ISSN1518-0581

# ABEI Journal

The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies

Number 11 November 2009

Universidade de São Paulo
**Reitora:** Profª. Drª. Suely Vilela
**Vice-Reitor:** Prof. Dr. Franco Maria Lajolo

Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas
**Diretora:** Profª. Sandra Margarida Nitrini



*ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* is indexed by Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA), Maryland, USA and Modern Language Association (MLA). It is published once a year, in November, by Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses. This issue is co-edited with the support of the Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo and the W. B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies. Subscriptions, submitted articles, books for review and editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editors.

Submitted articles should normally not exceed 6,000 words and should conform to the method of documentation of the MLA Style Sheet. They should be sent electronically and in one hard copy with an abstract at the beginning and biodata at its end in Word for Windows 6.0, until May of each year.

Subscription rates: single issue: US$ 20 inc. postage
Yearly subscriptions: personal: US$ 20 inc. postage
Institutional: US$ 35 inc postage (2 copies)

**Editorial Address**
ABEI (Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses)
Universidade de São Paulo – FFLCH/DLM
Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 403
05508-900 São Paulo – SP – Brasil
Tel. (0055-11) 3091-5041 or 3091-4296
Fax: (0055-11) 3032-2325
e-mail: lizarra@usp.br



Foi feito o depósito legal na Biblioteca Nacional (Lei n. 1.825, de 20.12.1907)
Impresso no Brasil / *Printed in Brazil*
Dezembro 2009

ISSN1518-0581

# ABEI Journal

The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies

EMBASSY OF IRELAND IN BRAZIL
*W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies*

FFLCH
USP

*ABEI Journal*, Number 11, November 2009. São Paulo, Brazil.

*ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies*
*Number 11, November 2009*



Serviço de Biblioteca e Documentação da FFLCH/USP

ABEI Journal: The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies / Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses. – n. 1 (1999) São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 1999-
Anual

ISSN 1518-0581

1. Literatura Irlandesa 2. Tradução 3. Irlanda (Aspectos culturais) I. Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses II. ABEI

CDD 820

Cover: *Dallas Sweetman* by Sebastian Barry produced by Paines Plough at the Canterbury Festival.
Lucinda and Mathew Lysaght.
Photogaph by Alistair Muir.



*Coordenação Editorial*
Mª. Helena G. Rodrigues – MTb n. 28.840

*Diagramação*
Selma M. Consoli Jacintho – MTb n. 28.839

*Revisão*
Laura P. Z. Izarra / Munira H. Mutran

# *Contents*

Introduction ..... 7

Interviewing Roxana Silbert and Tessa Walker from Paines Plough ..... 9
*Munira H. Mutran*

Interviewing Ciaran Carson ..... 19
*María Graciela Eliggi and María Graciela Adamoli*

**Theatre**

From Playboys to Disco Pigs: Irish Identities on a World Stage ..... 27
*Linda Gunn*

Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses*: Toward a new definition of Irish Theatre ..... 39
*Charlotte J. Headrick*

Rewriting the "caoineadh": Dermot Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* ..... 47
*Giovanna Tallone*

**Fiction**

The Aleph and the Labyrinth ..... 63
*Carlos Gamerro*

Translating James Joyce's *Dubliners*: Confronting Literalness and Revision ..... 73
*José Roberto O'Shea*

Irish Women's Migrant Writing: George Egerton's *The Wheel of God* (1898) ..... 77
*Tina O'Toole*

Childhoods in Irish writing ..... 89
*Noriko Ito*

**Culture and History**

Irish Society and Culture in the Twenty-First Century ..... 99
*Fintan O'Toole*

Representing Ireland in the Periodical Press During 1848 ..... 111
*Malcolm Ballin*

**Poetry**
Matrophobia or Matrocompliance?: Motherhood as 'Experience and Institution' in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan ..... 127
*Pilar Villar Argáiz*

Perceptions of Contemporary Ireland in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin ..... 147
*Luci Collin Lavalle*

Irish Neutrality: Louis MacNeice's Poetic Politics at the Outset of "The Emergency" ..... 165
*Matthew Schultz*

**The Irish in South America**
Unframing the Black. Diaries of Roger Casement ..... 183
*Angus Mitchell*

**Voices from Brazil**
Notes on Four Texts by Ana Cristina Cesar ..... 205
*Viviana Bosi*

**Reviews**
Irish Cinema: The Last Decade ..... 217
*Lance Pettitt*

Ondřej Pilnýs *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* ..... 221
*Mária Kurdi*

Chris Arthur's *Words of the Grey Wind* ..... 225
*Luci Collin Lavalle*

Manuela Palacios and Laura Logo's *Writing Bonds: Irish and Galician Contemporary Women Poets* and Manuela Palacios González and Helena González Fernández's *Palabras extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy* ..... 229
*Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff*

Ciaran Carson's *The Pen Friend* ..... 233
*Viviane Carvalho da Annunciação*

**Books Received** ..... 237

**Contributors** ..... 239

# *Introduction*

This issue is partly the result of a selection of contributions from a number of guests and participants at the Fourth Symposium of Irish Studies in South America held in Buenos Aires in last September, and from visitors to other international events that took place in the course of the year, such as the Second International Conference of the Brazilian Association of University Teachers of English (ABRAPUI), hosted at UNESP, in the city of São José do Rio Preto.

We begin with an interview with Roxana Silbert and Tessa Walker, respectively the Artistic Director and Literary Director of Paines Plough, the company that staged Sebastian Barry's *Dallas Sweetman* in Canterbury Cathedral in September 2008. This was the first play to be staged in the cathedral since another specially commissioned play, by John Masefield, battled with the notorious acoustics of the nave in 1928. (It is often forgotten that T. S. Eliot´s celebrated *Murder in the Cathedral*, staged seven years later, was not produced in the cathedral itself, but in the more intimate space of the Chapter House, off the cloisters.)

T. S. Eliot provides a link to our second interviewee, Belfast poet Ciaran Carson, who was shortlisted for the prestigious T. S. Eliot Poetry Prize in 2008 for his collection *Second Time Round*, thus consolidating his position as one of Northern Ireland's most highly respected contemporary writers.

Other poets featured in this issue are Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, and Louis MacNeice, in articles by Pilar Villar Argáiz, Luci Collin Lavalle, and Matthew Schultz, respectively. As well as these Irish poets we are also pleased to bring the work of the Brazilian poet Ana Cristina Cesar to the attention of our readers in an article penned by Viviana Bosi.

In addition to Sebastian Barry, other dramatists featured in the current issue of the journal are Enda Walsh, Dermot Bolger and Elizabeth Kuti, in contributions from Linda Gunn, Giovanna Tallone and Charlotte J. Headrick. We are also honoured to be able to reprint the text of the lecture given in São Paulo by the renowned *Irish Times* theatre critic, Fintan O'Toole.

Fiction and issues relating to its translation are covered by Carlos Gamerro and José Roberto O'Shea, who discuss Borges and Joyce, while Tina O'Toole examines writing by George Egerton, and Noriko Ito looks at the theme of childhood in Irish writing. Cultural Studies are covered too, in Malcolm Ballin's article on representations of Ireland in mid-nineteenth-century periodicals. In "Voices from South America" we are delighted to publish an article by the distinguished historian, Angus Mitchell, editor of *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*.

The establishment of the W. B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies at the University of São Paulo was the highlight of this year. Generously funded by the Irish Embassy in Brazil, it promises to stimulate yet further the rich cultural and academic exchange between Ireland and South America.


*São Paulo – Largo da Misericórdia, 1915.*

# *Interviewing Roxana Silbert and Tessa Walker*

Munira Hamud Mutran

Roxana Silbert and Tessa Walker visited the University of São Paulo while they were offering workshops on drama in the "Núcleo de Dramaturgia – Novos Autores" promoted by SESI/The British Council in São Paulo to whom we are deeply indebted for the opportunity to meet them. As Roxana Silbert directed Sebastian Barry's play *Dallas Sweetman* at Canterbury Cathedral for the Canterbury Festival in September 2008, the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies invited her for an interview on the production of Barry's play.

**MHM –** I have been told that Sebastian Barry was commissioned for the writing of the play called *The Miracle Man* or *The Man of Miracles* to be presented at Canterbury Cathedral. Why was the title changed for *Dallas Sweetman* and what does it mean?

**RS –** Dallas Sweetman is the main character of the play and he is the man of miracles. Dallas Sweetman is the servant in a household in Ireland and he looks after two twins; when he saved them his masters called him the man of miracles. And when he saves the twins he is a young man of fourteen years old and he likes to think of himself as a man of miracles. That's how he identifies himself, because he is a man that has very lowly origins and has aspirations to have a great position in the house. But it is interesting, a lot of the play is either biographically true, and the only piece of complete fiction in the play is Dallas Sweetman. But after we did the play we had several people asking where they could do the historical research on Dallas Sweetman.

**MHM –** Is Dallas an Irish name?

**RS –** It is, it is a quite common Irish name. I think that Sebastian wanted to change the title because the play is very much about the little man, and the play is about a very important moment in Ireland's history both culturally and religiously, and he wanted to look at this very important moment in Irish history from the point of view of the little man, a man of no importance, and in a way calling it the man of miracles it would suggest it is a very special man, and he wanted to give just the name because the name

means nothing to anybody, except the man who has it. We co-produced the play in Canterbury Cathedral, but the priests were very upset that he changed the title because they said: “well, Man of Miracles is a much better title for attracting audiences; no one will know who Dallas Sweetman is”.

**MHM –** Paines Plough Theatre Company commissioned *Dallas Sweetman* for the Canterbury Festival. As the Company “seeks the most exciting space to produce their work” and since the Canterbury Cathedral policy “seeks new works of specific relevance to East Kent”, does it follow that Barry would write something which would be suitable and would produce a play about conflicts between the Catholic religion and the Protestant?

**RS**: It was a very interesting commission because Canterbury Cathedral came to us. It is an extraordinary event because there’s never been a play in the nave of the Cathedral. So, just a little history on that. Canterbury Cathedral had in the thirties commissioned plays. They had commissioned T.S. Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*, but it was not done *in* the Cathedral, because the people were against producing a play inside the Cathedral. So this was the first time that a play was commissioned specifically for the nave, produced in the nave. Sebastian Barry is a man who does not need to accept commissions. The money is very poor for commissions. If you are a young writer you need the money to support yourself. If you are a man of Sebastian’s stature who has now written a bunch of novels and plays, you don’t need to accept a commission. You just write a play and then you decide who you want to produce it. So, when I approached Sebastian, I didn’t know him, I had never met him, I loved his work, and I thought that this enormous space in the Canterbury Cathedral needed a rhetorical language to fit it, and there are very few British playwrights that can do that. And interestingly, and we put together the list, most of the playwrights were Irish, because the Irish poetry is still existent in a way that in English theatre is not so prevalent. So I contacted Sebastian with really a cold phone call, I’d never met him, he didn’t know me, and I said: “This is what we’ve been offered; this is why I’m approaching you”. And it so happened that he had a play that he wanted to write, which was a story of twins. And I think that the way this play came about is a very interesting example for the way playwrights think. Because he had the play he wanted to write, he has twins himself, and he comes from a family who has a history of having twins. And the story of twins in this play is true; and that’s the play he wanted to write, and he wanted to write it in this period [1600s]. Then, how that became relevant to Canterbury Cathedral was a much, much different journey for a very long time. So the first play was the story of Thomas Beckett in court. So when I first talked to him, he wanted to write about twins, and when the play arrived on my desk it was about Thomas Beckett. And it is quite dreadful actually. Quite, quite dreadful – that was a surprise. And he said, “It is terrible, isn’t it?”. And I, “Yes, it is quite terrible”. And he then went on to write another play. What the story became, in a way the story of Thomas Beckett became the heart of the play. It was a very odd process. We

didn't feel they fitted together. We spent all of the time in the Cathedral. Another thing that is fascinating about Sebastian is that he loves architecture. And he has a rectory, Sebastian's own rectory, which he pretty much built himself. So he is very interested in stones, he is interested physically how buildings are put together, so he was fascinated by Canterbury. And a combination of all those things became this play: he takes these very random elements and finds a way of really putting them together.

**MHM –** Sebastian Barry makes parallels not only between Dallas Sweetman and Thomas Beckett, but also with Mountifort; they both open their arms to wait for death. So, was this thought about later in the process to make it connected with the story of Beckett, which had been told before?

**RS –** I think that when he wrote the first draft, which was about Beckett, he was trying to find what the story of Dallas was. I think it wasn't easy to find a way into it. It is not something that he had thought and tried to write. It was about how to bring these stories together and make sense, emotionally, politically, religiously.

**MHM –** In *Dallas Sweetman* you have Lucius and all the other people who existed in history. Is this revisiting the past a strong tendency in contemporary drama?

**RS –** I would say untypical. There are very, very few plays that are set outside the contemporary period. We have very few playwrights who write stories like Sebastian's; he is an exception. I think he chose the period because the story of the twins actually happened in the eighteenth century and he set it in the 1600s, because it was the moment in which the Irish and English Church split. What was very interesting about Canterbury is that Canterbury is an Anglican Church, it's not Protestant. The Anglicans in England believe themselves to be part of the Catholic religion. The Catholics in Ireland hate the Anglicans because they believe the Anglicans betrayed Catholicism. But also because what happens in England today is the split between Muslim and Christian cultures, and I think Sebastian wanted to write about that. But if you try to remember, there are a lot of plays that look at this issue because it affects every single moment of our being in Europe at the moment. Sebastian didn't want to write about the political problem, he wanted to write about the spiritual. So it is a play that also deals with a very specific point at which England split from Ireland.

**MHM** – How does Sebastian Barry solve the problem of language when writing about past ages?

**RS** – I think that you can't write the language as it is now, I mean, for example, no one knows what Gaelic sounded like in the seventeenth century, no one knows. So this is an invented language, it is neither actual modern Irish or Irish, nor is it ancient. But in order to write the way people speak you have to get into the way people think, and then

the structures of thinking were different than they all know; and then, the way people think has to be reflected in a language and that's I think why it is very difficult to write historical plays, because it's finding the right language, because you can't write the language of today, because it reflects a different culture, but simply mimic a language of what was spoken then.

**MHM –** As director of *Dallas Sweetman*, would you tell us what kind of problems the transposition from the text to the stage offered? Did Sebastian take part in the process and what kind of changes were done?

**RS –** Big changes were done during the writing of the play. There was a lot of sitting around the table and reading the play. What you have in this play basically is traditional Irish storytelling, and the question is how do you make it dramatically, how do you make it interesting to the audience and why do you put it on stage and not simply read it or hear it on the radio. So, what I had to find out was the relationship of Dallas to the audience, why was Dallas speaking to the audience, what was he telling them, why did he want to tell the audience these things, what did he mean to the audience, what did he want on the stage.

**MHM –** Does the audience assume the role of the judges mentioned so many times?

**RS –** Yes, for that took a long time to achieve and to arrive at.

**MHM –** Because it is a trial, isn't it? Mrs. Reddan has one point of view and Dallas lies until he tells the whole story.

**RS –** We had to do a lot of work on what was true and not true, and we also had to create. I wanted it to feel fluid so that there was always action while we were speaking, but I wasn't simply repeating what he was saying without adding another layer to what he had spoken other than simply portray what was being said. And we worked with music for almost two hours in the play, so we had a special school composed it, that was constant in the play. So we were working on three levels, which is a very dense and poetic test, musical score, and physical score in a way. It is about how language interacts on stage with space, because we were rehearsing in a small space. Canterbury Cathedral is huge, it's enormous, and there's history in every stone. Until we were in the rehearsal we hadn't realized that we needed to create the intimacy of the storytelling, but without losing the sense of epic in the story. And the Cathedral *was* epic in those stones, it was absolutely beautiful. And it was a very extraordinary rehearsal because Canterbury Cathedral is a tour centre, with people coming in all the time, and they couldn't close the Cathedral for us to rehearse because they would lose too much money. So we had to rehearse in the Cathedral with lots of people coming in and out. But you can't hear anything because the acoustics is so bad, and I was really worried about that; actually it

was brilliant because I understood it because I couldn't hear it. And another thing that was extraordinary was that on the hour, every hour, they had a prayer. So whatever we were doing ... we had to stop and we had to wait for the prayer. And it was the best rehearsal process I have ever been through because you never could get tense, you could never get angry or annoyed because you just stopped, and we sat together in silence for five minutes every hour. I was introduced to every single priest, so the relationship that you get at their company was quite extraordinary. You know, to just sit for five minutes every hour made that process really spiritual and it was an amazing thing. But it was very intimidating; I mean, when we were rehearsing in Canterbury we rehearsed in a space where the Cathedral was truly reproduced. And you have this extraordinary burden of history, and Sebastian was terrified to be under that...

**Question from the audience** – I have a question about the setting. Did you have to put anything extra? After all you were at Canterbury Cathedral. But the stage directions are very few in the play, so you cannot exactly figure out how the setting was devised.

**RS –** We created the stage area, I worked with a very brilliant designer, Robert Innes Hopkins, who is a theatre designer, wonderful, he is an artist, a sculptor, and he wanted to put into the space a very bold, really lucky old piece of sculpture. And what we had, a very pragmatic problem which was the necessity to lift the stage so that you could see it. Because the Cathedral is very high we wanted to create something that wasn't trying to compete with the height, but which just worked at a horizontal dynamic. So it was high enough and when you looked at it, it took your eye up, but that you were still eyelevel with the characters. And it was an enormous, a very difficult, a very beautiful thing. But what it did was create perspective because it wasn't an enormous stage, it was probably half size of this room. If you were at the top of it you were very high, yet if you were centered you were very close to the audience. Because the play moves, there's a lot of journey. We needed a space where we could create journey, so we wanted a space that was reminiscent of the Irish landscape, which was very important; but also a space that in some ways reflected the main character's state of mind. And the other thing that was very challenging was the lighting, because the lighting didn't just light the stage; it lit the architecture of the Cathedral. So we had the stage, and then a long long way off there is a pulpit like a painting. When Sebastian wrote the play he took a lot of interest in the lighting; he was very influenced by that shade of light on the stage. And there were times when the lighting was very focused on Dallas, and on the entire architecture. And the Cathedral was like another character in the play.

**Q** – Are the conflicts of 1600s still significant in Ireland?

**RS –** I think Sebastian feels very strongly about Ireland as a culture that thinks itself as victim. Ireland, the way it manages or identifies itself as a victim of the English and that

suits Ireland to forget that its conflicts were internal, and that a lot of the problems that Ireland created, it created for itself; they were not created by others. And in Ireland, that is still an extremely provocative thing to say; and this is the reason why it was going on in England – it could not be heard in Ireland. So the time to do this play is not easy because that's still very provocative. And also because the moment at which Ireland and England split, which is also a very important moment in English history, is the start of modern England, the way we organize ourselves politically is directly linked to this particular period of time. And given the mess we are currently in, it's an attempt to understand something of where we came from, in order to understand how we got to where we are today. Dallas is fundamentally mad, and he was a mad man, but he is a man who is over opinionated. He thinks of himself a greater man than he is, and he is a man who is unable to face what he has done. And I think that that is emotionally true of many individuals, and I think that is as current as anything. And I think it's also true for both English and Irish cultures, they can't face what they have done, and so they live in a world, in a limbo, because they can't move forward. And what is very beautiful about Sebastian's work is his absolute belief in love.

**TW**: Yes, this is why *The Pride of Parnell Street* is that as well, it's a love content in his work, very very small gestures, but those gestures can somehow begin to heal. And I think that in terms of where we are in our political history at the moment, we are to emphasize what has happened to us since 2001 and how that's affected Europe. Reconciliation or understanding doesn't occur. I think it's easy to see something in the historical context and try to keep it there. Well, *Dallas Sweetman* feels very relevant, very contemporary. Its language resonates the idea of nations being divided, of political confusion, and fear. I think that if things are doing incredibly and increasingly well, Ireland is still a country with poverty. I think one of the issues is to try to be completely contemporary, completely in the moment, because moments change. You write something which is better understood today; but things change very quickly, time moves on, time changes.

**Q –** I'm myself directing one of Friel's plays, *The Faith Healer*, which is basically text. And for over a month I've been facing the idea of how to approach the play physically. How does the Paines Plough Theatre Company deal with the physical training of the actors?

**RS –** We don't have a group to practice. It's very rare because it's too expensive.

**TW –** I have another job for Shakespeare Company where to have actors committed to training is incredibly difficult. Most theatre companies have the production, literary and directing teams, and then the actors come for specific plays, and we have four weeks of rehearsal. So those actors are working with a host of companies across the country, a lot of different directors, and lots of them are working on television as well.

And often, the best ones make their money on television, and they try to do a play or two a year. So we don't have that sense of group that you have here, that you work with a group over a long period of time. Some companies have a physical approach – European companies consider themselves to be physical theatre. We don't start from physical to bring physicality to text. We start really from the text.

**RS –** We look for texts that help with physical approach. So this is the way we work, and we're looking for writers that work with us in this way. Plus, we work with choreographers. And one of the things about having a culturally commissioned play is that if you, for example, have these forty-four actors, the plays have to be written for the actors. We don't do that. We say, write what you want to write and we will find the right actors for your play. If it's a play, as for example, *Dallas Sweetman*, which requires Irish actors , because of language, this physicality is a different way of speaking to different relationships. The Irish acting style is different. If the setting is in London, very urban, we would find actors that fit that.

**TW –** We talked about *The Faith Healer* whose language is so extraordinary and the stories are about relationships, and if that relationship is right and if you can physicalise that character we wouldn't do anything else. I mean, I saw that play and it was three people standing on the stage and talking.

**Q –** You just mentioned that your work focuses on new works. Besides Sebastian Barry what other Irish contemporary playwrights would you consider ?

**RS –** Enda Walsh has a history with Paines Plough, Dennis Kelly represents the young generation. Fifteen years ago when I started directing, one of the first plays I directed was *Translations* by Brian Friel, and I saw it in London.

**MHM –** Did you produce any of Enda Walsh's plays?

**RS –** Yes, *The Small Things*, a short version.

**MHM –** Was it well received?

**RS –** Yes. It was well received, but it didn't do well with audiences. No, it did very badly with audiences. Because it is a very delicate piece, it's very dense, *very dense*, it requires a level of concentration, something from the audience in terms of its difficulty. Another playwright we would like to work with is Mark O'Rowe.

**MHM –** Have you produced any of Conor McPherson's plays?

**RS –** No, no, no, too shy. [laughters]. The interesting thing about Conor McPherson is he does not get his works produced in Ireland. *The Seafarer* had to be produced at the

National before it went to the Abbey. And also his work is heavily criticized but we love him. And I think that Tom Murphy is a great, great, great playwright.

**Q –** How is theatre produced in Britain? Do you have sponsors or government support?

**RS –** There's a lot of movement between the commercial and the subsidised sectors. For example, *The Weir* started in a theatre that had seats for a hundred people, and it did very, very well. And then we moved to a theatre that had seats for three hundred people, and it did very, very well. And then we went to the West End, which is commercial. And that's most of our usual journey. You know, you can start in the subsidised sector and move into the commercial sector. The commercial sector would never take the risk even on a very well known Conor McPherson's play with four men sitting in a pub. They would never take that risk; they would pick something else. So there's quite a lot of fluidity. For example, we did a project last year with a commercial producer, just as a favour, just as a gift. There's a lot of research about who goes to see you next because it is very interesting to realize that you have people who like opera, you have people who like ballet, you've got people who like Shakespeare, and then you have people who like new things. But the people who go to see new plays are people of a certain type.

**TW –** I think that we work with small companies. It's a phenomenal work that resonates in some ways in the contemporary world. We are interested in stories that are related to the contemporary world. But it doesn't mean they have to be set now, in a theatre in the centre of London today.

**Q –** Here in Brazil my company undertakes quite a long theoretical work when approaching a new play. For example, when we produced one of George Bernard Shaw's plays we spent almost a year reading all Shaw's works. Would you tell us how long did it take to prepare Sebastian Barry's play to understand the Irish context?

**RS –** I think there's a huge difference in Brazil, because the relationship between people who are practicing and people who are academics is very strong. There's a lot of people who are practicing, writers, directors that are ultimately academics. In Britain there's this gap. We get a lot of new audiences for new work because we have a continuous tradition of playwriting from the fifteenth century, sixteenth century; we have a sense of development or the reaction against tradition. It's organic, we're not trying to re-start a theatrical culture. So people don't think about it, because it's as if you are born and become a teenager and you react against your parents or you become not your parents, but if your parents have gone missing you miss them. There's been no break in our drama tradition for five hundred years. And I think that makes a huge difference. And also the tradition is British; it's not imported. You here have Portuguese drama, or Spanish drama, or French drama, we have British drama. And it's a very different culture and history, and we have produced very different work

**TW –** We know it almost instinctively, culturally, not just because we read lots of plays. When we read plays we can understand instinctively where they fit in, we can understand them because it is in the DNA of our culture. In relation to Sebastian Barry's play we did a lot of research reading different works by the Irish playwright.

**Q –** Do you use anything apart from reading the author's work?

**RS:** Yes, I do a lot of research so … I did all the historical research, I did all the religious research, I researched the cathedral, the cathedral's history and its architecture; I spent a lot of time in the cathedral, I spent a lot of time on the art and on the music of that period. I spent a lot of time watching movies of Thomas Beckett. I did all of that. The difference between the way that I researched and the way that you did your research is in terms of time. I had four weeks; we never have more time than that. The reason why I did all that research on my own is to select exactly what I think actors need. You know, I find images … I find the music for rehearsal with the actors. Although I'd love to spend that much time researching and I think that the actors would love that too, that would not be possible for us because I have to work very quickly. When we do new work, we insist on four-weeks rehearsals; so imagine, if we have a two-hour play, you get each scene twice. It's extraordinary that British actors know how to work together and absorb information very, very quickly. However, the audience has to understand the play in the moment that it's spoken: You don't need to know anymore because there would be nothing worse than petrifying the imagination and inspiration when you are producing a play.

*Photographs by Alistair Muir*

# *Interviewing Ciaran Carson*

María Graciela Eliggi
and María Graciela Adamoli

## Introduction

Ciaran Carson (1948 -) is Professor of Poetry at Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is the author of several collections of poems, including *First Language*, which won the 1993 T. S. Eliot Prize. He has written prose books, a book about Irish traditional music, a memoir for Belfast and also a novel, *Shamrock Tea*, longlisted in 2001 for the Booker Prize. His translation of Dante's *Inferno* (2002) was awarded the Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize. In 2005, he published *The Midnight Court*, a translation of the classic Irish text "Cúirt an Mheaán Oíche" by Brian Merriman and in 2007 he translated "The Táin" from the old Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúalinghe*, with great success.

During the summer of 2008 Prof. Ciaran Carson agreed to be interviewed in his office at Queen's University, Belfast, by María Graciela Adamoli and María Graciela Eliggi from the National University of La Pampa, Argentina who were interested in his work as poet as well as translator.

**Interviewers:** Prof. Carson, what would you say is the state of the art in Irish literature? Do you consider that there are different trends?

**Ciaran Carson:** I suppose all art, or all literature, must respond in some way, however obliquely, to whatever is happening in the larger world. In my own case, my first book, *The New Estate*, responded in part to poetry in Early Irish; but there were also some reflections on the troubled state of Northern Ireland. Having said that, the poems were somewhat formally conservative. That book appeared in 1976, and I didn't write much, for various reasons, for some ten years. My next book after that, *The Irish for No* (1987), was written in a very different style, with very long lines reflecting speech and storytelling rhythms. I think I wanted to get something of the constant disintegration and reintegration of the city of Belfast into the work. A sense of urgency. At the moment, though there is relative peace, there are many unresolved issues out there. The tension hasn't gone away.

**Interviewers**: In the fields of fiction, for example, at the end of the twentieth century there was a group of writers who believed that fiction was exhausted. In the field of poetry, do you think that that same feeling of exhaustion, that everything has been said applies to Irish poetry?

**CC:** I don't think fiction is ever exhausted. Our lives are stories. Interestingly, some of the work I was doing in the 1980s and 1990s was seen as "experimental"; but I was conscious throughout of how it depended on traditional storytelling techniques. The old myths and the old stories are still relevant, and there is little new under the sun. At the back of any writer's work is the knowledge of what has been done in the past. Writing comes out of reading and listening to others, whether in the present or in the past.

**I:** How would you define your poetry? Have you gone through different stages along your creative life? I have in mind, for example, Yeats, whose critics have identified three different stages in his writings.

**CC:** I've already mentioned the move from a relatively conservative style of writing in *The New Estate* to a looser form of writing in subsequent books. That work was seen by many as being concerned with the conflict in Northern Ireland – issues of authority, control, violence. A while back it occurred to me that I might try something different. I was tired of all that stuff about violence, maybe. I'd never written a straightforward love poem, so I thought I'd try that; but when I did, it came out somehow false, or untrue, a kind of parody of how love poetry is thought of. So I tried it again, with a series of poems in which the speakers, man and woman, were not "me", but personae. Essentially, I made up a story about a love affair, and through that fiction I found myself able to say things about love that I found impossible to say in "my own voice", whatever that might be. The book which resulted is called *For All We Know*, the implication in the title being that we really don't know that much, whether about ourselves or the world in which we live. Yet we keep on going by making up stories about ourselves. We find things out by entering the language of story and submitting to its procedures. By looking at and listening to words.

**I:** How do you go about that search for words?

**CC:**I read a lot, for one thing. Promiscuous reading, anything from poetry to science fiction to popular science books to graphic novels, to books about language. I read the signs on the street.

**I:** What are your sources of inspiration?

**CC:**Apart from the reading, I look to art and music and sport, any discipline which tries to deal with our place in the world and how we manage it. The writing comes obliquely

out of that. It is a kind of inspiration. But when the writing is being done, it's difficult to say where it comes from. For writing to be alive, you must feel that it's coming from or going into the unknown. If you begin a poem by knowing what you're going to say, it is very rarely a good poem, because there has been no adventure into the unknown. You learn things you never knew by the act of writing.

**I:** So, would you say that your writing is experimental all the time?

**CC:**It's a search all the time, certainly. We assume we know the world, that we know what we're going to say about it, or how we feel about it; but once you begin to put it into writing, you find that actually your grasp of what was in your mind is weak and tentative. Much of our ideas about anything are hazy and ill-formed. Writing is a search for accuracy. There are so many ways of saying things; usually the proper way is one you had never considered until then.

**I:** Are you methodical in your writing?

**CC:**That depends. At the beginning of any book it's difficult to know how to proceed; but once I get into it, I usually work at it more or less daily, in my own room in my own house. I need that space. The method doesn't so much arise from my ordering the words, but their ordering me. They dictate the method of the book.

**I:** Do you feel sad sometimes for not being fully inspired?

**CC:**Yes, but what can you do about it, except wait, or search, or hope?

**I:** In connection with what you have just said, writers of fiction have the pressure of having to write sometimes for the editor who urges them with a deadline. Have you ever experienced that sort of pressure?

**Ciaran Carson:** Well, before the editor ever gets on to me, I put pressure on myself. So generally it's not a problem.

**I:** While reading and re-reading your own poems, do you feel tempted to change them after a certain time?

**CC:**Once the book is printed, I never change anything.

**I:** So, you never change what you have written…?
**Ciaran Carson:** There are times when I'm tempted to, when I look back at something I wrote years ago, and see that it could have been said better. But for better or for worse,

the person who wrote those words is what he was then. And sometimes I think he's not so bad. We are always learning. If we were to revise everything in light of the knowledge we have now, it would be somehow untrue to the original inspiration.

**I:** In reference to religion and myth in Ireland as subject matter. Would you say that they still continue to be important topics for writers?

**CC:**Those topics are always there, whether we like it or not. And they tend to emerge without our even being aware of them. They're part of the deep background. A subconscious river.

**I:** You have done a huge work in the field of translation. Which were your difficulties when translating from Irish to English? Has your Irish upbringing – the fact that you were brought up in an Irish environment – been of any help at the moment of carrying out your project?

**CC:**I'm always aware that when you say a thing in one language, it's not the same as saying it in another. Each has different expressions, nuances, twists of thought. Each has its own arena in which that language operates. Writing depends on how a thing is said, so being bilingual helps one to understand different modes of expression.

**I:** How critical are you about the job of other translators?

**CC:**Some years ago I did a translation of Dante's *Inferno*, and before I embarked on it I got hold of as many English translations as I could, from the eighteenth century up to the present day. One thing I thought they all lacked was a sense of the original music. And many of them translated into a single, elevated register, whereas Dante is always moving between registers, shifting from formal to demotic. So I wanted to see if I could do something better with regard to music and register.

**I:** Did you go through moments of "aporia", of not knowing how to decide how to say something in translation …?

**CC:**The particular difficulty with *La Divina Commedia*, for someone translating into English, is that it's written in *terza rima*, which is difficult in English. I walked a lot, trying to get the third rhyme, often abandoning the two good rhymes I already had for the sake of the third. Dante walked a lot. His poem was written on the road.

**I:** …so you feel very much identified with Dante?

**CC:**As I understand it, his Florence was not so far removed from Belfast in its entanglements of politics and language.

**I:** If you were to decide between rhyme or meaning at the moment of translating, which one would you choose?

**CC:**The rhyme-scheme, the music, as I've already suggested, is as much part of its "meaning" as the ideas expressed in the poem. Of course one is inevitably constrained by rhyme. But so was Dante. Even though rhyming is easier in Italian than in English, there are places where you can see how Dante has bent his thought to the rhyme; that he ends up saying something otherwise than what he initially had in mind. The rhyme drives the poem as much as the sentiments or the ideas. Translating into English, one can only respond by reading the original as well as one can, trying to understand it in one's own words. And translating anything is a good way of understanding it.

**I:**What is your advice for your students?

**CC:** Read and read and read. Most student writers think that writing is about expressing themselves. They believe that they should say how they feel without appreciating the fact that throughout history our feelings have been much the same. Other writers have expressed it better, and we should always attend to those examples of style, because without examining the styles of others we can have no style of our own.

# Theatre

# *From Playboys to Disco Pigs: Irish Identities on a World Stage*

Linda Gunn

**Abstract**: *This article examines the subject of Irish identity in contemporary Irish theatre productions, focusing a selection of plays showcased to a world audience through receiving their UK premieres at the Traverse Theatre Edinburgh during Edinburgh Fringe Festivals over the last ten years. It considers several issues around the theme of whether Irish identity is a concern in contemporary Irish theatre and, if so, why and in what ways has it been used. This is carried out by examining productions which address Irish identity directly, productions which address it indirectly and some which, apparently, do not appear to be concerned with it at all, using the latter category to discuss the question of influenced readings and interpretations.*

In May of 2009 I delivered a paper at the VIII International Conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (AEDEI) in Alcalá de Henares near Madrid, the theme of which was "From Local Ireland to Global Ireland: the Reality Beyond".[1] I was extremely pleased when the organizers told me that my abstract had been accepted, if a little daunted at the prospect of presenting a paper on Irish Studies to a gathering of experts in that area of study; the focus of my work, as a researcher in Edinburgh, has been nationalism and identity, but Scottish rather than Irish. However a somewhat itinerant career prior to becoming "an academic" studying culture and identity in theory had brought me into fairly close contact with one area of contemporary Irish culture and its producers in practice: theatre.

*Dublin by Lamplight*,
Corn Exchange.
Photographer: Paul McCarthy

Working my way through various theatre jobs while a design student, little did I know that I was actually carrying out fieldwork for the future. Had I gone into the theatre with this in mind, rather than working as a set-designer, I suspect I would only have found what I had gone looking for and

missed much more valuable data. To put the following article on contemporary Irish theatre even more into context then, the later objective observer was inspired by the completely and utterly subjective or even unconscious earlier participant. The primary data for this study therefore comes from the field study referred to earlier, which began in 1992, but the focus here is on a ten year period up until 2008.

For many years I have made a point of going to see most, if not all, of the Irish theatre productions that come over to the Traverse theatre during the Edinburgh Festival period (August to early September) to have their UK premieres and I have rarely been disappointed, but, since my professional subject area is nationalism, national identity and the arts, I have recently been attempting to analyse what it was about Irish work that made it stand out for me, other regular Traverse Festival visitors, and theatre professionals including the Artistic Director of the Traverse over the period studied, Philip Howard: "Was there anything in the water over there that made Irish theatre different?" After all, it has been said of the festival on several occasions that there are so many Irish productions on the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and occasionally also on the Edinburgh International Festival programme, that "the Irish could almost have a festival of their own".[2] Many Irish productions win one or several critics' awards. For example, Enda Walsh's *The Walworth Farce* won one of the most coveted press awards, a *Scotsman Fringe First*, in the first week of its run and in 2009 both Druid and Abbey Theatre companies received these "prestigious" awards for their productions of new plays by Mark O'Rowe and Walsh.[3] In terms of the Traverse theatre – the "world stage" of this article's title – on a number of occasions it has appeared as though the Irish had "taken over Edinburgh's principal Fringe venue".[4]

The Traverse theatre, during the Edinburgh Festival period, is argued to be representative of the international theatre audience for several reasons. The Traverse theatre, Scotland's only theatre dedicated specifically to new writing, has an international reputation which it has gained through collaborative work and exchanges with artists from numerous other countries, touring its own productions to places from the United States, to Kosovo, to Syria. The Edinburgh International and Fringe Festivals combined make the *Edinburgh Festival* one of the biggest arts and theatre festivals in the world. Thousands of people flock to Edinburgh every year for this month long event, the importance of which was recognized by *Culture Ireland*, an Irish State Agency set-up in 2005 in order to promote "the best of Ireland's arts and culture internationally" and to assist in the development of the country's "international cultural relations".[5] For several years *Culture Ireland* was able to give financial support to eligible Irish companies which hoped to take productions to the Edinburgh Festival which the organization recognized as an "important arts market" noting that following their performances at Edinburgh, many companies received invitations to present their work at key international festivals. During the Edinburgh Festival the Traverse theatre is viewed as an essential destination not just for ordinary theatre audiences, but for critics, theatre professionals, and for programmers of other theatres and arts festivals around the world.

## Identity or representations?

To say that we are looking at or for something called Irish identity is, rather obviously, a misnomer on several counts: there is no one essential or all encompassing Irish, Brazilian, Spanish or any other national identity and few undiluted *cultural* identities. Each nation or culture, obviously, comprises thousands of individuals bringing different variations into the mix before we even take into account personal histories and experiences. As with any culture, Irish beliefs about Irish identity have been influenced by events, histories, visual images and the shifting interpretations of these over time, that have been made available and broadcast over centuries and this applies to stereotype images too. What we and some of the plays used here are actually looking at then, are representations.

Whether Irish or any other cultural identity, we have to consider whose representations of Irish identity we are actually talking about: in this case, representations produced by the Irish, or by *outsiders* or non-Irish. These cannot genuinely be separated as each has had some level of influence on the other as none of us is immune to received images, regardless which side was responsible for them in the first place. Ideas, beliefs and representations of Irish identity have been influenced by the Irish, by Irish exiles (the diaspora being a huge and influential element) and by those with whom the country has shared relationships, whether voluntarily or imposed, for example, with the English then British. Such events and histories contribute to the narratives passed among a people then made available to future generations and, moreover negative influences, such as the latter (diaspora and colonization) are also and perhaps particularly important in terms of stimulating voices within and about a culture, resisting disempowering representations or subverting "inferiorist"[6] and *stereotypes*. None of these many different influences, real or myth, personal or shared with an "imagined community"[7], are miraculously suspended by playwrights, directors, actors, or audience members (even those of us who harbour the conceit that we are objective as academics) and theatre is a mix of the planned and the "unplannable for". Each individual in a theatre audience is a participant in a unique event: each performance is unique; the experience of the same audience member watching the same production is, as for the actors on stage, different from one performance to the next. This is not merely due to the more intangible or unquantifiable elements in operation when groups of unknown individuals come together; modern theatre develops through performance and in response to audience.

To look at or *for* (discussed later) national identity in theatre is therefore a slippery business, but this study acknowledges both the "fuzziness" of national identity as a subject and the non-static and unfixable nature of theatre. However blurred the line between local beliefs about national identity, national stereotypes and received ideas generated, arguably, by outsiders, distinctions can be and are frequently made. In an attempt to manage this study and the data used in it I have imposed a crude framework grouping a number of Irish theatre productions under the three headings: "Outsider

stereotypes and national myths", "Up close and universal", and "Beyond national identity". The selection of plays represented includes several written by the same playwright, Enda Walsh reflecting the number of Walsh's plays which appeared at the Traverse over the period examined, a number disproportionate to that of plays by any other Irish playwright. Testimony as to why this should be the case may perhaps be found in the many references to, if not comparisons that have been made between his work and that of Beckett, Pinter and, even, Shakespeare by both theatre critics and academics.[8] The first section includes two productions that directly and deliberately address notions of Irish identity as a subject: what the Irish have believed to be representative of their national identity (*Dublin by Lamplight*) and outsider notions of Irishness (*Stones in His Pockets*). The next introduces two productions in which national identity is less the subject, but in which it is used either as a prop by characters or as a signifier of any local (*The Walworth Farce* and *The New Electric Ballroom*). The final section refers to a number of productions in which, while unarguably Irish to non-Irish audiences in particular, the subject Irish identity might appear not to be a concern, but which for a consideration of the "finding" of Irishness in a work (*Terminus*, *Bedbound* and *Disco Pigs*).

## Outsider stereotypes …

As introduced earlier, national stereotyping is something people all over the world are both subject to and, often, collude with. A writer may set out to question a culture and society, but audiences are not guaranteed to recognise that this is his/her intention. Even the work of writers such as Brian Friel can be transformed by audiences who want to consume them as nostalgia. It is not being suggested, even remotely, that the play discussed below should be thought of as on a par with Friel, but it has been used here for it directly addresses the romanticisation of a culture and identity at the same time also illustrating not only how outsider stereotypes operate, but also acknowledges that they are used by both outsiders and locals. As suggested earlier, there is a relationship between received notions of Irish identity and the stereotyped themselves.

*Stones in His Pockets* by Marie Jones (Lyric, Belfast) is not representative of the Traverse theatre's usual fare, being a work that Philip Howard, the theatre's Artistic Director at the time, admitted, could not be described as particularly "challenging".[9] However, it proved to be as popular with Edinburgh Festival Fringe audiences as it had been in Ireland and would be in the future with many other audiences for similar reasons: it was enjoyable, endearing, and very funny, carried by superb performances by its cast of two who played all fourteen characters in the play. The main two characters, Charlie and Jake, get work as extras playing stereotype "Oirish" locals in a Hollywood movie which "shows how the Irish responded to being dispossessed of their land in the past" but, says Patrick Lonergan, "the irony that [Marie] Jones reinforces is that the company making [the] movie is dispossessing the Irish of their entitlement to define their own

identity in the present".[10] In his 2009 book Lonergan's focus is *Globalisation*, therefore he highlights the point that the play is analyzing "the mass media's presentation of national identities for global consumption": "throughout the action, [Jones] illustrates the discrepancy between appearance and reality in the representation of Irishness . . ." (for example, when the film producers in the play complain that the cows and some of the villagers don't look "Irish enough"). But the playwright also shows how many of the locals are "complicit in, and beneficiaries of, their own exploitation"[11], another situation in which the Irish are not alone. An alternative and, perhaps, more positive way of describing this might be to credit the stereotyped as exploiting the myopia of "the other". Either way, those represented are not, necessarily, the passive recipients many academics would believe.

Broadcasting reductive and inferiorising stereotypes of others' identities is not, of course, new to the global age. Communication is obviously much faster now, but cultural stereotyping and caricaturing occurred in the days when "global mass media" meant print.[12] In effect it is the reach of the modern mass media, of which the stereotype is the stock-in-trade, which has made audiences more experienced consumers, choosing whether and when to be passive recipients of the images broadcast to them. The characters in *Stones in His Pockets* are shown, ultimately, to "take control of the narrative", but while tapping into "the frustration that local communities feel with mass culture" Lonergan suggests that the play's success is due, in part, to its representing some of the stereotype images it purports to be challenging.[13]

*Dublin by Lamplight*, Corn Exchange. Photographer: Paul McCarthy

## ... national myths

Some of the Irish companies from whom spectacular writing or innovative approaches will now be expected by Traverse festival audiences employ techniques developed elsewhere, for example, American *Story Theatre* style as used in the next production. The director of Dublin's Corn Exchange theatre company, Annie Ryan, is also American. It is debateable whether such factors diminish *Dublin by Lamplight*'s Irish credentials, but Ryan claims that the company started with the technique, and then "thought what they wanted to do a play about".[14] The play was then devised with the company by writer Michael West in 2005: a tragicomedy employing Commedia dell'Arte style thick make-up and choreographed exaggerated movement to tell counter-running tales of love, death, politics and art. A slap in the face of a revered story of Irish history and identity, this satire is set in the iconic year of 1904 which saw the appearance of the Abbey Theatre and Sinn Fein, and in which Joyce set Ulysses. While two of its characters, a thinly disguised Yeats and his patron, Lady Gregory, struggle to launch the "National Theatre of Ireland" with *The Wooing of Emer,* "a heroic drama about a mythical Irish princess", outside, real people are killing and being killed for the nationalist cause.[15]

*Dublin by Lamplight* "celebrates the romantic stories Ireland tells about itself, and the traditions of the nation's theatre, while simultaneously debunking them", looking at how Irish culture has fed off the period "sometimes naively romanticising it"[16] but, according to Director of Corn Exchange, Annie Ryan, while playwright Michael West had "really wanted to write something about Yeats, the whole period of setting the [Abbey] Theatre up in 1904" the play was born out of the question, "What does Irish Identity mean nowadays, when we have people from all over the world?".[17] So, we have a writer and a group of people building a play and production around the notion that once upon a time "the Irish people" had a strong sense of national identity, one of the myths we imagine about identity when we're in a situation that makes us think about it at all: that is, that people in the past were surer about theirs. In this instance and for this particular group of artists at a particular moment in time, national identity was indeed an issue and the catalyst to increased immigration into Ireland.

## Up close and universal

Unlike *Dublin by Lamplight,* the following two plays are less concerned with the stories Ireland tells itself than with the stories the characters use to either hide from the truth or reassure themselves of the inevitability of their fates. Both feature characters that constantly replay stories about their pasts, and while representations of Irishness are employed in both, literally by the characters in the first play, these are studies more of personal than national or cultural identities. In *The Walworth Farce* "instead of engaging with reality outside" a father has hidden himself and his two, now adult, sons away from the world in their grubby London flat, making them repeatedly play out an

absurd fantasy about life "back home" in Ireland. The threesome act out a "nostalgised" story of Ireland as an innocent and happy family home:

> BLAKE. When we came here as little kids you could still smell Ireland from our jumpers... you could smell Mammy's cooking, couldn't you? It was roast chicken that last day and it was a lovely smell, hey Sean? And I think we might have come across on a boat ... (*Prompting SEAN, smiling.*) Go on.
>
> BLAKE *holds* SEAN'S *hand.*
>
> SEAN (*continuing*). And despite the sea and wind, the smell of Mammy's cooking and that chicken was still stuck in the wool of our jumpers.[18]

Dinny, the father, would keep this "surreal state of affairs" going forever, arguing that he is keeping Sean and Blake safe, but his story hides them all from an ugly truth about the past and once Sean is beginning to doubt how dangerous the outside actually is. This and a real outsider's interruption of their manic routine "sends the play-within-a-play" off the rails with terrifying repercussions.[19]

Both the Traverse theatre and Druid Theatre (Galway) had hoped that Walsh's *The New Electric Ballroom* would play as a companion piece to *The Walworth Farce* for the 2007 Fringe, but the company were unsuccessful in winning the funding required to give both plays their UK premieres together. In *The Walworth Farce* Dinny has created a fun-filled nostalgic story of home and hearth in Ireland to keep himself safe from what really happened there. In *The New Electric Ballroom* the characters, again, repeatedly go through a ritual acting out of a story. This time three sisters working at the canning factory in an Irish fishing village act out a story from the two older sisters' youth based on their teenage desire and devastation at the hands of "the Roller Royle", the handsome crooner who sings at the dancehall, *The New Electric Ballroom* in the 1950s; on the opportunities for a different life that had seemed possible then; and on the hurt, betrayal and consequences of one fatal night with "the Crooner" which, instead, trapped them (like the village's other inhabitants) in unchanging, dead-end lives. Breda and Clara force younger sister Ada to become part of their purgatory. Any hope (through a romance with the local fishmonger) is snatched away from her just as she is about to reach out to it.

As with *The Walworth Farce*, *The New Electric Ballroom* is about the power of the stories and myths we tell ourselves. In both of these plays the characters act-out - play and replay "stories" about their lives. Unlike Dinny's fiction in *The Walworth Farce*, Breda and Clara's story in *The New Electric Ballroom* is based on a truth, but they cling to theirs as punishment and penance, this time to keep the younger sister "safe" in it with them as they once made the mistake of thinking there could be another bigger world outside their small closed-off one, and have been determinedly paying for it ever since.

Both plays are dark comedies "played lightly"[20], the contrast between what's happening on the surface and what lies behind the characters' myths about their lives, is what makes one (*The Walworth Farce*) disturbing and slowly terrifying and the other (*The New Electric Ballroom*) deeply moving and tragic. Both, also, can be and are very easily and obviously described as "Irish" in that *The New Electric Ballroom* is set in an Ireland that is small town, and closed off from "the outside world", or "local" (so, in that sense, traditional), and while the action in the second takes place in a flat in London's Walworth area, the life the characters act out and want to believe in is set in a romanticised nostalgic version of back home in Ireland with the Mammy and the *craic*, also uses a representation of from the repertoire of the traditional.

In *The New Electric Ballroom* the characters, almost an entire community, are trapped in staying and being "*local*": going through the same routines, having the same conversations with the same people over and over again and again. But, neither of these plays need be set in Ireland. The old clichés about art hold true: focussing on the local talks to us about universal experiences, an issue returned to after considering some plays in which Irishness is neither the subject (as in *Stones in his Pockets* and *Dublin by Lamplight*) nor, a factor in but not germane to the characters' situations, as in the last two Walsh plays.

## Beyond National identity

Irish identity was not a point of reference in Abbey Theatre's "Fringe First" Award-winning *Terminus* (written and directed by Mark O'Rowe, author of *Howie the Rookie*, 1999) which had its UK premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2008.

*Terminus* uses three actors who deliver three monologues which briefly overlap as the actors hand over to the each other throughout the performance. Gradually connections between these characters become apparent. One is an ex-teacher who walks into violence in an effort to make up with a stranger for letting-down her own daughter. The younger woman wants her world to end with the end of her relationship. The third, male character has sold his soul to the devil in order to fulfill his desire. The stories range, therefore, from the reality of the street – an underworld of casual violence and inhumanity – to fantasy (as the lost soul flies through the streets killing to feed his devil).

At the beginning of *Bedbound*, written and directed by Enda Walsh, a wall crashes to the floor revealing the play's two characters, father and daughter, and the claustrophobic location of this tale. All of the action takes place on a grubby single bed in a tiny room where the polio-stricken daughter has been walled-in all her life "like a fairy-tale princess".[21] From the opening, and relentlessly through to the end of this hour long torrent of words, this production was a mesmerising and jaw dropping experience for audiences, as "like watching a dam burst".[22] The father, Maxie, a rage-filled braggart in a faded suit always on the edge of explosion into violence or heart attack:

> talks in frenetic spasms about his murderously determined struggle to become cock-of-the-walk in the Cork and Dublin furniture-dealing business.
>
> Littered in his wake are the steaming remains of dimwitted colleagues, his marriage and his polio-stricken daughter. Shame at himself and her condition has caused him to turn their house into a maze of partitions at whose centre she is literally walled-in.[23]

Maxie seems to have the advantage in this tortured relationship, but as they repeat their endless routine of trying to fill the gaps that exist between them with words, we begin to question who really holds the power.

*Disco Pigs* was Walsh's breakthrough hit which had its UK premiere at the Traverse in 1997. Again, it features characters with a "twisted dependency" who live in their own "hermetically sealed world", and language, the characters' own private language: a mangled mixture of Cork dialect, baby talk and animal noises, is one of the ways Pig and Runt, two Cork teenagers, maintain their distance from the realities of the outside, adult, world.[24]

Each of these last three plays, *Terminus*, *Disco Pigs* and *Bedbound*, are urban and contemporary in their settings with little or no harking back to stories of Ireland's past or imagined. Near the beginning of *Bedbound* we hear Maxie, as an ambitious 15-year-old "berating his fellow country-men with the need to "drag their priest-ridden, second-rate country" into the 20th [sic] century. This character and play could be interpreted as representing Ireland, a "postcard from the front line of Ireland's sudden lurch into rampant late-20th-century consumerism" (the Celtic Tiger era):

> but it's a postcard so shredded through Walsh's nightmare vision that what emerges is less a social document than a brutal Punch and Judy show in which the hidden violence of a society and way of life rushes to the surface.[25]

So, apart from their setting did non-Irish audiences find Irishness in these productions and, if they do, is it really there, or could this be more to do with their approaching Irish plays and productions with that in mind? "Branding" is a word so closely related to the rise of consumerism in the West that Lonergan applies it to Irish theatre:

> to see a play that is branded as "Irish" does not mean that we encounter a work that literally originated in Ireland itself. It means that we consume a work that accords with our predefined notions of Irishness. It is not important that the work be Irish; it is important instead that ... it seems Irish.[26]

Even those commentators who did not rate Walsh's work as highly as most at the time of these productions noted the influence of Samuel Beckett, but surely both Beckett and his legacy are international.[27]

Language is a common factor in all of these plays, standing out and, at times, punching the audience in the face and taking the breath away. In *Disco Pigs*, it is an integral part of the plot and the armour the two teenagers use to cocoon themselves from the realities of life, but that language "slams against your ear unexpectedly".[28] In *Bedbound*, the characters use words in an attempt to compensate for and to bridge the gulf in their twisted relationship, and it is language of an extraordinary quality, ranging from lunatic ramblings "sometimes babbling and keening like the invented tongues of a world twisted beyond the power of ordinary speech, at other times falling clear, lucid and beautiful from the actors' mouths." Mark O'Rowe's *Terminus* can be described as a performed poem and what holds this, at times disturbing, at times magical, tale together is the writer's brilliant use of language. But is this unique to Irish writers?

## Finding Irishness and finding what you look for

The Enda Walsh productions discussed here can be used to examine the finding of Irishness in a work by audiences and critics. Walsh is Irish, was brought up in and lived there until relatively recently and, since these plays come from his experience and influences, they, unsurprisingly, employ Irish references and idioms, although in *The Walworth Farce* Irishness is employed to emphasize the family's nostalgised myth of its past. The more important factor is that Walsh's plays were written by a writer who is fascinated by human beings and their relationships with one another. Being Irish is not the sole factor that has influenced his character, life and work. The plays discussed here - these stories or tragedies - could be re-located or transported to many different locations around the world. The same stories could take place and the same characters be imagined in almost any culture and equally, as audiences, we read into and find our own concerns, local or otherwise in what we see on stage. For example, in the decade immediately preceding the vote for devolved Government from the United Kingdom and a re-opening of the Scottish Parliament (after 300 years), it was common for theatre audiences in Scotland to see or find references, allusions or metaphors related to Scotland's political and cultural situation in almost any work produced by artists living in Scotland, much to the amusement of some and frustration of other playwrights.[29]

Malgorzata Semil-Jakubowicz, a well-known theatre professional and drama lecturer in Poland, has described what she calls that country's "love-fest" with Irish theatre in recent years. Polish theatre audiences and the practitioners have been finding resonances between the Irish and Polish situations for example, similar "social problems", a history of repression in terms of identity (religious, national and cultural) and a "romantic concept of freedom fighting" to list but a few elements.[30]

None of these is unique to either Poland or the Irish and clearly, simply *being Irish* has become a major factor in this love affair, but another factor at work, according to Semil-Jakubowicz is that Polish theatre has traditionally looked at more "esoteric issues" whereas modern Irish playwrights look at individuals or at the human condition..

Several of Walsh's plays have been staged in Poland – Semil-Jakubowicz translated *The Walworth Farce*) and *Disco Pigs* has been staged three times. confirming, I would suggest, the cliché, but perhaps also a truism, that close examination of the human condition in almost any "local" can communicate universally.

In terms of the appeal of simply being Irish, referred to earlier, it is a fact that since the 1990s international audiences at the Traverse theatre during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival have become familiar with the work of several Irish companies, particularly Druid and the Abbey theatre, but also, Rough Magic, and Corn Exchange will now be on the list of "hot tickets", therefore it could be argued that the branding message that influences these fairly literate and generally experienced or discerning audiences, is one that says "Irish theatre can be expected to deliver". That brand has become respected and popular for a number of different reasons although some productions demonstrate several. These might include innovative direction, for example, Annie Ryan (Corn Exchange); the quality of the writing; the use of language; imaginative staging (Dublin company, Semper Fi's crime noir, *Ladies and Gents*, was staged in adjacent public toilets splitting the audience into two groups which saw one half of the story staged in the 'Gents' while the other half played concurrently in the 'Ladies', after which the audience had to switch places in order to "get" the full story).

None of these are elements – innovative direction, good writing and use of language; and imaginative staging – is exclusive to Ireland, but several talented playwrights, director and companies working in Ireland happened to emerge from the 1990s and this coincided with the artistic directorship at the Traverse of someone who recognised them and wanted to work with and showcase several of them. Philip Howard, the Artistic Director who might be held responsible for starting the Traverse's own "love-fest" with Irish theatre considers himself simply to have "been lucky" but, regardless of the reason, these elements all came together at the right time and the right place and, as a result, have provided unforgettable theatrical experiences for thousands of people from all over the world.

## Notes

1 VIII International Conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (AEDEI), Alcalá de Henares, May 2009.

2 "It is *Culture Ireland* that has made it possible for eight Irish theatre companies to visit Edinburgh next month . . .". Fisher, Mark. "Learn from the pluck of the Irish." *Scotland on Sunday*. 15 July: 2006. See also Turpin, Adrian. "A Breath of Fresh Eire." *The Sunday Times*. 28 Aug 2005.

3 *"Culture Ireland supports Irish Theatre and Dance at Performing Arts Showcase in Edinburgh 2009."* Culture Ireland Press Release *5 May 2009.*

4 "Fringe 2008 Reviews." *The British Theatre Guide* 12 Aug. 08.

5 *Culture Ireland* was established in 2005 by the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism comprising a board of appointed directors. *Culture Ireland Press Release* 5 May 2009.

6 See Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

7 See Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. 1983. London: Verso, 1991.
8 "Like Pinter's *The Homecoming*, it explores gender and power in a disturbingly domestic setting. And like *Hamlet*, it uses a play-within-a-play to explore and celebrate the power of performance." Lonergan, Patrick. Rev. of *The Walworth Farce* by Enda Walsh. *The Irish Times*. 22 Mar 2006.
9 Philip Howard, former Artistic Director of Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. Interviewed Edinburgh Jan. 2009.
10 Lonergan, Patrick. *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 11.
11 Lonergan, Patrick. *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 9.
12 See Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. 1983. London: Verso, 1991.
13 Lonergan, Patrick. *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 12-14.
14 Mansfield, Susan. "Brief Encounter." *The Scotsman* 19 Aug. 2005.
15 Turpin, Adrian. "A Breath of Fresh Eire." *The Sunday Times*. 28 Aug 2005.
16 Turpin, Adrian. "A Breath of Fresh Eire." *The Sunday Times*. 28 Aug 2005.
17 Mansfield, Susan. "Brief Encounter." *The Scotsman* 19 Aug. 2005.
18 Walsh, Enda. *The Walworth Farce*. London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2007.
19 Fisher, Mark. Rev. of *The Walworth Farce* by Enda Walsh. *The Herald* 23 Aug. 2007.
20 Lonergan, Patrick. Rev. of *The Walworth Farce* by Enda Walsh. *The Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 2006.
21 Gardner, Lyn. Rev. of *Bedbound* by Enda Walsh. *The Guardian* 6 Aug. 2001.
22 Gardner, Lyn. Rev. of *Bedbound* by Enda Walsh. *The Guardian* 6 Aug. 2001.
23 Taylor, Paul. "A high-pitched stream of vomit and guts." *The Independent*, 17 Jan. 2002.
24 Fisher, Mark. Rev. of *The Walworth Farce* by Enda Walsh. *The Herald* 23 Aug. 2007.
25 McMillan, Joyce. "Postcard from the edge." Rev. of *Bedbound* by Enda Walsh. *The Scotsman* 9 Aug 2001.
26 Lonergan, Patrick. *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 . 217.
27 "a direct descendant of the work of Samuel Beckett, and is shot through with the wild-west mentality of small-town Ireland." Gardner, Lyn. Rev. of *Bedbound* by Enda Walsh. *The Guardian* 6 Aug. 2001.
28 "The CillianSite" Ed. The CillianSite Collective. 14 May 09. <http://www.cilliansite.com/extras/scripts-sources>
29 Playwright David Greig. Interviewed Glasgow 20 Jun. 1997 and 17 Mar. 1998.
30 Semil-Jakubowicz, Malgorzata. "Irish drama – world stages". Plenary lecture presented at the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) conference, Glasgow, July 2009.

# *Elizabeth Kuti's* Treehouses*: Toward a New Definition of Irish Theatre*

Charlotte J. Headrick

**Abstract:** *Does a dramatist have to be born in Ireland to be an "Irish" playwright? This article explores the idea that a dramatist can be "of Ireland" and write a distinctly "Irish" play without being born in Ireland. In our global world, the idea of nationality is increasingly fluid. The work of dramatist Elizabeth Kuti exhibits the hybridity of some contemporary Irish plays. Kuti has a doctorate from Trinity College Dublin; she was married in Dublin, and one of her sons was born there. She has worked with several Irish theatre companies including the Abbey Theatre and Rough Magic Theatre Company, two of Dublin's and Ireland's most prestigious theatre companies. This article examines Kuti as an Irish dramastist , concentrating on her two plays with Irish locations.* Treehouses *is set in a Dublin nursing home. As a memory play, time and place shift from the Hungary of World War II, to the Dublin nursing home, to some place in England.* The Sugar Wife, *set in Dublin during the American Civil War, explores the lives of Quaker abolitionists. The play discusses the ethics of how money is made and used. Having lived in Ireland for eleven years, from 1993 to 2004, Kuti can certainly claim"insider" knowledge. Tellingly, she describes her situation: "I'm not Irish but I feel a part of Irish theatre."*

During an intermission of the Oregon State University 2005 production of the American premiere of *Treehouses*, an audience member was heard to say "I thought they said this was an Irish play." Overhearing that remark, I was reminded of the stereotypical expectations of what were the qualifiers for Irish drama. *Treehouses* is not set in a pub nor a kitchen. There are no drunkards or maniacs. It has an international cast of characters, and its dramatist Elizabeth Kuti was not born on Irish soil. Kuti's play, however, is one of the many plays that define a new world of Irish drama.

Although this article will explore *Treehouses* and its claim as an Irish play, Kuti's work is not alone in the contemporary canon of new Irish drama which expands the definition of what an Irish play is. In the United States, it took several years for departments of English literature and the professional groups associated with those departments to use the word "Irish" in describing literature from the Republic and

Northern Ireland. For decades, those literatures including all Irish drama, were grouped under the "British" umbrella. Then there was the argument of the situation of the dramatists from Northern Ireland. Were they British or Irish? Geography seems to have won. Literature from the island of Ireland is Irish although some scholars continue to distinguish between work from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, many of us, scholars of Irish theatre, simply teach Irish drama courses.

The tradition in the theatre is that a dramatist writes to the universal from the specific. For centuries, dramatists have taken ideas, experiences, civilizations, cultures that are not their own and shaped them into a vision of a play which creates its own unique world. Does a person have to be male to write believable women characters and can a woman write accurate portraits of men? Of course they can. Shakespeare was English , but his plays are set in Italy, Austria, as well as his own country.

So what constitutes an Irish play? The most simplistic definition might be to say that only dramatists born in Ireland with Irish settings for their plays can be classified as Irish. So is Declan Hughes's *I Can't Get Started* about Americans Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman an Irish play or something else? Hughes is Irish, a founding member of Rough Magic Theatre Company in Dublin. Although written by an Irishman, in his play, he explores an iconic American couple. To my mind, Hughes's play occupies a liminal space; it is a hybrid. I have heard academic papers presented at Irish studies conferences on Rona Munro's *Bold Girls* presenting it as a play about life in Belfast. Munro is a Scot who is writing about Belfast life.[1]

Munro is not alone. Another dramatist who presents a dilemma is Nicola McCartney. McCartney, a native of Belfast, product of a "mixed marriage," represents that chameleon quality of nationality that also marks Kuti's work. McCartney's work has been produced in Belfast and in her early days in the theatre, worked with the legendary Charabanc theatre company. Since going to Glasgow to college, McCartney has certainly made her mark on Scottish and British theatre. She has said ironically that the Scots consider her Irish and the Irish consider her Scots. Her play *Heritage* about Northern Irish emigrants to Canada in the early part of the twentieth century has been on the secondary schools curriculum for study in Scotland. Like her character Sarah in the *Heritage*, McCartney has recognized the hazards of being too closely identified with a "tribe." She is from Belfast but she can speak Irish. She considers Glasgow home but recognizes and celebrates her native ties to Belfast. Her plays run the gamut of topics from those with Scottish settings, Belfast locales, European, and British settings as well as the Canadian setting of *Heritage*.[2] Emer, the matriarch of the play, speaks several passages of Irish in the play and she and her grandson most often converse in that language.

McCartney, like Hughes and Munro speaks to the universal through the specific. She refuses to be limited by her place of birth and by a specific culture.

Even more complicated than McCartney's history is that of Elizabeth Kuti. Kuti is Anglo-Hungarian. Her Jewish father was hidden and saved by a Hungarian Catholic family during World War II, a story that figures strongly in her *Treehouses.*

Kuti was born to an English mother and a Hungarian father, moving to Ireland in 1993 to study at Trinity College Dublin. As an actress and playwright, she has worked with many of Ireland's leading theatre companies including the Peacock at the Abbey, Rough Magic, Loose Canon, Bedrock, and the Corn Exchange. *Treehouses* won a Stewart Parker Award in 2000. In 1995, *The Lais of Marie de France* was produced by the Andrews Lane Theatre for the Dublin Fringe.

She is the mother of a son born in Ireland. As she writes, "my son Charlie was born in Dublin and I lived there from 1993 to 2004, and got married in Dublin in 1999. So I could have got an Irish passport back then on grounds of residency. Also technically Charlie can get an Irish passport I think and therefore as the mother of an Irish citizen, so could I."[3] On her sense of national fluidity, she states, "However on more genetic grounds, my father is Jewish Hungarian with Polish roots and on my mum's side we are English, though my mother has four Scottish grandparents. So more Scots than Irish really, ironically! All very strange." (*idem*). She says, "I feel very English, and also kind of distanced from Englishness. Nationality is a concept that I find very difficult to grasp –I suppose it seems too fluid and haphazard a thing to me." (Kurdi 11). She says she feels strong bonds to both her English family and her Hungarian family and "that I love feeling connected to people and countries other than my immediate surroundings. A lot of all this stuff obviously went into the mix when I was writing *Treehouses*." (*idem*)

Kuti finished her doctorate from Trinity and while there, she discovered a manuscript of Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* which was missing its last acts. At one time the play was called *A Journey to Bath*, and it is believed that it was never performed. Scholars are not sure if the play was complete at Sheridan's death or that the *last* two acts were simply lost. Matching the manner and style of Sheridan, Kuti finished the play and Dublin's renowned theatre company Rough Magic produced it under the title *The Whisperers*. It is ironic that Kuti who has such mixed feelings about nationality should finish a play by Sheridan who is considered by some to be Ireland's first woman dramatist.

So how do we categorize Kuti's *Treehouses*, her award-winning play? Kuti clues us in to the scope of her worldview by the combination of Irish, Hungarian, and English characters in her play. Like Frank McGuinness in his *Dolly West's Kitchen*, Kuti gives us an international mix. We can consider *Treehouses* as an Irish play, written in Ireland with at least one Irish character. Kuti says "I'm not Irish but I feel a part of Irish theatre." (Kurdi 11)

Kuti may not be Irish but she has "insider" knowledge. *Treehouse*s is ultimately an Irish play with at least one Irish setting, the nursing home in Dublin and it treats one of the great themes of Irish drama – immigration. "Diaspora" has several definitions in the dictionary, most of them related to the "the dispersion of the Jews after the Babylonian exile." In contemporary times, the term has been used to refer to the African slave trade and to the settlement of the Irish throughout the world as well as to other cultures. This term has particular resonance for Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses*. Emigration from Ireland and the immigration of the Irish have long been topics of literary, sociological, and

historical discussions. What is less often discussed is Ireland as the site of immigration. Huguenots fled to Ireland and as skilled silk weavers helped to establish the linen industry in Northern Ireland and next to the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin is the Huguenot Cemetery. Kuti's *Treehouses* tells the story of two distinct emigrations, one of a Jewish boy escaping World War II Hungary and one of a Hungarian woman who has ended up in an Irish nursing home. A third story is about a young woman mourning the death of her father. As Kuti's play unfolds, we see how these threads connect, culminating in a final touching scene: "Magda's little room, and the barn where the boy hides." (Kurdi 12)

*Treehouses* functions on several levels. On one level it is a Holocaust drama. It is also a play by an Irish playwright in the broadest sense of the term. On another level, the play is an emmigaration/immigration play, one of the great themes of Irish drama according to Irish scholar Christopher Murray. The play is certainly about displacement. Additionally, *Treehouses* is a memory play like Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* or Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* or Diane Samuels's excellent Holocaust drama *Kindertransport* or Barbara LeBow's *A Shayna Maidel.*

As a Holocaust play, *Treehouses* tells the story of a Jewish boy named Joe who we discover does escape the fate of his family, partially due to the kindness of a woman named Magda. It is a memory play connecting it to that genre. And ultimately it is a play about immigration and emmigration. Magda and Stephen leave Hungary, settling in Ireland, raising their family only to have part of their family leave Ireland and emmigrate to the United States. Joe finds his way, in my reading, to the England of Kuti's birth where he raises his daughter Eva on his own. Old Magda sings in Hungarian; her nurse Ger is pure Dublin and Eva is British. In flashbacks of Magda's memories, we meet Joe, Stephen, and her younger self.

Kuti's skillful layering of forms, genres, and her gift as a storyteller make *Treehouses* the award winning-play that it is. Old Magda in her penultimate speech of the play has a glimmer of hope:

> And maybe he too–maybe he did escape, like I did, through all this upheaval, eventually to a safe place, both of us crossed the border, washed ashore and found some resting place – an ark – or haven. . . and perhaps somewhere too a child of his loves him and forgives him for some betrayal of the heart – ..." (Kuti 81)

Although it is not distinctly Irish, the longing for "home" has been a mark of much Irish drama and that image is used in *Treehouses*. Kuti explains that she was using the image of the treehouse to stand for home and family, but the treehouse is temporary because children grow up. She says,

> And by extension that could apply to all the houses we live in–homes, houses, cities, countries, the world – they are often temporary shelters, that serve their

> purpose then get dismantled. I had an Emily Dickinson quotation above my desk when I was writing – "What else is this world but a nest from whose rim we are all falling." (Kurdi 12)

Kuti sees Eva's burning of the treehouse as Eva releasing her father which allows "him to remarry and herself to grow up and away from him, that his betrayal of her was necessary for her to grow up too and ultimately leave him and pursue her own life." (Kurdi 12) Kuti sees the act as "angry and destructive" but also it has the "the healing, cauterizing power of fire." (*idem*) She says it also resonates with Eva's cremation of her father's body.

Kuti herself knows what it is to be an emigrant. She is an Anglo-Hungarian who emmigrated to Ireland. She is now listed as an "Irish" playwright. Certainly her work is redefining the term "Irish playwright." Like Declan Hughes, like Dolores Walshe who sets two of her plays in South Africa, or Anne LeMarquand Hartigan whose *La Corbière* reclaims a piece of British history, Kuti expands the parameters of what the theme and nature of an "Irish" play should be. Kuti's play fits into multiple categories, both as an Irish work of art, as an emigration play, and as a piece of Holocaust drama.

Kuti's *Treehouses* is not simply a "one-off." She further explores international themes with an Irish setting in her award-winning *The Sugar Wife*. In 2006, this play won the Susan Blackburn Smith Award which is given to the best play written in the English language by a woman. *The Sugar Wif*e, set in Dublin, has two American characters as well as the Irish characters. Both of the American characters are part of the abolitionist movement, one is an abolitionist and the other a former slave. The Dublin characters are Irish Quakers who are welcoming the abolitionists in their fundraising efforts. Like *Treehouses*, *The Sugar Wife* also works on multiple levels, particularly examining the morality of capitalism. In both of these plays, Elizabeth Kuti shows us the richness of the "new" Irish drama. Even though she now teaches at the University of Essex, outside of London, and even though some of her new work has other settings than Ireland, I believe that she will continue to be, in her words, " a part of Irish theatre."

## *Postscript*

The American Premiere of *Treehouses* was presented in April of 2005 and it was remounted in October of 2005 for the annual meeting of the Western Region of the American Conference for Irish Studies hosted by Oregon State University and the Center for the Humanities. The production was done in the one hundred and twenty seat Lab Theatre in Withycombe Hall on the Oregon State Campus. Scenic design was by George Caldwell who skilfully created the three distinct playing areas of the script, the Dublin nursing home of old Magda, the barn in Hungary, and the back yard with the burned out treehouse. Lighting design was by guest designer Dan Koetting, now chair of the theatre program of the University of Colorado, Denver. Student costume designer was Kendra

Thysell. Old Magda was portrayed by Vreneli Farber, veteran actress and a professor of Russian. All other roles in the play were performed by students at Oregon State. In 2005, I wrote the following director's notes for the program:

> "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is as strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave...." *Song of Solomon*
>
> "Love lost, love found, the oldest story... "

In 1999, while on sabbatical, I had a conversation with Lynne Parker, artistic director of Dublin's Rough Magic Theatre Company in which she told me how impressed she was with this new playwright Elizabeth Kuti and her play *The Whisperers* which she, Parker, was directing. The next year, I saw that the Peacock in Dublin had produced Kuti's new play *Treehouses*, a play that went on to win multiple awards. Soon after that, I read the play and was struck with how beautiful the script was, how poetic the language.

*Treehouses* is a difficult play to categorize. It is a play of memory, of immigration and emigration; it is also a Holocaust play. Kuti skillfully weaves intricate threads of story, images, and language to create an ornate tapestry. It is a work that can rightfully claim a spot next to other plays that deal with the Holocaust such as American Barbara Lebow's *A Shayna Maidel* and British Diane Samuels's *Kindertransport*. Kuti's play, based on her own family and on her own research, tells yet another story in the millions yet to be told. of the Holocaust and its aftermath. In this the 60th anniversary year of the liberation of Auschwitz, the University Theatre is honored to present the 17 April matinee and final performance of *Treehouses* as an early event in support for and in benefit of the 2005 Holocaust Memorial Week We would like to thank the playwright for all her help and to Irma Delson for sharing the stories of her Hungarian family with us. It has been a joy for all of us involved working on this rich script and we hope that you, the audience, will have an equally rewarding experience. CJH

As audiences left the theatre, they were given a copy of an e-mail from Elizabeth Kuti which she sent to me on 4 March 2005. I had written her asking if there was a family influence in the play. The following is an excerpt from that message:

> The play definitely came out of events in my family history, in that my father (who is Hungarian and Jewish) was hidden during the war by someone in Budapest. I met her in the summer of 1996 when she was a very old lady. She's dead now. She was made a hero of the people, I believe, for what she did during the Second World War. My father always kept in touch with her and with her family. They are Catholics, I think, and I think she had my father christened to protect him. It's always been very hard to talk about the Holocaust with any members of my family. My father survived the war, and so did his father (my grandfather) but his mother (my grandmother) died in Auschwitz. My grandfather

> married again after the war, a lady called Clara, and I always knew Clara as my grandmother ("Nagymama"). She survived Auschwitz. So, yes, there's quite a lot of all that influencing the play, but the characters, settings and incidents are all made up. But I suppose the seed of it was that lady who hid my father. She was a tiny, hunched lady when I met her. It was a strange experience because I couldn't stop crying when I met her, but we couldn't talk to each other because I can't unfortunately speak Hungarian and she didn't speak English. But I remember she looked at me very kindly and talked to me and I found her very reassuring although I couldn't understand what she was saying.

This was a first-time- event for me. Neither before nor since have I distributed a "post-show" program. Because of the nature of the play, that we were doing the final performance as a benefit for the Holocaust Memorial Week on campus, that it was the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, sharing the inspiration behind the play seemed appropriate. Audiences were very moved by *Treehouses.* One of my most intense memories of the production is finding my friend Bill sobbing in the audience at the end of the play. Bill is in his seventies, a retired theatre professor; I had never seen him react so viscerally to a play. He wasn't the only one in tears by the end. *Treehouses* is a powerful and moving play that creates a memorable and moving experience in the theatre.

## Notes

1 At least one Belfast actress confided in me that she thought Munro spent three days in Belfast and then wrote her play; to her mind, Munro's play did not capture the Northern Irish experience.
2 Does Martin McDonagh truly qualify as an Irish dramatist even though he was born and lived his life in London? Most critics, it seems, have little problem categorizing him as an Irish dramatist. Like McCartney and Kuti, he also locates his work outside of Ireland. His *Pillowman* is set in some unspecified European country
3 Elizabeth Kuti, personal communication to Charlotte Headrick, 11 October 2009.

## Works Cited

Kurdi, Maria. "Interview with Elizabeth Kuti", *Irish Literary Supplement,* Vol. 23, 11. 22 March 2004.
Kuti, Elizabeth. *Treehouses.* London: A & C Black, 2003.

# *Rewriting the "caoineadh": Dermot Bolger's* The Lament for Arthur Cleary

Giovanna Tallone

**Abstract**: *Dermot Bolger's play* The Lament for Arthur Cleary *is an experimental and innovative work focusing on the context of suburban Dublin life and on the character of a migrant worker. In the background of a Dublin that has become a prey of unemployment, poverty and heroin, Bolger reconstructs and rewrites the eighteenth-century Gaelic poem* Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire *in order to face and discuss issues of contemporary Irish life. However, the use and/or distortion of typical features of a traditional "caoineadh" are at the basis of the play, whose structure and organisation rework motifs and elements to be found in* Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire *and in the keening tradition at large.*
*The purpose of this essay is to analyse Bolger's* The Lament for Arthur Cleary *vis-à-vis* Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, identifying images and structural elements that are reworked and rewritten in the structural organisation of the play.*

Dermot Bolger's debut play *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* was among the highlights of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1989, and since then it has attracted praise and attention as "one of the seminal texts of Irish drama over the last few decades" (Jordan xxxi). It is innovative in terms of themes and perspectives, in that it sheds light on the experiences of a migrant worker within a European context. The eponymous Arthur Cleary personifies "an Irishman as an alien in the common European home" (Merriman 170). The focus on the figure of a wanderer gives the opportunity to use the issues of diaspora and displacement in order to draw attention to the "place without history" (O'Toole ix), the dilapidated and violent suburban landscape of a Dublin scarred by unemployment, prejudice, poverty and heroin, the "avoided areas of Irish life" (O'Toole xiii). In its "imaginative use of stage space, of lighting, of props, of masks, of sound effects" (Pelletier 251), Bolger creates a play characterised by fluidity. In fact, in its mixture of expressionistic and surrealistic techniques, the play's episodic structure is based on subsequent scenes quickly dissolving into each other, or overlapping with each other. The first scene, centred on Arthur and his lover, Kathy, flows into the first of

the four frontier scenes, immediately followed by a politician's rhetorical speech on Ireland and Europe, which gives way to a scene outside a disco just before Arthur and Kathy meet. The fluidity in structural organisation has a parallel in the multiplicity of roles each of the actors, except those playing Arthur and Kathy, play almost with no transition. Characters are protean as five actors are cast into twelve different roles, which creates a dark sense of the uncertainty that implicitly characterises contemporary life.

After fifteen years spent as a migrant worker in various European countries, Arthur Cleary comes back to a Dublin he does not recognize. The topography of the place is now alien, speaking of loneliness and exclusion:

> It's all smaller, different when you return […] O'Connell Street – Just like some honky-tonk provincial plaza. Everywhere closed except the burger huts, all the buses gone, everyone milling around drunk taking to the glittering lights like aborigines to whiskey (Bolger, 2000. 21).

The map of "the streets of Dublin tattooed along the veins" (61) is no use. Checking memory against reality, Arthur reproduces his stateless condition at home as well as abroad, he realises that "this is the place but […] I can't find my own self" (31). "Some days I get lost" (49), his return just means hopelessness and loss. The new Dublin he has come back to is a foreign land, an unknown country dominated by new lords and masters, personified by the money-lender Deignan. An alien in his own city, Arthur is watched with suspicion. Kathy puts into words the new condition Arthur does not seem to be aware of:

> They're all watching you and you don't realise it. The pushers, they hate the way you look at them. Even the kids around here, Arthur, they haven't a clue who you are […] To them you're just an outsider. And now Deignan […] His kind own this city now, Arthur. He'll want to own you as well (51).

Arthur Cleary's refusal to submit to or compromise with the new *status quo* will result in his violent death, anticipated in the title and in the play's opening scene, a flash forward overture (Grubišic) that makes it clear that the dead will be on stage in revenant drama.

However, the social context of the bleakness of contemporary Dublin life remains in the background, as the catalyst of the play is not so much Arthur's death, but the voice that laments and celebrates his death. In fact, the *files rouges* of exile and return, alienation and exclusion, love and death, past and present, find a coherent and sequential pattern in the structure of the traditional "caoineadh", or keen in its English form, the lament for the dead, which Bolger uses as a source, as a set of allusions but also as a structuring principle. This means that in many ways, Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* reproduces the formal characteristics of a "caoineadh" beyond its immediate

impact of theme and content, and that the play is a postmodern rewriting not only of the eighteenth-century Gaelic poem that inspired it, but also a rewriting of the behaviour of keening at large.

Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is more or less loosely or freely based on *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, the lament composed by Eibhlin Dhubh ní Chonail after her husband's death in Carraig an Ime, Co. Cork, in 1773. The context of its composition is well known. Uí Laoghaire, a captain of the Hungarian Hussars, came back to Ireland after his service on the continent and had to face a country under the Penal Laws. Like his twentieth-century counterpart, Airt Uí Laoghaire does not recognise his own place and becomes an alien at home when antagonism grows with Abraham Morris, the High-Sheriff of the district. Uí Laoghaire's refusal to sell him his famous mare for five pounds is an open challenge to the Penal Laws, which at the time prohibited a Catholic to possess a horse of a greater value than this. In the ambush that followed, Uí Laoghaire was shot at Carraig an Ime (Bromwich 237; Ó Tuama, Kinsella 119). It is said that when his white mare came back with Uí Laoghaire's "heart's blood on her back" (Ó Tuama, Kinsella 203) his young widow mounted her and rode to Carraig an Ime to recite the first part of a powerful and passionate lament over her husband and drink his blood. Eibhlin Dhubh ní Chonail followed the tradition of professional keeners, or "mna chaointe", she might have heard on various occasions (Bromwich 240) and her "caoineadh" is "out of the ordinary" as it developed out of personal grief for the death of a young husband, while "mna chaointe" usually moved from wake to wake and were paid "in whisky or tobacco or with few shillings" (Ó Coileáin 107). *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* is "a favourite nationalist text and a powerful love poem" (Murray 243), it is exemplary of the keen literary genre, it exists in several written versions and translations based on Eibhlin Dhubh ní Chonail's oral performance (O'Brien 56), and "might be the result of other contributors apart from Eibhlin" (Ó Tuama, Kinsella 199). Its thematic and structural features are well-established in the keening tradition – the speaker addresses the dead man directly, often using terms of endearment, describes his physical prowess and the material comfort of the hero's home, reveals premonitory dreams, and curses his enemies (Bromwich 242; Partridge passim). It is generally the lament of a woman for a dead man, in which set images and metaphors are used beyond their narrative and consequential meaning. In telling how she wasted no time to reach her husband's body, Eibhlin Dhubh ní Chonail says:

> I gave a leap to the door,
> A second to the gate
> And a third on your horse
> (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 203).

This is not to be interpreted literally but the three leaps are "stylised literary motifs rather than a factual account" (Partridge 33). Likewise, the gesture of drinking the blood of the deceased is a recurring motif in "caoinadh" and in Irish sagas, from Emer's lament for Cú Chulainn to the lament of Deirdre for the sons of Uisneach.

In the play *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* Dermot Bolger exploits the source of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, translating the famous Irish-language poem into modern terms (Kiberd 610). From this point of view, the relationship between *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* and its rewriting as *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, pretext and aftertext, is in a way of transposition as it "preserves the design of the main story of the protoworld but locates them in a different temporal or spatial setting" (Doležel 206). Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is thus an experimental work transposing an eighth century event and poetic composition to address contemporary Irish life (O'Brien 57).

An intermediate step between pretext and aftertext is Bolger's own version of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, the poem "The Lament for Arthur Cleary" first published in his 1985 collection *Internal Exiles*. Here Bolger provides his own version and adaptation of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* using an explicitly urban or suburban setting, whose elements – or parts of them – were later to be used or developed in the play. *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is thus the result of multiple rewritings tightly interlinked to each other. Parallelisms between pretext and aftertext are fairly obvious in the names of the main characters, closely resembling each other, in their condition of wanderers and returned emigrants and in the unjust death they suffer resisting to figures of authority. In fact, Deignan, the money-lender, and the set of people that now control the city, from drug-dealers to policemen, reproduce the authority and control represented by Morris and the English rule in the context of Airt Uí Laoghaire's death. Likewise, the horse at the centre of Uí Laoghaire's death is updated as Arthur's motorcycle, which emphasises his condition as a wanderer. And in both cases a young woman recites a eulogy for the dead man, so that an act of performance is a catalyst drawing together two texts that are very different in time, setting and genre. If the "caoineadh" is "a central theatre of women's expression in the Irish language" (Bourke 2002. 1395), its fluid, oral nature "comes to full circle in Bolger's play, as it reconstructs the traditionally emphasised orality" (Grubišic).

*The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is thus an intergeneric and intertextual result, whose fascination is provided by the imaginative use of its sources. The background of the traditional "caoineadh" does not only provide themes and images, but it is also essential to understand the structural organization of the play. Kathy, Arthur's lover, as a modern "bean chaointe", dominates the stage and her presence and voice give structure to the play as the play's organising element (Merriman 170).

*The Lament for Arthur Cleary* opens with Kathy reciting the first part of her "caoineadh". The presence of the other characters on stage in the background does not interfere with or change her apartness as a lamenting woman (Bourke, 2000. 76). As she "takes centre stage" (Bolger, 2000 3), her centrality and liminality are emphasised in the peculiar position of ritual separation of lamenting women (Partridge 35). And according to the stage directions, "her voice is echoed by a recording of itself over the music which grows in tempo" (Bolger 2000. 3). This reproduces the voice of the "bean chaointe", or keening woman, and the chorus of lamentation that grows around her,

showing in embryo the communal nature of the act of keening. By juxtaposing keener and her own recorded voice, Bolger creates the effect of communal grief, at the same time keeping the woman at the centre of the grieving process. From this point of view the other characters, Friend, Porter, and Frontier Guard take part in the mourning. "They advance more, chanting phrases from their sentences which become jumbled into each other" (Bolger 2000. 4), thus resembling the "mumbling", "sobbing and wailing" (Bourke 2000. 72) which underlie original keens. These are "an oral-formulaic poetic composition" (72) whose "extemporaneous method of composition" (Ó Coileáin 100) develops out of initial mumbling or murmuring allowing the keening woman to gather her thoughts and organise lines and rhythm (101). On the other hand, the merging of voices in a quasi choral lamentation in Bolger's play is consistent with and emphasises the fluid structure of the lament, which results in the atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty that underlies the play, marked by the unstable relationship between actor and character.

In a process of compression and expansion, Bolger's poem from *Internal Exiles* is essential for the organisation and development of the play. The first verbal utterance of the play is represented by Kathy's recitation of the lament, which corresponds to the first and the third stanza of Bolger's poem reproduced in full:

> My lament for you, Arthur Cleary,
> As you lay down that crooked back lane
> Under the stern wall of a factory
> Where moss and crippled flowers cling.
>
> I cupped your face in my palms
> To taste life draining from your lips
> And you died attempting to smile
> As defiant and proud as you had lived (Bolger 2000. 3)

Features of continuity and discontinuity with the tradition of the "caoineadh" interact in the strong metatextual character of the opening, where the direct address to the deceased is mediated by the interaction between the speaker – "my lament" - and the addressee – "for you". The first line shows a shift of attention from the relationship between speaker and addressee to the relationship between the speaker and the text she is composing. In *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, the first line, "Mo ghrá go daingean tu!", "My steadfast love" (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 200-1] is repeated throughout the poem with slight variations ["Mo chara go daingean tu!", "My steadfast friend" (200-1); "Mo chara ismo stór tu!", "My friend and my treasure!" (204-5); "Mo chara is m'uan tu!", "My friend and my lamb!" (206-7); "Mo chara thu is mo chuid!", "My friend and my share!"; "Mo ghrá  thu is mo chumann!", "My love and my beloved!" (210-11); "Mo ghrá is mo rún thu!", "My love and my darling!" (214-15)]. Bolger enhances the theatricality of the text shedding light on the text itself, "My lament for you", i. e. this is

my keen, and as such certain strategies or techniques are to be expected. Alternatively, the metatextual reference is an allomorph or a form of rewriting of the mumbling or inarticulate and undistinguished sound or cry with which the “mna chaointe” starts the “caoineadh”.

Following the opening, stretches or extracts of Bolger’s poem are occasionally inserted in the play at crucial moments, and if Bolger uses and distorts *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* and the “caoineadh” in general, the use and/or distortion of his own poem provides a basis for the textual organisation of the play.

Literal extracts from the poem alternate with fragments from the poem expanded in the dialogue. For example, the scene at the disco in which Arthur and Kathy first meet has a direct source in the few lines of the poem, stanza 10:

> Beyond the cajoling disc jockey
> And nervous girls trying to look bored
> Away from the slow crucifixions
> I had witnessed stranded on that floor
> (Bolger 1985. 70)

Likewise, the drug-dealing scene in Act Two is an expanded rewriting of the following stanza of the poem:

> And the hand to appear
> Dispensing white packages
> From a darkened window
> As the driver accelerates
> (Bolger 1985. 72)

In the play, the scene “is staged in juxtaposition to Kathy’s speaking of her forebodings” (Merriman 169). The overlapping of Kathy’s words and the recording of her own voice is doubled, as her lament overlaps with the rapid exchange between the Frontier Guard and the Friend, pusher and drug-addict, centred around “a bag of white powder” (Bolger 2000. 56). This happens in darkness, a realistic and metaphorical detail also aimed at keeping Kathy’s centrality on stage alive.

Stanzas 42 and 43 in particular are enlarged in the significant frontier scene, a catalyst in the play, repeated with slight variations four times.

> Or halted at a border post
> Pulling a compartment window down
> To watch the guard’s light
> Flicker on the wheels of the train
>
> Clutching a green passport
> In a limbo between foreign states

Consumed with nostalgia
For an identity irretrievably lost
(Bolger 1985. 74)

Border crossing is the axis of the play (Merriman 168) working at different levels. The border between countries is also the border between life and death, which is openly revealed in the final frontier scene. In fact, the reference in the poem to "the limbo between two states" has thus a double value, as the two states can be both referred to two countries as well as to the states of life and death. Arthur is thus suspended between two states or conditions. The obsessive reference to and presence of trains and stations highlights his liminal position as well as his state of no belonging. "Where am I now? Which side of the border am I on?" Arthur asks obsessively receiving no reply apart from the awareness that he is never at home (Bolger 2000. 5). "Home" is a key-word in the play, the unattainable object of desire, forever wished for and forever lost. Unable to reach home, Arthur seems to be condemned to stay forever on the border between countries and conditions. The border is nowhere in the same way as the wakehouse evoked on stage is nowhere. Among the sparse props, a box and a barrel recall a coffin accompanied by a sort of funeral procession in the opening scene. Likewise, Arthur himself is in transition on an everlasting border, as he is trapped in the limbo of Kathy's grief unless he stops haunting her.

The four replicas of the frontier scene are variously compressed, and little by little further and further sentences and phrases become implicit in their suppression. The requirement of his passport is accompanied or anticipated by the use of lights. "A spotlight switches on" in the stage directions which "flickers on the stage" and is used in the dialogue in the meaningless order to "check the wheels" (Bolger 2000. 4). This expands the lines of the poem "the guard's light / Flicker on the wheels of the train". This is followed again by the use of lights in the stage directions: "the Porter switches on his torch. He keeps moving the beam up and down the wooden bar in front of which Arthur now stands in semi-darkness with a passport in his hand" (5). The use of light itself focuses on the "semi-darkness" as a *locus* in-between, neither light nor darkness, neither here nor there. This is also part of the theatre of death enacted on the stage, in which the corporeal presence of ghosts reveals the return of the dead. Arthur is revealed he is dead in the final frontier scene, when the Frontier Guard discloses the border as the line between death and life and the play as revenant drama. This is epitomised in Arthur's conversation with his dead mother:

Arthur – Why am I talking to you, Ma? The dead cannot talk.
Friend – They can son. But only among themselves (32).

The six extracts from Bolger's poem that appear and sustain the play emphasise the intrinsic theatricality of the "caoineadh" and its tradition as performance (Bourke, 2000 68). In its extemporaneous composition and recitation, the "caoineadh" "is not a literary composition, not merely an oral composition either, but part of a dramatic

performance of which the verbal element is but one factor" (Ó Coileáin 102). Its beginning as mumbling, below the level of verbal articulation, develops into verbal expression accompanied by non-verbal behaviour in the form of body movements such as rocking oneself and clapping of hands (Bourke 74; Ó Coileáin passim).

When reading Bolger's poem, theatre director David Byrne "noticed the dramatic potential of the piece" (Pelletier 250), which is nothing but the intrinsic theatricality of the "caoineadh" as performance. The play *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* rewrites the original theatricality of the "caoineadh" giving new voice to an old form. So the use of the "caoineadh" as performance, the use of the lament as rewritten by Bolger and the use of certain strategies in the structure of the play have their roots in *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* and in the tradition of keening itself.

The opening of the play reminds a funeral procession as in the stage direction the actors "file on stage" (Bolger 2000. 3). They are introduced as having "sticks in their hands" which anticipate both death and life. In fact they are immediately seen as instruments of violence as their "sharp banging … grow(s) in fury". While the Porter, Friend, and Frontier Guard, speak, "each sentence is accompanied by a sharp thud of a stick" (3). If on one hand this is an obvious gesture of violence and physical abuse which highlights Arthur's death, on the other hand the sound of the sticks can be read as an allomorph of the clapping of hands that accompanies the ritual of keening, as a sign of life. Life is cry and sound, while death is silence and deafness (Caforio 76) and in the keening tradition the sound of clapping hands corresponds to the hyperactivity of the wake, in that only vitality can keep death at bay, which is inactivity par excellence (Caforio 50).

The sound of sticks recalls one of John Millington Synge's descriptions of a funeral in *The Aran Islands*, where the mourners beat upon the wood of the coffin with their hands as an essential part of the ritual of keening:

> The coffin was still lying in front of the door, with the men and women of the family standing around beating it, and keening over it, in a great crowd of people (Synge 134).

In the stage directions Bolger thus makes reference to an old practice inserting a ritual gesture in the implicit organization of his play.

Notably, this underlies the opening scene, wordless except for the two stanzas of Kathy's lament and interacts with both her opening monologue and the subsequent scene in Arthur's flat. The display of sticks raised "in a fan behind (Arthur's) back" (Bolger 2000. 4) with their related sound is revealed to be nothing but Kathy's dream, enacted on stage and put into words by the object of the dream, Arthur himself: "A bad dream love, just a bad dream" (4), then reiterated by Kathy: "I'm frightened Arthur. I dreamt it again". In a way Bolger is here reproducing the frequent reference to premonitory dreams in traditional "caoineadh" as intersigns announcing death

(Caforio 8). In *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, Art's sister mentions a dream of destruction:

> A vision in dream
> Was vouchsafed me last night
> In Cork, a late hour,
> In bed by myself:
> Our white mansion had fallen,
> The Caortha had withered,
> Our slim hounds were silent
> And no sweet birds,
> … (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 215)

Seeing the house demolished in a dream is an obvious premonition of death and destruction, which Bolger reiterates in the final stretch of Kathy's lament at the end of the play. Here Kathy sees "a horse come riderless / Over fields trailing / A bridle smeared with blood" (Bolger 2000. 65), lines quoted verbatim from Bolger's poem (Bolger 1985. 76) which reproduces the return of Airt Uí Laoghaire's white mare in Eibhlin Dubh's lament. Bolger sheds light on the metatextual feature at the opening of his own keen and picks it up again in what in the poem is stanza 72 and the last words that Kathy pronounces in the play:

> […] a woman stood screaming.
> As I shuddered awake
> I realised her voice was mine (Bolger 2000. 65)

Kathy's reflection on her own voice mixes together the natural shock of the woman with attention to her own voice as a keener, which casts a bridge to the opening words – "My lament for you". The juxtaposition of the monological voice and of the context of dream in a way recalls the trance-like condition of the keening woman (Bourke, 2000 76) that Kathy reproduces in her recitative solo. Likewise, the brief statement of the material comfort Kathy abandons to go and live with Arthur has the quality of dreams in its quick tempo:

> I had a room with fresh linen
> And parents to watch over me
> A brown dog slept at my feet
> I left them for Arthur Cleary (Bolger 2000. 34)

In this case, Bolger distorts the usual celebration of the material comfort of the house of the hero to highlight the comfort Kathy leaves in order to share her life with Arthur. The material comfort of Airt Uí Laoghaire's house is thus rewritten from a different angle, and the "caoineadh" is distorted to suit the narrative requirements of the playwright.

The recurring reference to dreams in Kathy's lament is magnified in the structure of the play that has the logic of dreams in its juxtaposition of unrelated sequences (Pelletier 251). This sort of fluidity of scenes is close to the extemporaneous performance of the "caoineadh". As Seán Ó Coileáin remarks, "the stanza, and consequently the poem, is constructed as a series of paratactic phrases" so that "themes can be expanded or contracted, ornamented or laid bare, at will" (Ó Coileáin 102). "The Lament for Arthur Cleary", Bolger's poem, follows a similar paratactic construction in the fast and close development of quick stanzas developing and merging into each other in a continuum stressed by the lack of punctuation.

Bolger follows a similar paratactic construction in the organization of his play, in that the development or merging of scene into scene and of sequence into sequence reproduces the structural scheme of the "caoineadh". Likewise, the repetition of the frontier scene with its dreamlike quality acts as a catalyst to be compared with the reiteration of phrases such as terms of endearment recurring in keens.

If a series of structural and thematic features are used and/or distorted in the play, it is significant to notice that Bolger enacts also a variation of the motif of drinking blood as a motif of lament in ancient sagas (Partridge passim). In *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* Eibhlin Dubh says:

> Your blood streamed from you,
> And I didn't stop to clean it
> But drank it from my palms (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 205)

Bolger rewrites this motif for a modern audience without losing the passionate grief that characterises the original. Kathy as a modern "bean chaointe" rewords and simplifies the motif making it more stylised:

> I cupped your face in my palms
> To taste life draining from your lips (Bolger 2000. 3).

The reference to blood drinking is not made explicit but it is implicit in the ritual gesture of "tast(ing) life draining from (your) lips". The palms that contain blood in the Gaelic song becomes containers for holding the husband's face in Bolger's rewriting, so that in a game of saying and not saying the parallelism with the18th-century source is kept alive.

Likewise, as in *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, nature dies when the hero dies in mutual synchronicity. In her premonitory dream, Art's sister sees that "our slim hounds were silent / and no sweet birds / when you were found spent" (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 215). The bleakness of the suburban landscape undergoes a similar fate, as the epitome of the industrial Dublin landscape is a prey to further devastation represented by the growth of weeds:

As you lay down that crooked back lane
Under the stern wall of a factory
Where moss and crippled flowers cling
(Bolger 1985. 69; Bolger 2000. 3).

In the shift from Gaelic elegy to modern play natural details such as songless birds are expanded into "moss and crippled flowers", the liminal state between life and death, which again recalls the choral mourning for the death of the hero. The repeated reference in Bolger's poem to lanes, laneways, cobbles, factories, streets, yards, car parks, doorways, replaces the landscape inhabited by the hero in *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* and provides an imaginative labyrinth where to convey the words of sorrow of Kathy's lament. The emphasis on these urban details shed light on the inhabited world and expands the few references to places of social life in *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, where the "market-house gable" (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 201), "parlours", "rooms" (201), and "gate" (209) provide a background for the earthly life of Airt Uí Laoghaire.

An allusion to the elegy as a source also recurs in the use of the full name of the protagonist, which regularly recurs in the play both as a vocative and as an object of reference, from the extracts from the lament to the enactment of scenes from the past. Lines like "My lament for you, Arthur Cleary" (3), "Within sight of my father's home / Is where I first loved Arthur Cleary" (24), "I left them for Arthur Cleary" (34), interact with the repetition of the hero's full name in dialogue, when he is recognised by people who used to know him in the past, for example in the dole queue scene, or as a form of threatening in the voice of the Frontier Guard and of Deignan:
Arthur – […] I'd climb down the steps from these flats and people would shout, 'Arthur Cleary! Arthur Cleary! Come in! Come in!
[…]
Friend – At three in the morning, they'd still be arriving. 'Is that Arthur Cleary? Have we found the place?' (Bolger 2000. 31)

This emphasises the epic dimension (Grubišic) of both source and transposition, creating a tight link between the protagonist and his 18th-century counterpart. In a way this rewrites the tradition of praising the genealogy of the deceased, as in *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*:

My friend and my calf!
O Art Ó Laoghaire
Son of Conchúr son of Céadach
son of Laoiseach Ó Laoghaire
… (Ó Tuama & Kinsella 213)

*The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is a complex play in which the background of contemporary Irish life interacts with reflections on its sources. The 18th-century composition *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* provides a starting point that Dermot Bolger reworks to recreate on stage the act of performance peculiar to the keening tradition. If the play has been seen as a radical transposition (Pelletier 250) of Eibhlin Dhubh ní Chonail's lament, this is in terms of setting and context. As a matter of fact, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* also reconstructs the structure and textual organization of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* and of "caoineadh" at large. However, while giving prevalence to the woman's voice, Bolger also gives voice to the lamentee (Grubišic), who is aware of his own liminal position. The "caoineadh" is thus brought on stage and the stage space is that of a wakehouse, where traditionally the celebrations for the dead took place. It is a space to let them go, to make the abandonment of life and the journey into Hamlet's "undiscovered country" (Hamlet, III, i) easier. "Let go" is also the final line of the play, with which Arthur decides to stop haunting Kathy's mind and future and to leave the borderline area he has trapped himself in. *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is thus centered on a borderline space, which is consistent with it being in many respects a "frontier play" (Dudley Edwards 148) as it sheds light on Dublin as a "frontier town" (O'Toole ix) in its contemporary complexity. It is a frontier play also because it deals with the borderline between states and conditions, between life and death. And as a rewriting of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* is also a frontier with its original Gaelic source (Dudley Edwards 150), whose intrinsic theatricality finds an accomplishment in the verbal and non-verbal patterns that provide and sustain the play's structure.

## Works Cited


Bolger, Dermot. *Internal Exiles. Poems*. Portlaoise: The Dolmen Press, 1985.

____. *Plays: I*. Introduced by Fintan O'Toole. London: Methuen, 2000.

Bourke, Angela. "Keening as Theatre: J.M. Synge and the Irish Lament Tradition". In Nicholas Grene (ed.). *Interpreting Synge. Essays from the Synge Summer School 1991-2000*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000. 67-79.

____. "Lamenting the Dead". In Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Geraldine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary Dowd, Clair Wills (eds.). *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Vol. iv, New York: New York University Press, 2002. 1395-6

Bromwich, Rachel. "The Keen for Art O'Leary, Its Background and Its Place in the Tradition of Gaelic Keening". *Éigse* (5). 1945-47. 236-52.

Caforio, Antonella. *La Tradizione Irlandese tra Mito, Storia, Quotidiano Folklorico: il Rapporto Vivi-Morti*. Milano: Pubblicazioni dell'I.S.U. Università Cattolica, 1998.

Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Dudley Edwards, Owen. "The Irish in the Edinburgh Festival". In Dermot Bolger (ed.). *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens. The Changing Face of Irish Theatre*. Dublin: New Island, 2001. 148-72.

Grubišic, Katia. "'That feeling like this has happened before': The Origin and Development of Dermot Bolger's *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*. *Journal of Student Writing*. Number 25, July 2003. http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JWS/number25/grubisic.html, last accessed 3/9/2009

Jordan, Eamonn. "Introduction", in Eamonn Jordan (ed.). *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000. xi-xlviii.

Merriman, Vic. "Centering the Wanderer: Europe as Active Imaginary in Contemporary Irish Theatre". *Irish University Review*. Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring /Summer 1997. 166-81.

Murray, Christopher. *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama. Mirror up to Nation*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

O'Brien, Kathleen. "Contemporary *Caoineadh*: Talking Straight Through the Dead". *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*. Vol. 32, Number 1, Spring 2006: 56-63.

Ó Coileáin, Seán. "The Irish Lament: An Oral Genre". *Studia Hibernica* (24), 1988. 97-117

O'Toole, Fintan. "Introduction". Dermot Bolger. *Plays: I*. London: Methuen, 2000: ix-xiv

Ó Tuama, Seán & Kinsella, Thomas. *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*. Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1981 (1985).

Partridge, Angela. "Wild Men and Wailing Women". *Éigse* (18), 1980-81. 25-37.

Pelletier, Martine. "Dermot Bolger's Drama". In Eamonn Jordan (ed.). *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000. 249-56.

Synge, John M. *The Aran Islands*. Marlboro, Vermont: The Marlboro Press, 1989.

# Fiction

# *The Aleph and the Labyrinth*

Carlos Gamerro

**Abstract:** In "The Aleph and the Labyrinth" I begin by chronicling Borges' early readings of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which were a prologue to his lifelong fascination with this novel. In particular, Borges saw in *Ulysses* yet another attempt to write the "total book": an attempt doomed to failure, perhaps, but nevertheless heroic. In the light of *Ulysses*, Borges explored this ambition in "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote", "The Library of Babel", "Funes, His Memory" and particularly "El Aleph"; and offered his faulty and fragmentary reading of Joyce's text as a metaphor for our equally – and fatally – faulty and fragmentary knowledge of the universe.

Borges was, if we believe his claim, the first writer of the Spanish language to read *Ulysses*:

> I am the first traveler from the Hispanic world to set foot upon the shores of *Ulysses*, a lush wilderness already traversed by Valéry Larbaud, who traced its dense texture with the impeccable precision of a mapmaker. I will speak of it with the license my admiration lends me and with the murky intensity of those ancient explorers who described lands new to their nomadic amazement, and whose stories about the Amazons and the City of the Caesars combined truth and fantasy. (*TL* 12)[1]

This was written in 1925, in an article entitled "Joyce's *Ulysses*". The previous year Borges had attempted what might be the first translation of a fragment of this wild continent: the last two pages of Molly Bloom's monologue. If we consider *Ulysses* was published in 1922, this was quite precocious indeed, and the young Borges had perhaps the right to boast.

Of course, when claiming he had read *Ulysses*, he had to face the inevitable question all self-proclaimed *Ulysses* readers sooner or later have to face, even today: yes, I know, so have I, but have you read it *all*? Have you been able to *finish* it? Borges confessed he hadn't, "and yet", he said, "I know what it is, with that bold and legitimate certainty with which we assert our knowledge of a city, without ever having been rewarded with the intimacy of all the many streets it includes." (*TL* 12)

Applied to any other novel, this might seem to some of you an easy way out, some kind of coy joke or *boutade*. But when pertaining to *Ulysses*, it becomes the perspicacious exposition of a method. The best way to read novels like *Ulysses*, or to get to know a city you are new to, is to get lost in them, to wander around, to walk the same streets again and again and ignore others altogether. One of Borges's finest stories, if not his finest, suggests that we can better know the universe by falling in love with one of its corners than by attempting to embrace the whole. That story is "The Aleph", and I will return to it later, as one of my contentions today is that without the example of Joyce's enterprise this story in particular might never have come into being.

But coming down to the hard facts, to the rock of Scylla as Joyce would have it, the fact is that Borges never read *Ulysses* in its entirety. Later in life, he even wondered if anybody else had: "One understands *Ulysses* is some kind of microcosm, right? And that it encompasses the whole world… Of course it is pretty long, and I don't think anybody has read it. Many have analyzed it, of course, but as to reading it from beginning to end, I don't think anybody has" he joked in a book of conversations with Osvaldo Ferrari in 1984, when he was 85.

And yet, and yet, Argentine literature has been a dedicated reader of *Ulysses*. Thanks to Borges we were off to an early start, and we persevered. For one thing, *Ulysses* was translated into Spanish for the first time in Buenos Aires: the José Salas Subirat version was published in 1945. And if I had to choose the foreign language novel that most influenced Argentine literature in the twentieth century, that novel would certainly be *Ulysses*. So, now returning to Borges: How did *he* read *Ulysses*? What did he see in it? Or, better still, since writers will never be innocent readers, what did he want from *Ulysses*, what did he take from it? Not, certainly, any of the Joycean styles or procedures. Borges was not given to parody or pastiche, at least when writing on his own: when writing with his close friend and colleague Adolfo Bioy Casares, he certainly indulged this repressed gift.

But what about the first half of *Ulysses*? What about those pages which, if aught that the imagination or the hand of Joyce has wrought in language, deserves to be called Joycean style, shall be called Joycean style? What about interior monologue, what about the painstaking recording of the minutiae of perception? Borges more than once spoke about the difference between the "style of reality", which in his opinion better suits the novel, and the "style of memory", which tended towards economy of language and detail, to the "persistence of isolated features", which better suits the kind of short story he practiced. What he calls the "style of reality" might be better termed "the style of perception": this style reached its apotheosis in *Ulysses*, a novel written in real time, and later in the French school of the *nouveau roman* (anticipated in what we might call the objectivist sections of the "Ithaca" chapter). The style of memory, on the other hand, arises not from the immediacy of perception but from the more or less passive interplay of memory and oblivion. If I were asked, for example, to put this room into words, and I tried to do it while sitting here, I could go on for ages and ages, and pages and pages,

I wouldn't know where to stop. But if I let a week pass, and then give it a try, I might be able to construct a picture of it with a few strokes: a picture that would be synthetic, as the style of memory usually is, rather than analytical – as befits the style of perception. Borges always veered towards the former, and in his essay "New Refutation of Time", he equates this simplifying power of memory with that of night: "Night is pleasing to us because, like memory, it erases idle details"(*OI* 187) In the poem "The Night They Held His Wake in the South", he wrote "the night / that lifts the greatest sorrow from us / the prolixity of the real."(*OC* 88)

Of course, all this talk about the economy of memory becomes meaningless babble if you are Funes. In case you haven't read the wonderful Borges story "Funes, His Memory", it is about a man, a gaucho from the Uruguayan pampas, who after being thrown from his horse and becoming crippled, discovers he has acquired a perfect memory, backed by a preternatural perception of all things. Funes could recover "the forms in the clouds in the southern sky on the morning of April 30, 1882, and he could compare them in his memory with the veins in the marbled binding of a book he had seen only once, or with the feathers of spray lifted by an oar on the Río Negro on the eve of the Battle of Quebracho. […] Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day; he had never once erred or faltered, but each reconstruction had itself taken an entire day." (*CF* 135) (A very Joycean feat!). If Funes had taken to writing, his "style of memory" would have been even more abundant and prolix than Joyce's style of perception, just as Proust's "style of memory" sometimes threatens to be; and as a matter of fact I've never been able to help seeing in Funes a Borgesian joke on Proust.

When I wrote another draft of this essay, some years ago, I was very pleased with myself at having made this connection between Funes and Joyce. I later came across a 1941 piece entitled "A Fragment on Joyce", a piece not included in Borges' *Complete Works*: "My story's magical *compadrito* [i.e. Funes] may be called a precursor of the coming race of supermen, a partial Zarathustra of the outskirts of Buenos Aires; indisputably, he is a monster. I have evoked him because a consecutive, straightforward reading of the four hundred thousand words of *Ulysses* would require similar monsters. (I will not venture to speak of what *Finnegans Wake* would demand; for me, its readers are no less inconceivable than C. H. Hinton's fourth dimension or the trinity of Nicaea.)" (*TL* 220). This is the problem with Borges: every time you discover something new about him, you eventually find out he had discovered it before you.

This "prolixity of the real" was anathema to Borges the writer, but was celebrated by Borges the reader. In his 1925 piece he defines Joyce as "a millionaire of words and styles." (Knowing Joyce as we do, perhaps it would be better to amend "millionaire" to "spendthrift"), and compared him to the Elizabethan dramatists: "In Joyce's unrelenting examination of the tiniest details that constitute consciousness, he stops the flow of time and defers its movement with a pacifying gesture contrary to the impatient goading of the English drama, which encloses the life of its heroes in the narrow, thrusting rush of a few crowded hours. If Shakespeare – to use his own metaphor – invested in the

turning of the hourglass the exploits of many years, Joyce inverts the procedure and unfolds his hero's single day into many days upon the reader." (*TL* 13). And in his "A History of Eternity" after expounding the conception of a Christian eternity, which contains everything that is, has been, and will be, not only in actuality but in potentiality (that is, all the things that might have happened or might happen in the future), he compares it to Joyce's novel: "Unlike the Platonic eternities, whose greatest danger is tedium, this one [i.e. the Christian eternity] runs the risk of resembling the final pages of *Ulysses*, or even the preceding chapter, the enormous interrogation." (*TL* 134).

So, we have it that Borges didn't make use of the stylistic experiments (which doesn't mean he didn't admire them), nor the interior monologue, nor the minute realism. So what was it that so fascinated him about *Ulysses* and its author, what was it that led him to write "Invocation to Joyce" (*SP* 287):

Scattered in scattered capitals,
Solitary and many,
We played at being the first Adam
Who gave names to things […]
We were imagism, cubism,
The conventicles and sects
That the credulous universities venerate.
You, meanwhile, forged
In the cities of exile […]
The weapon of your art,
You raised your arduous labyrinths,
Infinitesimal and infinite,
Admirably ignoble,
More populous than history.
We shall have died without having made out
The biform beast or rose
Which are the center of your labyrinth […]
What does our cowardice matter if there is on earth
A single valiant man,
What does sadness matter if there was in time
Somebody who called himself happy,
What does my lost generation matter,
That vague mirror,
If your books justify it.
I am the others. I am all those
Whom your obstinate rigor has redeemed.
I am those you do not know and those you continue to save.

What Borges most admired was the sheer magnitude and ambition of Joyce's enterprise. Borges was always haunted by the mirage of the total book, a book that could incorporate all of reality without reduction or simplification, a book that could be

considered a complete picture of the universe as we know it. Borges' imagination of this textual totality took two forms: one is that of the book that is literally infinite, a book whose every page divides into two pages, which in turn divide into two, infinitely: this is the Book of Sand. The other one is the Library of Babel, an imaginary universe of bookshelves that exhausts all the possible combinations of the letters in the books included in it, that is, all the possible books that can be written in all possible languages.

Borges liked to imagine large literary objects. He toyed with the idea of a book that could be seen as a mirror of the universe. But such a book exists, in approximate form at least: it is the encyclopedia. Borges' lifelong fascination with encyclopedias, which began in his childhood, would eventually lead him to imagine, in his story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" an encyclopedia about an imaginary planet named Tlön, so complete, exhaustive and well written that humanity chooses to forget this reality and inhabit the one imagined by the encyclopedists. The idea that art can provide images of reality more vivid and lasting than reality itself was not alien to Joyce, and it actually reminds me of what happened to me on my first visit to Dublin: I could only see it in terms of *Ulysses*, and whenever a new building or feature was pointed out to me, all I wanted to know was "but is it in *Ulysses*?" If it wasn't, I walked on, almost indignantly you might say.

Back to Borges, then. Just as he was captivated by the encyclopedia, he was also thrilled by the idea of a book of fiction, a poem or a novel, that could also be an encyclopedia. Closest in time was the example of *Ulysses*; but the original model was, for Borges, Dante's *Commedia.* In the prologue to his *Nine Dantesque Essays* he writes:

> Imagine, in an Oriental library, a panel painted many centuries ago. It may be Arabic, and we are told that all the legends of *The Thousand and One Nights* are represented on its surface*;* it may be Chinese, and we learn that it illustrates a novel that has hundreds or thousands of characters […] The day declines, the light is wearing thin and as we go deeper into the carved surface we understand that there is nothing on earth that is not there. What was, is, and shall be, the history of past and future, the things I have had and those I will have, all of it awaits us somewhere in this serene labyrinth… I have fantasized a magical work, a panel that is also a microcosm: Dante's poem is that panel whose edges enclose the universe. (*TL* 267)

This description brings to mind Borges' most famous invention, the Aleph, that "point in space that contains all other points", but with an important difference: the Aleph contains all points in space but not all points in time, it shows you neither the past nor the future, but the present state of the universe. Those of you who have read the story will remember that this magical mirror of the universe was in possession of one Carlos Argentino Daneri, whose surname is a collapsed version of Dante Alighieri. This

Argentine Dante is a poet as well, and since he owns the Aleph, he has decided to use it as a source of inspiration and information in the writing of an ambitious poem entitled *The Earth*. When Borges – I mean the character named Borges in the story – visits him, he has completed, or rather "dispatched several hectares of the state of Queensland, more than a kilometer of the course of the Ob, a gasworks north of Veracruz, the leading commercial establishments on the parish of Concepción, Mariana Cambaceres de Alvear's villa on Calle Once de Setiembre in Belgrano, and a Turkish bath not far from the famed Brighton Aquarium." (*CF* 277).

The other problem with Daneri is that he is a very bad poet, exquisitely bad, as a matter of fact. To this we should add his plodding, unimaginative method of composition. Daneri is systematic in the worst sense of the word, and seems never to have heard of synecdoche or ellipsis: his idea of depicting the universe is to take the Aleph and say: "O.K., today I'll devote myself to the city of Córdoba. Let's see, I'll take the University first. Hmm… what classroom shall I begin with?"

In history, this total book or "poem unlimited" was attempted many times: perhaps every age needs to write its own. It was the *Commedia* in the fourteenth century, Michael Drayton's *Polyalbion* in the XVIth, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in the nineteenth century, and *Ulysses* in the twentieth century. Borges never attempted to write such a book, but preferred to write about them. His method was both lazier and more practical, as he explains in his prologue to *Fictions*:

> It is a laborious madness and an impoverishing one, the madness of composing vast books – setting out in five hundred pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes. The better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist, and offer a summary, a commentary on them. (*CF* 67)

Something I wouldn't call a difference, but rather an indifference (an indifference, coupled with a fastidiousness, he shared with Vladimir Nabokov), something in *Ulysses* Borges didn't care much for, were the Homeric parallels. In his "A Fragment on Joyce" he speaks of the Linati and Gilbert-Gorman schemas, and comments: "These imperceptible and laborious correspondences had only to be announced for the world to honor the work's severe construction and classic discipline. Among these voluntary tics, the most widely praised has been the most meaningless: James Joyce's contacts with Homer." (*TL* 220) And in his "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" he speaks of those "parasitic books that set Christ on a boulevard, Hamlet on La Cannabière or Don Quixote on Wall Street. Like every man of taste, Menard abominated those pointless travesties, which, Menard would say, were good for nothing but occasioning a plebeian delight in anachronism." (*CF* 90). Pierre Menard, let us remember, had set out to rewriting *Don Quixote* in the twentieth century, but not another *Don Quixote*, but word by word the same one as Cervantes', but not copying it, but writing it himself. After setting his character such a task, it is understandable that Borges' narrator should look down on the Homeric parallels as mere child's play.

I have discussed so far about what Borges took from Joyce, and of what he disliked in Joyce, about their differences… But what about what they have in common? What did they share?

Let's begin by looking at the surface of things. Both were writers that ushered in the twentieth century into their respective national literatures. Both had to deal with a literature that looked backwards, to a more or less invented idyllic past: the Celtic revival in Joyce's case; the "gauchesca", or "*gaucho* literature", in that of Borges. The gauchos are sometimes described as the cowboys of the pampas, though I prefer to think of the cowboys as the *gauchos* of the prairies (in this I follow Borges, who once spoke of the sea as "the pampas of the English"). The function of these born-again-pastorals was somewhat different in both countries: in Ireland it was a means of forging a national identity purified of foreign influence, of celebrating a Celtic Arcadia the British invasion had trampled on. Also, it can be seen as an attempt to claim the superiority of the Celtic spirit over Saxon materialism, to shrug off the Industrial revolution and Modernization that the British prevented from happening as something the Irish did not want anyway. In Argentina, the threat was Modernization itself, mainly represented by the massive influx of European immigration, which threatened to submerge a national identity nobody had cared much for until then.

Another parallel we could draw between Joyce and Borges is that they both decided that this literature of the twentieth century would be urban, and no longer rural-oriented, as it had been in the nineteeth century in both their literatures. This, incidentally, is a major difference between the literature of Argentina and that of the rest of Latin America, and it is perhaps one of the reasons why the influence of Joyce, and particularly that of *Ulysses*, looms so large in Argentine literature. In the rest of Latin America the major influence is not Joyce but Faulkner, because his formula of combining interior monologue, multiple point of view and other Modernist devices with a rural, semi-feudal setting would become, eventually, the formula of the Latin American *boom*, from Juan Carlos Onetti to Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa.

Joyce's commitment to urban literature was more radical than Borges'. Borges was more of a bridge-builder: his Buenos Aires was not that of the city centre, or the port, the dynamos of modernization, but the quieter suburbs that still retained a nineteenth-century air. He gave them a name: *las orillas*, "the shores", that is, the place where the city meets the country, or, as he poetically put it in his poem "The Mythical founding of Buenos Aires", "the street that had no other side".

Borges saw himself as a writer on the shores, or the margins, of the Western world: and this he saw not as a shortcoming but as an ideal vantage post to read the West, as he wrote in his seminal essay "The Argentine Writer and Tradition":

> I believe that our tradition is the whole of Western culture, and I also believe that we have a right to this tradition, a greater right than that which the inhabitants

> of one Western nation or another may have. Here I remember an essay by Thorstein Veblen, the North American sociologist, on the intellectual preeminence of the Jews in Western culture. He wonders if this preeminence authorizes us to posit an innate Jewish superiority and answers that it does not; he says that Jews are prominent in Western culture because they act within that culture and at the same time do not feel bound to it by any special devotion; therefore, he says, it will always be easier for a Jew than for a non-Jew to make innovations in Western culture. We can say the same of the Irish in English culture. Where the Irish are concerned, we have no reason to suppose that the profusion of Irish names in British literature and philosophy is due to any racial preeminence, because many of these illustrious Irishmen (Shaw, Berkeley, Swift) were the descendants of Englishmen, men with no Celtic blood; nevertheless, the fact of feeling themselves to be Irish, to be different, was enough to enable them to make innovations in English culture. I believe that Argentines, and South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation; we can take on all the European subjects, take them without superstition and with an irreverence that can have, and already has had, fortunate consequences. (*TL* 420)

Borges' epitomizing of the Jewish and the Irish perspective as being at the same time within and without Western culture seems to point directly to Leopold Bloom.

There is a line in this long quotation I want to go back to: "We have a right to this tradition, *a greater right than that which the inhabitants of one Western nation or another may have*." Consider the implications of that offhandedly tossed "a greater right". Joyce and Borges are writers of the periphery who are not content with being admitted into the Western canon: they want to occupy its center, and they want to be the ones picking who gets in and who is thrown out. Theirs is a minor literature that takes over from the major ones and redefines them, theirs is a triumphant extraterritoriality, one that relocates the margins at the center of things. Dublin, the city on the outskirts of Europe, becomes the literary capital of the world; the basement of a house on the outskirts of a South American capital hides the Aleph, and thus becomes the sole vantage point from which the whole universe can be seen. Both countries had a colonial or neo-colonial relationship with the great empire of the time, Joyce's Ireland in all possible senses of the word; Borges' Argentina mainly in the economic and cultural sense. And yet both Joyce and Borges took a decisive and, what's more important, intelligent stand against narrow nationalism, seeking not to purify their national culture from foreign influence but to absorb as much of it as possible, and in doing so, rewriting English culture not just for the Irish or for the Argentines, but for the English themselves: Joyce gives one of the most powerful and influential readings of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, and in the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter rewrites the History of English literature as a long march culminating in Irish literature – that is, in Joyce himself. Borges went back to the very origins of English literature, studying Anglo-Saxon and writing stories, poems and essays inspired by this literature. No writer in English, at least in the twentieth century,

has written an Anglo-Saxon literature as imaginatively, as vividly as this Spanish-speaking writer from a distant South American capital. And Borges also redefined the canon of English literature, bringing back in neglected writers such as Stevenson or Chesterton. Something similar could be said about the Greeks and Homer, the Italians and Dante (and Italo Calvino states it in his essay on Borges), the Spaniards and Cervantes, and so on.

I had this experience when I was Visiting Fellow at Cambridge University. Whenever I talked about Argentine literature, politics or history, the English professors would listen with great attention. But if I turned to Shakespeare, or Woolf, or Conrad, they would soon give me some polite nodding attention and then turn away. I was then reminded of Haines' supercilious indifference to whatever Stephen had to say about *Hamlet*.

Joyce's *Ulysses* has been appropriately called the Greek gift to English literature: after *Ulysses*, English writers had to learn their language from an Irishman. Spanish writers similarly had to learn their Spanish from the Latin Americans, Borges in the first place.

It's about time I justified my title, the Aleph and the labyrinth. In a television interview[2], Borges once again coupled his and Joyce's interest in labyrinths:

> There is something curious about labyrinths. The idea of getting lost is not in itself strange, but the idea of a building purposefully constructed for people to get lost in, that is strange. The idea of a builder of labyrinths, the idea of a Dedalus or, if you will, of a Joyce, and of an architecture whose purpose is that people, or readers, should get lost, that is a strange idea […]
>
> But in the idea of the labyrinth there is hope as well. Because if we could be certain that this world was a labyrinth, then we might feel safe. Because if it is one, then there is a center - even if that center is terrible, even if it means the Minotaur. But we don't know if the universe has a center. Maybe it isn't a labyrinth, maybe it is no more than a chaos, and then we are really lost. But if there is a secret center to the world, be it divine or demonic, we are saved […]. In the midst of the perplexity of life, we need to believe that the universe has a coherent form, that it is a labyrinth. But we can't be certain that this is the case.

We can read these words in a slightly different way: the truth of the labyrinth lies not so much in its center, because that is where the Minotaur waits, but in the way out. If the story of Dedalus teaches us anything, it teaches us that a labyrinth can only be seen from the outside: either when you design it, or when you fly above it. What you need, as the Greek Dedalus well knew, is a birds' eye view, such as Joyce provides in his "Wandering Rocks" chapter. In "The Aleph", Borges sees London in the Aleph and describes it as "a broken labyrinth". This broken labyrinth we can see from the margins, from the outskirts or *orillas*, from the outside: Buenos Aires or Dublin: And we can see it without the presumption that our imperfect eye will be able to mend it.

## Notes

1 Hereafter, references to Borges' works will be identified with the initials of the titles.
2 Included in the film "Borges para millones". Translation by Carlos Gamerro.

## Works Cited

Borges, Jorge Luis. "New Refutation of Time" in *Other Inquisitions*. Trans.Ruth L.C. Simms. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obras completas*. Trans. Carlos Gamerro. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions.* New York: Penguin, 1998.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Selected Poems.* New York: Penguin, 2000.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *The Total Library. Non-Fiction 1922-1986*. London: Penguin, 2001.

Ferrari, Osvaldo. *Diálogos*. Trans. Carlos Gamerro. Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1992.

# *Translating James Joyce's* Dubliners*: Confronting Literalness and Revision*

José Roberto O'Shea

**Abstract:** *This short paper addresses the issues of literalness and revisión in literary translation. The case in point is my own translation of James Joyce's* Dubliners *into Brazilian Portuguese, published in Brazil in the early 1990s.*

The notion of literal translation is a long-standing controversy in Translation Studies, having been either defended in the name of accuracy or attacked, dare I say, in the name of freedom. The phrase "literal translation" has been deployed in different ways. Sometimes, "literal translation" is understood as "word-for-word translation". Drawing on the notion of "unit of translation", J. C. Catford, for one, argues that literal translation takes word-for-word translation as its starting point, although because of the necessity of conforming with target-language grammar, the final target text may display group-for-group or clause-for-clause, striving for communicative equivalence (25).

As a translation strategy, no doubt, literary translation has its uses and its champions. A literal approach is, for example, generally useful for translating technical texts and legal documents, and the technique can also provide language learners with useful insights into target-language structures. And in literary translation, too, the approach has its champions. Vladimir Nabokov defines literary translation as "rendering, as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original". He also claims that only this strategy can be considered "true translation" (viii). Walter Benjamin, in turn, submits that the kinship of languages is more clearly highlighted in a literalist approach to translation.

But literal translation has also had detractors. Eugene Nida argues that "since no two languages are identical [...] it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence [...]. Hence there can be no fully exact translations" (156). Moreover, Ernst-August Gutt points out the near impossibility of reproducing in the target text meanings that are only implicitly present in the source text. And George Steiner comments that "far from being the most obvious, rudimentary mode of translation, "literalism" or as Dryden called it, *metaphrase*, is in fact the least attainable (324).

Moving quickly beyond this name dropping, I wish to suggest that all of us, as inescapable readers of translations, and some of us, as practitioners of translations, have experienced instances in which a literal translation has been problematic, at least, often grossly distorting or reducing the meaning of the original.

As a literary translator, I would argue that literalness and freedom, or for that matter, foreignization and domestication, are not mutually exclusive notions and that they are to be resorted to *ad hoc*, as need be. And however difficult it is to theorize one's own practice, as a case in point, I would like to offer here some thoughts as regards my own translation of *Dubliners* into Brazilian Portuguese (São Paulo; Siciliano, 1993, 1994). Due to space restrictions, I have limited my comments to the translation of the titles of three of those fifteen enduring stories – "Two Gallants", "Counterparts", and "A Painful Case" – which I, taking into account the reception of these stories by the Brazilian reader, have deliberately and freely rendered as "Dois Galãs", "Cópias", and "Um Caso Trágico".

Various English-language dictionaries define the noun "gallant" as "chivalrous man, man who is extremely gentlemanly; lover; paramour". In my translation, I have freely opted for "galãs", as opposed to the literal "galantes". The word "galã" is defined by Houaiss and by Hollanda (of course, here in back translation and in paraphrase) as a romantic character or actor who represents the handsome and righteous hero who plays a decisive role in the labors of love. Evidently, the title of this story, "Two Gallants," is ironic because Corley and Lenehan are anything but fine, chivalrous, gentlemanly men. Instead, as we know, they make an unpleasant practice of duping maids into stealing from their employers. The meanderings of the story, we recall, ultimately lead to the gold coin, suggesting that for both of these men, the coin is their ultimate reward and desire. Both men lead dissolute lives and have few prospects, and nothing but easy money gives them hope. As I understand it, for the Brazilian reader, such irony is better stressed by the non-literal "galã", particularly with its connotations of the soap opera, charming ham – a figure who is nigthly present from Monday through Saturday, year in year out, on the highly popular *novelas* aired through Brazilian national television networks.

In a busy law firm, we can also recall, one of the partners, Mr. Alleyne, angrily orders the secretary to send Farrington to his office. Farrington is a copy clerk in the firm, responsible for making copies of legal documents by hand, and he has failed to produce an important document on time. The title of the story, "Counterparts," refers to a copy or duplicate of a legal paper – the stuff of Farrington's career – but also to things that are similar, circular, repetitive. The tedium of work irritates Farrington, and the root of his violent and explosive behavior can be seen to ensue from the circular experience of routine and repetition that defines his life. Once again, I have veered away from literalness, that is, not translating "Counterparts" as the literal "Contrapartidas", which to the Brazilian reader does not mean "copies" at all, but "compensation" or "counterweight". The option for the less literal "Cópias", after all, a

crucial thematic notion in the narrative, attempts to validate my concern about the story's more efficient reception among Brazilians.

No doubt, "A Painful Case" narrates a tragedy. As we recall, four years after dumping Mrs. Sinico, Mr. Duffy reads a newspaper article that surprises him enough to halt his eating his usual dinner at the usual time at the usual restaurant, and hurry home. There, he rereads the article entitled "A Painful Case". The article recounts the death of Mrs. Sinico, who was hit by a train at a station in Dublin the previous evening. The news of Mrs. Sinico's death at first angers but later saddens Mr. Duffy. Perhaps suspecting suicide or weakness in character, he feels disgusted by her death and by his connection to her life. Disturbed, he leaves his home to visit a local pub, where he drinks and remembers his relationship with her. However, Mrs. Sinico's tragic demise points to a depth of feeling she possessed that Mr. Duffy will never understand or share, and it provides Mr. Duffy with an epiphany as he walks home that night. His anger begins to subside, and he feels deep remorse, mainly for ending the relationship and losing the potential for companionship it offered. Upon seeing a pair of lovers in the park near his home, Mr. Duffy realizes, of course, that he gave up the only love he had experienced in life.

The tragedy of this story is so intense as to be threefold. First, Mr. Duffy must face the dramatic death of a former friend before he can rethink his lifestyle and outlook. Second, acknowledging the problems in his lifestyle makes him realize his culpability: Mrs. Sinico died of a broken heart that *he* caused. Third, and perhaps most tragic, Mr. Duffy will not change the life he has created for himself. He is paralyzed, despite his revelations and his guilt. In light of such tragedy, one that involves a catastrophic end, I have felt that the Brazilian reader is better served by the title, in back translation: "A Tragic Case".

***

Turning to revision in translation, an issue that to my mind has not been duly explored by translation scholars, I would like to stress the importance of the procedure in the translation process in general and to explain the work I have developed with my "official readers".

Surely, three kinds of revision – and I don't mean just proofreading – are involved in translation. First, there is the intense revision of the original itself, which the translator has to put into practice, before each word, each sign of punctuation can be transferred onto the target culture and rewritten as the target text. Second, there is the revision the translators themselves – however blinded by their own translation, their own textualization – carry out. And there is the third kind, or should I say, step, of revision, when a third, interested, empathetic, party reads the translator's writing.

It is this third kind of revision that interests me the most. When I receive the typescript of my translations back from my three readers – colleagues from three Brazilian

universities – I invariably undergo an intense intellectual and artistic experience. One of three things happens: I either accept their objections (my readers are usually generous and helpful enough to object *and* offer possible solutions); or I refute the objection (and, of course, accept full responsibility for my decision); or – which is ever more fascinating – a sort of a dialectics takes place: in face of a problem of which I wasn't at all aware before my readers spotted it to me, and taking into account my reader's suggestion, I often find myself coming up with a totally new solution, as it were, an epiphanic synthesis.

However, more than detailing or illustrating processes of translation revision here, my aim is really to raise an issue, which, as I have said, I think has been overlooked in Translation Theory. But I can at least say that, as regards my non-literal translation of the three titles of Joyce's stories that are the focus of this brief essay, an intense dialectical process of revision – fortunately always constructive, besides being friendly and congenial – was *and still is* the case.

## Works Cited


Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*". *Illuminations.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Jonathan Cape, 1970. 69-82.

Catford, J. C. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation.* London: OUP, 1965.

Gutt, Ernst-August. *Translation and Relevance.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

Joyce, James. *Dublinenses.* Trad. Hamilton Trevisan. Segunda Edição, revista pelo tradutor. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970.

—. *Dublinenses.* Trad. José Roberto O'Shea. Segunda Edição. São Paulo: Siciliano, 1994.

—. *Dubliners.* An Illustrated Edition. Eds. John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995.

Nabokov, Vladimir. "Foreword". *Eugene Onegin*. Ed. & Trans. Vladimir Nabokov, 4 vols. London: Routledge, 1975. vii-xii.

Nide, Eugene. *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

# *Irish Women's Migrant Writing: George Egerton's* The Wheel of God *(1898)*

Tina O'Toole

**Abstract:** *Until quite recently, Irish migrant literature has tended to be an absent presence within the field of Irish Studies, and is only now beginning to be constituted as a vitally important field of enquiry in the field. In the contemporary period, the fixed points on the map of Irish emigration have been disrupted by what Negra calls "transnationalised Irishness": as certainties about emigration and Irish identities have undergone a series of transformations. However, the literature of 19th and 20th century Irish literary writers reveals that such fixed points were never there to begin with. Writers such as, for instance, 'George Egerton' [Mary Chavelita Dunne], Maeve Brennan, and contemporary writers such Anne Enright tend to construct migrant experience as a way of being in the world rather than a journey between two fixed points, which anticipates the kind of "nomadic subjectivity" described by Braidotti. This essay, focusing on Egerton's 1898 novel* The Wheel of God, *will suggest that reading Irish women's migrant literature unsettles categories of national and diasporic identity, as their central protagonists construct themselves within a complex nexus of Irish, European, and colonial identities.*

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Montréal poet Dionne Brand draws on David Turnbull's statement: "In order to find our way successfully, it is not enough to just have a map. We need a cognitive schema as well as a practical mastery of way-finding", repeating the phrase "In order to find our way successfully" (Brand 16). In the fields of Irish history, geography, anthropology and social science, the maps of Irish migration have been plotted for quite some time. However, in Irish literary and cultural studies scholarship, we have lagged somewhat behind on those way-marked paths. And yet, the "cognitive schema" as Turnbull would have it, within which we can make sense of the migrant experience (or experiences), is available to us in the work of Irish literary writers from at least the mid-nineteenth century on. Constructing a discourse within which the literary and cultural, as well as the social and historical aspects of Irish emigrant experience are situated, enables us to see other elements of that narrative, such as affect

for instance. This is certainly the case with George Egerton's work, in particular her 1898 novel *The Wheel of God* which will be my main focus of enquiry here.[1] Before I turn to look at this text, I'd like to sketch in broad brushstrokes some of the contexts within which my reading is situated.

In the past fifteen years a lively and growing dynamic has emerged in Irish scholarship which has broadened critical discourse beyond previous somewhat static literary-historical categories, deploying postcolonial, feminist and queer approaches to Irish literature and culture. In tandem with this, the fixed points on the map of Irish emigration have been unsettled in the context of the contemporary global environment and what Diane Negra calls "transnationalized Irishness" (1). This troubling of the canon and of the old certainties enables us to interrogate the connections and potential incompatibilities between received forms of national identity on the island, and locate these within a more complex nexus of Irish, European, and transnational identities. In the context of migration, these developments can be demonstrated with reference to Kerby Miller's ground-breaking 1985 study *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. The resonance of one of the key terms used here "exiles", now seems a little dated in an Irish context and perhaps this gestures to the shifts in this field since the early 1980s. If anything, even the fixities suggested by the term "diaspora", which has had widespread use since Mary Robinson's presidency in the 1990s, seem somewhat old-fashioned in comparison to terms we are now more familiar with in relation to twenty-first-century migration: hybridity, third space or contact zones, syncretism, and in an Irish context, Arrowsmith's "plastic Paddies". Perhaps we might best locate our praxis in relation to Irish migrant discourses in Ian Chambers' use of the term "migrancy", suggestive of fluidity rather than fixity. Chambers describes migrancy as "a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain" (5). If we consider this framework in the light of Paul White's discussion of the way migration changes people and mentalities, the new experiences resulting from the coming together of multiple influences and peoples, and these new experiences leading to altered or evolving representations of experience or self-identity, it seems to me that we may arrive at a very fluid understanding of both the migrant subject and selfhood more generally. Such fluid understandings are at the heart of work by several women writers of Irish migrant literature, such as that of Maeve Brennan and Anne Enright for instance, who tend to construct migrant experience as a way of being in the world rather than a journey between two fixed points. In some cases, this reflects the tangible life experience of the migrant woman herself: here we find a disruption of the binaries of home and adopted country such as that suggested by Maeve Brennan's statement in her Preface to *The Rose Garden* that "there are a number of places I am homesick for". This reflects James Clifford's description of the "lived tension" between "separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (255). Thus, as we locate Irish emigrant experience in the context of other immigrant communities abroad, and construct selfhood and new families emerging within new

communities in a hybrid way, rather than one fixed and immutably anchored in an Irish past, we ought not to forget this "lived tension" on the part of the migrant particularly when it comes to reading migrant literature.

In the contemporary period, it is perhaps tempting to see migrant experience as simply part of the modern condition and to dissolve the disjunctures between homeland and adopted country in a pool of cheap air travel and twenty-first century technologies (email, skype, online newspapers, satellite tv, and so on). The diasporic experience of *some* Irish people today is far removed from the traumatic rupture experienced by their compatriots a century or more ago. Thus when we encounter the literary expression of nineteenth-century Irish migrant experience, it is useful to remember George O'Brien's assessment, that "exile has been a dual negative in Irish life" its combination of depletion and silence making it difficult to represent. This dual negative is perhaps why we don't find emigration emerging as a significant theme in nineteenth-century Irish writing, although there are some exceptions to this tendency, such as the work of Mary Ann Sadlier for instance.[2] Using O'Brien's framework can explain why it is that only more recent generations of Irish writers and scholars feel free to address migration as a central topic in their work (as contemporary novels by Colm Tóibín, Anne Enright, Ronan Bennett and Joseph O'Connor attest). Where it is available to us, the literary work of Irish migrant writers can facilitate, it seems to me, some kind of understanding of the earlier migrant experience, constructing what it is to be neither "here nor there" (to use Bernard O'Donoghue's formula) enabling the reader to experience the third space – at a remove, perhaps, but nonetheless, in some kind of tangible way. As Joe Lee has pointed out, when talking about twentieth-century emigration:

> It is to the writers that the historian must turn, as usual, for the larger truth. It is they, sometimes themselves emigrants, who best convey the fetid atmosphere of the forties and fifties, the sense of pervading, brooding hopelessness at home, the emptiness, the uncomprehending remorse, the heartbreak and heroism of many […] as families were sundered and communities withered". (384)

The literary expression of the diaspora experience, too, can help us to fill in the gaps in this history, and perhaps explain why a particular mythology has grown up in the dominant culture relating to migration. As Eilis Lacey, the protagonist in Colm Tóibín's recent novel *Brooklyn* recalls*:*

> One thing Jack had said remained with her because it was unlike him to be so vehement about anything. His saying that at the beginning he would have done anything to go home was strange. He had said nothing about this in his letters. It struck her that he might have told no one, not even his brothers, how he felt, and she thought how lonely that might have been for him. Maybe, she thought, all three of her brothers went through the same things and helped each other, sensing the feeling of homesickness when it arose in one of the others. If it happened to

> her, she realized, she would be alone, so she hoped that she would be ready for whatever was going to happen to her, however she was going to feel, when she arrived in Brooklyn (38).

As well as exploring affect, this passage, it seems to me, sums up some of the reasons for particular versions of migrant narrative to have triumphed over others: such experiences (of fear, loss, or failure) were not written about, or in some cases even spoken, in either public or private discourses. This is why George O'Brien cautions that while recent use of the term "Irish diaspora" might offer us a way forward in constructing useful frameworks for migrant experience (and we might add to that the list of terms I mentioned above), we should also remember that "a phrase cannot lay a ghost".

So to focus on one writer, George Egerton, who used her own diasporic identity to posit a range of different subject positions beyond normative nineteenth-century codes relating to gender, class and nation for her female protagonists (and thereby for her readers). Despite her Irish background, where Egerton's work has been addressed by literary scholarship, it tends to be situated either within the framework of British "New Woman" fiction, or in relation to the *fin de siècle* Scandinavian models from which many of her short stories drew inspiration and form. I propose here to address Egerton's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Wheel of God* (1898), which has received little critical attention. Given how rare in particular Irish migrant literature written by women seems to have been, even up until quite recently, this novel which sits squarely in the frame of "diasporic literature" suggests an exception to the general tendency, such as that suggested by Patrick Ward's synopsis of Irish women migrants: "They were celibate and single and almost totally silent in the discourses surrounding emigration" (152). The *Wheel of God* draws on Egerton's first-hand experience of emigration and ethnic ex-centricity to articulate a feminist subject position and seems to me to posit a direct contradiction of Ward's view that "Those women who did write [about their experience of migration] and were able to publish their material were unable or unwilling to re-write those stereotypes constructed in the interests of men" (158).

As we know from the work of Kerby Miller and others, the numbers of young, unmarried women emigrating from Ireland in the post-Famine period equalled and eventually exceeded those of Irish men emigrating. Hasia Diner suggests that this was partly due to a conscious rejection by Irish women of their limited familial and economic opportunities in Ireland, and an awareness of the availability of waged work and economic independence in the USA. On the whole, we tend to think of *all* late nineteenth-century women emigrants ending up as domestic servants in the USA (such as those "Biddies" depicted in Maeve Brennan's short stories, as well as in the scholarly work of Hasia Diner and Maureen Murphy) and as with our general perception of all earlier emigrants, as those who never "came back" to Ireland once they had left. Yet, in the case of George Egerton and her fictional protagonist Mary Desmond in *The Wheel of God*, we are presented with a very different kind of emigrant, one who is not just barely literate but who later

constructs fictional accounts of her migrant experiences, and perhaps more importantly, one who returns to "tell the tale".

The material upon which this essay is based is drawn from my reading of the novel and also of Egerton's life-writing. It is clear from Egerton's letters that she consciously deployed her own life experiences as the basis for those of her fictional protagonists, and she draws direct parallels between both in the prefaces to some of her works. However, as with her better-known counterpart Sarah Grand, it is often difficult to differentiate between fiction and fact when it comes to these accounts, which brings to mind Foucault's discussion of self-representation and self-construction, the basis of which, he suggests, is a mixture of memory and invention. The figure of "George Egerton" was very much a deliberate construct. Married twice and involved in one earlier union, as well as several love affairs, Egerton adopted the names given to her by the men she lived with – and passed through a number of names/identities between her given name, Mary Chavelita Dunne, and her final marriage to Golding Bright. Family circumstances meant that almost every single member of her family, the Dunnes, migrated, some of them moving from place to place, others settling in one place almost immediately – as did Egerton's sister Kit, who settled in Johannesburg where she reared her children and later took in members of her own family along the way, including one of Egerton's husbands, George Egerton Clairmonte, at one point. In Egerton's letters to her father, there are references to her young brother Jack coming to stay with her in Scandinavia and then going to India in 1891; in 1893 she tells her father that "Bun", another sibling, has gone to Algiers, and later that Nan is going to live with Kit in South Africa. Johnny, the youngest member of the family comes back from Paris in 1896 with plans to emigrate to the USA. Doubtless this was due in part to their early life – the children of an Irish Catholic army captain, the Dunne children were each born in a different colonial barracks (not unlike the Bagstocks) and the family moved to settle in Dublin only when Egerton herself was 10. In the main, however, their migrations were economically driven – the struggle to make ends meet was one in which each member of the family was engaged, due in part to their not having had a solid start in life, little education and no money to secure positions.

This background, it seems to me, may be directly addressed with reference to Breda Gray's observations about the permissible and impermissible narratives of emigration. While there has been a tendency to address migration in a context purely of market forces and economic need, and generally the emigrant story – usually the successful emigrant story – was not one in which other "push" factors were really considered. Gray points out that frequently, the discourse of migration may incorporate family dysfunction or breakup, abuse, unwanted pregnancy or transgressive sexual identities, yet these stories have tended to remain silent, hidden or been pushed aside. In dealing with life experiences such as those of the Dunnes –who are just one example of such a migrant story – and narratives such as *The Wheel of God*, social and psychological motives for migration come to the fore and it becomes clear that in fact, they are the main story here.

We have little information about Egerton's life between 1877 and 1887, but we do know that during that period she emigrated to New York on her own. Katherine Tynan suggests that this was for a three-year period, before she returned to London to work in the mid-1880s. These experiences in New York were the ones she would return to in her novel *The Wheel of God* and also in some of the short stories, such as "Gone Under". Taking as her subject a young Irish woman who emigrates to New York late in the nineteenth century, fleeing destitution and a dysfunctional family, the novel questions national and social identities during the period. This novel was not as sucessful as Egerton's earlier work. This fact may be attributed to the decline in public interest in Decadent and New Woman forms in 1898, a mere three years after the Wilde trials. In our own period, despite the resurgence of interest in New Woman fiction, this novel has as yet been neglected apart from one useful essay by Scott McCracken. Yet it seems to me that it is an important text, not only in the context of New Woman themes, but also as part of a matrix of Irish discourses.

The novel begins with a deftly etched background of a family life not unlike that of Egerton's own, where the central protagonist, Mary Desmond, is a young adolescent being sent with notes to beg for financial assistance to a number of wealthy acquaintances of her father around Dublin city in the late nineteenth century. Chapter Three opens with the death of Mary Desmond's mother which is almost immediately followed by Mary's migration to the USA; she later tells us that she had first thought of London but "every one had said her chance was better in America, when the need to earn her living became imperative". Egerton's depiction of the emigrant scene at Cobh, far from being a rose-tinted picture of the Emerald Isle, instead points up images such as Spike Island in the bay, "an English governed convict prison" (59) (as she describes it) and draws our attention to the girl's still-sharp grief for her dead mother and also for the death of Captain O'Hara, an uncle figure. Mary Desmond's last glimpse of shore takes in "the sun striking white sparks off the houses that were each an Irish home, fast fading into a blur of green and white" (63). However, it's clear that these were the homes of others – not of Mary Desmond herself. The juxtaposition of this picture with the sharply delineated life experiences of this young woman in the earlier chapters, make clear to us that this migrant is not leaving an idealised Irish home: her mother dead, father in debtor's prison, siblings already scattered to the four winds, we are not here offered the cold comfort of a cosy domestic scene being left behind which may offer solace in the migrant landscape, or a place to return to. Nor can Mary Desmond find respite in or a sense of solidarity with the company of her fellow-travellers, from whom she feels alienated from the start – partly due to class distinctions of a sort, partly because of their reliance on Catholic prayers which she cannot join in because of her rejection of her religion following her mother's death – an experience very close to Egerton's own.

Like many before her and since, Mary Desmond has a letter of introduction to a distant relative in New York who sets her up with a place to live, from whence she sets

off to find work. At this point, the novel picks up a thread we are familiar with in New Woman texts: addressing the problem of work for women such as Mary Desmond, who, coming from backgrounds of either genteel poverty or the middle classes, are neither trained for skilled work nor able for heavy labour. But the backdrop to her search for work is the alienation experienced by a girl lately arrived from Dublin, a small town in comparison to the vast industrial city she has landed in:

> She was scarcely miserable, because she had not time to think of her position, and she was too bewildered by the feverish whirr of this monstrous international sifting sieve […] Life seemed less concrete, less inside the houses and warehouses; it was everywhere, pounding like a gigantic steam-hammer, full speed, in the air, in the streets – insistent, noisy, attention-compelling. Trains above one's head, one caught glimpses of domestic interiors, intimate bedroom scenes, as one whizzed past second stories in the early cars […] Mary Desmond felt that the clocks in America must surely give two ticks to the *one* of the sedate old timepieces at home. (68)

In many ways, this passage is typical of Irish emigrant fiction – it would not have been out of place, for instance, in a Sadlier novel. However, the insistence on Irish exceptionalism we find in other emigrant writing is not echoed here, as Egerton constructs her protagonist in relation to a range of other migrants in a transnational framework. When she finally finds clerical work in a large insurance firm, her job is to make ledger entries based on the new business being brought in by their sales staff:

> Murphies, O'Reillys, Bradies, Browns, Jones, Robinsons, Gomez and Mendozas, Müllers and Grüners, Russians and Poles with a hatful of consonants – a grotesque tale of overcrowded mother countries, *wandertrieb,* evictions, enterprise or expedient flight. (75)

Here, we find the usual list of motivations for people to emigrate – and also, the cosmopolitan landscape which the newly-arrived immigrant to New York inhabits. This is enhanced by the relationships Mary Desmond forges with her co-workers (none of whom are Irish) and with others she encounters. So, in contrast to the work of Sadlier, for instance, Egerton doesn't construct a "diaspora space" within which the Irish emigrant is bound within an Irish expat community, fixed by ties of culture, religion and a predefined relationship to their homeland.

While Mary Desmond is typical in that she misses her father and siblings, at no point in this text does she either write or receive letters to or from home – the usual means by which the Irish emigrant story has been narrated. Instead, on the occasions we find her solitary in her boarding house, her companions are library books – she spends her first Christmas day in New York with "a book of Norwegian peasant tales by a man

with an unpronounceable name". Her imaginary life transports her away from her circumstances, not to an Irish hearth and home, but to Bjornson's Scandinavian north: "She was away in the fjords, and up in the saeters with Arne, sitting on the cliff with Marit" (87). It seems to me that this is just one of the ways in which Egerton marks out her central protagonist as not so much an Irish emigrant to New York, but as a nomad with an Irish diasporic identity, with much the same heritage and cultural allegiances as her own and that of her Dunne siblings. This is not, therefore, the narrative of a homesick Irish girl, alienated in New York; more that of a "nomadic subject" (to use Braidotti's formula). In the case of Mary Desmond, however, we do not have two fixed points in her history – a past rooted in a specific place and time, mother country, mother tongue – and a present in a new place where she will forge a new life. Instead, we have a variety of cultural markers and geographical places, held together by her attachment to her family and her sense of herself as a Desmond "after all, there was no one like one's own" she tells us. Added to this is her knowledge of the wider world and an adherence to a wider European, rather than simply an Irish, intellectual or cultural tradition. Egerton's construction of the emigrant here as hybrid is a very modern one, which anticipates Stuart Hall's "necessary heterogeneity" (31), or Edward Said's "contrapuntal consciousness" (366). Therefore, *The Wheel of God*, clearly located within *fin de siècle* literary forms, anticipates the twentieth-century transnational subject, and perhaps we can compare it an with early example such as Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904). Thus, rather than taking refuge in a fixed and identifiably "Irish" past, Mary Desmond has the ability to read herself into, and out of, the narratives of her own life history which are her sources of sustenance in this strange land. In this way too, Egerton's protagonist corresponds to the nomadic consciousness outlined by Braidotti, who defines this as being: "akin to what Foucault called countermemory; it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self." (25). Mary Desmond's resistance could be read in just this way, as a refusal to be assimilated to the received Irish emigrant story – in a similar way to that found in the work of Egerton's contemporary, George Moore. In his short story, "Home Sickness" Moore constructs emigrant nostalgia in relation to the country of adoption, rather than the "home" country, thus refusing what diaspora theory calls the "myth of return", and troubling the construction of home in earlier literary texts such as Sadlier's 1861 *Bessy Conway* for instance, where the "old country", is fetishised. If anything, James Bryden in "Home Sickness", brings to mind the words of Tarry Flynn's much-travelled uncle: "The best way to love a country like this is from a range of not less than three hundred miles" (Kavanagh 251).

As with other New Woman fiction, in other words, this novel is derived from *fin de siècle* feminist thought, its central protagonist is sexually and economically liberated, striving to forge a life for herself autonomously. Mary Desmond, Egerton tells us, "was turning over a great many pages in the book of life, and readjusting moral values" (90). Shortly after beginning to work in New York, she asks Cora, one of her colleagues: "How do the shop-girls get sealskin sacques and ostrich feathers?" and

Egerton tells us that "Cora had enlightened her [about the sexual economy of the place] with frank amusement at her ignorance" (90-1). The general attitude to this, and other ways of actually earning a living through sex-working, is one of acceptance – as Mary's landlady comments about one of her lodgers: "Well, she's proper enough here, and one must live". Paul White considers the ambivalence of many migrants towards standards of behaviour in the adopted country, suggesting that emigrants question "whether to cling to the old or to discard it, whether to compromise via symbolic events whilst adhering to the new on an everyday basis" (3-4). Mary Desmond experiences such ambivalence in response to these sexual transgressions and what she sees as her own complicity in them: "I seem to have lost a grip of everything since I came to America. I am confused by all sorts of moral issues; and I haven't sifted them yet – to my own satisfaction" (106). She seeks refuge in a brief return to her Catholic roots – she goes to Confession. But Egerton tells us "she found no comfort, only struck her hand and bruised it against the granite wall of ecclesiastical authority." In response to this, she takes one look back at the altar, sanctuary lamp and tabernacle "with regret" but realises that "henceforth she must wander outside" (91). Chief amongst her New York friends is a young woman who works in the same firm, called Septima, or Sep. Throughout, Sep is having an affair with a married man and bit by bit, Mary Desmond becomes aware of this illicit relationship and supports Sep through some of the difficult patches. Eventually however this transgressive relationship becomes impossible to maintain and when Sep's lover goes back to his wife and family, she commits suicide. For Mary Desmond, the loss of Sep breaks her link with her new life in New York and she determines to leave – not, interestingly, to "go back" Ireland, but to London, where she will try to forge another new start. In this way, it seems to me that Egerton's text generates what Sneja Gunew calls "serial accommodations", leading away from fixities of class, gender or national identities. Mary Desmond is very clearly situated at the end of the novel, as "neither here nor there" and *perhaps* "therefore home" as Bernard O'Donoghue's poem suggests.

This brings me to the question: if we are to read the work of Irish literary writers such as Egerton within a transnational framework, how might we say their work reflects or responds to changing notions about Irish identities? In the case of some of this work, there is a revelation, as I have demonstrated that the fixed points were never really there to begin with, or weren't as fixed as they now seem. Using a different lens opens up a series of new questions for us in relation to this literature, and we might go on to ask: how do these texts deal with, or shape, that experience of migration, write that tension between tradition and modernity, or as Piaras MacEinrí describes it: "between the communally-defined subject and the modern, isolated, self-defined subject". The work of Sadlier in particular, can yield very interesting material in response to this question, it seems to me. Furthermore, we might consider placing such a text within the burgeoning field of affect studies, or perhaps look at the embodiment of diasporic subjectivity, following Catherine Eagan's discussions of the fraught racial status of Irishness, and the work of Richard Dyer on heterosexuality as a discourse within migration.

So to draw some of these threads together into a skein: it seems to me that, granted wider access to texts such as *The Wheel of God,* both in terms of our own research but also in our teaching and interaction with students, we may begin to piece together different perspectives on Irish women's writing from earlier centuries, and begin to see earlier Irish women authors as *active* cultural producers and agents. In this way, we may further develop the resistance in contemporary feminist thought to the appropriation of Irish femininity evident in the more stereotyped constructions which have tended to dominate in Irish writing and scholarship. In a more general way, the kind of reflexivity I'm suggesting here, in which we look outward in an interdisciplinary way to diaspora theory, in tandem with a more in-depth engagement with the Irish literary past *and present* in all its diversity, it seems to me, can only enhance our understanding of Irish discourses, and thus enable us to construct more meaningful readings of contemporary identities, and hegemonies, in Ireland. The migrant perspective, or perhaps more accurately, the migrant process, situates the subject outside and frequently in opposition to the closed space of the nation, highlighting the boundaries of that space, revealing its constructedness and artificiality. Adopting such an interdisciplinary approach also enables us to ask, at a metalevel, how viable the traditional forms of enquiry we are used to in an Irish Studies context *are* in our altered world, particularly in the context of transnationalism.

## Notes

1 George Egerton [Mary Chavelita Dunne] (1860-1945) was one of the "New Woman" novelists of the 1890s whose most celebrated work was the short story collection *Keynotes* (1893). Egerton was born in Melbourne, Australia, the daughter of an Irish Catholic army captain who returned to Dublin with his family in the late 1860s. She wrote *Keynotes* while based in Millstreet, Co. Cork. On the whole, she led a peripatetic existence spending several years in Scandinavia and New York before settling in London. For further information see *Dictionary of Munster Women Writers* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001. 75-6).

2 Mary Ann Sadlier (1820-1903), who emigrated to North America from Cootehill, Co. Cavan in the 1840s, published over sixty novels in the USA and Canada in the 1850s and 60s, many of which dealt with Irish migrant communities in the USA and had Catholicism and the "myth of return" as central themes.

## Works Cited

Arrowsmith, Aidan. "Plastic Paddy: Negotiating Identity in Second Generation Irish-English Writing". *Irish Studies Review* 8.1 (2000): 35-44.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto: Vintage, 2001.

Brennan, Maeve. Preface. *The Rose Garden*. Berkely: Counterpoint, 2001.

Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Clifford, James. "Diasporas". *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 244-78.

Diner, Hasia. *Erin's Daughters in America.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Dyer, Richard. White. London: Routledge, 1997.

Eagan, Catherine M. "White" if "Not Quite": Irish Whiteness in the Irish-American Nineteenth Century Novel'. New Directions in Irish-American History. Ed. Kevin Kenny. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 2003. 140-156.

Egerton, George. *The Wheel of God*. London: Grant Richards, 1898.

Gunew, Sneja. Serial Accommodations: Diasporic Women's Writing. *Canadian Literature* 196 (Spring 2008): 6-15.

Gray, Breda. *Women and the Irish Diaspora.* London: Routledge, 2003.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". *Diaspora and Visual Culture*. Mirzoeff, Nicholas, (ed.). London: Routledge, 2000. 21-33.

Kavanagh, Patrick. *Tarry Flynn.* 1948. London: Penguin, 2000.

Lee, J.J. *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society.*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

MacÉinrí, Piaras. "From Emigration and Exile to the New Diaspora: Irish Migrant Literature." Irish Exile Autumn School, Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh.

Miller, Kerby. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Mc Cracken, Scott. 'A Novel from/on the Margins: George Egerton's Wheel of God.' Gender and Colonialism. Ed. Timothy P. Foley, Lionel Pilkington, Seán Ryder, Elizabeth Tilley. Galway: Galway UP, 1995.

Moore, George. "Home Sickness". The Untilled Field London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903

Murphy, Maureen."The Irish Servant Girl in Literature". *America and Ulster: A Cultural Correspondence.* Writing Ulster Ser. Vol. 5. Coleraine: University of Ulster Press, 1998. 133-148.

Negra, Diane. *The Irish in Us? Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture*. London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

O'Brien, George. "The Aesthetics of Exile". Harte, Liam and Michael Parker. (eds.). *Contemporary Irish Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000. 35-55.

O'Donoghue, Bernard. *Here Nor There*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1999.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1998.

Sadlier, Mary Ann. Bessy Conway; or; The Irish Girl in America. New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1861.

Tynan, Katharine (ed.). The Cabinet of Irish Literature. London: Gresham, 1905.

Tóibín, Colm. *Brooklyn*. London: Penguin, 2009.

Ward, Patrick. *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing.* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002.

White, Paul. "Geography, Literature and Migration". King, Rusell, John Connell and Paul White, eds. *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration.* London: Routledge, 1995. 1-19.

# *Childhoods in Irish Writing*

Noriko Ito

**Abstract:** *Childhood is a crucial stage of Irish life. It is the time in which essentials of Irish experience are nurtured, which will be developed later in a broader scope. Childhood is depicted as a universally important theme in all Irish writing, regardless of its artistic orientation towards traditional or counter-traditional. In traditional writing, childhood is depicted in the interactions between people and society. Protagonists are glimpsed actively living in realistic surroundings, among lively people. On the other hand, in counter-traditional writing, which is an artistically created universe, reality is replaced by fictiveness. Over an author's body of work there may be fixity and recurrence in protagonists and themes, to elucidate life's structure in a whole artistic perspective. Regardless of orientation, Irish writing invariably has influential roots in childhood, because childhood is where Irishness gains its essential foothold. This paper spotlights and elucidates childhood, investigating how it works as an influential element in forming protagonists in linkage with later life.*

## I.

Irish writing is characterized by what is called *Irishness*, components of which include nationalism, Catholicism, and the love of place. Actually nowadays Irishness has difficulty in being maintained. However, it is still a substantial issue when we read Irish literature. In all fields everything changes over time, and must be reconsidered in a new light. Such is the case with *Irishness* also. Let's take childhood as an example. Childhood is a popular topic in Irish writing, which has taken it as a time in which specifically *Irish* experience takes place, which may later be supplemented or supplanted by wider experience. In traditional writing, childhood is represented through active interactions between people and society, while in counter-traditional writing it is interpreted through a stylized aestheticism. Consequently, there is a marked difference in expression between these two ways.

The past is remembered, and as it is replayed, it is transformed. Also memory is not continuous or coherent but rather discontinuous and erratic. When childhood is recalled, that stage of life is made independent and arbitrarily spotlighted. Many phases,

some of which are difficult to get through or progress from. However, childhood is characterized by a certain number of unifying specificities, *Irishness*, which integrates traditional Irish writing as a corollary. For instance, Colm Tóibín's protagonists are born from the Irish climate, as are John McGahern's and Colum McCann's. These writers are, in a sense, traditionalists. *Irishness*, even though it is not so powerful nowadays as in the past, is still influential in their protagonists' lives.

Characteristically, traditional writers depict childhood in the interactions between people and society while counter-traditional writers like John Banville and Ann Enright do not. It is natural that in the enclosed universe of counter-traditionalists' fiction, there is little or no interaction between protagonists and society. Traditionally, Irish childhood plays a significant role, moulding the lives of protagonists. It often happens that they have an unhappy childhood. "Had I had a happy childhood? No" (Éilís Ní Dhuibhne 93). The circumstances they are in are oppressive and restrictive. The protagonists think that their past, including childhood, is problematic, influenced by social and familial conditions. Restrictiveness is mentioned in the experience of Eamon Redmond:

> Eamon went out to play, careful not to sit on the cold cement in case he got a cold, and not to get into fights. He was allowed to bring other boys into the house, but they had to play quietly. Often, when they left to go home and have their tea, he relieved. He had the house to himself again and could sit opposite his father and work at his lessons.(Tóibín 1992. 14-15)

Protagonists are also characterized by their being outsider. Eamon found himself estranged from his cousins, Helen (Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship*[3]) was not like an ordinary girl, Brian Tierney (Brian Moore's *An Answer from Limbo*) was a black sheep of his family, and so on. Signs of later predicament are already apparent in their childhood. Also with Brian Moore himself, childhood determined his later life. Moore lived in different places through his life. As a writer, he depicted the places he lived later in contrast with the place of his childhood, Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland situation serves as a background in depicting Sheila Redden (Brian Moore's *The Doctor's Wife*) at a turning point of her life. Sheila runs away from home. Away from the soured memory of childhood, Brian Tierney goes to America.

The protagonists search for their identity, which is closely tied to Irish history. They may have ambiguous feelings about history and their birth. *A Second Life* by Dermot Bolger and *Songdogs* by Colum McCann are works in which writers make birth the central theme. Their dubious birth is the dubious history of Ireland, in which colonizers and colonized coexist and their cultures mix. In McCann's short story, "Fishing in the Sloe Black River," the complexities and their effects on the Irish are crystalized symbolically. Recreating a new idea from the old material of Irishness, the story becomes a parable. Childhood, which is generated happily or unhappily from indigenous climate as the protagonists grow, is followed by their turbulent adolescence. The present is

begotten from and is inseparably twined with past. Both stages of life must go along with and be affected by, time. However, some protagonists defy against this truth and try to preserve the past in eternal present. The mixture of the two tenses and freezing time are a usual method of novels. This exemplified in the protagonist *The Sea*, is *The Sea* by Iris Murdoch of *The Sea*. The protagonist, Charles Arrowby, tries to carry on his ideal of his love of Hartley. Due to the unnaturalness of his ideal, the story turns out a frustration.

> In ordinary human affairs humble common sense comes to one's aid. For most people common sense *is* moral sense. But you seem to have deliberately excluded this modest source of light. Ask yourself, what really happened between whom all those years ago? You've made it into a story, and stories are false.'
>
> (At this point Titus, who could bear it no longer, surreptitiously seized a piece of ham and some bread.)
>
> 'And you are using this thing from the far past as a guide to important and irrevocable moves which you propose to make in the future.' You are making a dangerous induction, and induction is shaky at the best of times, consider Russell's chicken – (355)

Things in childhood are involved in things happening now. Time sequence is often ignored in novels. The tendency is prominent in Irish literary writing.

Some of the protagonists want to estrange themselves from the native country. They make exiles of themselves. Emigration is a method by which they can get through life. A significant turning point, emigration sometimes seems to solve the problems. However, it is difficult to say that it is a really happy solution. Many do not emigrate but stay in Ireland. Colm Tóibín's protagonists are products of the time and the place. In his Irish-based novels, Tóibín's protagonists reveal how the Irish lived in Ireland from the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. They show themselves to be born from the time. McGahern represents the time with superb precision and relevancy. He is called a regionalist. McGahern, Tóibín, and McCann write of returning natives after estrangement from their country. Katherine Proctor of Tóibín's *The South*, after a long exile in Spain, returns to Ireland. She did not have a happy childhood. She was an Anglo-Irish descendant. One memory which is reverberated is the day when she suffered persecution when her family was burned out of their house:

> An image came to her constantly of a child running for help, running for her life, being run through with bullets, while the thunderous sound of a fire roared in the background' (85).

After a long time experiencing upheavals in Spain, she returned to Ireland. She finds herself in a country unknown to her and tries to readjust herself to it. Time changes

everything, and protagonists must remould themselves. They reconcile with the past and their childhood is integrated into the whole scale of their life.

**II**

Banville's writing is free of all specificities of Irishness and can be read as an art born anywhere on the earth. His transcendental writing embodies what Bhabha (1994) mentions about the contemporary tendency of literature:

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

The themes and motifs Banville extracts from Irish experiences are radically innovated through experimental usage of words. From the start, Banville is detached from Irishness. Even *house* or *family*, which is essential to Irish literature, is totally differentiated from a usual Irish one. The house he depicts is inhabited by ghosts. House is usually full of ghosts in the sense that memories of the past are there. However, Banville's ghosts are rather aesthetic, waiting to be made into art. They are analyzed and are adjusted to the writer's plan as any other material of his is. Counter-traditional writing, in which objects are entirely controlled by the writer, is unfamiliar to Irish writing. McGahern or Tóibín would not have allowed intellectual musings to occupy such a vast space. Nor would any other traditional writer. Banville's narrator plays Janus roles. He is the self, as both subject and object, who writes and is written about. The book is written by him, who is seen writing. When he says that he is not here and may be somewhere else, he expresses the complex situation of the artist. Ironically the narrator has not established the self, who is "a bag of slack flesh in a world drained of essence". (Banville 1991. 99). The undefined self cannot be anything especially Irish. Childhood, which is the time he faces, vacillating between uncertain past and future, is the time which is bereft of any Irish specificities. The description of the self or time shows that Banville's writing is not Irish specificity but generalized ideas.

One protagonist of Banville's books says that childhood is entirely fictional, a time of "somehow indestructible treasures nestling at the heart of the world." (Banville 1997. 31). To the protagonist, who so often finds himself returning to childhood, the past seems always present, where memory and imagination merge and "confused soft noises mingle in the air…it will remind you of somewhere else, a meadow, with poppies, beside a dusty road." (Banville 2000. 137). The meadow is any meadow and poppies are any poppies in the

world. These things are seen by the self. Childhood is recollected through senses: “I am always strangely moved by the smell of exhaust fumes on the morning air. ..A swagger stick: Why is it, I wonder, that the sea smells of tar? …Life is full of mysteries” (Banville 2000. 13). As childhood is described sensuously, so the body of the protagonist is also perceived neutrally: “this strange, soft, breathing body in which my spinning consciousness was darkly trapped” (Banville 1998. 34). Childhood in Banville’s novels is a nucleus which does not change in ever expanding stylistic structure of ever increasing verbal experiment. It is on its own without being interacted with from outside. On the other hand, childhood in traditional writing is bred and is growing through the interactions with the surroundings. In both ways of depicting childhood, it childhood is the watershed where harmony is broken and is inseparably combined with the sense of loss. It is gone forever and we hear Helen’s lament: “My childhood is gone forever” (Tóibín 1999. 73). She knew her father died before her grandmother came to tell it to her. In her bed, she felt that her childhood was over.

The childhood depicted by traditionalists is wider scoped in the interactions between humans and society than that depicted by counter- traditionalists. A ten-year-old child’s experiences cannot help piloting his later life. Eamon Redmond, Tóibín’s (1992) protagonist, stayed with his relatives during the civil war. In the countryside where he lived, he experienced sex for the first time. After the deed, he was attacked by a sense of guilt, and when he came back to Enniscorthy, he soon went to the church to confess. Readjusting and conforming himself to social conventions, he reconstructed his life, to his relief. Childhood in traditionalists’ writing is temporal and spatial, closely related with the time when and the place where it is written. McGahern’s protagonists were all born in the early twentieth century when Irish tradition was still solid enough, although modernization was already incipient. The protagonist of *The Dark* (1965) was rigorously punished for answering back to his father. His course of life seemed to be fixed when he got a scholarship and studied at a university. However, he did not continue with the clerical profession, but instead, he made a pilgrimage in which he might find a new direction. At the end of the book, which is open-ended, his new direction is just a suggestion. His childhood, inseparable from Irish climate, is unhappy, but is accepted by him, as is seen in the reconciliatory ending of the book. In McGahern’s last book, *That They May Face the Rising* Sun, (2001) he has finally arrived at an apparently more settled stage, as we find direct references to childhood absent. Instead he concentrates on the opposite extremity of life, depicting an idyllic rural existence in which paganism is not far beneath the surface. In fact, this may shadow his memories of his own earliest existence, but such is not referred to explicitly.

## III

The love of place is another constituent of Irishness. In traditional writing, people are depicted as being grounded in areas or places. Childhood memory is inseparable from places, real and imaginary. Places in books are real and at the same time unreal,

because they are recreated from reality. However, there is a difference between places, as depicted by traditionalists and counter-traditionalists. In traditional writing, place and time are ruled by reality while with counter-traditionalists, place and time are just single dimensions, not an interactive area. With them, everything is renovated in space imagery. Body is a space, which is analyzed as an instrument and is spatially expanded. Like cubist painting, the body is deconstructed and seen from various angles. A fantastic usage of space carries us away into another dimension, like the wardrobe of C.S.Lewis' *Narnia*. With Banville, the landing at the top of the stairs is frequently the entrance to childhood, to another fictional world, and there fabulous play of words and ideas is glimpsed. Windows, rooms, garden as well as landing, constitute space that frames and defines a painting in words.

In Moore's case, childhood, as Sampson (1999) suggests, was a frustrating time to him. At home he was reigned over by his father and could not conform to social and familial conventions, which gave him the sense of guilt, and his desire to leave his country was nurtured. At school and at home he found himself as outsider. One day he was badly bullied at school, because he said he would become a writer.

> You may remember how a much larger audience assembled as I was dragged to the school drinking fountain, ducked under it and held until water ran down my spine, dripped into my trousers trickled down my skinny legs to fill my socks and shoes. You may remember that, after my duckling, I was forced to read my essay once more. Your motives were just, I suppose. You wanted to knock the pretensions from under me, to teach me the lesson I have been too long in learning. But I learned nothing. Soaking wet, my clothes torn, I read my essay, but with pride now, screaming out that I would do everything I had promised in it. And all of you, watching my pale face and trembling shoulders, hearing the true fanatic in my thin defiant scream, all of you turned away, uneasy of me. Because conviction – even a wrong conviction – makes the rest of us uneasy. For the first time in my life I had won. My own unsurety died and for the remainder of my years at school I grew in the wind of your disapproval. Your doubts that day made me a victim – the victim I still remain – of my own uncertain boast.
>
> For I did not become great. I had no vocation for greatness. (32)

The incident proved traumatic through his life, and in his book he refers to it again and again. Childhood followed by adolescence left him in further frustration, which is represented in Moore's *An Answer from Limbo*. Emigrating to America, the protagonist swears to become a writer. Through hard American life, his bitter childhood memory is incessantly remembered, and eventually leads him to cruelly treat his mother, who came to live with him. The consistency with which he tried to adjust himself to his dream since his childhood is not fulfilled.

## IV Conclusion

Childhood is an especially important topic for contemporary Irish writers. traditional as well as counter-traditional writers make use of the topic. In a transitional time like now, it is important for writers to know where they are situated. Whether they emigrate or stay at home, they must return to childhood to know what made the self. Childhood is the starting point, in which the self is formed. Whether it is formed in the interactions with the outside world, or is formed within the fiction, depends upon the character and situation of the writer, who makes the decision. This investigation has attempted to summarize an aspect of Irish writing during the past decades, indicating where writers are situated. A new contemporary- age sensibility is represented by counter-traditionalists, while Irish sensibility is solidly maintained with refreshing new angles by traditionalists. In both cases, Irish childhood has equipped, and will equip, them with ample influential and productive resources.

## Works Cited


Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *The Bray House*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1990.

Colm Tóibín, *The Heather Blazing*. London: Picador, 1992.

____. *The Blackwater Lightship*. London: Picador, 1999.

Brian Moore, *An Answer from Limbo*. London: Picador, 1962.

____. *The Doctor's Wife*. Fort Landerlae: Flamingo, 1976.

Dermot Bolger, *A Second Life*. New York: Viking, 1994.

Colum McCann, *Songdogs*. London: Picador, 1996.

____. *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*. London: Phoenix, 1995.

Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*. London: Vintage Classics, 1999.

Colm Tóibín, *The South*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1990.

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994. Available at http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/location1.html.

John Banville, *Kepler*. London: Minerva, 1991.

____. *The Untouchable*. London: Picador, 1997.

____. *Eclipse*, Picador, 2000.

____. *Birchwood*, Picador, 1998. 34.

John McGahern, *The Dark*, Faber and Faber, 1965.

____. *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.

C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950.

Denis Sampson, *Brian Moore : the Chameleon Novelist*. London: Doubleday, 1999.

# Culture and History

# *Irish Society and Culture in the Twenty-First Century*

*Fintan O'Toole**

I will first try to give you some kind of overview of the relationship between two things which sometimes we think are the same thing, but actually, I would suggest, are opposite: art and culture. Art and culture in Ireland have quite a fractured relationship and in looking at some aspects of that relationship perhaps we can get some sense of where Irish culture and Irish art are now in the twenty-first century.

An interesting moment to start might be the high point of the worship of art in twenty-first century Ireland. It was in May 2002 when the Irish Minister for Culture, a woman called Síle De Valera, the granddaughter of Eamon De Valera, arrived at Dublin airport. Eamon De Valera was the dominant Irish nationalist figure for much of the twentieth century; he had been in the 1916 Rising, the founding heroic moment of the Irish saints, and dominated Irish politics of most of the twentieth century. His granddaughter was Minister for Culture in 2002 and in this capacity she came down the steps of the airplane carrying a sacred scripture with historical delicacy and everybody gathered to look at it and take photographs. It was a moment of pure ritual, which was perhaps the most sacred moment in Irish culture since the Pope arrived at the same airport and came down and kissed Irish land. What is interesting was that what she was carrying were the manuscripts of James Joyce for which the State had paid twelve million euros. And there was a certain historic paradox in this. Her grandfather had ruled over Irish culture during the period in which James Joyce's books were not sold or read officially in Ireland. *Ulysses* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, these great novels themselves, had been excluded officially from Irish culture, and then you have this moment of cultural embrace: not only was Joyce being officially recognized as a great Irish artist but indeed was being sanctified.

This represented something broader which was the way in which, in a culture that was losing faith in all its institutions, art certainly had to take the place almost of religion and nationality. A simple example of this is what you do when you build a new bridge. In Ireland in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, if you built a new public monument or bridge or railway station you had to name it either after a Catholic saint, maybe a Catholic Bishop, or after a nationalist hero; so all the train stations for example in Ireland, are named after nationalist martyrs, and most other major public buildings have a religious or a national connotation. In the last years nobody named buildings, bridges, etc. after

Catholic saints or national martyrs; they were named after the new saints who were the writers. The last three bridges built over the river Liffey were Sean O'Casey Bridge, James Joyce Bridge and Samuel Beckett Bridge, which is a good place for waiting if you want to meet someone. There are even jokes about them and other monuments. On the day they were opening Samuel Beckett Bridge one of my colleagues reported that someone in the crowd said: "You know, you should call the stretch of the river from the Samuel Beckett Bridge to the James Joyce Bridge 'stream of consciousness'."

In the iconography of Ireland, this naming phenomenon means the replacement of religion and smashed politics with literature. You may say this is in some ways a great improvement. I'm not at all averse to the idea of celebrating Ireland's great writers. But there's something slightly uncomfortable about this because I'm not sure it necessarily represents the process of real engagement with the nature of literature or with the ways in which the writers themselves are critical of Irish culture. I think it represents more an impulse of what you do in a society which is not faithful to religious and political institutions: you use art to fill in that gap in the culture. This is part of my point about the relationship between art and culture. In English we use these words sometimes as if they mean the same thing. Typically if you have a government department, it is the department of Art and Culture, if you have a newspaper section, it is Culture and Art. Art and Culture is a nice little coupling, but in many ways although they are very much related, they are in fact in tension with each other.

By culture we mean all the assumptions that a society makes about the world and about itself. Culture is a whole set of ways of seeing the world and culture is most powerful when it is entirely unconscious; the things that mark any culture are the things that people don't know. Culture is almost in that sense, pre-conscious. Art is the opposite. Art is about questioning assumptions. Culture is about the familiar, and art is about making the familiar strange. Culture is entirely social, it is about what is shared. Art is often about the individual challenge to what is shared. I'm not saying they are totally separate. Culture shapes art and art shapes culture. It is useful sometimes remembering that they are in tension with each other.

What I want to suggest is that, within Irish culture, this relationship between art and culture is a complex one and it is one that has changed in many ways over time. If we want to understand where we are now, trying to situate where this relationship lies, might be important. And one of the issues about this embrace of art that I have been talking about over the high period of the Irish economic boom, would be to suggest the appearance that at this time art and culture came into alignment, that culture was embracing art in a way that it had not done before. But I also suggest that this is somewhat illusory, and that actually the relationship remains angular.

There is no doubt that one of the things that Ireland has got out of an economic boom was some genuine sense of society as a whole valuing its artists more than it had ever done before. When I look back to the early 1980s it is hard to imagine why Ireland had an international reputation for artistic work, particularly for literature. It's hard to

imagine how impoverished the official provision for the arts in Ireland was even in that period. For example, in the early 1980s, 1981, the Republic of Ireland had only eight theatres in the entire country. Eight theatres. It had no National Concert Hall, no Opera House, no National Museum of Modern Art and the National Library was full of boxes and boxes and boxes of manuscripts because there was nobody to catalogue them. Ireland's reputation in the arts was completely out of pace with its official provision for cultural infrastructure. And that is one of the things that changed in the 1990s and in the last ten, fifteen years in particular: during this period there has been a process of catching up in the infrastructure, which is still not as lavish as you will find in many other European countries, but at least it is respectable by international standards. And there are very good aspects of the cultural scene. I'm not criticizing it but I do want to suggest that, because the culture is beginning to embrace the artist, it doesn't mean that the artist's relationship with the culture is necessarily simple or that that conflict is over. This is a very, very crude, schematic way of trying to sum up many a hundred years, a hundred and twenty years, but let me suggest four triads, four threes, which give you some idea of the way in which this relationship perhaps has been configured, intellectually.

The first triad is James Joyce's famous formula in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where he thinks about how to be an Irish artist, how to forge the conscience of the race in the smithy of the soul, and the weapons he gives himself are Silence, Cunning and Exile. And they are strange weapons. There is a huge contradiction implicit in that. His ambition, he states, is to be the national artist, not simply to be 'a' national artist but to be 'the' national artist. And indeed not even to be an artist in the narrow sense, but to actually create the entire modern psychology of art. Joyce is nothing but ambitious. And he would think, therefore, that one of the weapons to form a nation's consciousness, Silence, doesn't sound like one. Cunning is a word for a very evasive kind of intelligence, it's a word for strategically thinking your way out of trouble and getting where you want to go by very devious routes. And Exile is physical removal of yourself from the country whose consciousness you are going to form. This immediately should alert us to the fact that there is a difficulty here. But in many ways, Joyce's weapons, which he chooses, become in effect, the weapons by default of most Irish artists for the first forty years of the existence of the Irish State, from 1922 onwards. Why do you need Silence, Cunning and Exile? Silence doesn't refer to silence artistically, it means, in a sense, a kind of public silence, silence that you are not going to be the spokesman for a political movement, or for public affairs, in that sense. But why did he choose these weapons? Well, effectively I would suggest that, after the 1920s, Irish artists did not really choose them. They were silenced and they were silenced very simply by censorship. In Irish society for most of that period the only real way to honour a writer was to state that their books had been banned. If you were not banned, you were doing something wrong: it followed that you have to be cunning, you have to think your way around censorship, you have to ask yourself how you can exist as an artist. It's a very problematic idea. There are two forms of exile: either physically or spiritually;

there's physical exile and internal exile. I think it's fair to say that not just writers, but the vast majority of Irish artists, in different forms over the first half of the existence of the State, existed in one or other form of exile. So, the first triad – Silence, Cunning, Exile – is the way of being an artist.

The alternative to this was the official definition of an Irish artist. It was one which was formulated in the 1930s by a short-story writer and intellectual, Daniel Corkery. Corkery was probably the nearest thing that Ireland had to an official artist. If Corkery was in the Soviet Union he would have been the president of the writer's union; his mentality was very much the official nationalist orthodox Catholic idea. Corkery's famous book called *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* is an attack against the Protestant writers who were founders of the Irish Renaissance. In his book he basically defines them as not really being Irish and he defines an Irish artist by three things; again a triad. The first is Land and relationship to the Land, so you have to be essentially rural, agricultural; this is fair enough, perhaps closer to most people in Ireland. Secondly, Religion, then. Effectively Catholicism, but you have to have a relation to Catholicism; and Nationality, a relationship to the Irish nation. These are the three pillars of an official Irish culture – you could look at them in comparative perspective. The official conception of the artist is biased in many ways. It has the sense of praise, of being racy of the soil, connected to the soil, connected to the people, all that stuff is there. And in a way you have a sort of dialogue in Ireland between Corkery's triad of Land, Catholicism, Nationality and Joyce's triad of Silence, Cunning and Exile. And the interesting thing is that, by and large, it is Silence, Cunning and Exile which are more effective.

One of the very interesting things about the Irish State is its failure to produce official artists. Corkery is very unusual in fact. And there are attempts to do this, but in a way, the culture's contempt for art is so strong that even though it would be in its interest to produce official artists, it doesn't manage to do so. Sean O'Faolain is a fantastic example of this. He would have been a wonderful official artist: he had been a nationalist, a militant, a member of the Irish Republican Army, he was passionately committed to staying in Ireland; he was a Catholic, a very different kind of Catholic, but he was a serious Catholic intellectual, a very good example of someone who could forge an artistic synthesis of Irish nationalism and Catholicism with a certain European intellectual ideology. But the State simply wasn't interested in embracing someone like O'Faolain. Though as a young man trying to write a sickeningly panegyric book about Eamon De Valera, the big boss of Irish nationalism, they weren't interested; they just didn't believe they needed artists at all. We all know that, when O'Faolain applied for a job of professor of English in Cork University, he was simply asked "Do you speak Irish"? So there was simply no capacity to create an official ideology of art; this is ironic, really, since Exile, Cunning and Silence were effective weapons to be used by the exiled artists.

The interesting nature of Irish literary culture from much of the 20th century is the paradox of repression. Not necessarily all of the artists set out to revolt. Joyce did, but a lot of his successors did not set out to revolt. They wanted to be living in Ireland,

they wanted to be official artists, they wanted to have their books read and published, they wanted to have chairs of Literature in universities, but the society would not allow them to do this. And it's contempt for art, which creates artists. And hence my warning about the relationship between art and culture. Culture is so resistant to art that it makes artists better. It will not embrace them; it will not allow them to be comfortable within their society. In this context, the other outstanding example of a would-be official artist is Flann O'Brien, who was a senior member of the Civil Service and worked in the Department of Finance. He was a superb Gaelic language scholar. Gaelic was a major cultural project of the State. He was quite a conservative man politically, and in the way he thought about things. And yet, Flann O'Brien ends up being, in many ways, the founder of the postmodern novel. Why is he the founder of the postmodern novel? Because he couldn't write novels that could be read by Irish people. His brilliant, brilliant book, astonishing book, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, sold I think, three hundred copies. Sean O'Faolain's first book of short stories sold some three hundred and ninety copies. So, what do you do if you are an artist in a society and you have no audience? Flann O'Brien's solution to this, which is in many ways the great Irish solution, is to talk to yourself. You write a novel which is about a novel. *At Swim-Two-Birds* is about a guy who's writing a novel about a guy who's writing a novel – the idea is that all of these characters exist particularly, independently of the writers. The characters are for hire; the writer hires them, brings them in and they all exist independently and they all get mixed up, so you get mythological characters, you get guys from cowboy novels, you get guys from Irish folklore stories. There is no time, time is completely obliterated, space is completely obliterated, you just get the book. And the book eats itself, argues with itself; it is very funny.

I want to suggest that the third triad replaces perhaps these other two into the 1980s and 1990s; instead of Silence, Cunning and Exile, or Land, Nationality and Religion, you get Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll. A self-conscious generation of writers rejects both the previous triads; they have no interest whatsoever in Land, Nationality and Religion, but also don't feel the need to be cunning, or silent, or in exile. The third triad can be seen in films and drama and other forms of art. Writers such as Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle represent the urban, the suburban, and they are very much affected by movies, rock music and by the arrival of sex in Ireland. An Irish politician actually said this in the 1960s, "there was no sex in Ireland before television". So, we got television and we got sex, as a result. This kind of hipper, more cosmopolitan, more deliberately provocative society in terms of its recitation of belonging has a sense of identity which is more angry in some ways, more loose, more oppositional, though it is also rooted. Ironically it is antagonistic to the official culture; but it is Irish in the simple sense that you hadn't had for a long time. You couldn't have had a simple Irish writing, for fifty years, because of all these things I have been talking about; however, in the 1980s you begin to get writers that are just simply Irish, they just write about what they know. And in a way it is local and global, glocalization. The founding moment of this

was Roddy Doyle's book about these kids forming a soul band. It's a perfect metaphor for the international, the cosmopolitan; it is part of the Anglo-American culture, but it is also localized in a very particular part of Dublin. In a way, that sort of triad, to some extent, elbows aside the other sets of terms.

In the fourth triad, you get a sort of hyper-globalization, from the mid-1990s onwards. With the Celtic Tiger economy Ireland becomes very wealthy, apparently very wealthy, resulting in a different kind of triad formed of complex ideas about Migration, Wealth and Conflict. Migration, a huge turn-around in terms of the way that culture operates is a continental happening: outward migration stops and inward migration starts. For 150 to 200 years one of the main facts of Irish life is that people get the hell out of the place. You have now the situation in which people are coming in to Ireland to look for a job. This is a psychological change of almost total proportions. Outward migration had been part of Irish identity; it's strangely one of the continuities of Irish culture. Poverty is one of the continuities; so much Irish culture is about being poor; it's about the idea of the Irish as outsiders, as an underclass. The typical representatives of Ireland in fiction or in drama are people who are on the edge, people who are either poor farmers or who are working-class people in the cities and that is very much part also of the 1980s. But again, what do you do when you become rich and your identity is of being poor? And the third sort of strange kind of continuity in Irish culture is Conflict; obviously the thirty-year Northern Ireland conflict, which started in the late 1960s. But of course it wasn't just thirty years in itself; it was a sort of recapitulation of ethnic conflicts in the island, the tensions between Ireland and Britain on territorialism, religion. All those questions were rooted much more deeply in Irish culture. These continuities in Irish culture come to an end in the late 1990s. Outward migration is replaced by inward migration. You do still have poverty, but it's replaced in the official imagery of Ireland by wealth, by the fact that we are the richest country in Europe; our self image becomes more of success, economic success. And the Northern Ireland conflict is settled, albeit in ambiguous ways by peace agreements in 1998. So, what I'm suggesting, really, is that you have those four triads, and each of them in turn has unravelled; Silence, Cunning and Exile ran out of steam as a way of being an Irish artist. Catholicism, Land and Nationality never had much purchase, but whatever it had it lost in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll only got so far; people started getting old and didn't want them any more. And the issues around Migration, Wealth and Conflict have also become problematic as ways of thinking about Ireland.

This raises a fundamental question which is about whether the culture in Ireland is one that is reflected in art at all. We tend to make the assumption that there is a simple indirect relationship between society and culture on the one side, and art on the other side, but at some level, the art has to reflect the society. That's true, of course it is, in the Irish case and also in other cultures. One of the things that makes Ireland unusual in Western European culture is that that relationship has always been particularly fragmented and particularly abstract. The simple way of trying to explain this in shorthand is the image of the mirror, holding the mirror up to society. Stendhal, the great French novelist,

in *Le Rouge et le Noir* has the image that "a novel is a mirror walking along a high road". I suppose that explains the classical idea of what a novel is.

Almost at the same time that Stendhal was writing that, his nearest Irish contemporary, Maria Edgeworth was writing in a letter to Walter Scott, about mirrors in fiction. And she says "it is impossible to draw Ireland as she is now in the book of fiction; realities are too strong; parting passions, too violent, to dare to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass. The people would only break the glass and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature". And of course, this image of the mirror really rambles through a lot of Irish reflections on the nature of art and society. You find Oscar Wilde later on in his essay "The Decay of Lying", rejecting the idea of art as a mirror, where he says this idea would, and I quote, "reduce genius to the position of a cracked looking glass". And then, of course, Joyce picks up the image of the cracked looking glass in the beginning of *Ulysses* where Buck Mulligan is shaving himself as Stephen Dedalus takes the mirror. It is broken and Dedalus/Joyce effectively says, famously, "it is the symbol of Irish art, the cracked looking glass of a servant". And then, we could even go further with another image of the mirror suggesting the fractured relationship between art and society in Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*. One of the characters, this strange mad scientist, experiments with mirrors and is haunted by the idea that if you look in a mirror what you see is not yourself, but it is yourself as you were a microsecond ago. And then he decides, if you could set up enough mirrors you could see yourself, and you could go back, and back and back and eventually see yourself when you were 12 years old. It is a strange haunted idea of the mirror not reflecting anything as it is now, but refracting infinitely back into the past.

So, this basic idea of reflection in Irish culture has always been problematic, and this is one of the things that makes our current situation interesting. Part of the mystery of Irish culture in many ways is why the art has remained relatively continuous over periods of very radical social change. This is not to say that there have not been significant shifts over time, but there's also a very strong sense of continuity and a very strong sense in which there are ways in which what seems new in Irish culture always has antecedents, and it is almost like the return of the repressed. Let me just give you some sense of this. If you think about the last fifteen years when, in some ways as I said, almost everything changed, some of the fundamental ways in which art reflects society are unusable, such as those ideas about poverty, about exile and about conflict. They have actually not been usable. So, you would expect in a way that Irish art over the last fifteen years should have been again very fragmented, very strange; it should have been capable of producing something almost equivalent, for example, to what Joyce was doing in the early 1920s, or what Flann O'Brien was doing in the 1940s, or what Beckett was doing in the 1950s and 1960s. And one of the interesting things is that there is no equivalence, there are no radical breeches happening in Irish art over the last fifteen years. What you find, actually, is much more continuity than you would expect, and I would suggest that this is precisely because there is not a direct relationship between

what happens in science and what happens in the arts, because the relationship is a complex and fractured one, it is the cracked looking-glass rather than the mirror. And you could see this in some ways.

One of the big sets of changes I spoke of before has shifted in Ireland over those years. Time and space, for example, became really quite problematic in terms of the way people saw them. We don't have time to go into all of this, but, in relation to time, for example, you had very strange kinds of time shifts, at the micro-level, the ordinary level of the way people lived. If you go from a relatively underdeveloped economy to a hyper-developed economy in short period of time, it changes people's sense of time. Ireland was very like South America where people don't turn up on time. Ten, fifteen years ago, if we were to be here at 10 o'clock, we would start at half past ten. Now in Ireland you start at ten, because people have got used to an urbanised society, a society in which more people work in offices, more people work in factories, so that the notion of time is much more regulated, and much more pressured. But also at the bigger level, historic time, there have been these big shifts in relation to those continuities I spoke about, in terms of how you understand the continuity of your society; some of the things that you used to measure those continuities with have ceased to function. So, exile, emigration, is usually complicated by the fact that it is now inward migration rather than outward migration. Conflict itself, the settlement in the Northern Ireland, conflict carries a sense of an ending of a certain kind of Irish history. At a bigger level, the idea of a certain post-industrial society, a post-modern culture, has huge effects in terms of the way you think about time. Postmodernism doesn't recognize time as being sequential, it is a culture which is full of pastiche, it is full of the idea of everything co-existing, of all styles and all genres being available at the same time, and of course this also links in with things like the internet that have exactly that same effect. Change is happening similarly in terms of space. In Ireland, you have big confusions about where Ireland belongs. This may seem extraordinarily stupid; however, we may ask, is Ireland part of America, or is it part of Europe? This may seem an extraordinary question. But the notion of where you are becomes quite problematic when almost all your industrial and economic base is coming from North America, when most of the inward investments in Ireland are North-American, when we're making *Viagra* and *Intel* chips which we did not invent – they're American products made in Ireland. This situation was actually expressed politically by a Deputy Prime Minister Mary Harney when she said, "geographically, Ireland is closer to Berlin than to Boston, but spiritually, we are closer to Boston than Berlin". This is a political statement containing all sorts of political messages about what kind of society Ireland should be, but in this kind of confusion of space as well as of time, and physically there's a strange kind of mixture of continuity and discontinuity.

One image that perhaps sums this up, for the last hundred and fifty years maybe, the haunting image of the Irish landscape was the empty house. Because of mass migration, the empty house, which had been abandoned because its occupants went to

New York, or Boston, or London, or wherever, has stood up in the landscape, but obviously it was not demolished, it just remained there. So, you get these kinds of layers of emptiness. And the empty house of the outward migration has now been replaced by the empty house of a property boom gone wrong. In the last Census of population of the State of Ireland in 2006, when the Celtic Tiger was still really roaring at its height, people were building property because this was what you did with money, building property. In a society of four million people, there were 240 thousand empty houses that were built as second holiday homes, or were built as investments by people who never lived in them. So you had this strange kind of continuity/discontinuity. The reason for the emptiness is opposite. One has to do with poverty, the other has to do with too much money. But the physical effect is similar and now the property boom has collapsed. You have this strange physical sensation of large parts of Ireland, not just in the countryside, but in the city, of emptiness. You see these half-built houses, half-built offices whose developers have gone broke. This physical emptiness, which has been somewhat part of the imagery of Ireland for a long time, has returned, but in a very strange haunted way. These things meant that you got certain kinds of repetition in the culture, but being repeated in a different context. I will suggest two things in relation to this: you could argue that one of the characteristic forms of Irish cinema, drama and literature in the 1990s, and in the early part of this century, has been the return of the Gothic. As we know, in the 19th century the Gothic was the mainstream of Irish fiction. It's strange. The English had Jane Austen. We had *Carmilla, the Lesbian Vampire*, by Sheridan Le Fanu, and *Dracula* is the greatest Irish novel of fictional imagination. At present, a return of the ghost story, of the sense of being haunted, of the sense of being displaced can be seen in Anne Enright's novel, *The Gathering.* So, the Gothic is both new and also old. The ghost story remains very much in drama, in a lot of Marina Carr's plays and in Conor McPherson. These plays look new and old; they look new in the sense that they are different from what went before the 1980s, but they are also old in the sense that they seem to recapitulate some of the energies of the past, for example, the continuities of William Butler Yeats's plays into Sebastian Barry's dramatic work in terms of the imagination. This is more about evocation of emotions, moods and spiritual forces than about enactment on stage and drama.

Where does this leave us? One of the things is, strangely, the almost complete absence of an Irish sense of realism. The Irish artistic tradition is not a realistic one. And there are all sorts of reasons for this. But one of the effects of it is a certain kind of strange relationship between culture and art. Do you remember Donald Rumsfeld? He was the American Defence Secretary at the time of the invasion of Iraq. He went through this magnificent existential reflection, when he said there are the "known knowns", things we know we know; the "known unknowns", things we know we don't know; and then there are the "unknown unknowns", things we don't know we don't know. In Ireland and Irish society and Irish culture there is a fourth one that even Rumsfeld didn't think about, which is the "unknown known", which is something that you know, but don't

know. And I would suggest that, oddly, all these shifts in Irish society, all these strange things, consist of this phenomenon of things that everybody knows and nobody knows. So, the most terrible example of this is the repression of women and children. In Irish society, what we have been dealing for fifty, sixty, seventy years is the fact that there are huge numbers of children who were tortured, who were enslaved, who were treated in astonishing ways, locked away; very large numbers of women, who simply did not fit into the pattern, or were regarded as being a moral danger. It is a society which had an incredible capacity to deny its own realities, and to punish and lock away anybody that did not conform to those realities. And one of the problems with the absence of a tradition of Realism is that in a sense, one part of what it does contributes to the idea of the "unknown knowns".

Why does society need the artist while artists don't necessarily need society? It needs the artists to make them know things they don't want to know. Part of what art does is to bring to light, in certain ways, the realities that society itself does not wish to absorb and acknowledge. Now, to some extent, Irish art did this in the 1950s, 1960s when writers like Edna O'Brien or John McGahern, and a whole lot of other writers were redefining an Irish reality. But they were doing so very largely in terms of sexuality and the family – very, very important areas – but tended not to do so in terms of politics, economics, power, public power. So, we have this difficulty in the culture, and it is a difficulty in relation to the way in which there is this tension between art and culture. The lack of a holistic relationship between art and culture has contributed to the difficulty that the society has had in understanding itself and in orienting itself. And I would go so far as to suggest that this actually has contributed very largely to economic disaster. If you don't know who you are, if you don't know how reality is, you are very easily sucked into an idea that this hole is filled by consumerism, by having more stuff, by buying more things, by building houses you don't really want, and of course by believing that there is no future and no past. There's only the present. The present will always be lots of money, lots of fun. And, all this is linked in with the broader idea that took hold of the Western world, that history is over. Boom and bust are over, will never happen again and everything is going to be planned safely from here on. So, the degree to which Irish society got sucked into illusions about itself is related to the fact that there is an absence of a realistic tradition in the arts.

Are we coming into an era in which this relationship between art and society might change again? I will finish with the thought that perhaps there's a possibility when a society goes through a shock, as Irish society is going through at the moment, that it begins to produce within its artists a response to that shock, which may be a kind of delayed response. Sometimes it takes a long time even in settled societies to reflect upon what is going on. Distance is a necessary aspect of the creation of art. And when you add in that distance to an idea of the shock, perhaps we may begin to see a period in which artists do take a more central role in reflecting for the society what its realities have been, and therefore, what they might be in the future. Colm Tóibín recently spoke

about this sense of responsibility: in a society where people don't trust the church, don't trust politicians, don't trust bankers, don't trust business people, who are you left with? And very often what you're left with is your painters, your writers, your filmmakers, your dramatists. And the one good thing about the way in which, for a long time, the society rejected the artists is that the artists were relatively uncorrupted by the embrace of society. Not having been loved sometimes is good for the artists, sometimes it perhaps has given artistic creators a certain kind of steel. If that steel can be brought to bear on the construction of a new relationship with Irish society, in which artists attempt to grapple with the nature of this shifting Irish reality, that may bring an interesting period over the next 20 years.

***** Fintan O'Toole's lecture given at the University of São Paulo on 14 September 2009. The editors thank Mariana Bolfarine for its transcription.

# *'Representing Ireland in the Periodical Press During 1848*[1]

Malcolm Ballin

**Abstract:** *The year of revolutions, 1848, stimulated a passionate discussion of Irish politics in the British and Irish periodical press. This article considers the range and nature of that debate. Periodicals represented every shade of opinion across a spectrum extending from the reactionary to the liberal to the revolutionary. Periodicals were deployed by governments in defence of their policies; they were quickly suppressed when they were accounted treasonous and as promptly replaced. The creation of stereotypical versions of the Irish character provided a context for the conditioning of opinion within the public sphere. This coloured the reporting of the Famine and the debate about measures taken in response to it, and influenced the different responses to agitation, agrarian discontent and sectarian violence. The periodicals imported into the debate about Irish issues some of the effects of political tensions arising from European revolutions, especially those in France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Various rhetorical strategies were directed at periodical readers in the interests of the competition between agitation and conciliation.*

## I. Introduction: the agenda

In 1848 the "active warfare of opinion" in England was being fought out in the Victorian reviews (Collini 55). These had their equivalents in Ireland, where there was also a sprightly set of journals. "That monster question, Ireland" as the *Spectator* described it on 1st January 1848, was at the top of the British political agenda.[2] A discussion about the character and history of the Irish people established a framework, within which the discussion of particular issues was read. Charles Trevelyan defended the government's policies on the famine in January's *Edinburgh Review*, leading to a fierce discussion in the periodicals.[3] Agrarian unrest and resistance to British rule, following sharp disagreements about the future of the Repeal movement, culminated in John Mitchel's trial for sedition in May and the abortive Smith O'Brien rebellion in July. There was a protracted debate about Irish governance, land tenure, the Poor Laws, and the roles of priests and landlords. These events were read against the 1848 European revolutions, especially the overthrow of Louis Philippe in February.

## II. The periodicals

Influential gentlemen read the quarterlies: the Tory *Blackwood's* or the *Quarterly Review* or, alternatively, the Whig *Edinburgh.* Liberals, especially if interested in foreign affairs, took the Benthamite *Westminster*.[4] The weekly *Spectator,* despite its Whig origins, managed to avoid "partisan spleen." The more scholarly turned to the *Athenaeum.* Monthly miscellanies such as *Fraser's Magazine* or the *Gentleman's Magazine* provided both information and lighter fare. The "elite of the labouring community" read *Chamber's Magazine* each week, some of them in its Irish edition.[5] Most periodicals were selling ten thousand copies but *Chamber's* could sell fifty thousand.[6] Periodicals, then as now, were often seen by many more people than those who actually bought them, for instance in gentlemen's clubs, in libraries or in the reading rooms.[7] In Dublin, Irish gentlemen often chose to read the same English periodicals (Hayley 93). However, two well-established Irish periodicals offered them alternative perspectives: the Tory *Dublin University Magazine,* and the Catholic *Dublin Review*.[8]

Thomas Wallis, at one time the editor of the monthly *Citizen* and a formative influence on Thomas Davis, once declared that "educated men never read weeklies."[9] However, weeklies set the political agenda within Ireland. Gavan Duffy believed that more revolutions were made from editors' chairs than from conspiracies (Davis 2). The Young Ireland movement produced the *Nation*, edited by Duffy, in which Thomas Davis preached his vision of pluralist nationalism, right up to his death in 1845 (Foster 161). The *Nation's* style was distinguished by the "constant flash of pike and sword", especially in the revolutionary ballads of Young Ireland (MacDonagh 76). The magazine's circulation rivalled that of the reviews and it was even more in demand in the repeal movement's reading rooms.[10] Duffy, its editor, was caught between two fires, in that he incurred the wrath of the constitutional O'Connellite's – who at one stage actually excluded the *Nation* from their reading rooms – but ultimately was "no longer able to breathe the brimstone fumes", produced by his firebrand contributor, John Mitchel.[11] After being effectively forced out, Mitchel founded the rival *United Irishman*, provocatively named for Tone and '98, and openly intended "to prepare the country for rebellion."[12] This was closed by the government before Mitchel's trial for sedition in May 1848, and was promptly succeeded by two identical journals, John Martin's *Irish Felon,* and the *Irish Tribune.* However, in July 1848, both of these were also suppressed after five issues each, together with the *Nation* – following Smith O'Brien's rebellion and Martin's transportation. The thrice-weekly Catholic *Pilot,* associated with O'Connell and "Old Ireland", was opposed to Young Ireland's extremism. A long-established Orange journal, the *Warder,* whilst a regular critic of the *Nation's* political position, still expressed generous sympathy for its views between 1845 and 1848 (Davis 228). I shall not have space here to cover some periodical writing of the period, such as the Northern Irish journals and the "short-lived and ephemeral" Chartist periodicals.[13] The major issues of 1848 were, however, comprehensively dealt with by the periodicals I have already mentioned.

## III. Versions of the Irish Character

In December 1847 the *Quarterly* published a review praising *Paddiana,* a two-volume account of Irish life which "overflows with humour, yet is unstained by vulgarity."[14] The reviewer claims (in an extraordinary misjudgement) that the writing is reminiscent of Maria Edgeworth's. This account of the travels of a British Lieutenant represents Paddy as a fighting animal, keen on an unregulated "shindy": "an Irishman may be called *par excellence* the bone-breaker amongst men, the *homo ossifragus* of the human family; and in this indulgence of this their natural propensity there is total and systematic disregard of fair play" (423).

*Paddiana* tells how Michael Cronin roughly seduces Kitty from her father's house and incarcerates her in his cabin in the canal bank, lined with peat and home to an illicit still. The grovelling obeisances made to a Roman Catholic Bishop, the grotesque death scene of Father O'Shea and the comical misbehaviour of a priest officiating at the execution of a murderer, provide the obligatory anti-clerical incidents. Improvident Paddy "will allow himself to die of sheer starvation, although all the while he has half a dozen gold sovereigns sewed up in his neckerchief" (433). While fishing, Irish Michael prefers to starve rather than eat fish or an exquisite soup made from seabirds. When the Saxon party feasts on eggs and bacon, Michael still refuses:

> He, an Irishman, of the age of twenty, – who had probably been brought up with pigs since infancy […] yet he had never tasted bacon! Nor wished to taste it! Poor creatures! What hope is there for a man who, half starved, will yet dine upon a boiled potato – nay, go without even that – rather than try a new dish? […] When the late "Famine" was at the worst in Connemara, the sea off the coast there teemed with turbot […] but the common people would not touch them … (435).

The writer's upper-class restraint then deserts him: "To wait till the age of reason dawns upon a people whose besotted ignorance is such that you cannot make them understand what is best for them, or that you are trying to benefit them, is hopeless (436)." Liberal periodicals are all dangerously deluded: "We see certain continental journals continually crammed with articles on Irish matters made up of extracts from Whig and Radical journals of English birth" but "kindness and conciliation are thrown away upon the Irish." (438).

This picture of Paddy aligns with his representation in other English journals. *Blackwood's* recommends Thackeray's *The Irish Sketch Book* as "not a whit inferior to *Paddiana*" (65).[15] Even the *Westminster Review,* usually sympathetic to Ireland, publishes a favourable review of another travesty, *The Confessions of Con Cregan.* Its readers are expected to be much amused by Con's clever trickery of the dying Henry McCabe, heartlessly resulting in the transportation of Con's own father.[16] The *Athenaeum* also admires Con Cregan.[17] The *Gentleman's* and *Chamber's* both recommend D. Owen

Madden's stereotypical *Revelations of Ireland* for its "lively portraits and humorous anecdotes."[18] These articles deliberately blur the line between fiction and factual reporting. The interplay between representations of the Irish in novels such as *Castle Rackrent* and allegedly objective accounts, such as *Paddiana,* would have created a confused mindset among periodical readers.

The late Leslie Williams has fully documented the regular misrepresentation of the Irish in the *Times, Observer, Punch* and the *Illustrated London News.*[19] Weary of this phenomenon, the Tory and reactionary *Dublin University Magazine* is stung into uncharacteristic anger by *Paddiana*.[20] "We hoped the *Quarterly Review* would have been superior to such miserable prejudices" but it has followed the example set by the *Times,* with its "atrocious and slanderous libels." (715). "Does it not speak volumes for the credulous gullibility of John Bull that he can swallow whole pages of stuff written in such a manner, merely because it possesses the palatable ingredient of abuse of Ireland?" (726). During a period of social problems linked to industrialisation and a bout of over-extended imperial adventures spread across the globe, it was important for the English to appear, by contrast, civilised, clean, sober, intelligent, and free from superstition.[21] The Victorians were in any case preoccupied with the concept of "character", seeing it always as an index of the moral health of the nation. (Collini 108-9). *Paddiana* illustrates the desire of Victorian Englishmen to cultivate what Seamus Deane calls "a more winsome view of the Irish as an entertaining people, rather than a people horribly mutilated and demoralised by English rule." (Deane 1994. 114). It is left to *Blackwood's* to trumpet overtly (in scare italics) the overt imperialist conclusion:

> The cause of Irish pauperism and mendicancy is entirely owing to this – that *England has given Ireland institutions and political franchises, for the exercise of which it is wholly disqualified by temperament, habit and political advancement.* We have put edged tools into the hands of children [original italics].[22]

These infantilising perceptions set a defining context for readers in their understanding of Irish politics.

Stereotypes of this kind were further reinforced in a debate about Irish historiography where, for example, in its account of Richard Madden's *History of the Penal Laws,* the *Dublin University Magazine* heads its review "Seditious Literature in Ireland". It accuses Madden of being "a perverter of the uses of history" treating Romanists as lambs and Protestants as wolves. In his work, "treason is fashioned into primers and sedition converted into spoon-meat for the elevès [*sic*] in the new school of normal agitation."[23] Here the *DUM* justifies Terry Eagleton's description of the magazine as working "in the style of its great mentor Edmund Burke to raise the gut instincts of the gentry to the level of a political philosophy." (Eaglteon 1999. 55) *The Dublin Review,* on the other hand, supports Madden, whose sympathies are with "the suffering, the

many and the oppressed"[24] *Blackwood's* version of Irish history describes the establishment of Grattan's Parliament in 1782 as the outcome of a movement which "owed character and solidity to GREAT SAXON LEADERS [*sic*]", of whom Grattan himself was allegedly one.[25] The *Quarterly* condemns Macaulay's Whig version of history as over-sympathetic to Catholics and "full of political prejudice and partisan advocacy."[26] This debate would have conditioned the responses of many influential readers in their reactions to contemporary Irish events.

## IV. The Irish Famine

Charles Trevelyan's article in the *Edinburgh* on "The Irish Crisis" runs to ninety-one pages, almost a quarter of the issue.[27] He sets out "to render some service to the public by attempting thus early to review, with the calm temper of a future generation, the history of the Great Irish Famine of 1847" (229). Immediately, therefore, the Famine is distanced and consigned (over-optimistically) to history. Providentialism surfaces early: he hopes that "supreme wisdom has educed permanent good out of transient evil". (230). Irish society is beset by many problems: absenteeism, bigotry, Orangeism, Ribbonism, Repeal, "but what hope is there for a nation that lives on potatoes?" Importation of Indian corn met resistance from a population who believed the "absurd notion" that eating it turned people black (249). Relief committees met insuperable obstacles such as lack of transport, and a "monstrous system of centralisation" resulted.

Trevelyan often uses excessively precise statistics that give his writing the cachet of official authority and proclaim an illusory degree of control over events.[28] Leslie Williams points out his reluctance to use the word "death" (Williams 276). This is perhaps especially remarkable, given the usual Victorian predilection for the funereal. Only once does he refer directly to the condition of the starving (267). He is inclined to be self-congratulatory: this is "the grandest attempt ever made to grapple with famine over a whole country". As Trevelyan moves into his final conclusions, he advocates more responsibility among landlords, citing "Mr Drummond's apophthegm that "property has its duties a well as its rights'." (301). The issue of national or collective character appears again: a peasant proprietary requires "a foundation of steadiness of character, and a habit of prudence, and a spring of pride, and a value for independence and comfort". (308). At the end he cannot resist a hollow joke at the expense of the Irish landlords' proverbial dependency on government: "It was a common saying that an Irish gentleman could not even marry his daughter without going to the Castle for assistance." (314). Trevelyan's article is simultaneously an attempt at a cool objective account, a record to assist posterity in future crises and a self-serving defence reeking of Free Trade ideology. The qualities of character he both personified and advocated in others clearly blind him to imaginative identification with the suffering of the Irish, which he barely acknowledges.[29]

In Ireland, the *Warder* instantly recognises it as "a document of considerable importance", but also condemns it as "a laboured attempt to extenuate the blunders of

the government."[30] The *Westminster* engages with the famine in a series of articles throughout 1848, drawing on Trevelyan's article, and on publications by sympathetic commentators such as Jonathan Pim (Secretary to the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Dublin) and G. Poulett-Scrope MP.[31] The *Dublin Review* supports these enlightened views, drawing on some of the same sources.[32] Wayne Hall, in his study of the *Dublin University Magazine,* points out that it had originally engaged with the Famine in 1846 and 1847, through its publication of Carleton's *The Black Prophet* and also through two highly influential articles by its earlier editor, Isaac Butt.[33] The *DUM's* commentary on the Famine in 1848 takes up some of the same publications that have attracted the attention of its rivals.[34] Trevelyan's article in the *Edinburgh* "contains in one narrative two strikingly contrasted histories", demonstrating that private individuals contributed to the relief of distress while decisions by public bodies aggravated it (537).

The *Dublin University Magazine* was usually a supporter of the landlords' position, its editors coming for the most part from the land owning class. Nevertheless, a later reviewer in August, praises Jonathan Pim, Secretary to the Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, paying tribute to his Quaker affiliations and admitting, remarkably for the *DUM,* that he has demonstrated that Irish landlords have been guilty of faults of neglect.[35] It immediately qualifies this, however, by accusing him of ignoring "crimes of most deliberate commission" perpetrated by Roman Catholic priests who have deliberately kept the people ignorant and "sown rancour, hatred and malevolence against their Protestant rulers". (230). In the following month's issue, it is much less generous to Young Ireland's writers in the *Nation,* who are characterised as demagogues, motivated by "avaricious cupidity, morbid vanity, frenzied ambition, and a frantic hatred of England."[36]

Some of the English periodicals of the time manage to get through 1848 without any significant comment on the Irish Famine. This is true of the *Gentleman's* and, more surprisingly, of the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's.* It is tempting to speculate on the motives for these silences, especially since all these journals have much to say about rebellion and agrarian outrages in Ireland. The *Athenaeum,* maybe in exasperation, welcomes the idea of mortgaging the whole of Ireland for fifty million pounds sterling.[37] *Chamber's* suggests that the importation of more Scottish entrepreneurs like John Anderson, who is credited with the successful development of the township of Fermoy in Munster, would do incalculable good. It underscores the infantilising theme by suggesting that this would displace the value of "a hundred agitators, bawling and bellowing from year's end to year's end."[38] Perhaps the silences of *Blackwood's* and others are to be preferred to these simplistic solutions.

## V. Agitation, revolt and rebellion

There are two distinct responses in this area. One group of periodicals concentrates on expressing outrage; another group, more liberal, seeks greater understanding. In December 1847, *The Quarterly* advocated the recall of Parliament to deal with agrarian murders.[39] Failure to renew the Arms Act has caused the assassination of landlords

(274). The article singles out the murder of Major Mahon: he was "unjustly exposed to odium by Roman Catholic priests" whose denunciations from the pulpit had been defended by "the Popish Archbishop McHale." (289). There is no reference to the Famine. *Blackwood's* also opens 1848 with a diatribe against "culpable lenity' towards agitation."[40] It denounces juries made up of criminals and the cosseting of O'Connell's quasi-military organisation. In Ireland "property has no rights and […] life has no protection ." (118). In addition, "thirty-seven Irish members are completely in the hands of the priests, one of whom has incited the murder of the landlord, Major Mahon, but is thought to be beyond the reach of the law." (122). The *Dublin University Magazine* stigmatises attempts to involve the Catholic Church in securing better government as a "fatal alliance." (137)[41]

*Fraser's Magazine* marks the beginning of 1848 by attacking O' Connell.[42] His agitation has led to a "deliberate system of murder." (126). A Coercion Bill is needed but will not touch the priests who instigate murders. By April "the Romish priests" are aiding Duffy, Mitchel, and others, whose writing "renders altogether unnecessary any legal evidence of their treason." (479). After Mitchel's trial and O'Brien's rebellion, *Fraser's* exults in the defeat of insurrection.[43] "Revolutionary journals" are allocated a leading role in the rebellion: "The affair seems to have been Journalism and Talk from beginning to end." (355). The *Dublin University Magazine* claims that Mitchel's acquittal would have meant that "no extravagance of seditious language, no audacity or truculence of treasonable design or incentive, could any longer, in Ireland, be made amenable to existing law". (785).[44] The *Quarterly* again strikes a note of colonialist self-justification:

> It has been the fashion to say […] that Ireland is the victim of English misrule […]. But in our view, whatever of peace, civilisation and prosperity has been introduced and as it were imported into Ireland has been by England – all her misfortunes are her own – her own obstinate resistance to the example, the counsels, the indefatigable indulgence, charity and generosity of England. (594).[45]

If the "mischievous madmen at Ballingarry" had been Catholics and had "furled the green flag over a crucifix", there would have been far more bloodshed (603). The article mixes defensiveness with malice, suggesting that to save the people from Famine, they should be employed building fortifications: "It would be a pleasant and gratifying Hibernianism to see the starving peasantry fortifying Slieve – na – nann – against themselves!" (612).

Among the second, more liberal group of responses, the *Spectator* expresses concern that ministers "seem resolved that the live surplus in Ireland shall be disposed of by dying off."[46] The *Spectator* studies the nationalist press, noting nervously the escalation of rhetoric in the *United Irishman*, where Mitchel declares that "the shortest, straightest, surest and plainest path to liberty, is the path of a rifle bullet" and also issues detailed advice on how to conduct street fighting in Dublin.[47] The *Spectator* reports Mitchel's trial fully, with the seizure of the *United Irishman's* presses, its replacement by the *Irish Felon* and the subsequent closure of all the nationalist journals.[48] In August

it gives a sympathetic account of Mitchel's fellow-journalist, John Martin, now sentenced to transportation, calling him "honest and conscientious as well as brave and devoted" and declaring him "a martyr to the emulation of spicy sedition."[49]

The *Westminster* has a generous retrospect on Ireland in October 1848, perceiving that the Irish have sympathy abroad and arguing that military occupation is dangerous (163).[50] Evictions and house levellings, "largely and unscrupulously acted upon", are the sources of discontent (165). The assassination of Major Mahon was provoked by his emigration project, involving three thousand of his tenants, of whom almost a third died in passage (169). The author of *Paddiana* would have been infuriated by the *Westminster*'s condemnation of the "extortionate, extravagant, dissipated, gambling, sporting, jobbing squire – landlords." (176). *T*he *Dublin Review* comments on the regular misrepresentation of the Irishman: "If he says he is oppressed and persecuted by a wicked faction, he is told that he deserves it because he is a papist […] he is treated as an alien, in language, in blood, and in religion." (471).[51]

## VI. Revolutions in Europe

The *Nation* leads the Irish response to European revolutions by greeting the abdication of Louis Philippe with banner headlines. Freedom has dawned. This "means war and liberty".[52] Even the moderate *Pilot* celebrates the revolution.[53] The *Warder* voices the fears of loyalists, forecasting that the "ferocious and sanguinary" policies of 1789 will reappear and that in Ireland "unbridled anarchy and rapine must follow."[54] In England, the *Quarterly* and the *Westminster* fall out over Lamartine's alleged promises to the Irish. The *Quarterly* claims that Lamartine had promised assistance to the Irish if they could secure their own independence. "The mouthpiece of this synod of sharpers, proclaimed the fraternity of France with all oppressed nationalities […] Are we to thank France that Mr. Smith O'Brien has not been crowned King of Ireland?"[55] The *Westminster*, however, quotes Lamartine's precise words, comparing them with what the *Quarterly* seeks to make him say. They cite his formal speech, specifically refusing to intervene militarily in Ireland or Poland, and pledging France to "remain in friendly and equal relations with Great Britain."[56] In the event, in E. J. Hobsbawm's words, the European revolutions of 1848 "all succeeded and failed rapidly and in most cases totally." (Hosbawum 26).

## VII. Conclusion

The treatment of these issues illustrates the difficulty of constructive interchange between the zealots of the nationalist press and the conservative writers of the reviews. Nationalist journals always write in the tradition of "performative discourse", deliberately intended to provoke revolutionary actions.[57] Both groups of writers come from the same

educational background and there is much intertextual awareness. Their most dominant style entails a kind of mocking parody of each other, reflected in orotund circumlocutions and latinised phraseology. Periodical writing in nineteenth-century Ireland suffered from what Seamus Deane calls "an excess of rhetorical skills" (Deane 1997. 46 ).A ppearing as a gentleman was always a pre-condition of being heard in Victorian societies (Collini 88). The concentration on the alleged "coarseness" and crudity of the O'Connell family betrays some of the class element in this discourse.[58] The clashes of 1848 served to harden attitudes on both sides of the Irish Sea. English journals are similarly polarised, but around different issues. They oscillate between repression and sympathy, between revulsion against the primitive character of Catholic peasant life in Ireland and a desire to construct a more romantic and civilised image of a sensitive, celticised, humorous, but essentially subordinate people. These periodicals are torn between charitable instincts in the face of human suffering and *realpolitik* in support of a landlord class, the balance being tipped by the fears of disorder that are often fed by the surge in republican feeling, reflected from the European revolutions of 1848.

## Notes

1 This article is based on a paper given at a conference: "1848: The Year the World Turned", which was held at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, in June 2004.

2 "An Observed Peculiarity in the State of Irish Policy", *Spectator,* XXI, 1018, 1st January 1848. 12-13,12.

3 "The Irish Crisis: Correspondence Explanatory of the Measures Adopted by Her Majesty's Government for the Relief of Distress, arising from the Failure of the Potato Crop in Ireland", *Edinburgh Review,* LXXXVIII, 87, January 1848, 229-320. The ascription to Trevelyan appears in Leslie A. Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, The British Press and the Irish Famine* (259), where she also explains that the text appeared later that year in book form as *The Irish Crisis,* under Trevelyan's name. As the civil servant responsible for British policy in Ireland, Trevelyan must have deliberately chosen the Whig *Edinburgh* as his medium for an authoritative statement on British policy.

4 Walter E. Houghton (ed.) *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824-1900* [2 vols.], Toronto, University of Toronto Press; London, Routledge, 1966, Vol. II, p. 541. Also see Walter E. Houghton, "Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes", in Joanne Shattock and Michael Woolff (eds), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings,* Leicester and Toronto, Leicester University Press, 1982. 3-137.

5 Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals,* New York, Octagon Books, 1966 [1930]. 324; Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences: 1790 – 1832,* Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. 47 and 95. Also see Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age: 1789-1836,* Westport (Conn.) and London, Greenwood Press, 1983. 94.

6 Circulation figures are notoriously unreliable and the extent of dissemination was difficult to estimate. See, Richard Altick,, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957especially Appendix C. 391-6; also Klancher. 50.

7 Marie Louise Legg, "The Kilkenny Circulating-Library Society and the Growth of Reading Rooms in Nineteenth-Century Ireland" in Bernadette Cunningham and Maire Kennedy (eds), *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives*, Dublin, Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland and Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1999. 109-23.

8 Walter E. Houghton, *Wellesley Index*, Vol. II, p.12. The *Dublin Review* was published in London and has sometimes been excluded from consideration as an Irish periodical. In 1848, however, in 1848 it was still very much concerned with Irish affairs.

9 Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement*, Dublin and Totowa NJ, 1987. 23. The *Citizen* was defunct by 1848.

10 Maurice Colgan, "Young Ireland, Literature and Nationalism", in Frances Barker, John Coombes, Peter Hulme, Colin Mercer and David Musselwhite (eds), *1848: The Sociology of Literature: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, Colchester, University of Essex, July 1977. 47-52, 48. For a critical account of the *Nation's* style and history, see Barbara Hayley and Enda McKay (eds), *300 Years of Irish Periodicals*, Mullingar, Association of Irish Learned Journals, 1987. 40-41.

11 For Duffy's expulsion of Mitchel see Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature: From Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1972. 107. For O'Connell's exclusion of the *Nation*, *see* Davis. 105.

12 For the *United Irishman's* original stance, see Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: 1845-9*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1962. 334.

13 I have omitted the *Christian Examiner,* still anti-Catholic though now no longer dominated by Caesar Otway and William Carleton, the *Freeman's Journal,* with its assiduous documentation of the Famine, and such Northern journals, as the *Belfast Protestant Journal* and the *Banner of Ulster,'* the hammer of the repealers'. The *Irish National Guard,* which supported Chartism appeared for fourteen weeks, in the spring and summer of 1848. See Richard Davis 219, for *Banner of Ulster;* 226 for *Belfast Protestant Journal*; Norman Vance, *Irish History: A Social History,* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990. 143) for the *Christian Examiner*; Cecil Woodham-Smith (*passim*) for the role of the *Freeman's Journal*; Michael Huggins, "Democracy or Nationalism: The Problems of the Chartist Press in Ireland", in Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (eds), *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press,* London, Merlin Press, 2005. 129-45 apud 137.

14 [Review of] *Paddiana or Scraps and Sketches of Irish Life: Present and Past*, by the author of *A Hot Water Cure, Quarterly Review*, LXXXI, 162, Dec. 1847, 417-39.

15 "[Review of] *The Irish Sketchbook* by Mr. M. A. Titmarsh", *Edinburgh Review*, LXXVII, 167, January 1848. 46-67.

16 "[Review of] *Confessions of Con Cregan: the Irish Gil Blas,* Vol. I", *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review,* LII, October 1849. 291-3.

17 "[Review of] *Con Cregan: the Irish Gil Blas*", *Athenaeum*, 1112, 17 February 1849. 161-162.

18 "[Review of] *Madden's Revelations of Ireland in Past Generations*", *The Gentleman's Magazine,* August 1848. 166-68, 167; "A Scotchman in Munster", *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal,* 224, Saturday, 15 April 1848. 254-5, 254.

19 Leslie A. Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, The British Press and the Irish Famine: Killing Remarks*, London and Burlington, Ashgate, 2003, *passim*.

20 "Paddiana", *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXI, 186, June 1848. 715-27, 715.

21 Leslie A. Davies, 362-4. Also see Linda Collay, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World: 1600-1850* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2002. 365), where she lists eighteen new theatres of colonial activity opened up between 1841 and 1861.

22 "Continental Revolutions – Irish Rebellion – English Distress", *Blackwood's Magazine,* LXIV, 396, Oct. 1848. 474-98, 488.

23 "Seditious Literature in Ireland; *The History of the Penal Laws,* R.R. Madden", *Dublin University Magazine* XXXI, 182, February 1848. 159-72, 159, 166 and 169.
24 [Review of] "Madden's History of the Penal Laws: *The History of the Penal Laws Enacted against Roman Catholics etc.,* R. R. Madden MRIA", *Dublin Review,* XXIV, 17 March 1848. 53-79, 59 and 74.
25 "The Repealer's Wish Granted: An Irish Tale in One Short Chapter", *Blackwood's Magazine,* LXIII, May 1848. 627-9, 628 and 629.
26 [Review of] *The History of England from the Accession of James II* by Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Quarterly Review,* LXXXIV, 168, March 1849. 549-630, 549 and 541.
27 See footnote 3, above.
28 For instance he records that the soup kitchens ensured, in July 1847, that "3,020,712 persons received rations of whom 2,265,534 were adults and 755,178 were children (267)."
29 For Trevelyan's own character see Cecil Woodham-Smith, pp 58-61.
30 *Warder,* XXVII, 1 January 1848. 4.
31 [Review of] *Conditions and Prospects of Ireland etc* by Jonathan Pim; *The Irish Relief Measures, Past and Present* by G. Poulett-Scrope M.P.', *Westminster Review,* XLIX, April 1848. 258-60. See Woodham-Smith 169 and 199.
32 "Tenure of Land in Ireland": *Ireland: Historical and Statistical* by George Lewis; *Conditions and Prospects of Ireland* by Jonathan Pim; *Large and Small Farms*, by Henry Passy; *The True Law of Population* by Thomas Doubleday", *Dublin Review,* XXIV, 18, June 1848. 349-80.
33 Wayne Hall, *Dialogues in the Margin: A Study of the Dublin University Magazine,* Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 2000. 143, 151 and 161.
34 'The Irish Crisis – The Poor Law: *The Irish Crisis by* C. E. Trevelyan: *The Conditions and Prospects of Ireland* by Jonathan Pim; *The Irish Relief Measures* by G. Poulett-Scrope, *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXI, 184, April 1848. 537-52.
35 "Condition of Ireland: [review of] Jonathan Pim, *The Conditions and Prospects of Ireland etc.*", *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXII, 188, August 1848. 228-43, 228 and 229.
36 "Irish Proprietorship", *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXII, 189, September 1848. 356-70, 363.
37 "From our Library Table: *Hints on the Causes which have Retarded the Improvement of Ireland etc.*", by W.H. Herbert, *Athenaum,* 1135, 28 July 1849. 9, 766.
38 "A Scotchman in Munster", *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal,* 224, 13 April 1848. 254-5. The Fermoy experiment had also been praised in the *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXI, 133, March 1848. 386-8.
39 "Ministerial Measures: Letter from an Irish Proprietor [The Earl of Devon] etc.", *Quarterly Review,* LXXXII. 163, December 1847. 261-308.
40 "Ireland and the Ministerial Measures", *Blackwood's Magazine,* LXIII, 387, January 1848. 113-26.
41 "Tenant Right, – Repeal – Poor Laws – Dangers and Duties of the Conservative Party and Landed Interest in Ireland", *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXI, 181, January 1848. 134-58.
42 "The Legacy of Agitation in Ireland", *Fraser's Magazine,* XXXVII, January 1848. 125-6.
43 Ibid., April 1848, "Why Should We Fear the Romish Priests?" (467-74); "Ireland: A Crisis Invited", (478-80); XXXVIII, August 1848, "Ireland: A Crisis Compelled", (236-9); September 1848, "Ireland: End of the Insurrection" (354-8).
44 "The State Prosecution", *Dublin University Magazine,* XXXI, 186, June 1848. 785-788.
45 [Review of] *Outlines of the History of Ireland', Quarterly Review,* LXXXIII, 166, September 1848. 584-616.
46 "An Unobserved Peculiarity in the State of Irish Policy", *Spectator,* XXI, 1018, 1January , 1848. 12-13, 13.

47 *Spectator,* XXI, 1028, 11th March 1848. 241-2. This is quoted (slightly out of context) from an article about the practice of the French revolutionaries, "The French Fashion", *United Irishman,* I, 4, March 4th 1848. 56-7.

48 *Spectator,* XXI, 1040, 3rd June 1848. 531-3; XXI, 1049, August 5th 1848. 748.

49 *Spectator,* XXI, 1052, 20th August 1848. 813.

50 "Irish Clearances and Improvement of Waste Land", *The Westminster Review*, L, October 1848. 163-87.

51 "Irish Factions, Parsons, and Landlords: letters from Isaac Butt, G. Poulett-Scrope", *Thoughts on Poor Relief* by The Earl of Shrewsbury, various reports on the Dolly Brae Massacre, *Dublin Review,* XXVII, 54, December 1849. 468-511.

52 "The Dawn of Freedom", *Nation,* VI, 283, 4th March 1848. 152.

53 "Glorious Revolution", *Pilot,* XIX, 1st March 1848, pages not numbered.

54 "The French Revolution", *Warder,* XXVII, 1382, 4th March 1848. 3.

55 [Review of] "The Events of 1848, especially in regard to Great Britain: A Letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne, by R.M. McInes", *Quarterly Review,* LXXXIV, 168, March 1849. 534-48, 544.

56 "The French Revolution of 1848 and its Assailants: Comments on a letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne on the Late Revolution in France by Lord Brougham", *Westminster Review,* LI, April 1848. 25-26.

57 For a discussion of the prevalence of "performative discourse" in Irish writing see Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture,* London and New York, Verso, 1995. 148.

58 See for example the *Dublin University Magazine:* [Review of] D. Owen Madden, *Revelations of Ireland etc.,* XXXI, 181, January 1848. 1-11, 7: "a chapter of O'Connelliana which presents an admirable picture of the great agitator's utter coarseness"; also the *Athenaeum,* 1144, 29th September 1849: [Review of] *Recollections and Experiences during a Parliamentary Career from 1833 to 1848,* by John O'Connell, 978-81, 978: "sketches made in true Irish fashion, coarse, rollicking humour"; also the description of the same book in, "Familiar Epistles from Ireland", *Fraser's Magazine,* XL, October 1849. 463: "insipid gossip, crude, maundering commentaries [..] exhibiting an intellect so shallow and petty …"

## Works Cited

### Periodicals

*Athenaeum: Journal of Literature, Science and the Fine Arts,* London, weekly, 1828-1921, ed. T. K. Hervey (1846-53).

*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* Edinburgh and London, quarterly, 1817-1980, ed. John Blackwood (1845-).

*Chamber's Edinburgh Journal,* London, Glasgow and Dublin, weekly, 1832-1956, ed. Leitch Ritchie (1848-58).

*Dublin Review,* London, quarterly, 1836-1969, ed. Henry Bagshaw (1837-63).

*Dublin University Magazine,* Dublin, monthly, 1833-77, ed**.** John F. Waller (1845-55).

*Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal,* Edinburgh, quarterly, 1802-1929, ed. William Empson (1847-52).

*Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country,* London, monthly, 1830-82, ed. William John Parker (1847-60).

*Gentlemen's Magazine,* London, monthly, 1731-1907, ed. "Sylvanus Urbanus [pseud.].

*Irish Felon,* Dublin, weekly, June 24 – July 22 1848, ed. John Martin,

*Irish Tribune,* Dublin, weekly, June 10 – July 8 1848, ed., Kevin Izod O'Doherty and Richard Dalton Williams.

*Nation,* Dublin, weekly, 1842-97 (suppressed July1848-September 1849), ed. Charles Gavan Duffy.

*Pilot,* Dublin, thrice-weekly, 1828-49, ed. Richard Barrett.

*Spectator,* London, weekly, 1828 – present, ed. Stephen Rintoul (1828-58).

*United Irishman,* Dublin, weekly, February – May 1848, ed. John Mitchel and Thomas Devin Reilly.

*Quarterly Review,* London, quarterly, 1809-1967, ed. John Gibson Lockhart (1842-67).

*Warder,* Dublin, weekly, 1822-80, editor not known.

*Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review,* London, quarterly [various titles], 1824-1914, ed. William Hickson, (1840-51).

## Secondary sources

Altick, Richard, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Brown, Malcolm, *The Politics of Irish Literature: from Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats,* London, George Allen and Unwin, 1972.

Colgan, Maurice, "Young Ireland, Literature and Nationalism, in Frances Barker, John Coombes, Peter Hulme, Colin Mercer and David Musselwhite (eds), *1848: The Sociology of Literature: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature,* Colchester, University of Essex, July 1977.

Colley, Linda, *Captives:Britain, Empire and the World: 1600-1850,* London, Random House, 2000.

Collini, Stefan, *The Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain: 1850-1930,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

Davis, Richard, *The Young Ireland Movement,* Dublin and Totowa NJ, 1987.

Deane, Seamus, *A Short History of Irish Literature,* Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994 [1986].

____. *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790,* New York and Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

Eagleton, Terry, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture,* London and New York, Verso, 1995.

____. *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1999.

Foster, R. F., "Ascendancy and Union", in R. F. Foster (ed.) *The Oxford History of Ireland,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989.

Graham, Walter *English Literary Periodicals,* New York, Octagon Books, 1966 [1930].

Hall, Wayne *Dialogues in the Margin: A Study of the Dublin University Magazine,* Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 2000.

Hayley, Barbara, "Irish Periodicals from the Union to the *Nation*", *Anglo-Irish Studies,* II, 1976.

Hayley, Barbara and Enda McKay (eds), *300 Years of Irish Periodicals,* Mullingar, Association of Irish Learned Journals, 1987.

Hobsbawm, E. J., *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875,* London, Sphere Books, 1985 [1975].

Houghton, Walter E. (ed.), *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824-1900* [5 vols.], Toronto, University of Toronto Press; London, Routledge, 1966.

____. “Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes”, in Joanne Shattock and Michael Woolff (eds), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, Leicester and Toronto, Leicester University Press, 1982.

Huggins, Michael, “Democracy or Nationalism: The Problems of the Chartist Press in Ireland”, in Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (eds), *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press*, London, Merlin Press, 2005.

Klancher, Jon P., *The Making of English Reading Audiences: 1790-1832*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Legg, Marie Louise, “The Kilkenny Circulating-Library Society and the Growth of Reading Rooms in Nineteenth-Century Ireland” in Bernadette Cunningham and Maire Kennedy (eds), *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives*, Dublin, Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland and Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 1999.

MacDonagh, Oliver, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1983.

Sullivan, Alvin (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age: 1789-1836*, Westport (Conn.) and London, Greenwood Press, 1983.

Vance, Norman, *Irish History: A Social History*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Williams, Leslie A., *Daniel O’Connell, The British Press and the Irish Famine: Killing Remarks*, London and Burlington, Ashgate, 2003.

Woodham-Smith, Cecil, *The Great Hunger: 1845-9*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1962.

# Poetry

# *Matrophobia or Matrocompliance?: Motherhood as "Experience and Institution" in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan*

Pilar Villar Argáiz

**Abstract:** *This article traces and examines representations of motherhood and mother-daughter relationships in contemporary Irish women's poetry in the light of Adrienne Rich's theories in* Of Woman Born. *I particularly focus on Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan, whose work poses a direct challenge to the traditional values of motherhood, a metaphor that, in the Irish context, has been intrinsically connected with national identity. In their dealings with topics as diverse as pregnancy, childbirth, infertility, infanticide, miscarriage, abortion and mother-daughter relationships, both writers offer alternative perspectives to the myth of the benevolent and abnegated Mother, a social and cultural ideal recurrently manipulated in Ireland by nationalism and Catholicism.*

## 1. Introduction: Irish Motherhood as an "Institution"

Motherhood has been a crucial feminist concern since the end of the 1970s, particularly since the publication of Adrienne Rich's landmark and controversial study *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976).[1] Together with other feminist voices like Nancy Chodorow, Rich (1986. 14). argues for a revision of mothering "as defined and restricted under patriarchy", in order to discredit the traditional assumption that motherhood is an essential and indispensable part of female experience, and to describe the mixed and ambivalent feelings a mother can usually experience.

Drawing on history, anthropology, psychoanalysis, literature and personal materials – as a woman, a poet, a feminist and a mother – Rich explains how patriarchy has tended to idealise women as mothers, transforming motherhood into a social, not merely physical, function. She distinguishes between two meanings of motherhood: biological motherhood or "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children", and motherhood as an "*institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control" (13). The latter

she claims has been manipulated to serve the interests of patriarchy, as observed in the economic dominance of fathers in families or the usurpation of the birth process by a male medical establishment (34). Furthermore, Rich explains, by drawing on historical sources, how this patriarchal conceptualisation of motherhood "revives and renews all other institutions", by reifying mothers as icons who "exemplif[y] in one person religion, social conscience and nationalism" (45).

This institutionalised version of motherhood as well as the use of the female body for patriarchal and nationalist aims are clearly evident in the case of Ireland, a country in which the ancient connection of women to fertility and the land has been recurrently manipulated as a tool of nationalism. The ideology of the new Irish Republic was founded on the sanctification of the family as the basic social unit, the construction of a highly conservative Catholic community and the revival of the old representation of Ireland as Mother-land. Articles 41 and 45 of the 1937 Constitution immediately associated Irish women with motherhood and domesticity. Women were expected to carry their lives of service and self-sacrifice in the sanctified realm of the domestic sphere: their model to follow was the Virgin Mary, an ideal of virtue, abnegation and submissive suffering. The lives of women were further limited through legislation: laws prohibiting contraception and divorce were introduced, and later, a constitutional amendment was passed, banning the practice of abortion.

Not surprisingly, motherhood is an essential concern for some contemporary women poets in Ireland, as Boyle Haberstroh (23) notices when analysing the poetry of Eavan Boland, Medbh McGuckian, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Eithne Strong. These writers offer a vast majority of literary and visual images of motherhood that both explore the effects of the colonial and nationalist inheritance, and aim to change prevailing icons of femininity in Ireland. In this sense, their project involves a dual process of "recovery" and "re-vision", to borrow Adrienne Rich's (1979. 35) now-classic term, a way of re-reading conventionalised images of women from a new critical perspective. Rather than invoking a singular, gender-based identity of woman/mother, their work unleashes a plurality of voices who perceive maternity as an ambiguous experience, simultaneously enriching (as a privileged condition which allows female self-fulfilment) and/or utterly repressive (as literally the root of women's degradation and enclosure within a domestic sphere which limits their artistic potential).

This plurality of voices becomes particularly evident in the poetry of Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan, for whom the theme of motherhood has proven extraordinarily intense. Like Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*, these two writers see motherhood in much broader terms than just physiological reproduction. Their images of maternity not only refer to the physiological labour of woman as mother, but they also have a variety of meanings involved with creativity, nurturing and women's societal expectations. In this sense, their work gives a complicated view of what motherhood in Ireland means in relation to experience and tradition.

The first section of this paper examines depictions of uncaring, "unmotherly" and "childless" mothers in Boland's and Meehan's poetry, with a view to highlighting how both writers fiercely challenge conventional idealisations of Irish women as holy mothers and nationalist female muses. The poems analysed in this section set the idea of motherhood in a socio-cultural perspective, as an "institution" which oppresses and hampers the personal development of fictional poetic identities. The last two sections concentrate on autobiographical poems by Boland and Meehan. Both writers explore, often within the same collection, the relationship of mother and daughter from very different perspectives, exposing the complexity of female experience and dismantling reductive ideals of motherhood.

## 2. "Unmotherly" Women and "Childless" Mothers

In *Of Woman Born*, Rich narrates her problems, as a white middle-class educated woman in the late 1950s, when adjusting to a stereotypical life of wifehood and motherhood: "My husband spoke eagerly of the children we would have; my parents-in-law awaited the birth of their grandchild. I had no idea of what *I* wanted" (Rich 1979. xi). After the birth of her third child, Rich decided to be sterilised. This was followed by a series of landmark events in her life: her marriage was terminated, her husband committed suicide and she came out as a lesbian in 1976. Ever since then, she has been trying to *give birth to herself*, a phrase by which we can interpret the thought-provoking title of her book.

Adrienne Rich's struggle in her life to discover her own self and identity outside the constraints established by "the power of the fathers" (57) parallels the endeavour of contemporary women writers in Ireland to break away and find their own ways outside imposed feminine standards. In 1980, Eavan Boland published *In Her Own Image*, a volume which meant a breakthrough in contemporary Irish poetry, in its exploration of diverse images of women, from witches to mad creatures, from sinful Eves to submissive victims of male standards. Several critics have singled Rich out as a significant influence on Boland's feminist volume (Allen-Randolph 1995; Luftig 1993; Gelpi 1999). Indeed, Boland read "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" in the final 1970s, before she began writing *In Her Own Image*, and this meant, as she claimed in an interview, "an enormous rush of oxygen" (Allen-Randolph 1999. 300).

It is easy to understand why Boland was so fascinated with this essay. Adrienne Rich's own life (as described in her essay) coincides in more than one way with Boland's life at that time. Like Rich, Boland began as a conservative young formalist, but, at the time of reading Rich's essay, she had a similar change of life that radically transformed her as a poet. At the end of the 1970s, she moved from the University culture in Dublin to the suburbs, where she began to raise her two daughters. Gradually, she came to the realisation that the traditional Irish canonical poem could not account for the ordinary life she had started to live. They were poems where "you could have a political murder but not a baby. Or the Dublin hills and not the suburbs under them" (Boland 1996. 119). As her

life as a woman in a Dublin suburb with small children was not part of Irish poetry, Boland felt the need to subvert the poetic tradition she had inherited. In this sense, her change of lifestyle meant for her the sort of "awakening [of] consciousness" Rich (1979. 35) talks about in her essay. According to Rich, women have to *wake up* to the fact that they have been culturally oppressed in a male-dominated society. The challenge for women writers, she thought, was to rebel against this repressive reality, an action which would simultaneously imply an unleashing of anger and a liberating act of self-creation:

> The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step and then you are in another country. Much of woman's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimisation, or a lyric of seduction. And today, much poetry by women […] is charged with anger. I think we need to go through that anger […] if not we will betray our reality. (Rich 1979. 48).

By reading Rich, one understands how Boland's rage in *In Her Own Image* is a necessary step in her radical defence of those womanly aspects that have been denigrated by religion and nationalism. In the title poem "In Her Own Image", Boland rebels with anger against her cultural oppression and puts the reader inside a woman's mind who kills her own child. As Rich (1979. 34) notes, woman's "awakening of consciousness" can be "confusing, disorienting and painful", for confronting oppression is not at all pleasant. The woman in "In Her Own Image" similarly feels confused and disconcerted at her awakening to the oppression she has been suffering. Her inability to define herself leads her to an act of self-negation:

> She is not myself
> anymore, she is not
> even in my sky
> anymore and I
> am not myself. (Boland 1980. 13)

These lines show a fragmented self, which, as Allen-Randolph (1991. 51) explains, only defines itself in negative terms, by "what-she-is-not". She cannot perceive herself as a stable and fixed subject. Unable to disentangle her sense of herself from her loyalty to her daughter, she ends up confusing her own body with that of her child. But, instead of self-destruction, she ends up killing her own daughter:

> I will not disfigure
> her pretty face.
> Let her wear amethyst thumbprints,
> a family heirloom,
> a sort of burial necklace (Boland 1980. 13)

The end of the poem portrays a dead daughter who wears a "family heirloom" of "amethyst thumbprints". Family is understood as a socially and culturally sanctioned structure which perpetuates the oppression of women. Unable to escape from this destructive heritage, killing her own child and liberating herself from a possible offspring are the only means of asserting her own identity. In her analysis of the history of maternal violence, particularly infanticide, Rich (1986. 263) argues that, if we do not listen to the particular story of mothers who kill their children, if we simply regard them as "psychopathological", we will never understand the specific socio-historical conditions that drive mothers to commit such acts of violence: rape, poverty, ignorance, lack of emotional support, sanctions against abortion and birth control, and fear of male theological doctrine. In Boland's poem, the narrator's rejection of motherhood results from her uneasiness with the social conventions regarding women as mothers, and her desire to escape from the traditional role of mothering that Irish women have been subjected to. The death of her child effectively emancipates the speaker from the constraints of mothering. Furthermore, by killing her own daughter, the mother avoids her experiencing the same victimisation that she has suffered from, and subsequently, the perpetuation of male stereotypes of women. The poem ends with the persona burying her "second nature" and adopting a "compromise" to "bloom" *in her own image*. The victorious rebirth of this new self at the end of the poem allegorises the advent of the new, revolutionary woman Adrienne Rich (1971. 98) talks about, a woman who after "coming awake" to her own oppression, "is becoming her own midwife, creating herself anew".[2]

In "Witching", Boland (1980. 28-30) also rejects motherhood as a suitable experience for women, distancing herself from the idealised role of the mother encouraged by the Church and the State in Ireland. The speaker in this poem is a witch, a liberating symbol of opposition towards an oppressive masculine culture. Rather than being desired, motherhood is connected here with those women who repeat the male standards for their sex, and also with the image of Mother Ireland:

> these my enemies …
>
> who breed
> and breed,
> who talk and talk –
>
> birth
> and bleeding,
> the bacteria of feeds. (Boland 1980. 28)

By connecting childbirth and bleeding, the speaker links motherhood with that nationalist speech that advocates blood sacrifice in the fight for the mother country. The "nursery lights" signify, as Kelly (1993. 53) puts it, those "national-muses [who provide] nurturing milk for the male oral tradition". These apparently harmless lights are

constraining images of womanhood that “shine”, “multiply” and “douse” the witch’s own light. Only by burning her own body, can she create her own light, a light which is not the reflection of any “nursery light”:

> I will …
> make
> a pyre
> of my haunch
>
> and so
> the last thing
> they know
> will be
> the stench
> of my crotch. (Boland 1980. 29-30)

By burning the *haunch* (a metonymy of motherhood), the witch destroys not only her potential to be pregnant, but also those traditionally Irish icons of female domesticity. Addressing the “nursery lights”, or the Irish nationalist literary tradition, she concludes: “smell/ how well/ a woman’s/ flesh/ can burn” (30). In this sense, destruction and creation are intrinsically linked. By destroying the mythical mother of the Irish tradition, the woman in the poem creates her own distinct identity. The “unmotherly” attitude displayed by this speaker runs counter to Boland’s depiction of maternity in her subsequent volume *Night Feed* (1982), in which, as we will see, she blesses motherhood as an enriching female experience.[3]

Boland’s scathing rejection of motherhood as a social institution in *In Her Own Image* is also observed in Paula Meehan’s work. Her poem “The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks” illustrates the cultural effect that the unattainable model of the Virgin Mary - an entrenched ideal of virginity and maternity - has exerted on contemporary Irish women (Meehan 1994. 40-42). The poem makes explicit reference to the Anne Lovett case in 1984, when a fifteen-year-old girl died while giving birth in the town of Granard, county Longford. The deaths of this girl and her baby took place in a grotto to the Virgin, where Anne decided to labour in solitude after nine months of secret pregnancy (McCafferty 99-100). In Meehan’s poem, the Virgin does not identify herself with the passive role she has been assigned by Catholic iconography. After complaining of the bad weather and the isolation she experiences “stuck up here in this grotto”, this religious icon expresses her desire for contact and sexual intimacy with a “mortal man”. Furthermore, she records her failure when fulfilling the role of motherhood that she supposedly symbolises:

> On a night like this I remember the child
> who came with fifteen summers to her name,
> and she lay down alone at my feet

without a midwife or doctor or friend to hold her hand
and she pushed her secret out into the night,
…
and though she cried to me in extremis
I did not move,
I didn't lift a finger to help her,
I didn't intercede with heaven,
nor whisper the charmed word in God's ear. (Meehan 1994. 40-41)

The Virgin overtly refuses to fulfil the nurturing, selfless and self-sacrifying functions she apparently embodies. The attitude displayed by the speaker in Meehan's poem reflects women's tendency, as explained by Rich (1986. 235), to set their own selves against an archetypical mother-woman, a psychological process she explains by means of the term "matrophobia". Meehan destabilises the symbolic significance of motherhood in Irish political, cultural and social life, by portraying the inability of this religious icon to help the girl and highlighting her sense of detachment from the maternal and protective role she has been assigned. This subversion is also carried out in a more recent poem by Meehan (2000. 32), "Ectopic", which deals with the controversial topic of abortion:

I must summon up the will to kill
you soon before you get too strong a grip
on the black hole that occupies the void that was my heart.

By capturing the loneliness and despair of a woman with an unwanted pregnancy, Meehan advocates, like Rich (1986. 184), women's right to "*choose* both the forms of our sexuality and the terms of our motherhood or nonmotherhood freely", in order to "achieve genuine sexual autonomy". In a country where a nationalist tradition has often returned to the symbolic identification between Ireland and the Mother, and where the precepts of the 1937 Constitution have relegated women to the exclusive roles of mothers and housewives, feminist counter-statements such as these are quite revolutionary.

Meehan's work also questions motherhood as a universal experience supposedly accessible to all women, by portraying women who, in different ways, lack the biological capacity to procreate. As Fogarty (110) explains in her analysis of contemporary Irish women's fiction, conventional "matrilinear plots have recently been expanded in a new direction to make space for the story of the mother without child". This theme of "thwarted motherhood" is evoked in Meehan's poetry. Poems such as "Child Burial" and "Elegy for a Child" focus on a mother's affliction by the death of her child and foetus respectively (Meehan 1994. 27-28, 29-30). This sense of defeat is also observed in "Childless", where the poet takes the reader inside the mind of a "sterile" woman who, unable to have children, expresses her will to give up literary creation for the sake of biological creation (González Arias 206). Meehan highlights the dilemma of living

as a mother or living as a writer by emphasising the narrator's wish to choose her child over her art:

> I would trade all my poems,
> My stores of words, my hoarded tunes,
> To have a child suck on my breast.
> Cruel fate, you must despise me
> To give me two good eyes to see with
> All around me young blood pulsing,
> While in cap and gown I am sterile. (Meehan 1984. 55)

According to patriarchal standards, adjectives such as "unchilded" or "childless" simply define women "in terms of lack" (as an *unwomanl*y woman) or in terms of "failure" (as a *failed* woman) (Rich 1986. 240, 251). It is this conventional assumption that Meehan ironically portrays in her representation of women whose sense of self-worth is framed around motherhood. The "sterile" speaker in "Childless" feels useless and worthless in "the face of all creation/ Seeding, sporing, taking root" (Meehan 1984. 55). She perceives herself not for what she *is* but for what she *is not*; in other words, she is caught within a patriarchal system that highlights her "lack". In this sense, poems such as "Childless" explore the tragic consequences when women accept imposed patriarchal systems of representation, by reflecting the internal confusion of a woman who has internalised the male belief that "Mothers are more real than other women" (Rich 1986. 216).

## 3. "Matrophobic" daughters

Until very recently, the mother-daughter relationship has occupied a marginal position in criticism.[4] As Rich (1986. 225) notes, the "cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story". In an attempt to overcome this cultural gap, Rich explains, from a simultaneous psychoanalytical and personal experience, the complex network of emotions that characterise this relationship. According to this critic, the daughter is assailed by two contradictory instincts which operate simultaneously: the urge to claim the mother and the struggle to escape from or reject her. On the one hand, as she explains, "the first knowledge any woman has of warmth [and] nourishment … comes from her mother" (218). On the other hand, the daughter sees her mother as a rival and threatening figure. Challenging Freud's contention that the daughter's rage at the mother originates from her "resentment for not having been given a penis", Rich (1986. 244) claims that her anger arises from her "mother's powerlessness or luck of struggle" when trying to escape from the roles imposed on her. Rich explains this alternation between desire and rage by means of the concept "matrophobia", a term she borrows from the poet Lynn Sukenick and which signals

"the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mothe*'" (235).[5] As she later contends:

> Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage … Our personalities seem to blur and overlap dangerously with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (Rich 1986. 236)

This friction between mother and daughter seems to be the dominant plot in the matrilinear narratives of contemporary Irish women writers, as Fogarty (86-113) claims in her analysis of Irish women's fiction from 1950 to the present. The work of Mary Lavin, Julia O'Faoláin and Edna O'Brien, among others, display a prevailing matrophobic focus, because the emphasis is almost invariably laid on "the desperate struggle of the daughter to avoid the trap of female subjugation and the calamity of duplicating maternal experience" (113). Because of this, Fogarty claims, "the links between mothers and daughters in Irish society" are usually depicted "as tempestuous, problem-laden, and fraught with multiple tensions". (86)

One of the most significant writers in Ireland to address this issue in terms of its psychological implications is Paula Meehan. As McKenna (81) notes, Meehan's "poetry speaks of the power and language of a community of the feminine and speaks in detail of its rupture in the face of masculinist-dominated society". This schism among women provoked by patriarchal standards is observed in "The Pattern" (Meehan 1994. 17-20), a biographical poem which explores the author's relationship with her mother in a therapeutic exercise to understand and accept this figure, and to suture her emotional wounds. As the speaker claims, their relationship has been influenced by the generic labels which limited their roles to those of "mother", "daughter" and "wife", which prevent them from communicating successfully:

> I wish now she'd lasted till after
> I'd grown up. We might have made a new start
>
> as women without tags like *mother*, *wife*,
> *sister*, *daughter*, taken our changes from there.
> At forty-two she headed for god knows where.
> I've never gone to visit her grave. (Meehan 1994. 17)

Although Meehan's "fate", as "the eldest daughter", is to inherit and perpetuate her mother's role, she yearns to construct her identity outside societal and conventional demands. As she argues in an interview with Dorgan (265):

> At crucial times in my life there would have been an expected role for me to play – these would have been mostly the models assigned to a woman …. And I suppose I had watched my mother fall victim to those roles. And while I mightn't have known what I wanted, I sure as hell knew what I didn't want.

Meehan's fear of the patriarchal legacy and her attempt to follow a different path from her mother's is precisely recorded in the final stanzas of "The Pattern":

> Sometimes I'd have to kneel
> an hour before her by the fire,
> a skein around my outstretched hands,
> while she rolled wool into balls.
> If I swam like a kite too high
> amongst the shadows on the ceiling
> or flew like a fish in the pools
> of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly
> home, she'd land me at her knees.
>
> Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,
> She'd say: "One of these days I must
> teach you to follow a pattern". (Meehan 1994. 20)

These lines record the tension experienced by a girl caught between the old tradition embodied in the mother and her dreams of a new tradition. Meehan uses the design that her mother weaves with knitting wools of different colours ("Moss Green, Mustard, Beige") as a metaphor of "the pattern" that she is expected to follow in the future. Nevertheless, the societal conventions that she wants to transmit to her daughter are not totally acceptable for the speaker. Her mother's knitting symbolises some values which oppress her and hamper her personal development as a writer: in contrast to this omnipresent mother, she "is a different kind of pattern maker: the pattern is the poem, the knitting together of words" (Boyle Haberstroh 223). The last lines of "The Pattern" illustrate Rich's theories about fearing the mother's role, and hold her mother responsible for her acceptance of certain conventional attitudes (González Arias 224). As Meehan argues in an interview: "I suppose my abiding fear is that I will become my mother" (304).[6]

This need to escape from the feminine "patterns" inherited by her mother, under the fear that she might reproduce them entirely, is continued in poems such as "Binding in the Wash in March", where Meehan (1986. 28) focuses on her mother's inflexible authority when she forced her to do all those tasks once considered feminine:

> My mother would start to panic
> At the first spits of spring rain
> And herd me down to the yard. 'Drop

A single thing and I'll swing for you
Paula.'

"The View from Under the Table" similarly portrays Meehan's mother as an oppressive and overwhelming force, who threatens to slap her if she doesn't fulfil her domestic duties. Going back into her past, the speaker wonders: "Who did she think she was with her big words/ and her belt and her beatings? Who do I think I am to write her (Meehan 2000. 12).

In other poems such "The Ghost of My Mother Comforts Me", Meehan (1997. 38-39) continues struggling with the spectre of her mother. Nevertheless, rather than seeing her as a figure who threatens to inculcate a mode of behaviour from which she desires to escape, the mother in this poem is presented as a protective figure with clearly divine attributes, providing comfort, tenderness, protection and creative energy for her child: "For you, daughter, there is no blame,/ for you no portion of guilt", "I will stroke your forehead till you sleep", "Because I am your mother I will protect you/ as I promised you in childhood" (38). These memories of warmth and tenderness are also captured in "Ard Fheis", where Meehan (1994. 21-22) counteracts the harsh memories of her working-class environment with the consoling remembrance of her mother:

And somewhere there is a vestige
of my mother nursing me to sleep,
when all my world was touch,
and possibly was peace.

Therefore, Meehan's mother is a central figure in her work. Poems such as these are testimony to the passion of the daughter for the mother, her need above all to understand this woman, to seek intimacy with her and to comprehend the forces acting upon her.[7] In this sense, the two instincts analysed by Rich operate simultaneously in Meehan's work: while she urges to reclaim her mother, she also struggles to win free of her influence on her life.

## 4. "Matrocompliant" mothers

Meehan's poems about her mother, predominantly autobiographical in character, might be set beside Boland's 1982 collection *Night Feed* to enlarge our vision of the complexity of mother and daughter relationships and the effect that canonical systems of representation still have for contemporary Irish women. In this semi-autobiographical volume, Boland also explores the connection and disruption between mother and daughter, and like Meehan, she describes this relationship as especially vulnerable. Whereas Meehan more frequently adopts a "daughterly" perspective, Boland reflects on her experiences of mothering when raising her two children in the Dublin suburb of Dundrum.

In contrast to Meehan, this poet describes in a highly transcendental way the union between mother and child, blessing and sanctifying motherhood as an enriching and fulfilling female experience. In “Hymn”, for instance, Boland (1982. 8) establishes a contrast between an undisturbed and peaceful domestic interior and a violent public landscape, making explicit her own ideological position:

> The cutlery glitter
> of that sky
> has nothing in it
> I want to follow.
>
> Here is the star
> of my nativity:
> a nursery lamp
> in a suburb window
>
> behind which
> is boiled glass, a bottle
> and a baby all
> hisses like a kettle.

According to the Bible, when Jesus Christ was born, three wise men set out on a journey following a nativity star that would eventually lead them to the crib where the Lamb of God was born. Boland, in the contemporary context of Ireland, has a different nativity star to follow: the nursery lamp in her suburb window. The sparkling light in the sky is only superficially attractive: its “glitter” is not real, but man-made, “cutlery.” On the other hand, its brightness is a reflection of the metallic weapons and bladed swords used in combat. Boland implies that the solution to human problems is not found in the distant stars (by invoking unreal or illusionary emblems), but in this suburban setting, in the speaker’s everyday world. It is here where a promising and happier future lies. The baby is portrayed as a contained source of energy: within the child lies the future, what the world will be. This theme is reinforced in the final lines of “Hymn”, which as Gelpi (1999. 218) explains, reinterpret the opening lines of John’s Gospel (“The Word made flesh”) in order to signify the first appearance of daylight in the morning:

> And in the dark
> as we slept
> the world
> was made flesh. (Boland 1982. 8)

In her revision of the Gospel, the speaker enhances the idea that holiness resides in the everyday “world” and more specifically in a nursery, and not only in the orthodox (patriarchal) “Word.” Human salvation is here, in the room where a baby is being fed. A

better future can be achieved, the poet implies, by the mother's nurturing of the child, in other words, by the child's proper education.

Boland's poem advocates the kind of premises defended by philosopher Sara Ruddick. According to Ruddick (120-122), it is necessary to bring the capacity for nurturing life into the public realm from which it has been excluded from centuries. This is what she calls "attentive love" or "maternal thinking", a kind of loving which is directly opposed to the abuse of others by "let[ting] difference emerge without searching for comforting commonalities, dwell[ing] upon the *other*, and also let[ting] otherness be" (122). As Daly explains, Ruddick is speaking of a maternal thought which is founded on respect and on an appreciation of difference, a way of thinking concerned with "the preservation of children and [with] fostering their growth and acceptability" (244) . This way of thinking, according to Ruddick, is "necessary in the promotion and maintenance of a 'politics of peace' " (quoted in Arcana 207). Boland's reappraisal of the maternal figure as a source of positive values validates Ruddick's perception of maternal thinking as a resource for peace.

Part of the difficulty with Boland's approach to motherhood is that the qualities which she values most in her role as a mother (connectedness and caring) are also the products of women's social subordination. In her analysis of maternal deprivation in female fiction, Bennett claims that, particularly since the 1980s, "there has been a tendency among white middle-class American feminists to romanticise women's so-called connectedness to others and to treat is as an essential and positive quality differentiating women from men" (134) . Such "essentialist tendency", she argues, refuels "the fantasy of the ideal mother, which feminism originally sought to challenge: the mother who puts herself, her needs, and therefore, her boundaries last" (134-5).[8] The risks of sentimentalising the experience of mothering has also been identified by Adrienne Rich (1986), who attacks that form of "women's movement" which conceptualises motherhood "as a potential healing of men's pain by women" (214).

Indeed, Boland's "Hymn" depicts the figure of the mother as "more morally credible or more morally capable than any other woman", as someone who has "a real stake in the future of humanity" (Rich 1986. xvi). In contrast to the hostile domestic atmosphere that Meehan portrays in "The Pattern", for instance, Boland idealises the nursery room as a space invested with power. Rich would not share this view of maternal power, because, as she claims, "it can be dangerously simplistic to fix upon "nurturance" as a special strength of women" (283). By romanticising her own experience as a mother, Boland seems to align herself with the Virgin Mary or the idealised role of the mother, encouraged by the Church and the State in Ireland. In this sense, even though Boland deconstructs the long-held separation between the domestic and the public/political spheres by infusing her private ordinary world with external significance, she seems to rely ultimately on the (patriarchal) institutionalised concept of the "Mother" that Rich (1986) analyses in her work, a numinous nurturer or morally superior being that has become,

> for men as well as women, a dangerous archetype; the Mother, source of angelic love and forgiveness in a world increasingly ruthless and impersonal; … the symbol and residue of moral values and tenderness in a world of wars, brutal competition and contempt for human weakness.

The speaker in "Hymn" – in her maternal function of gestating, bearing and nurturing her child – proclaims herself as a perfect counteract for a society ruled by male logic, encapsulating all those attributes of the mystical Mother that Rich criticises in *Of Woman Born*.

In this sense, whereas Meehan yearns to create a new relationship with her mother free from imposed tags and societal expectations, Boland seems at first to find no problem when accepting traditional depictions of women as holy mothers and caregivers. Her acceptance of these conventional roles runs counter to Meehan's overt *matrophobia* and reveals what could be labelled, by subverting Rich's term, as a covert *matrocompliance*.

Boland's *matrocompliant* attitude is also observed in "Night Feed", a poem that describes in complex terms the bond between mother and child. The title gives us an indication of what is going to be the double concern of the poem. First, it predicts a night feeding, in which the mother supplies nourishment to her child by giving her a bottle of milk. Secondly, it anticipates that this mother not only gives the newborn food, but is also "provided with [this] sustenance" (Kupillas 14). In other words, the woman's sense of worth and value is enhanced by her nurturing of the child:

> I crook the bottle.
> How you suckle!
> This is the best I can be,
> Housewife
> To this nursery
> Where you hold on,
> Dear life. (Boland 1982. 7)

As a mother, guardian and keeper, the poetic voice feels at the zenith of her self-fulfillment. The speaker finds her role of "Housewife/ To this nursery" essential for her female identity. The emphasis on the importance of motherhood as a source of identity for the female subject is criticised by Rich (1986. 11), who claims that, although motherhood is an important part of female experience, it is not, as patriarchy would want us to believe, an essential aspect of women's identities. This feminist critic discredits the traditional assumption that to be a mother is an essential prerequisite to be a "real" woman, a belief also challenged by scholars such as Davis (2003. 353), Donaldson (138) and Rajan (1-2), who contend that homogenising generalisations such as these might obliterate more heterogeneous women's experiences. From this perspective, Boland

might be accused of ignoring the different experiences of all those women who do not find in motherhood their source of identity.

Nevertheless, to read Boland's poems on maternity only from this perspective would be incomplete. Her representations of mother and daughter relationships have different imperatives. First of all, it is important to note that Boland's work distinctively pays homage to women's roles as mothers in order to reassess an experience which has been for long neglected in a national tradition almost exclusively concerned with public events, such as Ireland's political history. Secondly, as we have seen, Boland's reliance on her personal experiences of motherhood allows her to blur the conventional boundaries established between the public (political) sphere, reserved to men, and the private (domestic) sphere, assigned to women. Boland emphasises how the nurturing affection between mother and child is a possible refuge from a world of violence and destruction, although in the process, she runs the risk of reiterating the traditional idealisations of motherhood that Irish Catholic and nationalist discourses have encouraged. Thirdly, Boland challenges the notion that motherhood and writing are incompatible activities, by reaffirming the continuities between her life of a mother and her life of a writer. She blurs the division between mothering and art, that is assumed in the patriarchal culture, by asserting the value of both procreation and artistic creation. Finally, mother imagery is employed in Boland's poetry in order to portray the complexity of a woman's life and experiences. The mother finds relief in bearing her child, but she also feels a strong sense of loss, in the anticipation of this child growing old. In most of her maternity poems, Boland emphasises the inevitable disunion between mother and daughter, and the mother's subsequent fears that her influence will fade with the passage of time, as the child enters into adulthood.[9] Thus, motherhood is charged with a sacramental value, but most of the time, it causes pain and despair in the mother.

This complex and multi-layered depiction of motherhood is made explicit in "Endings" (Boland 1982), where Boland considers her own death in the light of birth and the beginning of life: "A child/ shifts in the cot./ No matter what happens now/ I'll never fill one again" (19). This mother-speaker is not only realizing that her child-bearing years are now over, but also that the older she grows, the more distant her child will be from her:

> If I lean
> I can see
> what it is the branches end in:
> The leaf.
> The reach.
> The blossom.
> The abandon.

Boland's images of branches and flowers coming to fruition are suggestive of her child's innocence and also of the inevitable process of life unfolding and perishing.

Boland's attempt to "reach" her child is counteracted by the noun "abandon". Motherhood is in this sense characterised by moments of closeness and also by defeat.

In this sense, Boland deconstructs the stereotype of the mother as "a single-minded identity" (Rich 1986. 23). One of Rich's concerns in *Of Woman Born* is to dismantle the institutionalised belief that maternal love is in itself continuous, selfless and unconditional. The mother and child interaction, as explained by Rich, is one dominated by ambivalent and contradictory feelings, such as "love and hate, jealousy even of the child's childhood; hope and fear for its maturity" (22). These complex feelings, "this interpenetration of pain and pleasure, frustration and fulfilment" (33), are clearly exposed in Boland's work. Like Rich, Boland openly challenges the patriarchal view of motherhood, which dictates what mothers should feel towards their children and subsequently what their reaction should and should not be. By portraying a mother's multiple fears and her sense of loss, this poet expresses the multidimensional nature of the female, as against monolithic representations of women.

Whereas Boland's poetry portrays mothers who are traumatized by their separation from their daughters and therefore yearn to be united with their offspring, Meehan's work, as we have seen, focuses on daughters who earnestly attempt to escape from their mothers' example and establish a new relationship unconstrained by patriarchal standards. Boland's stance is as subversive as Meehan's. By focusing on the ordinary but significant details of maternal love and fear, Boland expresses the often confusing and conflicting emotions a mother generally experiences, and disrupts the view of motherhood encouraged by the Irish national tradition. Her mothers are realistic figures that experience multiple fears and are affected by the passing of time and the loss of beauty.

## 5. Conclusion

Like Adrienne Rich, both Meehan and Boland examine motherhood in a social context, as fixed and transformed into an Irish political institution. In a country where motherhood has been associated with traditional symbols of nationhood and the Catholic religion, their poems are not only mere autobiographical explorations – as mothers and daughters – but also poems that are deeply charged with political connotations.

As McCarthy (97) claims, two stereotypes of women which are reproduced, "almost obsessively", in Irish fiction are the idealised "Good Mammy", "dutiful, self-sacrificing paragon, devoted to God and family, provider of selfless love and good dinners" and, on the other hand, "the "Smother Mother", a dominant matriarch who insists on her children's adherence to her principle". The stereotype of the "Good Mammy" is indeed present in Boland's poetry, as we have seen in "Hymn" and "Night Feed", poems where Boland might be accused of adopting the traditional idealisations of motherhood that Irish Catholic and nationalist discourses have encouraged. On the other hand, the cliché of "the Smother Mother" is revived in Meehan's "The Pattern",

where the speaker, instead of romanticising and idealising the mother-daughter relationship, offers a much more problematic connection between both figures, as victims of a patriarchal system which makes them rivals.

In this sense, when recounting their experiences of mothering and being mothered, both writers seem to adopt an opposite stance: Meehan's poems display an overt *matrophobia* in her desire to escape from her mother's patriarchal legacy; Boland's work, by contrast, reveals what I have termed a covert *matrocompliance*, in her attempt to recognize the substantial worth of women as bearers of children. In spite of their different approach to motherhood and mothering, both writers are equally subversive in resisting the passive, idealised and lifeless icon of domesticity, reified in Irish religious and nationalist texts. In their dealing with previous taboo subjects such as abortion, infanticide and infertility, these poets reclaim Irish women's right to control their own sexuality and identify their selves outside social and cultural ideals of femininity. Furthermore, their work denounces the uniqueness of the myth of the Irish mother, by unleashing a plurality of women's voices and experiences, ranging from "unmotherly" women, "childless" mothers and "matrophobic" daughters to "matrocompliant" angels-in-the-house and jealous mothers assailed by contradictory feelings towards their children. The multidimensional nature of these poetic voices dismantles monolithic ideals of femininity and reclaims Irish women's right to adopt a creative role for motherhood.

## Notes

1 For the public censorship and the controversy around the book's publication, see Barry (1984. 300-03).

2 Rich's reference to women's rebirth is deleted in her 1979 version of "When We Dead Awaken". The original source is Adrienne Rich's 1971 edition of this essay, included in Rich (1975. 98).

3 For a comprehensive analysis of Eavan Boland's artistic development through the phases of feminine subordination, feminist protest and female self-discovery, see Villar-Argáiz (2007). Boland's change of perception of motherhood is specifically addressed in pages 116-22 and 183-85, which examine the poet's evolution from an extreme aversion to the actual process of childbirth (as reflected in *In Her Own Image*), to a celebration of motherhood and maternal love (as observed in *Night Feed*).

4 Davidson and Broner's 1980 pioneering work, devoted to the study of the mother and daughter relationship in literature, prompted the growing interest in this subject matter among theorists and literary critics. See, for instance, Daly and Reddy (1991), Phillips (1996), Ingman (1998) and Giorgio (2002). These studies cover women writers' revisions of motherhood from different periods and countries, including Irish, English and American examples.

5 In poems such as "A Woman Mourned by Daughters", Rich (1993. 159-60) postulates precisely this antagonism between mother and daughter, exemplifying, as Keyes (1984. 36) notes, her "fairly lack of female identification".

6 Given her tenacious focus on the silencing of women's voices in the Irish liter-ary and historical past, female legacy is also a prevailing topic which surfaces in Boland's work. Nevertheless, unlike Meehan, the transmission of maternal inheritance is considered to be positive and liberating.

In poems such as “I Remember”, “The Parcel”, “The Source”, “The Art of Grief” and “The Last Discipline”, Boland (2005. 127, 226-29, 239-41, 271) explains how the presence and tenderness of her dead mother still sustains her life.

7 Other poems devoted to exploring her relationship with her mother are “Poem in October for Helena, My Mother” (Meehan 1984. 30), where Meehan, mourning the death of her mother, describes her as a victimised figure, “a bird with a broken wing” who could not “dance in the swirling leaves”; “Autobiography” (Meehan 1997. 40-41), which captures Meehan’s ambivalent feelings towards her mother, and “Mother” (Meehan 2000. 56-57), where the maternal figure is depicted as a “terrorist”, a “devourer” and a “mother keeper” of patriarchal conventions.

8 This re-idealisation has been discussed by Chodorow and Contratto in their essay “The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother” (1982).

9 Boland usually relies on the mythical legend of Ceres and Persephone in order to draw attention to the complexity of mother and daughter relationships. See, for instance, “This Moment”, “The Pomegranate” and “Daughter” (Boland 2005. 213, 215-16, 263-64).

## Works Cited


Allen-Randolph, Jody. “Écriture Feminine and the Authorship of Self in Eavan Boland’s *In Her Own Image*”. *Colby Library Quarterly* 27.1 (1991): 48-59.

____ . “The New Critics: Adrienne Rich and Eavan Boland”. *PN Review* 22.2, (1995): 15-17.

____ . “A Backward Look: An Interview with Eavan Boland”. *Colby Quaterly* 35.4, (1999): 292-304.

Arcana, Judith. “Truth in Mothering: Grace Paley’s Stories”. Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, eds. *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991. 195-208.

Barry, Kathleen. “Reviewing Reviews”. Jane Roberta Cooper, ed. *Of Woman Born. Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-1981*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984. 300-03.

Bennett, Paula. “The Mother’s Part: Incest and Maternal Deprivation in Woolf and Morrison”. Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, eds. *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991. 125-138.

Boland, Eavan *In Her Own Image*. Dublin: Arlen House, 1980.

____ . *Night Feed*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1982.

____ . *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the poet in Our Time*. London: Vintage, 1996.

____ . *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2005.

Boyle Haberstroh, Patricia *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

Chodorow, Nancy and Susan Contratto. “The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother”. Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, eds. *Rethinking the Family*. New York: Longman, 1982. 54-73.

Daly, Brenda O. “Teaching Alice Walker’s Meridian: Civil Rights According to Mothers”. Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy (eds.). *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991. 239-57.

Daly, Brenda O. and Maureen T. Reddy (eds.). *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Davidson, Cathy and Esther M Broner (eds.). *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980.

Davis, Angela. "Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights". Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2003. 353-67.

Donaldson, Laura E. *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender and Empire-Building*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Dorgan, Theo. "An Interview with Paula Meehan". *Colby Quaterly* 28.4 (1992): 265-69.

Fogarty, Anne. "'The Horror of the Unlived Life': Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction". Adalgisa Giorgio, ed. *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*. New York: Berghahn, 2002. 85-118.

Gelpi, Albert. "'Hazard and Death': The Poetry of Eavan Boland". *Colby Quarterly* 35.4 (1999): 210-28.

Giorgio, Adalgisa (ed.). *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*. New York: Berghahn, 2002.

González Arias, Luz Mar. *Otra Irlanda: La Estética Postnacionalista de Poetas y Artistas Irlandesas Contemporáneas.* Oviedo: University of Oviedo Press, 2000.

Ingman, Heather. *Women's Fiction between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

Kelly, Sylvia. "The Silent Cage and Female Creativity in *In Her Own Image."*. Irish University Reviews 23.1 (1993): 45-56.

Keyes, Claire. "The Angels Chiding". Jane Roberta Cooper, ed. *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*. *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-1981*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984. 30-50.

Kupillas, Peter. "Bringing It All Back Home: Unity and Meaning in Eavan Boland's 'Domestic Interior' Sequence". Alexander G. González, ed. *Contemporary Irish Women poets: Some Male Perspectives*. London: Greenwood, 1999. 13-32.

Luftig, Victor. "'Something Will Happen to you Who Read': Adrienne Rich, Eavan Boland". *Irish University Review* 23.1 (1993): 57-66.

McCarthy, Áine. "'Oh Mother Where Art Thou?': Irish Mothers and Irish Fiction in the Twentieth Century". Patricia Kennedy, ed. *Motherhood in Ireland*. Cork: Mercier, 2004. 95-107.

McCafferty, Nell. "The Death of Anne Lovett". Ailbhe Smyth, ed. *The Abortion Papers Ireland*. Dublin: Attic, 1992. 99-106.

McKenna, Bernard. "'Battle Dressed to Survive': The Poetry of Paula Meehan". Alexander G. González, ed. *Contemporary Irish Women poets: Some Male Perspectives*. London: Greenwood, 1999. 79-102.

Meehan, Paula. *Return and No Blame*. Dublin: Beaver Row, 1984.

____. *Reading the Sky*. Dublin: Beaver Row, 1986.

____. *The Man who was Marked by Winter*. Meath: Gallery, 1994.

____. *Pillow Talk*. Meath: Gallery, 1997.

____. *Dharmakaya*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2000.

Mills, Lia. "'I won't go back to it': Irish women poets and the iconic feminine". *Feminist Review* 50 (1995): 69-88.

Phillips, Shelley. (1991): *Beyond the Myths: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Psychology, History, Literature and Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996.

Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Rich, Adrienne (1976). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. 10th ed. London: Virago, 1986.

_____. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi, eds. New York: Norton, 1975.

____. (ed.). "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision". *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979. 33-49.

____. *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*. New York: Norton, 1993.

Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon, 1989.

Villar-Argáiz, Pilar. *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet: An Outsider within an Outsider's Culture*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2007.

# *Perceptions of Contemporary Ireland in the Poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin*

Luci Collin Lavalle

**Abstract:** *Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (Cork, 1942) has published various collections of poetry and presently holds a solid position among the most distinguished Irish poets. The paper discusses the work of Ní Chuillenáin aiming at identifying aspects and references of contemporary Ireland in her poems. The main concern of the research is to analyze how Ní Chuilleanáin deals with some thematic elements such as language, identity, history, topographical and domestic space, politics and religion, rendering to the reader a special depiction of contemporary life in Ireland.*

The Irish poet, essayist, translator and editor Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, born in the city of Cork in 1942, attended University College and the National University of Ireland, receiving her Bachelor of Arts in 1962, and her Master of Arts in 1964; next, she attended Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and obtained her Bachelor of Literature in 1968. Nowadays, she is Senior Lecturer of English at Trinity College Dublin and member of Aosdána. In 1975, with Macdara Woods, Leland Bardwell and Pearse Hutchinson, she founded the literary review *Cyphers*, which is published up to the present day. Ní Chuilleanáin has written collections of poetry and her awards include the *Irish Times* Poetry Award, the Books Ireland Publishers' Award, the O'Shaughnessy Prize from the Irish-American Cultural Foundation, and the Patrick Kavanagh Prize, among others.

In the list of Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry books are *Acts and Monuments* (1972), *Site of Ambush* (1975), *Cork* (1977), *The Second Voyage* (1977), *The Rose Geranium* (1981), *The Magdalene Sermon* (1989), *The Brazen Serpent* (1994), *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer* (2001), *Selected Poems* (2008) and The *Sun-fish* (2009); all of them were published by The Gallery Press, Dublin, in their first edition, and also republished in the USA and in England. As for her works as a translator, she has translated Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill from Irish, Michele Ranchetti from Italian, and Ileana Melancioiu from Romanian. All these books are remarkable achievements that, in the words of Anne Fogarty, "are testament to an unremitting artistic energy and endeavour and above

all to a singular poetic voice endowed with an exacting integrity and unwavering independence of vision." (Fogarty viii).

Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry, as the critical reception points it, may be characterized by indirection and obliqueness, by an elusive or even unemotional style distinguished by the exploration of contrastive viewpoints and "complex indeterminacies". In the cover of Ní Chuilleanáin is *Selected Poems* (2008), Seamus Heaney Says: "There is something second sighted, as it were, about Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's work, by which I don't mean that she has any prophetic afflatus, more that her poems see things anew, in a rinsed and dreamstruck light. They are at once as plain as an anecdote told on the doorstep and as haunting as a soothsayer's greetings." Or, as O'Reilly (2009) states, Ní Chuilleanáin's poems

> [...] do not yield much to superficial scrutiny. There are no grand gestures indicative of anxious intellectual posturing, which is what makes them at once so enigmatic and refreshing. Indeed, it is difficult to discern a temperament behind them without careful probing. (30)
>
> [...] Among the most stimulating aspects of Ní Chuilleanáin's writing are its fierce interrogative intelligence and its concomitant lack of easy, predictable New Age bromides.(30)

Exploring universal concerns such as aging, identity, religion and death, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin enriches her production with a keen sense of history and the use of mythology and legend. Her intense poetry deeply absorbs the reader, pushing him into "the self-enclosed world of the poems". Peter Sirr affirms, it is "a poetry where isolated moments are held in the poet's ordering gaze, a poetry that depends on the relentless clarity and attentiveness of that gaze and the details it illuminates rather than on the central government of an overt poetic personality." (457).

From Ní Chuilleanáin's description of herself as a "Gaelic-speaking female papist whose direct and indirect ancestors, men and women, on both sides, were committed to detaching Ireland from the British Empire" (Ní Chuilleanáin 1995. 579), one may infer some of the most significant themes which naturally resonate in her writings: the interest in language and identity, Catholicism and religious concerns, familial and communal traditions, history and national pride. The analysis of Ní Chuillenáin's poetry will identify the above mentioned themes and the way they may – or may not – reflect aspects of contemporary Ireland.

### *History – Rereading the Past*

Well-read in history, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin values the connection between past and present drawing, in several of her poems, parallels between historical events and modern situations. The poet herself comments: "History has been particularly alive for me as for many Irish people. We are [...] told it is bad for us. But like others who share

my linguistic background, I am aware always of the presence of the past and the strangeness, the untypical edge on the way I read history. We read with anger, anger forced through the narrow passages created by minority languages and small audiences" (Ní Chuilleanáin 1995. 571). This quotation reveals that this bond to history is both a private interest of Ní Chuilleanáin and a strong characteristic to be associated with Irish people.[1] This double attachment comes to be an essential key in the understanding of how history appears in Ní Chuilleanáin's poems: as a thematic element of great strength, apt to suggest substantial revisions of contemporary political, religious and identitarian matters. As Consalvo poses: "For Ní Chuilleanáin, history is not only a journey into the past but also a key to the present: 'we are inclined to associate certain things with the past as something vanishing, where in fact, one is constantly made aware of the fact that the past does not go away, that it is walking around the place and causing trouble at every moment.'" (17) . In Ní Chuilleanáin's work past keeps surfacing and, through the guidance of history, can be called to confront the present; as Allen also affirms:

> To make a case for history in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry, a case must first be made for the contemporary. The collapsed distance between past and present is part of her writing's enduring difficulty. It is also a source of its power, the refusal to separate history from the now [...] is symbolic of a determination to rethread the past's strands [...] In this subtle choreography of past and present, Ní Chuilleanáin sidesteps the arrangement of memory into definite forms, or what we more typically think of as history, that harmony of discordant dates that allows for representable translation between the private and public spheres. As a Renaissance scholar, trained in the trade of manuscripts, alert to the errata of the changing text, Ní Chuilleanáin seems actually aware of the history's limits. (22)

In many poems written by Ní Chuilleanáin it is possible to identify a continuous interplay between past and present, as seen in the poem "The Real Thing" (2008); its first two stanzas introduce the setting of a convent in the present as contrasting to "miraculous" deeds set in the past:

> The Book of Exits, miraculously copied
> Here in this convent by an angel's hand,
> Stands open on a lectern, grooved
> Like the breasts of a martyred deacon.
>
> The bishop has ordered the windows bricked up on this side
> Facing the fields beyond the city.
> Lit by the glow from the cloister yard at noon
> On Palm Sunday, Sister Custos
> Exposes her major relic, the longest
> Known fragment of the Brazen Serpent. (68)

In an atmosphere of isolation and oppression, reinforced by the bishop who "ordered the windows bricked up", Sister Custos appears and exposes a precious relic, thus mediating the blurring boundaries between a buried past and the questionable present. The relics Sister Custos guards embody the historical and the physical as well; surrounded by icons of the past, as the shielder of them, Sister Custos becomes the symbolic element who merges remote and present times. Contrasting with the treasures of the past, she is the common or the "real" person placed in the present; with her pronounced simplicity**,** lack of pomp and singular and exemplary faith, the preserves history and religious dogmas:

> True stories wind and hang like this
> Shuddering loop wreathed on a lapis lazuli
> Frame. She says, this is the real thing.
> She veils it again and locks up.
> On the shelves behind her the treasures are lined.
> The Episcopal seal repeats every coil,
> Stamped on all closures of each reliquary
> Where the labels read: *Bones*
> Of Different Saints. Unknown.

Despite the fact that Sister Custos is a sort of victim of circumstances, who is but a silenced voice, her figure "emerges as one who is in a position of power to pass on the relics of history [...]. Even if her own history is unwritten, in the act of caring that she performs in the discharge of her duty, she serves as a liminal link with the past, since it is she who shows the relics and tells the tales." (Nordin 70). The final stanza deepens the focus on Sister Custos, and the poem ends with the suggestion that she is, in fact, "the real thing"; far from being just a static voice, Sister Custos is the one who generates that discomfort of the "free foot kicking", reminding us that she, through a life of dedication and faith, works as the true keeper of history:

> Her history is a blank sheet,
> Her vows a folded paper locked like a well.
> The torn end of the serpent
> Tilts the lace edge of the veil.
> The real thing, the one free foot kicking
> Under the white sheet of history.

Commenting on "The Real Thing" in an interview to Patricia B. Haberstroth, Ní Chuilleanáin explains that "[...] what is exciting is reality. Reality is the only thing that cheers us up." (Fogarty 46). Thus, the past, as revealed by history, is important, but the present time – what is real here and now – is more valuable insofar as it may come to represent an expurgated and positive review of the past.

Another remarkable poem to be analysed here is “Translation” (2008), read in 1993 at the reburial ceremony of the Magdalenes.[2] The Magdalean story was, as Fintan O’Toole states, “[...] a story of history literally disinterred. It was a haunting image of a history that remains largely unwritten, a history that in being disturbed still has the power to disturb”. (O’Toole 1994. 81). The poem “Translation” starts with the description of the place where the “sinned women” worked and proceeds to a moving account of their bodies in the present:

> The soil frayed and sifted evens the score –
> There are women here from every county,
> Just as there were in the laundry.
>
> [...]
> Assist them now, ridges under the veil, shifting,
> Searching for their parents, their names,
> The edges of words grinding against nature,

In the two final stanzas the silenced women recover their voices:

> [...]
> Until every pocket in her skull blared with the note –
> Allow us now to hear it, sharp as an infant’s cry
> While the grass takes root, while the steam rises:
>
> Washed clean of idiom . the baked crust
> Of words that made my temporary name.
> A parasite that grew in me . that spell
> Lifted . I lie in earth sifted to dust.
> Let the bunched keys I bore slacken and fall.
> I rise and forget . a cloud over my time. (102)

This last stanza, which is peculiarly enigmatic, poses metapoetical hints: the poem manages to translate silence into expression. The last line of “Translation”, “I rise and forget . a cloud over my time” plays with the dubiousness that rises from the possibility of reading “my time” as the remote time when the victims were alive, or the time of contemporary events, since same victims are now resurrected and speaking.

Discussing a shocking fact of a shameful past, “Translation” questions the rights and means the Catholic Church had to punish the natural sins.[3] In thematizing a historical fact, the poem, which exhumes he the past and re-buries these women, (in a true act of translation, as its title suggests), is somehow seeking justice for the women incarcerated in these institutions. As Ní Chuilleanáin (2001) stated:

> Women from orphanages, Magdalene homes, mother-and-baby homes – and their families – are insisting on the stories of these places – their loneliness, hardship, and not infrequent cruelty – being told. The Irish appetite for history, asserts itself again, demanding recognition for events which are supposed to be outside history. As so often in the past thirty or so years, it is clear that the politics of Catholic Ireland are centered on the personal, sexual, and familial and that the live issues of the day spring from the need to acknowledge the past. While nuns figure in the stories that are being told now, they are flanked by others, perhaps the real authority figures: priests, doctors, and policemen. In the background are the politicians and bureaucrats who decide how little would be paid, and when nothing would be paid, for the upkeep of the powerless. (29)

"Translation" dares to approach polemical issues, as religious dogma and morality prevailing over some basic human rights. It is worth to note that the conventional Irish Catholicism, with its traditional liturgical and devotional practices, radically contrasts with the norms of marketplace Celtic Tiger capitalism, seeming even incomprehensible. Thus, in this poem, a "national resurrection" is also at stake; because "Translation" calls our attention to the official and the unofficial histories, as well as to the need of reconciling the ignominious past with the present. In "Translation", the references to Irish social history are incisive and translate the sense that it would be beneficial to Irish society to remember and try to understand, under religious, sociological and even political terms, the history of all these women confined in these institutions that existed, in an ultimate analysis, to promote society's moral stability.

In the poems discussed above, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin exposes the darker side of some religious procedures in maintaining institutionalized oppression, questions the so called "official history", and leads the reader to a revision of it, aiming at illuminating the contemporary moment, hence preventing us from, for example, segregating today's outcasts. Reflecting on the importance of relics in contrast to real people's faith, or allowing buried creatures to recover their voices, Eiléan Ni Chuilleanáin aims at the rebuilding of history under different values and perspectives.

### *Language – Preserving Identity*

The scene of contemporary Ireland is marked by many changes that occurred in the nature of Irish society in the last decades, after the impact of industrialization and globalization, the spread of education, and the effects of mass media. They directly affected the notion of national identity; the concept of Irishness had to be reassessed to correspond to the frames and exigencies of the twenty-first century. In this new panorama, language and its connections to the identity of a nation also had to be naturally reconceptualised.

Since the Gaelic Revival and the Irish independence, the revival of the Irish language represented a significant cultural advance. But nowadays, a contemporary

problem in Ireland, which became a serious socio-political issue, is the decline in the number of Gaelic speakers[4]. It is of interest to investigate how Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin, a Gaelic speaker, approaches the question of language and of general communication in her poems.

The intense relationship she has to language comes out immediately from the reading of her biographical data: daughter of Cormac O'Chuilleanáin, a university professor of Irish, and of Eilís Dillon, a novelist who has published more than forty books; sister of the writer and translator Cormac Millar, and married to the poet Macdara Woods, Ní Chuillenáin teaches languages and literature and is a translator of many languages - all this information evinces that the poet has a profound attachment not only to literary circles, but also knows in depth language matters and their social implications. Quinn confirms:

> Language and translation is one of the most important themes of the poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. She knows Irish, Italian, French ad Latin; when asked to produce English versions from cribs of poems by a Romanian poet, instead she learned Romanian. Such a depth of courtesy and imaginative involvement is singular in Anglophone culture, where translations by monoglot poets are routinely tolerated. The gesture is also iconic for Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry, which listens hard at the silences of history and other people's lives. (172)

However, the way language helps to establish and preserve identitarian features, comes to be a very important question in contemporary Ireland, where one sees the struggle of people from various social segments to keep Gaelic alive. The mechanisms of language appear as a significant theme in several poems such as "Studying the Language" (2008), which reproduces the structure of the English sonnet with three quatrains and a couplet, and starts with a persona's description of a group of hermits:

> On Sundays I watch the hermits coming out of their holes
> Into the light. Their cliff is as full as a hive.
> They crowd together on warm shoulders of rock
> Where the sun has been shining, their joints crackle.
> They begin to talk after a while.
> I listen to their accents, they are not all
> From this island, not all old,
> Not even, I think, all masculine. (89)

Although the hermits (symbolically, very close to the nuns) live isolated in their holes, at the same time, in a wider perspective, they are all together, sharing a collective existence and acting conjointly. Batten affirms: "Indeed, perhaps the image of community that remains most compelling in Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry is that offered in 'Studying the Language' of the 'cliff... as full as a hive' of hermits [...]". (186) Language, as the

poem depicts it, is the strongest communal element in the integration of the hermits' society. In contrast, the persona, who observes the hermits trying to grasp a communicative system, is "the foreigner" who seeks to establish some proximity with the group to feel integrated. As the poem reads:

> They are so wise, they do not pretend to see me.
> They drink from the scattered pools of melted snow:
> I walk right by them and drink when they have done.
> I can see the marks of chains around their feet.
>
> I call this my work, these decades and stations –
> Because, without these, I would be a stranger here.

If in the beginning of "Studying the Language" the persona and the hermits do not communicate; this persona reaches an understanding of their existences through the careful observation of the hermits' acts. As the couplet poses it, they end up sharing some complicity. The hermits' existence is made familiar to the reader when their acts are compared to human acts; the words "decades and stations"[5] establish a connection to the human sphere, stabilizing and humanizing the whole experience.

Othervise withows language ("I call this my work") the persona would "be a stranger"; through language (or through literature, in a metapoetical reading) the persona manages to unveil and preserve the identity of the group. In the poem "the speaker refers to her observation of hermits coming out of their holes in the cliffs, but what initially looks like a naturalist's interest in animal life soon turns into an allegory of culture which inquires into the contradictory feelings of belonging and alienation." (Palacios 86). As a witness of a process of communication, the persona surpasses the condition of strangeness and displacement, and experiences a new feeling of being integrated to a society. Focusing on the realization of the limits of language, and reinforcing that language unites people, "Studying the Language" presents a very important perspective applicable to the problematic of language in today's Ireland.

### *Topographic and Domestic Spaces – Memory as Architecture*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin demonstrates a deep interest in architecture in general and, in a great number of her poems, images of houses and rooms, of façades, ruins, towers, churches, cloisters and convents are abundant.[6] It is also frequent to of find in her poems detailed depictions of natural sites, with their peculiar vegetation of mountains and rivers. The elaborated description of specific cities, with their streets, docks and outdoors spaces, are also usual, and this geography includes Irish scenes, mainly references to Dublin and Cork, as well as several references to places in France and in Italy. Ní Chuilleanáin's thematization of Irish topographic and domestic spaces contributes to the process of re-imagining Ireland, as Fintan O'Toole (1998) postulates:

> The geographical Ireland, the bounded island, is a place that can be read. It can be imagined, albeit problematically, as the result of a given past, as the present form of an innate and immemorial Irishness. The second, demographic Ireland is a nation that cannot be read but must be written. And because it must be written, it could be written otherwise. Existing, as it does, imaginatively, it is always open to the possibility of being re-imagined." (161).

The city of Cork, recurring in Ní Chuilleanain's consciousness as a "psychic architecture", gave the title to a collection of poems published in 1977 (illustrated by Brian Lawlor), which contains poems written about and inspired by the poet's birthplace. In this collection, Ní Chuilleanáin reads the history and culture of Cork through its architecture, its walls, streets, lanes, buildings and monuments, and sets Cork's contemporary economic condition in the context of the city's history; through these poems she urges the reader to observe the city in detail, in order to discover what is the "real" Cork.

The poem "Cork" (2008), the first of the collection, makes an evocation of a space that is gradually made concrete by a description which holds a strong visual appeal:

> The island, with its hooked
> Clamps of bridges holding it down,
> Its internal spirals
> Packed, is tight as a ship
> With a name in Greek or Russian on its tail:
>
> As the river, flat and luminous
> At its fullest, images the defences:
> Ribbed quays and stacked rooves
> Plain warehouse walls as high as churches
> Insolent flights of steps, (37)

These stanzas describe a very poetic place, (leading to some reminiscences of the poet's childhood), trying to capture parts of the city, considering that change will inevitably come after the processes of development. Social history is preserved in the following stanza, which brings an atmosphere of complacency or acceptance of the place where one lives:

> Encamped within, the hurried exiles
> Sheltering against the tide
> A life in waiting,
> Waking reach out for a door and find a banister,
> Reach for a light and find their hands in water,
> Their rooms all swamped by dreams.
> In their angles the weeds
> Flourish and fall in a week,

Their English falters and flies from them,
The floods invade them yearly.

In the sequence of poems which thematize Cork, Ní Chuilleanáin portrays the history of the city through its architectural configurations, stressing the devastating effects of growth and progress, likewise the effects of British rule; many poems also inform that Cork has suffered much over time and its buildings reflect the historical ravages of water and fire. The remnants of a city, of its historical and aesthetic past, are recovered through memory. Ní Chuilleanáin rebuilds and eternalizes the place to the readers through elaborated poetic descriptions.

In contrast to the space of the city the domestic space is examined in the poem "In Her Other House" (2008), which starts with the description of an idealized house in an atmosphere of perfection:

In my other house all the books are lined on shelves
And may be taken down in a curious mood.
The postman arrives with letters to all the family,
The table is spread and cleared by invisible hands.

It is the dead who serve us, and I see
My father's glass and the bottle of sour stout at hand
Guarding his place (so I know it cannot be real;
[...] (97)

Here, once more, as seen in "Cork", memory plays an important role in the reconstruction of the space, which is described in a cinematic way by the persona, whose portraiture of life in that house evokes spaces for the family secrets and stories. The function of memory is reinforced by the notion that "It is the dead who serve us", as if past served the present. Also noteworthy in the poem is the presence/absence of the father figure for, even if the father's place is well demarcated in the table, the observation in parenthesis reminds us that "it cannot be real". Considering that, as the poem's title reveals, the persona is a female character, the poem recreates the domestic atmosphere conveyed by the presence of women, and this presence/absence of the father may suggest that the male is not the center. It is, thus, a female space, where the missing male may indicate the contemporary strength of feminine presence or, even the new contemporary family in which the father lost part of his authority, if compared to past times. In this sense, the poem opens up, pointing out the contemporary roles of male and female in Irish society.

The last stanza reinforces a sense of independence, of the freedom acquired when one is not worried with the verdict of history any more:

[...]
On the shelf a letter for him flashes a wide bright stamp.

He mutters once more, *Here goes, in the name of God –*
Women's voice sound outside, he breathes deeply and quickly
And returns to talk to the fire, smiling and warming his hands –
In this house there is no need to wait for the verdict of history
And each page lies open to the version of every other.

Through the depiction of a city, which recovers a topographical space as seen in "Cork", or through the depiction of a domestic space as seen in "In Her Other House", Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin's treatment of space is often connected to memory. It is an important element in the rebuilding and, therefore, in the preservation of those spaces Moreover, the whole process of eternizing spaces is a solid and significant legacy to contemporary times.

## Politics – The Elusiveness of Words

Raised up in a Republican family, in which many members were deeply connected to the Irish War of Independence, Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin was instilled with a strong sense of national pride. But, in spite of all this political and nationalist background, it is not usual to find overt references to political facts in her poetry; this is why the poem "The Informant" (2008) calls our attention as an uncommon piece of political theme. Created as a response to the violence of an Irish paramilitary funeral, "The Informant" establishes a very subtle connection to political problems in Ireland. In the poem, an ordinary old woman is interrogated; in the first stanza, details of her private life are revealed:

Underneath the photograph
Of the old woman at her kitchen table
With a window beyond (fuchsias, a henhouse, the sea)
Are entered: her name and age, her late husband's
occupation
(A gauger), her birthplace, not here
But in another parish, near the main road.
She is sitting with tea at her elbow
And her own fairy-cakes, baked that morning
For the young man who listens now to the tape
Of her voice changing, telling the story,
And hears himself asking,
Did you ever see it yourself?
Once, I saw it. (62)

The process of communication between interrogator/interrogated suffers interferences and its fluidity is partially lost. Here the poem exposes the fragility of a discourse when it is disturbed by external elements. In the following stanza there is a

tension between words and silence; when the interrogator listens back to the tape with the recorded information, he notes that the inquisition is filled with gaps:

> *Can you describe it?* But the voice disappears
> In a rising roar like a jet engine,
> A tearing, a stitch of silence
> Something has been lost;
> The voice resumes
> Quietly now:
> 'The locks
> Forced upward, a shift of air
> Pulled over the head.
> [...]
>
> Then what happens?
> The person disappears.
> [...]
>
> You find this more strange than the yearly miracle
> Of the loaf turning into a child?
> Well, that's natural, she says,
> I often baked the bread for that myself.

The surprising twist in the last stanza, when the political content shifts into a testimonial of folk information, is very provocative and establishes a confrontation between a mythical reality, and the official report of facts. Ní Chuilleanáin's poem then shows the political as a secondary content, while what appears as the really important matter is the way information is conceived and transmitted. As Ní Chuilleanáin says in an interview:

> In "The Informant" I was actually writing about – which I've never done, and I don't usually identify with – a particular death in the north, the death of the soldiers who were dragged out of a car at a funeral and shot – [...] It seemed particularly awful. I don't want to put it, as many people say with what has happened in the north of Ireland, that one death was worse than another, but that one did seem particularly tragic. I was writing again about ways of speaking about these things." (Ray 64)

Here comes a substantial feature of the way the theme is approached in this poem: by the elusiveness of the last lines, brought by the interrogated woman's words, "The Informant" calls our attention to the elusiveness of the political discourse. In the poem, historicization fails; the inquisitor, who had the obligation to record words, misses important parts of the story ("something has been lost") and is fooled by the very notion the woman has about facts. One eventually notes that the title of this poem is dual – "the

informant" is both a reference to the victim who died, as to the lady who is forced to retell the story. Therefore, "The Informant" reminds us of the fallacy of official discourses, of the double intentions of speakers, and of the interference of a mythological otherworld (acknowledged in the comment "you find this more strange"). In an ultimate analysis, the poem brings as its central theme the questioning of agency and political authority: if politics is shaped according to the ways of speaking, who possesses the "true" notion of facts? No doubt this question finds an impacting resonance in the field of contemporary Irish politics.

## Religion – Faith and Nationalism

Religious questions connected to the universe of Roman Catholicism, are possibly the most recurring themes in Ní Chuilleanáin's work. It is worth mentioning that her first poetry collection *Acts and Monuments* (1972), ironically borrowed the name from John Foxe's sixteenth-century historiography of English Protestantism, also known as the *Book of Martyrs*. Another book, *The Magdalene Sermon* (1989), focuses is mainly on women's religious experiences, and this exploration into religion also appears in Ní Chuilleanáin's collection *The Brazen Serpent* (1995).

To discuss religion in Ireland has always been delicate and polemic due to the associations the topic holds with nationalism, politics and identity. In the contemporary scene, Irish Catholicism means both nationality and religion, and "has been a matter of public identity more than of private faith, and the struggle to disentangle the two is what defines the Irish Church now." (O'Toole 1994. 123). Ruth Fleishmann says:

> In countries where peoples of different tribal origins had been politically united under colonial rule, a common religion different from that of the colonizer could provide the essential unity of culture. In Ireland, where a leading section of the nationalist movement was of Ascendancy origin, the part religion could play in the nationalist ideology was limited. Catholicism nonetheless remained a powerful source of nationalism. It was the only area where colonialism had never prevailed and the first in which colonial laws had to be repealed. As the Irish language declined, Catholicism became the main distinctive feature of the Irish as a nation. (Welch 91)

From the reading of today's Irish newspapers, which often bring news on Church scandals, one knows that the Irish Catholic Church is now a troubled institution that suffers a severe loss of authority. Along with these specific problems which occur inside the Church, other impacting changes came up with the Celtic Tiger and Ireland's conversion to materialist modernity as, for instance, a burgeoning interest in the Celtic spirituality. All this new religious panorama has been observed by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, a poet concerned with the traditional conditions of religious belief and of sustainable

faith. Ní Chuilleanáin writes on faith in the middle of a crisis of bad faith that came forth from the collapse of the institutional power of Irish Catholicism since de 1980s, and which caused the disintegration of the traditional authority of the Irish Catholic Church.

The poem "St Margaret of Cortona" (Ní Chuilleanáin 2008. 72) illustrates the treatment Ní Chuilleanáin gives to some religious themes. The poem starts with a preacher who is embarrassed to pronounce the word which reveals that the saint was a prostitute:

> *She had become*, the preacher hollows his voice,
> A name not to be spoken, the answer
> To the witty man's loose riddle, what's she
> That's neither maiden, widow nor wife?
>
> A pause opens its jaws
> In the annual panegyric,
> The word *whore* prowling silent
> Up and down the long aisle.

These initial stanzas touch upon the traditional "virgin-or-whore patriarchal binary". Despite the rhetoric which typifies the masculine clerical version, the poem presents a prostitute who was converted and who has a solid understanding of herself and of her past life. The priest, embarrassed to admit his prejudice, exemplifies the usual "theological misogeny" of the clerical world. It follows the description of the saint, whose presence is still felt in an effective way:

> Under the flourishing canopy
> Where trios of angels mime the last trombone,
> Behind the silver commas of the shrine,
> In the mine of the altar her teeth listen and smile.
>
> She is still here, she refuses
> To be consumed. The weight of her bones
> Burns down through the mountain.
> Her death did not make her like this;

Saint Margaret of Cortona then appears as renegotiating the feminine "modes of agency":

> Her eyes were hollowed
> By the bloody scene: the wounds
> In the body of her child's father
> Tumbled in a ditch. The door was locked,
> The names flew and multiplied; she turned
> Her back but the names clustered and hung
> Out of her shoulderbones

Like children swinging from a father's arm,
Their tucked-up feet skimming over the ground.

The poem establishes an overt meta-textual link with Irish social history: the saint is the Patroness of the Lock Hospital, Townsend Street, Dublin (her relics are kept behind the altar of a Dublin church), and its content opposes the preestablished Victorian order that condemned prostitution. Religious tradition here suggests a communal awareness as a forum that connects faith, nationalism, aesthetics, identity and politics, to correspond to the main needs of contemporary Ireland.

## *Conclusion*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin has an extraordinary organic view of historical, socio-political, religious and identitarian facts connected to the past and the present of Ireland. Thematic elements are interrelated: the rereading of the past as corroborated by history; the discovery and preservation of identity as supported by language; the description of topographic and domestic spaces in a process that takes memory as an architecture; the elusiveness of words in political discourses; the complexities of faith and nationalism as held by religion – all these thematic elements are interrelated, in a ceaseless conversation claim an organic analysis.

Ní Chuilleanáin writes poems which expose a hidden Ireland, which was once suffocated and modeled by the official discourses and institutions of colonial rule. In doing so, she reveals ambiguities generated in the past and leads us to an understanding of conflicts that lie at the heart of Irish culture in the twenty-first century. Her treatment of fundamental and polemic issues that characterize contemporary Ireland presents new perspectives on worn-out themes. Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry is constantly inviting the reader to reflect upon the very character of institutions and discourses, to think beyond the inherited structures of thought that establish the boundaries of social contact – her poetry compels the reader to perform a revision of these structures in the contemporary Ireland, and subsequently in the contemporary world.

## Notes

1 *Cf.* O'Toole (1994. 80): "One of the strange things about Ireland's relationship to history is that everything seems to be connected. You flip over a story about a high-tech global economy and you find yourself in the nineteenth century. You scratch polished surfaces and they bleed."

2 In 1993, after an excavation of a Sister of Charity convent in Dublin, which had been sold to a developer, the remains of more than 150 women were found; later on, the bones of these women were cremated and buried in Glanesvin Cemetery. This episode called the attention of the world as it led to the existence of the Magdalene Laundries, institutions operated by the Roman Catholic Church where "fallen women" (prostitutes or unmarried mothers) were confined. Named after Saint Mary Magdalene (the patroness of penitent sinners), these prison-like laundries forced

women to work under slavery conditions. Around 30,000 women were admitted in these institutions, along a history of more than 150 years. In Ireland, the last Magdalene Laundry was closed only in 1996.

3 Another noteworthy poem which thematizes the Magdalens' story, showing the network behind the placidity of convents, is "The Architectural Metaphor" (2008).

4 Some reports point out that only 10% of the population in Ireland is fluent in Irish (between 10,000 to 20,000 speakers).

5 "Decade" is a reference to the decades of the rosary, term used in the Roman Catholic Church to describe a series of prayers, usually consisting of 15 decades of aves, each decade being preceded by a paternoster and followed by a Gloria Patri, one of the mysteries or events in the life of Christ or the Virgin Mary being recalled at each decade. The word "station" refers to the Stations of the Cross (Via Crucis).

6 These images often come with a technical vocabulary as, for example, in frequent listings of ecclesiastical architecture terms such as naves, apse, and chapel, among many others.

## Works Cited


Allen, N. "Each page lies open to the version of every other': History in the poetry of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin" in Fogarty, A. (ed.) Irish *University Review – A Journal of Irish Studies – Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin*. Dublin: Colourbooks, 2007. 22-35.

Batten, G. "Boland, McGukian, Ní Chuilleanáin and the body of the nation", *in* Campbell, M. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 169-188.

____. " 'The World Not Dead After All': Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Work of Revival", *in* Fogarty, A. (ed.) *Irish University Review – A Jounal f Irish Studies – Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin*. Dublin: Colourbooks, 2007. 1-21.

Consalvo, D. M., "An Interview with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin", *Irish Literary Supplement*, Spring, 1993. 15-17.

Fogarty, A. (ed.) *Irish University Review – A Journal f Irish Studies – Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin*, Dublin: Colourbooks, 2007.

Ní Chuilleanáin, E. *Selected Poems*. *Ireland*: The Gallery Press and Faber and Faber, 2008.

____. "Nuns: A subject for the women writer", in *My Self, My Muse*, edited by Patricia Boyle Haberstroth. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001. 20-29.

____. "Acts and monuments of an unelected nation: the Cailleach writes about the Renaissance". A special issue; *Contemporary Irish Poetry and Criticism, The Southern Review*, 1995. 570-580.

Nordin, I. G. *Reading Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, a Contemporary Irish Poet*, United Kingdom: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.

O'Reilly, C. "No word for hers" – The Literary Supplement – The Irish Times, 27 February, 2009. 30.

O'Toole, F. *Black hole, green card – The disappearance of Ireland*, Dublin: New Island Books: 1994.

____. *The Ex-Isle of Erin – Images of a Global Ireland*. Dublin: New Island Books, 1998.

Palacios, M. "The course of nature: an Ecofeminist Reading of Contemporary Irish and Galician Women Poets" in: Palacios, M. and Lojo, L. (eds.). *Writing Bonds – Irish and Galician Contemporary Women Poets*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009. 77-96.

Quinn, J. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry – 1800-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Ray, Kevin “Interview with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin” *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 31.1-2 (Spring-Summer 1996): 64.

Sirr, P. “How Things Begin to Happen: Notes on Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Medbh McGuckian,” in *Southern Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (Summer 1995). 450-67.

Welch, R. (ed.) *Irish Writers and Religion*. Great Britain:Colin Smythe, 1992.

# *Irish Neutrality: Louis MacNeice's Poetic Politics at the Outset of "The Emergency"*

Matthew Schultz

**Abstract:** *This article builds upon previous scholarship attuned to Ireland's complex position as a neutral state during the Second World War ("The Emergency"), and which points out Louis MacNeice's hostility towards the Irish government's official stance. It does so by looking at "The Closing Album" as a political lyric critiquing Irish neutrality's isolation0*
*ist and damaging effects and shows how the poem – in the act of critiquing neutrality – asserts the modern poet's position as an emotionally invested political spokesman. I argue that the nation's political goals were irreconcilable with postcolonial artistic aims: Irish writers were intent on constructing an image of Irishness that was not dictated by British coloring and was exportable through the medium of their art, while the government aimed at becoming a self-sufficient, sovereign nation. This split between politician and artist during The Emergency ushers in a modern Irish poetry that is at once political and aesthetic.*

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind [...]"

– John Donne, "Meditation XVII"

"Ireland affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality."

– Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland) 1937
Article 29.1

In 1893, W.B. Yeats published a lecture titled "Nationality and Literature." In it he highlighted the distinctions between "epic" and "lyric" cultures, suggesting that Ireland leaned towards the epic. David Dwan (2004) explains Ireland's position according to Yeats's distinctions, "Fundamentally at odds with its own epoch, modern Ireland stood poised to restore a classical integrity to experience, introducing a social, moral and aesthetic coherence that had been lost to modernity." (201) Essentially Yeats was objectifying Ireland as part of a larger epic culture that took shape from connections to

earlier Gaelic and Celtic traditions; whereas a lyric culture would be significantly more subjective, allowing for a politicized poet. Forty-six years later, in 1939, Louis MacNeice published "The Closing Album," which coincided with the year of Yeats's death, the inauguration of World War II, and Ireland's declaration of neutrality. At the time of publication, Ireland was still struggling to establish itself as a sovereign nation when revolutionary and statesman Eamonn de Valera's declaration of neutrality created a decisive break from Britain. 1939 marks a shift from epic to lyric in Irish culture and modern poetry. Yeats, until about 1914, saw Ireland as a nation of various peoples and scattered folklore which he, the heroic poet-genius, had gathered into an objective national identity. MacNeice and other poets of the 1930s, who became known as "The Tragic Generation," insisted that lyric and epic traditions coalesce in the modern poet: a common man who invoked personal emotion and intellectual awareness to aid society.

Although critics have previously explored Ireland's complex position as a neutral state during the Second World War, and pointed out MacNeice's hostility towards the Irish government's official stance, they have not yet looked at "The Closing Album" as a political lyric critiquing Irish neutrality's isolationist and damaging effects or shown how the poem, in the act of critiquing neutrality, asserts the modern poet's position as an emotionally invested political spokesman – thus realizing the role of the lyric poem in the heightened awareness of modern intellectual poetry. I argue that the nation's political goals were irreconcilable with postcolonial artistic aims: Irish writers were intent on constructing an image of Irishness that was not dictated by British coloring and was exportable through the medium of their art, while the government aimed at becoming a self-sufficient, sovereign nation. Finally, I argue that the split between politician and artist ushers in a modern Irish poetry that is at once political and aesthetic.

In 1946 Arthur Griffith argued in a public address recorded by *Irish Times* editor R.M. Smyllie, "The British had built a paper wall around Ireland; on the inside they painted what they wanted the Irish to know about the rest of the world, on the outside what they wanted the rest of the world to know about Ireland." (317)

At the outset of the Second World War, Eamon de Valera's foreign policy reinforced the paper wall when the state declared its official, neutral position. Ireland installed censorship laws that forbade any mention of the War in Irish news and masked any global implications of the war by calling it "The Emergency." Surely Ireland's recently won independence from the British Empire influenced the government to divorce its foreign policy from that of Britain to suggest independence and sovereignty, and as Patrick Keating (1984) points out, "A policy of neutrality embeds nationalism and self-determination, that is, the desire of the nation to assert its separate cultural identity, independent statehood, and sovereignty against a hostile international environment." (7) Problems arose when Ireland's position in this global conflict became a domestic conflict: a *tête á tête* between politicians and poets, each group focused on two different halves of the same precarious whole. De Valera's government (Fianna Fáil) was mainly interested in creating a sovereign nation that could sustain itself on domestic products thus ceasing to rely on

British imports, and "Irish politicians never lost sight of the vital importance of establishing sovereignty by maintaining neutrality." (Foster 560). If politicians were blinded to the bleak picture of Ireland's position in the post-war community, the mid-century Irish poets – commonly referred to as "the tragic generation" – clearly saw that domestic agricultural, economic, and political crises loomed. Patrick Kavanagh, a contemporary of MacNeice, who was "acutely conscious of the realities of Irish life, overwhelms the reader of [his] work with a sense of desolation of a rural existence in Ireland." (Brown 175).

Ireland's tenuous situation during the Second World War could be described in both geographic and cultural/political terms: as an island – disastrously close to the conflict (and the possibility of invasion), yet protected by its placement west of England – and as a postcolonial state. The government's constant fear was reappropriation into the United Kingdom. De Valera (1946) confirmed, "In a sense, the Government of a nation that proposes to be neutral in a war of this sort, has problems much more delicate and much more difficult of solution even than the problems that arise for a belligerent." (8). For de Valera, Irish neutrality was less an act of isolationism than an attempt to establish national sovereignty; as Elizabeth Bowen called it, "Éire's first *free* self-assertion" (italics original). (Lane and Clifford 12). But opposing such "free self-assertion" was article 29.1 of the Bunreacht na hÉireann (the majority of which was penned by de Valera himself), which argued that Ireland's foreign policy should be devoted to international peace, justice, and morality.

In " The Aesthetics of Irish Neutrality," Clair Wills (2004) points to why these ideas are opposed, noting that a declaration of neutrality explicitly rejects article 29.1. She writes, "One of the most striking aspects of ['The Emergency'], and the most damaging in the long run, was de Valera's refusal to acknowledge – publicly, at any rate – the moral dimensions of the war. He never appeared to see the war in broad terms of European morality but concentrated on Ireland's destiny within a domestic framework far removed from the struggle against Nazi Germany." (123). Willis also argues that de Valera's stance suggests that "Ireland should be neutral, but individuals don't need to be, as though public and private aspects of the self can be neatly disentangled." (124). De Valera most forcefully articulated this split on September 2, 1939 in an address to the Dail:

> We, like other peoples, have, as individuals, each one of us, our sympathies in struggles of a kind like the present. In fact, as war is a great human tragedy, as wars are initiated usually for no slight reason, there is generally some fundamental cause of sufficient magnitude to make nations resort to the arbitrament of force, and so it is only natural that, as human beings, we should judge the situation, each one of us, and, having formed a judgment, sympathise with one side or the other. I know that in this country there are sympathies, very strong sympathies, in regard to the present issues, but I do not think that anybody, no matter what his feelings might be, would suggest that the Government policy, the official policy of the State, should be other than what the Government suggests. (De Valera 9)

This declaration of neutrality, despite individual sympathies, was a product of what I will refer to as island syndrome: the island community perceives itself as impervious to outside observation. In his 1946 article "Unneutral Neutral Éire," R. M. Smyllie noted, "Éire was nonbelligerent – that is to say, she was not officially concerned in the war, although so many of her children served the Allied cause; but she was never neutral in the generally accepted sense of the term. Government and people alike realized from the start that the country's fate was linked up inextricably with that of Great Britain…." (324). Why then the show of neutrality?

Some have suggested that Ireland actually helped the Allied forces more as a neutral country than she could have as a belligerent. Ireland's neutrality took two forms: what Patrick Keating has called "disarmed neutrality" and what Karin Gilland has labeled "military neutrality." Neal Jesse (2006) explains, "Ireland's neutrality is peculiar in two aspects. First, Ireland has not in the past nor does it now employ a credible defense of its territory. Second, Ireland has not historically been impartial. During World War II…Ireland was clearly pro-western." (15). Ireland was in no position to declare allegiance to the Allies because it would have been more susceptible to German invasion. The picture on the inside of the wall was split between an inward-looking identity construction by the government and individuals trying their best to "see" what was going on beyond the Irish shores. On the outside of the wall, across the channel, and later across the Atlantic, friends of Ireland were becoming increasingly frustrated with Ireland's seeming lack of concern. Ireland's position in the post-war world was taken up by "the tragic generation" and the poet's role in modern politics became MacNeice's obsession.

His version of the modern poet with an emotional and intellectual agenda engaged with the political realities of the state. "Man is a political animal," he writes in "The Poet in England To-day: A Reassessment."[2] What MacNeice reassesses is his pre-war view (which appeared in his 1938 essay *Modern Poetry*) that "The writer / to-day should be not so much the mouthpiece of a / community (for then he will only tell it what it knows / already) as its conscience, its critical faculty, its / generous instinct."(*MP* iii). However, "recent events having suggested that there are too many slips between certain means and certain ends, the poet is tending to fall back on his *own* conscience" (emphasis added). (113).[3] MacNeice, by 1940, seemed to champion the aesthetic, emotional, socially detached "everydayness" of the lyric form over the practical, politically-minded principles of the epic. Not so, in fact, as Ben Howard (1991) offers, "Like any sensitive writer of the thirties, MacNeice felt the pressure to bring poetic imagination to bear upon social and political realities." (68). MacNeice amalgamates emotion and intellect by allowing the individual voice of the common man to penetrate political theory as is evident in poems like: "The Closing Album," "Neutrality," "Bottleneck," "Babel," "Autumn Journal," "Snow," and "Carrickfergus."

As an Northern Irish poet living abroad (mainly in London where he was hired by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1941 to produce radio programs supporting the Allied Forces in the war effort) he essentially occupies a liminal position as an Irishman beyond the pale of Irish neutrality. He writes in the final line of

"Snow"(1935), "there is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses," MacNeice occupied this space as a politically-minded lyric poet critiquing Ireland's use of neutrality to gain sovereignty. "The Closing Album" is an emotionally-charged criticism of de Valera's government that argues for Ireland's need to focus on its place in international politics. That poem is the maturation of his 1938 "Autumn Journal XXIII" which suggests MacNeice's opposition to the neutrality proposed by de Valera as early as 1927:[4] "Now I must make amends…/ I have thrown away the roots of will and conscience, / Now I must look for both…/ Soon or late the delights of self-pity must pall…/ When doing nothing we find we have gained nothing" (ll. 80-100). MacNeice employs the personal pronoun as a stepping stone to the more important first person plural, which suggests a move from the personal meditation of lyric to a collective emotional understanding of Ireland's situation. He asserts that yes, the Irish must look inward for a self-image, and that they should find a moral conscience concerned with international justice and global cooperation, who should – in effect – pull them off the fence of neutrality. "The Closing Album" is that very process. MacNeice divided "The Closing Album" into five sections: "Dublin," "Cushendun," "Sligo and Mayo," "Galway," and "V."

### ***Dublin***[5]

Like the autobiographical "Carrickfergus," (1936) a poem that calls attention to the speaker's sense of alienation, *Dublin* positions MacNeice as an outsider. He begins with a catalogue of Irish heroes, the bronze statues of whom bear testament to domestic heroes who agitated for Catholic emancipation and repeal of the union and set the domestic tone of the poem. Admiral, Lord Nelson watches Ireland assert her independence from atop his pillar in the middle of O'Connell Street:

> Grey brick upon brick,
> Declamatory bronze
> On somber pedestals –
> O'Connell, Grattan, Moore –
> And the brewery tugs and the swans
> On the balustraded stream
> And the bare bones of a fanlight
> Over a hungry door
> And the air soft on the cheek
> And porter running from the taps
> With a head of yellow cream
> And Nelson on his pillar
> Watching his world collapse. (13)

Here the Irish eye looks inward and uncovers MacNeice's bitter attitudes towards Irish politics. Whereas the first stanza presents the landscape of past heroes and domestic hardship, MacNeice quickly paints a different picture on Dublin's paper-walled boundary: "This was never my town, / I was not born nor bred / Nor schooled here and she will not / Have me alive or dead" (14-17). As the poem continues, Dublin is depicted as isolationist, segregated from the rest of rural Ireland as an uncaring urban space with its own history, its own problems:

> But yet she holds my mind
> With her seedy elegance,
> With her gentle veils of rain
> And all her ghosts that walk
> And all that hide behind
> Her Georgian façades –
> The catcalls and the pain,
> The glamour of her squalor,
> The bravado of her talk. (18-26)

Domestic heroes in the first stanza gives way to domestic defeat in the image of the once great Georgian mansions that have been transformed into glamorized façades that hide tenement housing. Dublin is the microcosm of Ireland – at once Irish and English, glamorous and steeped in squalor. It is a city of boundaries and domestic problems. But just as Dublin cannot forget its national connections, Ireland cannot forget her international responsibilities. In the following lines MacNeice reminds his readers of the nineteenth-century land acts, the War for Independence, and the Civil-War – the internal conflicts served to invoke terror. The image of war should persuade MacNeice's audience that they have a moral responsibility as a nation to help defend the rights of their European neighbors:

> …the mist on the Wicklow hills
> Is close, as close
> As the peasantry were to the landlord,
> As the Irish to the Anglo-Irish,
> As the killer is close one moment
> To the man he kills,
> Or as the moment itself
> Is close to the next moment. (31-38)

MacNeice has laid the foundation of his anxiety: the closeness of war. Unconvinced by the Irish nation's opinion that the war was not their affair, he has set out as a rhetorician pleading to the emotional and intelligent capacities of his contemporaries. He sets his stage – props as close "as one moment to the next" – to illustrate that Ireland is not as far removed from the war as it likes to consider itself, and "the poet is once again to make his

response as a whole," "reacting with both intelligence and emotion…to experiences." (*MP* 29-30).

> But O the days are soft,
> Soft enough to forget
> The lesson better learnt,
> The bullet on the wet
> Streets, the crooked deal,
> The steel behind the laugh,
> The Four Courts burnt. (45-51)

Again *Dublin* asks the reader to remember the internal conflicts of not so long ago when days were hard, when the conflict engulfed their own streets. Remember the Easter Rising, the War for Independence, the Civil-War; remember the ancient conquests of Dane and Saxon – now beware of the Germans who are poised on the doorstep.

The section ends, "O greyness run to flower, / Grey stone, grey water / And brick upon grey brick" (61-63). Greyness will run throughout the poem as a "neutral" leitmotif. It is neither white nor black (read Allied forces or Axis of power) – nor is it void of either, but rather an amalgamation; neutrality is a dangerous position because of this very fact. It occupies a state of betweenness that was detrimental to Ireland's foreign policy objectives in the immediate postwar era: "The ending of partition was clearly preeminent, closely followed by Ireland's need to restore favourable economic relations with the United Kingdom. The third objective was the restoration of friendly relations with the United States, and the fourth and final was membership of the United Nations." (Raymond 35) Had Ireland remained purely and completely neutral (a seemingly impossible task given their history, proximity, and moral investments) perhaps there would have been fewer fences to mend and initiation into the UN would have been a smoother process.[6] MacNeice's poem points to the damaging effects of neutrality, and subsequently asserts the new role of the modern poet "as informer, critic, and entertainer, who 'uses with precision, tools which lie ready to everyone's hand.' The new poet should be 'synoptic and elastic in his sympathies,' and he should cultivate social awareness, allowing himself to be 'penetrated by great events.'" (Howard 66).

## *Cushendun*

Issues of veiling and secrecy arise in the second section of "The Closing Album." MacNeice employs words that suggest opacity: "clouds," "night," "walled," "forgetfulness," "curtains," and "box," all of which go into the construction of a wall that blocks the outsider's gaze in and the insider's gaze out:

> Limestone and basalt and a whitewashed house
> With passages of great stone flags

And a walled garden with plums on the wall
And a bird piping in the night. (68-71)

This wall represents the neutrality wall built around Ireland during the second World War and suggests that de Valera – author of article 29.1 – forgot his devotion to international justice and morality as MacNeice reminds the reader in the closing stanzas of *Cushendun*:

Forgetfulness: brass lamps and copper jugs
And home-made bread and the smell of turf or flax
And the air a glove and the water lathering easy
And convolvulus in the hedge.

Only in the dark green room beside the fire
With the curtains drawn against the winds and waves
There is a little box with a well-bred voice:
What a place to talk of War. (72-79)

The walled garden and the secret room suggest an individualism and nationalism that is critiqued by the section's concluding line, "What a place to talk of War." As "The Closing Album" asserts, "a war of this sort" should not be locked behind shuttered windows in a "little box." Of the four geographical areas covered in "The Closing Album," Cushendun is the only location of Northern Ireland – an Allied force fighting under the British Flag. MacNeice is agitated that this beautiful, simple town must fear the blitz and invasion, but "dear, dirty, Dublin" exists in ignorant bliss.

During "The Emergency," the Irish Republic enforced censorship through the office of Mr. Frank Aiken, Minister for Coordination of Defensive Measures. Smyllie writes in 1946, "the lengths to which the Irish censorship went to maintain a completely colorless neutrality often made its activities ludicrous…Everybody agreed that some form of censorship was necessary in order to preserve neutrality and the security of the state; but nobody except Mr. Aiken and his staff ever expected that such depths of absurdity would be plumbed." (322-3). In fact, enlistment numbers, obituary notices, and the ethnicity of prominent leaders were withheld by the Irish press.[7]

*Cushendun* recalls the forgetfulness of *Dublin*, stanza IV of "The Closing Album." Instead of calling forth memories of deception and destruction, MacNeice summons the hearth: sights of copper and brass, the taste of home-made bread, the smell of turf or flax, and the sounds of the wind and of the waves. Serenity juxtaposed with violence predicts "the toppling hour." In *Dublin* war is remembered through statues and landmark battles; in *Cushendun* war is predicted to cover Ireland because the statues of *Dublin* have been forgotten, domestic politics have taken their place. *Sligo* and *Mayo* sees war's approach; *Galway* feels its physical presence, and the concluding Section "V" exposes neutrality's faults. Through each section MacNeice maintains the modern poet's position of "informer, critic, and entertainer."

### *Sligo and Mayo*

In his article, "Neutrality and Commitment," Richard Brown (2005) writes: "While MacNeice never abandoned the notion that (in the words of the much later *Autumn Sequel)* 'Everydayness is good,' the events of 1939 were a significant challenge to the assumption that it was the business of poets to dwell in the everyday. As 'The Coming of War' relates, MacNeice felt September 1939 as a shock to his complacency." (116). The first line of the *Sligo and Mayo* section repeats that "the country was soft" first proposed in *Dublin*, "But O the days are soft, / Soft enough to forget." What follows are five stanzas of an "everydayness" that is ultimately challenged by the imminent "coming of war" in the final stanza of the section. MacNeice presents a Sligo farm scene complete with "turkeys gobbling under sycamore trees," "little distant fields [ ] sprigged with haycocks," a "roadside cottage," "And pullets pecking the flies from around the eyes of heifers / Sitting in farmyard mud / Among hydrangeas and the falling ear-rings / Of fuchsias red as blood" (1-12). The blood-red flower falling around a complacent barnyard scene casually points toward the coming war; this indirect reference to war is replaced in the final stanza with direct implications of "disarmed neutrality:" "And when the night came down upon the bogland / With all-enveloping wings / The coal-black turfstacks rose against the darkness / Like the tombs of nameless kings" (100-3). MacNeice may be referencing Joyce's Mr. Deasy in *Ulysses* who specifies exactly what nameless kings will lie in those tombs: every Irishman, for "We are all Irish, all kings' sons." (Joyce 31). Night's darkness (the darkness of war) completely envelops the Irish landscape, it does not contain itself to the continent or England nor to Northern Ireland – neutrality, MacNeice suggests, will not protect the Republic; it will make graves for kings.

It may seem as though "The Closing Album" is the sort of pro-Ally propaganda that MacNeice produced for the BBC in the 1940s, however; his position concerning the role of the English poet in the Spanish civil War is analogous to his implicit argument here about the Irish poet's role in the Second World War, suggesting that the poem is less propaganda and more an examination of MacNeice's own moral self-conscience which is apparent in *Modern Poetry*:

> Art, though as much conditioned by material factors as anything else, is a manifestation of human freedom. The artist's freedom connotes honesty because a lie, however useful in politics, hampers artistic vision. Systematic propaganda is therefore foreign to the artist in so far as it involves the condoning of lies.
>
> Thus, in the Spanish Civil War some English poets were torn between writing good propaganda (dishonest poetry) and honest poetry (poor propaganda). I believe firmly that in Spain *the balance of right* was on the side of the government; propaganda, however, demands either angels or devils. This means that in the long run a poet must choose between being politically ineffectual and poetically false. For the younger English poets the choice has now been simplified. A poet

> adopts a political creed merely as a means to an end. Recent events having suggested that there are too many slips between certain means and certain ends, the poet is tending to fall back on his own conscience. (113)

For the modern Irish poet (as defined by MacNeice) interested in constructing an image of Irishness to use in repainting the paper walls erected by the British Empire, poetry has become less outright propaganda – or a falsification of image – and more scaffolding for identity construction. The modern poet seeks an understanding of his own ideals, which, in the case of MacNeice, align with article 29.1 of the Bunreacht na hÉireann. "The Closing Album" is the medium through which MacNeice's emotional and intellectual connections to Irish – and international – politics "inform, criticize, and entertain" the reader. Toward the end of *Modern Poetry* MacNeice reinforces the "everydayness" of the artist: "I would have a poet able-bodied, fond of talking, a reader of newspapers, capable of pity and laughter, informed in economics, appreciative of women, involved in personal relationships, actively interested in politics, susceptible to physical impressions." (*MP* 201). In other words, the poet is an active participant in humanity; he is not merely emotional or strictly intellectual. He is both; he is modern, because the society that the poet represents is both lyric and epic. The final two sections of "The Closing Album," *Galway* and *V*, will stress the interconnections between the lyric and the epic, the personal and the global.

## *Galway*

*Galway* presents an image of the Irish landscape, beautiful in its rural simplicity yet already ruined by conflict. The presence of the war is felt here among the Irish peasants, and it is here that the economic fallout between the Irish and Britain will affect the most lives. De Valera, in attempts to make the country self-sufficient, had dictated government funds so that a multitude of vocations were forced to be employed rather than focusing on Ireland's strengths – oats, barley, and grass for cattle and horse breeding.[8] Stephen Gwynn (1940) states:

> Mr. de Valera's gravest problem will be that of employment; he has dotted the country with little factories of various kinds, and most of these depend on imports for their raw materials. Will he continue to get these imports so the factories can carry on? That is his agonizing question. Widespread unemployment would mean not only great expense but discontent, and discontent spells danger. (312)

*Galway's* opening stanza points toward economic fallout with the UK and the US because of Ireland's neutral position in the war, "O the crossbones of Galway, / The hollow grey houses, / The rubbish and sewage, / The grass-grown pier, / And the dredger grumbling / All night in the harbour: / The war came down on us here" (104-110). Hollow houses and the rubbish and sewage suggest families and workers had to move on in order to find

employment. The pier is overgrown with grass because of disuse; there were no products to ship. MacNeice is sure to make it clear that Galway's problems are directly connected to the problems of war; it was not physical acts of war (blitz, invasion) that hollowed houses and closed factories, it was policy – a problem brought on by the Irish themselves.

The second stanza of *Galway*, seemingly before stanza one chronologically, shows the reader the quiet simplicity of postcolonial, pre-Emergency Ireland, "Salmon in the Corrib / Gently swaying / And the water combed out / Over the weir / And a hundred swans / Dreaming on the harbour: / The war came down on us here" (111-117). By moving backward though time from the "rubbish and sewage" of stanza one to the "hundred swans dreaming on the harbour" of stanza two, MacNeice stresses the implications of war: this is the fallout, now here is what was affected. The chronologic reversal creates a greater impact because the dark images of war's effects are already in the reader's mind as the second stanza unfolds: presenting "the crossbones of Galway" at the outset allows that image to permeate the entire section.

In "Louis MacNeice: Irony and Responsibility," Peter McDonald (2003) points to MacNeice's tendency to "undermin[e] the self to complicate and qualify the myth of 'Ireland.'" (127-8). McDonald's reading of MacNeice is in dialogue with Brown's assertion that, "[MacNeice] reacts against precisely the isolationist nationalism of later Yeats, who supported De Valera's policy of appeasement in the autumn of 1938". (122-3). I agree that MacNeice was ultimately interested in the image Ireland projects, but I do not think he undermines the self in order to react against Ireland's "isolationist nationalism." Just as stanza three of *Galway* warns that Ireland is *not* isolated, readers should recall Donne's "Meditation XVII," "No man is an island, entire of itself." Ireland will be affected by the war because the war is in England, indeed it is in Northern Ireland, and soon it will spread from county to county and house to house until the entire island is nothing but "rubbish and sewage:" MacNeice thus ends *Galway*, "The night was gay / With the moon's music / But Mars was angry / On the hills of Clare / And September dawned / Upon willows and ruins: / The war came down on us here" (118-124). MacNeice's warning against a political philosophy which argued that neutrality created imperviousness to outside observation (and ostensibly German penetration) leads into section *V*, which asks questions about the individual as *part of* humanity, the lyric as *part of* the epic.

## *V*

MacNeice's conclusion of "The Closing Album" – the untitled section V – consists of four stanzas, each posing a question. The questions serve to engage the reader, to lift her out of a neutral state as passive observer. The four stanzas of the final section align with the four previous sections of "The Closing Album," alluding to the inter-connections between individual and society, and between Ireland and international justice: no man, nation, or stanza is an island, entire in itself.

The first two questions ask why "everydayness' should continue:

> Why, now it has happened,
> Should the clock go on striking to the firedogs
> And why should the rooks be blown upon the evening
> Like burnt paper in a chimney?
>
> And why should the sea maintain its turbulence,
> Its elegance,
> And draw a film of muslin down the sand
> With each receding wave? (125-132)

*Dublin* and *Cushendun* juxtapose everyday softness with impending conflict, in both cases illuminating Ireland's closeness geographically, economically, and morally to the war. Here "everydayness" is juxtaposed with conflict ("now it has happened"). And these two questions stress the urgency and anxiety of the poem's speaker as the Ireland decided how to deal with a global war that has arrived, suggesting that everydayness had no place in such an "emergency."

The third stanza addresses the consequences of ignoring the conflict – (re)colonization:

> And why, now it has happened,
> Should the atlas still be full of the maps of countries
> We never shall see again? (133-135)

This question should remind the Irish of the social implications of colonialism. It suggests that Ireland's neutrality opens the island to invasion from either side: The British thought about invading to regain access to Irish ports, and the Germans were tempted to capture Ireland to use as a staging area for attacks on England. Either invasion could have resulted in recolonization under the British *or* German empire.

With the refrain of *Galway* still fresh in the reader's mind ("The war came down on us here."), the final stanza of "The Closing Album" asks:

> And why, now it has happened,
> And doom all night is lapping at the door,
> Should I remember that I ever met you –
> Once in another world? (136-139)

The most logical answer is that this is a global conflict that humanity itself has a stake in, there is no "other world." This final question changes the face of modern war, modern neutrality, and modern poetry. It blurs distinctions between poet and politician; it reveals

the individual in humanity, amalgamating the lyric with the epic; it stresses the role of all nations in global policy, land-locking all islands under the flag of humankind.

The questions that follow my study ask if Louis MacNeice's views on modern poetry and neutrality are still relevant today. Sean O'Faoláin, in an editorial piece from *The Bell* in 1945, remarked on Ireland's post-war relationships with Britain and the United States, "We emerge a little dulled, bewildered, deflated. There is a great leeway to make up, many lessons to be learned, problems to be solved which, in those six years of silence, we did not even allow ourselves to state." (288). But MacNeice did state the problem, and if the final question posed by "The Closing Album" did effectively blur the dichotomies of lyric and epic, individual and collective, artist and politician, then what is the contemporary product? Who is the contemporary producer? It seems that MacNeice's "common man" poet with the heroic quality of calling people to action with words alone is no longer a force in today's global society, but MacNeice has opened the door to the celebrity activist who uses the personal spotlight to illuminate global causes. He states that, "[The modern poet] is grinding an axe or showing off, telling tales about his enemies, flattering his friends. His object is not merely to record a fact but to record a fact *plus and therefore modified by* his own emotional reaction to it…." (*MP* 197). MacNeice goes on to explain that the "record of a fact" – and the emotional modification of the fact – are necessary components for the modern poet who takes for his subject the political situation of common men. He writes, "…the younger poets to-day are becoming more direct, focusing their aim on some ideal from the practical world which is also the ideal of many ordinary men." (*MP* 200). MacNeice's bitterness toward Irish neutrality in the Second World War critiques isolationism and promotes a worldwide community where the individual is responsible to the whole.

## Notes

1 Terence Brown summarizes the cultural/political divide in *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* in this manner: "The period 1939-1945, therefore, for most Irish men and women, was not experienced simply as a time when Ireland opted out of history but when her own history and the maintenance of her recently won independence were of primary concern. The cultural isolation of the preceding twenty years was perhaps deepened, but the healing effects on Civil War division in Irish society of a genuine external threat might be set against that in any overall evaluation. For many, the years of the war were simply a continuation of prewar experience, in economically straitened circumstances, with the language, national sovereignty, religion, and protection of Irish distinctiveness as the dominant topics of intellectual and cultural concern in a society still moulded by its essential conservatism, with talk, drink, sport, and other local activities absorbing energies spared from the rigours of daily life" (168).

2 *New Republic* 102: 13 (25 March 1940), 412-13; subtitle added from the holograph manuscript (Humanities Research Center Library, University of Texas, Austin).

3 This and subsequent references to MacNeice poems are taken from Louis MacNeice, *Collected Poems 1925-1948* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 113.

4 "In the first debate on foreign policy after Fianna Fail's entry to the Dáil in autumn 1927, De Valera strongly criticized the Cosgrave government's equivocal position on neutrality. But however

much De Valera believed in neutrality, he was equally determined that Ireland should never be used as a base from which any foreign power could attack the United Kingdom. Thus, as early as 1927, he had established the two principles upon which his wartime policy was to be based" (Raymond, 32).

5 Hereafter, italicized *Dublin, Cushendun, Sligo, Mayo,* and *Galway* will refer to the sections of "The Closing Album," not the actual cities/counties.

6 See the Ronan Fanning article, "The Evolution of Irish Foreign Policy," in *Irish Foreign Policy*: "Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of another newly independent Dominion, asked the Indian parliament: 'what does independence consist of? It consists fundamentally and basically of foreign relations. That is the test of independence.' World War II was the moment when Ireland, like so many other states, had to sit that test, for only then did the British perceive the exercise of Irish independence as a potential threat to their own national interest" (315).

7 See Eunan O'Halpin's article, "Irish neutrality in the Second World War," in *European Neutrals and Non-belligerents During the Second World War*: "Ireland's adherence to neutrality in September 1939 was domestically highly popular. No significant political figure in any party argued against it, and even de Valera's bitterest enemies saw neutrality both as the litmus test of sovereignty and as the only way of avoiding a civil war. Once the war began, public debate on neutrality and on the course of military affairs abroad was almost completely stifled by the imposition of a remarkably inelastic and thorough press censorship, far stricter than that applied in other neutral states, which made it difficult to publish even the most anodyne remarks in support of one set of belligerents or the other or to question the moral or pragmatic basis of neutrality, which was also used to suppress discussion of domestic economic problems on the grounds that to air such matters would be to imperil national morale, and which even made it impossible for sports reporters to describe the weather conditions at the events they were covering" (290).

8 See Gerard Keown's article, "Creating an Irish Foreign Policy in the 1920s," in *Irish Foreign Policy*: "Ireland's insistence on status was not a narrow nationalist preoccupation, however; practical benefits of an economic, political and security nature flowed from the assertion of full sovereignty. For example, the power to conclude separate commercial treaties and appoint trade and diplomatic representatives abroad was seen as being central to the development of a more balanced economy. Government departments did not believe that British embassies would adequately promote the country's economic interests abroad" (28).

## Works Cited


Brown, Richard Danson. "Neutrality and Commitment: MacNeice, Yeats, Ireland and the Second World War." *Journal of Modern Literature*. Spring 2005.

Brown, Terrence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. 175.

Dwan, David. "That Ancient Sect: Yeats, Hegel, and the Possibility of Epic in Ireland." *Irish Studies Review*. 12.2 (2004).

De Valera, Eamon. *Ireland's Stand: Being a Selection of the Speeches of Eamon De Valera During the War (1939-1945)*. Second Edition. Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, LTD., 1946.

Foster, R.F. *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*. London: Penguin, 1988.

Gwynn, Stephen. "Ireland and the War." *Foreign Affairs*. January 1940.

Howard, Ben. "In the Shadow of the Gasworks: Louis MacNeice and the Critical Office." *Sewanee Review*. Winter 1991.

Jesse, Neal G. "Choosing to Go It Alone: Irish Neutrality in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective." *International Political Science Review*. 27.1 (2006).

Joyce, James. *Ulysses.* New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Keating, Patrick. *A Singular Stance: Irish Neutrality in the 1980s.* Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1984.

Lane, Jack and Clifford, Brendan (eds.). *Elizabeth Bowen: "Notes on Eire," Espionage* Reports to Winston Churchill, 1940-1942: With a Review of Irish Neutrality in World *War II*. Co. Cork: Aubane historical Society, 1999.

MacNeice, Louis. *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938.

____. *Collected Poems 1925-1948.* London: Faber and Faber, 1949.

McDonald, Peter. "Louis MacNeice: Irony and Responsibility." *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Raymond, Raymond James. "Irish Neutrality: Ideology or Pragmatism?" *International Affairs.* Winter 1983-84.

R.M. Smyllie, "Unneutral Neutral Eire." *Foreign Affairs*. 24.2 (1946).

Sean O'Faoláin, "The Price of Peace," *Bell*, vol. X, no. 4. July 1945.

Wills, Clair. "The Aesthetics of Irish Neutrality During the Second World War." *Boundary*. Spring, 2004.

# The Irish in South America

# *Unframing the Black Diaries of Roger Casement*

Angus Mitchell

> "Of course there are lots of people in the world who will defend anything that exists merely because it exists, and they are so mentally constructed that they cannot imagine another state of things."
>
> *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (176)

**Abstract:** For a century now, the disputed frontier region of the upper Amazon – bordering Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Bolivia – has been the subject for one of the most persistent controversies in Irish history. In 1910 and 1911 the British Consul, Roger Casement (1864-1916) undertook two separate voyages up the Amazon to investigate crimes against humanity: the decimation of people and environment resulting from the extractive rubber industry. These investigations ultimately helped the South American rubber boom go bust and persuaded international investors to switch interests to the new Anglo-Dutch rubber plantation economy of Southeast Asia. But since Casement's execution in 1916 for his part in the Easter rising, a bitter controversy has raged over his reputation and the authenticity of the so-called Black Diaries. Three of these contested records configure with his Amazon voyages and are sources for analysing an important socio-economic tipping point in Latin American history. In 1997 & 2003 I edited two volumes of documents relevant to his Amazon investigations which formed part of an on-going methodological inquiry enabling a new and alternative textual reading of the Black Diaries and the re-evaluation of Casement as a critical voice in Irish and World history.[1] The publication of these edited volumes reawakened a long-standing argument suggesting that the diaries are forgeries. In 2008 a comprehensive new biography was published on Roger Casement, which went to some length to discredit my nascent argument. This article is the first part of my response to the biographer, Séamas Ó Síocháin's *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary*.

This subtitle of Ó Síocháin's biographical reconstruction of Roger Casement's life – "Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary" – is a descriptive triptych few figures in history

might claim, but it accurately captures his epic trajectory. In 1884 and still a teenager, Casement left a world of relative security in Liverpool to take part in the European annexation of sub-Saharan Africa. He quickly ascended through the ranks of the colonial hierarchy, impressed his seniors, and travelled widely through unmapped areas of the African interior. In 1892 he took on the first of a series of appointments with the British Foreign Office and ended twenty years of service in Africa with his damning report exposing the barbarities of the administrative system imposed by King Leopold II in the Congo Free State. After a brief retirement from the Foreign Office in 1905, Casement was appointed to a series of consular positions in Brazil and in 1909 was selected to be Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro. The following year he made a journey into the Upper Amazon to investigate reports which had reached London of crimes against humanity committed by the British-backed Peruvian Amazon Company in the Putumayo river valley. Building on his reputation as a fearless interrogator of injustice, this inquiry propelled Casement to the heart of imperial affairs and landed him a knighthood in 1911. Yet, despite his imperial credentials, Casement had for many years been subverting his official position and discreetly encouraging and funding nationalist causes in Ireland. Two years later he resigned from the Foreign Office and threw himself openly and wholeheartedly into the political maelstrom of Irish independence. He was instrumental in the founding of the Irish Volunteers (later renamed the IRA) and organised and partly financed the running of guns into Ireland, a week before the declaration of the First World War. In 1915, his efforts in Germany to recruit an Irish Brigade from among captured Irish POWs were largely unsuccessful and he returned to Ireland on the eve of the Easter rising on board a German submarine. Shortly after landing, he was captured and spirited off to London to be interrogated by the intelligence services and imprisoned in the Tower of London. After a show trial at the Royal Courts of Justice he was found guilty of treason, but efforts to force the government to reprieve the sentence were undermined by the rumours of the discovery of “a diary”, which sensationally revealed Casement’s double-life as a sexual deviant. Rumours were quickly spread with the aid of a tightly controlled press and Casement was hanged.

This biography is the latest in a long line of historical reconstructions into a man now considered to be the most complex Irish rebel ever to stand up to the British Empire. But what is the continuing fascination for Roger Casement? In an age where tabloid history prevails and scholarship happens in the often inaccessible, academic sanctuaries of seminar rooms, international conferences and peer reviewed journals, Casement straddles all sorts of contradictory positions. He belongs to no single historical domain but manages to both bridge and divide the centre and the periphery, the popular and the academic, the British and the Irish, and the colonial and the postcolonial. His life has just the right concoction of rebellion, betrayal, intrigue, conspiracy and sex to make it appealing to many different constituencies for a spectrum of different reasons.

In the last decade many antagonists have joined the Casement debate and there has been an extensive production of some very sound and commendable scholarship

which sits starkly beside some wildly confused and second-rate work masquerading as erudition. Ó Síocháin's contribution belongs to the first category. He has put in the hours, patiently working his way through large sections of Casement's widespread and scattered archive, and has brought useful new material to light. This hugely informative biography, supplemented by extensive bibliographical references, is a resource of great value which will sit alongside other weighty biographies intermittently published over the last century.

However, to capture Casement's world in a single volume is a hard task. His conflicting networks of supporters, the different colonial and national contexts in which he operated and the battle he fought against secret diplomacy makes his meaning and personality fragmentary, obscure and elusive. On reaching the end of this biography, as Casement's body hangs on the scaffold in Pentonville prison, some readers may be forgiven for feeling that here is a life that defies straightforward reconstruction. There are too many embodied conflicts and contradictions, too much vested interest in the interpretation of his life while too many significant dimensions of it remain obscure. His life cuts against the grain of established narratives and his end, as described by this work, is humiliating for everyone: for the British, for the Irish and for Casement and his supporters. When Eamonn de Valera commented cryptically in the 1930s that "a further period of time must elapse before the full extent of Casement's sacrifice can be understood", was he referring to this tangled web of hostile vested interests undermining his hero's reputation?[2] The steady stream of work – memoirs, diaries and biographies – which have helped keep him in the public imagination is evidence of his intricate entanglement and what Lucy McDiarmid has called his over-remembered state.

Ó Síocháin constructs the narrative of his life by transcribing plenty of long quotations which help elucidate a few key themes: his emerging identity as an Irish separatist extending from his concerns about the destructive capacity of empires and his identification with those dispossessed by modernity. He contributes towards a wider understanding of Casement in both sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil confirming Casement's place within the genealogy of anticolonial activism and postcolonial thought. Casement's efforts to defend the rights and lifeways of indigenous people places him alongside the protestations of Bartolomé de las Casas, while aspects of his critique of colonialism foreshadows the later analyses of Franz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi. Furthermore, Ó Síocháin's knowledge of the Irish language helps us navigate this understudied and neglected aspect, which Casement supported so passionately.

But in the final chapter – describing his capture, trial and execution, when so many strands of his life converge and the implications of his earlier action is transformed by his treason – the interpretation follows a well-worn path of earlier psychological biographies, and makes a confused association between disloyalty, insanity and sexual difference. Ó Síocháin accepts without question the official line circulated by the authorities at the time, and repeated ever since, that Casement lost his mind. As a consequence of his disloyalty, and his commitment to Irish independence, his character

fragmented and disintegrated. His actions were not the logical steps of a man who believed the First World War was an illegal crime against humanity, but of someone who had gone insane. When press rumours began to circulate in the days immediately after his trial claiming that diaries had been found which revealed Casement as "addicted to sodomitical practices" few people in Britain were surprised. A man capable of treason was capable of anything. The efforts to save him from the noose were quickly confused. The clusters of supporters, who rallied from different areas of Ireland, Britain and the rest of the world to try and persuade the government to spare him, fell away. Casement was railroaded to the gallows, but in death proved just as subversive as he had proved in life.

In the forty years following his trial the very existence of the Black Diaries was denied by the British Home Office. When they were partially revealed in 1959, the diary entries were shown to coincide with the moments when his actions were most accountable to the Foreign Office and when he made his most heroic investigations of the colonial encounter and the atrocities extending from the violence underpinning colonial rule. The earliest diary of consequence deals with his journey up the Congo in 1903 and the three other diaries cover the days and months of his two voyages up the Amazon in 1910 and 1911. As sources, the documents belong less in the snarled demesne of Irish history but more appropriately in the emerging arena of postcolonial studies and the history of the global South. In terms of their meaning in Irish history they have been loosened from their historical moorings and are merely of interest for their symbolic requirements in obscuring the intellectual move towards rebellion and helping isolate a traitor who has always been awkwardly included in the narrative of the time. However, more recently, Casement's internationalism has started to be revisited by non-Irish historians and his works in Africa and South America have been reconsidered. Adam Hochschild's bestselling book *King Leopold's Ghost* (2006) partly retrieved Casement's importance as a pioneer of human rights. Other works were published in Argentina, Colombia and Brazil which acknowledge Casement's significance.[3] But confusion continues to reign over the value, meaning and legitimacy of the Black Diaries.

Since the existence of these diaries was first rumoured, various claims have been made about their authenticity and the forgery debate has endured for over ninety years. In the appendix to the volume, Ó Síocháin goes to some length to refute those who still argue the case for forgery. Much of this is taken up with a specific attack on my argument, which has been published regularly over the last sixteen years in edited editions, journal articles and journalism. My curiosity in Casement was awakened during a period of residence in Brazil in the 1990s when, like many others, I grew concerned with the fate of the Amazon rainforest. Various histories and novels about the Amazon make reference to Casement's investigation of the Putumayo atrocities. As I delved deeper into the vast and dislocated archive of material detailing this outrage, it became clear that there had been a tremendous level of cover up and deliberate forgetting of the tropical apocalypse caused by the few decades when rubber was extracted violently

from the tropical regions bordering the Atlantic. The Black Diaries, which cover the first two years of Casement's investigation and his two principal voyages up the Amazon, present an obviously distorted account and my own approach was largely concerned with retrieving not merely the investigation but a methodology that could enable a more informed reading of the Black Diaries. Unfortunately, my alternative reading of the diaries caused indignation and a defensive response rather than curiosity, transparency and a desire to enlighten public debate.

Over the last decade, as debate over the diaries has raged, Ó Síocháin (1998) has preferred to stay out of the diaries controversy. His only refutation of my argument was made in an Irish language publication. In 2004, partly in response to my own archival work, he co-edited a volume containing the uncensored version of Casement's 1904 report exposing King Leopold II's regime in the Congo Free State alongside the Black Diary for 1903. The introduction gave a good overview of Casement's consular work in Africa, but he ignored deeper questions about the internal and external dynamics of the documents. In the appendix to his biography, however, he expands on earlier arguments and takes a more deliberate and antagonistic line to the present revival of the argument for forgery.

What this biography reveals is the analytical tradition and methodologies, borrowed and refined since 1916, determining authenticity. Ó Síocháin accepts uncritically the arguments defending authenticity which emerged from 1956, following the publication of the first biography of the post-war period by the *Daily Express* journalist Rene MacColl. These arguments were subsequently elaborated and endorsed by Casement's later biographers: the newspaperman-spook Peter Singleton-Gates, the television personality Brian Inglis, the literary historian B.L. Reid, the school master Roger Sawyer, and the activist for Gay Unionism Jeffrey Dudgeon. Those arguments, however, were not rooted in any recognisable methodology for determining the legitimacy of suspect documents but belong to the embedded propaganda war fought between British intelligence and Irish republicans over Casement and his meaning. While Ó Síocháin's biography adds significantly to the overall knowledge about Casement and does much to draw together the traces of his life and his scattered archive, it does little to alter his traditional interpretation. The overarching argument is co-dependent on existing viewpoints and contains various ideological biases and unexamined assumptions inherited from earlier approaches. His interpretation also ignores the political aftermath of Casement's life and the continuing history wars surrounding his reputation.

There was a dilemma facing the authorities in 1916, which helps explain both the riddle guarding Casement's secret and the presence of the Black Diaries. In delivering a verdict of guilty and pronouncing a sentence of death, the judicial process played directly into Casement's hands and enabled the traitor to achieve the martyrdom he so fervently desired. It was therefore necessary to seek another means of punishing the felon: a punishment which vitiated the possibility of martyrdom. The overarching thesis presented in the introduction to *The Amazon Journal* argued that, beyond their immediate

use fostering a whispering campaign, the Black Diaries had taken control of Casement's historical reputation and had successfully airbrushed him from the historical accounts where his name should be remembered. The evidence for this is apparent from his marginalisation and silencing in the writing of the history of both colonial Africa and the Amazon and in the scripting of Ireland's own revolutionary history.

## The Black Diaries Described

Ó Síocháin opens his defence of the Black Diaries by briefly describing the physical nature of the documents and making some reference to their provenance and to my public disagreement with Roger Sawyer (1997), which inaugurated the latest phase of the controversy. He recognises that the survival of two diaries for 1910, with parallel entries for the same days, is the principal point of difference in the dispute. Comparison of these documents is where the crux of the disagreement lies. Here the most important textual interrogation can be made about the internal dynamics of the documents and the essential questions asked. What is the textual relationship between these two documents? Which came first: the longer version or the shorter one? Did Casement keep two diaries and, if so, what were his possible and probable motives?

In 1997 I took issue with the fact that the three biographers who had the greatest influence in accepting and endorsing the authenticity of the Black Diaries and privileging them as the principal source in the narrative of his life had selectively suppressed *The Amazon Journal*. Instead they had legitimated the sexualised narrative without any recognisable explanation for the silencing of this source. Brian Inglis (1973) failed to mention the manuscript in his biography.[4] B.L. Reid (1976) included a few short quotations but cited an incorrect archival reference number.[5] Roger Sawyer (1984) also chose to overlook both the manuscript and typescript versions in his bibliography which was otherwise quite comprehensive with regard to Casement's South American archive.[6] More recently, Jeffrey Dudgeon (2002) ignores the version in pursuit of his high-camp re-writing of Ulster's most notorious sexual anti-hero. Ó Síocháin, by contrast, refers to *The Amazon Journal* at length, but he fails to engage in any meaningful intertextual analysis. While acknowledging the importance of the journal, he is oblivious to how its presence destabilizes the argument concerning the authenticity of the Black Diaries. His own position remains firmly rooted in various discredited and obsolete lines of reasoning established by earlier biographers, upon whose shoulders he stands.

The document variously termed the "Amazon Journal" or "Putumayo Journal" or "White Diary" has a well documented provenance. It was used at the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry in 1913, when two copies were typed up for circulation.[7] Later on, it was referred to by W.J. Maloney in his study on *The Forged Casement Diaries* and quoted by de Valera in his Casement oration at Murlough Bay in the Glens of Antrim in 1953.[8] Biographers were clearly aware of the document, but in pursuit of their sexualised and psychological narrative they suppressed it, because its presence

provokes awkward questions about the parallel Black Diary and enables some very detailed intertextual analysis to be undertaken. Comparative and forensic analysis between the two texts exposes the processes of suppression and revelation, distortion and exaggeration at play. It is misleading to suggest, as Roger Sawyer does, that the Black Diary entries for 1910 are the "unedited" source for the writing of the longer entries. There is no evidence whatsoever for supporting this supposition. His defence of the Black Diary as the master-narrative is itself indefensible:

> Their value here lies in the fact that they are first impressions, gathered whilst investigations are actually going on, and are wholly unedited. The White Diary is almost as good value as far as historians are concerned; they just have to remember that their author is slightly modifying his impressions and experiences for the benefit of future readers.[9]

My disagreement with Roger Sawyer extended from my deepening concerns with his misreading of the textual contradictions. To believe in the veracity of both versions is to believe in a man with a completely paradoxical character. The author of *The Amazon Journal* is someone who clearly empathises with the Indians and is eager to alleviate their suffering resulting from the slavery, brutalisation and violation imposed by the rubber system. The narrator in the parallel diary, in contrast, is deeply exploitative and fixated with the native body for his own sexual gratification. Ultimately, these two figures are irreconcilable and while there is temporal and spatial configuration (but not exactitude) between the parallel texts, there is a spectrum of difference and dissimilarity which should make us cautious, if not suspicious. Quite simply, it is impossible to believe in both versions detailing the same days.

Ó Síocháin freely admits that the Black Diaries are stylistically and aesthetically unlike anything else written by Casement. They are written in "jerky sentences" which carefully encode information in an obscure and often confused manner. If Casement did keep them then he interpolated them for himself adding information in order to improve their accuracy as historical documents and encode important official material into the narratives. Most people who try and read them find them unreadable and dull. As Oswell Blakeston commented in 1960, "the recent publication of his secret diaries has at last revealed the man as the worst of sinners, a bore."(148) Ó Síocháin tries to rescue Casement from the sin of being a bore by claiming "whether genuine or forged, they follow the life of a British consul through the course of the three relevant years, incorporating a lot of detail on aspects of Casement's Congo and Putumayo investigations." (479).

But this approach glosses the deeper implications of his investigations and normalises the violence underpinning the texts in a very misleading way. The Black Diaries configure with 1903, 1910 and 1911: the very years when Casement undertook his most dangerous voyages into the interiors of central Africa and the upper Amazon to

investigate atrocities. Far from incorporating a lot of detail, as Ó Síocháin suggests, the Black Diaries do the exact opposite, they reduce the complexity of his investigations to a monotonous level, discreetly filter the trauma and undermine the moral high-ground he needed to occupy in order to give both impact and authority to his published reports. The man who emerges from the Black Diaries is neither "imperialist, rebel or revolutionary" but rather "sex tourist", a man without either moral compass or ethical conscience for his actions. He is a man completely at odds with the Casement described and remembered by those who knew him until his treason was identified. If the Black Diaries configured with the more mundane years of Casement's consular years, when he was performing his consular duties in Santos or Belém, then their plausibility would increase. However, the fact that they deliberately configure with the pivotal months of his official career may strike Ó Síocháin as "strange" but he makes no effort to explain what he finds "strange".

On the surface, there is nothing really to arouse the suspicion that the diaries are forged, which is surely the hallmark of a good forgery. It is only when they are placed in different contexts, when they are scrutinised beneath their surface, when their silences are interrogated, and the politics of their representation questioned, does their architecture and form start to disintegrate and their coherence fall apart. More than a century on from his investigations, it is possible to deconstruct how the diaries have been adopted as instruments of archival control of Casement's meaning and memory and have helped the narrative process of western historiography forget the crimes against humanity which he investigated and described, and which validated his transformation from imperialist to revolutionary.

In a world, where the certainties of history and claims to objectivity are challenged and where authentic pasts are contingent, the idea of value free history is untenable. The Irish novelist, Colm Tóibín's observation of how we all bring our own baggage to the Casement controversy and how Casement himself used his own Irish alterity to investigate the colonial system is a valuable observation, but one which needs to be considered in terms of the readings and mis-readings of the Black Diaries.[10] The analysis of Casement is now more than merely the story of an extraordinary life lived at the height of the British Empire, and at a crucial moment in Irish self-determination. In the wake of the postmodern turn it may now be deconstructed and re-remembered as a fascinating insight into the politics of historical knowledge, the authority of the archive and the instability of text.

## History of the Controversy:

While Roger Casement's place in the histories of the British Empire, Ireland, sub-Saharan Africa and the Amazon is incontrovertible, it is the controversy relating to the Black Diaries which has provoked the most sustained inquiry and interest in his life and meaning.[11] What this controversy reveals is not merely the complexity of the man but the frictions and troubles resulting from his inclusion within different national narratives. His executed cadaver became a *tabula rasa* upon which all sorts of different

political and cultural agendas were written and re-written: Irish republicanism and nationalism, gay and human rights, Catholicism, international socialism, anarchism, fascism and anti-fascism and, most notably, sexuality, have all inscribed their political and cultural significances onto Casement's body. The history of the controversy serves as a distinctive insight into the dynamics of power and how both the British and Irish states have used different strategies to control meaning and prevent ownership. If Casement is the most reconstructed figure in modern Irish history, it is through a process of deconstruction, which examines the politics of truth and knowledge and the changing value of the Black Diaries, where his meanings start to destabilise and unravel, and the disfiguring influence of propaganda becomes apparent.

In terms of shaping and controlling his meaning, the most critical missing dimension has been the role of British intelligence in the long saga. Ó Síocháin's biography is the first study to make cautious reference to Casement's links with different intelligence agencies during his consular career. While working as a survey officer in the Niger Coast Protectorate for Claude Macdonald from 1892-95, his duties involved surveying and mapping areas of the Niger Delta for the War Office Intelligence Department.[12] During the Boer War he helped plan a covert expedition to sabotage Boer railway communication. At his three postings in Brazil, he had close contact with the Commercial Intelligence Department of the Board of Trade. More awkward is the plotting of his last three years which involved him in a Gordian knot of interlinking conspiracies leading to his interrogation by the three intelligence chiefs: Basil Thomson, Reginald Hall and Frank Hall. No biographer has yet engaged with the intelligence network Casement organised himself after the founding of the Irish Volunteers in 1913. Some information about this clandestine organisation is detailed in the unpublished manuscript by Sean Francis Kavanagh.[13] After his capture, it was, of course, Basil Thomson's CID "Special Branch", which discovered the diaries and began the whispering campaign by selectively showing extracts to influential statesmen, churchmen and newspaper editors. His prosecutor, F.E. Smith was director of the Press Bureau on the outbreak of war in 1914 and was deeply implicated in the raising and arming of the Ulster Volunteers, which began the militarisation of politics in Ireland in 1914. The shadow of the intelligence world is cast over every path in Casement's career.

But the hidden hand of British state power can be traced forward beyond August 1916 to recent times. The National Archives (Kew, London) revealed in 1995 that the first editor of the Black Diaries, Peter Singleton-Gates, was a Fleet Street "spook" and had a direct line to Basil Thomson, a revelation which cast serious aspersions over his version of events and his reliability as a journalist.[14] The poet Alfred Noyes, when working for the Ministry of Information during the First World War, was co-opted to spread the rumours about the Black Diaries. Later, once he realised that he had been duped, he wrote a book *The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement* where he attempted to explain why and how the forgery had been perpetrated. The most active figure involved in the controversy at a political and cultural level from 1954-65 was H. Montgomery Hyde, a former MI6 agent and colonel in the intelligence corps, who continued to serve after

1945 at the intersection between British intelligence agencies, the House of Commons, the British judicial system and the publishing industry. Montgomery Hyde was actively influential in raising the question of the Black Diaries in the British Parliament and helping to authenticate them in the public imagination. He also authored various works on homosexual history and persistently referred to Casement and the diaries in a way which facilitated the process of authentication.[15]

Rene MacColl, Casement's 1956 biographer, also worked for the Ministry of Information and was a special reporter for Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the Conservative newspapers which first circulated stories about the Black Diaries. More recently, Adrian Weale (2001), the author of a malignant and shallow interpretation of Casement, was prepared to admit his former career working for "seven years in military intelligence, specializing in interrogation and psychological operations." (Dustcover). The failure to recognise the long arm of British intelligence reaching right through the narration of Casement's story is a significant omission. It is a concern, therefore, that Ó Síocháin's argument is dependent upon secondary sources authored by individuals closely connected with intelligence operations, propaganda and "Psyops" (Psychological Operations), and whose impartiality he accepts without the slightest suspicion of any hidden agenda.

Problematically, conspiracy is deeply entangled with Casement's life and legacy. He condemned both regimes in the Congo and Amazon as "conspiracies" against decency and humanity and used similar language later in his life to damn British rule in Ireland. In the mid-1990s, researchers who called up a Casement file marked "Irish conspiracy" at the Public Record Office (now the National Archives), were required to sit in a special room with a CCTV directly above their work station recording every page turned and every note taken by the reader.[16] Casement involved himself in a series of conspiracies from 1913 onwards intended to tarnish the reputation of the government. His efforts to publicise the Findlay affair and British diplomatic efforts to have him assassinated is the best known but there were others (Leon O'Brion 1971). To write Irish revolutionary history is to engage with a live tradition of conspiracy reaching back to the Fenians and Clan na Gael and forward to the dirty war fought against the Provisional / Real / Continuity IRA. From 1914 when the intelligence agencies began to dig deeper into Casement's life they discovered how significant parts of his Foreign Office salary had for several years been channelled towards funding Irish revolutionary organisations: the Dungannon Clubs, the Irish language schools, and various organs of the radical press, which all contributed towards the insurgency (Hay 2009).

The other aspect of intelligence operations with obvious implications for the Casement story is propaganda. Casement was himself a skilful propagandist, who had used the press adroitly for his own campaigns to bring about Congo reform and to draw attention to the plight of Amazon Indians enslaved by the extractive rubber economy. In 1914, after his arrival in Germany, he contributed articles to *The Continental Times*, a newspaper with overtly anti-British and pro-Irish views. His trial became an extraordinary

exercise in First World War propaganda, which illustrates the supremacy of the state in controlling opinion and influencing due process.[17] But propaganda, like intelligence history and conspiracy, is another area where biographers fear to tread. From early in Casement's career it is possible to see the mechanisms of censorship and propaganda vigorously at play. Both of his reports exposing crimes against humanity bestowed substantial leverage on the British government at a diplomatic level, and were used to influence public opinion and elicit promises of reform from the offending regimes. Similarly, these investigations empowered Casement and validated his own transformation from imperial servant into anti-imperial rebel. Many of those who accept the authenticity of the diaries are prepared to admit that the spread of rumours about Casement's sexuality by different agencies in 1916 was an underhand and deplorable action, but this action is never seen in the longer and larger context of the propaganda engagements extending from his earlier investigations which later merge into the writing of history about the period.

If arguments to do with conspiracy and propaganda are easily disregarded for how they allow unverifiable assumptions to be cast about the diaries, a new approach for interrogating the dynamic of the diaries is now possible, which is able to map the strategies used by the state to control information. The declassification and release of the diaries and the intelligence files in the 1990s coincided with what archivists describe as the "archival turn", a paradigm shift in professional understanding of how archives work, for whom and to what ends. The earlier questioning of the power / knowledge nexus by Michel Foucault (1972, 2001) and various Subaltern critics led on to the Freudian reading of the archive by Jacques Derrida in his seminal essay *Archive Fever*. Inspired by these works several progressive archivists began to rethink the archive as a locus of hegemonic control: not just a place for study but as a place worthy of study in its own right. The processes of archiving in terms of provenance, order and description were all deconstructed to reveal agency in the mediation and promotion of specific narratives and dominant memories. The old view of archivists as detached and neutral guardians of the "truth", and of documents as merely blameless by-products of action, was discredited. Documents had to be assessed for their power relations within the construction of social memory and considered less in terms of how they served the state, more in terms of their societal relevance.[18]

This fundamental alteration in understanding archives as an attachment to processes and structures of power has serious implications for the Casement story and the history of the Black Diaries. Ó'Síocháin's approach to the documents, in line with all previous biographers, is still rooted in an archaic, one dimensional and positivist tradition, which comprehends archives as unmediated and neutral spaces. His biography quotes at length excerpts from Casement's reports and extensive official and private correspondence without ever reflecting on the huge spaces and silences evident in the archive. Furthermore, Casement's own well-developed view of the undisclosed power of the archive is ignored. For the biographers, the story is nothing more or less than the

uncritical interconnection of all available documentation: a narrative which merely has to fit the documented facts.

Anyone who bothers to work their way through the vast and dislocated body of Casement papers will be struck by the way he is so conscious both of documents and the written word. Whenever he arrived at a new consular posting his first memorandum back to the Foreign Office always reported the state of the archive. In 1900, when he was sent by Prime Minister Lord Salisbury to establish a new British consulate on the Congo, his first duty was to reorganise the archive.[19] Shortly after arriving as Consul in Belém do Pará he wrote a long letter back to Sir Edward Grey talking about the need to create a secret and confidential archive for sensitive documents which was separate from more run-of-the mill correspondence.[20] He was fastidious about dating, numbering and cross-references of official documentation. With his own revolutionary turn he became more concerned about the safety of his papers. It is inevitable that his paper trail would itself become a bitter scene for conflict. Shortly after his execution, Ernley Blackwell, the key Home Office official involved in the Black Diaries conspiracy, ordered the burning of Casement's prison papers (Dudgeon 8) and for the next fifteen years meticulously followed up every reference to Casement papers in an effort to control information about the man. In the *Archives Africaines*, held at the *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* in Brussels, Casement's official missives with the Congo Free State administration have been erased from the state papers. Fortunately, copies have survived among British Foreign Office papers in the National Archives. The history wars fought over Casement's reputation have been largely about control of his archive.

*

Casement's history wars can be conveniently divided into four specific engagements. The first phase extends from his execution in 1916 to the outbreak of war in 1939. Following the convenient discovery of the Black Diaries at the moment of Casement's capture, extracts were shown to influential statesmen and used to railroad him to the scaffold. During the 1920s and early 30s there appeared a series of conflicting statements by the intelligence chief Basil Thomson and other senior intelligence operatives. Both his cousin Gertrude Bannister and his biographer, Denis Gwynn (1931), approached the Home Office about the diaries but they were both stonewalled and the existence of the diaries was vigorously denied. In 1936, W.J. Maloney, a leading Sinn Fein propagandist published *The Forged Casement Diaries*, a work which deliberately named and shamed the politicians and intelligence chiefs involved in Casement's overthrow. The book provoked a bitter controversy involving the poet W.B. Yeats, the playwright George Bernard Shaw, the novelist Francis Stuart, and the socialist feminist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington.[21]

A second phase, from 1940 through to the return of Casement's bones to Ireland in 1965, saw the provocative appropriation of his meaning among nationalists in Northern

Ireland. In 1953, the opening of Casement Park in West Belfast and de Valera's unscheduled oration at Murlough Bay in the Glens of Antrim antagonised the Unionists. For Irish Nationalists, Casement became an emblem of resurgent self-determination. The about turn of Alfred Noyes and his condemnation of the diaries as forgeries compared to his defence of the documents in the 1930s was explained in his controversial book (1957). However, publication of the Black Diaries in Paris (Singleton-Gates, 1959) and their banning in Ireland merely excited interest and invested them with an illicit glamour. Printing them also helped authenticate them in the public imagination. Access, however, to the originals, could only be granted by the Home Secretary. The British and Unionist establishment had a wily defender in the shape of Montgomery Hyde. In Britain, Casement's name was discussed through the emerging discourse on sexual liberation. Through the early 1960s the controversy raged without end in the columns and letters page of the *Irish Times* and was only brought to an end with the return of Casement's body to Ireland in 1965. Behind the scenes, President de Valera closed down all official discussion of Casement. Talk of the diaries was silenced in the national press and the "forgery theorists" were driven underground.

A third phase can be identified from 1966 to 1993. This was the period when the Black Diaries were accommodated in to a series of psycho-biographies. Taking a lead from the Singleton-Gates volume, three biographers in turn (Inglis 1974; Reid 1976; Sawyer 1984) started to seamlessly incorporate the sexual narrative into Casement's life. It coincided with a moment when homosexuality was searching for new avenues for open discussion. Casement presented an ideal body upon which an experimental sexual language could be inscribed. The biographies also coincided with the mushrooming of violence in the North of Ireland but Republicans tended to instinctively distrust the Black Diaries as a work of "black" propaganda. Perhaps the most important publication came from the left field. In 1987, Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* introduced poststructural approaches into the analysis. By scrutinising the politics of factual production Taussig began to dissect the edifice of colonial reality. In a world where torture and terror rule, facts mutate and meanings aand truths are rendered unstable and illusory. Taussig's work failed to attract a single reviewer in Ireland and his methodology adopted an epistemological approach which went over the heads of a conservative academy rooted in the certainties of archival infallibility and the empirical tradition. By 1993 Casement's relevance had been banished to the margins of history and memory. Only his sexuality was considered relevant as an emblem of modernity and as a means of showing the nationalist project as narrow in its outlook and homophobic. Significantly, this was also the period when Ireland's brand of "revisionist" history, often motivated by an anti-Irish Nationalist view of the past, became both fashionable and widespread.

The fourth phase from 1993 through to 2009 saw the unfettered release of copies of the diaries and a substantial declassification of official documentation.[22] The polemic involving Sawyer and myself as described above escalated into an intense and sometimes fierce public debate. In 1999 Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, during his annual Arbour Hill

Easter oration, made a reference to the need to open an inquiry. In May 2000, the Royal Irish Academy took up the challenge and hosted a two day symposium on Casement (Daly 2005). A suggestion by the official historian of MI5, Christopher Andrew, to select two non British or non Irish forensic examiners was ignored. Instead, W.J. McCormack, an Irish academic employed at that time in a British University appointed a steering committee of British and Irish "non-experts" and hired a former Special Branch forensic examiner, Dr Audrey Giles, to compare handwriting under the full glare of film production crews funded by the two state broadcasters: RTE and BBC. This may have made good spectacle and helped reinforce consensus but it did little to satisfy those who could read through the whitewash. The U.S. document examiner, John J. Horan, said the tests were inadequate and flawed and would be unacceptable in a court of law. McCormack's published volume showed his own particular biases and his interests in proclaiming a specific and categorical outcome in favour of authenticity. The controversy also exposed the great lack of transparency and the long role of ambiguity in the scripting of Irish history.

Publication of Jordan Goodman's *The Devil and Mr Casement* (2009) brought the story in some way to an end. Goodman, a retired British academic, wrote a scrupulously researched account of Casement's Putumayo investigation, but cleverly avoided the controversy by ignoring the Black Diaries and reducing their relevance to a few brief sentences in the context of his trial. The British press almost universally decided not to review his book. In Ireland a Casement stripped of his sexuality was a Casement which few people recognised.

*

A matrix of different reasons can explain why the diaries came into existence and why they have been carried through so persistently to the present day. George Orwell's comment, made at a later stage in the century, might well be applied: "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." Casement's life was first and foremost about forcing systems of power to confront their crimes and misdemeanours. His investigations ultimately led to an excoriating attack on power itself and, because he had privileged access to the main players in imperial government, his accusations were all the more damning. After the outbreak of the war in 1914, he looked for every conceivable way to damage Britain's war effort and promote the cause of Irish sovereignty. With the barrel of his pen he attacked some of the most highly placed statesmen in the imperial galaxy, including Winston Churchill, Sir Edward Grey and A. J. Balfour. But his most excoriating attack was levelled at the distinguished historian and statesman, James Bryce. Bryce was a man closely connected to the atrocity culture of the age. He had been one of the visible Oxford historians who had spoken out against the Bulgarian atrocities back in 1874. In 1915 he would lead the official British investigation into German atrocities in Belgium.

When Bryce was British ambassador in Washington in 1912 he had helped Casement court US government sympathy for the Putumayo atrocities and from this

collaboration it is apparent that both men shared concerns about humanity. Their differences, however, on the British Empire were diametrically opposed. For Bryce, the protection and extension of the British Empire and the building of the Anglo-American special relationship was the presiding concern of his political writing and action. He believed the Empire could and should be used as an instrument for the improvement of mankind. Casement, by contrast, who had watched the violence underlying colonial rule, detested empires and the violent injustices they produced. He became equally concerned with the potential tyranny which could result from the Anglo-American special relationship. In 1915, Casement published a scathing attack on Bryce's widely circulated report on *Alleged German Outrages* in an essay called *The Far-Extended Baleful Power of the Lie*. (Mackey, 1958) Significantly, he accused Bryce of exaggerating and lying about the extent of German atrocities in Belgium and fabricating evidence. The charges were not made lightly.

This essay was part of a co-ordinated propaganda campaign which Casement waged against British power following the outbreak of hostilities. His writings against the British Empire and comments on the role of certain statesmen in dragging Britain and Ireland into the conflict make reference to "secret knowledge" and "inner history" and exposed a conspiratorial space within the diplomatic build up to the Great War. Among a slate of accusations he made the following remark:

> It was Napoleon I think said that the falsification of official documents was more common with the English than with any other nation. Sir Edward Grey is said by his friends to be thoroughly English, and no one who has read his famous White Paper giving his version of the origin of war, or his speeches in Parliament explaining what the White Paper omitted to make clear, can doubt for a moment his nationality. The White Paper has already been revised twice I think – certain lacunae having been discovered, even after a triple editing, that gave the mockers occasion to revive Napoleon's calumny. There were dates that had gone astray and curious discrepancies that showed a later hand at work than that ostensibly penning the despatch. At the second revise it was hoped that the present edition (the 3rd edition let us call it, second million, cheap or popular issue at 1d.) was above detection even by the expert. The most careful revising eye in the Foreign Office could find no opening for attack. Alas, for the reputation of the experts.[23]

To conclude, the Black Diaries are a variation on what in modern military intelligence parlance is termed a PSYOP (psychological operation)?the interception of a signal (in this case a text) and its reconditioning in order to influence and confuse the enemy. This is not an isolated incident. Britain's long and often dirty war fought against Irish republicans provoked some desperate acts in the battle for hearts and minds. Recent research has revealed how a deliberate policy of "verisimilitude" was instigated during the War of Independence by the British authorities in Dublin Castle and how this policy prompted the contamination of the historical record. Intellectual dishonesty and "lying

for the common good" is a recognisable trait in writing about the revolutionary period. The presence of the Black Diaries has also suited the politics surrounding the polemics of Irish history, which has deliberately censored the pivotal role played by a cabal of Anglo-Irish insiders, most notably Casement, the historian Alice Stopford Green, and the novelist Erskine Childers, who together organised the running of the first shipment of arms into Ireland in July 1914.

Finally, the effect of both postcolonial studies and critical discourse theory has shown how representation is constituted by the powerful in ways that validate and normalise their positions. The long road of political compromise in the dividing of Ireland has necessitated deliberate restrictions to sensitive information and calculated manipulation of the record. Keeping the lie of the Black Diaries alive once served the interests of British national security and the twenty-six county Irish republic. It has not served the cause of universal justice. In the extractive rubber industry millions of lives were destroyed or ruined. Vast areas of the Amazon and Congo were opened up to extraction. Further tropical devastation occurred in Southeast Asia, as more rainforest was cleared to make way for rubber plantations. Casement was the unique witness to this crime and the extent of that crime is rendered meaningful through understanding his life. The story will continue to haunt Irish and British historiography until judgment day, but those who enter the Casement labyrinth should be cautious to keep a critical eye open to the politics of historical knowledge and the contrary constructions of colonial reality.

## Notes

1 See Angus Mitchell (ed.), *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (1997) and *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: the 1911 documents* (2003).

2 NAI, Department of Taoiseach S 7804 A, Eamonn de Valera to Julius Klein, 11 October 1934.

3 Studies include Ovidio Lagos, *Arana, rey del caucho* (Buenos Aires, Emecé, 2005), Geraldo Cantarino, *Uma Ilha chamada Brasil: O Paraíso irlandês no pasado brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2004); Roberto Pineda Camacho, *Holocausto en el Amazonas: una historia social de la Casa Arana* (Bogotá: Espasa, 2000); Márcio Souza, *Silvino Santos, O cineasta do ciclo da borracha* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1999).

4 A second edition of his biography *Roger Casement* was published shortly before Inglis' death in 1993 with an important Preface about the diaries' controversy. A critical view of Inglis was sketched by the essayist Hubert Butler in "Grandmother and Wolfe Tone' in H. Butler, *Independent Spirit* (124-131).

5 At the start of chapter 8 "A fine beastly morality for a Christian Co." of *The Lives of Roger Casement* Reid refers to the diary as "the conflated (and inflated) fuller journal that survives in manuscript and typescript in the National Library of Ireland' (104). In his footnote he gives the reference number NLI 13085-86. The actual reference for the MSS version is MS 13087/25 and the typescript version in MS 1622/3. Reid's cryptic comment and incorrect archival number suggest that he was conscious of the significance of *The Amazon Journal* but wanted to confuse its relevance to the argument.

6 In *Casement: The Flawed Hero*, Sawyer took the Inglis line and preferred occlusion. He defended his position in the *Irish Times* 24 October 1997.

7 The provenance of this diary can be clearly traced. It was sent by Casement from the Canary Islands in 1913 to Charles Roberts and used as evidence before the Parliamentary Select Committee. Roberts quoted a long passage from the diary when he was cross examining Henry Parr. See *Report and Special Report from the Select Committee on Putumayo*, Q. 8466: 337. The question of the provenance of the diaries is dealt with at length in the introduction to my edition of *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (31-54)

8 National Archives of Ireland, Department of Taoiseach / S7805D.

9 Letter to *Irish Times*, 16 April 2002.

10 Colm Tóibín has made some valuable interventions in the most recent cycle of the controversy although his own use of the Black Diaries as a symbolic text for raising the profile of gay Irishmen has neglected some of the deeper ethical issues embodied in the diaries. See his *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodóvar* (London, 2002) and "The Tragedy of Roger Casement', *New York Review of Books*, Vol.LI:9, 27 May, 2004, pp.53-57. For a useful critique of Tóibín see Barra Ó Séaghdha, "Re-viewing Casement', *Irish Review* 33 (2005): 85-95.

11 The principal figure involved has been Lucy McDiarmid who has scripted a series of essays and, most notably her chapter in *The Irish Art of Controversy* (Dublin, 2005). W.J. McCormack produced an idiosyncratic account *Roger Casement in Death or haunting the Free State* (Dublin, 2002).

12 On the maps see "Casement's maps of the Niger delta', *History Ireland*, 14:4, July/August 2006. 50-55 and Robert Burroughs, "Imperial Eyes or "The Eyes of Another Race'? Roger Casement's Travels in West Africa', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:3, September 2009. 383-397.

13 Sergeant Sean Francis Kavanagh, *The Betrayal of Roger Casement and the Irish Brigade* (Unpublished typescript, 1955). Intriguingly, Kavanagh described himself as "Casement's Special Secret Service Agent'. A copy of this typescript survives in the Clare County Archives.

14 See NLI MS 46,064 containing Roger Sawyer's papers on Peter Singleton-Gates. This includes Singleton-Gates' typescript of "A Summing Up' (1966) with a few new revelations about the diaries and the role of different agencies.

15 The Penguin "Famous Trials' edition contained extracts from the 1911 diary charting Casement's second voyage up the Amazon and was published for the mass market. On Montgomery Hyde's importance to both Ulster Unionism and Gay rights see Jeffrey Dudgeon, "H. Montgomery Hyde, the Ulster Unionist MP (and author of *The Other Love*) who led the 1950s Westminster campaign for homosexual law reform and his struggle for political survival', in Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D 4372.

16 TNA FO 337/107 – entitled "Irish conspiracy' from this file it is apparent that the Foreign Office referred to Casement's involvement with Germany as a conspiracy from October 1914. Also see CO 904/195.

17 See my "John Bull's other empire: Roger Casement and the press, 1898-1916' in Simon J. Potter (ed.), *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire c.1857-1921*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2004.

18 Two journals in particular, *Archivaria* and *Archival Science* have led the field in publishing theoretical critiques of the archival turn. Most notable is the work of Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift', *Archivaria* 43 (Spring, 1997): 17-63.

19 Correspondence regarding the reorganisation of the archive is held in TNA FO 10/739, Roger Casement to Marquess of Salisbury, 13/12/1900.

20 TNA FO 743/22 Memorandum on Care of Confidential Archives at Pará by Roger Casement, HM Consul, 7/10/1908.

21 There have been several attempts to explain the 1930s phase of the Casement debate. The most idiosyncratic is W.J. McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death, or Haunting the Free State* (2002) or Lucy McDiarmid, *The Irish Art of Controversy* (2005).

22 Readers at the U.K.'s National Archives interested in examining the Black Diaries have immediate access to microfilm copies. Access to the originals remains complicated.

23 NLI MS 29064, ff.45, Casement signing himself John Quincy Emerson to the Editor of the *Continental Times*, 6 October 1915.

## Works Cited


Blakeston, Oswell. *Thank you now: an exploration of Ulster*. London: Anthony Blond 1960.

Burroughs, Robert. "Imperial Eyes or 'The Eyes of Another Race'? Roger Casement's Travels in West Africa", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:3, September 2009. 383-397.

Butler, Hubert. *Independent Spirit: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

Daly, Mary E. (ed.). *Roger Casement in Irish and World History*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005.

Dudgeon, Jeffrey. *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a study of his background , sexuality and Irish Political Life.* Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things; An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 2001.

____. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Routledge, 1972.

Goodman, Jordan. *The Devil and Mr Casement: One Man's Struggle for Human Rights in South America's Heart of Darkness*. London: Verso, 2009.

Gwynn, Denis, *Traitor or Patriot: The Life and Death of Roger Casement*. New York: Jonathan Cape, 1931.

Hay, Marnie. *Bulmer Hobson and the Nationalist Movement in Twentieth Century Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.

Hochschild, Adam . *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. London: Pan Books , 2006.

Hyde, H. Montgomery. *Trial of Sir Roger Casement.* Edinburgh: William Hodge, 1960.

Inglis, Brian. *Roger Casement*. London: Hodder and Staughton, 1973.

Mackey, Herbert (ed.). *The Crime Against Europe: Writings and Poems of Roger Casement*. Dublin: Fallon, 1958.

Maloney, W.J. *The Forged Casement Diaries*. Dublin: Talbot Press, 1936.

McCormack, W.J. *Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State*. Dublin: University College Dublin, 2002.

McDiarmid, L. *The Irish Art of Controversy*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2005.

Montgomery Hyde, H. *The Trial of Sir Roger Casement*. London: Penguin 1960.

Mitchell, Angus (ed.). *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*. London: Anaconda Editions, 1997.

____. *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents*. Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission 2003.

____. "Casement's maps of the Niger delta", *History Ireland*, 14:4, July/August 2006. 50-55.

Noyes, Alfred. *The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement*. London: Gollancz, 1957.

O'Brion, Leon. *The Prime Informer: A Suppressed Scandal*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971.

Ó Séaghdha, Barra. "Re-viewing Casement", *Irish Review* 33 (2005): 85-95.

Ó Síocháin, Séamas. *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary.* Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2008.

____. "Ruarí Mac Easmainn: an dubh an bán", *Oghma*, 10 (1998): 57-66.

____ & M. O Sullivan, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and the 1903 Diary.* Dublin: University College Dublin, 2004).

Reid, B.L. *The Lives of Roger Casement*. London, Yale University 1976.

Sawyer, Roger (ed.), *Roger Casement's Diaries 1910: the Black and the White.* London: Pimlico, 1997.

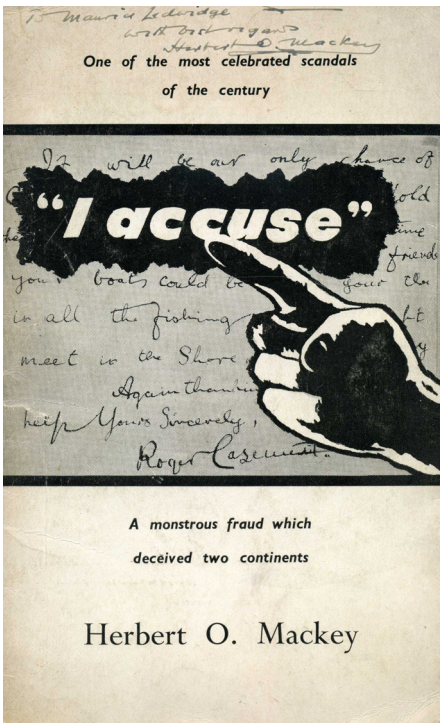
____. *Casement: The Flawed Hero.* London:Routledge, 1984.

Singleton-Gates & Girodias, Maurice, *The Black Diaries.* Paris: Olympia Press, 1959.

Taussig, Michael. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

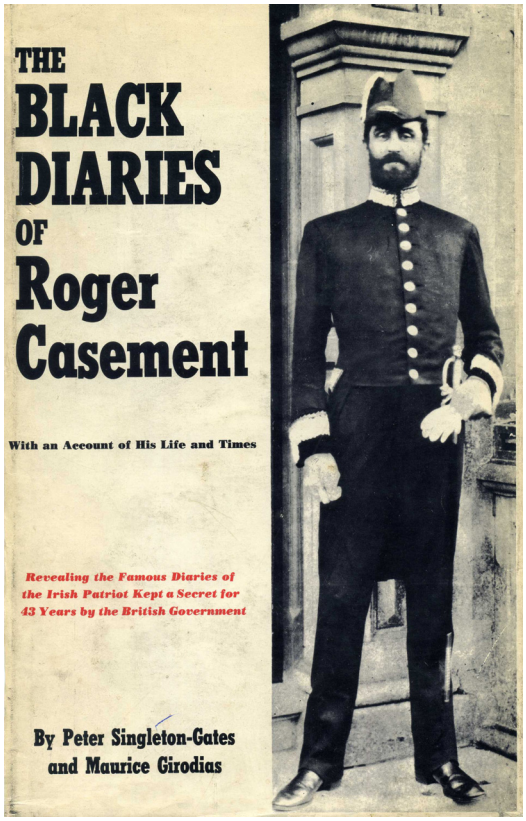
Weale, Adrian . *Patriot Traitors: Roger Casement, John Amery and the Real Meaning of Treason.* London: Viking, 2001.

*Roger Casement aboard an Amazon riverboat 1910.*




*Herbert Mackey's pamphlet from 1960 "J'Accuse"; an obvious reference to the French writer Emile Zola's defence of the French army officer, Alfred Dreyfus.*


*The Black Diaries released into the UK's National Archive in 1959 after decades of denial about their existence.*




*The US version of the Black Diaries published by the Grove Press.*

# Voices from Brazil

# *Notes on Four Texts by Ana Cristina Cesar*[*]

Viviana Bosi[**]

**Abstract:** *The objective of this article is to comment on four texts by Ana Cristina Cesar: a sequence of fictional letters and three poems. They appear in the posthumous volume* Antigos e soltos *[Old and Loose] (2008), made up of poems, letters, diary entries and other texts, contained in a file of drafts kept by the author. The poems chosen are, in a way, about the dilemmas of poetic writing and the relationship between life and art.*

The poet Ana Cristina Cesar, born in Rio de Janeiro, published little in her short lifetime (1952-1983): her work was included in some newspaper and magazine anthologies, and, for the first time in a book, *26 poetas hoje* [26 Poets Today] (1976), edited by Heloísa Buarque de Holanda, who also wrote the preface. This was the publication that established the label "marginal generation" for an offbeat group of young poets who were then becoming known, principally in Rio de Janeiro. Though not entirely subscribing to the ideas of the group, Ana Cristina shared with them a preference for handmade editions produced and distributed by their own authors, outside the circuit of the publishing houses. In this way she produced the little books *Cenas de abril* (1979), [April Scenes], *Correspondência completa* (1979) [Complete Correspondence] and *Luvas de pelica* (1980) [Kid Gloves]. In 1982, for the first time, a commercial publishing house published one of her books: *A teus pés* [At Your Feet], which also included her earlier work.

Having graduated in Modern Languages, she went on to take an MA in England, on the translation of Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss", and another MA in Brazil on documentary cinema. She was especially keen on the work of Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath and Walt Whitman, and translated several of their poems. She was also a journalist, contributing pieces on literature, theatre and the arts in general.

She died tragically, leaving many unpublished texts, including poems, diary entries, letters and critical essays, which were published posthumously in the volumes *Inéditos e dispersos* (1985) [Unpublished and Scattered] and *Crítica e tradução* (1999) [Criticism and Translation] – both edited by Armando Freitas Filho; *Correspondência*

*incompleta* (1999) [Incomplete Correspondence], edited by Armando Freitas Filho and Heloísa Buarque de Holanda; and *Antigos e soltos* (2008), [Old and Loose], edited by Viviana Bosi.

I shall now comment on four poetic texts taken from a file of drafts that Ana Cristina Cesar kept for many years. She used to rewrite each poem several times. The versions chosen to feature in this article were those that the poet typed or of which she made a fair copy – though we cannot be sure that they were "definitive". Most of the material found in this file was published in the book *Antigos e soltos*, [Old and Loose], in which the texts presented here may be found.

THREE LETTERS TO NAVARRO

Navarro,
I am leaving you my posthumous texts. I ask only this of you: do not let them say they are products of a sick mind!
I can cope with anything except this biographilic obscurantism. These literary psychologists are enormous rats – they gnaw what they find with the thread and the rancidity of their cheap analogies. As though what they did to Pessoa were not enough. Yet again we need a new generation that knows how to listen to the chatter of the signs.

R.

Navarro,
The animality of the signs disturbs me. Lines of verse come galloping down tree-fringed avenues to trample on my soul or beat their wings amongst the dark pigeons of the night. They fill the bathroom, disturb the tenants, escape through the chinks as worms. Oh, the melancholic impertinence of metaphors! I feel sorry for myself, the clumsy sorrow of wounded animals. Whilst comforting them I double up over my own sorrow and weep. My ears vomit rhythms, tears, I obey. I'm frightened to say that the form of the letters hides love, desire, and you flinching around me. At the next try (and there are five thorns) I shall manage nothing more than a babble.

R.

Navarro,
Today I produced a character who's already freed me from the anxieties of silence. I'm still not sure about the sex and age that I'm going to give him or her. But there's no need to worry: these questions have already been duly resolved by Orlando. I'm only fearful about his or her future: he or she dreams of creating immortal pages but is tortured by a lack of productivity. I fear that this problem may also have been overcome by the great Woolf. Who'd have thought it, here I go committing the crime of exalting Personalities! Since I read Pessoa however he never lets my shots backfire. Quiet, I hear the door! It was the old folk coming back to the celestial tent. Without them God would feel that he was an orphan, but with them I'm sure he feels that he's divine. I was telling you about the relegated

character to whom I have already given a family. Since it seems to me that he or she likes the sea and the coves, above all the molluscs, writhing in their shelters. He or she believes they can be imitated on paper, but can find no bridge between such beings and such forms. Like being like form, as my beloved aunt used to say, but caring mirrors contradicted me in the blink of an eye. However, the figure of a loved aunt is larger than the despair of the evidence... Let the collages and their deliria come to me. Or the little children, whose gaze moves my exhausted eardrums. I was talking to you about innards. Keep this secret; this secretion. No,

R.

TRÊS CARTAS A NAVARRO

Navarro,
Te deixo meus textos póstumos. Só te peço isto: não permitas que digam que são produtos de uma mente doentia! Posso tolerar tudo menos esse obscurantismo biografílico. Ratazanas esses psicólogos da literatura – roem o que encontram com o fio e o ranço de suas analogias baratas. Já basta o que fizeram ao Pessoa. É preciso mais uma vez uma nova geração que saiba escutar o palrar os signos.

R.

Navarro,
A animalidade dos signos me inquieta. Versos a galope descem alamedas a pisotear-me a alma ou batem asas entre pombos pardos de noite. Enchem o banheiro, perturbam os inquilinos, escapam pelas frestas em forma de lombrigas. Ó melancólica impertinência das metáforas! Tenho pena de mim mesmo, pena torpe de animais aflitos. Ao animá-los me dobro sobre a pena e choro. Meus ouvidos vomitam ritmos, lágrimas, obedeço. Tenho medo de dizer que a forma das letras oculta amor, desejo, e a tua esquiva pessoa ao meu redor. Na próxima tentativa (e cinco espinhos são) não soltarei mais que balbucios.

R.

Navarro,
Hoje produzi um personagem que já me alivia as ansiedades do silêncio. Hesito ainda sobre o sexo e a idade que lhe darei. Mas não há porque preocupar-me: essas questões já foram devidamente resolvidas por Orlando. Temo apenas por seu futuro: sonha criar páginas imortais mas torturase na improdutividade. Receio que também este problema tenha sido superado pela grande Woolf. Quem diria, aqui

vou eu incorrendo no delito de exaltação de Personalidades! Desde que li Pessoa porém não me deixa o tiro de sair pela culatra. Caluda, que ouço a porta! Eram os velhos que voltavam à tenda celeste. Sem eles Deus se sentiria órfão, com eles tenho a certeza sente-se divino. Falava-te da personagem relegada, a quem já conferi família. Pois me parece que aprecia o mar e as covas, mormente os moluscos retorcendo-se nos seus abrigos. Crê imitá-los em papéis, mas não encontra ponte entre tais seres e tais formas. Tal ser tal forma, já dizia minha tia a quem amava mas espelhos solícitos desmentiram-me num piscar de olhos. A figura de uma tia amada é porém ainda maior que o desespero das evidências... Que venham a mim as colagens e seus delírios. Ou as criancinhas, cujos olhares me enternecem os tímpanos exaustos. Falava-te de vísceras. Guarda este segredo; esta secreção. Não,

R.

The famous *boutade* of Mallarmé ("It is absolutely not with ideas, my dear Degas, that verses are made, but with words.") is usually interpreted in an elegantly clinical way, as proof that poetry is such an autonomous art that it can rise above every impurity, whether ideological, historical or biographical.

In a certain mysterious way, "*Três cartas a Navarro*" [Three Letters to Navarro], texts found amongst Ana Cristina Cesar's papers, return to the question of the writing statute in its complex overlapping with life, and infuse new blood into the phrase of the refined French poet, encountering the crisis of modern verse from an entirely different angle. From a certain point of view, we might say that the phrase is here baptised and confirmed in the belief that the poet in art is free from empirical injunctions, and, through words, breathes life into the "rhythmic wing."[1] On the other hand, this does not mean a sweet detachment from real life, since the sign is reached from within, from the wrong side of the garment as it were. Sartre considers poetic language to be wild, arising from things as yet unnamed: in Ana Cristina's text, the engagement is deep because the internal and external animals sprout from the wilder root of the senses, grabbing author and reader alike at the threshold of consciousness.

In the first letter, the initial request already places us – indiscrete readers of someone else's correspondence – in the position of accomplices of the executor, an unknown person disguised under the pseudonym of Navarro. Unpublished, the letters are written for posterity. "R.", the equally enigmatic signatory, vehemently requests "literary" distance and respect. Always utilising the second person singular and a slightly pompous and somewhat antiquated vocabulary (is it perhaps an echo of the Portuguese style, recalling the reference to Fernando Pessoa?), the writer's tone underscores the appeal that his or her privacy should be preserved, that the reader should be freed from his or her "biographilic" vice so

that he or she may "listen to the chatter of the signs". The whole appeal is based on the separation between the empirical "I", who can be "gnawed" by critics with a psychological bent and thus destroyed, and the literary construction, which should retain the capacity to continue to speak.

And what are these signs like? Does it so happen that they come to dance harmoniously around the letter-writer, revealing themselves for his or her delight? On the contrary, they are described in the second letter as "wounded animals" which torment the writer like a voodoo demon, lines of verse that "trample on [the writer's] soul". Swept away by their convulsive strength, "R." is trampled underfoot, disturbed, pricked by thorns (each one representing a successive attempt at communication), until he or she is doubled up in tears and is reduced to "a babble". They gallop, beat their wings, slip away like worms, taking over the rooms of the house. They pass through locked doors to torture the reluctant "I" with their unwanted visits. These tormenting and dominating invaders address the interlocutor, against the will of the author, who is defenceless against the alterity of the language slipping by. It is not the mouth but the ears that "vomit rhythms, tears", it is up to them to obey the voices assaulting the poet. "I is another" but the other is an "I" – both caught up in a war of love and desire, repulsion and disquiet. If the writer feels sorry for them, he or she is really feeling self-pity. The writer's innermost feelings are the animals, which reveal their wish to be the only reader ("singular and anonymous", in Silviano Santiago's appropriate expression). Mallarmé stated ironically that a poem is composed of words and words alone, as if they did not contain all unconscious matter, much denser than mere ideas – readymade, explicit, clean, already tamed and obedient.

Pessoa and Woolf appear in the third fragment precisely as examples of heteronomy – whether in the androgynous, ubiquitous figure of Orlando, or in the aversion to the exaltation of the personality of Pessoa's poetic "I". It makes no difference whether the character,[2] or alter-ego, that the poet wishes to create, inspired by them, is male or female (by the way, "R." always refers to himself in the masculine gender), nor what his or her age is, nor whether his or her style would reflect his or her personality (problems already solved by the two model writers, masters of variability): what is important is to discover whether it will be possible to break through the barrier of time with an everlasting piece of writing.

Paradoxically, "R." ends up exalting the very character that he wishes to obliterate: in literature, this is a shot that always backfires, as Eliot recognised when he described poetry as an "escape from emotion", arguing that only those possessed of personality and emotions can know what it means to wish to escape from them.[3] Furthermore, he attributes a family and a house to the character, whether male or female. Several generations are present: the old folk, the beloved aunt, the little children. The old folk take care of everything, even of the Creator Himself: "Without them God would feel that he was an orphan, but with them I'm sure he feels that he's divine." But the correspondence remains secret, even in the "celestial tent," since the poet is insulated, and sees askew, hidden like the molluscs in coves beside the sea. Once again, the letter-writer merges with the character: which

of the two has a family? As Jakobson perceptively noted, the sudden flow of poetry in life is its own no less sudden ebb.

One of the character's preferences is already known: "he or she likes the sea and the coves, above all the molluscs, writhing in their shelters." Both are moving forms and difficult to comprehend: both sea and molluscs are undulating and retractable in the rhythm and sonority of the written thought, but immeasurably different in reality – immense and minute, infinite and insignificant, powerful and slow... The character seeks to enclose opposites, identifying with both of them.

The character "believes they can be imitated on paper, but can find no bridge between such beings and such forms." Just as the incompatibility between representation and life creates an impassable moat of frustration in literature, so it is with the mimesis of the mirror, in which one does not recognize oneself. The impossibility of a true copy, the dichotomy between appearance and essence, and the irreducibility of signified to signifier – "the despair of the evidence"; these have been problems since the time of the Ancient Greeks which only Eros and Poiesis, who were relatives, have been able to overcome. Inadequate metaphors replace truth. "R." believes only in the collage, which has no need of the realism of the façade, and the gaze of the child (which, dislocated, – in a juxtaposition of sound and image characteristic of montage – "moves [the] exhausted eardrums") – both of which are forms of art; only in these does "R." believe, since they might just possibly reach the innards: "this secret, this secretion."

In *Cenas de abril*, [April Scenes] possibly contemporary with these letters,[4] the correspondence is also composed of a montage of disconnected phrases. Indeed, the idea of "correspondence" is certainly reminiscent of Baudelaire's theories on poetical creation, whether of verse or prose poetry, which reject the workmanlike copy of reality in favour of a more imaginative construction where fragments of the serpent-text can be recomposed in different permutations. Since it is impossible to know the complete context surrounding the words of such intimate letters, we have to make a patchwork of allusions, in an attempt to conjecture at meanings, like gossips eavesdropping on a conversation outside a closed door.

And what about the ending? Why is there this abrupt "No" by way of closure? In every version, whether handwritten or typed (and Ana Cristina rewrote her texts many times), these letters end in this intentionally interrupted way. Could it be an emphatic request to Navarro not to reveal the content to anybody? And furthermore, by avoiding a well-finished closure, is the sender not stressing the inconclusive sense of his thoughts, which are necessarily fragmentary? And those "literary psychologists" who confuse life and work, cheapening the writer's efforts, should they not be firmly expelled from the "celestial tent" where the writer battles with his animal-words? And in this case, we, as furtive readers, are we not betraying the secrets behind the scenes of the creative process? "Have you brought the key?" – to which we reply: "No"...

* * *

The three following poems were written at different times. At first sight, there seem to be no similarities between them, neither in terms of form nor of theme, but it is possible to discern a thread of progressive tension in the point of view of the poetic “I” linking them to each other. The first of them, probably the earliest, strikes the attitude of a song, with circular returns echoing the integration of the “I” and the world:[5]

Wales after springtime

I saw a sea sighing at twilight
it was a sea sighing
at twilight a sea

nothing cried and
every guitar was asleep tired out

I saw a sea at twilight
it was sighing as if it sighed
at the dampening twilight

            it stirred the new-blown air
re-blown by the sighs of the sea

I saw at twilight a mystery with no enigma
It was a sea stretching itself out on the sand.

Rhoose 30.08.69

País de Gales depois da primavera

Vi um mar suspirando à tardinha
era um mar suspirando
à tardinha um mar

nada chorava e
todo violão adormecia só de cansaço

vi um mar à tardinha
suspirava como se suspirasse
à tardinha marejando

se remexia o ar recém-ventado
re-inventado pelos suspiros do mar

vi à tardinha um mistério sem nenhum enigma
era um mar se espreguiçando por cima da areia

Rhoose 30.08.69

The poem repeats like a peaceful melody the pleasurable movement of benevolent waves, ebbing and flowing. In the manuscript, we note that the poem did not end there: the rocking movement continued, with two more lines (later crossed out) which echoed the preceding ones, like an endless song. It is reminiscent of Bandeira's "Debussy", sweetly idyllic, surrendering to the soft rhythm of the calm sea. The almost naïve repetition of the lyric is effected with absolute simplicity.

The second poem, "*Le Ballet de l'Opera a Rio*", returns to the question that lies at the heart of all writing, alluding to issues raised in the letters above, in the key of the dramatic apostrophe:

*LE BALLET DE L'OPERA A RIO*

from the wings one misses the illusion of the
entrancement. but today I wanted to write from among the lights that
the audience alone can see.
I wanted a pure stage, pure
audience viewpoint. I want
to write with violence to comfort you: the violence
with which (we imagine)
the enchanted dancers rise up
in ecstasy
in transfiguration

LE BALLET DE L'OPERA A RIO

dos bastidores perde-se a ilusão do
transe. mas hoje eu queria escrever do meio de luzes que
só a platéia visse.
desejava um palco puro, pura
perspectiva de platéia. desejo
escrever com violência para consolar-te: a violência
com que (imaginamos)
os bailarinos fetichizados se erguem
em êxtase
em transfiguração

The impulse of complete abandon: "pure stage, pure/audience viewpoint" – in the frenetic violence of art as a surrender to entrancement. The primitive ritual, origin of the dance and of the theatre, Dionysus reincarnated: chimera of a curative poetry, in which one embraces total catharsis, opposed to all distancing. This is what the poetic "I" would like: to cease to be the author so as to be able to feel the pleasure of the audience, plunged in the magic of the show, unaware of the scaffolding sustaining it. "We imagine" the sublime naturalness of the dancers, who, in order to appear spontaneous, broke their bones more than

a thousand times in secret in arduous rehearsals (as Valéry observed). The exercise has to be so perfect that the presentation gives the impression of having been born there and then, just for that sole occasion of splendid communion between performers and audience. A mystical moment of consecration of the sparkling and inimitable light for which the disenchanted world yearns so nostalgically.

So, the movement of desiring announces what has been lost. Innocence had already been destroyed by the separation between pure entrancement and its construction: between the "machine à emouvoir" and the backstage area there is a gap, attested to by the line "I want/to write with violence to comfort you". The utopia of complete communion with oneself and with the original pantheistic forces has been fractured by the power of consciousness divided from itself.

The third poem, in a gradual sequence, tends to distanced reflection and recognizes limitations:

```
strange craft this
cohabited by
steel and sargasso.

the poet becomes imprisoned
in the unkempt meshes
of hair
beyond reach

desire
is transfixed
on the wall ahead

outlining its extreme
wings on the windowpane


ofício esquisito este
onde convivem
aços e sargaços.

o poeta se deixa prender
nas malhas mal traçadas
de cabelos
fora do alcance

o desejo
se fixa imóvel
na parede em frente

desenha suas asas
extremas na vidraça
```

Here, there is neither harmonious contemplation nor passionate rapture: there are no sublimations arising from an encounter with nature or art, as in the preceding poems. The wide landscape of the beach and the transcendent horizon of the dancer have been suppressed.

In their place, there is the merely sonorous association of "steel and sargasso" ("*aços e sargaços*", in the original) – materials equally disagreeable in the excess of their opposite nature. After this first stanza, which ends in a full stop, the remainder of the poem continues uninterrupted as a single sentence. The poetic "I" is bound, unable to move, hemmed in by the boundary of the window pane, stuck there with "extreme wings" since there is no way to penetrate it. The confinement seems to heighten the consciousness of the space available for the "strange craft" of the poet, who is aware of the permissible perimeter for manoeuvre, imprisoned by the hair, squeezed in by the wall. In the tiny area of the bedroom (and of life itself, to recall Drummond), the subject stretches him or herself out as much as possible, aware of the physical restriction, of the unfinished poem, which, despite the impossibility of reaching beyond, breaks free from the very place that delimits its end.

## Notes

* The publication of the fictional letters and poems reproduced here was kindly authorised by Waldo Cesar and Armando Freitas Filho. The material was first published in the magazine *Poesia Sempre* [Poetry Forever], n. 19, Rio de Janeiro: *Biblioteca Nacional*, December 2004. At that time, these texts had not previously been published, being part of the so-called "*Pasta rosa*" [Pink File], an item of the Ana Cristina Cesar papers held in the *Instituto Moreira Salles*.

** Viviana Bosi's original text has been translated into English by Peter James Harris (UNESP) and Lúcia Biojone do Nascimento.

1 I am referring to the line "*tem sangue eterno a asa ritmada*" ["the rhythmic wing has eternal blood"] in Cecília Meireles's poem "*Motivo*", [Theme].

2 It should be noted that in this passage the author prefers to refer to the *character* in the masculine and, further on in the same letter, uses the *word* "character" in the feminine, a common oscillation in Portuguese that she exploits, whether intentionally or not.

3 "Tradition and the individual talent", in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

4 Armando Freitas Filho observes that the same typewriter was used, which seems to point to a proximity in time.

5 I am referring to Kayser's classification of the three poetical attitudes: song, apostrophe and sentence (corresponding respectively to the tone of the pure lyric, the dramatic and the epic).

# Reviews

# *Irish Cinema: The Last Decade*

Lance Pettitt

If Neil Jordan's tour de force *Michael Collins* (1996) for Warner Brothers and his bravura adaptation of Pat McCabe's novel *The Butcher Boy* (1997) mark a kind of high-water mark for contemporary Irish film, what happened to Irish cinema in the succeeding decade? This brief essay will outline the major changes in funding and production that determine the environment in which new films get made. It will then survey some of the key thematic tropes of films made in or about Ireland and its culture.

I'm going to show that narrow-gauge or essentialist notions of a national cinema have become well-nigh impossible to sustain in the contemporary period. Using the "national" optic to view Irish cinema has always been problematic because the country and the culture being represented on screen are far more complex, diverse and variegated than an orthodox political nationalism will permit. There remains a persistent tradition of viewing "Irish film" as a combination of "Troubles" narratives set in Northern Ireland, nostalgic romantic comedies (often set in the 1950s), historically set "heritage' films (often adaptations of novels) or generic crime/caper movies, of which *In Bruges* (2008) is perhaps the latest example.

The fact is that most films made in Ireland or about Ireland tend to be funded wholly or partly by the United States, British and European Union sources, in combination with state-support from the United Kingdom's Film Council in Northern Ireland, Bord na Scannan na Eireann/Irish Film Board and the Arts Council in the Republic. Commentators on the economics and infrastructures for film making have long noted that there has *never* been a bona fide industry within Ireland, merely various kinds of film making activity, subject to the vicissitudes of other countries' economies, tax laws and labour markets. Because of its relatively small population on a physically bounded land mass, "Irish cinema" is dependent on sales of its films at cinemas, on TV and DVD sales beyond its own shores to maintain itself. Interestingly, since 2005 the Republic has been pioneering digital formats in a network of cinemas altering the nature and costing of selected film releases.

It is true that since its inauguration in the early 1980s, the Irish state has financially backed film support structures and offered tax incentives to foreign productions, but these have often been suspended (1988-93), subject to government change or threatened as the case with Section 481 in 2004. In the 1990s Ireland could compete effectively for film business, but more recently its costs and facilities have come into competition from east European economies providing cheaper locations, facilities and post-

production. The last decade has seen the continued influence on moving image production for cinema and terrestrial TV screening from British television (notably in Northern Ireland) where TV films and series often made in cross-border production with a now developed independent sector in the Republic. The onset of the Peace Process (1998) and decrease in political violence in Northern Ireland has not only changed the themes treated in films post-Ceasefire, but contributed to the transformation in the nature of the media and cultural sectors in Northern Ireland and the border areas of the Republic. The period under review has seen passing of the high point of the so-called Celtic Tiger economy (reckoned to be 2003) and positive spill-over effects for Northern Ireland of a stable economy in the United Kingdom under a Labour government.

Part of this material film culture is an infrastructure that exhibits and discusses the films, TV programmes and performances in a circuit film festivals and awards ceremonies from Cork to Clones and beyond; at film centres in Dublin, Derry and Belfast; in journals like *Film Ireland* and online reference sites like those hosted by Trinity College, Dublin and *Estudios Irlandases* based in Barcelona. Irish cinema has been subject to canonisation and critique at academic conferences organised by major universities who run degree programmes in film that all feature Irish cinema modules and, gradually, the number of doctorates on Irish film from its universities is notable. Quick to latch on to trends, both popular and academic publishing has produced several book series and individual titles the market for which was not apparent in the mid-1990s.

If the artistic impetus of *The Butcher Boy* was a debunking of national myths, films since then present an uneven range of topics and approaches, determined by the funding, technological and critical contexts just summarised. British director Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006) was a notable film that explored the Irish war of independence and civil war period (1919-23). It achieved significant box-office combining digital and conventional print release, was a critical success in Cannes and sold well in non-Anglophone European Union countries. In the period of the Peace Process, contentious contemporary history has featured in two contrasting films about the killing of thirteen civilians at a peace march in Derry by British soldiers in 1972 known as "Bloody Sunday" (Paul Greengrass' *Bloody Sunday* and Jimmy McGovern's TV film *Sunday*, both 2002) and more recently McQueen's *Hunger* (2008) has reawakened interest in the prison Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s. So while these historical and political topics stand out, they do because much of the rest of the material to view has tended to be less confrontational in its topics and techniques, seeking a popular audience market, a good example of this being Paddy Breathnach's teen horror *Shroons* (2007) which unashamedly delivers a "genre" film. Veteran director John Boorman's *The Tiger's Tale* (2006) is an example of a film that overtly comments on the post-Tiger zeitgeist but ends up a laboured, unsatisfying film. Indeed other gentler, less overtly "political' films can be seen to be teasing out and exploring other social and cultural phenomenon more effectively. These include such topics as Ireland's experience

of net immigration but also the malignant legacy of emigration from a previous generation as in the darkly tragic *Kings*, set in London (2007). Comic and upbeat treatments of new social interactions within Ireland include the short *My Name is Yu Ming* (2003) and the Oscar-winning musical film, *Once* (2006) which told the bitter-sweet romance between a Dublin busker and a Czech migrant. Ireland's increased wealth, materialism and social division, and the changing nature of sexual politics of a "post-Catholic Ireland" remain firmly in the frame of filmmakers' concerns. Gerry Stembridge's *About Adam* (2001) and Liz Gill's feature *Goldfish Memory* (2004) were notable examples that explored non-angst ridden narratives about fluid sexualities, drawing on European precedents, in a markedly middle-class milieu photographed with a lush visual quality. In a similar vein, Lenny Abrahamson, has emerged as a director of great talent, often working with script writer cum actor Mark O'Halloran to produce two very distinctive films: *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007). The focus of his films is on the marginalised, the loner or alienated figure in Irish society. Whilst their debut feature featured two heroine addicts in Dublin and the follow up movie is set in a small-town locale, this is less a social realism than an acutely observed, sparely scripted and stylised visualisation of contemporary Ireland which draws on a slowly paced, Europe aesthetic. Martin MacDonagh's latest film (following on from his highly acclaimed short, *Six Shooter* (2005) is set in European and can be read simply as a variation on a gangster/caper-movie. However, the dark humour, violence and the underlying themes of guilt/ redemption are wonderfully played by Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell. Whilst theatrical modes, British TV and the experience of performance in the United States, funded big pictures and continue to feature in the definition of Irish film, Europe and European markets, European Union  funding and a European cinema aesthetic have all increasingly featured in the past decade's most significant films.

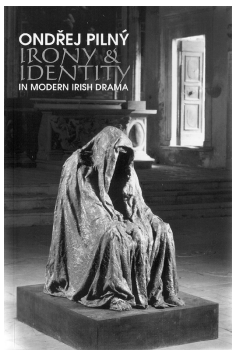
Useful online sources

http://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/indexnavy.htm
http://www.tcd.ie/irishfilm/

Adam Paul Film. *Still.*


Colm Meany. *Kings.*

**Ondřej Pilný. *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama.* Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006. pp. 186.**




Mária Kurdi

This intelligently, lucidly written volume offers analyses of some major writers and works in modern Irish drama from a particular angle and the perspective of a scholar living in another small European country, the Czech Republic, which ensures a unique position for the author. Pilný's focus is the interaction between the representations of collective and personal identity, a never-fading theme of drama in Ireland until our time, and the operations of the mode of irony, which is considered here in terms of its Romantic concept "as a philosophical and aesthetic stance that serves to comment on the apparent incongruities and paradoxes of the world" (3). Both identity and irony are complex enough territories to complicate the focus, challenging the author with their subtleties and transformations across time, geographical as well as socio-cultural spaces. Not many books undertake spanning over the three stages of the evolution of Irish drama in the last one hundred and ten years, therefore doing so, which happens in this volume, is definitely to the credit of Pilný's venture. Together with that, the book, however, purports to be neither a history of modern Irish theatre (in spite of its historical references) nor a survey of the most outstanding playwrights; rather, it maps important phases and influential directions in this narrative through selected examples.

Structurally, the book is divided into three parts, the subtitles of which mark out the above phases and directions with an eye for continuity, clarity as well as nuance. Under the heading "Visions" we find a chapter discussing Yeats's and Synge's ideas about and practices of writing a new kind of drama for decolonising Ireland. "Rejections" as the second subtitle introduces the part on plays whose lack of acceptance was connected with what can be estimated as unwelcome changes in the history of Ireland's national theatre. Finally, the part called "Revisions" visits the contemporary scene centering on the activities of Field Day and a couple of playwrights to interrogate recent dramatic depictions of Irishness and, importantly, also of conventional notions about it. In the following my aim is to highlight some of Pilný's insights, contentious as they may prove to be at times, to give the prospective reader a taste of the particular offerings and values of *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama*.

In the first part, Pilný is right to find the precarious relation between realism and the authentic portrayal of Irishness which the founders of the modern Irish theatre implicitly promised, a crucial issue of the Revival period. Discussing Yeats, he points to the paradox of the poet-playwright's didactic purposes with the foundation of the modern Irish theatre while he tended to write plays decidedly unpopular because of their lack of

"mimetic accuracy" (23) in favour of poetic visions and an intricate symbolism. In the relatively long subchapter on Synge, Pilný underscores the multiplicity of ironies, often double edged, in the plays, thoroughly complicating the issue of identity. By way of an example, the blind couple in *The Well of the Saints* can be perceived, he says, as "mock-heroic, for the farcical and grotesque elements are ubiquitous in the play and prevent a straightforward reading of Mary and Martin as Romantic, unconforming selves" (57). The same nuanced approach could have been applied to the remarks on Nora in *The Shadow of the Glen*, whose departure for good with the "romanticized tramp" is described as a "path for liberation" (49), although her acceptance of this situation seems to be just another form of dependence on patriarchy, persuasively disguised by patronizing gestures. Closing the discussion of Synge, Pilný attributes "an ironic counterrevolutionary impulse" (66) to the writer, which sounds exaggerated or even politicized, therefore limiting in view of the complexities and visionary nature of Synge's work.

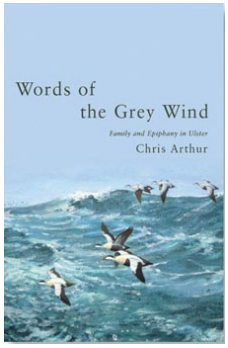
"Rejections," the middle part of the book hinges on the analysis of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* and Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says "No"!*, plays which the Abbey Theatre, represented by Yeats and Lady Gregory, did not accept for its programme in the 1920s. Admittedly, both were counterdiscursive and inclined to dismantle "the prevailing narratives of nationhood" in the author's opinion, by deploying irony and adopting a set of "pioneering avant-garde techniques" (71). Their downright rejection, Pilný concludes the chapter, marked the end of the early, experimentalist era of the Abbey and testified to its increasing conservativism, which endured for decades. This, however, simplifies the picture a bit, disregarding the greater variety of factors that had a role in changing theatre practices at that time. One also feels tempted to reconsider the actual dramaturgical merits of the two plays among the factors.

In the part called "Revisions" Pilný's arguments, again, have a more carefully provided grounding. Similarly to his interrogation of what became of the original aims of the Abbey, here the author follows the route of the Field Day enterprise in relation to its initially declared attempt to go against hegemonic metanarratives of both identity and representation. As revisionary playwrights, Pilný looks at the work of Friel, Parker and McDonagh, which is a strange combination at first sight. Nevertheless, the link between them, found in their persistent use of irony, offers the reader further insights. Friel's plays, Pilný opines, "do not allow for any metanarrative to arise. Ambiguities frequently abound, while mythical and counter-mythical moments tend to stand in more or less equal balance. … when it appears that a metanarrative may be emerging from beyond the text, textual or dramatic irony eventually qualifies it" (119). Which, at the same time, underscores that Friel's art has surpassed the practices of the theatrical project he acted as one of the founders of. Next, the comments on Parker's work, among others, suggest parallels between his woman-as-Ireland figure in *Northern Star* with that in Johnston's *The Old Lady Says "No"!*, which would have deserved more elaboration perhaps at the expense of the not really productive consideration of another Parker play, *Heavenly Bodies*. Regarding McDonagh, Pilný's addition to the already well established

view that the playwright's work caricatures myths is notable: McDonagh, for him, is a satirist in a more subtle sense as well, because "his plays in fact ironise the very notion of Irish dramatic realism" (166). This appears to be a welcome claim for the writer to be considered as a postmodernist, although Pilnó's book itself remains laudably frugal with the assignment of labels and categories.

All in all, Pilný manages to demonstrate how the metanarrative of the Irish Dramatic Movement became deconstructed by its best representatives and later inheritors through their ironical treatment of essentializing notions of identity and subversion of nationalist or postnationalist audience expectations. What some readers may justifiably miss here is not the good number of names and works left out or just barely mentioned, but the fact that the three main chapters are not followed by a summary or conclusion, which were to assess and interpret the author's insights and observations on a more general level. Nevertheless, *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* recommends itself as a thoughtfully argued and, at certain points, benignly provocative contribution to the field, beneficial to study, to agree or disagree with. It claims a recognized place in the scholarly library of those interested in fresh, comprehensive approaches to the protean ways of representation which make modern Irish drama so varied and challenging across more than a century. While undoubtedly an individual achievement, Ondřej Pilný's recent book is also a hallmark of the development of Irish Studies at Charles University, Prague, which has become a known and respected centre of the field outside Ireland, demonstrated to the wider public by the expanding publication activities of Litteraria Pragensia.

**Arthur, Chris. *Words of the Grey Wind – Family and Epiphany in Ulster.* Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2009. pp. 253. ISBN 978-0-85640-843-4**




Luci Collin Lavalle

Fundamental and moot literary issues always come to our minds when one approaches the topic "a book of essays". Despite all the tradition of extraordinary essayists – from Montaigne to Adorno, from Bacon to Borges and Camus, from Baudelaire to Cotzee, from Shelley to Yourcenar, from Emerson to Epstein, from Shaw to Sontag – the status of the essay form is still perpetually questioned and, alas, essays, or "creative non-fiction", are often taken as a minor literary expression. The hierarchy of literary genres – poetry, drama, and fiction – and the position of the essay among these genres will always be an endless debate; for the moment being, this debate would evade the focus of this review: to comment on the special qualities of the recently released *Words of the Grey Wind – Family and Epiphany in Ulster* by the Irish writer Chris Arthur (Belfast, 1955), a book of essays.

Printed in Belfast by Blackstaff Press, with the assistance of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, this anthology somehow (re)introduces an Irish writer to the Irish reading public. The first four essay books written by Arthur were published in the USA, thus being the author not so much known in his own country. The fact that Arthur has been living outside Ireland, first in Scotland and, next, in Wales (he has been teaching at Lampeter since 1989), may have also contributed to this "invisibility" in Ireland. But, if one considers that – and here let's think of reknown writers as James Joyce and Gertrude Stein – the exile is one of the most effective ways an artist may have to exert a critical view on his/her own culture, his/her own production. Arthur's case is not unusual, and would not justify a lack of interest for his work in Ireland. Hopefully the release of this new book may lead critics and readers to the discovery of Arthur's exceptional talent as essayist.

With an insightful *Foreword* by John Wilson Foster, *Words of the Grey Wind* is a collection of thirteen essays chronologically disposed according to the dates of their publication: "Kingfishers", "Ferrule", "Meditation on the Pelvis of an Unknown animal", and "Linen" belong to the book *Irish Nocturnes* (United States: The Davies Group, 1999); "A Tinchel Round my Father", "Table Manners" and "Train Sounds" are from *Irish Willow* (United States: The Davies Group, 2002); "Witness", "Miracles" and "Swan Song" are from *Irish Haiku* (United States: The Davies Group, 2005); the other three essays of the anthology, "Mistletoe", "Room, Empty" and "Waxwings" are new. Differently from the collections of essays that Arthur has published before, which had drawings illustrating the texts, this one brings some photographs of his family members adding a nostalgic flavour to the volume.

Chris Arthur is a consummate philosopher and an erudite who draws freely from religion, philosophy, biology, physics, astronomy, chemistry and history, and his literature profits very much from his solid background. His mastering regarding the literary complexities of the essay form surfaces in his intelligent and perceptive use of sources that are, at the same time, varied and deep; Arthur knows how to balance depth and fluidity in the text, and this makes *the* quality in essays. In his *Words*, he explores many inspiring themes, such as family and blood-obligation, heritage and the sense of belonging, tradition and memory, the precariousness and mystery of existence, Christianity and religiousness; it is worth noting that in the whole book a tone imparted by the Buddhist thought seems to prevail and it reverberates in motifs such as the interdependence of all beings, that evocation of the sense of wonder at the universe, and the reverence for nature. Reinforcing the idea presented in the subtitle, right in the epigraph for the book one reads that intuition and epiphanies, as "assaults of the Ineffable", are central to the collection and happen to guide us into the apprehension of the "true nature" of things around us.

A heedful consideration and then a reconciling of binaries mark Arthur's essays: the text departs from the immediate to reach the immense and universal, encompassing the commonplace and the miraculous, the physical and the spiritual, the accidental and the destined. In Arthur's book everything is interconnected and ruled by a profound awareness of change and of the impermanence of life. The themes and the stages of argument in the essays create a metaphysical net, and appear as the combination of the voices in a fugue. The first essay in the collection, "Kingfishers", for instance, starts with the observation of the bird which appears in the title:

> To anyone with an eye for birds, kingfishers are memorable. Not only because the brightness of their colours sets them apart from all other native species (the green woodpecker is their only serious rival), but also because, at least in an Irish setting, sightings are uncommon. Indeed even those with no ornithological leanings may find the kingfisher an exception to their normal indifference towards birds. (5)

Next, the essay moves to a visit to an Asylum in Armagh, and then to the specific recount of Auntie Carrie's life at the Asylum; it also discusses, in the sequence, the question of causation and impredictability, a bomb explosion in Lisburn (a town close to Belfast) and even other topics. Like a coda, brilliantly amalgamating all the apparently disparate subject matters, the text surprises us with the return to kingfishers and, almost by its end, the essay presents the "impossible question":

> ... is our life punctuated by a flash of kingfisher colour as something transcendent impinges on us, or are we imprisoned in the world we see, earthbound and clumsy,

> shackled immovably to the chains of our finitude? Is there, behind the stink of fish in a dark hole in the earth, some hope of bright colour beyond it? (23)

In "Meditation on the pelvis of an unknown animal" the reader's trajectory is wide and varied for he/she is taken from the initial discussion about owl pellets to ruminations on fossils and bones, following Georgia O'Keefe's pelvis paintings, the story of Sirima, a wealthy prostitute in India at the time of the Buddha, and then to reflections on karma and rebirth. All that leads to exquisite statements:

> It's rare now for most of us to encounter the epiphany of bones. Cities shield from the sight of their citizens nearly all of the elemental organic processes – birth, illness, death, decay. Despite television's endless fare of disaster and violence, our finitude has been so hushed up, so cosmeticised, that it can sometimes almost be forgotten. Which – beyond its immediate aesthetic appeal – is why I keep the pelvis of a large unknown animal in my living space, an un-ignorabe *memento mori*, and why I hang Georgia O'Keefe's paintings on my walls. They help remind me of that sometimes savage sense of the numinous which pervades so much of life's substance and, as such, provide useful touchstones against which to assess religious ideas. Bones are an excellent acid test for the adequacy of any world-view. They provide an earthing ballast which prevents thought from soaring off into those far reaches of the intellectual stratosphere beloved by theologians, where the oxygen of intelligibility becomes perilously thin. (41-42)

Taking memories, unique incidents or particular objects to start his essays, Arthur proceeds in his poetic desquamating process; throughout the book this process, often transmuting the mundane into the sacred, is also reinforced by the use of a keen analytical thought and of a very poetical language, thus transforming seemingly common things – from a ferrule to a cup of tea – into experiences charged with symbolism and philosophical contents. In "Miracles", one of the best essays of the collection, the observance of an otolith gives rise to a precious remark on the act of writing:

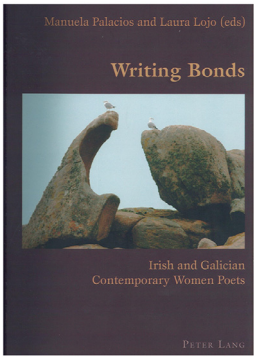
> It the act of holding it and writing this, I feel as if I'm trying to act as some kind of lightning conductor, providing a conduit so that the charge of meaning carried mutely in the otolith (let's continue to call it that for now) can find safe passage and be earthed through words. The trail of sentences, written first in black ink (before their electronic marshalling into print), is like a slow unpacking of its cargo, an attempt to bleed out significance and sense from the tiny incisions that are all we can puncture in the tough armour of the baffling phenomena around us. It is, I know, just a scratching at the surface, a peeling off of only the thinnest, most obvious layer, a thin trickle from a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir. With something as densely concentrated as this, I could write for all my life, trail out skeins of words, and still not discharge more than a fraction of the otoliths's dark, compact voltage. It is this laden plenitude, the potency of meaning so

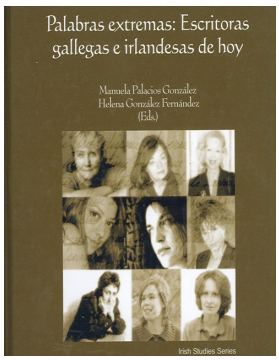
> tightly compressed within it, which gives this object so much of its allure. (163)

With his unique acuteness, and as a child who saw the onset of the Troubles, in "Witness" Arthur approaches the cruelty and impact of the "religious warfare" and also the extinction of morality; in the essay "Swan Song", with a very frank tone, he ponders on his stillborn son and about grief and human loss; in "Room, Empty" he analyses our sense of presence and, principally, our understanding of "voidness"; this text stirs our attentiveness not to confuse metaphysical and mundane senses of emptiness or, as the essay reads:

> I would argue that the metaphysical is so tightly embedded in what we take to be the mundane, that the philosophical is so close-threaded all through the everyday, that it is impossible to separate them. Unless we address the intimacy of such interconnection, we risk marooning our reflections in realms of artificial abstraction that are irrelevant to the hard realities our lives must negotiate. (210)

*Words of the Grey Wind* spots the importance of paying attention to the minutiae, the careful observation of all things and events – shapes, forms, faces, birds, ideas, pictures. In this book, Arthur puts into practice the Buddhist principle of the dense interconnection of all beings: if the essays depart from minimal details and often display Irish scenes, the reader is led to investigations of a transcendental magnitude through which the locality proves to be universal. Exploring contrasting thoughts and experiences, and finally reading them as unities in the circular frame, the essays convey the idea of the intermingling of everything. The publication of Arthur's new collection of essays in Ireland is to be very much praised – through a superb poetical use of the English language, very important messages are being delivered in this book. Now many more readers will be closer to the discovery of one of Ireland's best essayists of our present times.




**Manuela Palacios et Laura Lojo (editors) *Writing Bonds: Irish and Galician Contemporary Women Poets*. Bern Germany: Peter Lang AG, 2009.**

**Manuela Palacios González and Helena González Fernandez (editors). *Palabras extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy*. Spain: Netbiblo, 2008.**

Gisele G. Wolkoff

As part of the Galician project on Irish and local contemporary women poets, these publications concentrate on the importance of the debates surrounding contemporary women poets in both geographies (Ireland and Galicia) and how the intersection of such voices of critics and authors is relevant to the understanding of both countries. Throughout the abundance of poetic and critical references that are mentioned and commented along *Writing Bonds*, there is always the reminder left for the reader that some of the issues that bound Ireland and Galicia are those that are still to be reread, such as: nationalism, religion, land, nature and gender. The latter is particularly developed in the reflections of Manuela Palacios' chapter "The Course of Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Contemporary Irish and Galician Women Poets", followed by María Xesús Nogueira's "Dolls, Princesses and Cinderellas: New Feminine Representations in Contemporary Galician Women's Poetry" and Laura Lojo's "The Poetics of Motherhood in Contemporary Irish Women's Verse".

The book is divided in two parts that are meant to be critical as regards to gender, poetry, contemporaneity and, also, voice empowering. The second part entitled "Writing and Unwriting: Poets at Work" brings three of the most renowed authors in the above mentioned geographies today: Carmen Blanco, Mary O'Donnell and Luz Pichel talking about writing and belonging, as well as interviews with Anne Le Marquand Hartigan and Luz Pozo-Garza, by Laura Lojo and María Xesús Nogueira, in this order.

The first part of the book is a collection of five chapters that delve into the matter of women poets of the twentieth century in Galicia and Ireland focusing the topics of nature, nation, womanhood and belonging. The marked transcultural width critics and poets is accompanied by the reminder that the whole discourse on women's literature makes us "run the risk of homogenizing what is plural aesthetically and ideologically." (23-24). Taking as ideal the diverse example of authors that compose the book, with their distinguished visions on the dialogue between Galicia and Ireland, readers do not run that risk. Moreover, the volume provides us with notable remarks on

the relevance of Poetry, both by means of the critics and by the authors that speak mainly throughout the second part of the book.

Among important contributions from the poets, the first part opens with Medbh McGuckian, "Longer and Longer Sentences Prove Me Wholly Female: Medbh McGuckian and Feminism(s)". Manuel Fernández-Rodríguez presents Olga Novo's works and validates her poetic discourse as a space of alienness. Those highly interested in learning the writers' own thoughts on poetics will definitely find the second part of the book deeply enticing. Maria Xesús Nogueira points out to the importance of women author's voices within the revitalization of the canon in the 1990s; Carmen Blanco declares love and freedom as the basis for women's happiness; Luz Pichel discloses her own ways with writing; Luz Pozo-Garza tells us of her influences – which for the Portuguese speaking public may sound very revealing. Anne Le Marquand Hartigan reinforces the word as the vehicle for personal and social empowerment.

In *Palabras extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy* by Manuela Palacios González and Helena González Fernández, six other researchers discuss contemporary destabilizing notions of the family and the role of women in the 1970's and 1980's, when they attained an intellectual and economic independence.Women writers represent the transformation of social women's positioning.

The editors' main aims are to make Irish and Galician contemporary poets' productions and the criticism of their works known to establish a link between creation and criticism and to reflect upon such link in relation to tradition. Certainly, these objectives converge into the priviledged space of discourse on national and gender identity.

Landscape is represented as a key factor in the rereading of the fragmentary depiction of women's subjectivities in both the Irish and Galician cases. In spite of this common aspect shared by the two instances, the editors admit the existence of a plurality of poetic voices that constitute the literary system as a whole and the general context of the poets'works. Nature dialogues with national identity, as much as with knowledge and power to denounce the postmodern condition of the female figure. This is evident in the first three chapters in which reflections upon the experience of the language and that of the nation are particularly highlighted by the Galician poets Xela Arias, Chus Pato, María do Cebreiro, and Emma Couceiro. In this sense, it is clear why the two geographies can be studied parallelly: both Galicia and Ireland exist within their philological possibilities (Spanish and Galician, English and Irish, respectively). Moreover, the feminine subjectivity is transcribed poetically in its capacity to transform language which could also change the world. The subversion that comes from the feminine writing can be seen in the deconstruction of identities, the multiplying positionings of enunciation, the breaking of linearity and the interruption of conventional readings.

The fourth chapter, "Corporeidad y lenguaje en la poesia irlandesa actual", recuperates the figures traditionally associated to women (that of the virgin, the mother,

and the whore) and points out to how traditionally the female body is taken as the metaphor of the colonized territory. One of the ways in which both Galician and Irish poets deal with the revisioning of the traditional role of women in society and in writing is with the use of myth – Eva Bourke, Anne Le Marquand Hartigan and Katie Donovan in the Irish case, and Chus Pato and Maria do Cebreiro, in the Galician context. A dialogic link with the past is established through figures such as Mnemosine, Penelope, Helen, Casandra.

The second part of the book, entitled "Con voz propia: Ensayos y entrevistas", is dedicated to essays and interviews by Maria do Cebreiro (chapter 7), Anne Le Marquand Hartigan (chapter 8), María Xesús Nogueira Pereira (chapter 9) and Luz Mar González Arias, interviewing Mary O'Donnell and Celia de Fréine (chapter 10).

*Writing Bonds* and *Palabras extremas* have proved to be of great excellence for anyone adventuring in Comparative Studies, or simply in the journey of fruition.

## Work Cited

Hartigan, Anne Le Marquand. *Immortal Sins*. Salmon Poetry, 1993. Dublin, Ireland.


**Ciaran Carson. *The Pen Friend*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2009.**

Viviane Carvalho da Annunciação

Walter Benjamin, in his *Arcades Project* states "the collector dreams his way not only into a distant and bygone world, but also into a better one – one […] in which […] human beings are no better provided with what they need… but in which things are free from the drudgery of being useful"(8).This is the principle in which the unflinching exploitation of the private memories of Belfast in the eighties, *The Pen Friend*, is grounded on. Following back on the notion that postcards, perfumes, fashion, sensations are able to unravel obscured layers of memory and history, the well-acclaimed Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson inserts his hometown in the chaotic and disgruntling experience of modernity. Nevertheless, in an age when the artistic artifact has lost its aura and the writer is no longer seen as a special being, the readers who are involved with the correspondence between Gabriel and Miranda are going to stop and reflect upon the function of the small niceties of contemporary existence.

At the outset of the novel, like a collector obsessed with the particularities of the objects he accumulates, the author gives the tone of his narrative: If on the one hand the sentence *It's been a long time* is the content of the first of the thirteen postcards Miranda sends Gabriel, on the other hand it is also the main preoccupation of the narrative: what is the past? How can you return to it? How can you fill in the intervals of existence with meaningful spaces? The narrator, disguised as *the Angel*, provides details of his private and public background in order to answer those questions: his retirement from the Municipal gallery after his father's premature death; his fondness for Nina's handwriting; his vintage clothes and details of their first encounter. Making a clear allusion to *Du côté de chez Swann*, the first tome of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913) by Marcel Proust, the narrator places the encounter in a café in Fountain Street where Nina is dunking a biscuit into tea, in the very same way Marcel dipped his Madeleine into hot tea. By doing that, the character in question reveals a trait of her personality.

Through their first conversation another striking stylistic feature of the novel is presented: the use of free indirect speech. According to Roy Pascal (1977), it is an aesthetic device which has the function not only of expressing the characters' subjective experience, but also of communicating this very same experience to the readers. With a view to depict a reliable portrait of Gabriel and Miranda's relationship, the author uses free indirect speech as the fictional manipulation of a *dual voice* that provides the immediacy of a character's inwardness without abdicating the narrator's overview.

Another factor which contributes to the *dual voice* is the dialogue between postcards and pens: while the reader is aware of Miranda's voice through her postcards, he or she becomes acquainted with "the Angel" through his responses to those cards. Interestingly enough, Carson places in the middle of the narrative – chapter six, or postcard number six – the canvas *Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid* by Jan Vermeer. The portrait located in the National Gallery in Dublin was stolen by I.R.A. in the seventies. In this sense, the Vermeer reproduced by Carson is a metaphor for the novel as a whole: at the same time it represents and recollects the lover's story it also pays heed to Belfast's history and its inhabitants through a human condition, which is loneliness and impotence in face of the propelling march of history. Furthermore, it also subtletly inserts the private world of labour in the portrayal of the maid who is mysteriously glancing at the window, while her mistress is anxiously writing a response probably to the letters scattered on the floor.

Along those lines, it should be also understood that the pet name chosen by Miranda to refer to Gabriel is also a reference to Walter Benjamin's Angel of History. In one of his most famous texts, "On the Concept of History", he compares history with Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, in which the artist portrays an animal-like deity who is ready to take flight but is prevented from doing so because of his solidarity: its face is turned towards the past and it wishes to go back to it and undo the wrong deeds, however the fugacity of the present blows it to a frightening and uncertain future. In a mysterious intertwining of facts, history and fiction, the book also serves the purpose of recollecting emblems of high art and beauty which have constantly been disregarded due to the extreme importance given to mass culture. In chapter five for instance, named, "Eine Kleine Nachtmusic" as a reference to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composition, Gabriel is reminded of Nina's preparation for her mother's wake after she committed suicide. Mentioned twice in chapter ten, the French poet Charles Baudelaire reminds the author of his voyeurist *flanerie* around the hotels and pubs. Nonetheless, the chapter that was supposed to be dedicated to beauty and pleasure, twists into pain and suffering when the couple bump into their old friend Hugie Falls, with whom Gabriel attended the civil Marches in the sixties. As the narrator observes, that was a turning point in their relationship; however, more than that, it is also a defining moment in the narrative as well, for the reader starts to perceive that the characters are interesting metaphors for the actual state of affairs in Belfast. At this moment, through the argument started by Hugie, Dublin is not only compared to Belfast, but also incites a courageous debate between art and politics which culminates into the very essence of art: an act of civilization and barbarism. While the couple is talking, Miranda states: "You see, Gabriel, you really are rather naïve. You really do think that art exists in superior realm, untouched by politics, without the intervention of the Powers That Be. But I'm different, I know what I've got into, and I go along with it." (p. 183).

The discussion about art, politics and commitment comes to the surface again and acquires a new light, for it is not the author that is explicitly discussing those

matters, but the characters who have had their lives and destinies deeply altered by the city where they sojourn – Belfast, Paris and Dublin – and by art, since he works with painting and she with fashion. Consequently, the characters, more than representing a naïve love story, are remarkable portrayals of a post-troubles Belfast obsessed with art and politics. Fundamentally, the image of a love affair which did not quite work due to the personality incompatibilities represents the present melancholy of a contemporary city which struggles to find its identity after a long overdue peace process. If on the one hand Belfast is presently absorbed by culture, refinement and commerce, on the other hand the vulture of the bombs of the past still haunts its dark corners and narrow alleyways.

Either touching on delicate points of Irish history, or portraying a love story, *The Pen Friend* manages to remain new, not due to its political references or its mentioning of facts and art, but to the collector's tone that invigorates the strength of the narrative with a utopian ideal of reunification. It is as if every postcard wished to unify the lovers, cities, experiences, and surprisingly, languages. In chapter ten, Gabriel describes Nina's articulate use of French, which he admired and envied in his lover:

> And, half-jockingly, I'd purpose that the whole world should indeed have learned Esperanto, for then we would not need to learn languages of different nations in order to communicate with them. But that's precisely the point, you'd say, the point is the difference Vive la difference, as they say. (167-168).

This passage is a perfect example of the desire of unification of both lovers. However, the ironic tone of the expression *Vive la difference* changes the narrative thoroughly and their emotions drift apart. At an ultimate level, the longing for union is part of the Irish history, for Ireland is characteristically known for its division between South and North, republicans and loyalists and, more specifically in Belfast, the Falls and Shankill. The book recollects the memories of the city throughout the eighties.

In short, *The Pen Friend* remains highly committed to literature and to the nuances of language meaning. Carson's book will bring a lot of pleasure for the ones who are enthusiastic about paintings and music but, unsurprisingly, it will still remain as an emblem of pain and sorrow for neither Nina and Gabriel are unified, nor the Angel of History is able to go back and save what has been miscarried.

## Works Cited


Adorno, Theodor. "Commitment". In. *http://grace.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/frankfurt/commitment/commitment.pdf*. Consulted 08 of January 2010, at 1 pm.

Benjamin, Walter. "Exposeé 1935". *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard, Eiland and McLaughlin, Kevin. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London and England, 1998.

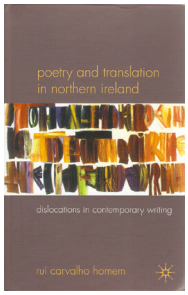
____. “On the Concept of History”. In. *http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm*. Consulted on 06 January, 2010, at 6:30 pm.

Carson, Ciaran. *The Pen Friend*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2009.

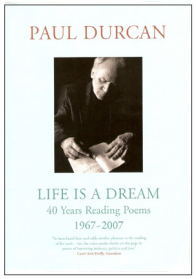
Pascal, Roy. *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1977.

# *Books Received*

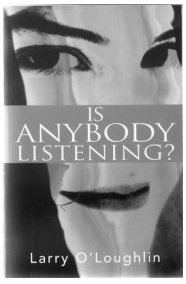

Carvalho. Paulo Eduardo. *Identidades Reescritas. Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2009.



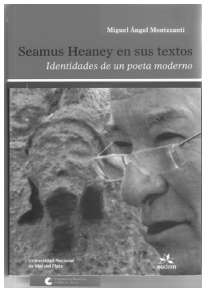

Homem. Rui Carvalho. *Poetry and Translation in Northern Ireland*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.




Durcan, Paul. *Life is a dream. 40 Years Reading Poems 1967-2007.* London: Harvill Secker, 2009.




O'Loughlin, Larry. *Is Anybody Listening?* Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1999.




Montezanti, Miguel Ángel. *Seamus Heaney en sus textos. Identidades de un poeta moderno.* Mar del Plata, Argentina: EUDEM, 2009.

# *Contributors*

**ADAMOLI**, **Graciela María** is a lecturer at the Universidad Nacional de La Pampa (UNLPam), Argentine. She has got a Master degree in Anglo-American Literature. Presently, she co-directs the project "Irlandeses en Argentina: Recuperación de fuentes literarias, traducción y crítica". She has participated in numerous national and international Conferences and has published widely. She has co-edited two books on literature *Estudios literarios sobre la cultura chicana* and *Towards an ever Expanding Canon*.

**ANNUNCIAÇÃO, Viviane Carvalho da** holds an MA in Irish poetry from the University of Sao Paulo, with the dissertation entitled "Seamus Heaney: The Polyphonic Poetry of Exile". At the moment, she is a doctorate student at USP and Secretary of The Brazilian Association of Irish Studies. Under the co-supervision agreement granted by the funding agency CAPES-USP, she is developing her doctoral research at The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University Belfast. She has published reviews and articles on Northern Irish Poetry and literary criticism at the ABEI Journal and the Irish Migration Studies in Latin America.

**BALLIN, Malcolm** is a Research Associate at Cardiff University. He was educated at Newport High School and Selwyn College, Cambridge. After taking his first degree in English in 1957 he began a career in the British steel industry. Following retirement in 1996 as Director Human Resources for British Steel plc, he returned to academic life, taking an MA in English at Cardiff in 1997 and proceeding to a PhD in 2002. He has since specialised in periodical literature, with a particular emphasis on Irish, Welsh and Scottish magazines. His book, *Irish Periodical Culture: 1937-1972*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2008. He is currently working on a new book for University of Wales Press about periodicals and the public sphere in Wales.

**BOSI, Viviana** lectures at the Department of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the University of São Paulo. She has published *John Ashbery, um módulo para o vento*, and has organized Ana Cristina Cesar's unpublished poetic texts, *Antigos e Soltos*. She has also co-edited two books on poetry and fiction, and has published widely on contemporary Brazilian poets such as Francisco Alvim, Armando Freitas Filho, José Paulo Paes, Sebastião Uchoa Leite and Ana Cristina Cesar.

**ELIGGI, María Graciela** graduated as Teacher of English and Public Translator from the National Univeristy of La Plata, (1977, 1981). She later carried out post-graduate studies at the National University of Río Cuarto where she graduated as Magister in Anglo-American Literature (2008). She lectures at the National University of La Pampa, Argentina, and she is the Director of the UNLPam Translation Service. She has been carrying out research in the fields of translation and literature since 1994, the results of

which have been presented at national and international conferences and have been published in specialized journals. At present, she is the director of a research project about the Irish in Argentina called " Irlandeses en Argentina: recuperación de fuentes literaries, traducción y crítica."

**GAMERRO, Carlos** Argentine author and translator, has taught seminars on Joyce and Borges at the Buenos Aires Latin American Art Institute. He has taught Literature at Buenos Aires University (UBA), and teaches at present at the Universidad de San Andrés and at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA). His publications include the novels *Las Islas* (Simurg, 1998; Norma, 2007), *El sueño del señor juez* (Sudamericana, 2000; Página 12, 2005; 27 letras, 2008), *El secreto y las voces* (Norma, 2002), *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (Norma, 2004; Belacqua, 2006), the book of short stories *El libro de los afectos raros* (Norma, 2005) and the books of essays *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina* (Norma, 2006) and *Ulises*. *Claves de lectura* (Norma, 2008). He is at present working on a translation/adaptation of Hamlet for the stage.

**GUNN, Linda** is a researcher at the Scottish Centre for the Book, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, Scotland. She has worked on the project Scottish Literary Magazines and Devolution 1979-1999 and currently works on the "Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland" (after a UNESCO 2003 Convention). Her PhD from Edinburgh University examined the relationship between representations of Scottish identity, and political confidence towards the 1997 referendum. Interests and teaching: Scottish politics and culture, focusing on the arts (particularly writers and theatre); Scottish working-class identity; the transition from "Page to Stage" in theatre.

**HEADRICK, Charlotte** is a professor of Theatre Arts, coordinator of the University Theatre, and Assoc. Chair of the Department of Speech Communication at Oregon State University. She holds the Ph.D.in drama from the University of Georgia. She is the 1994 Elizabeth P. Ritchie Outstanding Professor for Undergraduate Teaching, the highest teaching award of Oregon State University and she received the 2003 Excellence Award from the College of Liberal Arts, the highest honor given by the College. She has directed the American Premieres of several Irish plays including *SigNora Joyce* by Gemma O'Connor, *Love and a Bottle* by Declan Hughes, *Treehouses* by Elizabeth Kuti, *Heritage* by Nicola McCartney, and *Lay Up Your Ends* by Charabanc Theatre Company. Additionally, she has directed *Eclipsed* by Patricia Burke Brogan, *Tea in a China Cup* by Christina Reid, and *Twinkletoes* by Jennifer Johnston. Her articles and reviews on Irish theatre have appeared in *Nua*, *Theatre Symposium*, *Northwest Theatre Review*, *Working Papers in Irish Studies*, *Irish Literary Supplement*, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, and *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*. Other essays have appeared in *Theatre Journal, Southern Theatre, Contemporary Theatre Review, Comparative Literature and Culture,* and *Hypermedia Joyce Studies.* She has presented numerous papers on Irish Theatre nationally and internationally, particularly on the work of Irish women dramatists. She is the recipient of the Kennedy Center Medallion for outstanding

service to the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival and of the Hovland Service Award for Oregon State. She was the first woman to chair the Northwest Region for the KC/ACTF. She has twice been a fellow at the Center for the Humanities at Oregon State University. She is the former -editor of the on-line journal *Siar* (Western Institute for Irish Studies). Along with Eileen Kearney, she is the co-editor of a volume of Irish plays by women (*Women of Ireland*) under consideration by Syracuse University Press. She is a member of Actors Equity Association, the professional union of actors and stage managers. In addition to Irish plays, she directs a wide variety of works.including, most recently, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado,* Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: Part I*, and Rickman and Viner's *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. In February of 2010, she will be directing Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband.*

**ITO, Noriko** is staff member at Tezukayama University since 1974 and currently Professor of English in the Faculty of Business Administration. Her field of interest is contemporary Irish writing, especially by Colm Tóibín, John McGahern, Emma Donoghue, Dermot Bolger, Deirdre Madden, Roddy Doyle and Colum McCann. She translated Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing* and Brian Moore's *The Doctor's Wife* into Japanese, and contributed to several Japanese books and magazines on Irish literary topics.

**LAVALLE, Luci Collin** teaches Literatures in English and Literary Translation at the Federal University of Paraná and, presently, is engaged in post-doctoral studies at the University of São Paulo. As a writer she has published eleven books (poetry and fiction) and has participated in many international anthologies (USA, Germany, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay). As a translator she has published *Re-habitar - Ensaios e poemas*, by Gary Snyder (Azougue, 2005), *Etnopoesia no Milênio*, by Jerome Rothenberg (Azougue, 2006), *Contos Irlandeses do Início do Século XX* (Travessa dos Editores, 2007) and *Congo Negro*, by Vachel Lindsey (Éblis, 2009).

**MITCHELL, Angus** first travelled to Brazil for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which inspired his interest in the environmental history of the Amazon. He worked in an advisory capacity on the development of the script for the Brazilian film Carlota Joaquina (1995) and during this time started resarch on Roger Casement's career in Brazil. As an independent scholar he edited two volumes of documents on Casement's official investigations of the north-west Amazon: The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement (1997) and Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents (2003) and a 'Life & Times' biography Casement (2003). In 2004 he completed his PhD at the University of Limerick on 'Roger Casement in Africa'. He has lectured in universities in the US and Europe and is currently completing a study of the postcolonial politics arising from Roger Casement's execution.

**MUTRAN, Munira** is Professor of Irish Literature in the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo. Her work has had great influence on Irish Studies in Brazil. She is author of Album de Retratos. George Moore, Oscar Wilde e William Butler Yeats (São Paulo: Humanitas/FAPESP, 2002), co-editor of

Kaleidoscopic Views of Ireland (São Paulo: Humanitas, 2003) and ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies since 1999 and editor of Uma Antologia do Conto Irlandês (São Paulo: Olavobrás/ABEI, 1996) and Sean O'Faolain's Letters to Brazil (São Paulo: Humanitas/CNPq, 2005) among other publications.

**O'SHEA, José Roberto** is Professor of English at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, in the South of Brazil, where he works with English and American Literature as well as Translation Studies. He has a BA from The University of Texas, an MA in Literature from The American University, in Washington, DC, and a PhD in English from The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. In 1997, he spent a year at the Shakespeare Institute, in Stratford-upon-Avon, as Honorary Research Fellow, working on his annotated, verse translation of *Cymbeline, King of Britain* into Brazilian Portuguese. In 2004, he was visiting researcher with the Drama Department of The University of Exeter, working on his translation of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Among his publications, and specifically in regard to his thirty published translations, there's critical theory (Harold Bloom), prose fiction (Flannery O'Connor, Christopher Isherwood, Richard Yates, Joseph Conrad, and James Joyce), poetry (W. H. Auden, and various North-American poets), and drama – the Shakespeare series: *Antônio e Cleópatra* (São Paulo: Mandarim, 1997), *Cimbeline, Rei da Britânia* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2002), *O Conto do Inverno* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2007), *Péricles, Príncipe de Tiro* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, in the press), and *O Primeiro In-quarto de Hamlet* (currently in revision).

**O'TOOLE, Fintan** is a writer, cultural critic and political commentator based in ublin. He has written for the Irish Times since 1988, including a weekly column, and as drama critic for the New York Daily News from 1997 to 2001. He has published widely. Among recent books, he is author of After The Ball (2003); White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America (2005), Ship Of Fools, How Stupidity And Corruption Sank The Celtic Tiger (2009), and co-author of Post Washington: Why America Can't Rule the World (2005, with Tony Kinsella), and The Irish Times Book of The 1916 Rising (2006, with Shane Hegarty).

**O'TOOLE, Tina** is a lecturer in English at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Widely published on Irish literature, women's writing and feminist activism, her work includes the full-length study *Documenting Irish Feminisms* (co-authored with Linda Connolly) (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005); as General Editor, *The Dictionary of Munster Women Writers* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005); and the essay collection, co-edited with Patricia Coughlan, *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*, which brings together a range of essays by international experts in the field of Irish and feminist literary criticism (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008). Her current projects include a monograph on *fin de siècle* Irish literature and a Special Issue of *Éire-Ireland*, co-edited with Piaras Mac Éinrí, on 'Irish Migrancies'.

**PETTITT, Lance** is Reader in Media and Popular Culture at Leeds Metropolitan University. He is the author of *Screening Ireland: Film and TV Representation* (MUP, 2000) and *Irish Media and Popular Culture* (forthcoming: Routledge, 2010).

**SCHULTZ, Matthew** teaches, researches, and coordinates the Graduate Writing Center at Saint Louis University. His recent publications include pieces on W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Oscar Wilde. This article is an expanded and updated version of a conference paper given at the 2008 American Conference for Irish Sudies in Davenport, Iowa.

**SILBERT, Roxana** is Artistic Director of Paines Plough Theatre Company since 2005 and Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Previously she was Literary Director of the Traverse Theatre in Scotland and Associate Director at Royal Court Theatre. She directs new plays. Producer of Play Pie Pint season at Oram Mor and Shunt Vaults, LATER at Trafalgar Studios and the award winning Ravenhill for Breakfast cycle at Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh Festival 2008.
[**Paines Plough** is one of Britain's leading theatre companies. The company has existed for thirty-two years with the sole purpose of commissioning and producing new plays nationally and internationally. Paines Plough has launched some of Britain's most important playwrights including Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Dennis Kelly.]

**TALLONE, Giovanna** is a graduate in Modern Languages from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, and holds a PhD in English Studies from the University of Florence. An EFL teacher, she is currently attached to the Department of English at Università Cattolica, Milan. She has presented papers at several IASIL conferences and has published articles and critical reviews on Brian Friel, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Clare Boylan, Lady Gregory, Mary Lavin, James Stephens, and Seamus Heaney. Her research interests include contemporary Irish drama, Irish women writers, and the remakes of Old Irish legends.

**VILLAR-ARGÁIZ, Pilar** lectures in the Department of English Philology at the University of Granada, Spain, where she obtained a European Doctorate in English Studies (Irish Literature). She is the author of the books *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet: An Outsider within an Outsider's Culture* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007) and *The Poetry of Eavan Boland: A Postcolonial Reading* (Academica Press, 2008). She has published extensively on contemporary Irish women's poetry, cinematic representations of Ireland, and the theoretical background and application of feminism and postcolonialism to the study of Irish literature. In addition, Villar-Argáiz has co-edited two books on English/American literature. Her research has been published in the best peer-reviewed journals of her field: *New Hibernia Review* (USA), *Irish University Review* (Ireland), *Nordic Irish Studies* (Denmark), *Internationalist Review of Irish Culture* (Italy), *An Sionnach: A Journal of Literature, Culture and the Arts* (USA), *Oxford Journal Contemporary Women's Writing* (Great Britain), *Irish Studies Review* (Great Britain), and *Estudios Irlandeses: Spanish Journal of Irish Studies* (Spain).

**WALKER, Tessa** was an Associate Director at the Soho Theatre from 2001 to 2003 and is currently Literary Director at Paines Plough. Credits include: *Black Crows* by Linda Brogan (Clean Break Theatre), *Orange* by Alan Harris (Script Cymru), *Fish and Co.* by Samuel

Adamson (NYT at Soho Theatre), *Matches for Monkeys* by Sean Buckley (The Chelsea Theatre), *Debris* by Dennis Kelly (The Latchmere, BAC Critics' Choice Season, The Traverse Edinburgh and Staatstheater Biennale, Germany), *Blackout* by Dennis Kelly (The Welsh College of Music and Drama and The Soho Theatre), *The Watched* by Christopher William Hill (Tour), *The Supposed Person* by Francesca Bartellini (Le Petit Herbertot, Paris) and *Hysteric Studs* by Charlotte Mann (BAC and Theater Lab, Houston). For the National Theatre Studio: *Heartbroken Mary Loses Struggle with the Serpent of Time* by Marcello Bertuccio, *A Rock and a Hard Place* by Russell Tovey and *Killing Brando* by Alexis Zegerman.

**WOLKOFF**, **Gisele Giandoni**. Her PhD thesis was on Eavan Boland's poetry at University of São Paulo. At present she develops her postdoctoral research at Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra, supported by "Fundação Para Ciência e Tecnologia do Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior de Portugal".

LIVRARIA HUMANITAS/DISCURSO
Av. Prof. Luciano Gualberto, 315
Cidade Universitária
05508-010 – São Paulo – SP – Brasil
Tel: (11) 3091-3728 / Telefax: (11) 3091-3796
e-mail: livrariahumanitas@usp.br

HUMANITAS – DISTRIBUIÇÃO
Rua do Lago, 717 – Cid. Universitária
05508-900 – São Paulo – SP – Brasil
Telefax: 3091-4589
e-mail: pubfflch@edu.usp. br
http://www.fflch.usp.br/humanitas

Ficha Técnica

*Mancha* 14 x 24 cm
*Formato* 21 x 28 cm
*Tipologia* Times New Roman 11,5/15
*Papel* miolo: off-set 75g/m²
capa: supremo 250 g/m²
*Impressão do miolo e acabamento* GRÁFICA FFLCH
*Número de páginas* 244
*Tiragem* 200 exemplares