

Greetings to Brazil in Our Friends! People, Place and Tradition in Paul Durcan's Poetry

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Abstract: It would probably be fair to say that Paul Durcan is best known for his satirical poetry of social protest and for his performance of it. This is reflected in the fact that his work has been all but ignored in terms of academic criticism with only one full collection of relevant essays published. It is telling that, whilst not a few Irish poets have hailed their respect for Durcan, Edna Longley has been in the academic minority in noting his importance. Though Irish Studies in the South has generally overlooked Durcan's contribution, Longley summarises her introduction to The Selected Paul Durcan: "Durcan's poetry seems in touch with the deepest wells of Irish sensibility, yet radically challenges their pollution. In addition to his other achievements, he has developed the conscience of the race".¹

Durcan is a prolific writer in that he has produced, and continues to produce, enormous bodies of poetry. With an ear to the ground, Durcan's writing has confronted most aspects of Irish socio-cultural debate. It may well be however that titles such as 'Priest Accused of Not Wearing a Condom' or 'The Divorce Referendum, Ireland, 1986' from Going Home to Russia have come to define the popular image of Durcan as a satirist whose basic relevance is to the immediate social situation. I argue that this view limits the possibilities of his aesthetic which in fact works to challenge the much larger questions of identity that Longley refers to above and that will be my concern in the following pages.

Writing Durcan's Ireland

By 1990 in Ireland we'd been adolescents for seventy years
Obsessed with the Virgin, automobiles, alcohol, Playboy, unity.
The Commander-in-Chief issued her first and only commandment:
First and last you must learn to love your different self.²

The above four-lined poem from *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* honouring Mary Robinson and her presidency, 1990-1997, is a compact exposition of the main concerns of Paul Durcan's poetry; religion, materialism, personal excess and despair, sexuality and nationalism. Durcan positions Robinson as a kind of new-age Moses descending with great new insight, a potential reformer guiding Ireland towards self-discovery. The implication that the solution to Irish social problems and the key to the development of a mature Irish culture lies within an understanding of the same self that is being brought into question is interesting. The emphasis on a "different self", as opposed to a new self or the search for an *other*, suggests a belief in the untapped potential within that which already exists. This faith in the subject, I will argue, underwrites Durcan's art which, although often stylistically postmodern, retains a more traditional unifying instinct. I have inverted the title *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* to *Greetings to Brazil in Our Friends*, for in Durcan's poetry inner and outer landscapes converge, the "different self" lies within the self as a suppressed element – a potential awaiting realisation.

Durcan has repeatedly used his own father as a symbol of the patriarchal society that he seeks to challenge. His father, the poetry insists, was firmly of his generation, ever-loyal to the value-system of post-independent Ireland. 'Poem Not Beginning With a Line From Pindar' from *Daddy Daddy* details exactly what that fact meant to Durcan who depicts him:

The President of the Circuit Court
Of the Republic of Ireland,
Appointed by the party of the Fine Gael...

The party of the Fine Gael is the party
Of respectability, conformity, legitimacy, pedigree,
Faith, chivalry, property, virility.
The party of Collins, O'Higgins, O'Duffy, Cosgrave.
Great men queuing up at the bride's door.
Walk tall to the altar rail in pinstripe suit and tie.
Talk the language of men – bullshit, boob, cunt, bastard –
And – teach the Protestants a lesson.³

His challenge to his father mirrors a challenge also to the sexist, bigoted attitudes of the society that his father represents. It is important however that at no time does Durcan simply reject his father, a point that will be examined in more detail later.

Durcan's poetry works on two levels; one that functions as an outward address to society and another introspective challenge to the self. It could be said that in his poetry the social and private are inextricably linked. Coleridge once wrote of Aristotle that he "required an involution of the universal in the individual".⁴ Similarly Durcan's subjects take on a double role; firstly they become characters in his social dramas and

secondly they come to represent repressed parts of his own psyche which he seeks to explore. Durcan's writing of women, for example, confronts the feminist concerns of women in society yet it is also an attempt to explore the feminine residual, along with the patriarchal masculine, in the self. Durcan has shown a belief, as our opening quote highlights, that both society and the self require sexual and cultural boundaries to be challenged if the full potential for self-expression is to be realised. This self-expression depends upon a mind-state that is outward looking, tolerant of difference and also aware of its various internal components. The path to its achievement therefore necessitates both an outward search and an inner-voyage.

Fintan O'Toole has recognised that Durcan can be seen as a Stephen Daedalus trying to awake from the nightmare that is history.⁵ I propose that early experience drove Durcan to mount his own search for a Bloom-figure and that he found one in Patrick Kavanagh who was to become a great inspiration to him, as the title of the later poem 'Surely my God is Patrick Kavanagh' from *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* declares. Kavanagh's influence upon Durcan's art was essential in encouraging him to be courageous in speaking his own true voice:

While other poets my comic light resent
The spirit that is Kavanagh caresses my soul⁶

Yet his status as an alternative father-figure is apparent also in 'Waterloo Road' from the same collection:

And I rowed my oar by the star of Patrick Kavanagh.⁷

It has therefore been his own personal Telemachian search that has driven Durcan's odyssey forward and so far it has journeyed through eighteen collections, the latest stop being Brazil. Each collection and the exotic locations within them offer an epic setting for Durcan's heroes' self-challenging tasks. Ultimately however, unlike Daedalus, Durcan has displayed a belief that the potential to become the Bloom-figure has resided within his own father, a potential awaiting realisation:

Reading Ulysses myself
I found it as strange as my father
And as discordant...
It was not until four years later...
That Ulysses began to sing for me
And I began to sing for my father.
Daddy, Daddy,
My little man, I adore you.⁸

Again Durcan displays a faith in that which he criticises. He also recognises his own role in becoming a more understanding reader.

Durcan also follows Joyce in his instinct to liberate the female subject. The emancipation of Molly from the stereotypical *Penelope* role is as important to Bloom's gaining an understanding of himself as is the alternative unification of father and son. Bloom's introspection in *Ithaca* and the equanimity that he deems himself to feel with regard to the Molly and Boylan's affair is his triumphant moment in that he overcomes the dominant, possessive instinct typical of his peers to accept subject equality. Durcan's work is similar in its attempt not merely to renegotiate with the father-figure but also to rewrite the role of the female, would-be-mother figure, to discover a greater means for universal understanding. This is evident in autobiographical poems such as 'The Pieta's Over' from *The Berlin Wall Café* where the wife challenges her passive role by turning the romantic male hero away:

I will admit it is difficult for a man of forty
Who has spent all his life reclining in his wife's lap...
A man cannot be Messiah forever,
Messiahing about in his wife's lap...
Painful as it was for me, I put you down off my knee
And I showed you the door...⁹

'The Pieta's Over' frees the female subject from the traditional confines of the canvass, and of the dominant patriarchal social order, in ways similar to Eavan Boland's 'Trade for the Mimic Muse'¹⁰ or Paula Meehan's 'Not Your Muse'¹¹. Durcan's position as a male feminist offers a valuable perspective on the negative effects of inherent sexism on the male, as well as on the female, subject. His admitted misunderstanding of the female subject, I argue, is partly the result of the patriarchal mindset that he has inherited. That is not to say that Durcan may use society as his scapegoat, rather that he must recognise and challenge his own part in a prevailing culture of patriarchal self-righteousness.

Durcan's poetry repeatedly confronts the restrictions upon women in Irish society and promotes the importance of female input. 'Edenderry' from *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* identifies the emerging female voice as being able to offer an insight into conflicts that have become stuck in the residual mud of imperialism. Having situated Edenderry in a feminine sphere, by reference to "The Edenderry Women's Association", Durcan writes:

Edenderry is the source of the Boyne:
Spawning fields of Boyne Salmon –
The salmon of wisdom¹²

This alternative “source” offers wisdom and life as opposed to the historical narrow-mindedness and sectarianism synonymous with the Boyne region. Furthermore, by this return to a feminine source the contested appellations Derry / London-Derry, though not actually referred to, are eclipsed by “Eden” with its suggestion of paradise, of a time before “the fall” for which the male as opposed to the female now becomes culpable. This notion of an alternative source links Durcan’s feminism with his approach to tradition by suggestion of hidden residual potential.

Patrick Kavanagh’s influence upon Durcan in terms of finding a voice for his beliefs has been underlined, Mary Robinson’s influence is of similar importance in that she has actually provided a working model for those beliefs. *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* is in many ways a book about friendships, Mary Robinson and Patrick Kavanagh have sections dedicated to them while Francis Stuart; “Alone, important and wise”,¹³ Brian Friel; “the only man in Ireland who knows how to dance”,¹⁴ Marie Foley, Seamus Heaney and others get similar tributes in section eight. The collection celebrates those whose intellectual journeying has furthered the self-understanding of their culture. It is noteworthy that precisely the centre section of *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* is dedicated to Kavanagh where as the Mary Robinson poems close the collection; their importance is therefore formally noted. Durcan’s belief in Robinson’s capacity to break down the limiting structures of Irish culture and society is based upon her own visions for the presidency as outlined in her inauguration speech:

The Ireland that I will be representing is a new Ireland, open, tolerant, inclusive. Many of you who voted for me did so without sharing all my views. This, I believe, is a significant signal of change, however modest, that we have already passed the threshold to a new, pluralist Ireland.¹⁵

Durcan’s celebration of Robinson as a cultural role model is therefore based upon real, self-defined possibilities. The poems from the section dedicated to her are often set to parallel and to answer earlier poems of protest. Therefore ‘Making Love Outside Áras an Uachtaráin’ from *Sam’s Cross*,¹⁶ one of Durcan’s most telling critiques of post-independent Ireland’s church-controlled value system, becomes ‘Making Love Inside Áras An Uachtárain’:

Instead of making love *outside* Áras an Uachtaráin
We are making love *inside* Áras an Uachtaráin
Power is conditional on love. Acton!¹⁷

Equally upbeat in announcing Robinson’s inclusiveness is the collection’s closing poem, ‘The Mary Robinson Years’, which celebrates an Irish society that has developed the confidence to “come out” and declare an open sexual identity unto itself. The poem encounters a “Six foot tall, Mulatto, red hair down to her hips” on Copacabana beach who turns out to be a transvestite, relief aid worker from Co. Tipperary. The image is of

a new Ireland that celebrates pluralism as highlighted by the hybrid of the woman's racial as well as sexual identity. The poem is particularly optimistic:

She turned her smouldering spine on me
And strode off into the night of Rio,
The gigantic, ocean waves of the south Atlantic
Breaking in rainbows of fireworks around her.¹⁸

The poem's optimism is testimony to Durcan's faith in Robinson's achievement. It is worth noting however that this is already an historical poem, the Mary Robinson years a past moment. "The Functions of the President" acknowledges this:

And but then! – and but how! – we repaid her!
In '97 we staged a presidential election
In which we defiled the status of women.
In her stead we elected the Celtic Elk
Whose hooves are the hooves of a hairy economy.¹⁹

While the poem laments that Irish society has missed out on a great opportunity for change it nonetheless insists upon Durcan's unchallenged faith in Robinson's abilities.

The poetry also recognises a need to achieve a greater balance between masculine and feminine elements within the self to move towards the Bloom celebrated by Declan Kiberd as "the androgynous hero of the future".²⁰ Later poems such as 'Geronimo' from *Daddy, Daddy* look to renegotiate with the suppressed feminine in a bid to express a truer, more complete self that may advance towards reconciliation:

Although we were estranged lovers
For almost thirty years,
When Daddy knew he was going to die
He asked that we marry²¹

Durcan's writing practices an ongoing process of divination to recover suppressed elements within the subject matter. These suppressed elements, he implies, possess a potential for cultural change and advancement. This belief that the repressed elements of the self and society are the key to the "different self" or, in Joycean terms, that the potentials of the Bloom figure reside within the natural father-figure drives Durcan's aesthetic always towards a reconciliatory approach to tradition. Furthermore Durcan has underlined the *impossibility* of extricating oneself from one's own cultural tradition.

The point was made at the outset that Durcan's poetry may be seen as both inward search and outward journey, the focus so far has been on cultural introspection but the wider view is also extremely relevant, indeed both movements are essentially

linked. Titles such as *O Westport in the Light of Asia Minor*, *Going Home to Russia* and *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* highlight the centrality of the notion of a global or common human experience in Durcan's thought. Each of the titles essentially involve a movement, a journey, or a shift of focus from one site of interest to another. The positive nature of this shift is underlined by such welcoming links as "Light", "Home", and "Friends". Durcan's vision has much in common with that of Edward W. Said who advises in *Culture and Imperialism*:

We must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history.²²

It is vital that such "overlapping" experiences are carefully emphasised while writing different cultures in any same sphere. If not the *foreign* culture inevitably becomes the practical *other* to the home experience. It is such a danger, I argue, that Durcan works to avoid. 'Oh God, Oh Dublin', a poem that on one level laments Ireland's cultural insularity, links Irish and Ethiopian experience through the shared tragedy of famine:

Why did I marry an Irishwoman?
God knows in Dublin in 1967
Ethiopians were not thick on the ground.²³

The word play on "thick on the ground" is effective in that the link, crop shortage, is ironically suggested through the medium of a colloquial Irish phrase (this is not the first time that Durcan has employed such a device in his writing²⁴). Similarly the choice of Lilly as the name for "A woman, black" is an obvious contradiction. Furthermore, the poem's irony lies in the fact that while the narrator despairingly asks "Why do Irish marry Irish?" it may be overlooked that within the poem an Irishman actually *does* marry an Ethiopian; Lilly's husband. Although not actually stated in the poem one can infer that Lilly and her husband are both economic emigrants, or at least the descendants of economic emigrants, unified in the "New world" by a common historical experience. 'Oh God, Oh Dublin' is a poem laced with contradictions that undermine racial stereotyping.

The poem 'Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil' embodies a journey within itself. Much of the poem deals with the act of driving; moving from one place to the next. The landscapes encountered by Durcan in the poem are reflected by the changing formal landscape of the poem itself. The cluttered prose-like narrative and run-on lines of the first four sections reflect the populated social sphere wherein Durcan passes his Sunday afternoon. There is then a movement into a bleak Beckettian no-land in section five; "[a] Siberian, Saharan, Gobi drive back to Achill Island". The narrative content is

gradually whittled down to barer, more darkened imagery. The sparse lines of the final section reflect the West of Ireland landscape whereupon Durcan has “landed”. It is within this sphere that Durcan is relieved of the contradictions, competitions and confusions of the day and is finally enabled simply to “hear”. It is the surrounding landscape and the voice of nature itself that speaks:

I hear the tempest o’er the mountains and the seas.

I hear the silence of the spheres....

I hear sheep baa-baaing to sheep on the mountainside:

Genocide, genocide.

I hear raven’s diving the peaks:

Ethnic cleansing, ethnic cleansing.

I hear tied-up terriers barking:

Thoughtlessness, thoughtlessness...

Let me pray:

Greetings to our friends in Brazil²⁵.

The West of Ireland landscape upon which the closing section is set has been traditionally employed by Irish writers to embody the struggles of the Irish past. Nationalist writers have continually appropriated “Mother Ireland” with qualities useful to their requirements. Durcan however, by reference to the “German soldier” and “our friends in Brazil” insists upon, and emphasises, a global human experience as opposed to an insular Irish one. Rather therefore than permitting a society to become insular by result of a self-created notion of its own uniqueness, Durcan’s global vision unites through a shared history of conflict, suffering and, potentially, friendship.

Current Climates: (Post)Modern Ireland, the radical and the traditional

In his essay “In light of Things as They Are, Paul Durcan’s Ireland” Fintan O’Toole observes that “One of the peculiarities of Irish culture is that there has been no real division between the mainstream and the avant-garde”.²⁶ O’Toole later adds that Irish writers such as Durcan; “write out of a society that has become post-modern without ever becoming modern, a place in which the global village is still a one-horse town”.²⁷ Edna Longley’s description of contemporary Ireland is more tongue-in-cheek: “Holy Ireland battling it out with the forces of pluralism, secularisation and liberalisation”.²⁸ It could be argued that there is a resulting tension within Irish art, and specifically within Durcan’s poetry, between radical and traditional elements. Romanticism, historically speaking, can be defined as an attempt to cope with the fragmentation caused by the advance of modernity in society through the provision of unifying concepts of identity. Postmodernism, on the other hand, works to expose romantic concepts of unity as discriminative, detrimental fallacies and to celebrate fragmentation as a liberating aspect

of modernity. Durcan, one can argue, is caught between the two in his desire for both change and reunion. It is for this reason that the father / son relationship is a predominant aspect of his work and that *Daddy, Daddy* in particular strives to reconcile the radical and the traditional.²⁹ Although Durcan may be often considered a postmodern writer for reasons of style, in that he promotes such concepts as fragmentation, multiplicity and the dissolution of borders, he does not, I argue, necessarily comply with the anti-humanist ethic predominant in postmodernism.

Certain elements of contemporary Irish cultural debate, arguably for valid reasons such as the ongoing sectarian conflict in the North, have shown a desire to dispose of the baggage of a problematic past and of the romanticism associated with that past.³⁰ Derek Hand, in his lecture "Knowing Your Place, James Joyce's City in Contemporary Irish Writing", has given the example of two Irish writers, Sebastian Barry, *The Whereabouts of Encas McNulty*,³¹ and Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry*,³² whom he believed to be "consigning history to the dustbin" in their treatment of modern Irish history in an altogether negative light. Hand argued that rather than turning from the past it would be more helpful to develop a proper relationship with it, "not to be imprisoned by it but rather to discover how it can be used to make the move into the future".³³ I argue that Durcan's poetry, in seeking a greater understanding of his father, works to reconcile with his father's tradition along the lines that Hand has suggested as being helpful in terms of advancing with it into the future. To give an example of an opposite approach, Patrick McCabe's novel *The Dead School* is perhaps the darkest example of modern Irish social paralysis in its portrayal of the simultaneous emotional collapse of two men representing different generations of Irish society.³⁴ McCabe's book highlights the uncrossable divide between traditionalist schoolmaster Raphael Bell and the young, demoralised, trainee teacher Malachi Dudgeon. Each man comes to focus his frustrations upon the other with tragic consequences. McCabe's novel highlights the vulnerability of the individual within a society dominated by myths, traditional and contemporary. It highlights too the necessity for a society to (re)develop an understanding of itself and of the various parts integral to it. The tragedy of the book lies in the failure of two generations to reconcile. The conclusion would seem to be that only by overcoming this failure can a modern Irish society gain the self-confidence to progress.

Having noted Durcan's reconciliatory approach to tradition and having identified suppressed elements such as the feminine and the indigenous as potential links back to a unifying cultural source, it is necessary to consider what tradition actually implies in the Irish context being dealt with. In view of the Northern conflict "tradition" has become a highly charged word upon the island. In her inauguration speech Mary Robinson proclaimed that:

The best way that we can contribute to a new and integrated Europe is by having a confident sense of our Irishness.³⁵

This idea points a return to the article title, “Greetings to Brazil in Our Friends”, for the emphasis is once again upon self-awareness and self-discovery as a prerequisite to outward advancement. Robinson’s vision for a globally active modern Ireland of the future requires first and foremost an interaction with the traditional at home. Declan Kiberd’s evaluation of Robinson is telling:

She effected a brilliant reconciliation at the level of symbolic politics of the best native traditions with a thoroughly renovated modern consciousness.³⁶

Kiberd notes the dual importance of the native and the modern in Robinson’s outlook. I argue that this is also an essential aspect of Durcan’s aesthetic. The Mary Robinson poems from *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* help to define Durcan’s visions for Irish culture, ‘Functions of the President’ is typical:

Dream, we dream – we’ve got you in our bloodstream –
Of unique spirals, abstract, functional,
As Ireland was in 3500 BC
And became again in AD 1990.³⁷

Durcan’s return to 3500 BC puts his attraction to the potentials of the indigenous into historical perspective. By that period Gaelic culture had already established itself, to which artefacts such as the tomb at Newgrange, 3200 BC, bear testimony. Durcan, I argue, relates to a past that pre-dates imperialist moulding and he returns to such a point seeking to expose the man made politico-cultural borders that history has developed.

‘Before the Celtic Yoke’ from the second collection *Teresa’s Bar* marks out specifically Durcan’s reading of Irish history. Its non-binary emphasis is essential. Irishness is not defined here as non-English but the Anglo-Irish relationship is noted as being but an episode in a larger story, the emphasis is upon deimperialisation :

What was it like in Ireland before the Celtic yoke –
Before war insinuated its slime into the forests of the folk?

Elizabethan, Norman, Viking, Celt,
Conquistadors all:
Imperialists, racialists, from across the seas...
Thrusting their language down my virgin throat....

My vocabularies are boulders cast up on time’s beaches;
Masses of sea rolled stones reared up in mile-high ricks
Along the shores and curving coasts of all my island;
Verbs dripping fresh from geologic epochs;
Scorched, drenched, in metamorphosis, vulcanicity, ice-ages.³⁸

The indigenous voice or “virgin throat” is a voice that is at one with the natural landscape. Landscape and qualities of landscape merge with the subject to create a composite organic identity. The self achieves a kind of purity through its bond with nature. Language itself remains natural, as yet unaffected by imperial moulding. The voice speaks from the past with a message for the present:

So go now brother – cast off all cultural shrouds
And speak like me – like the mighty sun through the clouds.³⁹

Here Durcan extends the Irish historical experience beyond the disabling confines of the post-colonial trap. His vision is grander and has a greater unifying potential. Edna Longley describes this as “Perhaps [Durcan’s] most comprehensively therapeutic poem ... primal dream rather than primal scream”.⁴⁰ It could be argued however that one must be careful in supposing that there was a particular point in history where all existence was harmonious.

A more sceptical Derek Mahon in his poem ‘Lives’ has confronted Seamus Heaney for such notions, and for his impulse to dig:

First time out
I was a torc of gold
And wept tears of sun...

...It all seems
A little unreal now,
Now that I am

An anthropologist
With my own
Credit card, dictaphone.⁴¹

The poem undercuts possible romanticism by presenting instead a more shallow reality. Mahon’s sceptical realism is similar to much of Durcan’s work, I suggest that the difference between the two is Durcan’s desire to engage with what he sees as the healthy potentials of the past. It can be argued that Durcan at least attempts to offer a unifying language where as Mahon has, in works such as ‘The Last of the Fire-Kings’, chosen to opt out:

I want to be...

the man
Who drops at night
From a moving train

And strikes out over the fields
Where fireflies glow,
Not knowing a word of the language.

Either way, I am
Through with history⁴²

I have stressed throughout this dissertation that Durcan realises the impossibility of breaking out of history and instead seeks to reconcile with it. Similarly Seamus Heaney has defended his approach in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

Even if we have learned to be rightly and deeply fearful of elevating the cultural forms and conservatisms of any nation into normative and exclusivist systems, even if we have terrible proof that pride in the ethnic and religious heritage can quickly degrade into the fascistic, our vigilance on that score should not displace our love and trust in the good of the indigenous *per se*.⁴³

Heaney's emphasis on a "love and trust" of the indigenous is fundamental to Durcan's writing also. Durcan's poetry displays a belief in the unifying potential of art, he quotes Yeats in 'Portrait of Winston Churchill as Seamus Heaney, 13 April 1999'; "The end of art is peace".⁴⁴ The stylistically post-modern Durcan, as I have already noted, is grounded by a faith, a "love and trust" that is contrary to the post-modern (stressing its position after modernism and the ideological catastrophes of the 20th century) ethos of scepticism. If Durcan is a heretic who shatters established structures he does so because he is also a romantic visionary looking to reunite the fragments in a more harmonious situation.

Durcan has noted that "poetry is of its very essence part of an age-old oral and placename tradition (known in Irish as *dindsenchas*)".⁴⁵ That he links places with the language of those that inhabit them is significant. As a student at University College Cork Durcan quit English literature to devote himself to Geography which, he says, "reintroduced me to the reality of my native land".⁴⁶ At this time Durcan read Welsh geographer Estyn Evans' book *The Personality of Ireland* which, in his foreword to the 1992 edition, he considers to be one of the most important he has read. Durcan was inspired by Evans, he writes, because "he had an instinctive as well as an intellectual grasp of the affinity between Gaelic and African culture. He was an environmentalist who believed with all his heart that a landscape and its people cannot be understood except in relation to each other".⁴⁷ Similarly Durcan's poetry links his characters with their environment as qualities of local landscape are internalised to become personal characteristics. Durcan's vision for the global landscape, as read for example in the poem 'Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil', aims to realise landscape as a unifying rather than dividing factor in human history. His work underlines the man-made nature of political borders and of the imperialist mindsets that maintain them.

'The Mayo Accent', from *Daddy, Daddy*, questions the imperialisation of culture that occurred in Ireland and its effect upon the individual:

Have you ever tuned into the voice of a Mayoman?
In his mouth the English language is sphagnum moss
Under the bare braceleted feet of a pirate queen:
Syllables are blooms of tentativeness in bog cotton:
Words are bog oak sunk in understatement...

Why then, Daddy, did you shed
The pricey antlers of your Mayo accent
For the tree-felling voice of a harsh judiciary
Whose secret headquarters were in the Home Counties or
High Germany?⁴⁸

The poem is multi-layered in that it includes centuries of cultural change in a very short space. The present concerns of class-conscious Ireland are identified in the father's adoption of, we may assume, the 'Dublin 4' accent, and yet this seemingly small-scale personal change is linked with centuries of cultural upheaval by reference to the "tree-felling voice". The poem implicates the father in the process of cultural deforestation, the son in reaction vows to return to Mayo, "Your son has gone back to Mayo to sleep with the island woman".⁴⁹ It must be recognised however that the father remained the poet's link back to what the Mayo accent represents; Durcan is not a native Mayo man, his father was.

Durcan therefore seek to provide an alternative to the patriarchal structure that persists in modern Irish culture. He does so by looking back into the available Irish heritage to unearth unifying elements for modern society. During her presidential inauguration speech Mary Robinson referred to the mythological Fifth Province of Irish folklore, her message followed lines similar to what we find in Durcan's poetry:

The recent revival of the old concept of the Fifth Province expresses an emerging Ireland of tolerance and empathy... as everyone knows, there are only four geographical provinces on this island. So where is the fifth? The Fifth province is not anywhere here or there, north or south, east or west. It is a place within each of us – that place that is open to the other, that swinging door that allows us to venture out and others to venture in."⁵⁰

I propose that within Durcan's poetry landscapes such as Brazil, Russia, Westport and other symbolic settings, embody the potentials of the "Fifth Province" referred to by Robinson. Such symbolic locations provide a harbour for the "different self". Durcan's journey to Brazil is the discovery of a different culture that may help to progress the

development of his own, yet it is also journey into the self, a rediscovery of the self's repressed elements:

Born Paul Durcan
In '44
I began,
When I was eleven
In 56
Unearthing
The goldmine of my body,
To undergo
A change
Of name...

I write
Under the pen name
Paul Durcan
But my real name...
Is Tinkerly Luxemburgo.⁵¹

Durcan refers above to "Unearthing / The goldmine of [his] body" in search of a different self. Similarly he has dedicated himself to unearthing the goldmine of Irish culture and of an historical experience that may possibly be reinterpreted to provide for all the inhabitants of the island.

In a climate where Ireland, for the first time in modern history, is experiencing large-scale immigration rather than losing its people to more rewarding foreign economies, tolerant voices such as Durcan's have become all the more crucial. Media attention to the growing racial tension within the state has exposed a certain fear-factor with regard to identity within the Irish mindset. Durcan's stress upon the importance of both the traditional *and* the modern is the key to the development of a culture that may feel secure enough of its own inherited identity to enable it tolerate difference in others. Furthermore, the haunting presence of the Northern poems, and the tragic 'Omagh' in particular, in *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* underlines the need for given concepts of identity and tradition to be continuously interrogated and developed to promote tolerance and acceptance. The key to this acceptance, as read in Durcan's poetry, lies in rediscovery, rereading history and redefining relationships.

Notes

- 1 *The Selected Paul Durcan*, p. 15.
- 2 'The First and Last Command of the Commander-in-Chief, *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 236.

- 3 *Daddy, Daddy*, p. 140.
- 4 Lillian R. Furst *Romanticism in Perspective*. p. 90.
- 5 Fintan O'Toole, "In Light of Things as They Are", *Kilfenora Teaboy*, p. 33.
- 6 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 127.
- 7 *Greetings to Our Friends In Brazil*, p. 132.
- 8 *Daddy, Daddy*, p. 99.
- 9 *The Berlin Wall Café*, p. 54.
- 10 Eavan Boland, *Collected Poems*. p. 55.
- 11 Paula Meehan, *Pillow Talk*, p. 24.
- 12 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 235.
- 13 "The Stoning of Francis Stuart", *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p.155.
- 14 "Dancing with Brian Friel", *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 158.
- 15 *Great Irish Speeches of the Twentieth Century*, p. 369.
- 16 *The Selected Paul Durcan*, p. 85.
- 17 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 226.
- 18 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 256.
- 19 *Greetings to Our Friend in Brazil*, p. 252.
- 20 Declan Kiberd, *Men and Feminism in Modern Literature*. p. 171.
- 21 *Daddy, Daddy*, p. 147.
- 22 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 72.
- 23 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 49.
- 24 The play on "Blue Man" (*Fearr Ghorm*) in "Dun Chaoín" from *O Westport in the Light of Asia* is similar.
- 25 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 3.
- 26 *The Kilfenora Teaboy*, p. 26.
- 27 *The Kilfenora Teaboy*, p. 32.
- 28 "Poetic Forms and Social Malformations", *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, p. 176.
- 29 See 'Ulysses', *Daddy Daddy*, p. 99. for example.
- 30 Kevin Myers' attack on Patrick Pearse in "An Irishman's Diary", *Irish Times*. July 22, 2000 is a recent example
- 31 Sebastian Barry. *The Whereabouts of Encas McNulty*. New York: Viking, 1998.
- 32 Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry*. New York: Viking, 1999.
- 33 Derek Hand's lecture took place at The James Joyce Summer School, Newman House, Dublin, July 2000.
- 34 Patrick McCabe. *The Dead School*. London: Picador, 1995.
- 35 *Great Irish Speeches of the Twentieth Century*, p372.
- 36 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p579.
- 37 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p251.
- 38 *Teresa's Bar*, p. 45.
- 39 *Teresa's Bar*, p. 45.
- 40 "Poetic forms and social malformations", *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, p. 178.
- 41 Derek Mahon, *Collected Poems*, pp. 44-47.
- 42 Derek Mahon, *Collected Poems*, p. 64.
- 43 Seamus Heaney *Crediting Poetry*. p. 21.
- 44 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 162.
- 45 Paul Durcan, "The Drumshanbo Hustler, A Celebration of Van Morrison", *Magil Magazine* 1988.
- 46 Extract from Durcan's foreword to *The Personality of Ireland*, p. 8.
- 47 Fwd. *The Personality of Ireland*, p. 8.

- 48 *Daddy, Daddy*, p. 139.
49 *Daddy, Daddy*, p. 139.
50 *Great Irish Speeches of The Twentieth Century*, p. 369.
51 *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil*, p. 105.

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