nderstanding means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent—with the intent to understand not just the claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well [...] [R]hetorical listeners might best invert the term *understanding* and define it as *standing under*, that is, consciously acknowledging all our particular—and very fluid—standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics. (Ratcliffe 2005, 28)

Rather than search for a solution, it is perhaps more fruitful to seek understanding, or more specifically engage in the process of standing under. Within the bounds of transitional justice, rhetorical listening presents as a powerful mechanism for survivor/victim self-directed agency; inherent in the shift between forms of justice is the emergence of survivor/victim-focused action. O’Donnell observes, “Listening to Magdalene survivors is a small but historically significant step in the transitional justice movement towards establishing governance [...] founded on recognising the dignity and value of (even) the most economically and socially vulnerable [...] We have much to learn from those who managed to survive the Magdalene institutions” (2018b). That is to say, when the needs of discourse communities collide, those who are not directly impacted, such as politicians or the general public, must endure through silences that are uncomfortable as it is through this process that they may begin to listen with intent. Thus, when Kenny called for the women of the Magdalen Laundries to surrender their story he entangled himself in a rhetoric that fails to listen.

But stories are not easily usurped as Judy Rohrer avows, “We are the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories others tell about us” (2016, 189). Rather than attempt to sever the story from those who lived it – rhetorical listening disentangles the lived experience and truth-telling inherent in transitional justice from the self-serving aspects of contemporary apologia. To this end, in her TTJC presentation titled, “Digital Tools for Responding to Institutional Abuse”, Emilie Pine offered innovative strategies for expanding the purview of analysing government documents, while simultaneously fostering a survivor/victim centered approach. Pine’s research intersects meaningfully with rhetorical listening as related to the *Echoes from the Past: Listening to Survivors of Childhood Abuse*⁵³ walking tour of the Goldenbridge area.

⁵³ *Echoes from the Past* is an audio and walking tour app, which aims to give users some insight into children’s experience of the Irish Industrial school system. It is a verbatim project based entirely on the 2009 Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and funded by the Irish Research Council New Horizons project *Industrial Memories*, based in the School of English, Drama and Film at UCD (*Echoes from the Past: Listening to Survivors of Childhood Abuse*).

Referring to that tour, Pine emphasizes, “The onus of responsibility is on the listener. This isn’t a silent event – survivors have given testimony. This project requires the listener to work harder to listen as they need to hear the audio track and imagine what the area must have looked like” (2018). Such instances are rhetorically potent and serve to maintain non-recurrence as the act of listening with intent compels participants to embody the experience being shared. To do this work, listening must be embraced as a rhetorical act, one that unlocks the potential for marginalised voices to be well-heard as per Royster’s call.

8. *Future Directions: Transformative Justice*

In contemplating the future of maintaining justice, it is instructive to consider how the shift from restorative to transitional justice acts as a blueprint for consistent evolution. In her lecture at TTJC, Rosemary Nagy shared that some scholars are “rethinking the term historical trauma as it is something that is ongoing in many instances” (2018); thus the generational impacts⁵⁴ as articulated by Merritt and O’Gorman (among many others) necessitate the espousal of responsive justice processes. Such adaptations begin with considerations rooted in transformative justice, which builds on foundational elements of restorative and transitional justice, but pivots towards schematic upheavals predicated on action. To this end, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin underscores how transformative justice is an appropriate step in the evolution of marginalised groups exercising tactics of change as there is “an absence of gender in truth processes – gender has been substantially missing in transitional justice [...] the experience of women has been persistently ignored” (2018). Thus, in the spirit of nimble responsiveness, the women of the Magdalen Laundries and advocacy groups will continue to monitor the pulse of justice by maintaining momentum as they consider innovative strategies for amplifying marginalised voices.

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⁵⁴ According to McCarthy, “[...] approximately 25 percent of the children in the industrial school system were children of Magdalenes, and many of these female children were made into Magdalenes themselves” (2010, 4).

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Miscellanea



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“I was an atom in the world of life”: James Dawson Burn’s *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy*

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Abstract:

James Dawson Burn’s *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy* (first published anonymously in 1855) relates the often-amusing life’s adventures of a man coping with various forms of social marginalization, as a vagrant, an illegitimate child, and an Irish immigrant in England. A story of personal reform and social reintegration, *A Beggar Boy* seemingly relies on Victorian cultural and literary conventions and sustains the values which Burn saw as governing middle-class life. However, subtle transgressions of traditional formal and generic paradigms reveal a tension between the individual’s unique perception of the self and the demands of Victorian middle-class discourse. An immediate and considerable success amongst the Victorians, today *A Beggar Boy* can help expand the parameters of discussion related to Irish autobiography and its perceived features.

Keywords: Autobiography, Irish migrants, Marginality, Vagrancy, 19th century

1. “the most pleasing part of history”

When Isaac D’Israeli published his review of the *Memoirs of Percival Stockdale* in 1809, he emphasized that he believed the English poet to be too obscure a figure to attract the readers’ attention with his life story. With some concern, D’Israeli added that he expected “to see an epidemical rage for auto-biography break out, more wide in its influence and more pernicious in its tendency than the strange madness of the Abderites” (1809, 339). His fears were soon justified, as the following decades saw an unprecedented proliferation of autobiographical writing in the British Isles and other parts of Europe. It was, indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century that autobiography gained legitimacy, established itself as a distinct genre and started claiming an aesthetic standing.

It seems a striking fact that in such an outpouring of life stories Irish experiences have often gone unnoticed, or that their specificity has scarcely been considered. Various factors could have contributed to this partial neglect. For one thing, autobiography has long been a “Cinderella genre” of Irish literature (Harte 2007, 1) which has not yet undergone the same systematic analysis as other forms of writing. Given that scholarly efforts have especially focused on contemporary authors and texts, the range of observable distinctive features of Irish autobiography is still rather limited: authors are said to privilege a tragicomic mode and show a recurring interest in exile (see Grubgeld 2004, 128, 16), they often filter their life events through the lenses of “nation and society” (Harte 2007, 3), and their accounts of childhood experience are rich in standardized elements (see Lynch 2009, 82-83) – or, to borrow Frank McCourt’s words, they illustrate how “[w]orse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood” (1996, 11). These “Irish” constituents or conventions seem quite provisional in the face of the historical diversity that characterizes autobiographical writing. A “desire to relate a range of previously unspoken (or only whispered) stories from the margins” (Smyth 2001, 134) has emerged somewhat constantly throughout Irish history, finding expression in texts such as Richard Boyle’s *Remembrances* (1623), Christian Davies’ *Life* (1740), or Dorothea Herbert’s *Retrospections* (1806, published 1929). Clearly, the specificity of Irish autobiographical writing needs further definition against the backdrop of its centuries-long tradition.

It is also true that the nineteenth century is in many ways a rather problematic period in the field of Irish literary studies. Ireland contributed to the cultural milieu of the time with many prolific writers, but most of their production sank under the weight of the triple-decker Victorian novel and their impact on the public did not equal that of Dickens, Eliot or Thackeray’s works. Irish autobiography poses similar questions of ‘canonicity’: while this genre was becoming a widespread means of self-definition for the English middle-class, in Ireland it was chiefly appropriated by the nationalist discourse. As Sean Ryder notes, the most influential Irish autobiographies of the time were written by Theobald Wolfe Tone (1826), John Mitchel (1854), Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa (1898), as well as a number of leading figures of the Young Ireland and Fenian movements (2007, 14). The Irish nationalist heroes’ inspirational life stories, as can be expected, did not excite equal sympathy in all the English-speaking world; they had little diffusion outside Irish borders and struggled to reach a wider audience even decades after their publication.

One Irish nineteenth-century life story, however, did enjoy an immediate and considerable success: James Dawson Burn’s *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy* (first published anonymously) went through five editions between 1855 and 1882, becoming one of the most viable autobiographies of the time. Written in an epistolary form addressed to Burn’s eldest son Thomas, this text details the often-amusing adventures of a man who needed to cope with various forms of social marginalization, as he was a “wandering outcast” (Burn 1855, 138), an illegitimate child, and an Irish immigrant in England. Born out of wedlock in Ulster around 1800, Burn claims to have been “on tramp” (87) through Ireland, Scotland and England for most of his life. After having spent his childhood wandering and suffering at the hands of his stepfather McNamee, who was either drunk or a victim of delirium tremens, Burn found himself suddenly transferred to the care of his callous biological father, a weaver named McBurney, who was based in Killaleagh. Feeling no connection with McBurney, his family, or Ireland, Burn soon fled to England, consigning himself to years of solitary vagrancy. With hindsight, he sees this decision as “early proof of my determination of character”, for “[h]ad I remained in Ireland, I think my natural energy of mind would have been crushed, and I might have remained a ragged outcast

during my life” (197-198). As an adult, he struggled to find financial stability because of failed attempts at various trades and businesses, or difficulties he encountered when his ability to work was hindered by severe illnesses, including the same typhoid fever that caused his first wife’s death. Burn seems to consider also his brief involvement in trade unionism as one among the diseases that he contracted, a “madness” (137) from which he soon distanced himself.

Notably, *A Beggar Boy* contains most of the elements that are now considered typical of Irish autobiography. Burn dwells upon his miserable childhood, emphasizing how he “was born in poverty, nursed in sorrow, and reared in difficulties, hardships, and privations” (2), he discusses social questions regarding the condition of lower classes in the British Isles, and he often identifies with an exile, in that he “wandered forth into the wide world a fugitive from kindred and from home” (47). In addition, Burn adopts a tragicomic view of life, which finds expression in a mixture of modes and frequent wordplay. For instance, here is the account of the first time he tried alcohol:

After walking about 100 yards after my last draw, I fell down on the road as if I had been shot, and I knew no more about the history of the world for forty-eight hours, and all the parties interested but myself, imagined that my rum-drinking was over. However, the doctor being anxious to prevent a coroner’s inquest, pulled me back from the world of spirits. (58)

A Beggar Boy owes much to the English picaresque tradition, being constructed as a sequence of episodes from Burn’s life, who constantly remembers “little” or “very good” anecdotes of people and places involved in his wanderings (e.g. 75, 89, 114, 159, 167). Although these incidents might be expected to play a role in the unfolding of the autobiographical memoir and in the development of the self, their actual import consists in constructing a general discourse about mid-century moral values and choices. There is little doubt that Burn is making a claim for respectability by relating his experience according to upper-class models; by the time he wrote his autobiography, his days as a “beggar boy” were behind him, he had raised his social status and was striving for further achievements. In fact, especially in the last letter, Burn seems to foresee further opportunities for his future and, almost in an Ulyssean-like fashion, hints at his need to pursue new adventures that would bring to completion the “unfinished processes through which I have passed” (193). It is not surprising that, after the success of *A Beggar Boy*, Burn wrote other books, engaged in a series of new occupations and even resumed his political interests¹. He had clearly intended to further elevate his social and financial position, and a first step in that direction was his autobiography, where he attuned his discourse to popular literature and met middle-class expectations.

In particular, Burn addresses the wide readership of Dickens’ novels, a writer he admired so enthusiastically that he dedicated the first edition of *A Beggar Boy* to him. What Burn attempted to learn from Dickens was especially the ability to “delight and instruct” (iii), a point that is repeatedly emphasized in the initial tribute. Even when he introduces the most troubled aspects of his experience and discusses the most alien contexts he visited, Burn carefully manages for them to be appealing to a middle-class audience. This was probably one of the reasons for the success of *A Beggar Boy* in the nineteenth century: it excited curiosity for an unknown and mysterious underworld that was never too frightening or too shocking for the reader. The underworld in question, of course, is that of beggars and vagrants, who were regarded by Victorian society with preoccupation, if not outright alarm. According to Charles Edward Lester’s estimates, in the year

¹ For instance, see Burn 1858 and 1865.

1848 alone the city of London relieved vagrants in 41,743 occasions and, in the same year, twelve English parishes offered help to “poor wretches” 130,523 times (1866, 24). The numbers of the wandering poor had so increased by mid-century that even Dickens, often a champion of the destitute, lamented their presence on the streets and warned his readers of their many deceits in “Tramps”, first published in *All the Year Round* in 1860. Yet, when Burns talks about his fellow “wandering vagabonds” (1855, 7), they become “*artistes*” invested with “genteel mysteries” (9, 16) or mere buffoons, the protagonists of amusing episodes such as that of the lady who “was short of the sense of hearing” but, as occasion required, saw her capacity miraculously restored (7-8). The anti-society is also normalized and rendered more familiar, as even among vagrants “there is an aristocracy as exclusive as any that prevails among the higher orders of society” (8).

As the illegitimate child of itinerant beggars, Burn carefully mediates his own otherness to the readers. The fact that he is also an Irish migrant, for instance, needs to be almost searched for in the text – Burn’s first statement about his origins is, “[w]here or how I came into the world I have no very definite idea” (3). Then, he talks about his Irish parents and step-father, proudly comments on his change of surname from McBurney to Burn to “sever the only remaining link that bound me to my family” (47), but he almost inadvertently drops the information that his nickname used to be “Mack” at least until 1848 (139), suggesting that he “tore two syllables” (47) from his name not long before writing his autobiography. Uprooted from his motherland and his family, Burn lacks “a stable sense of who he is and where he belongs” (Harte 2009, 24). Indeed, *A Beggar Boy* betrays an anxious desire of belonging and normalization; Burn’s efforts are clearly directed towards creating an autobiography that responds to literary tradition, relies on contemporary stereotypes, and draws upon common cultural knowledge. The most original aspects of Burn’s work emerge, however, because of this seemingly broad acceptance of contemporary standards and cultural codes: conventions are rarely fully embraced, and the elements of variations allow insight into tensions between the individual’s unique perception of the self and the demands of Victorian middle-class discourses.

2. “*mere worldly education*”

A Beggar Boy opens with a short essay on autobiography, clearly an attempt to find a suitable justification to publish the life story of a lesser-known figure. However, by the 1850s, the idea that autobiography need not be the special province of the great was already commonly accepted. Some twenty years after *A Beggar Boy* was published, *The Blackwood Magazine* even suggested that, because of their “instructive and entertaining” function, “the best of our autobiographies are those that have chiefly a domestic or personal interest” (Anon. 1879, 488). The fact that autobiographical writings could contain edifying or instructive elements was indeed one of the reasons why the initial wariness towards this genre had been overcome. Burn capitalizes on this mainstream cultural discourse and validates his work in the light of its didactic purpose, for, he says, his life “may be of service” to both his son and other youngsters, to guide them “in the path of duty”, because “in some cases, my conduct may be found not unworthy of imitation” (1855, 1, 2). What at first glance seems to be a fairly conventional opening apology takes on added significance and finds unexpected development in the text, where Burn proceeds to elaborate a sort of philosophy of childhood and education.

A Beggar Boy illustrates a path of self-formation that is deeply rooted in childhood. Burn details his progressive acquisition of skills and abilities by reconstructing the evolution of his understanding in an almost Wordsworthian manner: “My capacity for thinking was at this time beginning to expand, and my mind began to chronicle passing events” (6). In addition, he feels

that, when very young, "I was a thing without a mind, and might be said to have neither body nor soul of my own – that plastic part of my nature, which was to become my only patrimony, was being moulded under the most degrading influences and corrupt examples" (19).

The child starts his process of growth and formation from an initial state of 'emptiness' or absence – almost a state of non-existence, in which he is not even considered to be a human being ("a thing"); then, the shape he assumes depends upon external influences. Burn seems to have in mind John Locke's Enlightenment child of reason, and the blank slate, or the so-called *tabula rasa* which the philosopher believed to characterize the young mind (1824 [1689], 77)². To Locke, each pupil is like "white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" in the hands of his guardians and tutors (1712 [1693], 322). In the same vein, Burn ascribes the problems he encountered later in life with those responsible for his early formation, especially his parents and their dereliction of duty: "Having received a considerable part of my education in such a romantic school, it would be strange indeed if I could have escaped without being subject to the impressions consequent upon such a course of training" (1855, 34). The mind, Locke says, is guided into a certain way of thinking from childhood, when individuals are "most susceptible of lasting impressions", and neglect or wrong influences can be detrimental to the appropriate development of the understanding (1824, 422). Indeed, Locke believes that when ideas are joined in the mind by habituation from childhood, "it is not in the power of reason to help us and relieve us from the effects of it" (1824, 423). Following Locke, Burn suggests that once habits or frames of mind are instilled into the child, reason is hardly capable of undermining them; his upbringing made him "a dull dog" (1855, 193), and learning from experience for him was difficult, or better, "above my capacity", for "my mind [...] only received such impressions as it was most susceptible of embracing" (180).

Given his predicament as a child, Burn, like Locke, recommends that one avoid giving too much credit to opinions offered by parents and teachers³. *A Beggar Boy* includes a sort of categorization of sources of human knowledge where direct and autonomous experience of the world is ranked as the most important element:

The world is a great school for human education, and the different grades of society we mingle with are our monitors. The methods of instruction may be clearly divided into three classes: the first and most impressive is that which we receive from those we associate with. Our lessons in this department are of a practical character, and embrace the every-day acts of our lives, whether they relate to business or pleasure. The second class of instruction is that which we receive from clergymen and other public instructors, and its object is to impress upon us the beauty and advantage of a correct rule of life. The last source of information is, that which is derived from books, which may be said to embrace the whole round of human knowledge. (*Ibidem*)

Burn's line of reasoning has much in common with the *Essay*: he is offering his own answer to Locke's question, "Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? [...] Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge?" Whereas Locke answers in "one word", "experience" (1824, 77), Burn dwells on different options, especially on how books can help develop the individual in both a moral and an intellectual way. Near the close of *A Beggar Boy*, a short essay discusses

² Actually, the expression "*tabula rasa*" is never used in Locke's *Essay*, and it only appears – as "*rasa tabula*" – in "Abstract of the Essay", a manuscript first published by Peter King in 1829, then re-published with emendations in 1830. See Locke 1830, 231.

³ See Locke 1824, 50-51.

the importance that books have in self-fashioning and offers some advice on how to use them properly to educate children. The Bible is, of course, the first book Burn recommends; after that, “Historical books may be fairly placed at the top of all other sources of human knowledge” (1855, 195). When he starts discussing fiction, his tone acquires unusual emphasis:

There are other two classes of books which I think are perhaps more useful on their shelves than for any other purpose to which they can be turned. The first of these are the works of maudling sentimentalists; these books are full of language without meaning, and pretty flowers without fragrance! Among them are the measured effusions of men who do not possess sufficient specific gravity to keep them on the earth; their works are, therefore, too *starry* for common mortals!! The second class, comprise the works of authors who manufacture plots and incidents to suit distorted minds; the persons of their little dramas are made up of exaggerated shreds of humanity, who think and act under a lunar influence, and therefore continually outrage all our common notions of congruity!

From the above observations, you must not suppose that I am opposed to all works of fiction; on the contrary, I am of the opinion that some of the best books in the English language are to be found in this class; I need only instance Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield* and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. There is a charm about these books which will always possess a fascinating influence over the minds of their readers. (196)

In pointing out the fictional works with a positive effect on the readers’ minds, Burn omits to mention another “fascinating” novel that has clearly influenced him: in fact, both *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *Robinson Crusoe* are cited in *The Personal History of David Copperfield* among the books that have an impact on David’s mind, determining how he perceives his life and surroundings (Dickens 1912, 58). If *The Vicar of Wakefield* represents the general cultural and social importance of family life, *Robinson Crusoe* teaches practical survival and utilitarian ethics. The latter book is a point of reference not only for Dickens and his character’s development, but also for Rousseau – who, incidentally, adopts some of Locke’s educational tenets – and his imaginary pupil Émile. In agreement with Rousseau’s theories, Burn considers reading fictional texts as a potentially dangerous activity, which replaces direct experience of the world with something abstract and impractical; Rousseau also expresses little faith in the young readers’ ability to cope with figurative language, or what Burns defines “pretty flowers without fragrance” (1855, 196). The only novel that Émile is permitted to read is *Robinson Crusoe*, a story relatively free of corrupting influences and dealing with practical skills while describing solitary life: young men are meant to be self-sufficient or even alone in life. Similarly, *A Beggar Boy* constructs the image of a solitary child who survives a hostile environment and faces life on the road without the comfort of a loving family or stable friendships, supported only by the occasional help of middle-class benefactors. Burn’s self-image as a young man shows various points of contact with Crusoe, almost fulfilling Rousseau’s plans for Émile:

Je veux [...] qu’il pense être Robinson lui-même; qu’il se voie habillé de peaux, portant un grand bonnet, un grand sabre, tout le grotesque équipage de la figure, au parasol près dont il n’aura pas besoin. Je veux qu’il s’inquiète des mesures à prendre, si ceci ou cela venait à lui manquer; qu’il examine la conduite de son héros, qu’il cherche s’il n’a rien omis, s’il n’y avait rien de mieux à faire [...]. (1848 [1762], 252)⁴

⁴ In Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom’s English translation, “I want him to think he is Robinson himself, to see himself dressed in skins, wearing a large cap, carrying a large saber and all the rest of the character’s grotesque equipment, with the exception of the parasol, which he will not need. I want him to worry about the measures to take of this or that were lacking to him; to examine his hero’s conduct; to investigate whether he omitted anything, whether there was nothing to do better [...]” (Rousseau 2010, 115).

Some of the most ironic and light passages of *A Beggar Boy* are indeed devoted to observing how young Burn deals with the "grotesque equipment" of clothes that never fit him, are too old, or too ragged, so that "no young urchin could possibly have a better suit for ventilation, and what was more, I had a numerous *live stock* on my body with the addition of the itch to keep me warm" (1855, 40). Burn's luggage is also rather eccentric: he leaves his father's house furnished with no "staff, nor scrip, nor money in my pocket", but carrying around an "old turf-bag", which is his "only patrimony" (47). Similarly to Rousseau's, Burn's child progresses in life through identification with the protagonist of one of the first great English-language novels.

Burn's adventures and switches from one job to another as an adult still remind us of Defoe's characters, but with a significant difference: the former beggar boy admits that his lack of skills has hindered his accomplishments in various occasions. When in the hat trade, he does not foresee a change in fashion, and when trying to start his own taverns, his attempts fail for what he defines, adopting again Locke's language, a "want of business habits" (130). In this sense, Regenia Gagnier observes:

[...] Burn blames himself for his failure in business. Assuming a liberal ethic of autonomy and progress, he concludes that, despite no dearth of opportunity, he was personally deficient in the struggle to maintain either self or social position, and he therefore believes himself uneducable [...]. Clearly it is ideology – or hegemony in Antonio Gramsci's sense of popular consent to the political order – that distorts Burn's evaluation of his experience and induces the shame and guilt pervading the text. (1990, 108)

Because he constructs such an articulated and multifaceted discourse about education and self-growth, I do not believe that Burn blames himself for the difficulties he encountered in his business enterprise, nor that he expresses feelings of shame and guilt. On the contrary, he shows to be proud of his climb from beggar boy to respectable worker, a change he attributes to his Smilesian "character" when boasting in both his introduction and conclusion about "what energy and determination of character are able to accomplish when rightly directed" (1855, 200). Burn's discourse on failure is in part an expression of rethorical modesty and in part an assessment of the education that he received from his family, who is denounced for having sent him out into the world without the appropriate instruments to control his predicament and achieve success. For this, he especially blames his biological father: "If [my father] had sent me to school, which he could have done, and assisted me to go into the world with only an ordinary education, he would have saved me from being the foot-ball of fortune, and leading the life of a wandering vagrant for years" (44).

His mother, too, had a role in his misfortunes, as she "always stood between me and the flood which leads on to fortune" (24); after Burn discovers that he has a second step-father, he says, "I had been blessed with *three fathers* and two mothers, and I was then as comfortably situated as if I never had either one or the other, excepting that I was a living monument of the folly of both father and mother" (82). Raised by a mother that frequently misplaced her feelings by settling for untrustworthy men, a biological father incapable of any affection, and a stepfather who was too fond of alcohol, Burn is not surprised that "instead of regulating my feelings by the rule of reason, my passions dragged me headlong through the by-ways of folly" (122). Burn suggests that it is despite a lack of useful professional and personal "habits" (understood in a Lockean sense) that he has "braved every difficulty" (198) and performed the uncommon and admirable feat of advancing his position and acquiring respectability.

As emerges from the passage quoted above, Burn believed that the disadvantaged condition suffered in his youth made him especially subject to the whims of unpredictable fortune and

unable to keep his life under control. *A Beggar Boy* is extraordinarily rich in language related to “fate”, “fortune”, “accidents”, “trade-winds”, and “storms” tossing the protagonist in various directions (e.g. 18, 39, 198, 129, 162). To some extent, Burn’s proclamation that his strength of character won him success, which is very appropriate to reform narratives, is constantly undermined by references to how chance truly determines individual life. He emphasizes, for instance, that “my life was frequently on the turning point, when the merest accident would have made me a vagabond without redemption” (103). Therefore, as Burn implies, social marginality can, at fate’s will, be cast on anyone: “the smallest accident in the machinery of a family dependent upon labour, is frequently sufficient to turn the current of life from one of comparative happiness to irredeemable misery” (170-171). No one is the only master of their own fortune, as chance can work counter to any determination of character or effort made by the individual. In this sense, Burn disregards the middle-class belief that the poor can solve their problems through individual hard work, or that any other member of society can maintain their position at will. Even more significantly, he specifies, “I have frequently been impelled to the performance of actions from the sheer pressure of circumstances, against which my better nature revolted, and such I believe to have been the case with many others” (182). All human beings would act similarly under the same conditions, and the morality of all members of society is equally precarious: the Victorian association between the poor and depravity makes sense only for “men in comfortable circumstances”, who are scarcely familiar with “the difference between theory and practice” (121). Therefore, the actual failure portrayed in *A Beggar Boy* is that of Victorian beliefs and values, among them the ideals of industry, self-determination and character, which prove to be disconnected from a dynamic and living reality.

3. “fragments of the genus homo”

The influence of Locke’s works on Burn probably extended beyond the educational tenets included in them. Between 1684 and 1691, Locke offered his friend Edward Clarke some advice on the education of his children through various letters, which were then published in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). In the opening dedication to Clarke, Locke explains the history of the *Thoughts* and emphasizes their informal character: “the Reader will easily find”, he writes, “in the Familiarity and Fashion of the Style, that they were rather the private Conversation of two Friends than a Discourse designed for public view” (1712, n. p.). This “private Conversation” became a great success, as the *Thoughts* went through three editions before Locke’s death and other twenty-five editions over the course of the eighteenth century. Burn may have had this exemplary precedent in mind when he conceived his epistolary autobiography in thirteen letters, a form that he later discarded in a revised edition (Burn 1882).

Usually, letters are employed to privilege a sense of authenticity and to establish the immediate response to events as a pivotal moment of signification. Since epistolary writing is traditionally connected with attributes of spontaneity and naturalness, fictional correspondence is often endowed with linguistic and stylistic choices that make the text sound ‘artless’. Moreover, the epistolary form is linked to expectations of some dialogic exchange, where a voice responds at least indirectly to another and the shared world of the writer and addressee underlies such dialogue. None of these features, however, seem to concern Burn’s text. The sequence of letters in *A Beggar Boy* has nothing of a ‘real time’ interaction: the text maintains the structure of a conventional retrospective autobiography, with a considerable gap between the events and their recording. Burn restages his life at a distance both chronologically and emotionally, adopting a ‘monological’ narrative and a polished and artfully crafted style, which

is devoid of any sense of spontaneity. One should not discount the manner of intimacy that letters do seem to offer, but, as I will discuss in more detail shortly, Burn writes something personal that never becomes intimate. In other words, the epistolary form scarcely affects the text except for an initial address to Thomas and a short edifying discourse at the beginning of each 'letter'. After the opening salutation, the writer seems to forget all about his addressee, as well as about the social conventions pertaining to correspondence, such as the traditional conclusion with a variation on "Yours" and a signature. Perhaps, Burn employs the epistolary form as a mere strategy to elicit among his readers an empathetic reaction based on shared experiences of parenting and educating children. Furthermore, he might want to shed light on a successful aspect of his life which is never explicitly stated or brought to the foreground in *A Beggar Boy*: the letters show that, unlike his parents, Burn established a constructive and close relationship with his children, he cares about their education and is interested in handing on his baggage of experience. By presenting himself as a judicious and affectionate father, he also adds to the aura of middle-class respectability surrounding his self-image.

Although *A Beggar Boy* does not take on the formal features of epistolary communication, the sequence of letters is an important conceptual framework for the narrative constitution of the self. Whereas more conventional forms of autobiography are expected to apply a controlling structure to the story of one's life and mould the fragments of experience into a coherent whole, a series of letters does not need to be quite so cohesive. Letters display an inherent plurality of forms; they allow the disconnected flux of experience to emerge, in that the self can assume as many different declinations as required by varying circumstances or contexts. Borrowing Lilian Hellman's words, one might say that letters are "repeated presentations of self in contradictory stories whose lack of coherence or reason parallels life's patterns" (1990, 123). By adopting an epistolary form, therefore, *A Beggar Boy* accentuates a sense of fragmentation and transformation of identity, together with a difficulty of individuation stemming from vagrancy and the lack of a 'home'. Since Burn, as we have seen, is interested in mental processes, letters may also highlight how chaotically human memory works.

Burn's style seems so far from the spontaneous immediacy of letter-writing that it has given rise to doubts concerning the authenticity of his biographical material. Julia Wardhaugh, for instance, remarks that *A Beggar Boy* was "clearly written by an educated man" (2017, 63), suggesting that the author did not actually start his life as a beggar as he claims in the book. Undeniably, the former beggar boy is well versed in letters, figurative language, and rhetorical figures: the already quoted "I was born in poverty, nursed in sorrow, and reared in difficulties, hardships, and privations" (Burn 1855, 2), for example, is an instance of double tricolon. Burn favours learned turns of phrase such as "matter of palliation" (5) and adopts a flowery speech, which he sometimes overstates with ironic intent. In so doing, even the situations that would be scarcely appealing to a Victorian audience, such as his mother living with the beggar and discharged soldier McNamee, acquire a peculiar glow of respectability: "When my mother put herself under the protection of this gallant defender of his country, he was making an honourable living by appealing to the charitably disposed members of society" (*ibidem*). Burn does not avoid reproducing slang or dialect, but he generally uses it to some effect, most commonly a comedic one; he also specifies that he has never used the language of the 'lower' sections of society, as "my tongue was free from anything in the shape of provincialism" (103) and now even the "*Cockney* phraseology of my young days has lost much of its primitive simplicity" (23).

Language both reflects and contributes to the sense of fragmentation that is present on a structural level in *A Beggar Boy* through a 'Babelic' medley of tongues: the autobiography

includes vagrants' jargons, working class slang, Irish and Scottish dialects, expressions in Italian (e.g. "*con amore*"; 11), Latin (e.g. "*genus homo*"; 9, 113) and French. Burn shows his familiarity with both French and Shakespeare when describing his uniform as a member of the Northumberland militia:

The shoes were so capacious that, with a little enlargement, and a *Siamese* union, I might have gone on a voyage of discovery in them! The chapeau, instead of being a *fit*, was an extinguisher, and when I put it on I required to bid the world good night! The longitude of the trowsers was of such a character that I could not find my bearings in them, and the coat was of such ample dimensions that if I had had a family it would have made a cover for the whole of us. I dare say you have some idea how an ordinary sized man requires to be made up for the representation of Sir John Falstaff; my case was somewhat similar. [...] The coat required two or three others as companions to keep it from collapsing and burying me in its folds; and the trowsers put me in mind of two respectable towns in France, being *Too-loose* and *Too-long!* (109)

As suggested by the above quotation, Burn's display of erudition is not limited to language and its uses. *A Beggar Boy* includes references to the already mentioned Dickens, Defoe, and Shakespeare, but also to Robert Burns (a favourite), George Byron, Miguel de Cervantes, William Cowper, Oliver Goldsmith, Alexander Pope, Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, the lesser-known Irish writer Susanna Centlivre, as well as *The Arabian Nights*, the legend of *Paddy the Piper*, and many others. This dense web of intertextual relations is often used in a referential way, so that the experience of the protagonist finds an equivalent in literary and fictional worlds that are familiar to the reader; for instance, when roaming the British countryside with his stepfather McNamee, the narrator claims, "I had been the constant companion of my father, whether he was drunk or sober, like Sancho Panza, I was sure to be at this heels" (25). In other cases, Burn comments more profusely on authors and their works in short essays about the "men who erewhile scattered their beautiful flowers in the paths of humanity" (155). As is the case with letter-writing, this conspicuous use of intertextuality plays a relevant role in the process of autobiographical self-construction: quoting so many authors, Burn creates a fragmented and multidimensional narrating 'I', who appears engaged in a struggle to define a solid cultural identity.

Burn truly demonstrates that he has acquired an impressive learning, so the few imprecisions noticeable in his quotations are worthy of attention. When discussing how the principle of honesty can vary between different human beings, Burn uses the phrase "small by degrees and beautifully less" (17), which is a misquotation of Matthew Prior's *Henry and Emma* (1709), "fine by degrees and beautifully less" (line 430; 1793 [1709], 14). The same incorrect quotation must have been very frequent at Burn's time: it appears in magazines, journals and even parliamentary minutes until 1867, when Thomas Knightley published a contribution to *Notes and Queries* amending the widespread mistake and hoping that "now people will think more correctly of the poetry of Matthew Prior" (1867, 271). Burn could have simply fallen into the same error as his contemporaries, but, as suggested by the fact that he puts the phrase in inverted commas, he might also be consciously quoting *Henry and Emma* incorrectly – after all, a 'false' quotation would perfectly fit a discussion about lack of honesty. In Letter II, Burn also transforms the line "Wept o'er his wounds or tales of sorrow done" from Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (line 157; 1770, 9) into "Talked o'er his deeds of sorrow done" (1855, 32). In this case, Goldsmith's description of a suffering Irish soldier is applied to another discharged Irish soldier, Burn's step-father. Once again, the modification of *The Deserted Village* can be the result of a mistake, or perhaps it is an adaptation that better suits McNamee: it is hardly a

coincidence that the misquotation maintains only the idea of sorrows inflicted to others and eliminates any reference to the man's pain and distress. Burn's constant search of literary counterparts for people and events seems to remain frustrated and incomplete, as there can be but a partial identification between life and fiction, or between the present and the past.

A Beggar Boy is further complicated by a rich interdiscursive web of relations, for it occasionally borrows ideas and imagery from the newspapers of its time. This happens especially whenever Burn talks about Ireland, for which he expresses the same hostile feelings that he directs against his biological father. In fact, by rejecting his national identity, Burn rejects also the unloving and unavailable McBurney, for whom he reserved "the most unmitigated hatred" (37). As can then be expected, the descriptions of Ireland and the Irish are rather pitiless in the text; more surprising, instead, is the fact that Burn relies entirely on received opinions and stereotypes to build his case, without formulating any original account – in other words, for once he seems to have fallen short of his usual anecdotes. Indeed, he merely notes that in Killaleagh "I had frequent opportunities of witnessing those outbursts of feeling which arise from party spirit", but no example of such outbursts is given, and what follows is a newspaper-like generalized report of vices and follies of the "half civilized" Irish (42). Burn admits that "Ireland has suffered much from English misgovernment arising from an illiberal and short-sighted policy" (*ibidem*), a statement which echoes the willingness of mid-century press "to concede that Ireland had indeed been the victim of neglect and misgovernment on the part of past generations" (de Nie 2004, 26)⁵. He then comments about the Irish,

Instead of extending the commerce of their country, cultivating the soil, and adding to their social comforts, their time and energies have been wasted in party feuds, and savage forays upon each other. From this state of things, the Irish character had become a problem to the rest of the civilised world, and neither statesmen nor philosophers could find a key to its solution. (1855, 42)

Even the sentence construction, with the repeated use of third-person pronouns, attempts to mark a personal sense of distance, a separateness of experience with the Irish. Here, once again, *A Beggar Boy* almost parrots contemporary press, which, de Nie notes, ascribed Ireland's backwardness to inherent defects in the people's character (2004, 11-12). The harsh word "savage" was frequently used with reference to Ireland by nineteenth-century newspapers, which in turn derived it from descriptions of Africans or Pacific Islanders (12). Burn almost adopts this adjective as a signpost of all things Irish, as he refers it also to the "native of the north of Ireland" John Rooney (1855, 43, 72) and re-employs it in later publications: "Crime against the person in America by Irishmen is marked by much the same characteristics as at home; the same notion of savage justice and false feeling of personal dignity impel them to set themselves above the law by becoming the avengers of their real or supposed wrongs" (1865, 19).

The depersonalised journalistic tone adopted to talk about Ireland sheds light on Burn's complete disconnection from his origins and his family's homeland, connoting a lack of cultural recognition, belonging and security. Burn associates himself with Ireland only in an oblique way: there is a close affinity between the imagery that he uses to talk about his course of life and Henry Mayhew's metaphorical language related to Irish migrants in *London Labour and*

⁵ Michael de Nie also notes that "[i]n October 1847 the *News of the World* reproached other newspapers for parroting traditional anti-Irish stereotypes and asked them to bear in mind 'that it is English misgovernment that has made Ireland what it is – and has reduced the Irish to their present deplorable condition'" (2004, 87).

the London Poor (1851). In the public eye, the cholera epidemic of 1848-49 established a relationship between the spread of the infection, vagrants or wandering beggars and Irish migrants. Therefore, the wandering poor became a “stream of vice and disease”, a “tide of iniquity and fever” that Mayhew described as “continually flowing from town to town, from one end of the land to the other” (1861 [1851], 397). Of course, the water imagery is not a coincidence: the “tide” of iniquity and fever seemed to come across the sea from Ireland. Similarly, Burn describes himself as “a feather on the stream”, “a vessel at sea”, the victim of a “strong tide”, or “carried along by [...] tidal currents” (1855, 122, 86, 199, 83), images which seem to stand for the force of fate and the flood of migration simultaneously.

The ‘fluidity’ of the water metaphors and similes in *A Beggar Boy* is also meant to emphasize how unstable the situation of the working poor could be in the nineteenth century. Burn was constantly wandering from one job to another, a situation in which “the tramp, the day labourer, and the pedlar might be one and the same person at different stages in life, or even at different seasons of the year” (Samuel 1973, 152-153). In *A Beggar Boy*, transformations in state and rank can indeed be sudden; at one point, McNamee “left the begging-trade” and, seemingly without further adjustments, the family “became transformed into respectable travelling merchants, or what were then regularly termed ‘pedlars’” (1855, 25). Although Burn claims that he “despised” vagrancy (82), as a young man he decided to abandon work and return on the road because his mother invited him to beg with her. A single imprudent decision dictated by affection for his own mother, and the honest worker suddenly “was again a vagrant and continued so against my will for years” (66). The boundaries established by Victorian England between labouring poor, street-folk, beggars and vagrants seem to fade in a context that is far from reassuring, because a plurality of circumstances could define or re-define the individual abruptly and unpredictably. Burn, in other words, casts himself as neither a beggar nor a working man, or perhaps as both simultaneously.

4. “in the path of working-men”

According to Thomas Carlyle, a biography cannot consist of a mere factual report of dates and events; it needs to come to terms with “a Problem of Existence” that every mortal must face, that is “the Problem of keeping soul and body together” (1864 [1832], 311). This aspect is equally, if not more important, for autobiographies⁶, and it is also what nowadays is considered to be lacking in Burn’s text. In this regard, David Vincent writes:

By the third letter [Burn’s] enterprise was already in deep trouble. Burn was finding it increasingly difficult to relate his inner self to the series of occupational and political reversals he was required to encompass. [...] His dilemma, for which he could find no final solution, was that of how to negotiate between his private and public selves in an essentially secular universe. He wanted to give an account of his disaster-strewn life as a beggar, hatter, and commercial traveller, and as a self-improving reader, radical politician, and Oddfellow, but was deeply uncertain about the interchange between external structural processes and inner moral development. (2016, 175)

Vincent’s comment evidences another way in which, unable to mediate the disjuncture between “soul” and “body”, Burn represents a disintegrating identity, fragmented into as many

⁶ Carlyle might be talking about autobiography, too. In the nineteenth century, the term “autobiography” was not firmly established in the language; frequently, Victorian writers would use the words “biography” and “autobiography” interchangeably.

selves as the number of different jobs (or non-jobs) that he had throughout his life. In addition, if Burn's account of his moral development is somewhat incoherent, the narration of his emotional experience is virtually absent from the text. For one thing, there is a remarkable lack of fear in *A Beggar Boy*: even when Burn describes his solitary adventures on the road as a child or a young man, he does not mention feeling alarmed or in danger, and neither he nor the reader is ever concerned for his bodily or mental safety. Tension does not build at any point of the account because the 'voices' that the narrating 'I' alternatively adopts are that of the ironic jester, the educator, the essayist, and the dry chronicler. As for the latter, Burn records the deaths of his brothers and sisters (until "out of the whole of my mother's family, I am the only one left to toil on in the journey of life"; 1855, 134) and the loss of his wife and twelve of his children with the same lack of feeling: "During my wedded life I have had sixteen births, and twelve deaths to provide for. In the course of events these were things of absorbing interest for the time being, and they have all been surrounded with many feelings of much joy and no little sorrow" (199).

Burn scarcely depicts sentiments, emotional reactions, or troubled states of mind; rather, in a Defoe-like manner, he calmly accumulates facts and circumstances. Except for a fleeting childish infatuation for the "perfect mistress of my soul" (70), he also eschews talking about romantic feelings, especially in connection with his marriages and the death of his first wife, who is remembered merely as a "quiet and gentle" woman with "a very passive character" and "a very small amount of energy" (132)⁷. After all, Burn claims, "the love of the stomach outlives all other love" (90), and romantic feelings are more suitable to poets than labourers. It is in this sense that, as I have mentioned before, Burn writes something personal, but never something intimate. His attitude can resemble that of a scientist engaging his object of study, that is, his self and his life, which sometimes require "a psychological view of the case" or insights into "technicalities" (70, 22). A scientific framework, incidentally, is adopted also in other works by Burn, who is inspired by medical models, possibly even by Lamarck or Darwin's theories of species and acquired characteristics in *Three Years Among the Working-classes in the United States During the War* (1865) and *Commercial Enterprise and Social Progress; or, Gleanings in London, Sheffield, Glasgow, and Dublin* (1858)⁸. *A Beggar Boy* seems, instead, to follow the directions that Alexander Crichton offers to any physician wishing to analyse the human mind: he should be capable "of abstracting his own mind from himself, and placing it before him, as it were, so as to examine it with the freedom, and with the impartiality of a natural historian; [...] to go back to childhood, and observe how the mind is modelled by instruction" (1798, x).

Today, Burn's pseudo-scientific approach and unemotional prose are considered to be typical traits of working-class autobiography, where, Nan Hackett says, the self is minimised or even depersonalised (1989, 210). Indeed, the limited scholarly attention that *A Beggar Boy* has attracted so far is centred in the field of working-class studies, since the book conforms to a number of perceived notions and features of this kind of literature. In the same vein with most nineteenth century working-class autobiographers, for instance, Burn opens *A Beggar Boy* with an apology for his ordinariness, states a didactic purpose and uses literary contextualization

⁷ Burn's first marriage sounds like a mere contract: "I went through the dutiful ordeal of obtaining the consent of all the parties who were interested in the matter, and I became the happy husband of a good and virtuous wife" (1855, 112).

⁸ In *Three Years Among the Working-classes*, Burn comments on the "physique" of American people, their "physiological features", questions of race and adaptability (e.g. 1865, xii-xiv, 3-9, 72); in *Commercial Enterprise and Social Progress*, he recognizes a "peculiar adaptability in the Irish females for fine sewing" and illustrates other ethnic and/or national features for different groups (e.g. 1858, 135).

to demonstrate his education and self-improvement⁹. He can also be easily seen as avoiding introspection in order to “maintain a ‘mask’, which [...] is that of a successful, moral member of society” (Hackett 1985, 3), as is the case with many other authors who told their stories of social ‘redemption’. *A Beggar Boy*, however, shows some crucial departures from working-class memoirs, in which

[...] the desire to inform an outside group about an unfamiliar segment of society first justifies and then frequently subsumes the story of the individual. He or she no longer tells his or her own private story, but is rather relating the story of a group of people, so that his or her autobiography becomes a representative or collective narrative. [...] These works become cultural narratives rather than individual stories [...]. (2)

It is true that *A Beggar Boy* articulates a constant tension between a public and a personal sphere, but the representation of individuality is never surpassed in favour of class identity or collective discourses. This is especially evident when Burn discusses his previous political activity, which he abandoned with the threat of the first general strike in 1839, when he turned against the Chartists and started considering his previous involvement “political folly”, “monomania”, and “insanity” (1855, 145). Burn’s position is rather atypical for a working-class autobiographer as he not only disagrees with Chartist methods and approaches, but he also completely disowns the ideological apparatus connected with the movement, which is accused of having caused the tragic demise of many of its members. In fact, statements such as “it is very questionable, whether a more equal distribution of property would be beneficial to the community” (184) are rather rich coming from a former beggar and political activist. He also dismisses the Trades’ Committee as merely “an excellent school for young beginners in the science of oratory and public debating” (124), whose meetings were chiefly “dangerous” pretexts for “everlasting adjournments to the taverns after business hours” (125). In most cases, Burn’s accounts of gatherings and other political activities become occasions to praise the benefits of abstinence, industry and interclass sympathy, thus implicitly combating pejorative associations of the immigrant Irish with moral degradation and ineptitude. Burn’s main concern, even when discussing political matters, is his self-image as a prospective member of the English middle-class.

A Beggar Boy also shows an urge to consider and value the individual outside his social context and beyond any label assigned through cultural norm: in a sense, this could amount as a ‘subjectivist turn’ of working-class autobiography. This tendency becomes manifest once we compare Burn’s text with other memoirs where, instead, the self identifies with class and labour. For instance, William E. Adams was a Chartist, like Burn, who became a newspaper editor and an important member of the English republican movement. His autobiography, first published in 1901 in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, insists on the ideas of repetitiveness and dullness of work and opens with these self-effacing words: “I call myself a social atom – a small speck on the surface of society. The term indicates my insignificance. [...] I am just an ordinary person” (Adams 1903, xiii)¹⁰. For Adams, lack of differentiation is primarily an ideological tenet, according to which individual action must be minimized in the promotion of class effort. Interestingly, his memoir might have been influenced by *A Beggar Boy*, where similar imagery and wording are used though with very different implications:

⁹ See Gagnier 1987, 338; Hackett 1989; 2010, 211.

¹⁰ On the topic see Gagnier 1987, 338.

Although I was an atom in the world of life, I was never without an individuality; in all my miserable littleness, I possessed a mind far above my position; and though I often wandered in the gloomy valley, bordering on despair, the lamp of hope never ceased to burn and light me on my way. (1855, 98)

Burn employs the past tense, suggesting that he has now abandoned a marginal position in society which he had never accepted. In addition, while Adams' atom is a "social" one, a part of a cohesive and organised group, Burn's seems lost in a chaotic and bustling "world of life", where he always stood out from the mass, as if under a spotlight. Incidentally, in this sense *A Beggar Boy* calls to mind Tobias Smollett's *Adventures of an Atom* and its talking particles of matter, which "are singly endued with such efficacy of reason, as cannot be expected in an aggregate body" (1806 [1769], 404). The fact that the atom-imagery for Burn is connected with resistance to engulfment is further reinforced by another occurrence of the term when he describes his arrival in London:

[In London] I was fairly lost in a wilderness of human beings; I was a mere atom in a huge mountain of humanity! and as it were an unclaimed particle of animation – a thing that belonged to nobody. In fact, I looked upon myself as one of the outside links in the chain of civilized society. If I could have become a part of the monument somebody would have looked at me, and have set their wits to work to find out my use. (1855, 95-96)

London is not a suitable context to Burn, who, overwhelmed, decides to leave within three days. Significantly, although he writes a story of reform and inclusion, Burn seems to reject any assimilation of the self with "humanity". In the big city, he especially feels that he does not belong to society, that he is "outside" civilization, perhaps as both a vagrant and a 'savage' Irishman. His desire to be "part of the monument", to participate in something important and lasting, responds again to an individualist drive; it can be read as a metatextual remark, since, as James Olney says, autobiography is a "monument of the self as it is becoming" (1972, 35). Eventually, Burn builds his own monument in *A Beggar Boy*, where he lines up his achievements as if piling one stone upon another, demonstrating he is well familiar with the conventions and structure of Victorian society, its codes of culture, existing models of self-narration and literary practices.

On a superficial level, in fact, Burn's autobiography is a conventional mould deeply embedded in the cultural, literary and political discourse of the Victorian middle-class; yet, this mould is fraught with tensions and deviations from established paradigms, so that *A Beggar Boy* seems to resist most of the same values that it embraces. Burn is, then, a liminal figure at the centre of a liminal text: he is a working beggar, a settling vagrant, an 'apolitical' activist, who tells a story of self-realization while suggesting that life is dominated by chance and his true fulfilment is yet to come. He adopts an epistolary form without writing letters and he relates a "true history" (1855, 163) so loaded with literary references that it almost demands to be read as fiction. Working within traditional or extant templates, Burn establishes a dynamic intersection and contradiction of discourses, creating a dual dimension that pervades all levels of the text. Although he eschewed being associated with Ireland, his autobiography definitively adds new facets to the definition of a specifically Irish autobiographical mode. *A Beggar Boy* creates a multi-perspective narrative by responding to mainstream discourses while simultaneously subverting them; it also invites the reader to think about identity in nuanced terms by configuring the various components of the self as plural, partial and fragmentary. The fact that these same characteristics can be traced in the works of at least three among the most analysed Irish autobiographers, George Moore, W.B. Yeats, and Sean O'Casey, points to a cultural continuity that awaits further investigation.

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“My grandfathers’ double troubles”: Joseph O’ Neill’s *Blood-Dark Track: A Family History*. Biofiction or Autobiocfiction?

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Abstract:

In *Blood-Dark Track: A Family History* (2000), Joseph O’Neill, a journalist and barrister of Irish origins living in the Netherlands, (re)constructs the lives of his two grandfathers, the paternal one, Jim O’Neill, an IRA activist from Ireland, and the maternal one, Joseph Dakad, a businessman from Turkey. The two men shared the traumatic experience of being jailed more or less at the same time (1940s) for no clearly apparent political reasons. The grandson’s search to dispel “the taut silences” that covered their incarcerations is to be read as a detective story, an example of biofiction, or, rather, a personal investigation attempting to close the gap between the different cultures that contributed to create his identity clarifying in the process the concepts of nationalism and nationhood.

Keywords: biofiction, Irish nationalism, Joseph O’Neill, Levantines, Turkey

Blood-Dark Track: A Family History, by the Irish-born barrister and novelist Joseph O’Neill¹, published in the year 2000, is a double biography of the author’s grandfathers, the paternal one, Jim O’Neill, an IRA activist from Cork, and the maternal one, Joseph Dakad, a Catholic Syrian businessman from the city of Mersin in the south of Turkey. The author himself, although born in Ireland, grew up in the Netherlands, Great Britain, Turkey, and several other countries. He attended international schools, Girton College in Cambridge and the Inns of Court in London. The gaze of the narrator, thus, is not purely Irish but rather

¹ Joseph O’Neill, born in Cork in 1964, of an Irish father and a Christian Syrian mother, worked for several years as a barrister before choosing to be a full-time writer. He now lives in New York and has become an American citizen. Apart from the present memoir, he is the author of fiction (*The Dog*, 2014, *Netherland*, 2008, *The Breezes*, 1996, *This Is the Life*, 1991) and a collection of short stories, *Good Trouble* (2018).

post-national, a term O'Neill likes to apply to his own identity (see Reilly 2011). His viewpoint adds a different inflection to the Irish part of the story, questioning his grandfather's bold nationalism but it also casts a shadow on the cosmopolitanism of the Syrian grandfather, to which the author should feel more akin but which he ends up distrusting.

Grandfather, Jim O'Neill², was arrested in 1940 when Eamon de Valera's government, fearing that the IRA might compromise Eire's neutrality, rounded up all notorious activists and detained them in an internment camp, the Curragh, in county Kildare³. When Joseph O'Neill learnt this, "[n]obody explained precisely why or where, or for how long, and I attributed his incarceration to the circumstances of a bygone Ireland and a bygone IRA" (O'Neill 2000, 1). When he started doing research about his grandfather, he discovered that this episode of Irish history was "a non-subject" (147); there are no records of the IRA internments, no photographs, let alone monuments and most documents have been burned⁴.

Meanwhile in Mersin, a small but busy port on the Mediterranean with a substantial cosmopolitan population, the shrewd businessman and hotel keeper, Joseph Dakad⁵, a man of the world, was seized by the British at the Palestinian-Syrian border on the train that was bringing him back from Palestine where he had ostensibly been buying lemons. He was detained for over three miserable years in English and French prisons and concentration camps in Palestine, suspected of spying for the Germans and submitted to interrogations, threats and torture. On his return he wrote a memorial for the Turkish authorities and a detailed letter for the British insisting on his innocence and asking for damages.

Joseph O'Neill tries to clarify the circumstances of these two episodes and their significance for himself and his family in a narration moving to and from Ireland to Turkey and back and having, as the author sees it, a three-act structure, "[a]ct 1 being the received stories and silences. Act 2 being my own counter-narrative and Act 3 being the synthesis" (O'Neill 2010).

Although *Blood-Dark Track* cannot be defined as a truly experimental text, it does something new not only through its specific point of view and its double focus, but also through its mixing of genres. Teetering as it does between memoir and fiction, it illustrates an innovative literary trend that has become quite visible in recent years in the English-speaking world, that of biofiction, or fictional life-writing⁶. The growing scepticism about the trustworthiness of history and straightforward biography that emerged from Postmodernism has fostered the rise of a kind of writing that, under the pretext of depicting actual figures anchored in well-defined historical periods, manipulates, indeed, at times "constructs something coherent out of the facts," as O'Neill says in an interview (Payne 2016, 223), to serve an aesthetic, personal or political

² Jim O'Neill was born on a farm in Co. Cork and led a life of hardships moving from one small job to another. He fathered seven sons and daughters. Once freed from detention he refused to take part in active political life.

³ The Curragh internment camp hosted not only Irish citizens who were seen as a threat to Ireland's neutrality (IRA men and pro-Nazi activists) but also Germans and members of the Allied forces who had been caught on Irish territory.

⁴ While the story of the IRA camp was not told, that of the POW section of the camp inspired *The Brylcreem Boys*, a 1998 film directed by Terence Ryan.

⁵ Joseph Dakad (or Dakak, the original form of his surname frequently used by O'Neill in his narration) was born in Iskenderun (formerly Alexandretta) and lived in Mersin. The two ports on the eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey near the Syrian border boasted in the past a multi-ethnic population which at the time the story is set was dwindling and losing its economic and social importance.

⁶ The term biofiction was coined in 1990 by Alain Buisine in his trendsetting "Biofictions" published in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*. In the English-speaking world, the foremost expert of this sub-genre is Michael Lackey, the author and/or editor of, among others, *Biographical Fiction: A Reader* (2016) and *The Rise of the American Biographical Novel* (2016). His *Irish Biofiction* is forthcoming.

vision. Ireland has taken a prominent role in the vogue of biofiction with such stellar works as Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), John Banville's *Doctor Copernicus* (1976), *Kepler* (1976) or *Shroud* (2002), Anne Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002) to name just a few⁷.

O'Neill's biofictional text reconstructs (or rather constructs) the lives of two men who did not know each other and could not have been more different but who had in common not only a grandson (himself) but also the traumatic experience of being the victims of tense war-times that affected combatant and neutral countries alike and, even more so, of having lived in the aftermath of the dissolution of large empires (the British and the Ottoman). This is the historical background that led to the two men's detentions and which *Blood-Dark Track* analyses in all its implications.

The grandson's attempt to dispel the family's "taut silences" (O'Neill 2000, 11) that enclosed the incarcerations of the two men takes the form of a series of interrogations regarding the past, and of a personal enquiry aimed at closing the gap between the different cultures that contributed to create his own identity. O'Neill's own *Recherche du temps perdu* may not finally reveal much about the true causes of his grandfathers' disgrace, but works as a sort of Bildungsroman in which the autobiographical self's eyes are opened on the true nature of the paradises and heroes of his childhood and of the "cold and profound sea of misconceptions" (262) in which his family's personal narratives were steeped. The insights O'Neill gained into his grandfathers' lives took the form of "a slow idiotic awakening" (2) which led to a similar awakening about himself.

Although carefully documented, the two biographies are finally the fruit of O'Neill's creative imagination, especially in that they regard the actual lives of very minor historical actors immersed in, or rather swept away, by historical events much larger than themselves and that they do not fully comprehend. The grandson-turned-detective's investigation will not deliver any definite truth but lead to a narration of "times and places in which politics might have dramatic and personal consequences, in which people might be impelled to act or acquiesce in the face of evil" (13). Even while raising empathy for the plight of his grandparents and, through the micro-historical dimension, getting a better grasp of the "macro-historical edifices that national narratives offer" (Payne 2016, 223-224), the principal aim of the author is constructing a better rooted and more mindful identity for his own multicultural self. While O'Neill re-imagines the lives of his family at a crucial moment of the twentieth century, his meta-biographical narration frequently foregrounds the soul-searching perplexities and misgivings of its first-person narrator. Thus, the biofiction regarding his two grandfathers becomes a form of autofiction.

1. *Compositional Strategies*

Blood-Dark Track alternates narrative sections regarding the vicissitudes of the two men with macro-historical and sociological ones and, more prominently, sections in which the grandson-sleuth-barrister tries to discover the reasons for the two imprisonments thus becoming the true protagonist of this piece of family-writing. The prominence of the personal inquiry over the grandfathers' stories gives the memoir the dimension of a detective fiction staging a "first person narrator who is trying to think things out" (O'Neill 2010). In an interview with

⁷ Michael Lackey in the draft Introduction to his forthcoming *Irish Biofiction*, traces "the origins of biofiction back to the Irish engagement with an appropriation of a newly emerging form of portraiture aesthetic" which begins to be evident, he argues, notably in the works of Moore and Wilde.

Jonathan Lee in the *Paris Review*, O'Neill talks about his preference for the first person which explains away the oddity of using it in a narration concerning two members of his family:

I just don't think I've cracked the third person. Haven't come close to it. There's a central subjectivity to them – and a first person voice feels to me like the right way to explore a consciousness of that kind. [...] The first person is the shortest of shortcuts to an elusive element of the real. (Lee 2014)

Such a choice also tells us that what counts in this story is the consciousness of the narrator thus foregrounding the novelistic structure of *Blood-Dark Track*.

If we examine the compositional strategies deployed in the memoir, we notice that alongside the investigative process, a major role is played by the affective dimension. Driven by shock and sympathy for “how forsaken [the grandparents] must have felt” while in prison camps (O'Neill 2000, 11), the author starts his research in a meticulous and loving way, travelling to their places of birth and to where they had lived and worked and been detained, consulting documents, archives and history books and interviewing all the people who had known them and were informed of the facts so much so that the memoir is overwhelmed by details which often seem irrelevant. The process is analogous to collecting valueless keepsakes of a beloved. The barrister-investigator faces “finicky” questions to reach the conclusion that “[w]hat one learns, pretty quickly, is that frequently the truth remains anybody's guess. [...] Sometimes, however, something is illumined that is strange and unlooked for that [...] twists the case and gives it a new meaning” (13).

2. *Biofiction and (Auto)biofiction*

Since the purpose of this kind of investigation is not to clear the accused in front of a tribunal but only in the eyes of the investigator, the effect the findings have on the narrator is paramount. What will be illumined is not the truth about his grandfathers' behaviour but rather the sense of his family ties, his sharing of or dissent from the values held by the two families, the ethical and political responsibilities of the individual vis à vis his country, and the evaluation of the author's own life-choices in light of what he has learnt about the past. The lawyer's urge, thus, becomes the grandson's search for new meanings in his family history and in his own nature and beliefs. This is what propels him to investigate but also to create the personalities of the two protagonists, Jim O'Neill and Joseph Dakad, and of their antagonist grandson, the author of the memoir, Joseph O'Neill, who unites the two legacies in his name. This makes *Blood-Dark Track* an example of biofiction rather than of biography or history and, because of the importance he attributes to the personal repercussions of his findings, of autofiction.

Constructing the grandparents' personalities is an act of self-fashioning, as well as of finding surrogate forms of excitement and mystery. The more flamboyant and surprising the two characters are, the more the narrator's own expat identity and unadventurous life are put into relief. “I've moved around so much and lived in so many different places,” says the author in an interview, “that I don't really belong to a particular place, and so I have little option but to seek out dramatic situations that I might have a chance of understanding” (Lee 2014). Although in the interview he refers to the “dramatic situations” in his most recent novel, *The Dog* (2014), he might as well have in mind his grandparents' “journeys of the body and spirit” that seem “fantastical” in comparison to the unheroic predicament of “many of us, living in the democratic west at the beginning of the new century [...] casting our vote twice a decade or losing our temper at the dinner table or shunning the wines and cheeses of France” (O'Neill 2000,

3). Jim O'Neill's and Joseph Dakad's adventures help offset the tameness of his life and milieu, and shape (or at least suggest) a new persona for their grandson. Unlike sixteenth-century gentlemen moulding their selfhood on manuals and literary models (as described by Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*), O'Neill does it by claiming closeness to those two maverick grandfathers. Finally, however, the failings he discovers in them succeed in reassuring him regarding his choices and preferences.

The author, who defines himself as “an establishmentarian and politically sedentary – and politically guilt-ridden person” could not be more distant from the adventurous radicalism and “the values of political resistance” of his Irish family that fascinate him in spite of his fear of extremism and his political correctness (230). On the other hand, his own “bourgeois conception of life as an economic adventure” (*ibidem*) brings him close to his Levantine sources from which he ironically distances himself on recognizing similarities with his own lot. The two characters and their settings act as mirrors (or rather distorting mirrors) of each other, and especially of their grandson. Their doings “set [him] up a glass / Where [he] may see the inmost part of [himself]” (Ham. III. 4.20-21) helping him advance towards self-knowledge.

3. *The grandfathers: two different versions of masculinity*

Both grandfathers, born respectively into the British and the Ottoman empires, had spent their youth and maturity in young democracies that were trying to come to terms with an imperial heritage and deal with individuals belonging to groups that had formerly played an important role but no longer fitted the new picture.

The IRA, that had contributed to the achievement of an independent republic, was an uncomfortable reality once the Free State had settled in its acceptance of the partition so that the organisation was declared illegal. Jim O' Neill, however, remained attached to the stances of Irish nationalism although it was (at least temporarily) a thing of the past. The glamour of the IRA as impersonated by his grandfather fascinated Joseph O' Neill until he realised that underneath it lay the ugly aspects of sectarianism, hatred and violence.

The Christian Syrians (also called Assyrians), together with the other minority non-Muslim citizens of the country that had played such an important role in the economic and social life of several coastal cities of the empire, were looked askance by Atatürk's Turkey. Several measures to terminate their prominence in the country's economy and inflict financial ruin on them were successfully taken in the 1940s and 1950s. Dakad, as a member of a Christian minority trying to defend their dwindling privileges, had to act slyly and warily to avoid the sectarianism, hatred and violence that characterized the host country and yet, in spite of his prudence, he made a faux pas.

Both grandfathers had to adapt themselves to difficult political and social situations and they did it trying to maintain their dignity: “They lived in extraordinarily hateful and hazardous places and times, in which men with powerful egos were especially exposed”, writes O'Neill (O'Neill 2000, 336) tacitly opposing to them the identity of a European Union citizen at a time when a staid European Union meant something. The story of his grandparents brings into relief by contrast the poised personality of the author, fearful of nationalism, and at the same time fascinated by the extremism that goes with it; disdainful of the Levantines, of their opportunism which, for example, made them ignore the massacres of the Armenians or the Kurds, and yet sentimentally close to “these strange French-speaking Turks” (26) of Mersin in whose midst he spent the best summers of his life.

Initially the author is tempted to romanticize the two figures. James O'Neill's obituaries, describing the paternal grandfather as affiliated to the “First Battalion, First Cork Brigade, IRA

and a true Gael” are for the grandson “glamorous texts, call[ing] from a gritty world of hurling and revolution that was thrillingly distant from the bourgeois, entirely agreeable world of the Hague” (7) where he grew up. He imagines his “grandfather’s rebel world” (*ibidem*) as it was suggested to him by the illustration on the jacket of one of his mother’s books about the IRA. In the style of a boy’s comic, the jacket described

an ambush at dusk on a deserted country road in west Cork, the sky burgundy, the sunken day a low-lying mass of yellow. A convoy of trucks is turning into view, and waiting to jump them are a smart officer in a blue jacket and tie, and two sturdy rifle-toting fellows in rough shirts. (8)

Both the book and Jim O’Neill’s world speak “of cold adventurous nights and clean-cut valour” (*ibidem*).

On the Turkish side, when a former accountant of Joseph Dakad’s hotel, Salvator Avigdor, told Joseph O’Neill that his grandfather’s detention “had something to do with spying for the Germans [...] a shiver of an explanation accompanied this information” (1) and confirmed the aura that surrounded Mersin at the start of the war. It was a city “full of intrigue” (55) like Lisbon or Casablanca, said Avigdor, setting the author to fantasize about his maternal grandfather:

[A] man in a white tuxedo who tries to steer a neutral and profitable course through a sea of vultures, gamblers, desperadoes, lovers and idealists. Humphrey Bogart, as the owner of Rick’s Café Américain, had been almost exactly my grandfather’s age, and Casablanca was set in December 1941, which was when my grandfather was running the Toros hotel. (56)

This set O’Neill to investigate whether, indeed, his grandfather had entertained a complicity with the Germans who were trying to discover what influence the British might have over the Turkish government and to find out who had (probably unjustly) denounced him.

The mysteries of the two grandfathers’ plights were covered by the paternal and maternal families who appeared reticent to discuss them and whose silence was tinged with condemnation: “Jim and Joseph were each in some way in the wrong. *Les absents ont toujours tort*” (12). It was not until the author was thirty “that the curious parallelism in [his] grandfathers’ lives struck [him] with any force”:

I was driven to explore it, to fiddle at doors that had remained unopened, perhaps even locked, for so many years and not until then that I began to make out what connected these two men, who never met, and these two captivities – one in the Levant heat, the other in the rainy, sporadically incandescent plains of central Ireland. (2)

It is quite human to try to aggrandize one’s forebears, describe them in the rosiest colours and cover up what might throw a shadow on their personality and deeds or make them the victims of adverse circumstances. O’Neill, however, resists the temptation of having a Daniel O’Connell or a Humphrey Bogart character as grandparents. For his forcedly fictional portrayal of the two men, he relies on personal investigations and barrister techniques but also on his feelings and imagination. All of this will eventually yield a much less glamorous picture of the doings of his grandparents who were, anyhow, each in his own way, quite flamboyant characters, fit to be fictionalized. The grandson’s piece of family-writing ends up being an act of love (although tinged with misgivings) on behalf of two men he had not really known and is now trying to know, being fascinated with their personalities and adventures but in the end

also critical of their positions. For in the end the memoir finally turns out to be a personal exploration of the author's own expat identity with its shortcomings and merits.

4. *The Irish Grandfather*

Of the two grandfathers, the one whose personality appears more attractive for his grandson is Jim O'Neill, not the kind of person the respectable barrister nor his businessman father, Kevin (Jim's third oldest son) would have normally approved of. Jim best impersonates the values of rootedness and hot-headedness the narrator does not possess. He is first introduced as a poacher, delving in this minor crime in order to buy communion and confirmation clothes for his children, much like the protagonist of Ken Loach's film *Raining Stones*. Raised during the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War in County Cork, "the centre of fierce resistance to the Anglo-Irish treaty" (O'Neill 2000, 134), Jim witnessed the killing of two of his cousins and much violence all over that led him to join the IRA in his early twenties and throw himself into paramilitary life becoming a competent and respected volunteer. All of his activities as lorry driver, pipefitter, trade-union activist, member of republican clubs and of the Gaelic League, "where you spoke Irish and danced Irish dances" (71), show him as highly politicized. He wanted to participate in armed raids or join the International Brigade in Spain but for different reasons did not, always regretting it. However, because of his reputation and apparently not because anything he did, he was arrested in 1940 as a would-be terrorist, a threat to the country's neutrality.

Four years between Mountjoy prison and the Curragh would profoundly mark Jim for the rest of his life (as a similar experience marked Joseph Dakad). On his return he would no longer want to be actively involved with the republican army but remained, all the same, "one of the most reliable unofficial men the IRA had in Cork, someone who could be trusted to dump arms, transport people, raise funds and quietly put his experience and contacts at the disposal of the movement" (221). Looking at a photograph of his, the grandson commented: "[M]y grandfather was the very image of the hard, handsome IRA man" (160). His actions, however, were contributing indirectly to the lethal violence that shook Ireland.

As a man without a clear-cut national identity, the author is often swept away by strong vicarious nationalist feelings when he thinks about the flame that burnt in the heart of his family. He remembers, for instance, the profound surge of emotion when as a twenty-one year-old student in a Cambridge University library he had come across the text of the Proclamation of Independence (which he feels compelled to transcribe in full in the novel), or how moved he was by his grandmother's tale of how he, at the age of four, had once broken free of her hand and taken the lead of a parade to celebrate the unveiling of a monument commemorating an IRA ambush. "I cannot fully account for these intense sensations of patriotic exhilaration," he writes, realizing they are rather simplistic but constitute a relief "from the finicky, obstructive, futile, morally muddy world" of his other self and that they make him feel "significant" (150). To the ears of the "post-nationalist" narrator, instead, affected by "a sense of chronic displacement" (Lee 2014), the strong attachment to one's nation exerted a bemused attraction and the names themselves of the places where dark events tied to Irish nationalism took place, often under the eyes of members of his family or, perhaps, through their hands, are modern-day *Dinnseanchas*⁸. Clonakilty, Kilbrittain, Drimoleague, Slobbereen, evoking the events that took

⁸ *Dinnseanchas* are short Middle-Irish poems or prose pieces evoking the origins of a place, the traditions attached to it or the memory of events or people associated with it.

place there, “have the lyricism of the unfamiliar” and he continues thinking about them, in spite of their ugliness, “as grey-brown, inward-looking, and vulnerable to flooding by a past that, like the local water table, lies just beneath surface” (O’Neill 2000, 65). What lies just beneath the surface is a nationalist story, which is also the apparently glorious story of his family, both on his grandfather’s and his grandmother’s side. “My grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather [...] was each imprisoned in the cause of Irish freedom” (68).

This was, however, an outsider’s view. The author’s father, Kevin, instead, who grew up an Irishman and at the age of seventeen did a stint in the IRA with his two brothers, rejected Joe’s values and deeds telling his son, “[f]or me, West Cork was about ambushes and murders and the Black and Tans. It was a bloodstained, haunted kind of place – spooky. The roads and fields were dark and isolated. Men were shot and buried there” (64). The author, who was too young when Jim died to remember him, was fascinated, unlike his father, by his grandfather’s fame and dare-devil deeds and collected as many stories about him as he could from friends and relatives. Hints of the family’s violent past emerge from the apparently most innocent moments of Joseph’s fact-finding travels in West Cork with his uncle Brendan. After drinking tea with a cousin on a farm, Joseph is given a “souvenir”: a rusted Colt 45 wrapped in a towel. “That’s the gun that shot Admiral Somerville” (94), says the uncle laughing. This instigates the author to research the death of that Admiral Somerville⁹, a well-respected Anglo-Irish member of the community who was shot in 1936 by an Irish commando, allegedly because he was helping Irish young people to join the English navy. Why was Joseph given the gun? Was Jim O’Neill part of this commando? Joseph has strong suspicions about his grandfather’s involvement. For a good part of the novel, the author returns again and again on this event animated by a morbid interest and a sense of horror that his grandfather might have been a murderer until at the end it is revealed that the Admiral was shot by Joseph O’Neill’s granduncle, Tadhg, his grandmother’s brother. Jim, thus, was not directly responsible of the killing, yet he would certainly have approved his uncle’s criminal behaviour. Although from the onset of his writing Joseph O’Neill knew the answer, he prolonged the suspense and the thrill giving proof of his fictionalizing intentions and his desire to create mystery and suspense around a fact with which a biographer would have dealt head on. The suspense adds to the aura that surrounds Jim O’Neill all through the story but also foregrounds Joseph O’Neill’s slow awakening to the horrors tied to sectarianism – the main plotline.

5. *The Turkish Grandfather*

O’Neill’s “bourgeois conception of life as an economic adventure” (230) should have made him feel closer to the Levantine cultural roots of which Joseph Dakad was the product and the epitome. And yet between the two grandfathers, the Irish Jim, the protagonist of a possible murder and of many gallant actions, seems to be the one who conjures up the greatest admiration, probably because of his otherness. The representation of Joseph is more critical of the man but inseparable from the tenderness and pathos elicited by old Mersin, his mother’s birthplace and the theatre of O’Neill’s childhood summers, a town “of verandas, gardens and large stone houses” (22) inhabited by a dwindling community of mixed ethnicity and religion, the Levantines.

⁹ De Valera’s anti IRA policies (of which Jim O’Neill was to be a victim) were indeed sparked by the assassination of Vice-Admiral Henry Somerville in 1936. He had served in the British Navy and had retired to Cork, where he was recruiting young Irishmen for the British armed services. His shooting marked the revival of terror in the countryside.

The term Levantine initially referred to a nucleus of non-Muslims – Christians and Jews – who had lived in the Ottoman Empire “comfortable in many cultures but perhaps never truly at home in any” (King 2015, 350) and constituting a first model of globalised society. The term, however, has come to sound derogatory¹⁰ (see, for instance, the contempt T. S. Eliot conveys in *The Waste Land* regarding Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant). Joseph Dakad, writes the grandson, “born in the quintessential Levant port of Iskenderun, undoubtedly qualifies as a Levantine in the pejorative sense” (and, he adds, “destructively” so) (181). The same qualifier applies also to many of the other denizens of Mersin mentioned in the story, with their “propensity for intrigue and deception” (*ibidem*).

The “culturally variegated Levant” (198), however, is also a fascinating though pathetic space. One of O’Neill’s informers reminisces about “a time when Mersin was a marvel [...] a cosmopolis where you’d hear three words of French, four words of Turkish and three words of Arabic” (O’Neill 2000, 54). Those were his grandfather’s times when “linguistic expertise [was] highly esteemed” (38). Joseph, himself, spoke seven languages. The Levantines of his grandfather’s set felt they were still the real Mersin people, in spite of the fact that the Empire was a thing of the past and the majority of Turks (mostly blow-ins), resented them and were buying them up. They were held together, essentially, by having lived there for many generations and having given “the dusty Turkish port of Mersin” its present importance populating it with “the families of shipping-agents, cotton-traders, commercial landlords, shopkeepers, stallholders, tradesmen, importers, exporters” (40). They were not fully integrated, spoke French or Arabic rather than Turkish (in other parts of the country French and Greek) and considered “les Turques” as specimens of the other (256). A gulf “separated the culturally variegated Levant” from “modern, uniform Turkey” (199). Those people did not know they were a dying generation as they kept looking down on their hosts, the Turks, with a mixture of fear and contempt while clinging to old ways of life and social intercourse – card-games at the club, social visiting, beach parties, intermarriage. It is appropriate, therefore that the chapters describing Joseph Dakad and the mystery of his incarceration should start with his funeral.

Nevertheless, Joseph Dakad, the expression of this dying world, is represented, on the basis of his relatives’ recollections, as very much alive. He was chic, with his custom-made silk shirts; a charmer and a womanizer (un *coureur*, as his widow, O’Neill’s beloved Mamie – Granny in French – used to boast). Appearance was all-important to him and he enjoyed showing up his pedigree dogs, his horse and his Pontiac, the first American luxury car in town. A photograph of him on his prancing horse gave him “a chivalric air. Le chevalier Dakad: this was what the ensemble was calculated to impress upon the world.” The irony, in the eyes of the grandson, was that “to my knowledge there hadn’t been a local class of chevaliers to which Joseph might have belonged since Crusader times” (40). The Mersin Levantines were, indeed, a petty bourgeois élite, that thought very highly of itself and Joseph, a well to do and respected member of the Levantine community, impersonated it at its best (or, perhaps, at its worst).

A far-sighted and forward-thinking businessman, he had turned the family residence into the most sought-after hotel in town, the Toros, to which he kept adding amenities such as central heating or the installation of the first elevator and the first swimming-pool in town. He had a knack for business and became the co-owner of the first cinema in Mersin. It was, in fact, his

¹⁰ Levantines are the non-Muslim inhabitants of the Levant, an area itself of uncertain delimitations corresponding roughly to the Eastern Mediterranean. They were “a nondescript group [...] the products of the long period of interaction” between the Ottomans and other religious groups (Christians of various denominations and Jews) (King 2015, 350).

sense of business that led to his downfall but also that put into question his possible involvement in espionage. “Intoxicated” by his business successes, Joseph Dakad had launched into yet a new adventure. Having noticed that, due to an unusual freeze, there had been a dramatic rise in the price of lemons, a chief export commodity of the area, in January 1942, he decided to increase his gains as a citrus merchant by planning a trip to Jerusalem, then under British control, to arrange for a shipment of 200 tons of Palestinian fruit. Having obtained a British visa with much frustration and difficulty, and some bribing, he embarked on the trip. On the train home, however, he was seized by the British at the Palestinian-Syrian border. What followed was, according to the testimonial the grandson found in a storeroom of the hotel, a martyrdom that left him a broken man with a weak heart which, in his wife’s opinion, led to a premature death.

Turkey, a neutral nation that seemed to be leaning toward the Allies, was full of Germans who moved about the country and especially in coastal cities like Mersin where they often stayed at the Toros Hotel. Among the Toros visitors (many of them German) was also the notorious German ambassador, Von Papen (the employer of the most famous of spies, Cicero), who was warmly welcomed and made to feel at home by its owner. Dakad was enough a man-of-the-world to feel he could navigate safely such a stream of events and draw a profit from them, forgetting “the guiding political precept for Mersin Christians [that] *il ne fallait pas se mouiller*, it wouldn’t do to get wet” (316).

Although O’Neill could not find evidence of his grandfather’s being really involved in spying, he strongly suspected that the latter might have been guilty of some shady actions or imprudent informing, thus partly confirming the conclusions of *The New York Times* reviewer of the memoir that “the fastidious hotelier and import-export dabbler [was] merely a man out of his depth” (Harrison 2002, 16). His grandfather was a fearful man (a *froussard*, as his family used to say) with “a profound aversion to trouble” and aware, like the other members of “a minority with a history of disloyalty” (O’Neill 2000, 311), that survival in the young national state of Turkey demanded at all times to display an impeccable citizenship. He always insisted on his being a Turk, but the belief was not reciprocal as was proven by the events. He probably “failed to appreciate the appearance of [his] actions in the eyes of men who saw the world through nationalist eyes” (333).

These considerations, despite his grandfather’s known Germanophilia, convince O’Neill that it was rather Dakad’s vanity that led to his downfall. His “central ambition” was to appear as “a gentleman of importance [...] connected and knowledgeable [...]. He was mesmerized by the idea of himself as a man at the centre of things, a man of accomplishments, a chevalier” (316). This would have made him act imprudently, flaunting his relationships with important foreigners including Germans, boasting about his successes and new ventures and complaining about the obstacles authorities (both local and British) seemed to invent to thwart him. Whether he was betrayed by his British friends from the club or Turkish authorities sold him down the river, he “may easily have been the victim of Byzantine goings on” as the former British consul in Mersin suggested to O’Neill who, fifty years after the events, was interviewing him about the intelligence scene (175).

After meticulously studying historical documents and interviewing some of the people concerned, O’Neill reached the conclusion that Dakad may, indeed, “have been innocent, but innocent of what? It pained me to acknowledge it, but this was a question I would never be able to answer with certainty” (318). Since the detailed account of his investigations did not yield much, O’Neill chose to tell instead the story his grandfather’s pilgrimage from jail to jail. Notwithstanding the same detective-like approach the grandson had brought to his two grandfathers’ plights, the ascertainment of Jim’s responsibility in the murder of Admiral Somer-

ville constitutes a suspenseful story, while in the case of the mystery surrounding his Syrian grandfather's imprisonment, the pathetic narration of his sufferings and especially an extended social analysis of the peculiar Mersin world win out over the opportunity of writing a spy story.

What transpires most forcefully from the Turkish sections of *Blood-Dark Track* is the mixture of nostalgia and sadness with which O'Neill evokes the climate reigning in the old Mersin of his childhood – a spirit close to the *hüzün* Orhan Pamuk has made famous in his memories of Istanbul¹¹. Although the portrait of Joseph Dakad is not sympathetic and the Mersin society is represented rather negatively, O'Neill can rightly say, "I felt no hostility towards these lost, disconnected siblings" (181). He claims, indeed, a sense of fraternity, a nearness to this lost world, which even embraces his not quite likable grandfather. His "complexly ambivalent heritage with respect to Turkish history and culture" (Payne 2016, 221) emerges in the conflict between reason and heart - reason opening his eyes on the many shortcomings of the Turkish national state and of its Levantine component, the heart making him evoke this world, and even his reprehensible grandfather, with great tenderness.

6. Conclusion: Nationhood, nationalism and national identity

What prompted the writing of *Blood-Dark Track*, a book which is half way between biography and history, were the historical events that took place in Ireland and Turkey in the first half of the twentieth century and the way they originated the mysteries surrounding the heroes of O'Neill's personal mythology, his grandfathers. Writing the memoir, however, became finally "a way to think about more things than simply my grandfathers" (O'Neill 2010).

The text is principally concerned with nationhood, nationalism and national identity and the ethical questions raised by these concepts. As the book progresses, we may see how the author reverses his initial high esteem for "nationalism's uplifting tenets" (O'Neill 2000, 331) as impersonated by Jim O'Neill and comes to appreciate his own post-nationalism and pluralistic identity.

The book illustrates a would-be competition between grandfathers as to who is going to win his grandson's esteem and love. Obviously, the competition lies in the latter's shifting emotions. In the narration, the Irish grandfather stands a better chance than his Syrian counterpart. Faced with the question of what their nationality was, the elder and the younger Joseph would have been equally at a loss in answering it while Jim O'Neill would have had no doubts. Since one is easily fascinated by one's opposite, Jim with his national faith becomes a foil to a person whose "experience of place is not simply reducible to a notion of nationality based on natality" (Payne 2016, 222). Therefore, Jim enjoys a much more favourable representation.

The litmus test, however, is not only the two men's sense of national identity but also the actions that descend from it. As the Somerville affair is slowly unravelled, the sectarianism of Irish nationalism shows its ugly face and tarnishes the brilliancy of Jim O'Neill's image. Conversely, the absence of a national identity affects negatively the Syrian grandfather's behaviour. In order to be accepted by the Turkish nationalist majority as a real Turk, Joseph Dakad often denies his own identity and cowers in order to be considered a Turk (as in the whole business of his imprisonment) and, together with the rest of the Syrian community, turns a blind eye on crimes such as the massacres of Kurds and Armenians, the fruit of Turkish nationalism which they would not dare criticize, let alone oppose.

¹¹ In Banu Helvacioğlu's definition, Pamuk's *hüzün* is the "melancholic perception of Istanbul's historical and cultural status as a fallen city" (153).

The topic of the massacres, like the story of the assassination of Admiral Somerville, recurs in the memoir taking an increasing importance as the narration goes on. In the end the Turkish events throw light on the Irish ones: “Evidently, just as centuries of hostile interrelationships had done little or nothing to humanize Syrians and Armenians and Turks in each other’s eyes, so it was with the Protestants and Catholics of West Cork” (O’Neill 2000, 331). Consequently, both grandfathers appear as victims of nationalism, Jim because nationalism has made him behave in a manner that is in contrast with his generous and loving personality: “[I]ncluded in [his] birthright and estate [...] was a tutelary hatred that imprisoned him long before, and long after, the Curragh” (O’Neill 2000, 333). On his side, Joseph is a victim because the nationalism of the majority has obliged him to act hypocritically in order to be accepted. His less than admirable behaviour is caused by the fact that he “relied on unreliable nationalist assurances of [his] equal citizenship” (*ibidem*). The final analysis highlights the similarities as well as the great differences in his grandfathers’ lives prompting “[a]n unsettling scenario of shadows,” that of Jim, the nationalist, shooting Joseph who, like Somerville (to whom the following words are devoted), “belonged to a rich and profoundly self-sufficient religious minority with a tradition of looking on the national majority as an unfrequentable, undifferentiated and largely negligible mass” (332).

The final soul-searching chapter shows Joseph O’Neill wording a sort of *mea culpa* for not seeing that “nationalism simultaneously nurtured and concealed a capacity in ourselves for a hatred as powerful as that which led to the oblivion of the Armenians” (331). The two heritages merge in this recognition which leads the author to vindicate his post-nationalism as the most viable solution. “We can no longer limit our sense of the world to our country or region or culture,” asserts O’Neill (Payne 2016, 222).

Whatever *Blood-Dark Track* may be – history, biofiction, autobiographical writing, a text of political ethics, an act of love or a condemnation – we may go with the author’s concluding remarks. It is a warrant granting release:

I claim the privilege, as a grandson, to dwell on my grandfathers in a way of my choosing. I could think of their lives as tragedies. [...]. I could linger on the continuing violence and hatred in Turkey and Ireland, and link my grandfathers’ shortcomings to the lethal infirmities in those countries’ political cultures. But I would rather release Jim and Joseph from such gloominess (O’Neill 2000, 338)

The release of the grandfathers from a gloomy vision and from the oblivion and condemnation that surrounded the most significant episode of their lives, corresponds with the author’s own release from uneasiness regarding his “sense of chronic displacement” (Lee 2014) which in the end appears as the right answer to the evils caused by nationalism and myopic attachment to one land over another. In the end the memoir sounds like a vindication of internationalism and post-nationalism that go hand in hand with love for the two countries of his heart, West Cork and Mersin.

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Voices



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The Joy of Writing after 20 years. In conversation with Cónal Creedon

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Interviewing Cónal Creedon¹ has been a thrilling and intriguing experience, but at the same time demanding. In fact having known him since 2000 and having shared lots of events connected with *Passion Play*² (1999) and the *Second City Trilogy*³ (2007), it was my intention not to infringe on his privacy.

¹ This is the link to Cónal Creedon's website illustrating his biography and works, <<http://conalcreedon.com/conal-creedon-biography-books-theatre-tv-documentary-radio.pdf>> (05/2020).

² *Passion Play* is set on Good Friday. It is thematically styled and structured on the gospels of the New Testament. The novel works on various levels. At its most fundamental, *Passion Play* tells the story of a 33 year old man, whose various paths through life have led him to his current situation – alone, lonely, isolated, living in a kip of a bed-sit, facing eviction. With only two hits of LSD and a bottle of whiskey for comfort. His head becomes filled with the sounds of footsteps on the ceiling and a cacophony of voices from another life. Caught in the slipstream of the past, he takes off on a kaleidoscopic odyssey of Marx Brothers' proportions – where the insanity of life is reconciled with the taste of freshly boiled pig's head. In the end, Pluto realises that death is the gateway to eternal life and "sometimes the need to die is stronger than the will to live". *Passion Play* is inspired by two events that have become engrained in the Irish psyche – the Passion of Jesus and the Easter Rising of 1916. Both of these events occurred at Easter time and culminate in a blood sacrifice – followed by redemption. The plight of our anti-hero, Pluto, reflects the Passion of Jesus and his ultimate ascension into heaven. The recurring theme of Easter 1916 and vignettes from the gospels weave seamlessly in and out of the gritty magic realism of the narrative. Ultimately, Pluto's blood sacrifice leads him to a most beautiful redemption", see Cónal Creedon's website (05/2020).

³ *Second City Trilogy* was commissioned by the European Capital of Culture 2005. The trilogy is comprised of three short plays: *The Cure*, *When I Was God*, *After Luke*, and is structured in such a way that a cast of three actors can perform the trilogy in repertory. It is conceived as a tragicomic exploration of various father-son relationships, set against the social, historical, and topographical background of Cork City. The *Second City Trilogy* was first performed on 27 June 2005 at the Halfmoon Theatre, Cork Opera House. Due to public demand, the initial proposed production run of two weeks was extended to 6 months – eventually transferring to the main stage of the Cork Opera House. In 2007, the text of *Second City Trilogy* was published by Irishtown Press to celebrate the acquisition by the Crawford Gallery of a portrait of Cónal Creedon by artist Eileen Healy. The portrait features on the cover of the book", see Cónal Creedon's website (05/2020).

From initial reserve, where it felt I was talking more to the writer than to a friend, our dialogue has developed into freer space and spontaneity. It all started after I went to Cork last Easter and I listened to Cónal's reading of *Begotten not Made*⁴ (2018), which sharpened my curiosity to learn about what had led him to write it 20 years after *Passion Play*. In the meantime I had been pestering him about writing his next novel. So, after the publication of *Begotten not Made*, we finally got to the interview.

I had planned to meet Cónal at Easter, but Covid-19 made it impossible. We opted to engage online over a protracted period of time to carry out our project. And suspended time, I would say, expanded time into a relentless pursuit.



Figure 1 – Cónal's portrait. Courtesy of John Minihan

⁴“*Begotten Not Made*, with illustrations by the author, is a fairy tale for the 21st century, where the mystery of blind faith is explored and the magic of belief is restored. Brother Scully met Sister Claire only once. It was back in 1970 – the night Dana won the Eurovision Song Contest. Every single morning since their first and only encounter, with a flicker of a light bulb, Sr. Claire has sent a coded message of love to Br. Scully. This Christmas Eve morn, for the first time in almost fifty years, no light shines out from Sr. Claire's bedroom window. And so begins this magical tale of a very real, yet unrealised love” (“Dublin Literary Award”, 2020). *Begotten Not Made* was awarded the “Eric Hoffer Award USA”, 2020 for Commercial Literary Fiction, and the “Bronze Award for Indie Next Generation Book Award USA”, 2020. It was one of five finalists of “The Most thought provoking Book of Year Montaigne Book Awards USA”, 2020 and nominated for the “2020 Dublin International Book Award”. It has been cited as “Book Of The Year 2020” in the *Irish Examiner*, and “Selection of Top Books of The Year 2019” by Theo Dorgan on “Liveline”, RTÉ.

CM: As you have published Begotten Not Made I thought that I would like to interview you about the novel in this period of lockdown.

CC: I'd be absolutely delighted, this is such a confusing time. Hopefully we'll all come out the far side intact.

CM: Yes we'll get through this dystopian story we are living in.

CC: We're telepathic. This very moment I wrote the word "dystopian". Isn't that bizarre? I've been invited by the Shanghai Writers' Association to include a piece in their next publication, and I was just making a list of words that might work well together, and this very minute I scribbled "dystopian". I would hazard a guess it is a word I have never actually typed before and it probably won't make it into the piece I'm writing – but it's an interesting coincidence.

CM: Let's begin by asking you where you get your inspiration. I would be interested to hear about what inspires you and who inspires you?

CC: I've always been drawn to culture with a small "c" rather than culture with a capital "C". I am fascinated by people I meet. I am intrigued by life as I encounter it. Certainly, at this stage in my life, I could name-check every inspirational writer, artist and musician, from the classics to the cutting-edge avant-garde, but that would be superimposing a retrospective inspiration.

It would be misleading to attribute the inspiration of my youth to the inspiration I found through my later-life's experience. I have always been inspired by real people in real-life situations rather than literary interpretations or artistic impressions of real life.

CM: Your work seems to focus on Cork City, Ireland, and more specifically on the streets in which you grew up. Could you share with me some aspects of your childhood?

CC: I grew up into what I describe as a "Spaghetti Bowl of Streets" on the Northside of Cork City. My family has lived on this street for generations, well over a hundred years, back to the time of great-aunt Julia.

We had a shop, a very small shop, the front room of a regular street house had been converted into a shop maybe a hundred and fifty years ago. We weren't wealthy, but we had financial stability of sorts, at a time when many others had nothing.

I grew up surrounded by a big family - 12 children, my parents, 2 aunts lived with us and many others who happened to visit and stay. Seldom a night went by without as many as 20 hearts beating under our roof. Our kitchen was like a cross between a 24-hour canteen and a railway station; there seemed to be people coming and going, and food on the go morning, noon and night. My mother used to say "It's like Piccadilly Circus". At the time I didn't know that Piccadilly Circus was a massive busy intersection in the centre of London. I assumed, she was talking about a circus with clowns, performing animals and acrobats, and that sort of made sense, because there was a circus atmosphere in our house. It was a circus without a Ringmaster, nobody seemed to be in charge.

I was blessed to have eight older sisters and ten aunts. My mother once said that I was five years of age before my feet touched the ground. She was referring to me being held in arms and passed from one sister to another. I believe my personality has been profoundly shaped by

this massive female influence. I sometimes wonder if the gender imbalance of my childhood had been the other way around? I sometimes wonder, how I would have turned out had I been born into a family with eight older brothers and ten uncles. I'd have probably ended up in politics or prison or both.

My mother had 10 sisters, and my father's brother had 14 children. This meant that there was always a sense of extended family, always a sense of occasion in the house regardless of how small the occasion. Every week brought its own occasion: a birthday, a first holy communion, a confirmation, a first girlfriend, a first boyfriend, a first day at school, a first tooth, a first job, a first haircut, a marriage, a birth or a death.

CM: Clearly the street on which you grew up had a very big influence and impact on you, I'd like to know more about your life growing up?

CC: Well, I still live on the very same street my family lived and traded on for over a hundred years.

It has always been a working class area. As a child, aspects of the nineteenth century continued to cast a shadow down our street. Our neighbourhood still had traces of those large multi-occupier houses, where the tenants shared communal outdoor toilets. Neighbours socialised on the street, and on summer evenings some would gather around the yellow fluorescent glow of our shop window.

Our neighbourhood was a melting pot of old Cork and those newly arrived to the city. Our shop counter was a meeting place. It was pre-internet, pre-computer, most households didn't have a telephone, and those lucky enough to have television were limited to a single channel, broadcast in black and white a few hours a day. More often than not you'd find yourself staring at a notice on the screen: "Is Dona linn An Briseadh Seo", which means "We Apologise For The Breakdown".

And late at night, when The Hilton Night Club across the street closed their doors, the musicians from the showbands would gather at our shop counter for a slice of Chester cake and a bottle of milk, elbow to elbow with off-duty cops, villains and vagabonds, before the long road home to Mullingar or wherever they came from.

CM: It is true to say your work is inspired by growing up in this area.

CC: I guess it's true to say that my Gods have always been local. My heroes ate Chester cakes and sipped pints of milk at our shop counter. I am inspired by newspaper and fruit-sellers, shopkeepers, hawkers, shawlies, pigeon fanciers, dog-walkers, republicans, Christian Brothers, villains, vagabonds, heroes, activists, revolutionaries, revisionists, peacekeepers, troublemakers, lawbreakers, lawmakers, prostitutes, nuns, priests, saints and sinners, junkies, alcoholics, vegetarians and vegans.

This is not leafy suburbia. This is where the urban poor collide full on with the merchant princes. The people on both sides of that divide are my neighbours and neighbours become like extended family. This is home and there's no place like it.

CM: And this colourful childhood inspired you to write?

CC: Ah well, it's not as if specific experiences from my childhood inspired my writing. It's not as if there is a bubble of childhood stories that I dip into for inspiration. It is far more complex than that. It was a headspace, a state of mind, a set of values.

Our shop counter was a focal point for the neighbourhood. My life, my experience, my expression has been informed by the oral tradition of story and song of my childhood, and if that qualifies as inspiration well, I guess that's where I got my inspiration.

The unfolding life and drama often drifted from the street into our shop and wound its way around our counter right into the little kitchen behind. The neighbours gathered there to entertain and be entertained.

It would be nothing out of the ordinary for a song to break out in our shop – then total silence, as all those seated on coal bags and leaning on counters listened intently, hanging on every word to some unfolding epic saga about, the day a swan from the river waddled into number 8 down the street just as the cat was having kittens, or how The Scarlet Pimpernel up the street planted the bomb in Coventry and later escaped the hangman and climbed the prison wall not once but twice ...

CM: And has your neighbourhood changed much over the years?

CC: My neighborhood has changed totally and my neighbourhood has not changed at all. It is a living entity. Like nature itself, it is never-ending and always changing. As sure as all the small shops on our street, including our family shop, closed in the late 1990s, they are now re-opened and trading. The new shopkeepers on our street are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Brazilian, Chinese, Russian and Eastern European, so nothing has changed. The only change is that these days I can get a better selection of vegetables and spices.

I embrace change. And like my father and his father and his great-aunt Aunt Julia before him, I continue to engage with the people on my street.

CM: And what about your teenage years?

CC: When Punk Rock erupted it presented the perfect catalyst for the chemical reaction of youth, mind and energy. Ever since then, I've always been drawn to the true originals: such as John Lydon, Poly Styrene, Ian Dury, John Cooper Clarke and without doubt, Cork's own: Finbarr Donnelly.

The local music scene was bristling with energy, attitude and originality. I was definitely incredibly inspired to see schoolmates exuding originality and doing their own thing on stage down the Arcadia Ballroom, a big old hulking dancehall where punk bands gathered in the late 1970s. The message I received was loud and clear: whatever I wanted to achieve in life, I would have to do it for myself.

The last job I've had, when I say "job" I mean full-time employment with a wage packet at the end of the week, was with Cork Gas Company back in the early 1980s. Since then, I've been doing it for myself. I just followed the dream – sometimes the dream can be an absolute nightmare. This notion of doing it for myself was reinforced by the endless recession of the 1980s: all opportunity just ceased to exist. And without opportunity, you just got to make it up yourself as you go along. I've been more or less making it up as I go along ever since. I wouldn't recommend it as a career path, but it beats working for a living (*Sarcastically*).

My play, *The Cure*, deals with an individual who was so beaten down during the recession of the '80s and was not mentally or educationally competent to capitalise on the opportunities of our Celtic Tiger economy of the '90s. My play, *After Luke*, also deals with the same topic, that sense of internal culture clash, internal inertia. I guess Pluto in my novel *Passion Play* had similar symptoms. He was from the generation of lost opportunity.

CM: So you have always lived on your street?

CC: By the early '80s, Cork was sinking fast and vanishing down the plughole into the deepest recession. Everyone was leaving for places like Boston, New York, London, Berlin. I went to Canada, at one point seven of my siblings were in North America, in Canada and USA. I stayed there for maybe four or five years. I think those years were so very important.

First of all, it broke that link with the street at that very pivotal age, in my late teens, when I could have gone down a road that might have brought my life's journey to a very different place. Secondly, being in Canada at such a young age, gave me a powerful perspective of my own place. I believe a writer needs to be slightly removed and my time abroad gave me that distance. It offered me an insight into my own life, an attention to detail of my own sense of place.

My place is a place that accommodates everyone from hoteliers to homeless. That's my street. It is a very magical place, maybe not to everyone's taste, but I love it and I live it.

In a way, I find the past a very boring place compared to what is going on in the present. You might enjoy this short piece about my sense of place. It was recorded by RTÉ television (Creedon 2014). There's also a radio interview, extensively about my play, *The Cure*, but it does give an insight to my street (Creedon 2013).

CM: Did you begin writing when you returned to Cork from Canada?

CC: No. Not at all. When I came home I opened a Launderette right next door to my family home. But I began writing while in the Launderette. I began writing a radio drama series *Under The Goldie Fish*, and my short stories started to gain a bit of recognition: the George A Birmingham Award, Francis McManus Awards, PJ O'Connor Awards, BBC One Voice Monologue Award.

Back in the 1980s/1990s, people/artists/friends from the flats and bedsits would drop in to my Launderette for the company and truthfully, for the warmth during the winter months.

I was certainly influenced by the artists and art students hanging out in my Launderette. There was no employment in Ireland in the 1980s so, it was a great time for self-expression. Even though working in the Launderette was humdrum, by the early '90s it was a place where a lot of young people hung out. We'd often re-group back in the Launderette after the pubs. I had a cassette player there. Had some fairly raucous, late night "poetry readings". Must be one of the few launderettes in the world that was raided/visited by the police to break up a rowdy poetry reading. It would be nice to say we talked about art, but in truth I was in my late 20's and it was a rolling party: art exhibitions and book launches and poetry readings were just the kick-off to a good party.

Unemployment was so high in Cork that for the want of something to do, everyone seemed to be a musician or an artist. Art was at the centre of everything. And the realisation that self-expression could be considered as work was a huge eye-opener for me.

Like my parents before me, my house became an open house. I would say there are probably close to 20 artists, stall owners and shopkeepers around the town who lived in my house at one time or another between the years 1988 to 1999. My house was very much a come and stay, sort of place.

The living conditions weren't great; electric cables running all over the house and no proper heating, water taps not working, rattling windows etc., but that's the sort of house it was. It was a big downtown, rattling, leaky old house. Back then the bed-sits were often in a worse condition – Pluto in *Passion Play* lived in a bed-sit house. Comparatively, my place was comfortable I had space and there was always a party. In a way, people staying in my place was just a continuation of the way things were during my parents' time.

Even to this present day my house is still very much an open house. Located downtown, it's the sort of house where people drop in to chat, some stay. Some evenings I cook for guests, even though I may not have invited anyone, people just seem to turn up.



Figure 2 – *The Launderette*. Courtesy of Cónal Creedon

CM: Getting back to your inspiration, clearly your narrative is inspired by the streets on which you live, but how about the influence of other artists?

CC: With regard to other writers and artists? Well, I'm totally impressed by human endeavour and am very lucky to have met so many of my heroes and found them to be just as impressive in real life. When it boils down to it, I'm impressed by people and how they interact with people.

Truthfully, I'm inspired by the private person more than the public aspect of their work. So, in the context of art and literature, I'm inspired by the artist not the art. Many of the artists who really inspired me you may have not heard of, people such as Ciarán Langford, Kevin Holland, Eilís Ní Fhaoláin, Alice Maher, Finbar Donnelly, Ben Reilly, Dimitri Broe, Paddy Galvin, Desmond O'Grady, Theo Dorgan, Maud Cotter, James Scanlon, Sean McCarthy, John Spillane, Martin Wedge, Martin Finnin, Irene Murphy, Mick O'Shea and so many others.

You most probably will not have heard of these people. Some have gone on to achieve national and international acclaim at this point, others are still in their studios just producing

great art for art's sake. But they were extremely active in the art scene in Cork in the late '80s early '90s. A group of maybe 20 or more artists moved into a big old semi-derelict warehouse at the end of my street, they called themselves "The Backwater Artists". Their arrival into my neighbourhood became a massive turning point in my life.

That generation of artists opened my eyes to the fact that self-expression could be a way of life. I'm ever grateful that I was inspired by those artists to follow my dream and close my launderette. The Backwater Artists' Group have gone from strength to strength and are now located in a new state of the art facility of workshops, galleries, print facilities over on the Southside. And though I'm not a visual artist, I still consider myself as one of the Backwater Artists and thankfully, they still invite me along to openings and parties. Life can sometimes deal a funny hand of cards, well the day the Backwater Artists' Group moved into my street it was like getting four aces and a joker up my sleeve.

But for the most part the people who inspired me and my work don't work in the arts at all. In order of importance I would list Fiona, my parents, my uncle Jack and auntie Kit, after that it spreads out into my siblings, extended family, friends and neighbours and that has remained fairly intact over the decades.

CM: Well, as you said I don't know those artists. I know that Patrick Galvin wrote poetry?

CC: Ah well in fairness, I wouldn't expect you to know the people who inspired me, inspiration is a very personal experience. At very pivotal points in my life, I have been blessed that there were always certain individuals standing in the wings offering encouragement and lifting my spirits. Paddy Galvin would have been one of those people.

CM: When did you meet Patrick Galvin?

CC: I think it's true to say that people loved Paddy Galvin. And I'm privileged to be able to say we were great friends. It seems like Paddy has always been connected to my adult life, so I really have no idea how we met.

He was a very sweet and kind man. Obviously, there was a generation of age between us, but we enjoyed each other's company.

I am not specifically inspired by artists or writers or their work. I am inspired by people. Our friendship was not based on his writing or my writing, we were just good friends, nothing academic about it, just friendship for friendship's sake. We had a lot in common. As you may know, Paddy grew up on Margaret Street in the South inner city, which is almost identical to my neighbourhood on the North inner city. Neither of us had attended UCC but both of us were appointed writer-in-residence at UCC, incidentally both of us were writer-in-residence in Cork Prison also. We ploughed a similar furrow we both found our inspiration in the streets, we both were multi-disciplinary, we both wrote novels, stage plays, poetry, film scripts, radio plays, he composed and recorded songs and of late I too have drifted into working with musicians such as Claire Sands and John Spillane (Sands 2019; Spillane, Creedon 2020).

I often performed with Paddy and we conducted workshops for visiting groups. He was a very humble man and such great company.

I remember, I think it was Christmas 1996, Paddy asked me to meet him. And eventually, he took two sheets of paper out of his little bag. He had handwritten two versions of "The Mad Woman Of Cork". One was presented on the page like a standard poem, the other had the stanzas scattered all over the page. He asked me which one I thought was best? I said, in my opinion the one that's all over the place was the nicest. And with that, he tore up the version

that was like a standard poem and handed me the copy that was all over the page. “There, that’s for you for Christmas”, he said.

Seemingly, I had mentioned to him that I liked that poem. Although, I think my favourite poem by Paddy is “Plaisir d’amour”. A very kind man, and we had a lot of fun together.

I was also very fond of his wife Mary Johnson and their daughter Grainne and son Maccara. Mary and Paddy were regular visitors to my house, and I to theirs. So, I have many happy memories in their company. They became friendly with my family, and were regular visitors to my cousin, Joe Creedon, in Inchigeela creating, once again, that all-important sense of extended family.

When he got ill, I used to visit him at home and even though he wasn’t able to communicate because he was recovering from a stroke, I used to hang out with him. We might watch a match on the telly. Sometimes I’d read to him, other times I’d play a recording of my radio plays, or TV documentaries. To be honest, I’m not sure how much he comprehended, but Mary used to say my visits brightened him up, and that was a good enough reason for me to visit him. I loved them both. Mary was also an incredible woman. If ever there was a statue to be erected in this town I would suggest it be dedicated to Mary Johnson. A tireless, worker for the arts and artists. She fought our corner, endlessly in the wars, she achieved so much on behalf of others.

Of course, there was the added connection of the Spanish Civil War. For some reason, Paddy and Mary had a big interest in the Spanish Civil War, and my father’s cousin, Mick Riordan, was one of the last surviving members of the Connolly Column who went to fight the fascists in Spain. As you probably know, the Spanish Civil War manifested itself like a Civil War in Ireland, where the Irish Blue Shirts supported by the Catholic Church, went to fight for Franco, while the International Brigade fought against Franco. My father’s cousin, Mick Riordan, had been in the IRA and went on to set up the Communist Party in Ireland. He was ultimately excommunicated by the Catholic Church – which would have made life extremely difficult for him and his family back in the days of Holy Catholic Ireland – when the Catholic Church ruled the roost.

But in later life, after Mick Riordan was re-accepted back into Irish life, there were a number of celebrations and of course Paddy and Mary would always come along and play a very active part.

Actually Conci, I introduced you to Mick Riordan, that day you, Piera and I went to Dublin. Mick used to run the Communist book shop in Temple Bar, Connolly Books. I think you may have bought books there, perhaps a copy of his book *The Connolly Column*, or maybe it was out of print at the time?

(And here Cónal Creedon shares a link to a song [Moore 2011], “Viva la V Brigada” by Christy Moore – inspired by, Michael Riordan).

Christy Moore wrote this song. He says he was inspired to write “Viva la V Brigada” following a meeting with Mick Riordan. Before Mick died Christy Moore came along to sing it at his bedside.

CM: It’s interesting that your cousin was excommunicated by the Catholic Church. You seem to write a lot about religion, particularly in Begotten Not Made. Were your parents very religious people?

CC: No we wouldn’t have been a particularly religious family. Culturally we were Catholic. And back then Ireland was extremely Catholic, but as a family we only engaged with religion as

an extension of our culture and our history, rather than any sense of blind religious devotion. So, like everyone else we took the Catholic sacraments: Baptism, Holy Communion, Confession, Confirmation, Marriage ...

I don't have a memory of our family going to Mass as a family unit, even at Christmas or other church holidays. So, no, we weren't what one would describe as a devout family. Having said that, because we grew up in a small shop, our shop counter would have been a social hub in our neighbourhood, our front door was always open. Clerics and priests and nuns were regular visitors to our house, but their visits were social not religious. The bishop of Cork has been a lifelong regular visitor ever since he was a student in the seminary in the late 1950's. He came from Inchigeela, the same village as my father, so he became like extended family. Though retired now, he is 80, he is still considered extended family.

Begotten Not Made is about a seismic shift that happened in Ireland sometime around the end of the 1970s. Dana winning the Eurovision identifies the moment when everything changed, and Ireland ceased being insular. Ireland was ready to step forward and join Europe as an equal. Meanwhile, Brother Scully viewing the rising sun at the "Changing of the Guard", identifies the time when the old guard of the Catholic Church became redundant as keepers of Irish morality.

If one looks at the numbers of new vocations to the Catholic Church, right up to the late '60s young people were still flocking to join religious orders. Brother Scully was one of that last generation. But then by 1970 it stopped. It stopped suddenly like a tap being turned off.

The heartbreak of the two unrequited love stories is made all the more palpable because the main characters are oblivious to the massive vortex of change coming down the tracks. Deputy Head Brother Lynch seems to be the least compassionate character and yet he seems to be the only one who is aware of the impending disaster of change.

Begotten Not Made is set against the last generational wave of young Irish people who flocked to join religious orders, and then suddenly were left high and dry by an Irish culture that had moved on. I have visited our local monastery and there are no young Brothers there at all, just a handful of very elderly Brothers, like dinosaurs – the last of a species near extinction. When I was a kid that monastery was like a beehive, full of fit, sporting young men who held huge influence in this city. I often think those elderly clerics must feel short changed by the way current Irish culture has forgotten them, life in Ireland has changed so dramatically around them. That really is what the book is about. It's about how our "belief" – not just religious belief, but our cultural belief, changed dramatically at that moment in time.

I consciously stayed away from the many scandals that have rocked the Church: sex abuse, mother and baby homes, etc., that would have been another book. This novel is very much the story of the view of the world from inside the head of one man. A young man who realises he is devoting his life to a great lie, but due to the entrenched cultural morality of the time, he is unable to do anything about it. The tragedy is, when the cracks became apparent, he finds himself trapped on the wrong side of a shift in culture.

CM: Your previous novel Passion Play was published twenty years ago in 1999. When did you first think of Begotten Not Made? While you were assembling Passion Play? Or just after it?

CC: I think I may have first told you about Begotten Not Made back in early 2000s. Basically, Passion Play is set on Good Friday with many biblical references and a strong Jesus theme running through it. Then I wrote the play The Prodigal Man, commissioned by RTÉ Radio 2001, which was a re-working of the Prodigal Son parable, that brought me back to the Bible and Christian thinking again. I had written two other stage plays, When I Was God (1999),

followed by *The Trial of Jesus* (2000) which was a reenactment of the crucifixion of Jesus played out on the streets of Cork on Good Friday 2000, two thousand years since Jesus' death, and it was part of the Irish National Millennium celebrations.

I plunged deep into biblical research for the *The Trial of Jesus*, and I think it may have occurred to me at that time that there was a strong case to be made for King Herod being Jesus' father. In 2001 I had a column in the *Irish Times* – "Video Paradiso" – writing about my fictionalised life that centred around watching a film every week. Well, that Easter I wrote about the biblical film, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), and in the column I put out the theory of Herod being Jesus' father. It just so happened, that the *Irish Times* decided to defer my column for a week, by which time Easter had passed and that particular seasonal film had lost its currency, so I wrote a different piece for the following week.

I had begun working on the novel *Glory Be To The Father*. It had fatherhood as a main theme, so I decided I'd weave the theory about Herod being Jesus' father into the novel. I had great plans to finish that novel that year, but then as often happens, the writing took me in a different direction, and I started writing stage plays and radio drama. I think *Glory Be To The Father* will be my next book ... we'll see...

CM: *What did you write next?*

CC: I had written a mountain of radio plays throughout the '90s maybe forty hours of radio drama, so I continued writing radio plays in the early 2000s – *This Old Man*, *The Battle of Kinsale 1601*, *Guests of The Nation*, *The Tailor and Ansty* – for RTÉ and *No. 1, Devonshire Street* was commissioned by BBC Radio4 and BBC World Service. I then wrote five stage plays between 2000 and 2005: *Trial of Jesus*, *Glory Be To The Father*, *The Cure*, *When I Was God*, *After Luke*.

Between 2005 and 2009 I made five film documentaries, all inspired by life in my own neighbourhood. I guess you could say, the documentaries are an extension of my writing.

Then between 2009 and 2015 I began touring my stage plays abroad, I toured three of my plays and conducted maybe four subsequent reading tours to China. I have had six productions of my plays in New York, picking up awards for Best Actor, Best Director and Nominated for Best Playwright at the "New York Theatre Awards". I also had a few productions at home in Ireland. In the meantime, I was commissioned to write *The Immortal Deed of Michael O'Leary*, published in November 2015 to coincide with the centenary of World War I. In the context of everything I've produced or written - *The Immortal Deed of Michael O'Leary* is by far the most personal and detailed self-exploration. I had been researching the story of Michael O'Leary, a man from my father's home village, Inchigeela since I was a teenager. A man who has been totally lost to history due to an unfortunate twist of fate. It's a fascinating story.

Meanwhile, all the time since 1999, I have been writing my current book in progress, *Glory Be To The Father* which included *Begotten Not Made* as a sub-strand narrative. Along the way I busied myself doing other bits and pieces, writing radio plays, reading tours and taking on roles such as Writer-in-Residence at UCC. That brings me exactly to where I am right now: just about to pull together and finish my next novel, *Glory Be To the Father*.

CM: *Can you tell me about your fascinating experience as Writer-in-Residence at UCC?*

CC: My appointment as Writer-in-Residence at UCC came just at a right time. The previous 10 years had been extremely busy. In 2005 my *Second City Trilogy* of plays premiered and I subsequently set up Irishtown Press Ltd with a view to touring and publishing the scripts. Then

between 2005 and 2010, I started making my film documentaries, basically one every year for five years, which is a fairly hectic schedule. My production company, Irishtown Productions Ltd, then started touring my plays. I have been in China on 5 or 6 occasions and had maybe 6 productions in New York and two productions in Ireland. That decade was extremely fullon, I was fortunate to have been invited to present a number of reading tours in Europe, the USA and China. It was such great fun. Great fun.

So in 2016, when I was appointed Writer-in-Residence at UCC, the notion of receiving a regular stipend was very appealing. I decided I would take the year off to engage with the job, the process and the interaction. Initially, I was concerned that I might not rise to the challenge, as I had not attended UCC. I had very seldom ventured inside the gates of UCC. Interestingly enough, as someone who prides myself in being very engaged with the city, UCC was a strand of Cork life I knew nothing about.

But from the first day I arrived into UCC, I knew I had landed on my feet. I had an absolute ball. It was so enjoyable. Every aspect of my time there was just brilliant. I had forgotten the luxury and the privilege of having work colleagues. My role was twofold. Firstly, I was to set up and teach a module for MA students, and secondly, I was to engage with the student body in general.

My first week in UCC, I put the word out that I'd like to address all the students, and so the various profs and tutors invited me along. I introduced myself and let the students know that I would like to be involved in a workshop, and so it began. It was just so much fun. From day one, I insisted that we were all writers, I wasn't a teacher, truthfully, I had more learning to do than the students. Our room was an open forum at all times, and we talked a lot about everything and anything and nothing at all, most of all we laughed a lot. It was magical, my God, I learned so much. I guess I just wanted to soak up the whole essence of Campus life, so I engaged with students from the various societies and departments across campus, German, Italian, History, Music, Theatre, Digital Humanities etc. I had an absolute ball.

You'll laugh, but true to form, I regularly brought my students for walks around the town instead of classroom work, it was great just to wander around, everyone throwing in their two-ha'pence worth, talking about details of architecture, street features, shopkeepers, history, geography, myths, stories, folklore and a whole host of characters we'd meet on our travels round the town. I guess my primary input was to convince them to put away their phones, and leave Professor Google up in UCC. It was all about hazarding a guess. The answer was never that important and certainly the correct answer wasn't that important, the magic was to be found in the conversation, the human engagement, the quest of seeking the answer. My line was: "I'd rather have a conversation with someone who had a question mark, rather than an exclamation mark in their speech bubble". They were an extremely bright and engaged group, and I was so encouraged at the end of that year, content in the realisation that our future is in very safe hands. A number of that particular group of students are now graduated and have gone on to become writers. A few of them have picked up awards, such a brilliant endorsement of what we were at. I also managed to publish an anthology with my students, *Cornerstone*. It was really a very special time for me. And that time with the students kicked off a need in me to write prose again. And so it was during my time as Writer-in-Residence that I finally began putting *Begotten Not Made* together.

Even though that was 4 years ago, I'm still in contact with the students, staff and faculty, and I am delighted that I'm still invited to the Christmas gathering. I think the English Department were happy with my time as Writer-in-Residence, and I was so honoured when they invited me to maintain contact with the department by appointing me as Adjunct Professor

of Creative Writing. My year at UCC was so memorable. I made great friends among the department, the staff and the students. I really don't have an ambition to be a teacher, it is a huge responsibility, and I don't think I'd ever be able to take on such a serious responsibility over a protracted period of time. I guess it's like the difference between being a parent or a fun uncle/aunt. I'm happiest to be in the wings, and if every now and again I can help with a little levity and encouragement that is perfect. Every now and then, once or twice a term, the English Department invites me to present a talk to the students, and now and again students working on a specific project call to my house, and that's perfect.

CM: So your time in UCC as Writer-in-Residence gave you the time to finally finish Begotten Not Made.

CC: Yes, I was given time by the very fact that I had a regular income. But most of all I was given the inspiration and the encouragement by the students. It was a highly charged and creative environment.

CM: Where did you get the idea of Jesus son of Herod?

CC: The theory of Herod being the father of Jesus seems very credible if not blatantly obvious from the four Gospels of the New Testament as they are presented to us by the four evangelists. It's all in the interpretation. Despite the constant recurring mantra that Jesus is the Son of God/Son of Man, the Herod narrative seems fairly clear. *Begotten Not Made* totally demystifies any ambiguity and makes a very strong case for the notion that Herod was Jesus' father.

That aside, there are many theories regarding the paternity of Jesus, the most popular obviously attaches him to a deity or a God, while other theories are more secular, including the Roman soldier Tiberius Julius Abdela Panthera⁵, who was supposed to have had an affair with Mary, as the Greek Philosopher Celsus reports, and of course the finger of suspicion always points to Joseph himself as the father. Obviously, I have my own theories regarding the paternity of Jesus, but the detail of who the father was or wasn't is unimportant. What matters is that a young Christian Brother became so consumed by his faith, that his obsession with "belief" effectively destroyed his vocation and ultimately his life.

CM: But is Begotten Not Made a story centred on faith and hypocrisy in monasteries and convents in Cork?

CC: Monastic life in this novel is simply presented as another aspect of life. Life and relationships within a monastic setting is no more than any other slice of life, with its internal jealousy, greed, power struggles, ambitions, loves and heartbreaks. The Christian belief is just the backdrop from which a religious community operates. I guess the real thesis of *Begotten Not Made* is: if we scratch the surface of any fundamental belief system of any community, religious or secular organisation, then we may find that the very basic cornerstone belief is not as solid as it appears to be. Maybe the survival of such a community depends on the core

⁵In the II century, Celsus a Greek philosopher declared that Jesus' father was Panthera a Roman soldier. But Origen who considered he was referring a fake story replied: "Let us return, however, to the words put into the mouth of the Jew, where "the mother of Jesus" is described as having been "turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera" (Origen 1980, 3).

belief remaining intact, unchallenged, entrenched and in the realm of the unproven. Belief only works if people can be convinced that such a belief is a special magical mystery of life and remains beyond question.

CM: How did you develop the idea of belief throughout the novel?

CC: Attempting to reveal the true fundamentals of any organisation or social communal gathering can reveal more complicating questions than definitive answers. In short, the whole book is about belief – the “grand” Herod story is more or less a smoke screen from which I present and explore a plethora of other “belief stories” within the narrative. A measure of good fiction is the ability to stretch the limits of plausibility to the limits of credibility. The core of this novel is effectively about two extremely unlikely unrequited love stories that develop within enclosed religious settings – the lifelong love affairs between Brother Scully and Sister Claire – and the apparent love that is shared by Sister Francesca and Mossie the Gardener.

By including a number of incredible stories in the narrative it makes the surreal love stories at the core more acceptable. By questioning the fundamental belief of Christianity, Jesus the son of God in heaven, born of a virgin, crucified and raised from the dead, this in some way, makes all the other fairy tales in the narrative, heroic pigeons, flashing lights, saintly apparitions, miraculous cures etc., seem more plausible.

In the context of *Begotten Not Made*, by holding the big belief – the paternity of Jesus – up to scrutiny it allowed me to tell what I believe to be the real story of the book, a very magical fairy tale of two unrequited love stories of four individuals trapped in religious life. Two love stories trapped by belief. I am aware of many clerics, male and female, who lived this life of self-denial because of their commitment to a religious belief and a vocation to what ostensibly could be described as the greatest fairy tale ever told. So, the Herod story is really not that important as a narrative, it is a strong hook. It is a hook that has attracted interest among readers.

CM: Beyond the “belief stories” explored in the narrative, did you wish to highlight the process of secularization in monasteries and convents in Cork?

CC: Yes. But not so much to highlight it, I am more interested in identifying this huge cultural shift that happened in my lifetime. The last time you were in Cork we went to the Nano Nagle Centre, housed in the renovated eighteenth-century South Presentation Convent. Well, Nano Nagle is currently in the process of being conferred to sainthood, meanwhile the convent she set up is in the process of being secularized. This is basically the backbone of one of the primary narratives in *Begotten Not Made*, the beatification of Sister Francesca of the Birds at a time when St. Joseph’s convent is in decline.

When I was writing *Begotten Not Made* back in 1999, I could not have envisioned such a thing would really happen in the South Presentation Convent. A short twenty years ago, it would have been unheard of, that such a prestigious Catholic Convent would be repurposed as a public space, rebranded as an arts centre/café, public gardens, even the nuns’ chapel is now a concert venue. Up until recently, this community of religious Sisters lived behind large stone walls, but now the walls are removed. It has become a visitors’ centre, a place where tourists go for a coffee and are lounging around, taking the sun in what used to be the nuns’ private garden. The nuns are more or less all gone now from the South Presentation Convent. In *Begotten Not Made*, Sister Francesca has a vision of these changes ahead, she is somewhat cynical about it – but she is also a realist, the convent is in decline and needs must (see Creedon 2018, 299).

The Ireland I grew up in was extremely Catholic, like Italy, the Mass was presented in Latin, reading the Bible was not encouraged. It was this ownership of the “belief” by a men’s organisation that gave these men of the Church so much power, and of course by the time I was growing up in the early ’70s all that was about to change dramatically. The world I knew and my parents knew had changed, and changed forever.

CM: Was Brother Scully’s hysterical laughter a way to show his/your disillusion with the triviality of certain miracles which served Christianity to attract “primitive minds”, as you say in Begotten Not Made?

CC: No. His hysterical laughter is far less contrived than a response to the incredulity of the miracles. Basically, Brother Scully is an emotional mess. His manic laughter is a symptom of his mental instability, partly due to the effects of the cocktail of heavy medication and treatments he has received over the previous 50 years. Brother Scully’s incessant giggling and laughter and repetition of words is no more than a symptom of his psychiatric condition. And ever since he was instructed by Deputy Head Brother (see Creedon 2018, 166) that the monastery was no place for expressions of emotion, insisting that “denial” is the greatest evolutionary development of the human race, Brother Scully has sublimated all his emotions into expressions of laughter. He has learned that laughter is more socially acceptable than crying, so all his emotions are expressed through laughter. Brother Scully’s laughter is not seditious. Brother Scully’s laughter is psychologically deep-rooted, it is in fact an expression of his isolation, his loneliness and emotional disconnect.

CM: While rereading it I felt that the text moves through different blocks that could be seen as different “short stories”. The first one about Brother Scully’s “doubts” about Christian dogmas with the theory of Jesus, son of Herod, the second about the so-called miracles told by the other narrator Sister Claire, stories-within-stories ...

CC: Oh yes, that? Well, here’s the thing, that device is purely technical. If I were to write and present the theory of the paternity of Jesus in one block it would read like an academic thesis. It would be extremely information-dense with facts and chronological dates. It would not read like fiction. It would require the full backstory and exposition of secondary biblical characters, John The Baptist, Elizabeth, Zacharias and the various members of the Herod Royal family, also an analysis of the political situation that was unfolding in Jerusalem at that time, including the workings of Roman rule and methods of maintaining law and order in Judea.

I decided it would be better to present the story three times. By doing this, the reader becomes complicit in the conspiracy that is unfolding in Brother Scully’s mind. The first telling is a very simplistic naive exploration by Brother Scully while in the seminary, when he questions the Theology Master, Brother Ambrose, about details of scriptures and in the process he exposes some minor anomalies in the biblical story. In doing this I establish the main players of the story that is about to unfold in the minds of the readers and I put forward the idea that there are narrative flaws in the New Testament.

Once the reader is familiar with the main characters, the goodies and the baddies established, the story is told a second time. This time Brother Scully expands his theory to Sister Claire. This second retelling presents the Bible story as a real flesh and blood family, the saga unfolds like a soap opera.

The third bite of the cherry is at the end when Brother Scully has a long and intense late-night discussion with Brother Ambrose. This intense scrutiny of the theory informs the reader that there is, in fact, a good solid scriptural basis behind the theory of Jesus’ paternity.

It would not have been possible to present this intense debate without having first informed the reader of the historical context and background, and the personalities, the frailties and fallibilities of the key characters.

CM: And you introduce stories within the stories, is this the device you use to lighten the narration? Was the theory of Jesus' paternity meant to be structurally framed by the different narrative blocks of stories within stories?

CC: This is a book of stories. Multiple interlocking stories untangle inside one man's tormented mind over one day. That's *Begotten Not Made*. The basis of all good storytelling is to convince your audience to suspend disbelief. I use the various fairy tales within the narrative, heroic pigeons, love stories, saintly apparitions, miraculous cures etc. to give space to the reader, to help the reader become comfortable with the challenges of the biblical and theological narrative. And conversely, I use the biblical exploration as a grounding counterbalance to the fairy-tale aspect of the stories.

And yes, I did actively structure the biblical theory in an episodic way to help familiarize the reader with the main characters. There's also a certain amount of repetition in each retelling. This gives the reader ownership of the theory rather than me presenting the readers with a long list of facts. It was important for me that the reader would engage with Jesus' extended family as a real-life family with its own internal conflicts, struggles and complications in a narrative storyline rather than present it as an academic theological theory.

*CM: Your books and plays regularly feature the characters going for a walk around the city of Cork. Do Pluto's walks in *Passion Play* cover a similar route in *The Cure* and in *Begotten Not Made*?*

CC: (*Laughing here*) You'll find I do bring my characters on walks around the town all the time, or maybe it's the case that my characters bring me on walks around the town. Going for a walk around town is one of my own personal, favourite past times. To tell you the truth, I enjoy bringing my characters and my readers for a walk. It gets me away from my desk without leaving my desk.

My walks usually take a very specific route in my head, but the details on the page never exactly fit any map. In *The Cure* there are two walks. One walk is very specific and unchanging. It is the walk taken by the protagonist's father and grandfather so many times that he can mentally namecheck every scent and industry, and shop front from the grotto in Blackpool all the way to my street, including namechecking the shop in which I grew up on Devonshire Street. This walk is revisited four times in the text and it can appear like a druidic chant, getting faster and faster and less descriptive as we get closer to the end of his journey: Patrick's Bridge, the gateway to the downtown. Meanwhile there is also a second walk in *The Cure*, the protagonist in real time is also walking through the streets of Cork in search of an early morning pub. It's Christmas time, and on his journey he meets his past. These encounters with his past force him to re-examine the present.

Meanwhile, the walks in *Passion Play* are of a different nature. The first one begins outside the Donkey's Ears pub when Pluto meets the young Mags and he takes the drug Ecstasy for the first time. It is fuelled by the drug which has the effect of spiraling energy and Pluto

gets extremely talkative and it ends in an explosion of sex with Mags. This walk begins on the Southside by City Hall and follows the river circumnavigating the “old town” and eventually he finds himself in the heart of the Northside at Shandon steeple. Along the journey, some of the episodes he talks about are tinged with autobiographical and historical detail. You might find it interesting, that Pluto, though wired on drugs when they get to Dalton’s Avenue on the Coal Quay, makes the comment that there should be a bridge built across the river there. The book was published in 1999, and many years later Cork City Council actually built a bridge at that very spot on the river.

Pluto’s second walk is fueled by LSD. At this point in the novel he is dead and his soul heads off in a chaotic multi-episodic, frantic walk that becomes distracted in a trippy sort of way. Due to the LSD influence he gets sidetracked by a pigeon in the river, then there’s the toilet bowel episode, then the DVD to be returned, then he meets Tony Tabs. It’s a very trippy, rolling snowball of a journey – obviously the energy is driven by the LSD, but what you might find interesting is that both walks in *Passion Play* end up bringing him to the same place, in the Shandon Area, *Under the Goldie Fish*.

In the first walk he ends up having mad, wild passionate sex with Mags in Shandon graveyard. In the second walk he’s back in the Shandon area for his son Paulo’s Holy Communion. Incidentally, Paulo was conceived during a sex session in Shandon graveyard in the previous walk, his Ecstasy-fueled first walk with Mags.

Ultimately, he travels through time and space to Sherkin Island, and finds himself in Bell’s Field on top of Patrick’s Hill, spellbound looking at the grand vista of the Northside. It dawns on him that the Northside, “the city of pain”, is actually his vision of heaven.

There are a number of walks in *Begotten Not Made*. When Brother Scully goes for a walk on the beam of light across the sky from Monastery to Convent, this is obviously a virtual walk where the young Brother’s demented mind presents him with an overview, a grand vista of the world he left behind, the world outside the monastery wall. The people mentioned are real people, familiar on the Northside of Cork City: Michael Crane and Gerry Dalton both are pigeon fanciers.

Another walk in *Begotten Not Made*, is when the word filters out of the Convent that Sister Francesca cured a pigeon, that word is carried in a very specific journey. Beginning in the heart of the Northside in the pubs of Shandon Street, down to the North Gate Bridge, along the North Main Street and South Main Street. Then filtering out across the island of downtown Cork, and over the South Gate Bridge up into the heart of the Southside and into the snug of Tom Barry’s Pub. Basically the story of the miracle goes from shop counter to shop counter, from pub to pub and travels across the city.

Bringing my characters on a walk is very much part of establishing the world of the book, or the play, in my head. And though audiences and readers might recognise the walks, and some might even say they have walked those walks, the fact of the matter is that the walks are not precise topographical maps. So the walks are mental and emotional walks. For example, there is no Church on French Church Street, the church is on the next lane, Carey’s Lane. In *The Cure*, Brother Keenan is seen outside Murray’s Gun shop window, but it is impossible to see Murray’s Gun Shop window from that location. I insert these anomalies into the narrative because I don’t want to be trapped by the exact detail of a map. At the end of the day, it is a world of make belief which offers a mirror to the reality.



Figure 3 – *Devonshire Street*. Photo by Conci Mazzullo

CM: I've been rereading Brother Scully's confession and it sounds like the Inquisition Trial of people already found terribly guilty, who had to admit that Satan misguided them!

CC: Well, first of all it wasn't a confession as an official Catholic rite. It was a trial conducted by Deputy Head Brother Lynch and Bossman. Christian Brothers don't have the authority to hear confession, only priests are qualified to hear Confession. And that explains why, later that night when Bossman slept soundly he had a very vivid and surreal dream about the Bishop coming to him to tell his confession.

The whole notion of Satan is introduced by the Head Brother seeking cheap thrills. He wanted to hear about the young nun's body and the sexual details of the act that occurred between the young Brother Scully and the young nun, so he introduced the notion of confession and Satan and the temptation of Adam by Eve to legitimize his probing questions about the sexual act. There is a sense in the text, that Bossman becomes more and more sexually aroused by the details, and leading to sexual orgasm. The scene where he sits in the darkness and lights a cigarette in the calmness is very much a postcoital scene.

CM: Why was Confession so intimidating in the Christian Brothers' when you generally know the penance was three Hail Mary's?

CC: Confession! Don't start me on Confession! The basis of Confession is that we are all guilty of something. Even before birth we are guilty of Original Sin, save me please! Personally, Confession is one of my biggest issues with the Catholic Religion. Particularly, in a place such

as Cork up until the 1970s. Basically, when I was a child Cork was more or less 100% Catholic. And in general we were an extremely poor society.

In retrospect, I find the fact that every man, woman and child went to their local parish church to tell another man, albeit a “man of God”, exactly what they had done “wrong” is a total abuse of power. The KGB, the Stasi or Maoist China did not have such a level of information gathering from the general population that the Catholic Church had.

The secrecy of the confessional also creates the perfect “safe” environment for devout individuals to reveal information about their neighbours, employers, their families, etc. Basically, the Church through the system of Confession gained insight into every single household right across the community. At its most insidious, should someone in Cork refer to a wrongdoing by someone in the far side of the country, the details could be easily cross-referenced via parish priests, it’s a bizarre idea but the potential of such cross-referencing put the Church in an incredibly powerful position. It also elevates the priests, these pampered men, to a position of almost demi-god in the community. Personally, I find it infuriating when I think of my mother’s generation, those saintly, abstemious, morally devout women of her time, going on their knees, with their heads covered, in a darkened confession box to confess their “sins” to some fucking eejit, pardon my English. Even the notion of men entering a church bareheaded, while bishops and cardinals are parading around the altar wearing the most outrageous head gear is so outrageous, elitist and fundamentally un-Christian.

I remember when I was a kid, it crossed my mind that it didn’t matter if you committed murder or robbed a penny lollypop, the penance would always be the same: Three Hail Marys. So, even back then I felt the whole idea of repenting and absolution of sins was just a smoke screen for information gathering. If the local priests know who is robbing from their bosses, or who is having an extra-marital affair, or involved in other more “devious un-godly” practices such as homosexuality, or involved in illegal organisations etc., and this information can be gathered and cross-referenced through “Confession”, that gives that organisation a frightening amount of power over the powerful and weakest individuals of society. Yes, I think Confession is so frighteningly insidious, particularly when you have kids as young as 7 years of age inside in a darkened confessional sharing their innermost thoughts and experiences with a strange man who claims to be in regular communication with the God of creation. Frightening! I agree with most of Jesus Christ’s message, but I don’t see Christianity in any of that.

CM: Brother Scully’s spontaneity and belief in the just Bossman’s line of enquiry, not by chance Bossman, entrapped him inside a net of hypocritical behavior condemning him before even starting to listen to his Confession. As you say “Frighteningly insidious”! Did you have any personal experience which led you to refuse Confession and what you rightly thought the morally wrong listening to people’s weak sides of their souls?

CC: Confession was certainly the first of the sacraments I gave up. I’d say I was maybe 9 or 10 years of age. At a very young age we instinctively knew it was a load of nonsense. I remember as kids, at the end of our Confession we used to tag on one extra sin: “... and I told lies, Father”.

By doing this we felt it sort of exonerated us from telling the truth to the priest in Confession. For example, you could make up a few innocent sins, such as “I didn’t do my homework, I didn’t bring the dog for a walk ...” and leave out the more serious sins. And if at the end of your Confession you just say “... and I told lies, Father”. In that way you were confessing that the Confession you had just told was a pack of lies.

I remember not having been to Confession for a number of years, for some reason, I found myself in a confession box with a priest at the far side of the grill. I would guess it was around

the time of my Confirmation. At the part when the priest invited me to say the Confiteor. I just couldn't remember the words of the prayer. It had been so long since my previous confession, for the life of me, I just couldn't remember the words of the prayer. All I could do was to repeat the opening words again and again, "Oh, my God ... Oh, my God ... Oh, my God ..." and I remember thinking this is ridiculous and farcical. Eventually the priest recited the prayer line for line and I repeated it back to him, and even at that young age I realized "this is just a load of nonsense". I do believe that was my last time actually going to Confession. As you know Frank O'Connor wrote a very famous short story, "My First Confession", actually set in my local parish church. Well maybe I should write a sequel: "My Last Confession" (*Laughing here*).

CM: I think that in Italy, after the II Vatican Council, things started to be more lenient. We were much freer than in other countries where the Catholics had to prove their fidelity to the Catholic religion.

CC: Absolutely, Vatican II was the beginning of the end, but I think Pope John had seen the writing on the wall and was trying to steer the church towards a modern age.

Certainly an Irish Catholic is not the same as a Roman Catholic. Devout Irish Catholics are still very connected to local pre-Christian deities. Irish Catholicism has been integral to the 800 years of struggle against the oppression of our English colonists. I don't mean Irish Catholic as a type of ritualistic practice but more as a cultural identification tag.

The line of demarcation was simple: the "native" Irish were Catholic and the English invaders/colonialists were "Anglican/Protestant" ever since Henry VIII, in the 1530's, and more particularly after the Desmond Wars of 1570's. This Catholic/Protestant divide always caused a certain amount of conflicting issues regarding our spiritual belief and our political aspirations. And certainly, Catholicism was the flag of the Irish rebel.

The 1798 Rebellion did complicate this theory as so many Protestants were the leaders of the United Irishmen. But for the most part, we did place the Catholic Church at the head and the centre of how "native" Irish culture expressed ourselves and defined ourselves. That is probably the main reason why Irish Catholicism became the state religion. Catholicism was handed the responsibility for Irish morality, education, and health since the 1921 War of Independence. It also explains the culture that allowed many recent scandals, sexual scandals, mother and baby homes, the abuse of power in education, and so many other aspects of Irish life to happen.

In very simplistic terms, the arrival of television gave the ordinary people of Ireland a world view, hence the Eurovision Song Contest being pivotal to the liberation of Brother Scully. You might find it interesting that in *Begotten Not Made*, the arch-conservative Deputy Head Brother Lynch's, stark warning that television would be the end of Catholic control in Ireland (see Creedon 2018, 58). Television, as he saw it, the great educator of the masses, was in fact the Antichrist.

CM: In Italy we were very lucky, because my generation attended higher secondary school after 1968; this meant we were much freer than the previous generation which had gone through World War II. Young people radically contested political, social, cultural, economic structures, refused capitalism through the students' movement in Europe and USA and somehow, then, culturally influenced society.

CC: Well, very similarly Ireland underwent dramatic change from late 1960's through the 1970's, and that's the backbone of *Begotten Not Made*. Deputy Head Brother Lynch in one of his rants gives out about students rioting all across Europe in 1968 (see Creedon 2018, 58).

CM: What about Brother Ambrose, who was definitely gay, why did he commit suicide? While talking to Brother Scully he finally emerged as a freethinking man who knew things as they were and appeared easy-going and critical of the Brothers' system.

CC: Brother Ambrose explains why he took his own life. Basically, he had long come to terms with the hypocrisy of the Church, he may even have lost his faith in the existence of a God, but was still happy to function within the church. But it was the realization that the Christian God was a God of conditional love that pushed him over the edge. He realized God's love came with conditions, so he had come to the conclusion that religious life was no longer an option for him. I'm not even sure if Ambrose would have classified himself as "gay", he knew he was clearly attracted to young males, but may not have fully understood that this was the "dreaded sin of homosexuality". His sexuality was a complication for him. I believe he struggled with his feelings and may not have fully understood them. Of course there is a massive contradiction and irony in Brother Ambrose, he is a Theologian, and yet his natural instinct is to refute the sexual rules imposed by Church Theology. And, as a Theology Master his position was to encourage younger Brothers when they were experiencing conflicts of faith, meanwhile his obvious sexual orientation meant he was continually in conflict with his own faith. There is also something interesting in that, his role in the Monastery, places him in charge of the young, idealistic, newly arrived seminarians. Was this a role he manufactured for himself?

In 50's Ireland, sex was considered as a male/female interaction. We have as a saying "There was no sex in Ireland before *The Late Late*". *The Late Late Show* was a talk show that started in the 1960's and aired relatively innocent topics by today's standards, but back then they shocked the nation.

So, Ambrose realized he had devoted his life to a God of conditional love, a God who did not accept people like him. In the course of his discussion with Brother Scully he caught a glimpse of how farcical his own belief system had been and he realized that maybe he had devoted his life to something he no longer believed in. If Brother Ambrose was a younger man he would have left the Monastery, but at this stage in his life he had nowhere to go. His family farm was gone to his older brother. His sister was living with his brother and that wasn't working out very well. So he was trapped, nowhere to go, and it most likely had been like that for decades. His only way out was to take his own life rather than live a life of hypocrisy.

It's important to remember that Ambrose had recently been accused of having sexual late night encounters with the young seminarian Brother Crowley, so realistically, his secret life within the monastery was over, his suicide may have had more to do with that and very little to do with his conversation with Brother Scully.

CM: So how were you inspired for Brother Scully's love for the novice? Did you know of brothers and sisters who took their life?

CC: I don't know of any Brothers or Nuns who took their own life. But the reality is that back then suicide was a mortal sin, so a death by suicide would not be generally reported or talked about or admitted.

Regarding clerics falling in love and leaving the religious order, I knew many. I'm not sure which came first, the inspiration or the experience. A Christian Brother, who was in the school I went to, left the monastery and married a nun. A number of years ago, long after I had written the bulk of this book, I asked if I could meet with him, not so much to find out about leaving the Monastery, but to learn details of day-to-day life as it unfolded inside a monastery.

For example, I asked him how they would address the Head Brother, would they call him Head Brother? and he laughed and said: “No, we used to call him the Bossman”. In a way, such a simple answer was a breakthrough moment for me. It really opened my mind to the notion that religious orders were just a functioning community within the community.

Another was a young priest. I went to London with my father back in the early 1970s. We stayed in this young priest’s flat, but it was a shock to me at the time when I realized that he was married to a nun. And there was a sense that we shouldn’t talk about it when we returned to Ireland.

But there are many, many, many cases of young lads of my vintage who went off to join religious orders, many of whom quit and ended up getting married and having kids.

The big change of the 1970’s was the ability to reject the church and its power.

CM: I noticed that the so well-rounded characters inhabiting the pages of Passion Play are definitely related to the time you wrote the novel – ’80-’90s –, whereas those of Begotten Not Made are connected with the ’70’s and develop through other 50 years. Did Brother Scully feel nostalgia of his past, of his unrequited love, his lost innocence? When he repetitively recites like a mantra “wherediditallgowrongwhere ...” what does it refer to?

CC: Passion Play is very much set in its own present ’80-’90s. But large pivotal extracts of Passion Play are also set in the ’60s and ’70s, when Pluto, Pinko, Tragic Ted, Fatfuka were kids growing up on McSwiney Street.

Similarly, Brother Scully is very much in the present, but just like Pluto in *Passion Play*, Brother Scully’s past informs and haunts his present. It’s a bit like Tir Na Nóg, when Oisín falls from his horse, he realizes he is old and his whole life has just passed him by. It’s like an awakening. Suddenly, the present for Brother Scully becomes very real. He realises that he is surrounded by the elderly and infirm, even the eternally youthful Brother O’Connell is now very elderly and requires a walking frame and his old nemesis, Deputy Head Brother Lynch is struck immobile because of a stroke. The youthful energy and zest in the monastery is all gone, and that very realization is probably one of the reasons that motivates the elderly Brother Scully to do something now. Hence his mantra: “wherediditallgowrongwhere ...”. He is asking himself: how did I end up where I ended up, where did all the years go?

I don’t really think his view of the past is nostalgic. It’s the exact opposite. His view of his past is oppressive, painful, devoid of fun, devoid of free will. One particular night of his tragic past is lodged in his mind. He realises, that if he had made the correct decision that night of Dana’s Eurovision win, all those years ago, his life would have been so different. So, realistically, there is very little space for nostalgia in his heart. His past is a past of total regret, no rose-tinted glasses at all.

CM: The only outstanding female role is that of the novice Sister Claire who determines a seismic quake in Brother Scully’s life, why is she pivotal?

CC: Yes, sister Claire is the important female character and Brother Scully is the important male. It is a two-person show, if you don’t count the pigeon. All the other characters really only have walk-on parts. I wanted to keep the bulk of the book in Brother Scully’s head. So the narrative is confined to an internal journey. If the novel engaged too much with other events and characters around the Monastery, the power and intensity of the isolation of his mind would be lost.

Brother Scully’s life from childhood was fast-tracked to join religious orders. I believe this was the case with most clerics of that time. And maybe Brother Scully’s life/career as a religious

Brother would have been a great success, had everything gone according to plan. Who knows, he may have even gone on to be the head of the monastery. It was even suggested while in the seminary, that he might go on to be the youngest Superior General of the Order. He certainly had the energy, the drive, the enthusiasm, and all was going to plan.

But for one minor complication. On the special night Dana won the Eurovision he was presented with a new narrative for his life, the very notion of physical love with Sister Claire, and suddenly his whole life plan became derailed. For the first time he realised that up to this point in his life he had expressed very little free will. But if he was to follow his free will and desires, and run away with Sister Claire, it would have been totally counterproductive to how he had lived his life. Of course Sister Claire vanishes that night and we don't see her again until 50 years later, at which point she is an elderly nun.

But there is another second female character in the narrative. The reader is also presented with the lifelong narrative of Sister Francesca. Hers is a very complicated love story with Mossie the Gardener, which is ultimately resolved at the very moment when death did them part.

Incidentally, when I chose the character names for Sister Francesca and Sister Claire, they were to be two sides of the same coin, I had St. Francis of Assisi and St. Claire in mind.



Figure 4 – *Begotten*. Courtesy of Cónal Creedon

CM: Yes I had thought so when juxtaposing the names you chose for the two nuns. But Sister Claire is finally contributing to the beatification of Sister Francesca, thus carrying out the convent's strategies and beliefs.

CC: You ask about Sister Claire taking on the role of a nun and contriving to create the sainthood of Sister Francesca. Well, that is realistically often the case with individuals who come to a crisis of faith.

Sister Claire did falter when she met Brother Scully that night. She appeared much more overt about expressing her sexuality than Brother Scully, but yet she hesitated because she required him to express commitment. Realistically, it would have been a huge leap of faith for a Brother or a nun to leave religious orders, so that notion of two going together would make a lot of sense. You must remember these two young people were qualified teachers, but most schools in the country were Catholic run, and of course their families would most probably reject them.

But Sister Claire's behaviour in the kitchen that night implies that she is more mature mentally and emotionally secure than Brother Scully, but in the absence of Brother Scully's commitment, she came to terms with her crisis of faith and decided her life would be better within the convent. As often happens following a crisis of faith, she lost some of her naivety and innocence of a young novice, but maybe it is that loss of naivety that refocused her to go on to eventually become the Reverend Mother. It's obvious towards the end of the book that she is very cynical about the sainthood of Sister Francesca, but she decides to comply with the ambitions of the enthusiastic young bishop. It's a compromise, her life has been full of compromise, she fully understands the state of her depleted elderly community of Sisters, she is aware of the financial security her community requires for their old age.

CM: Did you give importance to all the names chosen for your characters as I presume you chose Scully coming from Irish Ó Scolaidhe?

*CC: I picked Scully for many reasons. His name changed many times over many drafts, but I stuck with Scully, because it sounded like Skull and a sense of foreboding. Also the whole narrative happens within his skull. Well obviously, Scully would have implications of "Scoil", the Irish word for "school". I selected the name of Brother O'Connell, after one of my personal favourite Christian Brothers called Brother O'Connell: He taught me in 6th class. Always very enthusiastic, always dashing around, always engaging and caring, and was in charge of the choir. While Brother Crowley is actually Fatfuka in *Passion Play*. In *Passion Play*, Fatfuka went to join the Christian Brothers and left under a cloud. You might remember he had a brief gay affair with Pinko before he married his wife and had children, and then of course he got cancer. Brother Crowley offers a glimpse into what had happened to Fatfuka while he was in the Brothers. It's implied in *Begotten Not Made* that Brother Crowley and Brother Ambrose may have had a brief relationship before Brother Crowley walked out of the Monastery. Christy, the child in *Begotten Not Made*, is the protagonist in my next book, *Glory Be To The Father*.*

*CM: So we have got characters moving inside your macro text, interestingly, from *Passion Play* to *Begotten*.*

*CC: ... and further afield, some of them will move on into *Glory Be To The Father*. Yes, like Mossie the Gardener also turns up in my next book as a fairly pivotal character.*

CM: What about Ambrose?

CC: Ambrose was a name I battled with, but ultimately went with it because St. Ambrose was a big doctrinal leader of the early church in Milan. Also, Ambrosia is a brand name for creamed rice, and creamed rice is considered soothing, often given to children. Ambrose's role in the monastery was to sooth anxiety and worry among the young seminarians.

CM: Getting back to Begotten Not Made, I wonder, could Brother Scully see the Southside of Cork, i.e. the Nano Nagle Centre from his window?

CC: I believe you might be getting two Presentation Convents confused. Nano Nagle is a former Presentation Convent located on the Southside of the city. North Presentation Convent is located on the Northside.

Brother Scully is in a Monastery on the Northside of the city. In real terms, he wouldn't be in a position to see a convent on the Southside of the city. But, having said that, it's best not to get bogged down on a the detail of topography. Brother Scully's world is not identified as Cork. Cork as a location is not mentioned anywhere in the text. So it would be very misleading to identify what he can or can't see in Cork city; even though the book is immersed in Cork, the topography is imaginary and intentionally not detailed enough to identify what he can or can't see. Although, in my mind's eye, Brother Scully is on the Northside and the Monastery would be the North Monastery, and Sister Claire's convent would be the North Presentation Convent which is adjacent to the North Monastery, but I don't reference them by name. Yet many of the references are very much Northside: Murphy's Brewery, the stacks of houses of Goldsmiths, Audley Place, Patrick's Hill, Shandon, and of course the pigeon fanciers named in the book. Michael Crane and Dalton are totally real Northside Cork people. Whereas the Nano Nagle Centre is very much on the Southside of the city, but it is fascinating that the recent repurposing and proposal of Sainthood for Nano Nagle (in real life) is a mirror of what is happening in the Convent in *Begotten Not Made*.

CM: But what was the Nano Nagle area like in the '50s? Always the Northside against the Southside? Would it be different from the Northside Christian Brothers? I mean less well off? Was it the same in the 1950s-1970s?

CC: Cork City Northside and Southside are carbon copy images of each other. In the past, the old walled city of Cork was located on an island in the middle of the river Lee. The English colonists restricted indigenous native Irish access to the old city of Cork. This old city is still identifiable to Cork people, it is the street between the North Gate Bridge and the South Gate Bridge. The Gate Bridges were in place to keep the native Irish out. Over time, two separate communities of indigenous native Irish established either side of the river, separated by the old walled city. Effectively, you had two independent indigenous native communities established on either sides of the river, viewing each other from opposing hillsides, but with very little social contact or interaction. I believe this is the root of the palpable competition and rivalry that traditionally existed between the Northside and the Southside of Cork City.

So in effect, the Northside and the Southside are carbon copies of each other. Shandon steeple on the Northside reflects the tower on Tower Street over on the Southside; The North Cathedral reflects the South Cathedral; the North Monastery Christian Brothers reflects the South Monastery Christian Brothers; The Northside Presentation Convent reflect the Southside "Nano Nagle" Presentation Convent; The Northside Murphy's Brewery is reflected by the Southside Beamish Brewery; the Northside O'Connor's Funeral Home is reflected by the Southside Forde's Funeral Home. Even the streetscape, the hill of Shandon Street is reflected by the hill Barrack Street, and the respective off shoots of Blarney Street and Evergreen Street are almost identical. If you fold the map of Cork using Washington Street as the axis – which bisects the old city – well all those buildings and industries and streets on both sides of the river align almost perfectly. Yet both communities are separated and isolated by this "old town" in the centre of the river.

I believe it is this separation and yet similarity of two communities that has nurtured what was traditionally such an entrenched and sometimes bitter Northside/Southside rivalry in Cork, a rivalry probably not so evident in recent years.

That sense of the Northside and the Southside being carbon copies of each other is identified in *Begotten Not Made* (see Creedon 2018, 189-190). I describe the opposing hills of the Northside and the Southside as the “Butterfly wings” in the passage where Mossie the Gardner gossips about Sister Francesca’s miracle in a pub on the Northside, and the news travels from one pub, “The Shandon Arms” in the Shandon area on the Northside to the corresponding pub, “Tom Barry’s”, in Greenmount area on the Southside:

It’s a miracle, whispered Mossie the Gardener.

No, not a miracle, said Sister Francesca.

She was annoyed that Mossie would suggest that God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, would concern himself with something as trivial as curing a small bird’s broken wing. She was adamant that no miracle had been procured, and insisted that the bird’s recovery had been nothing more than a combination of care and the power of prayer.

Gardening can be thirsty work, and sometimes gardeners drink more than they should. That evening on his way home from work, young Mossie The Gardener dropped into the Shandon Arms for a pint or two. Word of the robin’s miraculous recovery spread along the bar counter like ink on a blotter, through the snug, past the card players in the corner and out into the lanes around Dominick Street and Eason’s Hill, then right across the city from the northern tip to the southern tip of the butterfly wings, from the laneways at the top of Shandon Street, all the way down into the bowels of the town, across two rivers, past mirror images of breweries, bridges and undertakers. Then shopkeepers and shawlies contrived to whisper and gossip from the North Gate Bridge, the full length of the North Main Street, and down along the South Main Street, all the way to the South Gate Bridge. The word travelled cheek by jowl up the steep climb of Barrack Street and swept into the maze of little houses that is Greenmount. Later that evening, when Johnny the Echo-boy poked his head into Tom Barry’s snug and said,

Ladies? Did ye hear about the young nun up in the Northside?

The news was there before him. They turned from their jugs and spoke as one.

About the miracle, is it? (Creedon 2018, 68)

The irony of the piece is that the news traveled from North to South before the newspaper man arrived with the evening newspaper. Indicating that these two separate and isolated working class communities were totally in sync and almost subversively connected to each other.

Johnny the Echo-boy is a real person, he has sold *The Echo* newspaper on the streets for decades. I am fascinated by the idea of a street newspaper vendor carrying spoken news. It is fascinating and so very real.

CM: As for the story-within-the-story, i.e. the miracle of St. Joseph, did you hear about anything similar, visions among nuns in your “extended neighborhood”?

CC: There are/were so many whisperings of spiritual events in Ireland. “Our Lady appearing in Ireland” became a huge phenomenon back in the mid 1980s, 35 years ago. It all began in Cork, in a place called Ballinspittle, a village near Kinsale. Within weeks it started happening everywhere up and down the country, including in my father’s home village of Inchigeela. This wasn’t a case of one or two children seeing an apparition of the Blessed Virgin, this was a case of literally tens of thousands of people witnessing what became known as “moving statues”. Night after night people gathered to see the “moving statues”. I myself witnessed the moving statues, I didn’t believe it was miraculous but I certainly witnessed the phenomenon. It was interesting

that it happened a few years after a similar phenomenon in Medjugorje. At that time there was a huge devotion to Medjugorje in Ireland. Back then foreign holidays or sun holidays were not the norm for Irish people, yet tens of thousands of faithful Irish flew to Medjugorje.

In the context of *Begotten Not Made*, it struck me that people could be so accepting of miraculous interventions by Our Lady, yet the notion of St. Joseph appearing from heaven sounds incredible, farcical if not outrageous.

CM: Very interesting, indeed. St. Joseph appearing to the nun is outlandish.

CC: I mean it was outrageous in the context of the characters in the book who had devoted their lives to beliefs including, rising from the dead, walking on water, virgin births, miraculous cures, apparitions of saints, devils transforming into snakes, yet in the context of the book the young Brother Scully's faith will only stretch so far, and the notion of St. Joseph appearing to a dying nun was just a belief too far. "Really, Who ever heard of St. Joseph ever appearing to anyone?!" (Creedon 2018, 105).

CM: Ok. I've been rereading the passages linking Brother Scully with Ambrose. And this is where Herod's theory is resumed again. I found the theological debate here much more vibrant and liberating I felt the two were discussing on the same level, on a friendly level, despite their different opinions. It was therefore really frustrating to realise that Ambrose had already decided to take his life.

CC: Well I don't know. As I'm only reading the book too. But I don't think Ambrose had decided to take his own life until after his talk with Brother Scully in the library. I believe he went to the library to talk sense into the young Brother Scully, but as the discussion deepened late into the night it was Ambrose who felt the need to rethink his own beliefs and his own life choices. And, at the end of it all, having lived his life in denial of being gay and in denial of his vocation, it obviously became apparent to him that he had to leave monastic life - and he chose to hang himself.

And yes, I do think Brother Ambrose and Brother Scully totally enjoyed the heated discussion, despite the seriousness of it. It was a debate that had been on the cards since Brother Scully was in the seminary, but it took a number of years before he would be informed enough to challenge the Master of Theology. In boxing parlance, it was a Title Fight and Scully took the Title on the thirteenth round.

CM: I don't understand why the Brothers were considered inferior to priests, as it is hinted at by Brother Ambrose.

CC: It's more than hinted. It's understood that Brothers and Nuns are at the bottom of the pyramid of power. Certainly here in Cork, there was a massive distinction between Christian Brothers and priests. The Christian Brothers were fundamentally established to educate underprivileged children. They were a strict religious order but had none of the social perks we associate with priests. Christian Brothers were more or less secular, they didn't have the authority to say mass or hear confession or administer other Catholic rites. They lived under a strict vow of communal poverty. Whereas, many priests lived comparatively privileged lives, with housekeepers, freedom to travel, access to cars etc. Christian Brothers were recruited from Christian Brother schools, so for the most part Christian Brothers traditionally came from impoverished working-class backgrounds.

As always, there is an exception to that rule. Following Catholic Emancipation of the 1830's and the Famine of the 1840s, Catholics gradually began to accumulate wealth. In-time wealthy Catholics wanted to send their children to "a better class" of Catholic school. In response to this demand the Christian Brothers opened a fee-paying school also called Christian Brothers, but it served a totally different social demographic.

But in general, Christian Brothers schools, such as the North Monastery, are located in large sprawling working-class areas, to serve the needs of underprivileged children. There are a number of social class indicators. For example, one identifying factor is: rugby-playing schools are considered to be well-to-do schools, whereas Gaelic games-playing school, such as hurling and Gaelic football would indicate a working-class school. The lines of demarcation are not as defined these days as they were in my day, but in general Christian Brothers schools were established to service the needs of the working class and under-privileged. And Christian Brothers did not have the same liberty or religious power as priests. Yet, in an odd way, the Christian Brothers as an organisation did have greater social and political power than any individual priest, probably due to the fact that many Christian Brothers students went on to hold high-powered positions in the Civil Service and politics, and of course right across the country the Order of Christian Brothers were a substantial voting bloc, so politicians would attempt to keep them on-side.

I went to the North Monastery Christian Brothers and I guess, in my mind's eye, the topography of *Begotten Not Made* suggests that Brother Scully was in the North Monastery and Sister Claire was in the adjacent North Presentation Convent. You know the North Monastery, Conci.

CM: Yes, I know it very well. Very clear distinction.

CC: I guess the process of this interview has made me stop and try to process my process and inspiration, and maybe that's what I find most difficult. It's a bit like attempting to figure out the mechanics of riding a bicycle while you are actually cycling a bike. It seems to me the fundamental drive behind my writing is self-exploration. I'm not really that interested in telling a story. The more I write the more forensic my exploration becomes.

I was born and continue to live *Under The Goldie Fish*, which incidentally is the title of my first radio drama. I chose the title *Under The Goldie Fish* because it identifies my inspiration as coming from the people who live beneath the golden fish weather vane on top of Shandon steeple. Shandon is an old tower, built in the 1700s, located in the heart of what is a working-class area of the city. Realistically, I have been writing about this neighbourhood, this warren of twisted streets with its publicans, shopkeepers, sweet factories, brass bands, characters, shawlies and culture and traditions ever since.

I do take a certain amount of pride in the fact that the title of my radio drama has now become the popular name for the Shandon area. Last year the Crawford National Gallery mounted an exhibition entitled, *Under The Goldie Fish*, an art exhibition of images and landscapes portraying many aspects of Cork down through the centuries, and if pride is a sin, well I'm damned to an eternity roaring in the flames of hell, because I was proud that my little radio drama of 25 years ago had made its mark in the collective memory.



Figure 5 – *Shandon with the Salmon*. Photo by Conci Mazzullo

As I mentioned earlier in this interview, my Gods have always been local and my heroes ate Chester Cake and supped milk at our shop counter. I am inspired by newspaper sellers, the fruit sellers, the shawlies, the pigeon fanciers, dog walkers, republicans, Christian Brothers, villains and vagabonds. This is the world I come from. It's the world I know, the world I understand, the world that inspires me.

My film documentaries cover the same ground, but the emphasis is on presenting real stories of real people accurately. My documentary-making informs my fiction. My documentary projects usually come out of endless researching of a person, an institution, an organization, an event in history which has specific implications for my neighbourhood. It gets to the point when my research becomes overwhelming and at that point I feel the need to record it. The need to record becomes almost obsessive. I encounter some fascinating individuals in the course of my research and I realise if I don't record these individuals they will be lost to history, lost to local memory. Michael Crane, the pigeon fancier (Creedon 2007a, *The Boys of Fair Hill*) is one of those individuals. Claire Ormond O'Driscoll (Creedon 2007b, *If It's Spiced Beef, It Must Be Christmas*) is another; John O'Shea (*The Boys of Fairhill*); Anna Grace (Creedon 2008, *Flynnie, the Man Who Walked Like Shakespeare*); Arthur Dowling (Creedon 2006, *Why The Guns Remained Silent in Rebel Cork*); Máire MacSwiney Brugha (Creedon 2005, *The Burning of Cork*). Truth be told, I feel that everyone who features in my documentaries are very special people and have a very original and individual story to tell. It is often the case that the people I interview become more important to me than the subject of the documentary.

Meanwhile, the subjects of the documentary are obviously my primary focus. The now legendary figure of Father O' Flynn and his work in the Shandon area may have slipped by unnoticed unless his story was recorded while his peers were still alive. Similarly, *The Burning of Cork* is now recognised as an event of national importance, and this year (pre-covid-19) there were many plans for centenary celebrations, including screenings in New York, Belfast, Dublin, Cork among other places. But back in 2005, when I was researching this story, the event was relatively unknown even here in Cork. It certainly was not given any real space in the history books. I remember coming across a one-line mention of the Burning of Cork in a school history book, but even in that the substantial details were incorrect, including the year it happened. There was little or no collective memory, information or record of this event, even City Hall had no mention of it on the City website. It is so satisfying, now fifteen years later, to encounter the many books and television programs on the subject, and the way the city has embraced it as a cornerstone moment on our history timeline.

This might sound like a stupid thing to say, but I only want to make documentaries about stories I want to tell. I am regularly invited to make documentaries, but invariably I turn them down. I guess I really have no interest in making television programmes, I just want to tell my stories.

If I can tell a story I want to tell, and if that elevates some aspect of my neighbourhood to national or international significance, well that's all the better. *The Boys of Fairhill* is my attempt at shedding a light on a very working-class past times from my part of town. You will notice even the dogs and the pigeons take on epic status. Michael Crane and his favourite pigeon, Josie Boy, is the inspiration for Dowcha Boy in *Begotten Not Made*.

I love when school kids call to the house to ask me about the documentaries for some school project or other, it does give me a great sense of accomplishment and validates the research.

CM: You are basically a researcher inside the texture of life in Cork.

CC: Researcher might be too strong a word. I am fascinated by people and the stories they tell. But then there's a huge part of me that just loves writing pure fiction for fiction's sake, I love that sense of trawling through my own brain and imagining bizarre situations and characters. But I do like to record aspects of life, and acknowledge the cultural significance of what is often sidelined and considered to be marginal by more mainstream culture.

Personally, I often find the less obvious is the most significant and the backbone of indigenous Irish culture. And I suppose what is most important for me, is that I am not just recounting nostalgia. It's important that the items I cover – the sports, the traditions, the shops, the key figures – are still operational and engaged. I really have no interest in nostalgia; my aim is to bring these hidden histories and hidden but living traditions to the attention of the general public. Father O' Flynn's Theatre Company is still producing Shakespeare, the shops are still trading, the bands are still playing, the harrier hounds are still running, the pigeons are still racing and the various Republican families still hold dear their Republican traditions.

CM: You have reached a significant reason for your quest, both within the text and as a general idea.

CC: Ah, well I wouldn't say it was a quest, it's just me trying to put some logical answer or explanation to your questions regarding why I do what I seem to instinctively do ...

Conci, you have probably seen *If It's Spiced Beef, It Must Be Christmas*, my documentary about the traders who live and work in my part of town. The people featured in it are friends and

neighbours of mine. I guess we were talking about inspiration . . . I'm not sure if inspiration is the right word, but those shops and shopkeepers are ingrained in my life as being ultra-important.

For example, Tony Linehan's Sweet Factory is referenced in the final passage of *Passion Play* as part of Pluto's vision of heaven, it's mentioned a few times in my play *The Cure*, a scene in my play *When I Was God* is set in Linehan's Sweet Factory where the character is talking to Danny Linehan, Tony's dad. Linehan's also features in my documentary about Father O' Flynn, *Flynnie, The Man Who Walked Like Shakespeare*, it is a major feature in my documentary, *If It's Spiced Beef, It Must Be Christmas*, and it crops up again and again in various place of my writing, it may even be mentioned in *Begotten Not Made*. As I say, I'm not sure if inspiration is the correct word, but I often think the Paddy Kavanagh's poem "Epic" totally captures where my head is. Though I am aware of globally significant individuals and events and history and culture, I am most inspired by the unfolding events and characters who inhabit my own personal, almost private local globe. Paddy Kavanagh refers to the lead up to World War II as "that Munich bother" and dismisses it, in the context of the importance of a local land dispute between two subsistence farmers, McCabe and Duffy. And I guess that's where I am: my world is my street, and I believe even if I could live for two lifetimes, I still won't have time to discover or understand every facet of my world.

"Epic"

I have lived in important places, times
 When great events were decided; who owned
 That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
 Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.
 I heard the Duffys shouting "Damn your soul!"
 And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen
 Step the plot defying blue cast-steel –
 "Here is the march along these iron stones"
 That was the year of the Munich bother.
 Which was more important? I inclined
 To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
 Till Homer's ghost came whispering to
 my mind.
 He said: I made the Iliad from such A local row.
 Gods make their own
 importance. (Kavanagh 1960, 23)

CM: *Talking about the fairy tales Dowcha-Boy and the story of Mossie and Sister Francesca, why did you use so many funny comments, so much irony? I particularly liked when he "decided to walk with his wings folded behind his back chirping a tune like a Local French pigeon from Picardia" (Creedon 2018, 94).*

CC: The Dowcha Boy story appears relatively early in the text, and I really don't know why it's in the book at all, but it seemed like it would be the type of story that would interest a young seminarian from the Northside of Cork City. It also was a major leap away from the world of convent and monastic life and I thought it would be good to bring the readers out over the walls for a little jaunt. But most of all, it's in there because I really enjoyed writing it, it made me laugh. And believe it or not, I often laugh as I'm writing, it's as if I've heard something funny for the first time. And conversely I've been known to shed a tear. In, *Begotten not Made* I find the scene where

Mossie the Gardner insists on time alone with the dying love of his life to be very moving. I also find the moment when Brother Scully eventually meets Sister Claire after fifty years gets me every time.

Speaking of birds? We have a story here in Cork. As you know the River Lee splits in two so there's the North Channel and the South Channel, well there's a story of a man from the Northside who worked in Beamish's Brewery, located on the South Gate Bridge, on the South Channel. Every day after his lunch he walks the full length of the South Main Street and the full length of the North Main Street and shakes the crumbs from his sandwich wrapper into the river at the North Gate Bridge. He then walks all the back down the North Main Street the South Main Street to the South Gate Bridge and goes back to work. One day a workmate asked him why he didn't just empty his crumbs in over the South Gate Bridge like all his other workmates. And the Northsider replied that he'd rather feed the Northside swans than the Southside swans. The joke being that the man assumed that the wild animals like birds, swans, ducks, had the same sense of place and deep local loyalty as he had.

Likewise, I wanted to put that sense of cleverness in the pigeon or in the storytelling about the pigeon, so the pigeon pretended he was a local pigeon by whistling a song about a local area in France. It's just stressing that sense of place many humans have but in this case imposing it on a pigeon – a homing pigeon.

CM: I was delighted when I discovered the front covers gallery of pictures of your books and in particular of Begotten Not Made from all over the world (Books by Cónal Creedon) and I immediately joined in. Now you've collected quite a few, it could become a publication of its own! It would easily capture your readers' attention! I'm delighted to be part of it!

CC: The photographs of the book arriving in from around the world just took off spontaneously. People, many of whom I don't know personally and I will never meet in my life, saw the fun in it and just joined in.

It all began maybe a year and a half ago when a young couple, Morgan and Nora, took a photo in the back of a camper van of a sunset in New Zealand, and by chance *Passion Play* happened to be on the table in front of them. Then maybe two weeks later they were on a train in Siberia, and they took a photo of a few Russian beer cans on the table, but the book also happened to be in that photo.

I think when people saw those two photographs posted on social media, it somehow inspired people to start sending photos of my books from wherever they were in the world. Some really mad ones arrived. My favourite include the photo of Elvis Presley holding the book in Las Vegas, and another one is taken underwater in the Sea of Cortez, and there was a Cork City Council delegation to Colombia who took a photo of my book *The Immortal Deed Of Michael O'Leary* in Colombia and sent it back. People just seemed to get into the spirit of it. And then a guy on Twitter decided to gather as many of the images as possible from social media and put them on a Google Map. People are very kind. Another guy, who is an ambulance driver, decided to go through *Passion Play* and make a full music tracklist of all the songs as they appear in the text and put it up on Spotify ("*Passion Play* the book; Pluto's musical journey").

Really, I get such joy out of that sort of thing. When people do such kind things for no reason other than they just like what I'm doing. I feel the same about you, Fiorenzo and Piera who just decided to pick up my little bookeen and give it all the time you give it. I'm so appreciative of people's support and encouragement. Sometimes I'm walking down town and a taxi driver rolls down the window and shouts out something like: "Dowcha, Cónal boy! One of our own!". And that's all it takes to keep me on track. I mean who else in this world gets that sort of personalized encouragement. It's a very privileged place to be.

CM: *Is there a similar structure in Passion Play and Begotten not Made?*

CC: In one way the two books are totally different. *Passion Play* is chaotically episodic, while *Begotten Not Made* is story-based and extremely linear. But now that I'm forced to think about it, I realize the two books are incredibly similar. To begin with, the two books take place over one full day. And the day is the eve of a very important celebration in the Christian calendar, the death and birth of Jesus Christ respectively.

The two main protagonists spend that full day confined to a room, the room in both books is cell-like, both characters are afraid to leave their respective rooms, both characters have serious emotional and psychiatric problems, both protagonists are living with a sense of love lost. Jesus! Maybe they are totally autobiographical! (*Laughing out loud here*).

So they create a whole life within the room. But eventually both Brother Scully and Pluto realize they must leave the room in order to find some sort of internal calm and put the world right. I'm laughing here, when I say, I must read those books again and find out something about myself.

CM: *In the video interview where did you read the pages from Passion Play, from the North Monastery hill? So the places Pluto is describing as his view of heaven are actually in the background. I walked up there last Easter. It was stunning! I did it very slowly taking pictures while I was going up. Yes from there you have an immense wonder magic view.*

CC: With regard to the reading of the extract from *Passion Play* in the film clip - this is the final page of *Passion Play* and I read it in a location from where the last scene in *Passion Play* actually unfolds, Bell's Field, at the top of Patrick's Hill. And absolutely, this is Pluto's view of heaven as described in the text. The point being made that this place, this "city of pain" that drove Pluto to take his own life, is also his heaven. Heaven and Hell are two sides of the same coin. By the way, this location, Bell's Field is also the location of the crucifixion scene in my millennium pageant, *The Trial of Jesus* (see Creedon 2014).

CM: *In these 20 years, while you were creating other works, plays, videos, documentaries, giving readings, producing and directing your plays in China, New York and Ireland and working on the new publication, you were already planning a follow up to Begotten Not Made, how much have you produced so far?*

CC: I have a lot of my next novel written. As I told you its working title is *Glory Be To The Father*, I've been working on it since the publication of *Passion Play* in 1999. It's like *Passion Play* in structure, which is extremely episodic, not a linear narrative and trusts that the reader will take the leap of faith and follow. *Begotten Not Made* is very much a linear narrative. It started out as one of the narrative strands of *Glory Be To The Father*, but it all became far too big and unwieldy. I'm still not sure exactly how to finish *Glory Be To The Father*. There are two obvious options at the moment, I'm sort of confident that in the act of bringing it all together, the ending will write itself.

CM: *Getting back to the structural narrative points I saw in Begotten Not Made, here's my point Pluto's/Scully's drone survey of Cork is like Joyce's last page of "The Dead", a peacefully and pacifying blanket of words as the blanket of snow underneath which lies the whole of Ireland. In your case, from microcosm to macrocosm, the whole of Cork as the whole of your universal world. Do you agree?*

CC: It's very nice that you draw similarities between my structures and the mighty Mr Joyce. To be totally honest with you, I'm not very comfortable about the work being compared to other writers really. I suppose, finding similarities could be a bit like making the predictions of Nostradamus fit a narrative. And of course, Joyce casts such a large shadow in the context of Irish writing that the very notion that a similarity is identified can become a bit of an albatross slung around my neck, it certainly could make a writer self-conscious of style rather than letting it flow and seeing where it leads. And because every missing comma of Joyce has been analysed and re-analysed, there's always the concern that writers might be subconsciously using Joyce as a template.

Having said that, I think your analysis of *Begotten Not Made* and *Passion Play* is correct. Not that I had thought about it before, as it turns out, using that structure was totally unplanned. But you are right, it's as if both characters Brother Scully in *Begotten Not Made* and Pluto in *Passion Play* go through a massive internal mental maelstrom in the body of the text, a total meltdown, and then when it's all over there is a moment of clarity followed by total calm. I find it interesting that you identify this, because my next book also seems to be heading the same direction. If I consider it truthfully, it more or less sums up my personal natural disposition fairly accurately.

Whenever I either witness or experience or engage with traumatic or challenging situations, I'm inclined to drive headlong into such situations knowing it's not going to end well. I invariably confront complications head-on without an exit strategy or a Plan B. Sometimes it works out, sometimes not. But eventually, when I'm out the far side and the dust has settled I always find it reassuring to remind myself that there's a great big world out there. I seem to confront my fiction the same way. I've been writing a book for almost twenty years and I don't know how it's going to end, but when the time comes – and I'll know when the time is right – I will sit down and drive it straight at the wall, confident that the resolution will become apparent.

Similarly in real life, having confronted the complication without an exit strategy, eventually it all becomes resolved for better or for worse. And it's as if I restore the calm by envisioning the family unit tucked up in bed asleep, or sitting by the warmth of a glowing fire, with a gale-force winter storm howling outside. Regardless of how bad things might be in a personal sense there is always that blanket of calm that wraps up the world and keeps those close to me safe. I have the capacity to switch from the intensity of a microscopic chaos to the calmness that the big picture offers.

Exactly as you say, switching "cosmos" to bring calm. Interesting you mention that, because that is how I really feel about life. It's not the end of the world until the end of the world and even then we might be going to a better place.

CM: Your work seems to be character-driven rather than narrative-driven, is that a conscious decision on your part?

CC: To tell you the truth, Conci, my writing is basically about me trying to figure out my observations of a lifetime. Writing for me is all about the process. Realistically, publication is not that important to me, except there comes a time when I have developed a world and characters on paper, and obviously I then publish the book or have the play produced. Even my film documentaries are really a self-exploration.

My fiction is totally driven by characterization. Similarly my documentaries are all about developing characters, and if a character is strong enough the narrative only gets in the way. A really well defined character will expose/explore a narrative even if he/she is only going to buy a bottle of milk. I feel if the narrative is too strong, in other words if it's all about the "story", well then the writing can become like painting by numbers and filling in the narrative blanks.

*CM: But I don't think it's only characterization. You often convey poetry to your texts. Remember first and last pages in *Passion Play*?*

CC: Those "poetic" sections you mentioned sometimes come very late in the writing process, and find space to develop during the re-drafting. Sometimes those sections come in very early in the process, like a theatre director creating a set from which the actors can come alive. If you examine those sections, they usually establish a strong background from which the character can step, fully-formed. Those descriptive passages invariably are set dressing and not narrative-driven.

CM: But don't you have a general idea to develop while going on?

CC: Not really. There always is a very simple overarching A to B narrative. But I get to know characters by writing about them, and eventually when I do get to know them they write themselves and that's when narrative begins to be formed. So, for example, with the novel I am currently writing, I have no idea in the wide earthly world how it's going to end, but that will become apparent when the time comes to finally sit down and write a few final drafts. The basic story line – or, as I describe it, the A to B – is very simple. A: A man walks out on his pregnant girlfriend on Christmas Eve; B: I'm not sure, he either returns home, or keeps going. But that is the full total narrative arc. In between the A and the B the reader is brought on a most fantastical roller-coaster ride of characters. It could all be nonsense, but that's what I'm writing and that's what I'm enjoying writing and publication is so far from my mind at the moment. It's just writing for the pure joy of writing.

At the moment I'm thinking that the main character is actually going to his own birth, but it may end up much simpler than that. We'll see.

CM: Yes they are manifested by the characters mental labyrinthine wanderings ...

CC: Apologies if my answers to your questions seem defensive, prevaricating or evasive, but I find it difficult to process why I write, how I write or why I write in a certain way. I don't ever really think about those things while I write, it's all very organic. Each day a new me sits at my desk and writes. I guess what I'm saying is that I don't have an overview of my work. I don't have a sense that I'm writing or working to a plan. I don't have a strategy. I guess, as a writer, I'm not disciplined but I'm highly motivated.

I could very easily decide to sell my house and open a B&B in the morning, or move away to live in a warm climate, drive a taxi. I actually do play with that idea. I suppose what I'm saying about character is that I'm not really interested in narrative. It's why I don't write detective stories or mysteries, with big convoluted storylines.

Obviously my work has a narrative, but I like to keep the narrative very simple, and I usually present the conundrum of the narrative at the beginning of the tale and finish it at the end, and that gives me the freedom to go anywhere I want to go for the other 300 pages between the covers.

So, for example, *Passion Play*: A) a man contemplates suicide; B) man commits suicide. Those are the two bookends of the book. That is the narrative. But in between I have the ability to go all over the place. Likewise, in *Begotten Not Made*: A) a lonely old man thinks about a love encounter in his youth; B) a lonely old man decides to seek out and reconcile the love of his youth.

In between that opening and closing I have the opportunity to travel wherever I wish within the mind of the character. Basically for me the more simple the overall story A to B, the more complicated I can become within the exploration of the character. I sort of feel that if I satisfy the reader with a strong and simple beginning and a strong and clear end, the reader will be more inclined to invest in the spiraling, offshoot, sidetrack characters.

CM: Could Passion Play and Begotten Not Made be seen as two Bildungsroman?

CC: I guess you could say that. Both novels explore the profound effect the formative years have on the final years of the protagonist as he nears death. But the novels are not nostalgia for the sake of nostalgia. In fact, I'd say the very opposite to it, they are very current and hold a mirror up to the complicated, challenging and sometimes ridiculous ways of the past. I guess you put your finger on it when you noted that there was a profound shift in the western world in the late 1960s-1970s, a dramatic change fueled by young people. As it turns out, both of my protagonists' formative years straddle that specific window of time, when change was so dramatic.

In *Begotten Not Made*, the conservative Deputy Head Brother Lynch identifies this change. He sees it coming down the tracks and blames it on television. He blames it on modern ways and the spoiled children of the Baby Boomer generation. And that more or less sets up the counterpoint; the moment of change in the world and how the protagonist deals with it.

Brother Scully's formative years were just at the wrong side of that change, so he didn't have the courage to leave religious orders, he stayed in the monastery. Whereas, Brother Crowley, who was only a year or two younger than Brother Scully, was born into the generation of change, so, he had enough confidence to walk out of the monastery. It's obvious that there is a certain amount of unspoken respect and pride in Brother Crowley's courage to walk away from God. I guess one of the big explorations of the text is that the last generation of religious orders did not get the life they had expected to have in old age, they didn't get the respect that their predecessors received.

When I was a kid, every family had a few members in religious orders and they were a huge source of pride, but then within two decades they were vilified because of the various church scandals. That must have been very difficult to accept for that last generation of clerics to join religious orders in the 1960's.

CM: Just wondering, have you ever written by hand?

CC: You'll laugh, but I write almost everything by hand. I find it flows better on the page than on the screen because the screen shows all the incidental, superfluous imperfections, tabs, spacings, spelling, punctuation etc., that get in the way when I'm in a flow, and I continually find I'm correcting things on screen rather than just going with the flow of where the pen is bringing me.

Also, when I'm working on a screen and the manuscript has stretched to a few hundred pages I really find it difficult to gauge where I am in a script, despite page numbers etc., unless I'm working off hard copy. And there's nothing like the accuracy of making edits and margin notes with a pen.

A few years ago my sister found a mountain of my handwritten stuff, about 30 or 40 hours of hand-written radio drama.

Every year, I'm invited to give a radio drama master class in University College Cork. I usually bring the scripts in to the students and spend an hour telling them about the correct technical way to present radio drama scripts, including sample templates from the BBC. Believe

it or not, but radio drama scripts are extremely specific in their layout, probably more detailed than film scripts. It's amazing how engaged with detail students become. But having spent an hour explaining the detail of the layout, inevitably, the students ask a lot of questions about margin widths, and page numbering, and font, and type size.

But, just before the end of the hour, I lift up this big garbage bag full of hand-written scripts, written in different colour pens and markers with doodles on the page and drawings and notes to myself etc., these scripts have no structure at all and are just pure chaos on the page, and I tell the students: "Now that I've told you the academic expectation of how a script should look, I will tell you to totally ignore and forget everything I've told you and just write from the heart". And you know what? They absolutely get it! It's like they realise that part of the function in education is to reflect on what the course details demand. Meanwhile internally they know their heart and their emotional connection with the work is somewhere else. And then we spend the second hour in deep immersion, digging into the nitty-gritty, meat and potatoes of radio writing, character forming, voice modulation, nailing multi-character dialogue, sound effects, timing, music, narration, monologue versus dialogue ... and that's when the notebooks are put away and the sparks fly.

So, yes! The short answer is, I write most things longhand, and then type it up and then work off the screen after the 1st draft. Then at a certain stage I print it out and work on the typed page with a pen every now and again, I input the changes on screen and reprint and make more changes by pen. I am currently on maybe draft number 20 with *Glory Be To The Father*.

CM: Oh my God! 20th draft, unbelievable, it's like painting and repainting till you get the perfect refined finish to it. At this stage is it language that you are refining?

CC: To tell you the truth it changes. Mostly it's about making it flow better, especially for the spoken word. But sometimes it could be something as simple as changing a character's name. Other times it can be weaving a new overlay, a new theme, and often when I'm writing I leave big tracts unwritten, just with a note to myself in the margin to go back and write stuff. And when I say 20th draft that doesn't mean re-writing draft after draft. I've been enjoying this process since 1999, so it's more like a guy who makes model aircrafts or puts ships into bottles. I go back to this script again and again when I'm not doing anything else. I have a few such projects on the go, and must say it's what I love most about writing: the very nature of writing with no other requirement than to just write for the sake of writing; this stuff might never be published.

CM: I'm sure that it's going to be impressive and successful! I think that readers who are unaware of the microcosm of Cork, like me at the very beginning, will be delighted to cross the border of The Undiscovered Country to quote Bernard Benstock's famous book about Joyce's Ulysses, led by your realistic/unrealistic walks through the Second City.

CC: Not so sure if the finished product will be impressive or not, but I'm having a ball writing it. And my best hope is that microcosm of Cork will fit any microcosm crossroads, village, town or city in the world.

CM: If you deeply enjoy what you are doing, it will certainly surface through your text. And following your works since Passion Play through The Cure to Begotten Not Made it has made me a literary "flaneur" as Walter Benjamin's words report: "Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in

the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley” (Benjamin 2006 [1950], 53). And one does not get lost, but loses oneself, wants to yield through “topographical” wanderings. I’ve always loved “losing” myself in cities or places, it was a matter of discovering something new any moment, but being a photographer I’ve developed it to a greater extent, enjoying every step as we did when we traced back Pluto’s life throughout Cork.

CC: On the subject of cities and streets and street names and losing oneself ... Malachy McCourt, Irish-American actor/writer, happened to be at my play *The Cure* in New York a few months ago and he invited me to his radio program at WBAI Radio the following day, and gave this very kind review of my play: “I saw it yesterday. Good writing knows no ethnicity. Good writing knows no nationality. Good writing is good writing – not alone is this good writing it’s excellent writing. Very personal writing. Very humorous writing. They say if Dublin was burnt down it could be rebuilt again by reading the work of James Joyce, well the same could be said about Creedon’s work: Cork city could be rebuilt from his words”.

CM: But it is Joyce himself who says it when referring to Ulysses

CC: Well maybe Malachy was quoting Joyce? Bless him.

CM: “ ‘I want’, said Joyce, as we were walking down the Universitätstrasse, ‘to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book’ ” (Joyce qtd. in Budgen 1972, 69). Yes he was definitely doing it! You must be flattered.

CC: It was my first time meeting Malachy. Obviously I’ve known of him for a long time, but was absolutely delighted when he turned up at the play. Malachy is a very lively 88 year-old, he’s got his finger on the pulse. The venue where the play was on is a really dark cellar down a very steep, winding stairs and it was very crowded there. It’s a rock music venue, “Arlene’s Grocery” on the Lower East Side. The Ramones Lady Gaga and Blondie and the New York Dolls all played there over the years. It holds about 200 people at a crush. So I was very flattered that Malachy would seek it out and came along. He came along and stuck around to keep me company for a good while after. Well honoured I was. It was a fairly fab afternoon, the Irish Consul General, Ciaran Madden also turned up. And the greatest surprise of all was that my nephew, Edmund, turned up. He didn’t know I was in New York, he just turned up to see the show. I was well surprised to see him and his wife there.

Back in 2009, when my other two plays were premiered in New York at the Irish Repertory Theatre, Frank McCourt, Malachy’s brother, was my guest of honour, and the poor man died a week before the play opened, but his widow, Ellen was there, and that was very sweet of her. I had not met Frank or Malachy before, so it was very nice that they supported what I’m doing.

CM: The Cure (2005) is my favourite play, I felt I could follow the grandfather’s nose up through Cork. Once I thought that it could be interpreted by a dancer while somebody was reading this part of the play!

CC: The mad thing is ... my favourite play of the *Second City Trilogy* is *After Luke*, and audiences seem to like *When I was God* more. Then again, *The Cure* is the most personal of the three. The character actually walks past my house in the play, twice – how mad is that! *The Cure*, picked up two awards at New York Theatre Awards in 2013, Best Actor Award & Best Director

Award, and I was nominated for Best Playwright Award. *The Cure* is the play of the Trilogy that has been produced most often, probably it has got to do with the logistics of putting on a one-person play. It's had maybe four productions in New York and a production in China.

CM: China has been an important haven an important haven for your literary career. Can you tell us about your experience there?

CC: I was in China in 2009 for a three-month Writer-In-Residence, with the Shanghai Writers' Association. I had been there the previous year as a guest of the Shanghai International Literary Festival. I went back the following year with two of my plays, *When I Was God* and *After Luke* performed at the Shanghai World Expo. I returned in 2011 for the Shanghai JUE Festival with another one of my plays, *The Cure*. I performed a series of concerts with John Spillane in 2013 and the Chinese Writers' Association invited me back as guest of honour in 2018.

Coming from Cork, China was such an immense culture clash. It absolutely woke me up. Even the simplest of tasks such as buying a bottle of milk is an experience. I've come to know many Chinese writers and performers at this point and it has always been a positive and enhancing experience. I am very grateful for the series of events and twists of fate that brought me to China's shore. Having toured plays, presented concerts and screened my documentaries in Shanghai, you'll appreciate I could write a book about my experiences in China. But simply put, China has thought me so much about myself, it has offered me an incredible perspective on my life in Cork, and working in Cork. It's very liberating to know that there is a whole world out there, and the realization that a few city blocks in Shanghai would represent a population larger than the total population of Cork, really gives perspective to the pettiness of small town life.

Long before I ever had any idea or interest in going to China, a decade earlier, back in 1999, the International Community in Beijing produced a very nice publication to celebrate the Millennium. They requested a story from me which I forwarded to them, and some months later when the publication arrived in the post from China, I was well honoured to realize that they only included two writers. I was one – the other was Seamus Heaney.

CM: Was there any significant event while you've been touring around to read from Begotten Not Made?

CC: Ah sur' listen, every reading is a potential pantomime, there is an aspect of every single live performance that is a learning curve. I've been at readings where scuffles have broken out. I love giving readings, I do suffer from extreme nerves right up to the moment I open my mouth and then it's like an alter ego kicks in and I just roll with it and it's liable to end up anywhere.

But speaking of Seamus Heaney. A few years back, I was doing a reading in Bantry Library, and lo and behold who turned up at the reading only, Seamus Heaney. Totally unexpected. Seamus is from the far north of Ireland and Bantry is on the furthestmost south coast of Ireland. It just so happened he was in Bantry that day so he dropped in to the reading. It was like having Elvis in the building. I decided to cut my reading short and invite him up to read. Of course, everyone wanted him to read, but he didn't have any of his own books with him. I think he was just being a gentleman and not wanting to steal my limelight. But I pointed out that we were in a library, and they had all his books on the shelf, so up he came and read from his work. Really, it was such a brilliant, fun afternoon. For me, it was like being the warm-up act for the Rolling Stones. I like when readings take an unexpected turn, keeps it a little bit rock "n" roll. It was fun, off the cuff and unexpected, and I like that.

CM: A very happy coincidence together in the Chinese Millennium celebration and together at the reading in Bantry, pure coincidence and such sweet memories.

CC: Isn't that what life's all about, making sweet memories ... More sweet memories and less bitter memories is the way forward!

*CM: Have you employed different language registers, Cork Hibernian English, according to the various characters both in *Passion Play* and in *Begotten Not Made*?*

CC: Not sure of your question, but if you are wondering if I use different styles of language, micro-dialects, I do. Maybe it's because I have written so much radio, but I'm subconsciously extremely conscious of having different voice modulations. I can look at a page of dialogue and tell who's speaking, not by the words, but by the very length of the sentences. We all speak in very individualistic ways, and if I can tune into that enough it means I can dispense with much of the: he said, she said, and worst of all, he said wistfully. Let the language flow.

I find that there is a whole genre of fiction portraying working-class characters in a dark world of drug taking, prostitution, crime, speaking with coarse language, so I decided to do a total flip on that and explore a working class that is universally more educated.

Christian Brothers are recruited from working-class families. So basically, I was presenting a character with a working-class morality, culture, background, values, but with the added bonus of being educated, his intellect and terms of reference would have been a little broader, his language would have been less coarse, his expression slightly more informed. So it was presenting working-class values, but with a more educated understanding.

*CM: I think that in *Passion Play*, *Pinko*, *Pluto*, *Fatfuka*, all have a different idiolect, a kind of personal language whereas in *Begotten Not Made* they are all educated so they speak the same way, is that true?*

CC: Not really. In *Passion Play*, *Pinko*, *Pluto* and *Fatfuka* all have the same accent and speak the same micro-dialect, because they all come from the same place. But the voices and accents of the various characters who live in the bedsits in *Pluto's* house speak in very identifiably different voices for many reasons, not least it presents a reference point to a character's past life. The tonal differences are acute and obvious: Monk is an Irishman returned from UK and he speaks with a UK-"oirish" accent with constant use of words like, "mate" and "over" referring to his years in the UK, Herman is German so he has a German accent, Brenda whose use of the word "Love" at the end of a sentence is consistent etc. That diversity of language is not the case for the characters in *Begotten Not Made*. I guess the feature of *Begotten Not Made* is that they all speak with the same accent. It's a monastery. And broadly speaking they're all from the same background. And even if they don't come from the same place, there is a type of Christian Brother/Religious Educator tonal quality they seem to pick up in the seminary. It's as if they are continually talking down to a student, they have the tendency to be patronizing, they ask a question and then answer their own question, representing a culture of authority, very typical of the stereotypical Christian Brother. The voice and style and modulation in *Begotten Not Made* is consistent among clerics. It is very different, more informed, more confident than you'll find among *Pluto's* friends in *Passion Play*. But, by the same token, *Pluto's* friends of his youth all speak with their own similar micro-dialect.

CM: As Walter Benjamin said: “Work on good prose has three steps: a musical stage when it is composed, an architectonic one when it is built, and a textile one when it is woven” (1996 [1972], 460). I find that your novel has got a rhythmic scaffolding, at times its text runs very fast, especially in roller coaster dialogues, then it takes a breath, especially in contemplative views from Brother Scully’s window, what can you tell me about the musicality of your novel?

CC: To tell you the truth, no less than any other writer, I do like to include an aural rhythm, metre and even sometimes I’ll dip into a slight rhyme, or the feedback I can achieve by slipping in an echo of repetition and alliteration. The truth of the matter is that it’s very easy to over indulge the flowery nature of words on a page and for me that can kill dead the spontaneity of the prose. So I also work at not making it appear too apparent or contrived on the page. The idea is that it should read lyrically when read out loud. I guess some would call it the “work” of being a writer. I’m inclined to call it the joy of being a writer.

CM: Cónal, I feel I must thank you for giving me this precious opportunity to interview you online, we probably invented a new method! It has added value to my lockdown. I feel I have been able to go “Beyond visible, beyond your visible world”.

CC: Thank you, Conci, for taking the time to unravel my contorted thoughts and for putting them into a logical order. I look forward to seeing you next time you are in Cork. We’ll go for a walk!

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Writings

Four Irish Poets

selected
by Frank Sewell



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Four Irish Poets

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The poets whose work features in this short section represent just some of the diverse strands that exist in modern poetry from Ireland. Their work (or, rather, some of it) links directly and/or tangentially to the current volume's theme of 'minorities'.

Máirtín Ó Direáin was an Aran-island poet, a native speaker of Irish, who moved to the cities of Galway, then Dublin, for employment; thereby moving from Gaeltacht (an Irish-speaking region) to Galltacht (a predominantly English-speaking region). Writing in a minority or minoritized language, he was naturally concerned with what Oswald Spengler had termed the "morphology of culture", the idea that cultures (like species) could die out: ancient cultures such as the Babylonian, recent ones such as the 'Anglo-Irish' (as some critics have called it), and still extant ones, including the Irish or Gaelic. A genuine pluralist, Ó Direáin saw part of his poetic duty as learning from and celebrating diverse cultures. In doing so in his own marginalized language, he showed the 'power and substance' of a minority language and how much it can enrich the culture of an entire country, just as it once inspired writers such as J.M. Synge.

Cathal Ó Searcaigh, likewise, writes in Irish, his native language. A prolific poet, with a range of themes, he was born and lives in the County Donegal Gaeltacht. Among his concerns is that the love that once "dared not speak its name" should be able to speak out openly and lovingly, rather than being shut out or shut out for being in a minority.

Stephanie Conn is a relatively new voice in Irish poetry, publishing several collections of poems since 2016. Among her interests are female artists of the past and present, including Frieda Kahlo who is given voice in the poems selected here. Kahlo was overshadowed in her own lifetime by Diego Rivera and often underestimated by (male) art critics, but has increasingly been recognised for her talent. Conn highlights Kahlo's personal courage in the face of illness and also her identification with elements of Mexican culture such as the Tehuana, who have been marginalized and underestimated.

Bernadette Nic an tSaoir, like Ó Searcaigh, is one of Ireland's contemporary Irish-language poets. She has published six collections of poetry. In the first poem selected below, she celebrates

one of the princes of Irish culture: the composer Seán Ó Riada who contributed much to rescuing Irish traditional music from the margins, from being the prized possession of a minority to gracing (increasingly) world stages and international film scores, etc. In some of her other poems, she focuses on less celebrated figures, characters from the margins and/or minorities, those whom Seamus Heaney (in “Mint”, *The Spirit Level*) has termed “the disregarded ones we turned against / Because we’d failed them by our disregard”.

Máirtín Ó Direáin

“Ómós do John Millington Synge”

An toisc a thug tú chun mo dhaoine
Ón gcéin mhéith don charraig gharbh
Ba chéile léi an chré bheo
Is an leid a scéith as léan is danaid.

Níor éistis scéal na gcloch,
Bhí éacht i scéal an teallaigh,
Níor spéis leat leac ná cill,
Ní thig éamh as an gcré mharbh.

Do dhuinigh Deirdre romhat sa ród
Is curach Naoise do chas Ceann Gainimh,
D’imigh Deirdre is Naoise leo
Is chaith Peigín le Seáinín aithis.

An leabhar ba ghnáth i do dhóid
As ar chuiris bréithre ar marthain;
Ghabh Deirdre, Naoise is Peigín cló
Is thug léim ghaisce de na leathanaigh.

Tá cleacht mo dhaoine ag meath,
Ní cabhair feasta an tonn mar fhalla,
Ach do dtaga Coill Chuain go hInis Meáin
Beidh na bréithre a chnuasaís tráth
Ar marthain fós i dteanga eachtrann.

(1957)

“Comhchríoch”

Faoi do mhuintir an diallait,
Is gunna leo chun fiaigh,
Ina lámha an ghlac ó chian,
An sléachtadh rompu, an riar:
An tsrathair ar mo mhuintir féin.

Ar an tseanáit ós áil leat trácht
Cá miste dul i do dháil;
An lá a bhfuil srathair is diallait
Faoi iamh sa mhúsaem
Cá mór nach ionann ár gcás?

(1966)

“Homage to J.M. Synge”

Just what brought you to my people
From foreign luxury to rugged rock
Was something akin to the living clay
And inklings derived from grief and loss.

You never heard the stones’ story,
The fireside tale caught your ear;
Nor showed interest in slab or churchyard;
There’s no entreaty from clay that’s dead.

But Deirdre appeared on the road before you
And Naoise’s currach turned Ceann Gainimh;
Deirdre and Naoise went their way
And Pegeen cursed and swore at Shauneen.

Mostly, you had a book in hand
And, from it, brought the words to life:
Deirdre, Naoise and Pegeen took shape
And leapt, unbounded, from the pages.

My people’s ways are in decline,
The wave no longer a protective wall,
But till Cuan Wood comes to Inishmaan,
The words that you compiled once
Will still live on in a foreign tongue.

(Trans. by Frank Sewell)

“Winding Up the Same Way”

Under your people the saddle,
And they had guns for hunting,
The reins in their hands for centuries;
They were served and bowed down to –
On my people was the yoke.

Since you like to talk of the old place,
Why don’t I go there with you?
The day when yoke and saddle
Are locked up in a museum,
Won’t our position be the same?

(Trans. by Frank Sewell)

Cathal Ó Searcaigh

“Antinous”

-- *Ammon, file, á chaoineadh in Alexandria, 133 AD*

Buachaill bocht as Bithnia
ach faoi bhláth agus faoi mhaise na hóige
b’eisean an té a ba deise
dá bhfacthas ariamh in Alexandria.
B’eisean Antinous na háilleachta
ar thug an tImpire taitneamh dó agus grá.

Bhéarfá mionna gur gineadh é gan smál,
bhí sé chomh dea-chumtha sin
i ngach ball, chomh caoin ina mhéin,
chomh séimh ina ghné. Dá mba toil liom na déithe
déarfainn gur iadsan a mhúnlaigh é
as cré dhiaga na gnaíúlachta.

Chífinn é ó ham go ham sa giomnáisiam
agus sa leabharlann ach ní raibh sé de dhánaíocht ionam
labhairt leis. B’eisean an comrádaí ríoga
is ní raibh ionamsa ach cléireach uiríseal
i seirbhís na hImpireachta. Mar ba dual do mo chinéal
bhí orm urraim a ghéilleadh dó i gcónaí.

B’eisean mian súl an tslua, fir agus mná,
b’ionann a gcás, b’áil leo bheith i gcaidreamh
leis an bhuachaill seo a b’áille dealraimh.
I dtaca liomsa de, ní raibh a thaibhreamh domh ach é,
a bhéal le mo bhéal, a ghéaga i mo thimpeall;
bhéarfainn a raibh i mo chnámha ach dlúthú leis.

I gcónaí buan agus daingean ina dhílseacht
dá leannán, nuair a tháinig am na hachainí
gan ghearán, d’íobar sé é féin sa Níl i ndúil
is go ndéanfaí an tImpire a shábhail
ó thubaiste éigin a bhítheas a thuar dó.
Dá mba rud is go dtiocfaí an chinniúint a ordú!

Anois tá a dhealbh le feiceáil i mbailte na ríochta
is tá a íomhá buailte ar bhoinn airgid na hImpireachta.
Le hómós dó d’fhógair an tImpire ina Dhia é agus cé
gur eol dúinn nach bhfuil sna déithe ach miotas ár mianta
is aobhinn linn go bhfuil Antinous, buachaill a ghéill
do chlaonta na Greige, ár ndálta féin, anois ar ard na glóire.

Antinous na háilleachta! Antinous na grástúlachta!
Sa cháil sin, buan beo a bheas sé anois agus go deo.
Sa staid dhiaga úd, fiú mura bhfuil ann ach samhail,
buanóidh sé ar feadh na síoraíochta
ionas nach dtig leis an bhás, fiú amháin, díobháil
a dhéanamh dó nó é a chur ó dhealramh.

(2013)

“Antinous”

-- *a lament from the poet Ammon (Alexandria, 133 AD)*

A poor boy from the province of Bithynia,
but he was in the flower of his youth,
the loveliest that anyone had seen
in all the city of Alexandria.
For he was the most handsome Antinous,
loved and beloved of the emperor.

You’d lay odds that he was born just perfect,
he was so well-built in body and limb,
so easy on the eye, so statuesque.
And were I one to believe in the gods,
I’d swear that it was they who fashioned him
from the holy clay of beauty itself.

Sometimes I’d see him at the library
or gymnasium but not once did I dare
speak to him. For he was a royal consort,
and I but a humble clerk in the service
of the Empire. True to my station,
all I could ever do was bow before him.

He caught every eye. The women’s, the men’s –
it made no difference; they’d all want a piece
of this prettiest of young men. And me,
I dreamt of nothing else but him, his mouth
upon my mouth, his strong arms around me.
I’d give my marrow bones just to hold him.

Firm and unstinting in his devotion
to his lover, when it was time, he cast
himself into the Nile without a word,
and all to save the Emperor from harm
the haruspices had foretold for him.
O, if only fate could be subdued!

And now his statue is in every town,
his image stamped on coins of the realm.
In grief, Hadrian declared him a god,
and though we know that gods are man-made myths,
we’re glad that Antinous, a Hellenist,
like one of us, has now been raised in glory.

Handsome Antinous! Graceful Antinous!
Thus let him live, both now and forever.
And if his divinity is but a symbol,
long may it last through all eternity
so that no-one, not even death itself,
can demonize him or defile his image.

(Trans. by Frank Sewell)

Stephanie Conn

“Notes on Concealment”

At six years old pull four socks up your shin.
At twenty-six, perfect the swish and swirl
of flowing A-line skirts, trimmed with pleated lace.
Clutter your neck with starched frills, silk ribbons,
sling jade and fire opals from gold chains.
Gather your hair in dark, flamboyant knots,
braid in place with clips and flower blooms.
Present a bold stare that dares any living soul
to look away or look lower, deeper,
to see the withered leg, the limp, the back brace
reinforced with metal bars, leather straps,
the plaster casts: your moulded second skin.

“Under a Gangrene Sun”

They are coming for my foot –
will cut the leg beneath the knee
to stop the pain, stop the poison spreading.

They have been shooting into my arm
for months to make the screaming end,
stabbing deeper into collapsed veins.

My brow softens. You lift your gaze at last
to meet my woozy stare and a fire-star
falls to earth, melting into green leaves

on the ward floor. Before it turns to desert sand
everything is rotten and shifts in a canopy of thorns –
toes swing on stripped branches, hang from beaks.

I hold my peacock ring in my left hand,
a clay deer in my right, try to remember who
brought them, if it was you, sobbing by my bed.

You weren't so sentimental when my heart
shattered yet you blub for my poor dead foot –
birth red turned to brown, black then blacker still.

I love you most of all. You give me wings
and I've never needed them more than today
putting on my Tehuana dress to meet the knife.

“Sustenance”

I dream of the Sapodilla tree,
her long and twisting root system,
resistance to wind, delicate cream flowers –
small bells that chime inside my foggy head.

I discard the rough brown skin in leaf-litter
share the sweet-soaked flesh of her fruit
with howler monkeys, a sun-blind kinkajou,
while yellow epauletted bats sip at nectar syrup.

My finger-nails sprout claws, slash at bark, slice
the trunk for her milky sap. I know the harvesters
boil and block and cut but I drop to my knees,
let the chicle drip into my mouth until I choke.

(2020)

Bernadette Nic an tSaoir (trans. by the author)

“Ar Shráid an Phrionsa”

In ómós do Sheán Ó Riada 1 Lúnasa 2010

Leacht cré-umha atá romham inniu
D’fhear buan, maorga, gradamúil.
Cuntanós an laoiach atá snoite
Faoi lámh an dealbhadóra.

Chímse an fear é féin, tráth
Ag scuabadh leis ar shráid
Thart an coirnéal chun siopa
Is fuadar faoi;
Lán glaise bonn do thit uaidh.
Do stad is labhair linn beirt go fóill
Ag trácht ar phort nó fonn amhráin,
Pingní rua is práis aige
Á bpiocadh den leac sráide...

Siúlaim Sráid an Phrionsa inniu,
Chím an scilling do thit ar leac
Is chim an lámh do chruinnigh.
B’in Oirféas an Draighin
Rí-Alceimicí an traidisiúin
A d’iompaigh miotal suarach
I riocht an óir le cor dá bhois
Is cloch a chuimilt.

Is fearr le Dia guí ná gol.
Más ansa leis na foinn
Mar thúis altóra os cionn Suláin,
Thaobhaíomar beirt na Flaithis
Ar Shráid an Phrionsa tráth.
(2010)

“On Princes Street”

In memory of Seán Ó Riada 1st Aug. 2010

Now you’re cast in bronze,
Majestic, lasting.
A hero’s face carved
By the sculptor’s hand.

But I see you
Hurrying along Princes Street
Darting to a corner shop
Dropping a fistful of coins
Picking them up off the street
Coppers and brass
As you stop a moment to chat
Of a jig or the air to a song....

Today on Princes Street
I see that little shilling
And the hand reaching,
Orpheus from *An Draighin*
King of musical alchemy
Changing base metal into gold
With a flick of the wrist
And the rub of a stone.

God wants prayers not tears.
If it’s true then He loves those airs
Rising like incense above Sullane,
And we were close to Heaven
One day on Princes Street.

“Cathaoir Pheadair”

San uaimh laistíos den Vatacáin
Tá tuamaí marmair na bprionsaí
Do shuigh ar Chathaoir Pheadair.

Is ar fud Baisleac Pheadair fhéin,
Leachtanna den chré-umha déanta
In ómós don Tiarna, deirtear.

Ór is airgead, míle seod ealaíne,
Maoin is péarlaí thar na bearta
Anso i gcroílár Eaglais Chríost.

Amach liom ar thóir gile an lae,
Mé plúchta ag an rachmas seo
Is ag an gcur i gcéill.

I gcúinne d’aimsíos an both
Is an bhean ag sciúradh leithris,
Í ag brath ar an méid a chaití chuici
Le greim a chur ina béal.

Dá siúlfadh Críost an Róimh inniu
Do shuífeadh síos léi siúd,
Labhródh go cneasta bog léi
Mar a labhair cois Tobar Iacóib.
Do leagfadh lámh ar bhriseadh croí
Is leigheasfadh pian a saoil.
(2013)

“St Peter’s Chair”

In the vaults below the Vatican
There are marble tombs of princes
Who reigned on St Peter’s chair.

In St Peter’s Basilica
There are fine bronze statues
To honour the Lord, it is said.

Gold and silver, a thousand jewels,
Paintings, riches and pearls
Are here in the Church of Christ.

I come out for sunlight,
Smothered by the wealth of riches
And pretence.

In a booth behind St Peter’s Square
I meet the cleaning lady.
She is poor, rents the booth
And lives on tips from tourists.

Were Christ to walk today in Rome
He would sit with her,
He would speak kindly
As he spoke by Jacob’s well.
He would touch her heartbreak
And heal her pain.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Hofstetter's Serenade
La serenata di Hofstetter

Ten poems translated by Conci Mazzullo



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Introduction

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Traveller of the Word

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The translations spring from a meeting dictated by an intimate necessity. *Hofstetter's Serenade*, which gives the title to the collection of poems has an interesting story of its own, as the string quartet concert for violin and piano was originally mistaken for Haydn's composition. The poems by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, often narrative poems, are inhabited by protagonists who come to the fore from history, from society and from deeply rooted experiences of her "history". A veil of empathetic feel and cathartic imagery filter defeat, tragedy, famine and slavery. Eiléan's endorsement of the enclloistered nun's choice in "Inside The House" and "She Was At the Haymaking" spreads out as a powerful heritage witness to courage handed down by generations of challenging women.

I already knew the poem about James Connolly that Eiléan had written in memory of him for the 1916 Anniversary. It was published in *The Irish Times*, commissioned by the Irish Writers Centre, who had asked six poets to write a single poem dedicated to each day of the Easter rising. Eiléan was probably inspired by the words of the "Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Ireland", where James Connelly addressed both "Irishmen and Irishwomen" willing to grant them "the right to the ownership of Ireland to pursue the happiness of the whole nation", including children as well, "cherishing all of the children of the nation equally".

In the poem, Eiléan recognizes in all of them, as well as in the lower classes victims of capitalism, the hopeless souls bustling to reach Dante's boat heading to Purgatory to be freed from hell. She also sees the lustful and Paolo's and Francesca's souls buffeted by the airs of love, unable to oppose the strength of the hellish whirlwind. The word *Enough* resonates throughout the text denoting the endless wait for change, but finally Connelly's sacrifice lets glimpse that women and men will welcome the inner strength of his testament.

"Hofstetter's Serenade" opens with "the tight bundle of grief" that has melted through 25 years from Eiléan's sister's

death. Searching for her leads Eiléan to follow the musical thread her sister had left her, which restlessly “catches its breath”, freely flows weaving textures of notes. It twists through music stands and instruments, and after leaving the concert-hall circularly traces back her sister’s childhood. Since she was eleven she had felt “the pure line of sound” lifting her into a fairytale dimension, music let her feel she could have fascinated an emperor a thousand years before. The poem gains vigor when Eiléan mentions the silence which interrupted the restless and endless waving sound! Eiléan is sensitive to the poem irregular sound patterns (ABCBA; ABAACDB) and diffused musicality, which link her pursuit of sound throughout the lines. Repetition of consonant sounds (internal rhymes, bright, tight, over and under, grows and rose) and the idea of movement focuses on a sequence of 7 gerunds chasing one another, rising, dipping, landing, catching, flowing along, breathing, tracing. The pronoun “she” is repeated 5 times to evoke her sister’s presence gradually fading until silence. Here her verse is often deceptively smooth and simple, but it can plunge down in an abyss or fly up to the celestial sphere.

One of the poems that I deem as geometrically perfect in its spherical allure, is “She Was At the Haymaking” which starts with the protagonist’s immersion in nature, contemplating the tide *courting* the land with its gentle pushes, while she’s attending to her job. Her solitary experience is counterpointed by a group of people ready for something momentous to happen. She’s on the watch both for the rolling wave and for the car and from the static circular movement she takes off to a different fate. “So I’ll go”. From the scent of hay, to the roar of the car, from her deep religious and spiritual roots she bravely moves to the future, to the unexpected world of self-denial across the Atlantic. From the circular *turning* the hay, at the river *mouth* to the *curved edge* of the tide, thinking of the *rolling wave* she then goes off to her challenging destiny.

What I think is also important to underline here is Eiléan’s Dante’s spiritual heritage that strengthens her choice of tercets and the last conclusive line apart from the last tercet, as in his Cantos to give emphasis to “the letter took three weeks crossing the sea”.

Throughout the whole collection hovers the “Architectural Metaphor”¹ which, beyond establishing the convent foundation conceals/reveals, the mystery of the foundress’s mummy’s head oriented to the west, through the sudden opening of a hatch.

“Inside The House”, tunnelling its potential, discloses by dotting the poem with the preposition “in” and the place adverb “inside”. From the title itself where a nun who voluntarily joined a cloistered convent moves *inside the house*, *inside* the building, *in* she [*goes inside*], *inside*, and finds her secret escape getting deeper, plumbing the basement or *searching inside the chimneys*. By getting deeper *inside*, where no man could violate the threshold, *inside the door*, by getting through the chimney she gets rid of constraints and finds her freedom taking over the man’s phallic role of penetrating the “physicality” of a dark void. And she finally joyfully says “You’d be black all over it”.

The same happens in *She Was At the Haymaking* where two opposed worlds are determined by the sensual world of nature and the presence of *houses* evoking enclosures, the family *house* and the nuns’ mother *house* which will entail a new world full of discipline and rules.

Other confining structures are recurring in the collection *Hofstetter’s Serenade*. *Rooms*, no longer *houses*, as strongholds appear in “Seaweed” where the female protagonist holds a privileged view point on the darkening storm of the 1916 Easter Rising, on the 24th April the day after her marriage, inside a *room* delimited by “smashed windowpanes”.

¹ “The Architectural Metaphor”, *The Brazen Serpent*, Gallery Press, 1994, 14.

However, in different contexts, *rooms* spatialize and expand into wider and more hopeful perspectives in “For James Connolly” where, from a hellish backdrop fighting against a tornado “that lifts the lids off *houses*” “waiting for the wind to change”, Irishmen and Irishwomen can glimpse a “*painted room*” in which music can be shared.

Usually Eiléan’s *houses, windows, doors, cloisters*, marking limits shelter secrets and mysteries. In “Carr’s Lane” the *house* hosting a library trespasses and crosses over finally falling into decay while hinting at the historical trade of beef or butter with the French ships carrying slaves to the Caribbean. Here History takes over its predominant role in Eiléan’s poetry and houses the more miserable *cabins* and Famine (1845-1849), in “Maria Edgeworth in 1847”. In this poem the narration focuses on a destitute young boy from the *cabin*, now a dock worker, often far from *home*, who brings meals to the community limiting starvation and helps Maria Edgeworth, whose basket of food gets lighter at every *cabin door*, feed the hungry families.

Recalling “Gloss/Clós/Glas”² from *The Girl who Married the Reindeer*, well encompasses the architectural metaphor of *doors, room, locked presses, locked door* and sheds light to the essential quest for significant language. In the poem the gender discrimination of the possessive adjectives His/Her, unknown to the Irish language, crucially puts into perspective the importance of words and the capture of the most suitable nuance of meaning. The highlights in the poem centre on the title “Gloss/Clós/Glas”, where Gloss means a brief explanation of an obscure word used in manuscripts/Clós means school courtyard /Glas means green as adjective/lock as a noun, which launch an explorative journey through elusive words that like “rags of language are streaming like weathervanes, like weeds in water [...] turn with the tide [...] slippery like the silk thighs of a tomcat...”.

Eiléan, as the scholar “who has still not gone to bed”, “hunting words [...] all night” and struggles with words, as it is visible in *Hofstetter’s Serenade*, enters worlds of words which are always crossed and travelled in different directions. We can’t decline her invitation to visit the pantagruelic visionary mouth of her poems, which open up unexpected sceneries, landscapes of the outer and inner world showing the linguistic mastery of an indefatigable traveller of the word.

² Gloss/Clós/Glas, *The Girl who Married the Reindeer*, Gallery Press, 2001, 46.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Hofstetter's Serenade

“The Cat Dinner”

We knew they were there, their flattened masks,
and that when they withdrew into lunar shadow
there would be no witness, a cobwebby silence.

Lips open but speech fails, round the half-cleared table,
sitting there, but strangers, our fussy notes shuffled,
lying at random. We made the long journey

to deliver the gesture, but who has noticed us?
– like the food left outside for visiting spirits
which is gone next morning, but did the cats eat it?

“Hofstetter's Serenade”

(Máire Ní Chuilleanáin 1944-1990)

I felt the draught just now as I was keying in the numbers –
the date of her death, going on twenty-five years ago;
it is May but the bright evening is turning colder,
the tight bundle of grief has opened out and spread
wide across these years she knows nothing of, and if I go
in search of her I must unwind and stretch out the thread
she left us, so it twines like a long devious border
turning between the music stands, over and under
the kettledrums and the big bass lying on its side,
but it plunges away leaving the concert-hall behind
and catches her at the start, in the year she was eleven, when
it first rose out of her, the pure line of sound that grows
rising dipping never landing twice on the same spot, then
catching its breath and then flowing along as even
as her own breathing, smooth like a weaver's thread
back and forth tracing. It weaves and it hops again,
the arched finger nails down the note but it overflows.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

La serenata di Hofstetter

Ten poems translated by Conci Mazzullo¹

“La cena dei gatti”

Sapevano che erano lì, le loro piatte maschere nere,
e che quando si rintanavano all'ombra della luna
nessun testimone, silenzio di ragnatela.

Labbra aperte ma silenzio, intorno alla tavola mezza sparecchiata,
seduti lì, estranei, le nostre febbrili note mischiate,
messe lì a caso. Abbiamo fatto un lungo viaggio

per recapitare gesti, ma chi si è accorto di noi?
– come cibo lasciato fuori per gli spiriti
sparito il giorno dopo, ma l'hanno mangiato i gatti?

“La serenata di Hofstetter”
(Máire Ní Chuilleanáin 1944-1990)

Ho sentito l'alito di vento proprio ora mentre
digitavo i numeri – data della sua
morte, venticinque anni fa;
è maggio ma la luce della sera, fredda si fa
il denso grumo di dolore si è
sciolto e disperso negli anni a lei ignoti, e
se la cerco devo srotolare il filo che
ci ha lasciato, che si intreccia
lungo confine, aggirandosi tra leggi, sopra e sotto
i tamburi e il contrabasso a fianco,
ma si tuffa via lasciando la sala del concerto
e la coglie all'inizio, quando undicenne,
affiorò la linea pura del suono che cresce
sollevandosi inabissandosi, senza atterrare
due volte nello stesso posto, poi
riprendendo fiato e fluendo, lineare
come il suo respiro, liscio come filo di telaio
avanti e indietro. Fila e supera ancora, con dita
arcuate giù sulla nota, ma lo sovrasta.

¹ The poems by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, originally published in *The Mother House* (2019), and their translations appear by kind permission of the author and The Gallery Press (<www.gallerypress.com>).

She was eleven years old. A thousand years before,
she could have been married to an emperor, she was sure
she was able to consent on the spot, as the notes wrapped
 around her, and
she went on playing as her eyes opened; like words,
like the long serpent that can only swim upstream, like time,
the line drew her along, the string and the bow, towards
the moment I saw the breath leaving her body, and the
 silence began.

“A Slow March”

Lento, as the threshold wearing down,
as the hesitant writer’s hand,
the man with the trombone
stands waiting for the moment,
the horn solo *lento* finishing then the pause
before he slowly lifts the long slider

and the girl with the piccolo
goes on waiting her turn, her five bars,
watching while he plays, her spine
tense as the hairpins pinching her hair
holding it smooth in its place
– one eye on the score, counting quavers

– and what harm if these characters
were to wear down to a trace and be
lost like the trace of the old defensive wall?
It would still take longer than
the notes of the trombone,
and the piccolo too, fading away.

Aveva undici anni. Mille anni prima,
sposa di un imperatore,
sarebbe potuta diventare, era certa
che avrebbe potuto subito acconsentire, mentre le note
la avvolgevano, e
continuò a suonare quando gli occhi si aprirono, come parole,
come sinuoso serpente che va, controcorrente, come il tempo
la linea la portò, la corda e l'arco,
verso il momento che vidi il respiro lasciare il suo corpo, e
iniziò il silenzio.

“Una marcia lenta”

Lento, come la soglia che si consuma,
come l'esitante mano di uno scrittore
l'uomo col trombone
è in attesa del momento,
il *lento* assolo del corno sta finendo, poi pausa
prima che lentamente sollevi il lungo pistone

e la ragazza con l'ottavino
aspettando il suo turno, le sue cinque battute,
lo osserva suonare, la sua colonna
tesa come mollette che pinzano i capelli
fermandoli delicatamente
– un occhio al conteggio, guardando le crome

– e che sventura se questi personaggi
dovessero ridursi a una traccia ed essere
perduti come resti di un muro difensivo?
Ci vorrebbe molto di più delle
note del trombone,
e dell'ottavino che sfumano via.

“Inside The House”

She crossed the footbridge, the bell
 was ringing from the chapel, they were there
 expecting her. In she went,
 inside, like breathing, her quest
 for the kernel, the seed
 that might burst and make a way
 of release for her, escape –
 even if its hiding place was a shell,
 even if it had to be secret
 as the fragile yolk that held the giant’s life:

she plumbed the basement and searched inside the chimneys.

She laughed telling the story.
 O, you’d do that, she said,
 we couldn’t have a man inside the door.
 The kitchen chimney
 and I loved it,
 well I remember
 the old days, you’d be
 black all over after it.

“Seaweed”

*for Thomas Dillon and Geraldine Plunkett,
 married April 23rd 1916*

Everything in the room got in her way,
 the table mirror catching the smoke
 and the edges of smashed windowpanes.
 Her angle downward on the scene
 gave her a view of hats and scattered stones.
 She saw her brother come out to help
 with the barricades, the wrecked tram
 blocking off Earl Street, then back inside.

– and for the man in the room, obscured
 by her shadow against the window
 the darkening was a storm shifting his life
 – he wondered, where were they now, and would
 this perch above the scene blow apart soon,
 and he imagined the weeds that sink their filaments
 between rocks to nourish a life in water
 until all of a sudden they’re sheared away to sea.

And out at sea the gunboat was bucking and plunging,
 throwing up spray. The weeds are slapped
 back again on sharp rocks beside beaches
 that are sucked bare by the storm after this one,
 their holdfast plucked away. He was thinking,
 would they find a place and lose it, blown away
 again and find another, on the western coast,
 as the seaweed is landed, a darkness in the dark water.

“Dentro la casa”

Lei attraversò il ponte, nella cappella la campana
risuonava, erano lì
e l'aspettavano. Entrò,
dentro come un respiro, ricercando
il baccello, il seme
che potrebbe esplodere e darle
una via di fuga –
anche se il suo nascondersi fosse un guscio
anche se custodisse un segreto
come il fragile tuorlo che
teneva il gigante in vita:

scandagliò il sotterraneo e cercò dentro i camini.

Rise raccontando la sua storia
Oh, lo facevi, diceva,
nessun uomo poteva varcare la soglia.
Il camino della cucina
mi piaceva,
ricordo bene
i vecchi tempi,
diventavi tutta nera dopo.

“Alghe”

*per Thomas Dillon e Geraldine Plunkett,
sposati il 23 aprile 1916.*

Ogni cosa nella stanza le dava impaccio,
lo specchio del tavolo catturava il fumo
e i bordi dei vetri della finestra fracassati.
Il suo sguardo giù sulla scena
le restituì l'immagine di cappelli e pietre sparse.
Vide suo fratello uscire a mettere su le barricate, il tram distrutto
che bloccava Earl Street, poi rientrò.

– e per l'uomo nella stanza, oscurato
dall'ombra di lei contro la finestra
il farsi buio fu una tempesta che cambiava il corso della vita
– si chiese dove fossero ora, e se
il loro osservatorio sulla scena sarebbe esploso,
e lui immaginava le alghe che affondavano i loro filamenti
tra le rocce per nutrire una vita in acqua
sin quando all'improvviso non siano strappate via in mare.

E fuori in mare la cannoniera cavalcando l'onda,
tirava su la spuma. Le alghe sbattute
ancora indietro, su rocce affilate, accanto alle spiagge
denudate dopo l'impeto della tempesta,
il loro fortino strappato via. Lui stava pensando
avrebbero trovato e perso un posto – ancora una esplosione –
e trovato un altro sulla costa occidentale,
quando l'alga si posa, un'oscurità nell'acqua scura.

“She Was At The Haymaking”

She was down in the small field
turning the last swathes of hay
on the slope facing the river mouth,

each time she came back up
she saw the wave so gently courting
the land, with shallow pushes

and the curved edge of the tide
making its way upstream.
She was alone in the field

– they were up in the house with Mary
whose bag was packed, waiting for the car
to bring her on her first stage,

the start of her long voyage
away to the far shores
of America and the novitiate.

She worked on with the rake
thinking of the rolling wave,
an eye watching for the car.

When she heard it on the road
she brought the rake up with her
on the steep path to the house.

They were all there in the parlour,
Mary sitting in the middle,
her face amazed. ‘I can’t go’.

‘Now that it’s time, I can’t go.’
Her parents said nothing. Her sister
had come to bid her goodbye,

now she said ‘So I’ll go’.
She shook a small bit of hay
out of her hair. She washed her hands,

she took up the bag and went off with the driver
to a house full of rules – so far away
that when she wrote to say she was happy

the letter took three weeks crossing the sea.

“Era lì a fare fieno”

Era giù al campo
rivoltando gli ultimi fasci di fieno
sul pendio davanti la bocca del fiume,

ogni volta che ritornava
vedeva l'onda delicata corteggiare
la terra, con lievi spinte

e il ciglio rotondo della marea
farsi avanti su per la corrente.
Era sola nel campo

– loro erano su in casa con Mary
la borsa pronta, in attesa della macchina
per portarla alla prima tappa,

inizio di un lungo viaggio
via per rive lontane
di America e noviziato.

Continuò col rastrello
pensando all'onda rotolante,
un occhio attento alla macchina.

Quando la sentì sulla strada
portò su il rastrello con sé
sull'erto sentiero verso casa.

Erano tutti lì nella sala,
Mary seduta in mezzo,
col viso attonito. ‘Non posso andare’.

‘Ora che è il momento, non posso’
I genitori in silenzio. Sua sorella
era venuta a salutarla,

‘Allora vado io’ disse,
scosse via il fieno
dai capelli. Si lavò le mani

prese la borsa e andò via con l'autista
verso una casa piena di regole – così lontana
che quando scriveva una lettera per dire che era felice

ci volevano tre settimane per attraversare il mare

“Carr’s Lane”

You can see the tall front door
but don’t expect to be admitted.
On your left is Carr’s Lane,
at the corner a newspaper shop;

up the lane a door, stone steps
worn pale by rain and people climbing,
unlocks at the agreed time
on quiet days for callers they know.

Scholars disagree about
Carr’s Lane, is it *cart’s lane* corrupted?
Or was there a prosperous
local merchant family called Carr?

– They could have grown rich selling
butter to the transatlantic trade
or beef abroad. If their books
gave their story, those have all been cleared.

The dealer came one Monday
early, the shelves were bare before noon,
the library is closed off –
dangerous, woodworm in the floorboards.

“Il vicolo Carr”

Puoi vedere l'alta porta d'ingresso
ma non aspettarti di poter entrare.
Alla tua sinistra c'è il vicolo Carr,
all'angolo un negozio di giornali;

su per il vicolo una porta, gradini di pietra
impalliditi dalla pioggia e persone che vi salgono,
si apre in tempi stabiliti
in giorni tranquilli per quelli che conoscono.

Gli studiosi non sono unanimi sul
Vicolo Carr, è forse corruzione di *Vicolo Cart*?
O lì c'era una famiglia benestante
di mercanti chiamata Carr?

– Avrebbero potuto arricchirsi vendendo
burro per il commercio transatlantico
oppure manzo all'estero. Se i loro libri
raccontassero la loro storia, sarebbero stati eliminati.

Il gestore venne un lunedì
presto, gli scaffali nudi prima di mezzogiorno
la biblioteca chiude –
pericolosi, tarli nelle tavole del pavimento.

“The Light”

for Damhnait Ní Riordáin

Come out, I say, and you all come to the light.
I look for her, she's there,
the sunlight glancing up from the shining leaves
wavers on her face
as she consults the rose-bush, the light moving
in slow time with her hair.

At the end of the garden where tall trees shiver
the river was in spate.
We walked down there at dawn to get rid of the noise
of the night's debate,
leaving the table with the bottles and empty glasses,
Socrates and his fate

in *Phaedo*, in the Great Books of the World edition
on thin Bible paper
laid open, we left them to look at the river rushing
down to Askeaton,
the tall Desmond castle, the friary beyond the bridge,
in their desolation.

We turned back again, to wash the glasses and arrange
the room before her parents
rose up. She stopped to consult the rose-bush, the risen sun
blazed in its ranges;
her face shone green in the glancing light, I remember
across all the changes –

and that they had arrived in the dark, the small shy moths
lined up, wings packed tight,
crowded under the lamp that still shone empty
recalling the hours of night.

“La luce”

per Damhnait Ní Riordáin

Esci, dico, e tu verrai alla luce.
La cerco, è lì,
la luce del sole che affiora dalle foglie splendenti
ondeggia sul suo volto
mentre consulta il cespuglio di rose, la luce che si muove
al passo lento dei suoi capelli.

In fondo al giardino dove rabbriviscono gli alberi alti
il fiume era in piena.
Camminammo laggiù all'alba per liberarci del rumore
del dibattito notturno,
lasciando bottiglie e bicchieri vuoti a tavola,
Socrate e il suo fato

nel *Fedone*, nell'edizione dei 'Grandi libri del mondo'
su sottile carta Bibbia
aperta, li lasciammo a guardare il fiume impetuoso
giù verso Askeaton,
l'alto castello di Desmond e il monastero oltre il ponte,
nella loro desolazione.

Ritornammo, a lavare i bicchieri e sistemare
la stanza prima che i suoi genitori
si alzassero. Lei smise di consultare il cespuglio di rose, il sole sorto
ne infuocava il profilo;
Il suo volto risplendeva di verde nel raggio di luce, io ricordo
attraverso tutti i mutamenti –

che erano giunte nell'oscurità, le piccole falene timide
allineate, con ali pigiate,
affollate sotto la lampada che ancora inutilmente risplendeva
evocando le ore della notte.

“For James Connolly”

i

When I think of all the false beginnings...
 The man was a pair of hands,
 the woman another pair, to be had more cheaply,
 the wind blew, the children were thirsty –

when he passed by the factory door he saw them,
 they were moving and then waiting, as many
 as the souls that crowded by Dante’s boat

that never settled in the water –
 what weight to ballast that ferry?
 They are there now, as many

as the souls blown by the winds of their desire,
 the airs of love, not one of them weighing
 one ounce against the tornado

that lifts the lids off houses, that spies
 where they crouch together inside
 until the wind sucks them out.

It is only wind, but what braced muscle, what earthed foot
 can stand against it, what voice so loud
 as to be heard shouting *Enough?*

ii

He had driven the horse in the rubbish cart, he knew
 the strength in the neck under the swishing mane,
 he knew how to tell her to turn, to back or stand.

He knew where the wind hailed from, he studied
 its language, it blew in spite of him.
 He got tired waiting for the wind to change,

as we are exhausted waiting for that change,
 for the voices to shout *Enough*, for the hands
 that can swing the big lever and send the engine rolling

away to the place we saw through the gap in the bone
 where there was a painted room, music and the young
 people
 dancing on the shore, and the Old Man of the Sea

“Per James Connolly”

i

Quando penso a tutte le false partenze...
L'uomo valeva un paio di mani,
la donna un altro paio, un po' più economiche,
il vento soffiava, i bambini avevano sete –

quando passava dalla porta della fabbrica li vedeva,
si muovevano e aspettavano, tanti quante
le anime che si affollavano presso la barca di Dante

che mai prese il mare –
quale peso per equilibrare quel traghetto?
Sono lì ora, tante quanto

le anime soffiate via dal vento del loro desiderio,
aere d'amore, non una di loro pesava
un'oncia da opporre alla bufera

che solleva i tetti delle case, che spia
dove si raggomitano vicini
finché il vento non li risucchia fuori.

E' solo vento, ma quale muscolo allenato, quale piede ben piantato
può opporvisi, quale voce così forte
da essere sentita urlare *Basta?*

ii

Aveva guidato il cavallo del carro della spazzatura, conosceva
la forza del collo sotto la fruscante criniera,
sapeva come dirgli di girare, indietreggiare o star fermo.

Sapeva da dove il vento provenisse, ne studiò
il linguaggio, soffiava a suo dispetto.
Si stancò di aspettare che il vento cambiasse,

come noi esausti di aspettare quel cambiamento,
che le voci gridino *Basta*, che le mani
muovano la grande leva e mettano in moto il motore

verso il luogo che vedemmo attraverso una breccia nell'osso
dove c'era una stanza dipinta, musica e,
giovani
che danzavano sulla spiaggia, e il Vecchio Uomo di Mare

had been sunk in the wide calm sea.

iii

The sea moves under the wind and shows nothing
– not where to begin. But look for the moment
just before the wave of change crashes and

goes into reverse. Remember the daft beginnings
of a fatal century and their sad endings, but let's not
hold back our hand from the lever. Remember
James Connolly,

who put his hand to the work, who saw suddenly
how his life would end, and was content because
men and women would succeed him, and his testament

was there, he trusted them. It was not a bargain:
in 1916 the printer locked the forme,
he set it in print, the scribes can't alter an iota

– then the reader comes, and it flowers again, like a
painted room.

era stato affondato nel grande mare calmo.

iii

Il mare si muove sotto il vento e nulla mostra
– da dove cominciare. Ma cerca il momento
proprio prima che l'onda del cambiamento si frantumi

e indietreggi. Ricordi i folli inizi
di un secolo fatale e la loro triste fine, ma non
allontaniamo la mano dalla leva. Ricorda

James Connolly,

che mise mano al lavoro, che subito vide
come la sua vita sarebbe finita, ed era contento perché
uomini e donne lo avrebbero seguito, e il suo testamento

era lì, si fidava di loro. Non fu un affare:
nel 1916 lo stampatore fissò il formato,
lo stampò, gli scribi non ne possono alterare una iota

– poi arriva il lettore, e rinasce ancora come una
stanza dipinta.

“Maria Edgeworth in 1847”

She was touched by the generosity of the porters who carried the rice and India meal to the vessels for shipment to Ireland in the famine, refusing all payment; and she knit with her own hands a woollen comforter for each porter, of bright and pretty colours, which she sent to a friend to present to the men, who were proud and grateful for the gifts; but, alas! Before they received them, those kind hands were cold, and that warm heart had ceased to beat.

*A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth,
by Frances Edgeworth.*

Anger. *Work*. Confusion – what is to be done?
– the Atlantic in the way and the news getting worse,
work stretching to occupy every hour in the day,
carrying back and forth, lifting bearing and setting down.

We are in the centuries when work told the body how
to lift, fasten and drag, the weight of the world needed
heaving,
when the horses staggered and slowed on the steep hill
the coach too full, too heavy to drag onwards –

they stopped fearfully and the child from the cabin
was waiting for his chance, he ran out with a stone
pushed it behind the wheel so the horses could breathe
and waited for the farthings flung from the passengers’
windows.

Now he is carrying sacks of meal to the boat
back and forth, loaded then free, and the work stretching
ahead,
like the road where at the same moment Maria Edgeworth
walks out, her young servant beside her carrying

the basket that gets a bit lighter
at every cabin door. This is her work now
at the end of her life. At home,
she sits down to the story she is writing,

line after line, her hand straying back and forth
across the remaining pages. The child from the cabin
is a man carrying meal to the docks, and at last
the day is over, and time for him to be paid –

but he is too angry, his comrades are too angry
to take money for helping to feed starving people. And she
who is not ever recorded as being angry

“Maria Edgeworth 1847”

Fu colpita dalla generosità dei facchini che portavano il riso e la polenta ai vascelli da spedire in Irlanda ai tempi della grande carestia, rifiutando qualsiasi pagamento; lei allora lavorò a maglia con le sue mani, per ognuno di loro, una sciarpa di lana, di bei colori brillanti, che mandò a un amico per donarla agli uomini, che furono orgogliosi e grati dei regali; ma ahimè! Prima che li ricevevano, quelle mani gentili, divennero fredde, e quel gran cuore aveva smesso di battere.

*A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth,
di Frances Edgeworth.*

Rabbia. Lavoro. Confusione – cosa si deve fare?
– l’Atlantico di mezzo e le notizie sempre peggiori,
il lavoro che si protrae per occupare ogni ora del giorno,
portando avanti e indietro, sollevando e scaricando.

Siamo nei secoli in cui il lavoro diceva al corpo come
sollevare, fissare e trascinare, del peso del mondo serviva
farsi carico,
quando i cavalli barcollavano e rallentavano sulle erte colline
la carrozza troppo piena, troppo pesante da trascinare oltre –

si fermavano spaventati e il bambino dalla casupola
aspettava la sua occasione, correva fuori con una pietra
la spingeva dietro la ruota per far prender fiato ai cavalli
e aspettava gli spiccioli lanciati dai passeggeri dalle
finestre.

Ora sta portando sacchi di polenta alla barca
avanti e indietro, carichi poi scarichi, e il lavoro si
allunga,
come la strada che allo stesso tempo Maria Edgeworth
percorre, con accanto la sua giovane serva che porta

il cestino sempre più leggero
davanti ogni porta. Questo è ora il suo lavoro
alla fine della sua vita. A casa,
si siede davanti al racconto che sta scrivendo,

riga dopo riga, la sua mano si sposta avanti e indietro
attraverso le restanti pagine. Il bambino della casupola
è ora un uomo che porta la polenta alle banchine, e alla fine
il giorno si spegne, ed è tempo di essere pagato –

ma è troppo arrabbiato, i suoi compagni sono troppo arrabbiati
di guadagnare per aiutare a sfamare gente che muore di fame. E lei

takes out her knitting needles and the long skeins of wool
the women have spun in the cabins, to make
a warm comforter for every man, her needles
twitching back and forth until the work is done.
She is famous and fortunate, she will be remembered.

Like the girl whose brothers were turned into swans,
she does what she knows, the long scarves piling
softly beside her chair, one after the other like the days.

They are far from home when her gift reaches them, the trace
of their work unravelling like a worn thread of wool, their
kindness
out of anger stretching across the sea, and answered.

che nessuno ha mai visto arrabbiata
tira fuori gli aghi da maglia e le lunghe matasse di lana
che le donne hanno filato in casa, per fare
una calda sciarpa per ogni uomo, i suoi aghi
che si agitano avanti e indietro sino a lavoro finito.
Lei è famosa e fortunata, sarà ricordata.

Come la ragazza i cui fratelli furono mutati in cigni,
fa ciò che sa, le lunghe sciarpe si accumulano
morbide accanto la sedia, una dopo l'altra come i giorni.

Sono lontani da casa quando i suoi regali li raggiungono, la traccia
del loro lavoro si srotola come un consunto filo di lana, la loro
gentilezza
suscitata dalla rabbia si allunga attraverso il mare, e ottiene risposta.

Frank McGuinness

Three poems from
The Wedding Breakfast

Translated by Fiorenzo Fantaccini



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Three poems from *The Wedding Breakfast*

Frank McGuinness

Translated by Fiorenzo Fantaccini

“Kites”¹

After forty years
embracing tonight
I reach and touch
air between us.

Your body flees,
free as a kite,
a vein of flesh,
string tied to dust

“Aquiloni”

Dopo quarant’anni
di abbracci stanotte
raggiungo e tocco
l’aria fra noi.

Il tuo corpo fugge,
libero come un aquilone,
una vena di carne,
corda legata alla polvere.

¹ The poems by Frank McGuinness, originally published in *The Wedding Breakfast* (2019), and their translations appear by kind permission of the author and The Gallery Press (<www.gallerypress.com>).



“Lucrezia Borgia”

I broke a mirror across my lover's head.
Who was it poured milk in his mercury?

He dressed me in leaves of mulberry trees.
He placed on my face a mask cut from lead.

“Lucrezia Borgia”

Ho rotto uno specchio sulla testa del mio amante
Chi è stato a versar latte nel suo mercurio?

Mi ha vestito con foglie di gelso.
Ha posto sul mio volto una maschera tagliata nel piombo.

“Easter in Venice”

in memory of Constance Hayes Hadfield

The day they dragged me from my mother’s paws
the doge committed original sin –
shoes on the table, the flowering haw.
Miracles happen each day in Venice.

Bricks in the bridge carouse the Rialto.
The lagoon waters turn our ships to stone.
Lie in the street, demolish fiascos.
A blast from your lips of ‘Molly Malone’.

Venetian first, Christian second.
Who do we celebrate this Easter Day?
Emperor, sultan? The fat of the land?
Nothing is simple in Venice, we say.

“Pasqua a Venezia”

in memoria di Constance Hayes Hadfield

Il giorno in cui mi strapparono dalle zampe di mia madre
il doge commise il peccato originale –
scarpe sul tavolo, il biancospino in fiore,
A Venezia i miracoli accadono ogni giorno.

I mattoni del ponte scuotono il Rialto.
Le acque della laguna mutano in pietra le nostre navi.
Sdraiarsi per strada, dimenticare i fallimenti.
Dalle tue labbra scoppia ‘Molly Malone’.

Prima veneziana, poi cristiana.
Questa Pasqua chi celebriamo?
Un imperatore, un sultano? I migliori prodotti della terra?
A Venezia niente è semplice, diciamo.



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May Quartet, 2020

Mary O'Donnell

These poems were written quickly one morning some weeks ago, one after the other, each one leading to a very local situation in which nothing much 'happens'. My hope is that the happening incidents exert themselves poetically below the surface. I wanted to remove the writing 'I' from the lyric voice, to hold myself at a distance – or, at an oblique angle to each event.

In "Sulky", the speaker is awoken by the sharp slip of hooves along a country road. This listening event perhaps raises a question also about the 'pace and gait' within the bedroom, where 'markers' are different. What I wanted to achieve was a sense of the morning washing into the room in drifts of sound, and hinting of the wilderness of hedgerow weeds and flowers on the small road outside. Within, a different scene is suggested.

"Thicket" ushers in an interior, and I am regarding the garden as 'interior' for the purpose of this poem. The spaces in which we live are liminal ones that find loose definitions of interiority and exteriority, both physical and otherwise. So, this thicket may be a site of discovery, of revelation, because it is connected with the inner life of the man and woman. I had not considered it as a site of confrontation. There is an alchemy between the couple and perhaps a suggestion that the relationship is mysterious – as relationships often are. The question of loss looms. The woman is in a position in which her greeting him – on whatever level they discover (this is not stated explicitly) – may make the difference she seeks.

During Covid 19 weeks, people in Ireland and elsewhere who have a garden have been working in it. My daughter and husband created a pond, digging, lining, planting and finally installing tadpoles and nine fish. The pond is symbolic. It is an oasis of quietly pouring water from an Italian urn, for example, inspiring tranquility for the voice in the poem. But what interested me was the darkness beneath the surface: the predation at the edge of our lives at present, for example, the need for 'hiding places' and safe havens, yet the possibility of flashes of lit gold and things which are auspicious. There is a holding back, as ever with the question of mystery, and as in the previous poem, "Thicket".

My sister lives in northern California and often writes about the redwood trees and her relationship with the primeval forest. In the poem "Sister", I wanted to look at the question of scale, and how we interrogate it in our private lives. Facebook tells so much. Then nothing. The scale is deceptive in the virtual world, suggesting vastness whereas in reality it is limited. But the trees create questions for the viewer, because of their height they have a vanishing point which parallels the vanishing point of our questions. As our deepest questions are rarely answered satisfactorily, it's a question of sitting things out, trusting.

Technically, I stripped the language of these poems to its barest. This is not something I do very often in my work. It seemed important to hold myself at a remove, to not explain much, to pay attention to a shorter line-break, for example, even hyphenating and breaking the word 'un-loosed' (lines 2-3, "Sulky"). This rejection of an extended line helped contain the thought pattern, which should in the case of these poems be restrained, and almost like smudge-marks from a painter's thumb on a minimalist canvas.

Finally, here are times when our trust in philosophical questions can be awakened, and this period in our lives is one of those. The background questions which have always floated in human consciousness though not always expressed – among them *Who am I really? Why am I here? What is existence?* – have surfaced for us and are ready to be explored as never before in twenty-first century consciousness. I have no desire to exclaim, proclaim, protest or argue. This period is a defining one, which is changing the attitudes, rules, and attachments by which we hitherto have lived life, allegedly 'to the full'. I hope that in writing this small quartet I am entering a space which looks at the matter of fullness from another perspective, and that the poems reveal it to be in the interstices of the hours, in the not talked about, the not immediately revealed, that this other, essential life takes root.

Maynooth, May 2020

"Sulky" *

This road, always bright,
on May mornings an un-
loosed stem free of roots.
The sulky trots by before six,

heading east and away
from dark interiors, restive
stables; away from night,
which pressed us

to this bed, where pace
and gait break slowly and
with different markers.
The little sulky, a pacer,

* a sulky is a small, light-weight cart with two wheels and a seat for the driver only, pulled by fine-boned horses and used for harness races. People sometimes refer to the horses themselves as "sulkys".

his dashed metal hoof
on road, past cow parsley,
wild garlic, the lingering waft
of an open night window.

“Thicket”

She is aware of a thread,
attached, loose, and she
is bound, could pray

to be held as long
as necessary. Sometimes,
she considers the cut

that would make
difference. They would
be lost then, he shouldering

down into the thicket
in a stiff wonder. She could
meet him there,

greet him, taking
the hand, the fingers,
his arcane chemistries.

“Garden Pond”

She and he have stuck at this
for weeks. Dug deep, lined,
anchored and filled.

Time for tadpoles, now,
auspicious fish. They seek hiding-
places beneath rock, fret

to a new cold when night
drops, a predator.
Mornings she arrives

at the edge to find gay
spatters and flashes
netted beneath shades

of fern. Little mysteries,
not telling them much.
Finned hours ahead.

“Sister”

Her woods are higher,
deeper than ours.
A Facebook post
tells so much, then stops.

Red deer graze, elk
like monarchs in her
silent place. This America
never lost pace; in

California, cedars carry
her questions to vanishing
point. Here, too, some
questions, sitting it out.



Recensioni / Reviews

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Yeats's At The Hawk's Well, directed by Hiroshi Sugimoto, The Paris Opéra Ballet at the Palais Garnier, September-October, 2019

A Japanese revisioning of the earliest of Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers*, where he shaped what he had learned of the art and artistry of Noh theatre from Ezra Pound and Ernst Fenellosa to match his private dramaturgical imperatives, held much promise. Most of the directorial team and two of the performers were Japanese artists established in their own right, while Sugimoto is renowned as a photographer with a particular interest in recording either remote, bleak landscapes or abandoned, dilapidated theatres, caught between living and dying yet still potent as liminal spaces. His is a sensitivity akin to Yeats's in this particular respect and resonant too of Celtic belief systems. From a first glimpse of the stage setting, such a liminal space confronted the audience. The traditional format of the Noh stage with its walkway or entrance path (*hashigakari*) leading to a square stage of untreated maple wood were there but subtly altered: where in the Noh theatre the walkway leads from the dressing room to the audience's left at a slight diagonal to the playing space, here the walkway advanced towards the audience from the back of the Garnier stage at the foot of a vast cyclorama to a playing space now positioned as a central forestage, the bright but spectral colouring of walkway and stage contrasting with the gleaming black flooring to either side of these Japanese elements. There were neither pine trees nor a gravel pavement surrounding the stage as in the Noh theatre: instead only the skeletal-seeming fundamentals of the prototype. Appropriately for Yeats's play, which starts with his Chorus calling to mind a journey through desolate rocks "the salt sea wind has swept bare", the stage picture evoked a journey to an abandoned site.

Traditional music and a group onstage of Noh musicians were replaced with an electronic score by Ryoji Ikeda that pulsed and echoed, suggestive of an ethereal world that could turn threatening or downright aggressive at times but was always eerily devoid of human agency. Gone too were the traditional backing of a permanent chorus and the permanent setting of a wooden wall with painted pine tree, instead the cyclorama was flooded with a luminescence, its height often bisected with a thin horizon-like line suggestive of a distant sea or far-reaching valley or plain. This computerised scenography linked precise-

ly to the music was devised by Sugimoto himself. Yeats by 1916 when he composed *At The Hawk's Well* had nothing but scorn for realistic scenery in the theatre, which he found bogus in its impact and distracting from the actors' performances. He devised theories of staging that eschewed all modes of realism and sought extremes of simplicity through stylisation: theatre he firmly believed should work as directly as possible on its audiences' imaginations. Sugimoto was exploring levels of stylisation made possible by current developments in digitisation way beyond anything Yeats might have envisaged, but the result was wholly in sympathy with Yeats's ambitions and, though electronic in its modes of realisation, found a remarkable dynamism in its pared-down, abstract power.

Sugimoto's biggest challenge came from working with a cast of dancers (the production had been commissioned by the Ballet de l'Opéra National de Paris), which required him to jettison Yeats's poetic dialogue and find a scenario and language of movement that would convey its import. He largely kept to Yeats's own narrative line but worked some notable variations on it in the confrontations of the three characters. The Old Man and the Young Man (Cuchulain) were dressed identically in silver trunks, boots and an encompassing cloak with a stiffly angular, padded collar that enabled the Old Man in particular when turning away from the audience to seem as if suddenly transformed into a rock or ancient tree-form. Both cloaks were quickly discarded to reveal almost identical near-naked body-lines and physiques. Neither man wore a mask or sported mask-like make-up; instead they each had long straight silver hair, hanging to the waist. The only distinguishing features between them were that the Old Man wore an equally long silver beard and his whole ensemble had a dull tarnished effect, where Cuchulain's by contrast positively gleamed bright, as if the silver were newly minted. In the programme the Old Man was given a new potential identity in being named "The Shadow" and at all points in their meeting he seemed to represent Cuchulain's *doppelgänger*, a possibly feared projection of an older self with whom the hero needed to wrestle: it was as if he embodied the ordinary, natural end to a life, which Cuchulain wished to transcend¹.

The bare forestage was in consequence a psychological space of self-determination; there was no well, no Guardian; and no transformation of woman into hawk. She was denominated "the Hawk-Woman" from the first and her startling arrival (in stark silhouette against a red cyclorama) presented her as a challenge, a trial to be negotiated in the hero's quest. Her costuming (like the men's, the work of Rick Owens) was spectacular: a fiery red leotard and wide red wings extending well beyond the reach of the dancer's arms (not angelic in formation, but seemingly rolls of textured metal that under stage lighting looked like molten lava). Again, there was no mask (nor hood, such as Dulac devised for Michio Ito in 1916), instead the presence of a hawk-like being was conveyed by the superb carriage of the dancer's head and make-up that emphasized her eyes, which have such a hypnotic influence on Cuchulain in Yeats's text. The wings were quickly shed and the dangerous quality of this strange being was sustained by the slicing, flashing movement of the dancer's arms and hands, and the frequent whip-lash movement of her legs, often shot out to full extension with the foot raised above shoulder-height and as suddenly retracted. One wonders whether in his preparation for his staging, Sugimoto studied Ninette de Valois' account of how she shaped the dance sequence when she herself performed the role at Yeats's invitation at the

¹ As is the custom with most large-scale dance companies today, two alternating casts shared the run of performances. In the first cast, The Young Man was danced by Hugo Marchand, the Old Man by Alessio Carbone, the Hawk-Woman by Ludmila Pagliero, and the Noh actor was Tetsunojo Kanze. For the second cast, Axel Magliano and Audric Bezard danced Young and Old Man respectively, Amandine Albisson appeared as the Hawk-Woman and Kisho Umewaka was the Noh actor. The reviewer saw the second cast on 11 October 2019.

Abbey Theatre Dublin in 1933. She devised three distinct phases to give her performance variety and a narrative development: “an evocation of brooding power, through suggestive seduction [of Cuchulain] to the violent ecstasy of a wild bird”. Certainly intimations of the first two states were to be found in the choreography for Cuchulain and the Hawk-Woman with her wheeling over his back or sliding in a variety of positions down his arm. Strangely the dance ended in a curiously perfunctory way with no seeming resolution, as he simply walked offstage and she, with wings replaced, was carried aloft in the opposite direction by two men of the chorus.

Were we to suppose that the play had been reconceived for the dance as a series of challenges to the Young Man’s status as hero? Neither of these first two sequences with the Old Man and the Hawk-Woman had worked any significant change in Cuchulain’s presentation of himself beyond a growing stature that was certainly present in his confident, almost imperious walk offstage from the Hawk-Woman. This idea of the dance as a sequence of challenges was further supported by a final encounter, the most surprising of them all, as a figure in traditional Noh costume and mask advanced through the chorus, dressed for the conventional role of ancient, hieratic being, slow-moving and almost uniformly white in appearance. Reaching the forestage he confronted a seated Cuchulain and with deeply resonating tones voiced what seemed like a translated version of the Old Man’s anguished account of his life, wasted in a quest that has amounted to nothing, a longing for immortality endlessly frustrated in the search. The Noh actor began to move with ritual pacing to left and right while wielding a knotted staff of wood, which appeared to grow ever heavier. At the climax of the dance with an effortful gesture he raised the staff in both hands above his head, only for it to descend forcefully across his shoulders like a yoke: a potent image of defeat. Drawing on his failing strength, he tossed the staff at Cuchulain’s feet; the hero leaned forward to seize it and the two men sustained a prolonged pose, eye-to-eye. Slowly the Noh actor turned and retreated back up the walkway and in time Cuchulain rose, holding the staff, and followed him out, his eyes fixed constantly on the figure before him.

This was not Yeats’s scenario with Cuchulain rejecting the lure of immortality, preferring a place in legend, folklore and art. Instead Sugimoto presented a Young Man who through experience grew to accept the burden of humanity with its frailties and disappointments. This is one way of interpreting the ending of this staging. But much depends on how one interprets that entrance into the action of the figure from Noh, who had all the trappings of a celestial being. Was the taking of the staff perhaps to be interpreted as an emblem of Cuchulain’s acceptance of his destiny, whatever it might bring, releasing him from the psychological urge to control his future? Yeats’s plays often end in uncertainty, a deliberate lack of closure, leaving spectators instead weighing possibilities of interpretation. This production followed that pattern.

Sugimoto’s staging pursued and in large measure embraced its own particular integrity, always defining Yeats’s relation to the project as source, or as the programme neatly defined it: “Création d’après William Butler Yeats”. The one disappointment, given the venue, was the lack of a consistent quality in the choreography. Most of the directorial team were Japanese; and one cannot but wonder why Sugimoto did not choose to deploy a Japanese choreographer (either versed in traditional Noh dance or trained in Butoh or some other form of relevant dance language) rather than Alessio Silvestrin, who proved sadly lacking in the requisite inventive range or skill. The work devised with the three principals was adequate to carry required effects and mood, but the juxtaposition of an experienced Noh performer alongside Silvestrin’s performers quickly emphasized the latter’s want of originality or discipline. Presumably out of a need to deploy members of the corps de ballet of the Opéra, Yeats’s chorus of Three Musicians were replaced with a corps of twelve dancers who had extended passages of dancing at the opening of the piece before the entry of the Old Man and again between the departure of the Hawk-Woman and the entry of Noh dancer. In his programme notes

Sugimoto writes of the chorus as elevated, celestial beings (far different from Yeats's Musicians who are representatives of common humanity, shocked by the action they witness). This is in line with Sugimoto's concept of the dance-play as happening on the borders between reality and the transcendental, but Silvestrin did not match that conception. *Celestial* is a difficult term to interpret in dance, but it is certainly not an excuse for a busy modernist pursuit of intricate steps for their own sake devoid of logic, atmosphere and, consequently, meaning. There was a lot of lifting, leaning, twirling, leaping, swooning, raising of arms and pointing of toes in extended positions (all effortlessly executed) but it was just incidental, background work in a style one associates with the dance accompanying pop songs (acceptable in itself, but in this context quite out of keeping with the rest of the performance). It did not induce any sense of the celestial, being irritating and potentially destructive of the mood meticulously created by the principals and Sugimoto's direction. Even the climactic dance for Cuchulain and the Hawk-Woman was predictable in its gestures, poses and lifts.

Ironically the Yeats shared a double bill with a performance of *Blake Works I* by William Forsythe, Silvestrin's one-time mentor, which demonstrated precisely what might have been offered in *At The Hawk's Well*. Here was modern choreography at its finest: liquid, fluent, disciplined, pursuing its own logic with insight and dedication and finding subtleties of meaning within the medium of dance. One sequence, the third of the seven songs, "Colour in Anything" explored in movement a relationship teetering on the brink of dysfunction through a whole gamut of gestures and body-postures expressive of yearning and parting. This was precisely the idiom through which to define the conflict between seduction and repulsion that lies at the heart of the encounter between Cuchulain and the Hawk-Woman. What an opportunity lost! Who chose a choreographer so out of sympathy with Sugimoto's scheme? Overall Sugimoto's was a valuable experiment in bringing one of Yeats's plays close to his dominant inspiration. Even where the production disappointed, it demonstrated what might have been achieved, since the central encounter with the three principal dancers and the Noh actor was undeniably gripping, dominating memory in the way that Yeats hoped his plays in performance would affect his audiences. Would it be unkind to suggest that in future revivals the corps de ballet be completely cut, since they contribute little of intrinsic merit? This would certainly strengthen the organic shape and progress of the piece as a work for four performers. The result would be more properly Yeatsian too.

Richard Allen Cave

Flann O'Brien, *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, edited by Maebh Long, Dublin, Dalkey Archive Press, 2018, pp. 672. £18.50 (Paperback). ISBN 9781628971835.

Recently characterised as the third member of the trinity of Irish Modernists, with James Joyce as the Father, Samuel Beckett as the Son and Brian O'Nolan as the Holy Ghost, readers may question what is appropriate when referring to this major influence on Modernist and Postmodernist fiction; Brian O'Nolan, Flann O'Brien or Myles na gCopaleen? For readers unfamiliar with O'Nolan's life and career, a brief overview may be useful and Maebh Long offers, with stunning brevity, an overview, yet she is careful not to make this collection another biography of O'Nolan. Long remarks:

This collection of letters is neither revealing biography nor controlled autobiography but the presentation of a life in and of letters that does not so much lift the veil as show the veils in the processes of their weaving. (xii)

On the opening pages of this book, Long begins with a lengthy quotation from Niall Montgomery's 1956 *Unpublished Biography of Brian O'Nolan*, which concludes with the lines:

Normally quiet, formal, a lover of music, fresh air, the urban scene, Brian Nolan is unquestionably the most brilliant Irish writer, the most promising, the strangest. (xi)

Montgomery's biographical sketch of O'Nolan is an apt beginning to this expertly edited volume of letters as it not only foregrounds the highs and lows, the accomplishments and the disappointments within his life, but it provides readers with an insight into his three public personas; the civil servant, the novelist, and the satirical columnist. Given this trinity of personas, readers will be unsurprised to find each are present throughout this collection; a collection that is joyously received for its rich and nuanced portrait of the multi-faceted O'Nolan that benefits from Long's decision to not conceal or hide O'Nolan's "eccentricities and irregularities [...] impishness, anxiety, affection, bravado, and irritability" (xvi).

Long's introduction offers an excellent and elegant summary of the letters contained within, as well as three subheadings which contextualise the rationale for the structure of the collection. In "Selection" Long admits that some letters are "lying forgotten in someone's attic", (xx) and are missing. In a similar vein, she offers clear and concise reasoning for her exclusions of materials such as short notes, memoranda and when multiple copies of a letter were given; furthermore, Long admits to omitting many of O'Nolan's surviving professional correspondence as a civil servant. Yet the inclusions Long has made provide illuminating details relating to the mode and style of writing O'Nolan employed while in the office. Under the heading of "Presentation", Long carefully outlines the standardisation of dates, locations and addresses, and the treatment of textual errors. For example, she notes, "O'Nolan increasingly makes typos, requiring the editor's [...] but he also tangles this issue with his penchant for puns". Finally, the section on "Annotation" details the criteria for the volume's extensive editorial footnotes. Many of these notes contain thorough information about the specific correspondence on the page above, as well as explaining initials, abbreviations or foreign words.

The letters are divided into years and broad chronological sections; "1934-1939", "1940-1947", "1950-1959", "1960-1963" and "1964-1966". What may surprise many readers is that letters from 1960-1966 are divided into two sections of their own, however, as readers progress through these letters it becomes apparent that the last six years of O'Nolan's life were the most comic and tragic. Accompanying these letters are numerous biographical outlines of those mentioned in the letters. Many of these correspondents are culturally and historically specific, some are relatively obscure while others will be familiar to even the most passing reader. For example, there are letters to and from Hilton Edwards, Hugh Leonard, Niall Sheridan, Timothy O'Keeffe, Patience Ross, A.M. Heath William Saroyan, Niall Montgomery, Thomas de Vere White, Denis Devlin, Sean O'Casey and James Plunkett, to name a few. Much of the pleasure of reading these letters come from seeing O'Nolan's different persona at work. Notably, in a letter dated 6 January 1939, O'Nolan writes to Longmans: "I have returned to you under a separate cover a marked proof of 'At Swim Two Bird'. I have made no changes of any importance, I think the omission of all quotation marks is an improvement. I suggest the name FLANN O'BRIEN as a suitable pen-name" (23). Additionally, on 15 January 1939, O'Nolan, again writing to Longmans, states: "I am extremely sorry if I appear to be nervous and shilly-shallying in connection with my book but I am afraid the title 'At Swim Two Birds' must be changed, likewise 'Flann O'Brien'. I have long had a hobby of provoking dog-fights in the newspaper here on any topic from literature to vivisection and I have been using 'Flann O'Brien' as a pen-name for some time" (29). Here,

O’Nolan demonstrates a sense of pragmatism when dealing with Longmans rather than overly brandishing his authorial egotism. Likewise, reading an early letter to Montgomery’s father also suggests a translation of James Stephens’s *The Crock of Gold* (1912) into Irish, an idea that Long’s footnote suggests may have influenced *The Third Policeman*, is illuminating and provides not only hints as to the literary merit of these letters but suggests more work into their own epistolaric significance is to be done. Among the gems within this collection are a series of letters written in Irish, particularly those O’Nolan signed as B. O Nullain or Brian Ó Nuallian. Although O’Nolan was a native Irish speaker, and as such finding such letters are unsurprising, two letters, one dated 29 May / Bealtaine, 1943 and 25 August / Lunasa, 1956, he employed this variant of his name. Most notably, these letters relate to an incident following his own research into the cataloging in the National Library of Ireland, and upon finding a connection between the pseudonym Flan O’Brien and Brian O’Nuallain he wished to deny its validity; thus demonstrating his taste for expressing his contradictory nature.

Despite the positive aspects of this collection, some very minor quibbles detract somewhat from the otherwise exceptional volume. For instance, there is little to no consideration of O’Nolan’s letters from the perspective of epistolary theory. Instead, Long’s introduction and notes focus on the cultural, historical and literary connections that can be derived from the contents of the letters. Equally, while the notes provided by Long are exceptional in their detail, they can be somewhat distracting at times and overwhelming in their sheer number. These issues aside, this collection offers scholars a series of substantial points from which to expand and further consider O’Nolan life and works, and it is a valuable resource that will be a staple of Irish studies, as well as epistolary studies, for decades to come.

Robert Finnigan

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *Twelve Thousand Days. A Memoir of Love and Loss*, Belfast, The Blackstaff Press, 2018, pp. 219. £ 9.99. ISBN 978-1-78073-173-5.

You can count your life in years, in months, in weeks, in days, in fragments, in John Donne’s “rags of time”, in moments of happiness and sorrow, in trips and holidays, in work experiences and amounts of money, in disappointments and in success. Numbers are there and each number is a meaningful marker in the flowing of days. Yet the twelve thousand days in Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s latest book, *Twelve Thousand Days. A Memoir of Love and Loss* – recently shortlisted for the Michel Déon Prize for Non-Fiction, a Royal Irish Academy award –, are much more than a list of days, as here Ní Dhuibhne reconstructs life spent with her late husband, Professor Bo Almquist, as well as the dramatic and traumatic context of his death. All these “rags of time”, amount to twelve thousand days recounted and relived in a moving and sensitive account interlacing more recent events with episodes in a more distant past.

Twelve Thousand Days is a memoir, a genre more fluid than autobiography, yet the dividing line is blurred. Like autobiography, memoir is a narrative about the author’s life, without the strict chronology and the detailed focus of the former, as it relies more on the subjective, emotional and intimate insight of the writer’s past. A memoir moves freely in time, it can begin at any given time and place, emotions and emotional truths are its priority, therefore past and present interweave and coexist.

This is what happens in Ní Dhuibhne’s *Twelve Thousand Days*, whose journey into the past provides an emotional path into a lifetime of love as well as into the dark world of be-

reavement. Interestingly, the organizational structure of the book resembles the Writer's typical way of writing and working with texts in her long career as a novelist and short-story writer. Each chapter has a double title, or rather the real title provided by day number – “Day 2” or “Day 11,998” – is followed by a caption that anticipates the content and raises expectations in the reader. In her memoir *Ní Dhuibhne* devotes each chapter to a specific day and to specific episodes, alternating events in the distant past with events in more recent times. Likewise, alternating stretches of past and present in narrative *Ní Dhuibhne* reproduces the frequent narrative and stylistic strategy to be found in her stories, which generally open in the present tense and on a present situation to break up into alternating stretches of past and present. Bo Almquist's final, shocking days are juxtaposed to the early phases of their love story, in the same way as in her stories *Ní Dhuibhne* juxtaposes an old legend and its modern counterpart. The book is thus a form of continuity as it resembles a collection of short stories whose characters recur from story to story.

The first chapter is entitled “Day One: Arctic Explorers” and sheds light on Bo Almquist's “wide range of colourful expressions in the form of proverbs and quotations” (3). The reference to Arctic explorers recurs again in the book often to emphasize the first-person narrator's emotional and practical incapacity (“Far from being an Arctic explorer, I was a coward”, 87; “an Arctic explorer would have been better prepared”, 124). The expression recalls Erling Kagge's *Philosophy for Polar Explorers*, where Kagge writes: “One of the things I have learned as an explorer is that, every so often along the journey, you have to stop and recalibrate, to take stock of unexpected events or changes in the weather. This book is a recalibration of sorts” (xix).

Also *Twelve Thousand Days* is a recalibration of sorts, which can be read at different levels. Its focus is on the life of two people that met and recognised themselves and each other as complementary. The chapter entitled “Before Our Day” describes a summer week in Dunquin where Bo Almquist supervised a few students' doctoral work. It closes with a strong image of affinity that would soon transform mutual respect and admiration into love. “I caught a glimpse of him, behind the veil [...] We were members of the club of the X-ray eyes, the club of the people who can see into the human heart. [...] We were on the same emotional wavelength” (48).

The memoir is an insight into Irish university life of the 1970s, the activity of the Department of Folklore at UCD and into the jobs at the National Library, but also into the life and modes of the time, such as the lack of telephone connections, and the social context that expected young girls to conform. “There were unspoken rules, in the air around you, that you understood although they were never articulated. Don't go too far. Even where hair is concerned” (60). Dating a considerably older man was unthinkable and a source of disapproval, marrying him even more so.

The episode of “Day 2. ‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments’” with its direct quotation from Shakespeare's “Sonnet 116” marks the first date of the couple and the tormenting hesitations of the narrator, going up and down Booterstown Avenue, conscious of “society imposing its norms” (62) and of the courage to defy conventions. The series of short verbless occasionally one-paragraph sentences give immediacy to the evocation of anxiety: “So many taboos, in 1978” (63), “The voice of the censor. Under the surface, checking and balancing” (64). The continuous repetition of the year, 1978, interlaces with and emphasizes the unwritten rules and the “pressure to fit in” (65), until the final decision is taken and a significant inversion in sentence structure underlines the spontaneous action made: “Up the avenue I walked” (66). In its shortness the lyric sentence sheds light on the turning point, the determination to defy conventions and take up her own life, in spite of the unwritten rules and the unspoken orders to conform. Beginning the sentence with the preposition “Up”, *Ní*

Dhuibhne highlights the decision that would change her life, as well as the conscious challenge and the awareness of the difficulties of a new start.

Ní Dhuibhne's use of simile is striking and this stylistic choice recurs in the memoir. In the episode mentioned above, she uses similes related to animals to express her hesitation: "Then I stopped in my tracks like horse who senses an evil presence", immediately followed by a one-paragraph single sentence: "Like rabbit caught in the headlights" (61) where the headlights suggest the spotlight scrutinizing behaviour. The restaurant where the couple have dinner on their first date is "A big grey stone building without windows, forbidding on the outside, like a fortress", soon followed by the metaphor of "a cave" (67). The apparently oppressive environment is actually a form a protection of the necessary secrecy of the relationship, which the reader follows in its development and in the privacy of the use of language, a real idiolect: "Who else spoke our language? Our mixture of languages, Irish and English and Swedish and German and French? Sometimes all in the same paragraph" (173).

The language of loss looms largely already in the early part of the memoir. In the chapter "Before Our Day. Behind the scenes at the National Library" Ní Dhuibhne recollects the difficulties she met with getting used to her job, remembering the Assistant Keeper's words "The first two years are the hardest". In the one-paragraph single sentence that follows, the devastation of loss is anticipated: "It's what they say about widowhood" (25). Likewise, the break up of her former boyfriend Oliver interlaces with and anticipates the bereavement, "I felt like that in the hour after Bo died" (58).

Bo's death was the result of a short illness that appeared as a minor medical problem, soon to develop with tragic consequences. The flashbacks dealing with health issues and with hospital scenes tick the time of disaster approaching far too fast. The sore toe that led to a wrong diagnosis marks the beginning of the end, and sharp criticism of the Irish Health Service is embedded in the series of mistakes and thoughtless lack of care and assistance. The letter carefully written by the family doctor is stuck into an ambulance porter's pocket and ignored; in a shocking image Bo is made to walk to the ambulance – "It reminded me of Jesus walking up Calvary" (102); the necessity of rehydration clashes with the delay of a drip and its malfunction; a doctor makes a diagnosis consulting the wrong case file; the hospital does not have a dialysis machine. These and similar mistakes are presented in an accumulation of false steps, at some stage this is called "a tragic farce" (172), and the attempt to move Bo to a different hospital is emphasized in the subtitle of chapter "Wednesday. Day 11,997" significantly called 'Trying to escape'.

If *Twelve Thousand Days* is in a way a very private insight made public, its second part, simply named "Part Two", made of about thirty pages, is even more so, as it deals with the aftermath of Bo's death both practically and emotionally. Here Ní Dhuibhne exposes herself in all her sorrow and fragility following the bereavement. Consistently with the organizational pattern of the book, "Part Two" is divided into four very personal sections, each with an appropriate title.

Starting with and quoting from the books about grief and grieving from which she found comfort, "Afterword" reflects on the various stages of grief, and painfully retraces the decisions to be taken about funeral and cremation, the support of family, friends and neighbours, the suggestion of a post-mortem, the tears that accompanied her for weeks and months, the sense of guilt for her own mistakes, the effort to go on and survive, the list of new activities to pursue, the help of a counsellor. The Author involves the reader in this particularly delicate phase with a very effective and moving use of similes to convey her numbness. "I was like a blown-up plastic doll, empty inside. Or transparent, like a ghost" (190); "I felt as if I was made of paper, moving through the rooms like a shadow" (193). Interestingly, the stylistic choice of comparing herself to paper anticipates the loss of interest in writing, again marked by simile: "My interest in writing fiction vanished completely [...] the creation of fiction seemed trivial, like a pointless child's game" (201).

Paper is also implicitly present in the second section, “Dreams”, in which Ní Dhuibhne reports some of the dreams she had taken notes of in her diary, also pointing out precise dates. The act of translating oneiric images into words, to give organization and structure to dreams in a way replaces fiction writing at a time in which this was impossible and the process of dreaming someone you have lost is also part of the grieving and healing process.

Section three provocatively creates expectations in the title, “Our father goes early to bed, for he is an old man”, which are immediately subverted. Rather than the childish description of a father who is not the same age as the others, the focus is on the adjective “old”. Earlier on in the memoir Ní Dhuibhne had reflected on this, and she returns to the obsessive idea: “once you pass eighty you belong to the category ‘old’, the subtext of which can be ‘dispensable’” (210). This chapter is also a shocking revelation the landslide of medical and administrative mistakes that led to Bo’s death, and the feeling of anger and guilt at what becomes consciously clear in retrospection.

“Hidden Pictures from the Middles Ages” is the last section of the memoir. It describes Ní Dhuibhne cycling to Visby on the island of Gotland to visit its medieval church in the summer of 2015, an experience that is a form of reconciliation and rebirth. A stylistic choice is remarkable in this respect, because though it opens in the past with the use of simple past and past perfect verb forms, it is mostly narrated in the present tense. This creates a double effect, highlighting the permanence of memories and a perspective on the future and on survival.

Interestingly, Ní Dhuibhne’s memoir is in a way anticipated by a much shorter text published in 2001 in the volume edited by Anne Macdona *From Newman to New Woman. UCD Women Remember*. The purpose of the collection was to celebrate the centenary of the UCD Women Graduates’ Association; it is a book of memories and Ní Dhuibhne contributed with the account of her first university days, the development of her interest in “pure English” and the course on “The Folktale and Medieval Literature” offered by the recently arrived Swedish Professor Bo Almquist. This, she says, is “the most important intellectual and personal choice of my life” (178). Only at the end of the piece does Ní Dhuibhne hint at the personal side of her choice: “In 1982 I married Bo Almquist and so I have maintained an involvement with the college” (179), thus creating a circular pattern with the Brontean title “Reader, I Married Him” (175).

In a way, *Twelve Thousand Days* closes a full circle Ní Dhuibhne started with the 2001 short essay, and her memoir is the first book written after her husband’s death. “Bo and I were people of the word” (172), and memories put into words keep the dead alive. Notably, her husband’s last gift was a gift of words, his translation of *Bornholms Saga* into Swedish, dedicated to her “in memory of our holiday on Bornholm” (170). The memoir is another gift of words, and with them a gift of life.

Giovanna Tallone

William Wall, *Suzy Suzy*, New Island Books DAC-Head of Zeus Ltd, Stillorgan-London, 2019, pp. 297. £ 18.99. ISBN 9781788545501.

William Wall’s, *Suzy Suzy*, starts with a declaration of war against Suzy’s mam: “Someone will kill my mother. It could be me. There’s something wrong with me I know, but I see my dad thinking about it too. Only my brother loves her...” (1).

What immediately captures the reader, apart from the use of slang, swear words, juvenile jargon, are Suzy’s initial developing thoughts. Especially the first chapters express just one idea as in short texts or tweets.

Vivid images and conflicting microcosms succeed one another in a fast rhythm before the reader realises the tragic depth of Suzy's uneasiness. "Idk" and "ffs" dot her diary pages together with her overly critical view of the surrounding world. Her mum appears uninterested and demanding, addicted to foodie programmes like *Master Chef* and *The Great British Bake Off*. Her dad revolves around "making money", a pure capitalist who doesn't give a damn about his tenants and feels hurt and defeated when missing a good deal. Her bro swings between putting up with her yearning for attention and companionship and totally refusing her.

While reading the novel you keep wondering where her uneasiness will lead her to. It is a struggle between resilience and the tug of death. Will she be able to resist the nihilistic appeal? Will she manage to undo, unweave the poisoned net that threatens to trap her? Will she succeed in getting away with the game of appearing evil and actually doing harm?

Both children, Suzy and Tony, end up cutting themselves to feel pain, to punish themselves and their inability to cope with "the end of the world", with the hypocrisy and serious misconduct of their family.

Her father's failed real estate bid for Ballyshane, against the Englishman, who finally buys it, hovers over the text. Suzy's father's anger conditions the family's life and choices to the point where Suzy agrees to go on a punitive expedition against the British owners of Ballyshane. With Serena, her pyromaniac friend they set fire to a plastic bin. Their "feat" ends up in a tragicomic performance, the would-be offended Bowles, the owners of the place, watch as audience their useless attempt at incinerating the bin.

The adjective disenchanted might immediately define Suzy; disenchanted has a wide range of nuances of meaning: discontented, realistic, disillusioned, knowing which would suit her, but she is not an utopist, a wishful thinker, dreamer, she is rather dissatisfied and frustrated. This adjective addresses Suzy's inner fragility, but she doesn't wear it fully as in the end she is neither cynical nor insensitive.

As a typical teenager, she has gone through the obsession of hating her family: "I can't stand to be in the same room as my mam, my dad is more or less a waste of space and my brother is weird" (57) to a later acceptance of them. As when her father "kidnapped" her to escape from the Revenue, to hide away, she felt cheated, but nevertheless, she still sympathized with him as desperate and miserable.

She definitely belongs to a dysfunctional family, she admits it herself and proves her addiction to Google by googling "dysfunctional" to learn about its characteristics. She discovers: "I have twelve of the fifteen signs" and then goes on, obsessively, wondering: "do people in families like mine ever kill each other? Like my dad could kill my brother. He hates him. I could kill my mam. My dad could kill my mam" (108-109).

It happens that usually, members of dysfunctional families tend either to withhold or not verbalize their feelings, wants, likes and dislikes with each other and Suzy experiences this all the time, particularly when Tony tries to commit suicide with his mam's car and leaves no brake marks! This is her comment: "My brother is a maniac. But I don't think it's what he did. Like I should ask him, but we don't talk a lot. Nobody in my family talks. We are secret agents" (116). Suzy starts cutting herself after her bro's failed suicide. Her declaration: "We're living in this dead inside where nothing moves except us" (122) introduces her body violation, under the shower, her inflicting pain by slashing her flesh.

The liquid, viscous society through which she drags herself is inhabited by weird friends with whom she experiences Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She focuses on death, inspired by cruelly morbid videos on YouTube. She either imagines it: "Serena would make a beautiful corpse. I can even see her in a coffin [...]" (70) or views ways to electrocute her mam in the shower (139).

With this unbearable, heavy burden she goes on a journey of self-discovery from adolescence to adulthood.

Like Roddy Doyle, William Wall, as a teacher, had a privileged point of view to observe and analyse the disillusioned reality, cynical feel of his students' uneasy dysfunctional families. Their Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, their indifference to tragic situations, their unaffectionate attitudes, their anesthetized feelings, their inability to cope with lack of love, their unsuccessful relationships, their sense of incivility and disrespect of law, their porn kinks dramatically converge in Suzy's world.

Suzy becomes the litmus test voicing William Wall's concerns about the decline of global society in particular Irish and British. And it is noticeable that Suzy refers to a poem written by William Wall himself – "Like we did that 'Ghost Estate' poem in Fifth" (155) – which highlighted the result of the Celtic Tiger crash leaving a large number of housing estates, funded by consumer credit, unbuilt or in disrepair (William Wall, *Ghost Estate*, Ennistymon, Salmon Poetry, 2011). Wall's political commitment goes through his macro-text, emphasizing the "gutted public services, racism, xenophobia, the privatization of National Health System, the undermining of workers' and women's rights, the anti/pro/abortion referendum"; his ideals are openly declared on his blog: *The Ice Moon*, where he defines himself "an interested observer of British politics hoping for the return to a form of Social Democracy" ("Thoughts on Corbyn and Brexit", 12 January 2019, <<http://www.williamwall.net/The-Ice-Moon/Entries/2019/1/thoughts-on-corbyn-and-brexite.html>>) and we inevitably find them surfacing through *Suzy Suzy*.

Even the Church with its pervading power is nailed down through Suzy's vitriolic, syllogistic, well-reasoned approach: "According to Miss Leahy religion is all about meaning. But get this: God created the world out of chaos, then he created man [...] then he had the Jews faffing about trying to find the Promised Land which turns out to be Palestine which is an excuse to kill Palestinians [...]" (64). In the text, it is revealed that Serena's mother, even though she is not religious, voted against abortion, Serena's father, Willy The Right To Life, whose hands were blessed by the Pope, delivered leaflets featuring dead foetuses.

The language used by the author is a perfect pastiche of Urban youngster language, coloured by its informal approach with common usage and popular culture. The male mind of the mature author is reflected in the attitudes and language of a girl, showing adult, powerful critical thinking. William Wall's careful linguistic choices are sharply emphasized through typographical elements, which underline what is dead-important to the protagonist; she often uses capitalization sometimes taking it to the extreme of using it for each letter: "The house IS FULL OF FUCKING SECRETS" (53), or using it only in the initial letter of a word: "the Extinction Of Planet Earth aka Armageddon" (64). The narration flows freely with hilarious satirical attacks or ironical touches, dealing with the tragic abyss of reality with lightness. As soon as the reader grasps the meaning of the initial glossary it is a non-stop-very-rewarding journey through Suzy's ups and downs.

But, in conclusion, let's go back to the first line: William Wall's *Suzy Suzy*, starts with a declaration of war against Suzy's mam: "Someone will kill my mother. It could be me" which, connects with the reverse declaration of war that another writer from Cork, Cónal Creedon made in his novel *Passion Play* (Poolbeg, Dublin 1999), when the protagonist, Pluto wonders about his mother's suicide: "[Why didn't they tell me a lie?] Tell me she died saving a beautiful white swan [...]" (1).

Conci Mazzullo

Frank McGuinness, *The Wedding Breakfast*, The Gallery Press, Oldcastle, 2019, pp. 77. €11.95. ISBN 978-1133-769-0.

Publication of a new collection of Frank McGuinness's poems is an exciting prospect, and *The Wedding Breakfast* is certainly cause for celebration, as it is by far his finest volume to date, illustrating all the memorable aspects of his style with remarkable clarity. To describe the poems as challenging is not to imply that they are *difficult* in the pejorative meaning of that epithet. Far from it: poems that flaunt their difficulty tend to alienate or frustrate even the focused and knowledgeable reader; the challenges of McGuinness's poetry compel attention and a deepening awareness through the exquisite verbal precision, the subtle but purposeful rhythms, the integrity with which the themes are defined. The artistry conspires to entice the reader to engage with each poem, to want to re-read it, and to uncover layers of meaning. No poem is ever predictable in its development, relation to genre, or traditional cultural expectations. We engage rather with a process of discovery: these are poems written for a reader with an enquiring mind by a poet with a resolutely enquiring mind, intent on sharing the search not simply presenting conclusions.

But one would be wrong to suppose the poetry overly cerebral, as one gnomic line expresses it so eloquently: "Body is mind's architecture of bone" (56). The questing is not purely intellectual; it embraces the emotional, social, moral, political, cultural and physical. Even the getting to a potential goal is not reductive: several of the poems interestingly repeat phrases or whole lines from a poem's opening ("in my end is my beginning"): we are returned to where we began but know the significance of that beginning with an expanding insight so the repetitions have a fresh originality. But experience in these poems does not bring just closure, rather there is an opening out to new possibilities, new tangents to explore, new perspectives. In "Trains" (11), for example, a chance experience of seeing a red-haired man lead a child along the aisle of a train expands into private musing that maybe touches on autobiographical memory of paternal care and sparks an awareness of lost opportunities to play the fatherly role ("that could be me") before returning to the words of the opening lines, as if answering an unstated question about why such chance moments can trigger a wealth of subtle emotional patterns that will ensure the experience is etched deep into the psyche. There is a hint of Wordsworth here, but the setting is wholly urban.

A recurring technique involves subtle layering, as in "Lucrezia Borgia" (62, and translated here), which addresses the nature of a woman whose identity is so drowned with historical fact, myth, lurid fantasy, or wild supposition that she eludes understanding for all her fame. McGuinness's poem offers four images that have resonated in his memory; they are spread over just four lines. No attempt is made to define Lucrezia or her particular significance for McGuinness, rather the poem respects her mystery as evoked through the meticulous juxtapositioning of these four powerful symbolic moments in her lifetime. An identity hovers in these sharp crystalline pictures that are at once immediate yet distanced, because there is no seeming connection between them: here is knowing and not knowing. The approach leaves the reader's imagination in a state of alert attention, to *wonder* while resisting the urge to judge. The poem, despite its brevity, frees Lucrezia Borgia from the burden of history with its wrong kinds of knowing.

Similarly, a celebration of the life of Paul Léon offers no precise details of why Irish literature and culture is indebted to a man murdered in a concentration camp in Silesia in 1942. Instead we are given three potent images conjuring pictures of Léon's presence in James Joyce's life: the novelist's working table; the joking claim, "A man I know swallowed a dictionary" (14); and

the careful assembling of precious manuscript into “nineteen manila envelopes”. Implicit in the writing is a rejoicing in the man’s expansiveness, forbearance, wit and loyal sense of duty; but statement would have brought only flat recognition, where those images tease at one’s powers of understanding, inviting the reader’s mind to play with richness of implication, the better to sense the richness of the man’s individuality.

In like fashion, a sonnet, “Yukio Ninagawa, Director” (65) eschews direct reference to the theatre director’s international celebrity or even any consideration of his impressive catalogue of productions of chiefly classical western plays. The spiritual dimension of Ninagawa’s life and work is what excites McGuinness’s inspiration: his chosen images evoke a playful building and rebuilding of temple-like structures from “flotsam and jetsam”, making something splendid out of something banal (the pursuit of much theatre); the daring in his creativity to rival the gods of his culture; the splendour of his appearance and his gentlemanly temperament; the indomitability and relentlessness of his private quest, envisaged as practising to “make perfect the music of spheres”. The focus throughout is on the wealth of being that Ninagawa brings to his artistry, the inner assurance (evoked by the measured pentameters that underscore the progress of the poem where all but the opening line comprise a single sentence), the control and deliberation. *Achievements* in worldly terms appear virtually immaterial by comparison.

Creative juxtaposition as a technique is pursued by McGuinness in this collection through the gamut of its possibilities, often to pose and question cross-cultural challenges. “Machou Picchu” (45) starts with a strange musing:

Some say it could be located in Kerry,
waiting to be found, lurking near Dunquin...

and proceeds wittily to contemplate two civilisations, two geographical locations, two cultures with distinct religious convictions that permeate social practice. The result is both disturbing and illuminating in equal measure, markedly so, given the refusal to offer easy elisions or quick solutions to the puzzle that opening line poses. There is no better demonstration of the scruple, delicacy, steely honesty that are the hallmarks of this poet’s enquiring mind. A similar technique appears to be at work in the several “translations” or poems “after” such writers as Lorca or Villon (and in poems inspired by paintings by Géricault or Breugel the elder). “Chanson”, for example, takes Villon’s lyric mourning the passing of time and the process of human ageing and re-defines the elegiac mood of the original into a meditation on the arid and stultifying consequences in later life of denying one’s sexual orientation. The heterosexual ambience of Villon’s poem, present always at the fringes of the reader’s awareness, sits in balance with the homosexual context this version depicts with its sad, gray conclusion:

Whose cock now do they prick tease but their own?
Who’ll tell them beauty weathers into stone? (37)

This reaching-across a cultural divide spanning centuries says a great deal about the changing moral barriers and restrictions that different societies choose to impose on writers, but it also exposes commonalities of experience and feeling: the allowed perspective on to that subject-matter is what has changed, is continually changing. In both these poems (and the others indirectly referred to above), it is the reader who must draw conclusions, either pushing for certainties or resting in irresolution, content to hold oppositions in balance. Again, as we read, we are caught between knowing and not-knowing.

To hold such a fine balance requires intellectual courage and great technical delicacy. These qualities are particularly in evidence in the poems that focus on gay experience. “The Wedding Breakfast” (18-19) celebrates a marriage but one decidedly outside the norm, even though with great good humour the ceremony embraces much of what would comprise a traditional heterosexual wedding. The comedy and absurdity of the situation are allowed (one groom recovering from heart surgery “wore the best of black pyjamas”, the bridesmaid was a nurse from Hong Kong, while the heart-surgeon “did the honours” and the champagne reception featured Lucozade), but none of this is at the expense of the seriousness or genuine feeling occasioned by the event:

we went on a bender in Belfast City
 pledging our vows in that hospital ward,
 risking the lives of our immortal souls,
 the revels of fertile love between men,
 enraptured in the Royal Victoria,
 surviving heart surgery, sacred as gold.

McGuinness’s gift is for continually shifting the perspective on his subject, allowing for a multiplicity of responses, but in this case, since the subject is autobiographical, never deviating from owning his heart’s truth.

“Kites” (74 and translated here) achieves a like complexity by hinting at, while never precisely defining (except perhaps through the title), an underlying conceit that draws on falconry. This image is expanded to gesture at ideas of fidelity and freedom; the wildness of natural impulses; the enduring confidence and trust that come with a forty-year long relationship; the delight in the physicality of that relationship that only mortality can bring to an end. Nothing in the poem intimates this is inspired by a gay relationship; the experience could as readily be felt by a partner in a heterosexual relationship, the traditional focus of such love poetry; and so the poem is both personal and potentially generalised in its non-specificity, private but widely human in its resonances. All this is achieved within the briefest of poems comprising eight relaxed lines that keep pace seemingly with a single wandering thought. What McGuinness frequently accomplishes throughout this volume is like a metaphysical conceit in the seventeenth-century manner, but one where the terms of reference are neither precise nor vague but are secret: they are, as it were, deliberately withheld by the poet to be intimated through allusion, the better to place the reader at the heart of the intricate experience McGuinness is seeking to evoke. This is poetry that profoundly honours the reader’s intelligence and sensibility.

Richard Allen Cave

Caoimhín De Barra, *Gaeilge: A Radical Revolution*, Dublin, Currach Press, 2019, pp. 272. € 14.99. ISBN 978-1-78218-907-7.

The future of the Irish language is a perennial topic in Irish cultural and political discourse. Caoimhín De Barra’s latest book, *Gaeilge: A Radical Revolution*, offers a nuanced and provocative take on this issue. De Barra states early on that there are two key questions to consider regarding the Irish language: whether it is worth reviving, and whether it is possible to revive it. He makes clear that his book will focus on the latter, which he feels is largely overlooked

in contemporary debate. *Gaeilge: A Radical Revolution* is, in sum, a detailed study of how the revival of the Irish language might be achieved.

In addition to his focus on the achievability (rather than the desirability) of an Irish-language revival, De Barra further clarifies the parameters of his discussion in two ways. He firstly makes clear that he will concentrate on the state of Irish within the Republic of Ireland. Although he acknowledges efforts being made to promote Irish both in Northern Ireland and abroad, the bulk of his analysis deals with the 26 counties. Secondly, he draws an important distinction between the Irish language (the topic of his book) and the Gaeltacht (the geographical regions in which Irish is the vernacular). These are often conflated in popular discourse, but De Barra is quick to highlight that they are two separate objects of inquiry. Gaeltacht communities face unique economic challenges, for instance, which are outside the remit of his study.

In the book's introduction, De Barra examines the kind of rhetoric commonly used by journalists and politicians when discussing the Irish language. He demonstrates the ways in which proponents of Irish are often cast as irrational zealots, and how Irish revivalism is even compared to Nazism or Islamic fundamentalism by some critics. These tactics, he argues, are an attempt to portray one side of the debate as rational and ideologically neutral, in order to avoid engaging with contrasting opinions. The introduction highlights just how fraught the topic in question is, and provides helpful context for us to evaluate the author's own arguments.

In Chapter One, De Barra writes about his experience of teaching himself Irish as an adult, having done poorly in the subject throughout the majority of his school years. This brief personal history provides some interesting practical insights into second-language acquisition, such as the observation that short periods of regular study are more effective than infrequent marathon efforts. Following this discussion, he turns his attention to the history of Irish in Ireland. Chapter Two traces the key events which led to English replacing Irish as the predominant language of Ireland, including the Norman invasion of 1169, the Cromwellian conquest in the 17th century, and the Great Famine in the 1840s. It also highlights some of the early attempts made to revive the Irish language, beginning at the turn of the 20th century. This cursory overview would serve as a good introduction for someone unfamiliar with the subject.

In Chapter Three, De Barra assesses the current state of the Irish language in Ireland. He points out that arriving at a clear conclusion on this issue is no easy task. Terms like 'fluency' or 'native speaker' are often ill-defined, and can be used in ways that are not politically neutral. He presents results from several surveys on the number of Irish speakers in Ireland, and shows that these vary considerably, due to the different measurements they use. Furthermore, he contends that a reliance on speakers' self-assessment is problematic, as people are likely to have different interpretations of their ability. As a whole, the chapter suggests the importance of precision in debates on language issues, while also arguing convincingly that we should see fluency as a spectrum, rather than a simple binary (you either speak Irish or you don't).

Any debate on the role of the Irish language in Irish society will sooner or later bring up the question of education. It is often taken for granted that Irish is taught badly in both primary and secondary schools, yet De Barra questions this trope in Chapter Four of his book. His main argument is that people have wildly unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved through formal education, given the obvious constraints in place (such as the number of hours dedicated to Irish in the curriculum). He shows that Irish is not taught badly, when compared either to other school subjects in Ireland, or to the success of language teaching in other countries.

Chapters Five and Six deal, respectively, with the hatred many citizens feel towards Irish, and the widely accepted view that English is vital to Ireland's economic and cultural success. De Barra firstly identifies a number of factors which contribute to a widespread contempt for

Irish. He primarily sees it as part of the nation's colonial legacy. As evidenced by the numerous sources he cites, the denigration of Gaelic culture was a key facet of British colonisation, and it is unsurprising that this would have impacted the way Irish people themselves came to view their native language. However, he maintains that the hatred of Irish also stems from a sense of linguistic superiority shared by English speakers the world over, as well as an identity crisis regarding what it means to be Irish. Mirroring the hatred of Irish, writes De Barra, is the widespread perception among Irish citizens that the English language provides great benefits to the nation of Ireland. He argues that having an English-speaking population is in fact a mixed blessing, and that critics tend to exaggerate its importance for the Irish economy.

Perhaps the most enjoyable section of the book is Chapter Seven, in which De Barra addresses seven of the most prevalent myths about the Irish language, and dismantles them with incisive wit. As he has done elsewhere in this work, he demonstrates that misrepresentation, misinformation and downright lying are commonplace in discussions about Irish. Most importantly, he shows that the Irish government does not spend nearly as much money on promoting the language as is often claimed.

In Chapter Eight, De Barra adds an interesting dimension to his analysis of Irish revivalism, as he considers historical attempts to promote or revive various other languages. The languages he examines are Welsh, Urdu, French, Catalan, Bahasa Indonesia and Hebrew. There is much that can be learned from these case studies and applied to the Irish context, and they also provide evidence, in some instances, that largescale linguistic revival is possible.

In both Chapter Nine and the short Conclusion, the author outlines in detail his own vision of how Irish could successfully be revived. He recognises that language revival is an ambiguous concept, sometimes used by proponents of the Irish language without any clear indication of what it represents. What he himself proposes, in speaking of an Irish-language revival, is the development of a bilingual society in which Irish and English would both have prominence, and in which anyone who wanted to develop Irish fluency would be able to do so. Though he considers a number of moderate steps Ireland could take to promote bilingualism, the core of his proposal is, as the book's title suggests, a radical one. De Barra believes that the only way to guarantee a revival would be to make Irish the sole language through which the Irish government functions. He envisions an Ireland in which Irish, over the span of a few decades, would become the working language of the entire civil service. This would place the language at the heart of society, and would create an economic and practical incentive for people to learn it. The author admits that such a radical restructuring of Irish society would be very difficult to accomplish. Nevertheless, he contends that these drastic measures are not beyond the realm of possibility, given that surveys suggest a large portion of the population would like Ireland to be bilingual. Whatever one thinks of De Barra's proposal, he must be commended for acknowledging that profound changes are needed if Irish is to undergo a revival in any meaningful sense of the word.

The most obvious criticism of *Gaeilge: A Radical Revolution* is that it contains more typographical errors than one would expect for a book of its length, in addition to a number of poor syntactical choices. These could perhaps have been avoided had the manuscript fallen into the hands of a more keen-eyed editor prior to publication. Ultimately, however, they do little to detract from the work's merit. De Barra's book is a well-researched, entertaining contribution to its field, and one which would appeal to general reader and specialist alike.

Peter Weakliam

Cristina Bravo Lozano, *Spain and the Irish Mission, 1609-1707*, New York, Routledge, 2018, pp. 310. £ 105. ISBN 978-1138636767.

This new book represents an outstanding and valuable contribution to the field of early-modern Irish history and more broadly to the relations between Ireland and Spain. Based on an impressive and extended archival research in different European repositories, the author examines the complex process through which the Spanish monarchy supported the return of the Irish missionaries to Ireland to fight against the spread of Protestantism. Structured on eight chapters which cover the period from the early decades of the seventeenth century until the first decades of the eighteenth century, the book tracks and identifies the causes which brought the Spanish monarchy to develop a sophisticated confessional strategy to support Irish Catholicism.

The first chapter serves to introduce the complex and risky context in which the Irish Catholics lived during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The author unveils the roots of system of patronage and how this was the outcome of a lengthy and troubled process in which the Irish clerics petitioned both the Spanish king and the pope to support the structure of the impoverished Catholic church in Ireland. The second chapter brings the reader into the detail of the mechanism of the Spanish patronage by explaining the key actors and institutions behind it and how these were interconnected in order to provide financial assistance to the returning clerics.

The third chapter gets into more details as it describes the changing nature of the royal patronage and how this was not only a mere financial help. Indeed, the author demonstrates that this process also involved all the network of the Irish colleges established in the Iberian Peninsula and in Spanish Flanders. By highlighting the role played by these institutions, Bravo Lozano allows us to understand the complexity and the ramification of the patronage system. This chapter also explains how the Cromwellian conquest had a detrimental effect on this system which, during the 1650s, was forced to support the Irish clerics in exile through the grant of pensions.

In the fourth chapter the author explores the impact of the Restoration on the system of the Irish mission which became increasingly structured and formalized with a steady increase in the number of missionaries applying for the viatica. It also assesses the impact of the political events in England and Ireland on the patronage. The fifth chapter considers the last turbulent of the Stuart monarchy and how and whether the Glorious Revolution affected the activity of the Irish missionaries. The sixth chapter explores how the dramatic shift from the Stuart dynasty to the Hanover brought seminal changes amid the Irish missionaries, and more broadly amid the Irish Catholic community. The seventh chapter is a logical follow-up of the preceding chapter as it investigates how the Spanish monarchy reacted to the implementation of the anti-Catholic laws in Ireland by providing more and more support to the returning missionaries. The last chapter explores how and to which extent the rise of the Bourbon dynasty, in the early eighteenth century, on the Spanish throne continued the patronage system developed at the onset of the seventeenth century.

By focusing on the viatica – the sum granted to the returning missionaries – Bravo Lozano has unveiled how and to which extent the Spanish court sought to use the Irish clergy as a political means, and how this form of support would influence the Anglo-Spanish relations. By tracking the names of the Irish clerics who asked to have the viatica, the author fulfils a two-fold aim: from one side she reconstructs the milieu of the Irish clerics who resided in Spain; on other side she demonstrates how and to which extent these Irishmen had developed a thick network with the lay and religious authorities, both locally and internationally. The examination of this

clerical network reveals not only the key figures behind it, but it also permits to understand the perils, the financial problems, as well as the “baroque” bureaucracy of the Spanish monarchy.

The book also investigates the sharp contrasts which existed between the regular and the secular clergy, but also the violent disputes of the Irish bishops in order to be appointed to the most relevant dioceses of the island. Another merit of the author is to have fitted the development of this patronage’s system within the broader political and religious context of the changing relations which linked the Monarquía hispánica to the Stuart monarchy. The rich appendix at the end of the book helps the reader to identify who and how many were the Irish clerics who, from the late 1610s, petitioned to be granted the viaticum in order to return to the Irish mission.

In conclusion this is a well-researched and organized book which will provide a major advancement to the field of the Irish-Spanish relations during the early-modern period. The fact that the book has been published in the new and prestigious Routledge Studies in Renaissance and Early Modern World is a further witness of the high scholarly contribution made by this young historian.

Matteo Binasco

Luca Bellocchio, *I sicari della pace. L'Irlanda del Nord e lo spettro di una nuova guerra civile*, Milano, Meltemi editore, 2019, pp. 168. € 15,00. ISBN 9788883539886.

Il cinefilo (e geopolitico accademico) Luca Bellocchio, che già aveva dato alle stampe nel 2006 per lo stesso editore *Irlanda del Nord. Un conflitto etnico nel cuore dell'Europa*, riprende il filo della sua contestualizzazione geopolitica del conflitto in Irlanda in questo nuovo volume di piacevole e arguta lettura. L'opera è composta da una introduzione, da due capitoli e dalla conclusione.

La disamina degli aspetti geopolitici del conflitto in Irlanda, dalla Prima guerra mondiale al processo di pace, contenuta soprattutto nel primo capitolo, è forse la parte più fondata sui fatti, più stimolante e meno speculativa del volume. Il quadro geopolitico che spinse il governo britannico alla Partizione del 1920-21, che divideva lo Stato Libero (poi Éire, poi Repubblica irlandese) dall'Irlanda del Nord che rimaneva parte del Regno Unito, spesso non viene considerato dalla storiografia, più concentrata sulle dinamiche interne alle isole britanniche. Così come, riguardo alla riapertura del conflitto nel Nord alla fine degli anni Sessanta del Novecento, con la conseguente fine dell'autogoverno unionista e il ristabilimento del dominio diretto del governo di Londra sulle Sei Contee, il più delle volte non viene sottolineata dai commentatori la presenza imminente della Guerra fredda come fattore determinante. La pervicacia inglese nel combattere una guerra contro-insurrezionale in Irlanda negli anni Settanta e Ottanta, invece di avviare un processo di ‘decolonizzazione’ e di ritiro, era infatti motivata anche dal timore che nel contesto del gioco globale a somma zero il blocco sovietico potesse usare l'Irlanda nazionalista contro la NATO e contro il Regno Unito. Allo stesso modo la caduta del muro di Berlino e la dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica, con l'incontrastata egemonia unipolare degli Stati Uniti (e dei suoi più stretti alleati della ‘Anglosfera’ al seguito, come sottolinea il Bellocchio), fu il quadro che permise e spinse il processo di pace negli anni Novanta fino agli accordi di Belfast del venerdì santo del 1998.

Ma l'autore nel resto del suo volume insiste su due presupposti (o tesi a priori), dei quali cerca di dimostrare – in modo invero poco convincente, anche se sempre molto leggibile – la realtà. Il primo, ad avviso di Bellocchio, è il completo fallimento delle strutture politiche basate sul consociativismo o power sharing istituite dagli accordi del 1998 o Good Friday Agreement

(GFA), accordi perfezionati e sviluppati in seguito dal cosiddetto accordo di St. Andrew del 2006. Il secondo è l'inevitabilità del ritorno alla guerra nell'Irlanda del Nord, data la presenza di cinque elementi oggettivi (i "sicari della pace" del titolo), ultimo dei quali la Brexit, che renderebbero in prospettiva impossibile la continuazione della presente situazione di sostanziale assenza di conflitto armato. Forse il tempo della pubblicazione, l'ottobre scorso, è stato infelice, dal momento che gli eventi dei quattro mesi successivi hanno vieppiù smentito la realtà dei due presupposti di Bellocchio.

L'autore insiste molto, quale riprova del fallimento delle strutture create dagli accordi di pace, sul fatto che l'Esecutivo (il governo autonomo consociativo) dell'Irlanda del Nord istituito dal GFA, formato la prima volta con considerevole ritardo nel dicembre 1999, si sia dissolto ben cinque volte tra il febbraio del 2000 e il gennaio del 2017; e insiste in particolare sull'ultima sospensione, la più lunga, conclusasi con la ripresa delle attività dell'Esecutivo nel gennaio 2020, ma ancora in corso al tempo della sua pubblicazione. Certo, le due comunità che polarizzano le sei contee dell'Irlanda del Nord, quella unionista (in maggioranza protestante) e quella nazionalista (in maggioranza cattolica) non si amano molto dopo una guerra durata quasi trent'anni, e in generale non si sentono di fare parte di una stessa società, e non si riconoscono negli stessi simboli e negli stessi valori, avendo aspirazioni irreconciliabili. E certo lo smantellamento degli arsenali delle rispettive organizzazioni clandestine armate (il decommissioning) non viene creduto reale, se compiuto dagli avversari, dagli uni e dagli altri. Ma proprio per questo il consociativismo imposto dagli accordi del 1998 è la maggiore e migliore garanzia contro la ripresa del conflitto armato. Il Bellocchio dimentica che tra il 1946 e i primi anni Ottanta, nel contesto della Guerra fredda, vi era un Stato strategicamente rilevante, e irrimediabilmente diviso tra sostenitori della NATO e sostenitori del Patto di Varsavia. Anche lì la Costituzione prevedeva di fatto un consociativismo imposto, quale garanzia contro la guerra civile. I maggiori partiti e sindacati schierati sui due opposti fronti disponevano di apparati paramilitari armati (certo formalmente illegali e clandestini) composti da milioni di persone, quale deterrente a qualsiasi rottura degli accordi da parte degli avversari. Una costruzione politica chiaramente diretta ad impedire lo scoppio della guerra civile, che per più di un quarantennio realizzò con successo il suo scopo. Mi riferisco, naturalmente, alla (prima?) Repubblica italiana. La farraginosità, la complicazione, l'apparente inefficienza di un sistema politico di consociativismo imposto, in cui non si possono fare passare leggi rilevanti se non con il consenso degli avversari e con estenuanti trattative, sono il prezzo da pagare per permettere a una società irrimediabilmente divisa di essere governata e di essere politicamente rappresentata evitando di pagare un prezzo molto maggiore, la guerra civile. E ciò vale anche per l'Irlanda del Nord.

Per Bellocchio i cinque "sicari della pace" in Irlanda sarebbero: 1) la "ingiustizia geopolitica" della Partizione del 1920-21, che non ovviò alla compresenza nel nord-est dell'isola di "due identità nazionali contrapposte"; 2) il "neo-imperialismo illuminato" condiviso da Stati Uniti e Regno Unito, che avrebbe imposto dall'esterno e dall'alto, con gli accordi del 1998, la democrazia consociativa alle Sei Contee; 3) di nuovo, gli stessi accordi del 1998 o GFA, che crearono delle "meccaniche istituzionali" come si è detto consociative, includenti il diritto di veto da parte della minoranza, e numerosi organismi burocratici e istituti per la composizione dei conflitti, oltre alla compartecipazione di Regno Unito e Repubblica irlandese quali garanti esterni, meccaniche che secondo Bellocchio non potrebbero funzionare (anche se lo fanno già, e da più di un ventennio); 4) la "ferita narcisistica" che rende incolmabile l'abisso tra le due comunità, le quali vivono vite separate; 5) la Brexit, che correttamente l'autore ritiene non essere così influente, a dispetto dei commentatori e propagandisti remainer e pro-UE che dipingevano la ripresa della guerra in Irlanda come prima, inevitabile conseguenza di una Brexit senza accordo.

Per inciso, è vero che dal referendum britannico del 2016 i partiti nazionalisti irlandesi (in primis il Sinn Féin, ma anche i due altri principali partiti della Repubblica, Fine Gael e Fianna Fáil) si erano dichiarati contro la Brexit, cercando di usare il suo spauracchio (e lo spauracchio di un 'hard border' tra le due parti dell'isola) come leva contro gli unionisti del Democratic Unionist Party, che almeno a parole avevano sposato la stessa Brexit; ma è anche vero che gli sviluppi occorsi dopo la pubblicazione del volume hanno dissipato questi fantasmi. Lo spauracchio di un 'hard border' tra le due parti dell'Irlanda (proibito dal GFA del 1998, e comunque mai esistito dalla Partizione in poi, se non sul piano della sicurezza nelle fasi più accese del conflitto) era infatti frutto del fallito accordo per l'uscita dalla UE proposto da Theresa May, in cui i negoziatori della UE erano riusciti a infilare il cosiddetto back stop, ossia l'attribuzione alla Commissione UE del potere di mantenere o fare finire l'attuale condizione economica, in termine di dazi, commercio e transito di merci, dell'Irlanda del Nord, allineata in questi settori con la Repubblica e con la UE. Ma tale improvvido tentativo della UE di entrare a gamba tesa in una questione su cui non aveva diritti, e già regolata da accordi internazionali, è stato stroncato dall'accordo per l'uscita dalla UE di Boris Johnson, che priva la UE di ogni pretesa al riguardo, e stabilisce che solo l'organo rappresentativo dei cittadini delle Sei Contee, l'Assemblea dell'Irlanda del Nord, ha il potere – tramite le sue regole consociative – di modificare l'assetto doganale, commerciale ed economico dell'Irlanda del Nord (seguendo in questo e la lettera, e la sostanza degli accordi di pace del 1998). Dal momento che l'Assemblea opera per l'appunto sulla base del power sharing è perciò assai improbabile, nel futuro prevedibile, che essa decida di distaccare la 'Provincia' dalle regole di mercato irlandesi (e di conseguenza UE) per farla uniformare a quelle del Regno Unito. Il nazionalismo irlandese (e in particolare il Sinn Féin) è riuscito a fare leva sugli interessi di una parte crescente del business già unionista che però oggi intende mantenere lo status quo economico, usando il voto tattico alle elezioni britanniche del 12 dicembre 2019 per fare perdere due seggi su dieci al Democratic Unionist Party e per eleggere tre tra nazionalisti moderati del Social Democratic and Labour Party, unionisti moderati dell'Ulster Unionist Party e, secondo la definizione ('designazione') prevista dal GFA, 'altri', cioè un deputato dell'Alliance Party: tutti remainer. Il confine doganale 'duro' è quindi scomparso dai radar, non è più un babau credibile. E la prosecuzione della integrazione economica e doganale tra Irlanda del Nord e Repubblica irlandese tenderà ovviamente, sul medio e lungo periodo, a favorire la riunificazione politica dell'isola verde, sanando il primo dei "sicari della pace" di Bellocchio, la "ingiustizia politica" costituita dalla Partizione. Non che il governo britannico ne sia molto preoccupato: il governo della Brexit, la quale sarà prevedibilmente senza accordo, non ha particolari motivi per amare gli unionisti intransigenti del D.U.P., che avevano fatto perdere la maggioranza a Boris Johnson in una votazione decisiva, e che ora sono irrilevanti nel parlamento di Londra. E di fronte al progetto della Brexit, la rinnovata indipendenza di una potenza già imperiale, oggi il mantenere il nord-est dell'Irlanda – pesantemente sussidiato dal Tesoro britannico, e abitato da meno di due milioni di persone – entro il Regno Unito è cosa del tutto irrilevante. Quanto agli accordi di pace del 1998 il Bellocchio insiste sulla base del realismo geopolitico che riscontra l'inesistenza pratica del "diritto internazionale" dopo la fine dell'URSS (ma alquanto bizzarramente in questo caso), che il Regno Unito potrebbe decidere di annullarli quando gli pare: anche vero, ma perché dovrebbe farlo? A quanto riportano le gazzette, la Commissione UE sembra invece non avere accettato di buon cuore questi sviluppi: dopo avere dichiarato chiuse le frontiere esterne dell'Unione a causa della pandemia, avrebbe ingiunto al governo della Repubblica irlandese di bloccare il confine con l'Irlanda del Nord, ora confine esterno della UE, pena procedura d'infrazione. La risposta del governo irlandese non è stata resa nota, forse perché – qualora vi sia stata – non era pubblicabile ...

“La guerra civile si materializzerà Brexit o non Brexit”, sostiene Bellocchio, “perché [la società] nordirlandese resta una società malata” (133). Ma quale società non lo è? E, allora, guerra civile sempre e dappertutto?

Nell’ultima parte del secondo capitolo e nella conclusione l’autore (che a dispetto del suo forse giusto rifiuto di modelli politologici e di disciplina delle relazioni internazionali in base al realismo geopolitico qui ricade invece nella modellistica) illustra quattro possibili modelli di soluzione per il problema irlandese. Il primo sarebbe il ritorno totale al governo diretto di Londra, annullando ogni autonomia locale dell’Irlanda del Nord (e questo di sicuro farebbe realizzare la dubbia profezia del Bellocchio riguardo alla ‘inevitabile’ ripresa della guerra). Il secondo riguarda la possibilità in un prossimo futuro di un referendum, come sancito dal GFA del 1998, per la riunificazione dell’Irlanda: e lo stesso autore prevede che questo sia il più probabile (senza o con guerra conseguente, non si sa). Il terzo (“indiscutibilmente poco plausibile”, come ammette Bellocchio) è la “Ri-Partizione della Partizione”, ritagliando le Sei Contee con trasferimenti (o pulizia etnica) in modo da creare una zona abitata solo da unionisti, che continuerebbe a fare parte del Regno Unito, mentre il resto si riunirebbe alla Repubblica. Cosa a quanto si dice presente a un certo punto nelle fantasie di Margaret Thatcher. Il quarto modello sarebbe una Irlanda del Nord come Stato indipendente e dal Regno Unito, e dalla Repubblica irlandese, modello che il Bellocchio ritiene il migliore, in quanto permetterebbe, almeno sulla carta, una presa di responsabilità da parte delle due comunità, unionista e nazionalista, e una rifondazione delle loro fondamenta culturali e simboliche. Bisogna dire che la U.D.I., ovvero Unilateral [o Ulster] Declaration of Independence, era negli anni Settanta uno degli obiettivi di cui parlavano i paramilitari lealisti impegnati nel conflitto, ma sulla base, ovviamente, della analoga UDI della colonia inglese della Rhodesia nel 1965 ...

Dando un giudizio sommario, il testo di Luca Bellocchio è comunque interessante. Intanto è scritto da qualcuno che ha comunque studiato l’argomento, cosa che in Italia non sempre accade. Poi stimola la riflessione, anche se lo si confuta.

Come nota finale, mentre dei refusi è meglio non occuparsi (‘chi è senza peccato’, eccetera...), vi sono un paio di inesattezze che sarebbe stato meglio evitare. Secondo la nota 38 a pagina 43 il Sinn Féin sarebbe un “partito fondato nel 1970 in Irlanda del Nord”. Riferendosi evidentemente l’autore al Sinn Féin Provisional, esso era la quinta fase o incarnazione di un partito fondato nel lontano 1905; e venne fondato sì nel 1970, ma a Dublino, non nel nord, e avendo come base l’intera isola. Due o tre volte il Bellocchio menziona poi il referendum scozzese del 2014 come se fosse stato un referendum sull’indipendenza, come hanno fatto i pennivendoli: invece si trattava di un referendum per l’abrogazione (Repeal) dell’Act of Union del 1707. Se fosse passato – ma il 55% degli elettori scozzesi votarono ‘No’ – avrebbe solo ricreato il Regno di Scozia quale era stato dal 1603 al 1707, con Elisabetta II regina. Non una Scozia indipendente.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

Edward Burke, *An Army of Tribes: British Army Cohesion, Deviancy and Murder in Northern Ireland*, Liverpool, Liverpool UP, 2018, pp. xvi+374. £ 19.95. ISBN 978-1786941039.

British troops arrived in Northern Ireland in August 1969 to provide “military aid to the civil power” after rioting in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, and several provincial towns. By 1972, more than 22,000 British soldiers were deployed across the north. Operation Banner, as it became known, endured for thirty-eight years. Edward Burke’s extensively-researched book

considers the internal dynamics of the British Army in Northern Ireland. Eschewing simplistic demonisation or defence of British troops, Burke assesses “the divergent motivations, experiences and emotions” (vii) of the Scots Guards and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders during 1971 and 1972, the bloodiest phase of the conflict.

An army of tribes bears the hallmarks of an academic thesis, drawing heavily upon the author’s thirty-six interviews with ex-soldiers and scrutinising unit log-books, regimental magazines, and unpublished diary excerpts. Burke skilfully incorporates close reading of these primary sources with critical analysis of the agency of two regiments in Northern Ireland. The parameters of the study are designed to provide detailed insights into soldiers’ “orientation, loyalties, rationale, confusion, motivation and fears during a period of profound tactical confusion” (5).

In 1971 and 1972, the 1st Battalion Scots Guards suffered fifty-five casualties including five dead, and the 1st Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered eight fatalities (16). An army of tribes is sensitive both to the challenges confronting embattled British soldiers, and how the Army alienated Catholic communities through acts of political tactlessness, like cratering border roads, as well as more extreme violence. In turn, with a broadly “pejorative” view of the local population pervading local brigade headquarters” (117), commanders were “often slow” (11) to investigate complaints about soldiers’ conduct. Yet hostility towards northern Catholics was not uniform: many Argylls hailed from “red Clydeside” and tended more towards non-sectarian ideas than to bigoted impulse (108).

The emerging picture is that of a British military machine experiencing strategic confusion and a degree of internal dysfunction. The Scots Guards’ training in desert conditions in the late 1960s contrasted sharply from their imminent deployment in the streets and fields of Northern Ireland (50). At the outset, the Army’s role to support the civil power in the north drew ‘heavily on the British colonial experience’ (66).

Rotating battalions did not share with one another important information about local political dynamics. Senior officers “often failed to recognise patterns of behaviour that caused serious damage to community relations” (344) and soldiers in small units could, in turn, become “too exclusively loyal” to their immediate colleagues (339). Among soldiers, a potent combination of fear, hatred, confusion, and trauma could combine to dangerous effect. Senior officers, meanwhile, struggled to contain the ‘offensive spirit’ among their charges.

Burke is equally mindful of disagreements between Army and government. Releasing internees and circumscribing Army discretion over arrests, Secretary of State Willie Whitelaw provoked the ire of soldiers on the ground (97). Yet despite the official position, these regiments were not entirely beholden to orders from above: Burke notes soldiers’ “border incursions” into the Republic of Ireland as evidence of a “degree of autonomy” in practice (145, 344-345).

An army of tribes also draws out micro-tensions within the military. Soldiers brought from Aden a tendency to divide infantry regiments between so-called “players” and “crap-hats”: the former were typically well-versed in colonial counterinsurgency, for example the Parachute Regiments and Royal Green Jackets, and prepared to bend or break rules; the latter were less immediately aggressive and were often derided by peers for their more staid approach (203).

Mindful that “personalised micro-wars within a wider campaign develop their own local grammar” (13), Burke accentuates the importance of locality in the Northern Ireland conflict. The author depicts in great detail the south Fermanagh area, where “grievance and violence [...] were extremely intimate, with complicated, often highly localised, motives” (17). Company commanders refracted orders from above through their own “personality” (128), with wide-ranging consequences for those who lived and worked around them.

Burke's fourth and final chapter, "Murder", is a 100-page tour de force of historical reconstruction. His review of the 'pitchfork killings' of October 1972 – two former members of the Argyll and Sutherland Rangers were later sentenced to life for the murder of two Catholic farmers – is attuned to the finely-balanced societal politics of this rural border region. This case-study highlighted the degree of autonomy among soldiers in this early period of Operation Banner. The Provisional IRA (PIRA) had killed Robin Bell, a local member of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), the previous day. The Argylls "were ready to accept [...] without question" the UDR's classification of Michael Naan as a "known" member of the PIRA in the area (275). In fact, Naan was a civil rights activist, but never a PIRA volunteer.

In a thoughtful and measured work, lapses are rare. Burke is unusually blithe in his assertion that PIRA bombings of 'economic targets' in the early 1970s were "a euphemism for a general campaign of sectarian attacks against local Protestant interests" (263). Such a pronouncement elides a wider literature which continues to debate the hotly-contested question of sectarianism in republicanism. On occasion, the minutiae of individuals' subsequent lives after 1972 slightly disrupt the prose.

Conversely, in a study concerned primarily with the heterogeneity and subjectivity of British soldiering in Northern Ireland, some of Burke's allusions to Fermanagh's activist networks leave the reader wondering about how civil rights and republicanism interacted in the county and beyond (292). Such reflections are testament chiefly to this book's thought-provoking quality and its author's forensic eye for detail.

Overall, *An army of tribes* is a meticulously-researched and highly readable discussion of two regiments' experiences of Operation Banner's early phases. It commands attention for analysts of the conflict and the British Army, and for social movement theorists concerned with protest cycles more broadly. It will also be of acute interest to regimental historians and readers interested in County Fermanagh's particular political dynamics. With a subject matter whose complexities and sensitivities demand nuance and balance, Burke brings both qualities in abundance.

Jack Hepworth



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Zsuzsanna Balázs (<z.balazs2@nuigalway.ie>) is an Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholar in the O’Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her research explores the anti-normative and anti-authoritarian potentialities in W.B. Yeats’s and Gabriele D’Annunzio’s drama, focusing on unorthodox representations of gender, power and desire in light of the two playwrights’ queer and feminist networks and collaborations. She is founding member of Modernist Studies Ireland and NUI Galway’s Queer Arts Collective.

Anna Charczun (<anna.charczun@alumni.brunel.ac.uk>) researches the development of Irish lesbian narrative between the 1800s and 2000s, investigates how the narrative evolved over time, and examines thoroughly the near entirety of the works that were included in this emergent canon. She is currently working on representations of lesbian writing and theatre in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be included in her forthcoming monograph entitled *Irish Lesbian Writing Across Time: A New Framework for Rethinking Love Between Women*.

Stephanie Conn is a poet from Northern Ireland. Her collections *The Woman on the Other Side* (2016) and *Island* (2018) were published by Doire Press. Her pamphlet *Copeland’s Daughter* (2016) was published by Smith/Doorstep. She is a current PhD candidate researching poetry and chronic illness. The themes and settings of her poems are international, often focussing on women, art, animals, and illness. Included in this edition of

Studi Irlandesi are three sections from a series of Frida Kahlo poems that Stephanie is currently working on: “Notes on Concealment”, “Under a Gangrene Sun”, and “Sustenance”.

Cónal Creedon is an award winning novelist, playwright and documentary film maker and Adjunct Professor of Creative Writing at University College Cork. Books include: *Begotten Not Made* (2018), *Cornerstone* (2017), *The Immortal Deed of Michael O’Leary* (2015), *Second City Trilogy* (2007), *Passion Play* (1999), *Pancho & Lefty Ride Out* (1995). Award winning plays include: *Second City Trilogy*, critically acclaimed in Shanghai, and New York. Cónal’s film documentaries have had numerous international screening, including World Expo Shanghai and New York University. Over 60 hours of Cónal’s radio drama have been broadcast by RTÉ & BBC. Cónal has been honoured by his home city of Cork with the Lord Mayor of Cork Culture Award, and was appointed Heritage Ambassador for the city. He was nominated Cork Person of the Year in 1999 and 2017.

Erin Costello Wecker (<erin.wecker@umontana.edu>) is an associate professor of English at the University of Montana. She earned an MA in Irish Studies and a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. Her research focuses on the interdisciplinary nexus between the fields of Rhetoric, Irish Studies, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Daryl Leeworthy (<d.s.leeworthy@swansea.ac.uk>) teaches history for the Open University in the UK. He has written widely on the LGBT history of Wales, notably *A Little Gay History of Wales* (2019), as well as the history of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Mark Ashton. His wider research interests include the history of social democracy, proletarian literature, and migration between Britain and Ireland.

Seán Mac Risteaird (<sean.macristeaird@dcu.ie>) completed his academic qualifications in Maynooth University. His PhD project focused on the contemporary Irish-language writers Micheál Ó Conghaile and Cathal Ó Searcaigh where he deployed queer theory as a mode of literary criticism. Seán has taught in Maynooth University, St. Thomas University (Fredericton, Canada), and on the Professional Masters in Education (Primary Education) in Hibernia College, Dublin. He then went on and worked as a Development Officer for Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge (TEG) between 2017-2019 in Maynooth University. He was appointed Assistant Professor of Irish in Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge, DCU, in 2019. His research interests include queer studies, in gender, in cultural and literary criticism and theory.

Conci Mazzullo (<concimazzullocm@gmail.com>) teaches English at a Higher Secondary School, and English and Irish Literature at the University of Catania. She holds a PhD in Irish Literature from Trinity College Dublin; the title of her dissertation was *Flann O’Brien’s At Swim-Two-Birds and the Construction of an Alternative Heroic Canon. An Intertextual Analysis* (2002). She has published essays and articles on Flann O’Brien and on the Irish sources of his works. She is a photographer and curated exhibitions in Italy and Nepal. Her most recent publication *Beyond Visible. Parallel Routes Nepal and Italy*, is a catalogue of an exhibition at the Nepal Art Council, Kathmandu (2018).

Patrick McDonagh (<Patrick.Mcdonagh@alumni.eui.eu>) received his PhD from the European University Institute. His dissertation was titled *Homosexuals Are Revolting: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973–1993*. Patrick has published articles on the history of gay and lesbian activism in Ireland in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*,

Irish Economic and Social History, *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, *GCN*, and *RTE Brainstorm*, among others. He is currently finalising a forthcoming monograph on Gay and Lesbian Activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973-1993.

Frank McGuinness was born in Country Donegal in 1953 and now lives in Dublin. He has written fifteen plays (including *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, *Carthaginians* and *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*) and twenty adaptations of European classics. His version of Ibsen's *Doll's House* won a "Tony" award and his most recent play, *Donegal*, was staged at the Abbey Theatre. He has published two novels (*Arimathea* and *The Woodcutter and his Family*) and a collection of stories (*Paprika*). The Gallery Press has also published his other poetry collections *Boosterstown*, *The Sea with no Ships*, *The Stone Jug*, *Dulse* and *In a Town of Five Thousand People*. He is Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing at University College Dublin, which conferred on him the Ulysses Medal (2019).

Barry Montgomery (<b.montgomery@ulster.ac.uk>) has served as Research Associate on the AHRC funded NUI Galway and Ulster University, *Representations of Jews in Irish Literature* project. He was lead researcher on the project's successful travelling exhibition, and is currently finalising a forthcoming critical volume. Montgomery is also currently publishing elsewhere in the field of Irish Jewish Studies, and has spoken on the subject at several Irish academic institutes, including the Royal Irish Academy (Dublin) and the Irish Literary Society (London). He is also engaged in publishing critical editions of works by Irish Jewish writers, Joseph Edelstein and Hannah Berman.

Ilaria Natali (<ilaria.natali@unifi.it>) teaches English Literature at the University of Florence. Her primary research interest is the study of modern manuscripts, with particular attention to the works of James Joyce and other Modernist authors. Since 2016 she has explored the relationships between literature and the history of medicine, devoting various essays to madness in eighteenth-century English poetry. In addition, she has analysed various aspects of Irish literature and culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Bernadette Nic an tSaoir is a native of Mayfield in Cork City and was a language teacher. Now a freelance translator/editor, she is presently working on her seventh collection of poetry in Irish. Her most recent collection is *Súil le Muir* (Dublin, Coiscéim, 2018).

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin was born in Cork. She is an Emeritus Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin. She has written on the literature of the English Renaissance, on translation, and on Irish writing. She has translated the poetry of Antonella Anedda into Irish; her poems in Italian translation have been published by Trauben (Testo di Seta, 2004) and at the Riflessi DiVersi festival in Umbria. She has published nine collections of poetry, and was Ireland Chair of poetry (2016 -2019).

Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910-1988) was one of the leading poets in Irish in the mid-twentieth century. He was born and raised on Inis Mór, the largest of the three Aran Islands, off the coast of Galway, Ireland. A writer in the country's minority or, rather, minoritized language, he "welcomed light from wherever it came / but ask[ed] the foreign light / not to drown out [his] own" (from his poem "Solas" / "Light"). Ó Direáin's themes include his home island versus the city, love and death, women and masculinity, art and being an artist, the relationship between tradition and modernity, between minority and majority cultures, plus what the philosopher Oswald Spengler called "the morphology of cultures". The two poems in this issue are selected

(with permission) from Máirtín Ó Direáin, *Selected Poems / Rogha Dánta*, ed. by Frank Sewell (Winston-Salem, Wake Forest UP, 2020).

Mary O'Donnell's seven poetry collections include *Unlegendary Heroes* and *Those April Fevers* (Ark Publications). Four novels include *Where They Lie* (2014) and the best-selling debut novel *The Light Makers*, reissued last year after by 451 Editions. In 2018 Arlen House also published her third and highly-praised collection of stories, *Empire*. Her new poetry collection *Massacre of the Birds* will be published by Salmon next autumn. She is a member of Ireland's affiliation of artists, Aosdana, and holds a PhD from University College Cork.

Micheál Ó hAodha (<micheal.ohaodha@ul.ie>) works at the University of Limerick. His translation of Galway-born writer Dónall Mac Amhlaigh's novel *Deoraithe*, entitled *Exiles*, chronicling the working class experience of Irish migrants to England during the 1950s, will be published by Parthian, UK, in September, 2020 (<<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Exiles-Translations-Donall-Mac-Amhlaigh/dp/1912681315/>>).

Cathal Ó Searcaigh is one of the leading Irish-language poets in Ireland today. He hails from Míin a' Leá, under the shadow of Mount Errigal in Co. Donegal. A poet, dramatist, and prose writer, his poems have been translated into many languages, including Italian: see *Bollirà la rugiada: poesia irlandese contemporanea*, ed. by Andrea Fabbri, Mario Giosa, and Massimo Montevercchi (Faenza, Mobydick, 1996). One of Cathal's themes is love, including homosexual love, as noted by critic Jody Allen Randolph who comments that "his breaking down of stereotypes and new deployment of gendered themes [has] opened a new space in which to consider alternate sexualities within a contemporary Irish context". His work has been translated by authors including Seamus Heaney, Gabriel Rosenstock, Paddy Bushe, and Lillis Ó Laoire. The poem "Antinous" is here translated by Frank Sewell.

Rania M Rafik Khalil (<rania.khalil@bue.edu.eg>) specialises in Irish drama. She is the Research and Postgraduate Studies Coordinator, Internationalisation Coordinator for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at The British University in Egypt (BUE) and the International University Ranking Coordinator for the BUE.

Frank Sewell is a senior lecturer in Irish Literature and Creative Writing at Ulster University. His works include the monograph *Modern Irish Poetry* (Oxford UP, 2001) and *Seán Ó Riordáin: Selected Poems* ed. by Frank Sewell (Yale UP, 2014). Sewell's poems and translations have been published in anthologies, including *The New North: Contemporary Poetry from Northern Ireland*, ed. by Chris Agee (Wake Forest UP, 2008), and in journals from *Poetry Ireland* to *Poetry*.

Monica Randaccio (<mrandaccio@units.it>) is a lecturer of English Language and Translation Studies at the University of Trieste, Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies, Italy. Her main fields of interest are contemporary Irish drama, language teaching, drama translation and, more recently, audio description. Among her publications, *Gli amori di Cass McGuire* (1999), *Il teatro irlandese contemporaneo: soggettività e comunità in Friel, Murphy e Kilroy* (2001), *L'osservatorio* (2005). She co-edited the fourth issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* (2014) on language and translation in Ireland. She worked on a project (FRA 2013) on Dario Fo's translations, *Traduzione aperta, quasi spalancata: tradurre Dario Fo*, 2016 and on another project (FRA 2015) on museum AD.

Kaitlin Thurlow (<kaitlin.thurlow@umb.edu>) received a MA in English Literature at the University of Massachusetts Boston and is interested in the ways literature and the visual arts intersect. She has presented papers on exile, empathy and objects in the work of James Joyce, John McGahern, Edna O'Brien and Donal Ryan.

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