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# **ABEI Journal**

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# Introduction

This issue of *ABEI Journal* is a reflection and a record of some of the highlights of the *First Symposium of Irish Studies in South America*, which took place at the University of São Paulo in September 2006. The aim of this international encounter was to gather professors, lecturers, postgraduate students and other specialists from both sides of the Atlantic in order to discuss contemporary production and tendencies in Irish Studies.

The Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI), organised the three-day meeting with the support of the University of São Paulo, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Ireland in Brasília. The Symposium itself was opened by the Irish Ambassador to Brazil, Michael Hoey, who also inaugurated the Beckett Centenary Exhibition at the Faculty Library. The event consolidated the study of Irish literature and culture in Brazil with lectures, seminars and papers on contemporary fiction, drama and Irish-Argentine literature.

In this issue of the *Journal*, therefore, we have selected some of the papers presented at the Symposium. We are pleased to include articles from three of our keynote speakers: Hedwig Schwall (Leuven University, Belgium), Inés Praga Terente (Burgos University, Spain) and Maureen Murphy (Hofstra University, USA), as well as articles based on papers presented at the Symposium by Maria Conceição Monteiro, Cielo G. Festino, Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos, Rosalie Rahal Haddad, Peter James Harris, Domingos Nunez and Noélia Borges. We are also publishing an interview that Irish Argentine writer Juan José Delaney gave to Laura Izarra during the event.

The current issue of the *Journal* is not restricted to material arising from the Symposium. We are also delighted to be able to reflect the increasingly international nature of the publication with articles and reviews received from contributors around the world including author Chris Arthur, Andrea P. Balogh, Csilla Bertha, David M. Clark, Nicholas Grene, Maura Harrington and Rüdiger Imhof, as well as Eoin Ó Néill and Sandra Vasconcelos from Brazil.

Finally, a note about our cover, which shows a production photograph of Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*, translated into



Latin American Parliament in São Paulo.  
Architectural project by Oscar Niemeyer.

Portuguese and directed by Domingos Nunez. Following on from its extraordinary success in London the play achieved critical acclaim and impressive box-office returns at theatres in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Tickets to the show were included as part of the programme of events at the Symposium, and many delegates will remember the play as one of the highlights of a very rich and fulfilling schedule.



# Fiction





# *“We Had the Experience But Missed The Meaning”: On The Relevance of Lacanian Categories in the Analysis of Fiction*

Hedwig Schwall

**Abstract:** *After having shown the three paradoxes of literature (the master being mastered by his literary tools, the reader's identification versus her critical stance, the text combining thematic unity and vital inconsistencies) we look at how several Lacanian concepts have their impact on a narrator's style: the twofold psychic system, three phases that mould our perception, the function of the father figure, the notion of the Other, the others and the “objects o”. It is in the relationship to the object o, where the two different energies of our psychic system meet, that we find out which type of person we are: neurotic, psychotic or perverse.*

*As it is mainly the hysteric neurotic and the paranoiac psychotic type who figure most often as narrators in literature, we look at how the former type is realized in Banville's *The Book of Evidence* and in Deane's *Reading in the Dark* while the latter, the psychotic type, permeates the narrative of Banville's *Mefisto*. Indeed, the protagonist's pathological narcissism which steers him now into megalomania, now into a death wish (unification with the Other he lost at birth), make him utterly confuse inner and outer worlds, literal and metaphorical meanings.*

## **Texts and textures**

Some among us are slow eaters – me, for example. I am also a slow reader – apparently, those two actions are often analogous, as is shown by Peter Greenaway in his film *The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover* (1989). Some people are said to “devour books” – metaphorically, of course. As slow readers have less time to read than others, they have to be choosy with their books. For me the first and foremost condition is that, regardless of the story, they have to be intriguing in their style. Take John Banville: with a style as wonderful as his, one does not need a story<sup>1</sup>. In some cases, however, both story and style are masterly, as in Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* – unfortunately he has only one novel so far. Anyhow, a good book is like a nice dish: you want to have it again and again and each time you enjoy it in a different way.

Now to relish certain dishes you need a certain technique. Enjoying the texture of artichokes, for example, demands some dexterity as you pick and suck the leaves. Just so, some texts can be more fully appreciated when the reader uses special techniques. Take the example of Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. In the historical approach of his analysis of that novel, Tom Herron concentrates on the political events to which the protagonist-narrator refers (Herron 2000: 168-191). He thereby ignores the fact that the I-narrator is unreliable, and that his views on the world are the reader's only source of information. A reader, trained in Lacanian reading, will recognize a consistency in the tale which enables him to specify that the narrator's unreliability is due to a psychotic structure. This ties in with his family situation: his (illusory) union with his mother has never been severed by his father, and as a result he never doubts anything and thinks he controls the world, while his ego has to keep up grandiloquent images of himself to avoid seeing the desolation of his situation and the hole in himself. The references to a historical reality are actually few and far between: he merely mentions his identification with heroic figures on television and the threat of the atom bomb (whereby he fantasizes that he is in control of the button); on the local scene, he belittles the impact of the police but grandly paints the town's fascination with the apparition of the Virgin Mary. These observations to me seem more characteristic of the narrator's psychological make-up than of any historic reality, and in that sense the psychoanalytic method seems a better approach for this book, as it can reveal the specific consistency of this type of unreliability, thus highlighting the author's accomplishment<sup>2</sup>.

But I want to go further, and argue that a "psychoanalytically informed" attitude is a good tool for most literary texts, as they are always layered, and built around **three paradoxes**. First, style is intended by yet exceeds the writer's control and consciousness; second, we must suspend our disbelief, while remaining critical in our close reading; and third, though readers may be scrupulously empathic, the complexity of style will always make them re-adapt their interpretation .

First, there is the paradox of style which is the master's tool, yet not in his/her possession: s/he is possessed by it. W.B. Yeats often stressed the difference between the journalist who merely informs and thereby uses straightforward language, which he equated with "plate-glass window". The literary writer, however, invites to meditate and therefore uses style, the equivalent of "coloured glass" (Yeats, 438). Yeats further specifies that style does not belong to the author but to his work: "though the labour is very great, I seem to have used no faculty peculiar to myself"; and when, much later, he finds his work much praised by some people, "I am a little ashamed, as though somebody were to attribute to me a delicacy of feeling I should but *do not possess*. What came so easily at first, and amidst so much drama, and was written so laboriously at the last, *cannot be counted among my possessions*." (Yeats, 532-533 my emphasis) On the other hand, the poet maintains that style is the writer's most personal feature, the aspect which makes his work unique. Indeed, when great writers publish their works, they give humanity a kind of capital, which gathers interest with every new and convincing (i.e.

consistent) reading of it. And no matter which philosophy or other epistemological system we use, we have to subject our mind to the exercise of close reading first.

Second, there is the reader's double stance. It is but in close reading that several interpretations may become visible, but they may be at odds with each other. This may again be partly intended, as literature experiments with polyvalence to find new combinations of meaning. So on the one hand, literature invites us to "a willing suspension of disbelief", but on the other hand its opacity signals: don't stop at the first reading, there is more than one story here. This is especially true for Joyce, who is "scrupulously mean" (as he puts it himself): he gives us clues as to how to understand a story, and then suddenly throws in other clues which steer us in the opposite direction, as I hope to have shown in an analysis of his short story "Eveline", where a hysteric girl slides into a psychotic crisis<sup>3</sup>.

This difficulty of the reader to find the "truth" of a literary text brings us to the third paradox, which strongly divides contemporary literary criticism, and especially those who focus on the ethics of reading, splitting them in two groups: those who think that literature is *essentially* paradoxical, and those who see its double demand as merely incidental. The latter group, led by Martha Nussbaum, are very optimistic about the fact that literature can teach us how to live. If we identify with the figures represented, we can live lives which we would not have time to live<sup>4</sup>. If we read in empathy with characters who live in entirely different conditions, we extend our knowledge of the human being. The former group, philosophers like Richard Posner, Geoffrey Harpham and Derek Attridge<sup>5</sup> question a too-quick "understanding", and focus on peculiarity of form (the colouredness of the glass) rather than on familiarity of content (Yeats's plate glass). They concentrate not so much on the story and its psychology but on the style; they stress the fact that we should be careful in believing that we "understand" other people directly. These philosophers (along with writers like McEwan, Banville, Coetzee and others) stress the fact that the other person always remains an Other with capital O: like Levinas, these thinkers emphasize that our neighbour, our best friend even, always remains beyond our understanding. Whereas people like Nussbaum see the literary figure as someone *like* us, her opponents stress that we must be wary of our own complacency, and in order to see how easily misunderstandings and ambiguities creep in, we must concentrate on the literary form in which these figures are represented. So, in the ethics of reading, the question of story versus style reappears.

It is significant that critics like Attridge are heavily influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis. As a discipline which stresses the power of that which escapes our conscious perception, Lacan makes us see that we do not only not quite understand the other, but we do not even understand ourselves, and therefore we must never stop to question ourselves. This may seem a little daunting, but it is very liberating. Whereas many rational systems have trained us to judge appearances in a linear, fixing, causal way, this often leads us to categorize people and "fix" them, like Eliot's Prufrock who

feels that society immobilized him: “formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall”. (Eliot 2365)

Lacanian psychoanalysis will refuse any kind of deterministic, biological thinking, to foreground the possibilities of renewal inherent in a conscientious use of language. Roddy Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* provides us with an excellent example of how a person, having suffered almost forty years of oppression through her own father, teachers and husband, is coaxed by her sisters to talk and write about her past, as she had always been creative with language. And indeed, their lively interaction revives the protagonist, Paula Spencer, who wants to liberate herself from a past that bogs her down into a repetition of the domestic violence she vaguely remembers. Paula very much wants to turn a “factual” past into a “pactical” past, in the sense that the “facts” of a violent family life should be reinterpreted: this time it is the beautiful moments which should be selected and agreed on. Paula needs this “pact” with her sisters on a more positive past as this can give her new perspectives and new chances in life.

In summary, one could say that we can read in two ways: either as *conquistadores*, people who want to “extend” their knowledge, to possess more ground which they reorganise according to their own habits; or we can read as *pilgrims*, people who want to “renew” themselves through contact with the Other, and to be questioned as to the mechanisms of our own perception. In order to account for the three paradoxes, Lacanians read texts at least three times: first, to explore the text and identify the themes; second, to see the consistency of the form, as it fits the content. In a third reading, they pay special attention to the inconsistencies, the insistent and halting passages. They are the eddies in the narrative flow: though one may merely see a slight movement on the surface of a sentence, this signals an obstacle underneath. This is also the case with the unconscious: it shows – not directly, but it is signalled in an irregularity, a slip, a repetition, an awkward sentence, a strange insertion, a special intertextual echo.

We will now present all the “ingredients” of a Lacanian reading, and in a third part illustrate this with examples from Banville and Deane.

### **Some basic concepts of the Lacanian system: the psychic system, three phases that mould our perception, the Other, others and the “objects o”**

Lacan’s representation of the psychic system may be complicated, but the “fundamentals” are simple: (1) the psychic system basically consists of **two** parts, the unconscious and the conscious one; (2) at birth the “individual” loses an imaginary wholeness and must come to terms with the fact that one is “divided”, and must constantly **reassess** one’s situation in relation to the others and the Other (3) this development reaches a kind of balance in the oedipal phase, when the child accepts the “castration”, term to indicate the frustration that we can only reach the world (the others) through the **mediation** of language, which is a never-ending task, as words always hover over the world but never coincide with it (4) the promise of wholeness is repeated in the

confrontation with the “**object o**”, message from the Other; (5) the ways in which human beings develop can all be reduced to **three basic types**: the neurotic way, the perverse way and the psychotic way.

The psychic system basically consists of two parts: the primary subsystem, that of the drives, the “hallucinatory” unconscious, and the secondary subsystem, which is that of the “reality principle”, the test of one’s own perception with that of others. The energy of the primary system is called *jouissance*, or enjoyment, which is an energy that is indifferent to the subject (people drink themselves to death) and is cyclical. The drives aim at only one thing, that is their own recurrence. We see this as children love to throw things away time and again, while adults’ lives clearly show repetitive patterns. This is why the secondary subsystem has to counteract the chaotic, hallucinatory repetition, bringing in a reality check and a demand for development.

From the child’s birth until his fifth year, the secondary subsystem is remoulded throughout the three main stages of the oral, anal and oedipal phase. At birth every child is castrated, in the sense that, from then on, the individual has to give up its illusion of being whole. The baby both “sexuated”, in being given either a girl’s or a boy’s name; and “interpreted”, in the sense that the child’s inarticulate behaviour (crying, sighs, ...) is met by words which it is to take up in due time. Yet throughout the first six months, the “oral phase”, the baby still regards the mother as an extension of himself, and he does not distinguish between subject and object, nor between inner and outer world: all is fusion in confusion. Yet through its interaction with others the child has to be cured of its idea that it is at the centre of the world. Apart from noticing that the mother is not the entire world, the child has to give up “*das Ding*”, a hallucinated entity, “unspeakable, and even less imaginable” (Libbrecht and Van de Vijver 1994, 61) that is connected to a primary urge to regain that paradise lost, where words were not necessary<sup>6</sup>. Lacan considers *das Ding* as “the absolute Other of the subject”, in the sense that it is the subject’s dream of not being “sub-ject” any more, not subordinate but only “ject”, thrown into a welter of *jouissance*. Yet the sense of loss, of one’s personal Atlantis, is the very energy which nudges the subject to make this or that choice, to take its own, individual, winding road (Lacan 5).<sup>7</sup>

That “winding road”, as I explained in an earlier issue of ABEI (Schwall 2003, 221-3) is somewhat channelled by society which socialises the child by inviting it to leave the oral stage and step into the anal phase. As the child is weaned and thus gives up his union with the mother, he finds compensation in the illusion that he can control himself: in his control of the anal muscle he can decide whether he is going to cooperate with the parents or not. It is but in the final, oedipal stage that the instalment of the “nom/n du Père”, the name and the “no” of the father must be realised. Again, with “father” no biological father, not even a male adult is meant, only the *function* of the person is essential: to convey the rules of the community, the culture, to the child – whether this is done by the (grand)mother, an uncle, a lesbian partner who adopted the child, etc. Of utmost importance is that, whereas the child saw no distinctions in the oral

phase and imposed his own definitions in the anal phase, the oedipal phase has him accept that the Other, culture, cuts boundaries in his *jouissance*, and thus transforms it into desire. The latter term differs from the former in that desire is basically metonymic: any aim one sets oneself is never ultimate, but leads to another. To realise the Name of the Father actually means that a subject finds the right distance between two “Others”: the one that informs his primary system and the one that rules his secondary system.

The term Other is always written with a capital, as in any case it exceeds the comprehension of the ego. On the one hand, “the Other” refers to the set of rules that governs a certain culture, which is the touchstone of the secondary system and so steers our perception from the outside; on the other hand, “the Other” also means the patterns in the unconscious that have formed themselves throughout the individual’s life, and which steer our perception from the inside, from the primary system. In finding our balance between these two systems the “others”, written in low caps as it refers to our co-human beings, our “familiar”, can help us to find our own way in setting examples we may choose to imitate.<sup>8</sup>

But apart from the others in small caps, who help the subject to explore a certain culture, there are the “objects o”, also in small caps, but they are “messages” from the Other which moulds the primary system; one could say they are echoes from the Thing. Indeed, the first “objects o” are the voice and the look, as they were the formative energetic signs of, respectively, the oral and the anal stage. Both voice and look are liminal phenomena in that they are concrete and can be heard and seen by everyone, yet one cannot situate them very precisely: they are emanated from the “holes” in our body, from mouth and eye, and the strange thing about them is that, though they do not send out a meaning, the signal they give cannot be ignored. A look can be there for all to see, yet it remains opaque in its interpretability. As Banville puts it in *Mefisto*: the protagonist is after these signs which are “indecipherable, yet graphic”.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as we will see, it is not just persons that can send out looks that hit another person in his primary system, thus affecting one as an “object o”: any thing can get a special significance, can look at us or appeal to us, and in that fascination leave us deeply puzzled.

So we see that the primary and secondary system are in constant interaction, an interaction which is intensified during an encounter with an “object o”. And it is in these moments that *jouissance* (reactivated by the object o) and desire (formed by one’s relation to authority, the Name of the Father) will interact, and reveal which structure a person’s psyche has: whether of a neurotic, psychotic or perverse type of psyche.

If neurotic, the person will accept authority but doubt it, i.e. it is acknowledged but very freely interpreted. Neurotics doubt everything (and therefore find it difficult to take an ultimate decision) but they want to remain in control. Three subdivisions can be made here. First there is the most frequent case (though more frequent among women than among men), the hysteric neurotic. The hysteric is histrionic and creative. She thinks herself an object o to the Other: though she recognizes authority, she sees that it is flawed and in need of fulfilment, which the hysteric believes s/he can provide. This is



the type which appears most in literature – so this will be the one we will concentrate on<sup>10</sup> The obsessive neurotic will stay in control through sticking to himself – this type is more frequent in men – and keeping control through thinking all things through till the last details. The phobic neurotic will control his fear by channelling it to certain objects (usually spiders, dogs or other animals).

While the neurotic type *represses* authority, the pervert will *disavow* it. Though he knows it exists “somewhere out there”, he ignores it completely and cannot free himself from the compulsion that he is the object o for his mother. In order to stem the flow of his *jouissance*, the subtypes of the pervert (fetishistic, masochistic, sadistic) will all try to push the partner so that he will finally set the law. As this type suffers from a lack of symbolisation, this law will never be firmly installed, and these people will repeatedly recur to challenge the other (by inducing either pleasure or anxiety) to set limits. The other has to function here as the Other: as the Law is not declared objectively, but induced by the pervert, this type’s communication is “dual”, pertaining only to the I and the other.

The psychotic type, finally, covers the schizophrenic and paranoiac subtype. This figure has *foreclosed* the Law, he has no concept of it. Culture is one blur of accidental phenomena; as there are no instructions for use given to the psychotic he will order them in his own idiosyncratic way. As the sense of a common Law is even more alien to him than for the pervert, the psychotic will be even more at the mercy of the primary system, and the drives which want their own recurrence. Faced with the cultural phenomena around him, he can at best imitate them, but not assimilate them, as he lacks the tool to do that: language. The “No” of the father has not worked; as a result, the child cannot distinguish properly between inside and outside, hallucination and reality, literal and metaphorical use of language. Of the neurotic and psychotic type it is respectively the hysteric and the paranoiac subtypes who figure most often as narrators in literature. Whereas the former is always in doubt, covering this up with a certain theatricality, the latter is a champion of certainties, always spontaneous, with his unconscious on show, and as a result, rather singular in his expressions<sup>11</sup>. It is significant that, while the pervert’s communication is “dual”, the psychotic’s is “monological”, singular, as he only takes his cues from his own primary system, while the neurotic’s is “triadic”: s/he always balances the positions of the other, the Other (or the Law) and himself, as we now hope to show.

### **The hysteric figure and his “object o”**

One could safely state that John Banville’s work in its entirety aims at representing protagonists who systematically single out “objects o”. Critics usually observe that Banville’s protagonists are incommunicative, but one should rather say they are deeply responsive. His heroes never listen to what people are telling them, because they want to obliterate the practicality of everyday utterance in order to concentrate on the things

that happen in the margin, details which throw a different light on “reality”<sup>12</sup>. Instead of engaging in the social interaction which produces meaning, they want to explore the significance of things, in contemplating the signals that touch upon the primary system. Therefore it is not surprising that his protagonists concentrate on things which are in-between the phenomenal and the noumenal, which are simultaneously present and absent. In *The Sea* Max goes back to the seaside to commemorate his recently deceased wife and the friends who died on that spot, in *Eclipse* Alex Cleave meets his absent daughter in a vision, the science trilogy focuses on the gaps between the phenomena and the laws that cannot account for them, while the art trilogy foregrounds the impact of painted people on real people. Let us look more closely at the last example. *The Book of Evidence* which opens the art trilogy hinges on a scene in which the impact of the “object o” on the protagonist will change his life for ever. In his confrontation with a painted woman, Freddie Montgomery feels how that thing looks at him in an uncanny way:

Things seemed not to recede as they should, ... as if they were not being looked at but were themselves looking, intent upon a vanishing-point here, inside the room. I turned then and saw myself turning as I turned, as I seem to myself to be turning still, as I sometimes imagine I shall be turning always, as if this might be my punishment, my damnation, just this breathless, blurred, eternal turning towards her ... It was not just the woman’s painted stare that watched me. Everything in the picture, that brooch, those gloves, the flocculent darkness at her back, every spot on the canvas was an eye fixed on me unblinkingly. (Banville 1989, 78).

Instead of the “spectated” object, the lady becomes a spectator from another world: the Other makes itself felt and overpowers the subject. Freddie is suffused with *jouissance* and he will turn away from any reality check. As he tries to steal the painted woman, a real one blocks his way and he kills her, an event which he further dissociates from the rest of his emotions. In this sense Freddie shows himself to be a hysteric; as they are narcissistic, they want to keep a good image of themselves and are able to “compartmentalize” sets of memories so that the less attractive ones are shut out from their self-image. But later, when he writes his “book of evidence”, his hysteric structure becomes entirely evident, as he takes a very histrionic stance to the authorities. Aestheticizing his crime, he is dead keen to present his tale in the witness box. He studies his profile and all other theatrical details of his appearance, and constructs his tale with great care – ignoring that the law stipulates that a person who pleaded guilty is not to be heard further. Finally, the narcissistic protagonist despairs of the lost chance to sport his genius, and with an irony that characterizes the hysteric’s unsatisfiable desire Freddie’s Book of Evidence will plead that what is “evident” in one’s own psychic system cannot be so in another’s: “You do not know the fortitude and pathos of her presence” (Banville 1989, 79).

Another novelist who shares Banville’s tendency to focus on a protagonist-narrator who in turn focuses on the layeredness, the opacity of human communication

is Seamus Deane. In his novel of the telling title, *Reading in the Dark*, his narrator stands out because he discards “meaning”, the quick social understanding that is usually expected of us, and instead concentrates on the *significance* of things. All starts with the young protagonist’s sensitivity to the powerful signs coming from his father “knowing something about Eddie, not saying it, not talking but sometimes nearly talking, *signalling*. I felt we lived in an empty space with a *long cry from him ramifying* through it” (Deane 1996, 43, my emphasis). Again, getting in touch with that layer of communication means that the protagonist concentrates on the marginal details, the “eddies in the river” of tales he hears from his uncles and aunts. Eddies indeed: what is lacking, and therefore obsessing the narrator, is the true story of uncle Eddie’s life and death.

It is interesting in this context that the novel is really a prose version of a volume of poems called *Rumours* – something which is vague and yet powerful, like the force of the “object o”. As Deane puts it : “I wish I knew what they / Were saying. I’m never sure/ What it is I hear.” (Deane, 1977, “Rumours”). The narrator refuses to take people’s stories about Eddie at face value, because he realises that there is another layer of energies under the plotline. Due to a series of events, the boy finds out the horrible truth: it is his mother’s family who killed his father’s brother, a fact which his mother is aware of but his father isn’t. “It was worse than the breaking of the laws of consanguinity”( Deane, 134). It is in this very problematic oedipal context, where the boy and his mother are tied into a secret the father doesn’t share, that the protagonist is confronted with two “objects o” which show us how the outside world can suddenly hit upon truths hidden deep in us, even if we don’t understand them directly – like the figure in T.S. Eliot’s “The Dry Salvages”: “we had the experience but missed the meaning” (Eliot, 1974, 93).

Indeed Deane’s protagonist is confronted with two objects o, the slice of bread and the roses, of which the meaning will only later become more clear and richer. First there is the bread’s mute language which lights up when the “reader in the dark” asks his father again to tell him what happened to his uncle Eddie, and he is hit. Dazed by the blow, the boy’s blurred sight focuses on one detail only: how his mother is cutting a loaf of bread and stops doing that, so that one slice is sadly hanging out of the bread, neither quite cut off nor fully sticking to the loaf. Though it seems an inconsequential detail, this image hits him with a special force, and it is only later that the protagonist will understand it is the image that sums up the rest of his life: as he discovers the secret of the mother’s family, but cannot utter this as it would destroy his own, he will forever remain like the slice of bread: still in the family, but cut off from them.

Second, there are the red roses in the yard. They certainly are a layered motif. First, they are an old Irish symbol; since the seventeenth century, Dark Rosaleen had become a representation of Ireland, and since Patrick Pearse and Easter 1916 also one of the blood sacrifice that nationalists demanded. In this context they also become a symptom of the family’s secret: each time the protagonist asks his father about Uncle Eddie, the father evades the questions to go out and clip the roses. So the sensitive matter somehow attaches itself to the roses, who become saturated with the protagonist’s

frustration So they are not only associated with the nationalist sacrifice propaganda but also with his own family's unspeakable crime. Indeed, the red roses also hint at the laws of "consanguinity" that have been broken, and in a blind fury the narrator cuts them down, not knowing what he was doing. Here, the roses certainly carry intertextual echoes, and the motif of the redness will be repeated in the mother's tortures of remorse, which will drive her to become psychotic. At the beginning of the book, "the redness [is still] locked behind the bars of the range"(6), but later she will not be able to tell the hellish fires in her imagination from external fires in the past (the fire in which Eddie disappeared) and the present world (at some point the area's the rats have to be chased away with fire). Indeed, after her father has confessed to the protagonist's mother that he had Eddie killed, the Name of the Father does not work anymore: internal and external worlds merge into one chaos and the protagonist's mother turns into a schizophrenic psychotic. Her only defence against the shame of her own and her family's doings is to split her personality, which she underscores with a double voice: to her young children she speaks in a young voice, that of her old innocent self; to the older ones she uses her normal voice; the protagonist is cut off entirely, as it was prefigured in the slice of bread.

### **The psychotic figure and his "object o"**

The most frequently occurring psychotic figure, as we saw, was of the paranoiac subtype, and here again John Banville provides us with an interesting example, this time in *Mefisto*.

That the psychotic is entirely sure of himself is due to the fact that he has completely negated his castration, his father's "no"; as a result there are no differences but the ones he projects himself, thus sticking to an entirely self-made world. This is clearly a far more problematical structure than the neurotic one, as the non-acceptance of a power beyond oneself entails that the psychotic has no definitions in common with others, all delineations are his own. The individual is at the mercy of his primary system, his *jouissance*, which is not tested against any intersubjective reality. This becomes clear in *Mefisto* from the very beginning, where the language of the protagonist, Gabriel Swan, remains singular: "I developed a private language, a rapid, aquatic burbling, which made people uneasy. It sounded as if I were conversing with someone ..." (Banville 1993: 9). Because the boy refuses to take any outer authority into account, he remains stuck in the repetitive patterns of the drives. This is expressed on both the micro – and the macrolevel of this novel, as Gabriel's obsession with the binary structures of his "mathemadics" lead him to repeat the events of part one in part two<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed Gabriel's father cannot make an impact. He is constantly belittled by his son, who cannot stand to have his ego controlled by anyone. But not only his father is perceived as one of "those stunted little warriors... a small man" (14), all other father figures, like his teachers, have but "a bit-part" (23). Kasperl, his next teacher, has "short

legs”, and Kosok “shuffles” (188) and has “stubby arms” (187). Indeed, Kosok is always missing out, “turn(ing) away, muttering” (170). Gabriel thinks that he is the only one who is on to the right thing, and that he will be the master of the universe after all: “Number, line, angle, point, these were the secret co-ordinates of the world and everything in it” (32).

Language, to the psychotic, has only one function: to prop up his troubled ego, and to make it “whole” again. He believes that, through his fusion with the Thing, he can regain the paradise that was lost at birth. For Gabriel, this “Thing” takes the form of a lost twin, his brother who died at birth. And because the dead brother is the centre of Gabriel’s fundamental phantasm (the basic formula of one’s “interior grammar”), the objects o that will fascinate him will have something “dead” to them, a confusing sense of being present in absence: “I felt Mr Kasperl’s gaze ... I fancied I could see something stirring, like torpid fish, in the dead depths of his eyes.” (M 49)

But not only the difference between life and death, also that between inside and outside, male and female will become confused. In his search for the language that can bring his brother back, a string of “objects o” brings Gabriel Swan to the final one, Kasperl’s black book that is supposed to contain the “ultimate” mathematical formulas – ultimate in the sense that Gabriel believes that through them the difference between word and world will be abolished. Yet this black object further aggravates Gabriel’s condition, as he only conquers it at the expense of severe burns which make skin transplantations necessary, thus confusing his sense of inner and outer world even further: “I was Marsyas, lashed to my tree, the god busy about me with his knife... this was a place where I had never been before... It was inside me.” (M 124)

That the inside/outside boundaries are blurred in ways which are specific for the paranoid psychotic becomes clear in the figure of Felix, who led him to the black book and who is an “alter ego” of himself. Felix maintains he has to “recognise what it is ...(people) want...”: he has to “interpret” their desire (M 176) and so he tells Swan’s colleague Leitch that Gabriel is homosexual. However, when Leitch does make a pass at Gabriel it seems Felix hit on a sore point here, as Gabriel denies any homosexual tendencies, while, earlier on, he was not displeased when Felix had him wear a bridal dress and women’s apparel<sup>14</sup>. Here we do not only see the psychotic’s refusal of his being sexuuated, but the paranoid substructure, as a suppressed wish (Gabriel refusing to acknowledge any form of homosexuality) is projected into an exterior threat (it is Leitch who made overtures, in some secret link with Felix).

Yet the bottom line of psychosis, as Philip Bromberg puts it, is “pathological narcissism”. It is “one of the particular characterological tolls ... as he tries to deny his apprehension of non-being” (Bromberg 1986: 441). Alternating between under- and overestimation, the psychotic structure will throw the ego alternately in depression, delusions of persecution and megalomania.<sup>15</sup> This is exactly what Felix does: one the one hand he promises that he will make Gabriel whole, and thereby presents language as exactly that which the psychotic wants: a magic tool that will make all mediation

superfluous, as Kasperl's black book will help Gabriel to coincide with the Other, his brother:

I would meet what I was waiting for, that perfectly simple, ravishing, unchallengeable formula in the light of which the mask of mere contingency would melt. .. And with it surely would come.. that dead half of me I had hauled around always at my side... and I would be made whole...(M 186).

Felix is indeed Swan's alter ego and the projection of his inner self, in that he objectifies the very mechanism of psychosis, as he drives Gabriel to unify again with the Thing, and to do away with language. Only, in his search of the Thing, Gabriel vacillates between the belief to become *whole* or to acknowledge that he is nothing but a big *hole*. When he is recovering from his burns and his colleagues watch his disfigured face, Gabriel fears: "They might have been standing on the edge of a hole, peering in" (M 194). But the psychotic keeps ignoring any dependence<sup>16</sup>. This is expressed, on the one hand, by a show of indifference. So Gabriel does not show much emotion when his mother is killed and his whole family ruined. On the other hand, he aggrandizes calamities: when Kasperl's mine collapses this gets apocalyptic dimensions: "Something was happening underground. ... Gardeners turned up smoking clods of earth seething with ... ganglia of thick, pink worms" (M 110). Gabriel thrives on his own, dark world, and it has something divine about it, to match the importance of his ego. He often thinks of angels, but they are never of the "guardian angel" type, rather a "malin génie", a bad brOther. The "huge figure in white robes, with gold hair and thick gold wings", pointed out by the nuns, had a "look, that to me expressed not solicitude, but a hooded, speculative malevolence" (M 31).

Indeed, Gabriel's "Other" is always self-constructed: not only does he belittle all figures in authority that culture sends him, but the ones he has chosen himself are cast out by the Other, the Law: the mathematics teachers Gabriel seeks out are sent away from school, Kasperl's sciences destroy lives, even his own; Kosok and his lab are questioned by the government. But there is yet another father figure that helps to glorify the psychotic's universe, and this figure is introduced by Felix. He calls Gabriel Swan a "bird-boy", "by Jove" (M 36), and suggests that he was fathered by someone in the Big House. Gabriel combines these hints, confusing their literal and metaphorical implications: indeed, Jove fathered the twins Castor and Pollux while he had taken the form of a swan, so he conceived bird-boys; and as a result, young Swan goes through the pictures of the inhabitants of the Big House, looking for a "a beaked nose" (M 11)): he takes myth literally. In his belief in his divine nature, Gabriel feels singled out by anOther of his own making. In this short-circuited kind of psyche, language is not sanctioned, and anything, literally any thing, can become a meaningful message; so Gabriel is constantly fascinated by the patterns the sun throws on the floor<sup>17</sup>.

## Conclusion

In this short article I tried to introduce some basic notions which psychoanalysis and literature have, I believe, in common: an interest in the layeredness and beauty which combine to make the opacity of stained glass. This fascinating complexity seems to be the fruit of writers who have mastered the paradox of letting their unconscious play, while sticking to the rules of narrative technique, thus letting the two instances of the Other – both in their deepest selves and in the culture in which they write – combine and intensify each other. But though I focused on the three types of psychic structures in this article, I want to stress very clearly that the idea is never to use Lacanian categories to make character analyses. Literature is no psychology, a literary figure no patient; if one uses psychoanalysis in literature it is for the analysis of style and structure.

When we look at the titles of the three books we briefly analysed, we see that each of the titles dealt with the relationship between writer and reader, and with the relationship between literature and knowledge. In *The Book of Evidence* the title refers to the very impossibility of the protagonist's enterprise: he cannot convey the evident power the "object o" has on him, and yet as a hysteric he wants nothing else than to say the ineffable, thus showing how the "object o" is at the heart of the novel. *Reading in the Dark* shows another kind of hysteric neurotic, this time one who realises very well that his reading, even though he manages to realize the paradox to suspend his disbelief in people's stories while remaining critical in his close hearing, will always remain a reading in the dark. And though one may identify with Gabriel Swan's sad story, it is important to look under the surface, which is already "advertised" in the novel's title, *Mefisto*. As a clever mixture of a literal and metaphorical translation of *Faust* (the English word "fist" is the literal translation of the German word "Faust"), we find the predicament of the protagonist prefigured in the title: in Banville's postmodern interpretation, Faust is a psychotic figure, as Gabriel combines Felix and himself, ego and alter ego, in himself, thus missing out entirely on the Other of the outside world<sup>18</sup>.

In their writings, both Banville and Deane are diametrically opposed to the psychotic's certainty: clearly siding with Posner, Harpham and Attridge, they know that they can never be sure of what they read or hear. And therein they seem to me not only the best authors, but the best readers as well.

## Notes

- 1 As a matter of fact, Banville does not so much drape his sentences over stories, but over mythical patterns and sometimes over psychological structures, as I hope to show.
- 2 It is only after I had given a talk on this novel that someone pointed out that McCabe wrote this novel just after he had worked for a year in an institution for disturbed children.
- 3 See "Mind the Gap: Possible uses of Psychoanalysis in the Study of English Literature with an Illustration from Joyce's 'Eveline'." *European Journal of English Studies* 6(3), 2002. 343-359.
- 4 See *Love's Knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*, OUP 1990.

- 5 The other “camp” is formed by Posner in “Against Ethical Criticism”, *Philosophy and Literature* 21: 1-27 (1997) with part two in 22.2: 343-365, 1998; by G.G. Harpham in *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) and Derek Attridge (*The Singularity of Literature*, and “Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other” *PMLA* 114.1: 20-31.)
- 6 Instead of speaking of “the Thing”, Lacan prefers to keep the German term, as this reminds the readers of its Kantian origin. Indeed, Kant’s worldview stretches to the “fundamentals” beyond the phenomena, to factors which cannot be perceived except in their effects. We cannot think back to our time as a foetus, but we can only “reconstruct” that sensation, going by the urge especially psychotics have to regress to the illusory state of completeness where there was no need for mediation.
- 7 :“ce autour de quoi s’oriente tout le cheminement du sujet” Jacques Lacan, *Les Psychoses, Le Séminaire Livre III. Les Psychoses*. Paris: Seuil, 1981, 65.
- 8 In the first place, it is the parents who help the new-born to answer his basic question: “What do the others want from me?” or in other words, how am I to channel *jouissance*, pure energy, into socialised desire? (This is one of the main themes of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, the 1997 Booker Prize winner.)  
As we want to be loved, we want to please our parents and therefore try to read their attitudes, to see what they want from us. Conversely, parents try to read their babies’ needs: does he cry because he is hungry, or does he want another nappy, or does he just want to be held? That people’s expressions are muddled, opaque, layered, can be deducted from the fact that different siblings from the same parents develop in a different way, as each “interprets” her parents in her own special way. Again, this is clearly illustrated in Roddy Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* where the three daughters have a very different relationship with their parents, which is reflected in their own respective families.
- 9 Banville, John. *Mefisto*. London: Minerva, 1993, 30; henceforth abbreviated M. The fact that primary and secondary system mix in strange ways in our perception of the world can be noticed when one finds a person attractive though s/he is not beautiful: here the expression mixes with the physical aspect of the body.
- 10 Neurotic types abound in literature, especially the hysteric one; Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus is a typical example of a healthy hysteric, as his narcissistic, theatrical, ever-curious behaviour shows. For a full study of Stephen Daedalus see IUR, *A Journal of Irish Studies*: “Forms of Hysteria in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero*.” pp. 281-293. Vol. 28/nr 2 Autumn/Winter 1998. Examples of female hysteria are to be found in the protagonists of Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (Mary Bruin) and *The Player Queen* (Decima), as well as in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (Lois Farquar).  
In his book *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Theory and Technique*, Bruce Fink explains the difference between the different neurotics in a very clear way, with many examples. Especially p.161 candidly sums up the differences between hysteric and obsessive neurotic.
- 11 Again for the description of the pervert see Fink, pages 165-202. This chapter is by far the shortest, which reflects the fact that perversion is, in its strictly Lacanian definition, not all that frequent.
- 12 It is significant that, for his book on “objects o”, Slavoj Žižek chose the title *Looking Awry*. This book is very accessible as he gives many examples from popular culture to show what the function of these awe-inspiring objects is.
- 13 Here again, Banville shows us his story-telling talent: we never hear anyone else apart from Gabriel, and thus become immersed in the psychotic perception, thus getting an inside-view of his condition. The end of the book remains open: whether the narrator is cured or not remains undecidable, as he merely sticks to the laws of consistency in story-telling, which is exactly what caused Gabriel to be short-circuited in his perception.



- 14 I ventured forward unsteadily in the spindly shoes, my calves atremble. .. A spasm of excitement rose in me that was part pleasure and part disgust. ... Each trembling step I took was like the fitful writhing of a captive whom I held pressed tightly to my pitiless heart.” (83)
- 15 This point, that psychosis is essentially a disturbance of the ego-functions, is shared by all authors, from Pinel in 1852 over Kraepelin (1909) to our day (Lacan, Postel, ...). For an excellent historical survey of the views which have been developed on the topic of paranoid psychosis, see *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse* (which offers an excellent complement to Laplanche et Pontalis, as each entry is treated more extensively than in their standard work, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*).
- 16 Bromberg stresses this: “What keeps the person going ... is ‘a grandiose self’. Its main job is to be perfect, ... to never be dependent...” (Bromberg 1986, 440).
- 17 Gabriel sees “the sun inching its complex geometry across the dusty floors” (M 63).
- 18 Banville points this out himself in an interview with Gerd Kampen, who asks why Mephistopheles is written with an “f” instead of “ph”: “Well, you get *Faust* and you get *Mephistopheles* in the same word. Everything is simple! [Laughs.]” (Kampen 2002, 347)

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# *Ways of Remembering: Musical Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*

Inés Praga Terente

**Abstract:** *In this paper we aim to analyze three different works – The Dead, The Butcher Boy and The Speckled People – and to show the capacity of music to activate memory and to act as a catalyst for nostalgia. Ballads and songs create in these works a landscape of its own, functioning both as a barrier and as a link between different characters and different worlds. An instrument or a song can become an objective correlative to the characters' broken dreams or truncated hopes, synchronizing with their life's rhythm, their emotional shades and accurately echoing their passions and frustrations, since the music that interweaves in the text is by no means accidental. Quite the opposite, it emanates from a carefully selected repertoire that sounds at the crucial moments and that operates as a sort of musical variation on a threefold theme: a failed love experience, a truncated sentimental journey and an intense feeling of otherness.*

Memory is a keystone of our capacity to know ourselves, to rebuild our lives or rewrite our history; therefore it is not surprising that so many authors have placed it at the centre of their work. Traditionally men and women have constructed both collective and individual sites of memory out of stone, out of dreams, on paper or in music. They are constructed to immortalize the dead, to prevent the relentless process of forgetting, to stop the grinding progress of time, to repossess the past, to recover a place, to find shelter from the outer world by digging our past. All these rituals can also be found in Irish literature, where recollections of childhood and early youth have been a recurrent and uninterrupted practice.

But we must admit as a starting point that there is a wide range of memories and that the processes of remembering can be very different. At the beginning of the twentieth century most writers of the Irish Literary Revival identified their childhood with that of the Irish nation and considered it a privileged zone of innocence, surrounded by a “*cordon sanitaire* of nostalgia and escape” (Kiberd, 103). On the other hand, Yeats's longings for sanctified locations were opposed by the urban terrible beauty and by the *non serviam* attitude of Joyce, whose *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* overshadowed most of

the twentieth century literary output. Memories of childhood and youth – be they fiction or non fiction – have not ceased henceforth though not always have they been a return to Tír na NÓg. Quite the contrary, the end of the last century has provided us with dreadful portraits of violence, loneliness, repression and otherness, emphasizing the feeling of alienation and exile in one’s own country or community. Thus a current of “secrets and lies”, approached from very different angles, has given birth to a new form of Irish memoir, almost exclusively male, very much concerned about identity and with *the other* playing a central role.

Memory can ally with a lot of strategies to tell a story, ranging from the anti-pastoral discourse of *The Butcher Boy* to the magic realism of *Reading in the Dark* or the rewriting of the Famine in *Angela’s Ashes*, just to mention some examples<sup>1</sup>. John Banville’s latest novel, *The Sea*, is another wonderful addition to an extensive list of literary landmarks dealing with recollections of the past.

The exercise of memory is a complex action with multiple and varied concerns: subversion, atonement, amendment, celebration, idealization, recovery, revival and a long etc. However it is generally agreed that one of the most powerful partners of memory is nostalgia, a concept defined by Luke Gibbons (1966) as “the painful desire to restore the sense of belonging that is associated with childhood and the emotional resonance of the maternal” (39). Gibbons codes it as a male phenomenon recalling Freud’s observation on the male desire to recapture an imaginary self sufficiency associated with nature, childhood and the maternal (40).

Though the postmodern condition is characterized by the absence of nostalgia for a lost, idealized past, (Lyotard 81) we must admit that these aspects have a strong presence in contemporary fiction. Rosa González (2000) has brilliantly analyzed the role Ireland has long been allocated as modernity’s ‘other’, emphasizing that its greenness and remoteness on the edge of Europe still provides the modern western world with an equivalent of the ancient world’s Arcadia (200-201). At present, in a digitally enhanced, post religious, post nationalist twenty-first century, Irish readers love being reminded of how different things once were (Foster 165).

In this article we aim to analyze three different works – James Joyce’s *The Dead*, Patrick MacCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* and Hugo Hamilton’s *The Speckled People* – and to show the capacity of music to activate memory and to act as a catalyst for nostalgia. Ballads and songs create in these works a landscape of its own, something we could define as a *soundscape*,<sup>2</sup> functioning both as a barrier and as a link between different characters and different worlds. Music possesses magical powers to organize memory and construct places, as Martin Stokes has stated:

The musical event, from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organizes collective memories and presents experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity. The “places” constructed through music involve notions

of difference and social boundary. They also organize hierarchies of a moral and political order. People can use music to locate themselves in quite idiosyncratic and plural ways (3).

However we are not referring to a physical place or landscape but rather to the feeling Seamus Heaney (1980) has defined in his celebrated article *The Sense of Place*: “our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind” (132). One of its final statements, “We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for our history” (148-149), supply an invaluable viewpoint we assume henceforth since we believe that the mutual relation between the fact of naming, the degree of loving and the ways of dwelling is what confers an individual essence on our relation with a place. Reversing the order we would propose that naming the place depends on the particular ways of dwelling in it and loving it and that the fact of naming a place implies a search for one’s history and the desire to make a home. All this involves a long succession of possessions, dispossession and repossession, both physical and spiritually, and an endless rosary of experiences: uprootedness, attachment, rejection, nostalgia, inner exile and many others.

Our analysis will not focus on music as context but as a constituent of the text, highlighting its role as the axis and the storyline of the narrative. We are interested in the music Harry White (1998) has defined as an “intelligencer of the text” (157-8), a music that interweaves and interacts in the story and that by no means is accidental. Quite the opposite, it emanates from a carefully selected repertoire that sounds at the crucial moments and that operates as a sort of musical variation on a threefold theme: a failed love experience, a truncated sentimental journey and an intense feeling of otherness. Music not only colours the text but seems to reinforce the power of words when these fall silent, making up for the spaces void of a verbal spell. An instrument or a song can become an objective correlative to the characters’ broken dreams or truncated hopes, synchronizing with their life’s rhythm, their emotional shades and accurately echoing their passions and frustrations. Balladry, operatic arias, or popular songs are woven into an immense fabric of musical metaphor by which music is enlisted as a means of imagining the past and modifying the present (White 157).

Few stories are so vividly coloured by memory as Joyce’s *The Dead* (1914). The epiphany of *Distant Music* represents a magisterial lesson due to the subtle and skilful way in which remembrance is employed. The very words, *Distant Music*, encapsulates music’s power to evoke and build spaces, both real and imagined, announcing the almost hypnotic state the ballad will provoke in Gretta and the revival of a forgotten world.

*The Dead* is an intensely sonorous story, invaded by laughter, noise, songs, dancing, conversation and any other trace of a celebration atmosphere. We have mentioned above the spaces music fills when words prove meaningless but both words and music go together over the pages which alternate the musical reverberations with Gabriel’s worry about the speech he is supposed to make.

However it is the singing of a ballad – *The Lass of Aughrim* – that makes a crucial turn in the story, not only stopping all this hustle and bustle but changing Gabriel's fate. The sound of the *Distant Music* marks an immediate spatial separation in the room and a strong feeling of distance in Gretta, proving that this effect can be powerfully enhanced by sound and that it is not exclusive of visual – kinesthetic experience, as it is generally thought (Yi-Fu Tuan, 92). This can be observed when a voice sounds in the distance while Gretta stays on the stairs and her husband watches her:

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter.

The hall-door was closed; and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia, and Mary Jane came down the hall, still laughing.

– Well, isn't Freddy terrible? said Mary Jane. He's really terrible.

Gabriel said nothing, but pointed up the stairs towards where his wife was standing. Now that the hall-door was closed the voice and the piano could be heard more clearly. Gabriel held up his hand for them to be silent. The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice. The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief:

*O, the rain falls on my heavy locks  
And the dew wets my skin,  
My babe lies cold... (211)*

*The Lass of Aughrim* tells the story of an ill fated young woman, a story of seduction, abandonment and death which reminds Gretta of another untold story: and of "a person long ago who used to sing that song [...] a young boy named Michael Furey [...] he died when he was only seventeen" ( 220). But the key factor is that the boy died for love, as the girl of the ballad did, a "gift" that, however tragic, Gabriel envies and feels excluded from, conferring him with a sort of *emotional otherness*. From this very moment the ballad lines up time and space, becoming a nexus between past and present, a barrier between romantic and real love and a passage from the collective racket of the party to the painful and silent privacy of Gabriel and Gretta sharing her secret for the first time. We would dare say that the ballad bursts into Dublin's urban and bourgeois atmosphere and replaces it with a rural one, permeating the atmosphere with the tragic echoes of a

boy from the West and displacing the city from the narrative axis. It is evident that memory takes hold of the story and moves it to the *other Ireland*, having as an epicentre both the ballad and the grave of a boy who died for love. It is also clear that the great alliance of music and memory seizes Gretta and carries her out to another world, the world of the dead the place where she really belongs to because there music has built an eternal site of love that summons her. The “soundscape” created by the ballad is a sort of mythic land in which the dead are the real living.

Similar echoes can be found in *The Butcher Boy* (1992), a novel that also depicts the *other Ireland*, an Ireland of hidden memories, damaged childhoods and destroyed psyches very far away from the De Valera’s “*cosy homesteads, contests of athletic youths and laughter of comely maidens*”. The main character, Francie Brady, is committed to an asylum when he retrospectively remembers his childhood in a small townland, digging up a devastating story encapsulated in the ballad that gives the title to the book. *The Butcher Boy* is a sad melody, very popular in the fifties, that tells a story of outrage and betrayal that leads a young woman to commit suicide – a variation of the *murdered girlfriend* theme in that here the girlfriend takes her own life. The ballad, an embryo of the tragedy that pervades the novel, is from the very beginning the umbilical cord that links Francie and his mother not only in their lives but in their fates. Mrs. Brady’s deep involvement in the song is remarkable:

Look, look, she says to me look what I bought she says its a record the best record in the world. I’ll bet you never heard a record as good as this Francie she says. What’s it called ma I says its called The Butcher Boy she says come on and we’ll dance. She put it on hiss crackle and away it went. Whee off we went around the room ma knew the words inside out. The more she’d sing the redder her face’d get. We’ll stop now ma I said but away we went again.

I wish my baby it was born  
And smiling on its daddy’s knee  
And me poor girl to be dead and gone  
With the long green grass growing over me.

He went upstairs and the door he broke  
He found her hanging from a rope  
He took his knife and he cut her down  
And in her pocket these words he found.

Oh make my grave large wide and deep  
Put a marble stone at my head and feet  
And in the middle a turtle dove  
That the world may know I died for love (19).

The lyrics of the ballad sound like a *prophecy*, casting a devastating death shadow over Francie. The threatening feeling inscribed in the music sounds over and over again, a music from which the boy cannot escape:

When it was over she says what do you think of that Francie – *he went upstairs and the door he broke he found her hanging from a rope!* He wasn't so smart then the butcher boy was he. She starts telling me all about it but I didn't want to hear any more. Then whiz away she goes out to the scullery singing some other song oh no she says them days are over that's all in the past. There's no one will let Annie Brady down again Francie!.

She'd leave the record off for a while then she'd go in and put it on again. Anytime you'd come in, from school or anything, it would be on. And ma singing away out in the scullery (19-20).

Therefore the ballad will become the unshakeable nexus of their two lives that, at the same time, forecasts their untimely separation. At one of the crucial moments of the book, when Francie sets the house on fire, he puts on the record and he feels they are together again:

and it was just like ma singing away like she used to [...]. I was crying because we were together now. Oh ma I said the whole house is burning up on us then a fist made of smoke hit me a smack in the mouth its over says ma its all over now (208-9).

*That the world may know I died for love.....* The last line of the ballad highlights a truncated love story and a young life cut short by death, as it also happened in *The Dead*. In *The Butcher Boy* music creates a nightmarish atmosphere and seems to dye the text red, covering it with blood from the beginning and making the characters head for destruction. Misfortune crops up over the pages like birds of ill omen that prevent the Bradies from leading a normal life: "what else would you expect from a house where the father's never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he's no better than a pig" (4) and their otherness acts as a curse, a terrible word Francie hears from his father's lips during one of his parents' frequent rows: "God's curse the fucking day I ever set eyes on you!" (7). Violence runs through the novel from beginning to end, under the mask of loneliness, alcoholism, murder, marginality or homelessness, perhaps the most powerful feeling of the story and an ill luck the characters seem to inherit. An example can be found in aunt Alo's party, a family meeting full of singing, drinking and celebration and whose lovely atmosphere is damaged by the bitter childhood memories of Benny Brady and his brother:

Shadows ate up the room. One last song, said Alo, and a nightcap to wind it up, what do you say, Benny?



No more singing. There's been plenty of singing.

Ah, now Benny, laughed Alo, don't be like that. A wee bit of singing never hurt anyone, am I right Mrs?

He started into The Old Bog Road, he said that was the one the priest had taught them in the home all those years ago. I knew as soon as he had said the word home that he regretted it. When you said it even when you weren't talking about orphanages, da went pale sometimes he even got up and left the room. Alo tried to cover it up by saying Will you ever forget the time we robbed the presbytery orchard? (31-32).

McCabe draws fascinating portraits of the characters through a song or an instrument which stands for their personality and their destiny. Thus *The Butcher Boy* will be both the axis of Mrs. Brady's life and her death sentence. It is worth remarking that she complies with the lyrics rather than simply listening to them and follows their auguries faithfully and tragically. As for Benny Brady, a trumpet and a very different song will be his identity symbols. His emotional links with the instrument are evident in one of the rare hopeful passages of the novel:

We're going to be a happy family son. I knew we would be in the end. I said we were. I'd make sure we were, I said. It was all up to me now. me and nobody else. then he said to me *the trumpet find the trumpet*. I lifted it and polished it up until it was shining just like it used to. Then I put it away in its felted case just like he did, laying it to rest like an infant after a long day. *Don't let them touch my trumpet Francie!* he said.

I told him he didn't have to worry, his worrying days were over. Your worrying days are over, da, I said (119).

Benny Brady is also very fond of a song, *I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls*, an aria of Michael William Balfe's opera *the Bohemian Girl*. The lyrics insist on a message of hope and love and it may be the reason for Francie to adopt it as a kind of family bastion and self esteem support:

I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls  
With vassals and serfs at my side  
And of all who assembled within those walls  
That I was the hope and the pride.

I dreamt that suitors sought my hand;  
That knights upon bended knee,  
And with vows no maiden heart could withstand,  
They pledg'd their faith to me.

And I dreamt that one of that noble host  
Came forth my hand to claim.  
But I also dreamt, which charmed me most,  
That you lov'd me still the same.

I had riches too great to count, could boast  
Of a high ancestral name,  
But I also dreamt, which pleased me most,  
That you loved me still the same<sup>3</sup>.

Francie cannot conceal his pride when he finds his father's song in one of the music books of his rival Philip Nugent:

There was an ass and cart going off into green mountains on the cover of one. *Emerald Gems of Ireland* it was called. I leafed through it. I know that one!. I shouted. My da sings it! *I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls!* (45).

It is evident that the recognition of a paternal trace reinforces him in front of his friend and in some way relieves his otherness, builds a bridge between his outcast condition and the Nugent's politically correct world. But again his self confidence is reduced when he quotes and evokes his mother's ballad, *The Butcher Boy*:

Oh, I said, and then I said I'll bet your ma never brought a record called The Butcher Boy did she Philip? He said she didn't. No, I said, what would she want to go and buy that for?. Did you ever hear it Philip?. I said. He said no. I said: You didn't miss much, Philip. It is the stupidest song in the world. I started laughing. Do you know what its about?. I asked him but he said he didn't and shook his head. You'd think I was stupid if I told you Philip I said and looked at him wiping the tears out of my eyes for every time I thought of how stupid it was it made laugh all over again. No I wouldn't says Philip. You would, I said, I know you would. No I wouldn't, he says. Do you know what its about Philip I said its all about a woman hanging from a rope all because this butcher boy told her lies. Did you ever hear the like of it, I said, and it sounded so daft now that I had to steady myself against the railway wall (46).

Both songs, those of Annie and Benny Brady, talk about love but they do it from very different angles: *The Butcher Boy* is an air of utter desolation whereas the other is a hopeful song attached to a happy memory of good old days (though, later on evidence of its falseness is given). Throughout the novel both Francie and his father seek refuge in beautiful places, songs and good memories in a clear attempt to subvert the fateful destiny written on its lyrics. Music becomes the counterpoint of adversity and a shelter from it, as we can see when the boy enters a church and hears a girl singing:

I never heard singing like that. The notes of the piano were clear as spring water rolling down a rock and they made me think about Joe [...] They were the best days, them days with Joe. They were the best days I ever knew, before da and Nugent and all this started.

I sat there for a long time I don't know how long. Then the sacristan came and wheeled the piano away. When I looked again the girl in the white dress was gone. But if you listened carefully you could still hear the song. Down By The Salley Gardens that was what it was called. I wanted to sit there until all trace of it was gone. It was like I was floating inside the coloured shaft of evening sunlight that was streaming in through the window (40).

*Down By The Sally Gardens* creates a mood of relief and pleasure, of sweet memories, of glimpses of an unknown Arcadia. Here the young Francie does nothing but discover the beauty of music and the mesmerizing powers Gretta also experienced in *The Dead*. But in *The Butcher Boy* Arcadia's proper name is Bundoran, the idyllic place where his parents spent their honeymoon and where he was conceived. Those days remain in his memory as they were told sanctified by his father, who remembers singing his song to the landlady of his guest house:

They went back to the boarding house where the woman had left the key under the mat for them. She said: For the man who sang my favourite song for me – *I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls!*

Did you sing that for the landlady da, I asked.

I did he says, do you know what she used to call us?

What da?, I says.

The lovebirds, says da.

I thought of them lying there together on the pink candlewick bedspread and I knew they were both thinking of the same things, all the beautiful things in the world (133).

The boy's nostalgia for the "the lovebirds" and his anxiety to rescue a past of truth and hope are the reasons for his pilgrimage to Bundoran, a spiritual landscape that Francie tracks down mentioning the song his father used to sing as a sort of a password for the past. Bundoran is not only a beautiful seaside resort and an enclave of the Gaelic world, but a return, both physical and psychic, to the maternal womb, to the marriage bed where he was born out of love. However Bundoran will prove a truncated paradise when the boy finds out that the idyllic honeymoon is a pack of lies as the hotel landlady makes clear:

What can I tell you about a man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here. Any man who'd insult a priest the way he did. Poor Father McGivney who wouldn't hurt a fly

coming here for over twenty years! God knows he works hard enough in the orphanage in Belfast without having to endure abuse the like of what that man gave him! God help the poor woman, she mustn't have seen him sober a day in their whole honeymoon! (181).

Once more music will offer refuge for a devastated Francie when after all this heart breaking finding, he comes across a music shop nearby and there he finds a volume of the *Emerald Gems of Ireland*. Some sort of warmth and sense of belonging are provided by the great sympathy he finds in the shop owner. Sharing a musical universe acts again as counterpoint to the sense of loss that invades him:

Then I saw it and when I did I nearly fainted, I don't know why I'd seen it plenty of times before. My legs went into legs of sawdust. Trot trot goes the sadyed ass pulling the cart and away off into the misty green mountains and the blue clouds of far away. And right over the picture there in big black letters EMERALD GEMS OF IRELAND. [...] But of course there's a far better book than that available now. There it is behind you. A much better book. It was called A TREASURY OF IRISH MELODIES. There was no ass and cart on the front of it just and old woman in a shawl standing at a half-door staring at the sun going down behind the mountains. So this is better than the other book, I says. Oh yes says the music man, much better. I want to buy it! I says, all excited and what did I do only drop more coins all over the floor. The music man thought that was a good laugh. He had no intention of selling it to me. He was giving it to me. Its not every day I meet someone whose father could play the trumpet like yours, he says. Isn't it enough that you like the songs? [...] He was the best man I ever met that old music man I kept looking at the book over and over and trying to see Joe's face as I handed it to him. I wasn't sure which road to take for the school I went the wrong way a few times what do you think of this book I said to them its good they said yes I said, its for Joe Purcell, *Emerald Gems* is nothing compared to this one (183-4).

Music is the storyline of Francie's memories, a memory that unearths, traces, delves into the past proving to be a catharsis for a story full of blood: a grievous memory, poisoned by secrets and lies that, despite everything, allow him to survive. But Francie not only will survive the curse that seemed to trap him with no future. As the story draws to a close we find him in a hilarious mood, pleased to possess a solid legacy from his parents: a trumpet and a ballad. Now they will become tools of pleasure rather than sorrow in his hands. He has definitely recovered the past:

So now I have a trumpet and if you could see me I look just like da going round the place in my Al Capone coat. Sometimes they have sing songs in the hall and they ask me for a song. Go on!, they say, you're a powerful musicianor! You're

the boy can sing then off I go and before long they're all at it, that's the stuff!  
The Butcher Boy by cripes! (214).

The third story we are going to analyze, Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* (2003), is built on the binary opposition memory/oblivion intermingling both elements in a fascinating and unusual way.

There are things you inherit from your father, too, not just a forehead or a smile or a limp, but other things like sadness and hunger and hurt. You can inherit memories you'd rather forget. Things can be passed on to you as a child, like helpless anger. It's all there in your voice, like it is in your father's voice, as if you were born with a stone in your hand. When I grow up I'll run away from my story, too. I have things I want to forget, so I'll change my name and never come back (37).

The above passage epitomizes the core of the novel, embedded in a memory seemingly very different from that of *The Butcher Boy* but also permeated by nostalgia and otherness. In this story Hugo Hamilton brings alive his own German-Irish childhood in 1950s Dublin through the naïve eyes and voice of a very young narrator. Born to an Irish fervent nationalist father and to a German mother traumatized by the horror of Nazism, he introduces us into a family who define themselves as the *New Irish*.

*When you are small you know nothing* is the sentence the novel begins with and that widens into another insightful remark: "When you are small you are like a piece of white paper with nothing written on it" (3). For the young narrator life is a sort of blank page that is gradually filled with memories of the father's and mother's past, of the past of Ireland, memories that must be destroyed, modified or neglected to be able to rescue the present and to look at the future. The story draws a picture of the conflict between the remnants of older times and the demands of a new world in which the nostalgic ideals of the father find no room.

Few works offer such a strong chain of memories that, paradoxically, openly reveal their fragility and unreliability. Oblivion seems necessary to write the history of a family in which the past is forgotten, memory is lost, some identities are secreted away and characters want to run away from their story. The boy's Irish grandfather "died because he was homesick and lost his memory" (12) and the father also lost his memory when he was small and "for him Ireland really didn't exist at all. It only existed in the minds of emigrants looking back, or in the minds of idealists looking forward, far back in the past or far away in the future. Ireland only existed in songs" (38). Therefore balladry must be rewritten and reimagined so that it can be a bastion for the existence and the history of Ireland and a reference for the inhabitants of an unreal world, created by a nostalgic father that dramatically rejects his past and invents a new story of his own. Both music and language – not in vain they must speak only Irish – join forces to

frame an artificial realm: “Your language is your home and country” (161) the father states determinedly, though the boy soon finds out that “your country is a place you make up in your own mind” (295). In fact they inhabit an utterly false Arcadia and they are *made* characters rather than born, made out of the echoes of a mythic land that belongs to either imaginary or real ballads:

My father’s name is Jack and he’s in a song, a long ballad with lots of verses about leaving Ireland and emigrating. The song is so long that you couldn’t even sing it all in one day. It has more than a thousand verses, all about freedom and dying of hunger and going away to some other land at the end of it. My father is not much good at singing, but he keeps repeating the chorus about how we should live in Ireland and be Irish (33).

Hamilton allows his characters to adopt the strategy above mentioned in the *The Butcher Boy*: to subvert the legacy of balladry and to lead their lives in the opposite direction. Therefore, to make up for the painful migrant tradition of Ireland Sean Hamilton wonders “why not bring people from somewhere else over to Ireland?” (33):

After the war was over he met my mother in Dublin and decided to start a German-Irish family [...] What better way to start a new country than marrying somebody and having children? Because that’s what a new country is, he says, children. In the end of it all, we are the new country, the new Irish. (39).

But this hybrid marriage – the other way round of emigration – will do nothing but reinforce nostalgia, uprootedness and homelessness

So that’s why he married my mother and now she’s the one who does all the dreaming and singing about being far away from home. It is my mother who left her own native shores, and that means we still end up living in a foreign country because we’re the children from somewhere else (33).

Young Hugo’s father has no hesitation in manipulating balladry – the only real stronghold for his son – adding stories or eliminating passages that can tarnish either his origins or the history of Ireland. “My father pretends that England doesn’t exist. It’s like a country he’s never even heard of before and is not even on the map” (37). But the most remarkable invention is his own character, drawn against the ballads stereotypes and his own past and ancestors

He didn’t emigrate or drink whisky or start making up stories either. Instead he changed his name and decided never to be homesick again. He put on a pioneer pin and changed his name from Jack to Seán and studied engineering and spoke

Irish as if his home town didn't exist, as if his own father didn't exist, as if all those who emigrated didn't exist (37).

The family's identity is supported by a long process of rewriting and *renaming* things, blurring the thin line that separates story and history in Ireland. Consequently the children's view of the past feeds on songs and storytelling and words and music accomplice to make up the "corrected" version their father wants to offer them:

There was lots of killing and dying and big houses on fire in my father's song, too. He tells us bits of the song [...]. He puts on the record with the song about another man named Kevin Barry who was hanged one Monday morning in Dublin [...]. There are parts of the song, too, that my father will not tell us anything about. Some of the verses are to do with the town of Leap and things he doesn't want to remember. Like the picture of the sailor over the mantelpiece. Or the people in the town who used to laugh at him for having a father who fell and lost his memory in the navy. (35-6).

A similar process takes place at school, where song lyrics become a history book that fill the boys with the echoes and feelings of old heroic Ireland:

In school, they teach us to love our country. They sing a song about the British going home. The *máistir* takes out a tuning fork and taps it on his desk. It rings, and when he stands the fork up on the wood it makes a long note. We hum the note and sing about the British getting out of Ireland.

*Ó ró sé do bheatha 'bhaile...*

It's a funny song and very polite. It says to the British that we hope they'll keep healthy and have a good trip home. When you sing this song you feel strong. You sit in your desk with all the other boys singing around you at the same time and feel strong in your tummy, right up to your heart, because it's about losing and winning. (120-121).

But all this cannot prevent young Hugo from feeling *the other*, doubly excluded because of his mixed Gaelic Irish and German parentage, for being too much of an insider and too much of an outsider at the same time. The whole family is made fun of and has to abjure its principles to be accepted:

You had to pretend that you had no friends who lived long ago like Peig Sayers. You had to laugh at Peig Sayers so that nobody would suspect you were really Irish underneath. You had to pretend that Irish music and Irish dancing were stupid, and Irish words smelled like onion sandwiches. You had to pretend that you were not afraid of the famine coming back, that you didn't eat sandwiches

made by your own mother and that you had an English song in your head at all times. You had to walk down O'Connell Street and pretend that you were not even in Ireland (236).

It is evident that family's slogan, *to be as Irish as possible*, couldn't do without a pilgrimage to the green and rural Ireland, the beautiful Connemara, again a country of the mind rather than a real landscape: "This really was the future [...]. It was a place where you could live on your imagination" (179-80). Once more we witness the idealization of the past and the nostalgia for an Arcadia they would like to capture in a bubble beyond space and time.

But we know that ballad stories cannot be utterly happy and so in the family's world rebels crop up as soon as the father is away: young Hugo speaks English or the mother puts the radio on to listen to the English songs she loves. The *other* music seems to reverberate on the air for quite a long time, as if they could not escape from it:

my mother likes the radio. She likes the song "Roses Are Red, My Love, Violets are Blue", but she is not allowed to sing it and she can only listen to it when my father is at work. When he comes home he switches on the news [...]. After the news the radio should be speaking Irish. If you sing a song, sing an Irish song, the man says, and my father nods his head. If there's a pop song in English my father suddenly pushes back the chair with a big yelp on the floor and rushes over to switch it off. The voice doesn't take time to go away, it disappears immediately. But even in the few seconds it takes my father to switch it off, before it gets a chance to go as far as 'Sugar is sweet, my love.....', enough of the song has escaped and the words are floating around the breakfast table in silence, but you can still hear the song echoing along the walls. It gets stuck to the ceiling-stuck to the inside of your head. And even though my mother is not allowed to sing it, she can't stop humming to herself in the kitchen afterwards (78-79).

Music is not the only barrier between husband and wife. They don't discuss about it. In fact they don't discuss very much at all. Perhaps they know they must not for fear of destroying the fabric of their life together and silence definitely proves to be the best shelter. Actually they married because she needed a safe haven and he wanted to create the New Irish family, a false utopia with dramatic results such as identity confusion and homelessness:

We are the German-Irish story. We are the English-Irish story, too. My father has one soft foot and one hard foot, one good ear and one bad ear, and we have one Irish foot and one German foot and a right arm in English. We are the brack children. Brack homemade Irish bread with German raisins. We are the brack



people and we don't just have one briefcase. We don't just have one language and one history. We sleep in German and we dream in Irish. We laugh in Irish and we cry in German. We are silent in German and we speak in English. We are the speckled people (283).

We can see that in *The Speckled People* the obsession about searching for one's history turns out to be a drawback to make a home. When at the very end the father dies, his wife feels disillusioned: "she says she was trapped by my father and could not escape. If she had the choice she would still be born in Germany and she would still come to Ireland, but she would have changed things and made different mistakes this time" (289) and the family feels homeless: "we are trying to go home now. We're still trying to find our way home but sometimes it's hard to know where that is any more" (296). But it is at this crucial moment when the mother provides the best way to look back at memories without anger: "She said she didn't know where to go from here. We are lost, but she laughed and it didn't matter" (298).

The final words add a hopeful note to a gloomy story, in which oblivion and memory ally to blot out the past and build the future. But things are not so easy because, as the mother says, "everything can be repaired except memories".

We have tried to show the different ways in which music interweaves in the text and reinforces the power of words. The stories analyzed here ooze nostalgia for a world that in some way existed only in memories. And music plays a magical role in endowing it with life, though briefly, while it sounds.

## Notes

- 1 See Roy Foster (2001), "Selling Irish Childhoods" in *The Irish Story*. London: Penguin Books, pp. 164-186.
- 2 This term has been used in Saddlemyer, Ann, "Synge's Soundscape" in *Irish University Review* 22, (Spring/Summer 1992), pp. 62.
- 3 Interestingly this song is the core of *Clay*, another story of *Dubliners*. See Praga, Inés, "Los espacios musicales de *Dubliners*" in Simons, Jefferey et al. (eds) (2003), *Silverpowdered Olivetrees. Reading Joyce in Spain*. Universidad de Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones.

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# The Master by Colm Tóibín: The Untold Tales of Henry James

Cielo G. Festino

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to make a reading of the novel The Master by Colm Tóibín, whose fictional time covers four decisive years in the life of Henry James, from 1895 to 1899. I will argue that, for once, it is James who is being watched from the perspective of a high window, the leit motif of the novel, only that instead of following James' gaze on the outside world, Tóibín enters the Master's consciousness. Hence, through the use of a central intelligence (The Master's acclaimed use of point of view) Tóibín turns James into the main character of his fiction in order to recreate those themes that most haunted him in his middle years: his frustrating experience in the theater with his play Guy Domville; the death of his parents and his sister, Alice; the suicide of his friend Constance Woolson Fenimore; his homosexuality; his not having participated in the American Civil War; being from a family of intellectuals, his having preferred fiction over history and philosophy.*

## I. Introduction

Colm Tóibín's novel on the life of Henry James, *The Master* (2004), is a blending of elegance and daring. Turning Henry James into the object of his fiction, Tóibín masterfully knits the threads of his narrative through the use of a central consciousness (James' acclaimed style) that denotes a witty observation of the life of "the Master".

The fictional time of the narrative focuses on a period that covers four years of James' life, from 1895 to 1899 when this seasoned cosmopolitan had already made of England his permanent residence. He first lived in his flat in De Vere Gardens in London and then in Lamb House in Rye, Sussex. As Tóibín makes him say, "Lamb House would offer him beautiful old windows from which to view the outside; the outside, in turn, could peer in only at his invitation" (123). Lamb House would give him not only that but also a sense that he actually belonged among the English as he felt very well accepted by his new neighbours, fact he displayed with pride in front of his American friends.

This period of his life has been called by the writer's most famous biographer, Leon Edel (1963) "the treacherous years", due to James' failure in the theater with his

play *Guy Domville* (1895). It is this sad experience that Tóibín uses as his starting point in order to give unity of design to his own novel because it affected James so deeply that, according to Tóibín, “The Master” rewrote it in each one of the texts that belong to this time of his life: his stories “The Pupil” (a boy’s troubled vision of his family) “Owen Wingrave” (the story of the Civil War soldier) and his novels *The Turn of the Screw* (a ghost story through which James sublimates his own ghosts), *The Awkward Age* (as awkward as James felt in his middle years), *The Aspern Papers* (his Italian journey), *What Maisie Knew* (his masterpiece in the dramatization of the subconscious), *The Spoils of Poynton* (the spoils of his own life), among many others.

For all the suffering that James underwent during those years, he himself called that time span “the sacred years” (Edel, 1963) because this experience in the theater, that happened to be so devastating, led him, on the one hand, on an inward journey, into the most intimate recesses of his personality, and on the other, to a renovation in the style of his fiction, that confirmed him as one of the great literary masters of the English language. As Edel points out: “the stage had given him some technical skills, that he would use in his fiction; a story could be told as if it were a play; characters could be developed as they develop on stage; a novel could be given the skeletal structure of drama” (179).

Though Tóibín knows that for James, “Remaining invisible, becoming skilled in the art of self-effacement [...] gave him satisfaction” (212), he voices the Master’s silences by carefully following the figure in the carpet left by his inward journey. For once, then, it is James who is being watched from the perspective of a high window, the *leit motif* of the novel, only that instead of following James’ gaze on the outside world, Tóibín enters the Master’s consciousness.

## II. The Master’s Inward Journey: James’s Untold Tales

Tóibín thus starts James on his journey to the most inward side of his soul, where he hides his most painful frustrations: “He was ready to listen, always ready to do that, but not prepared to reveal the mind at work, the imagination, or the depth of feeling” (213). To tell James’s untold tales, Tóibín turns the Master into a character, strategy that he confirms when he makes him say: “He lived, at times, he felt, as if his life belonged to someone else, a story that had not yet been written, a character who had not been fully imagined” (111). In order to show James at a crucial moment in his life, Tóibín applies in his novel the same narrative techniques to dramatize thought that James himself had developed in his fiction, to access the inner recesses of his characters’ minds.

If James watched other person’s private lives uninvited now, through Tóibín’s novel, we do the same with his own life. For all his recreation of James’s style, however, more than withholding information as James’s had done, Tóibín gives it all away.

It is not unusual that this inward journey into James’s consciousness should begin in January 1895 with a dream in which the novelist finds himself in a dream-city,

hurrying away, feeling the presence of a “person or a voice close to him who understood better than he did the urgency...” (2). However hard he tried to grasp who this being was, it eluded him. And when he tried “to leave the bustling street, it urged him to carry on” (2). One might think that James was trying to make sense of his own life or, after the disappointment of *Guy Domville*, trying to give up, but his own alter ego, the one he was always in communion with, helped him go on. It is at this critical moment, that he meets his own dead, in the figure of his aunt Kate and his mother, his two most beloved persons, who seem to both warm him against some evil and ask for help, fact that leaves him helpless. Then, he wakes up and in order to “numb himself”, he starts writing...

Tóibín thus selects some events out of the Master’s life that help him create different narrative personas through which he tries to portray some of the most conflictive facets of James’ identity: his desire to become a writer; the relationship with his brother William; his literary ambitions and frustrations; his sexual identity.

### **Breaking away from his family**

In order to recreate James’s relationship with his family, Tóibín seems to take the cue from Edel when he points out that though James continued showing his intellectual face to the world, the complex and intricate form he gave to his writings reveals that “while his mind moved forward, his feelings turned backwards to his childhood” (178). From this perspective, in *The Master* the outstanding James family is portrayed through evocative situations that show both love and tension among the members of this very traditional American family, of great wit and intelligence.

In a way, the fact that he settled down in England, at the outset of his career, with an ocean separating him from the James in America, is a hint of the novelist’s complex relationship with his family and his desire, so to speak, to escape from it. As Tóibín makes the Master say:

He had himself, in that year, escaped into the bright old world he had longed for. He was writing stories and taking in sensations, slowly plotting his first novels. He was no longer a native of the James family, but alone in a warm climate with a clear ambition and a free imagination (114-115)

In this constraining family context, Tóibín presents James’s mother as the great bulwark that helped him be himself, and realize his great dream: that of becoming a writer and not the more public kind of figure, that the rest of the family wanted for him and that, in turn, his brother William, renowned philosopher would in the end pursue. In the same way that William would become “a public persona, full of manly expression and fearless opinions” (146), central to the American scene, Henry would recoil upon himself becoming a more and more private figure in the steady English scene that did not allow for great changes and, therefore, suited his own style and personality, to the

point that, at the end of his life, he finally became an English subject. To show his mother's support, Tóibín says that "[she] had written to say that he must spend what money he needed in feasting at the table of freedom" (115).

Tóibín's novel also portrays James's mother as helping him not to participate in the American Civil War in order to pursue his own literary career. In turn this event became one of those memories that will haunt James well into his mature years. There is a scene in Tóibín's novel when, on the occasion of the inauguration of a monument to the soldiers of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment – to which their younger brother Wilky had belonged – William is asked to deliver a speech. Tóibín shows Henry pondering on the issue:

...he wonders about the power of one unasked and tactless question which could have punctured the power of William's speech at the unveiling. It concerned William personally and Henry too; and in soft whispers now it asked why neither of them had actually fought along with their two brothers, for the cause of freedom (146).

This is one of the untold tales that, according to Tóibín is hidden in the intricacies of the Jamesian style. Very appropriately Tóibín makes him reflect: "My own taste has always been for unwritten history and my present business is with the reverse of the picture" (146).

## **The Second Son Nightmare**

Another untold family tale that makes one of the richest vignettes in Tóibín's novel and that brings the narrative to its close, takes place when, after many years of separation, a famous and respected, but very ill, William James accompanied by his family, crosses the ocean to visit Henry at his residence, Lamb House, in Rye. They all together form what they humorously call the "Lamb House Club". Once again, not unlike James' own characters, both brothers try to reach out to each other from across their intellectual and emotional differences.

Tóibín thus builds this scene as the "second son nightmare" that, still in adulthood, Henry had trouble overcoming in his relationship with his elder brother, William. Already a mature man, Henry is presented as, once again, coerced by his past from which he has been trying to break free.

William, in a way, chides his brother for writing about the English scene when, in his opinion, he knew nothing about it, "You do not have in your possession the knowledge which Dickens or George Eliot or Trollope or Thackeray possessed of the mechanics of English greed" (316).

Then William goes on to criticize both Henry's theme and style that, in his opinion, was the direct result of his dealing with empty social matters:

I believe that the English can never be your true subject. And I believe that your style has suffered from the strain of constantly dramatizing social insipidity. I think also that something cold and thin-blooded and oddly priggish has come to the fore of your content (316).

In criticizing Henry's style, William was voicing the readers's growing irritation when faced with the Master's more and more convoluted sentences as his literary career progressed and he felt more self-confident to experiment with words and techniques: "I have to read innumerable sentences you now write twice over to see what they could possibly mean [...] In this crowded and hurried reading age you will remain unread and neglected as long as you continue to indulge in this style and these subjects" (316).

Revealing the American man's prejudice against European society, which he considered as futile, what William proposes to Henry is that he should write a historical novel about the "America he knew": "A novel which would deal with our American history rather than the small business of English manners, bad indeed as they are. A novel about the Puritan Fathers..." (317).

Throughout the scene, Tóibín presents the reader with an impassive Henry who, in a polite but biting way, tells his brother "that he would sooner descend to a dishonored grave than have written" (316) what he proposed. For Henry, who had labored to develop the form of the novel so that "it would have a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison" as he would say in "The Art of Fiction" (Veeder and Briffin 165), his brother's words were anathema.

What I understand Tóibín is trying to dramatize through William's speech is first, the old Puritanical superstition "of fiction being wicked" (166), as Henry James himself points out in his essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884), because it was believed "to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction" (168). Second, the Philistine belief that "the artistic idea would spoil some of their fun" (169), as William had reproached Henry when saying that he had to read some of his sentences more than twice.

Tóibín's phrasing of Henry's rebuttal to his brother, deserves to be quoted at full length and I believe, reads like a tribute to the Master:

I view the historical novel as tainted by a fatal cheapness and if you want a statement from me on the matter in clear American and since you wish me to pander to the crowded, hurried age, as you call it, might I tell you my opinion of a novel to be written by me about the Puritan Fathers? [...] It would be all one word, Henry said. One simple word. It would be all humbug! (317).

We understand that Tóibín's articulation of Henry's answer is built on the Master's theory of the novel that will pave the way for Modernism and that, paradoxically,

borrowed from his brother's psychological theory of the "stream of consciousness", as he also points out in "The Art of Fiction":

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing we are most curious about. The form, it seems to be, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances [...] The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant –no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes [...] His manner is his secret... (170).

Once again Tóibín pays tribute to James as he presents him as being truthful to his own manner of writing fiction to the end of his life. In spite of not being widely read, James's novels became more and more experimental, fact that actually turned him into one of the most emblematic names of the novel in English. James never compromised his art for mercenary reasons. As Tóibín makes him reflect, "He retained his pride in decisions taken, the fact that he had never compromised, that his back ached and his eyes hurt solely because he continued to labor all day at an art that was pure and unconstrained by mere mercenary ambitions" (20).

## Craving for Recognition

However, in his speech, William had strung a most intimate cord in Henry: the fact that he was becoming less and less popular, and that he was feeling frustrated as fewer and fewer people read his novels. His wanting to enter the theater, with his play *Guy Domville*, at the time that Oscar Wilde was the rage in England, bears witness to that. As he prepared himself for the debut of his play, Tóibín makes James say "This is [...] how the real world conducts itself, the world he had withdrawn from, the world he guessed at. This is how money is made, how reputations are established" (Tóibín 14).

His play *Guy Domville*, "the story of a rich Catholic heir who must choose to carry on the family line or join a monastery" (Tóibín 3) and, defying his family, decided to renounce the world and devote himself to a life of contemplation and prayer in the monastery" (Tóibín 11) actually resounded with James's own personal conflicts and choices both at a personal and professional level: becoming the person his family had expected him to be in America or being the person he was in England; writing what the



public expected or being loyal to his muse. The play proved to be an utter failure and had a serious impact on James.

Tóibín's novel suggests that some of the fiction written by James at this time like the story of the ghostly infants Flora and Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* is "...an aspect of himself" during this period of crisis, a continuation of the author's conflicts in his own fiction. I understand that this insight reveals that Tóibín in his novel tries to see beyond the Master's public figure, his intellectual identification, into his emotional identification, that he was at pains to hide from the world.

Tóibín's novel thus seems to show that the psychological journey James himself embarked upon in part accounts for the nature of his plots and style. It is as if he were trying to lose himself in a labyrinth of words in order not to face his most private wishes and desires and, at the same time, to find relief from his own inner conflicts.

Hence, in an elegant style that implicitly mimics the Jamesian preference for the subtly suggested, Tóibín, a master himself, moves backwards and forwards in time to rescue images and situations that reveal the almost elusive moment of transition when James transmuted his personal experience into fiction, to the point that memories and narration become one: "Often, ideas came to him like this, casually, without warning; often they occurred to him at moments when he was busy with other things" (63).

One of these moments of transition, between James's life and his own fiction, is suggested by the design of *Guy Domville's* plot: the choice between a life that the world approved of and a life of his own choice. As I see it, it actually mimics the matrix of James's most private untold tale carefully hidden in the intricate figure traced by his many narratives: his own sexual identity, which Edel significantly calls "the love that did not speak its name". (188)

### **The Love that did not speak its Name**

Dealing with James' sexuality in a novel is a delicate affair since the Master had always narrated his physical and sensual side by omission, when he markedly emphasized the intellectual and reflective side of man. Once again, mimicking the Jamesian style of dramatizing through the written word what one is denied in life, Tóibín actually deciphers this unsaid and unspoken aspect in James' life through scenes that portray the writer's dilemma at finding himself at the crossroad between reticence and longing, his own convictions and social mores, his own consciousness and society. This hidden self of James's, a mixture of desire and fear, is thus rendered through Tóibín's prose with a tenderness and refined artistry that reveal both subtlety and incisiveness on the part of Irish writer.

Resorting to James's techniques to picture and dramatize the secret side of the mind of his characters, Tóibín follows the Master on a very private journey that he had never dared complete or write about. Voicing the world of private and silent thought, Tóibín makes James narrate and reflect his frustrated attempt at meeting Paul Joukovsky, a young and wealthy Russian painter that belonged to the entourage of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev with whom James was infatuated. However, given the Master's

reticence, the young man's open homosexual behaviour had drawn them apart. In the novel, Tóibín makes Henry James say:

He wondered now if these hours were not the truest he had ever lived. The most accurate comparison he could find was with a smooth, hopeful, hushed sea journey, an interlude suspended between two countries, standing there as though floating knowing that one step would be a step into the impossible, the vast unknown (Tóibín 9).

Like James's own characters of the international episode, trapped in between two worlds, Tóibín presents the Master as unable to complete his journey in his real life between convention and his own desires. In a manner that reminds the reader of Daisy Miller or Isabel Archer, irritatingly spoiling their best chances, Tóibín shows a dejected James standing for hours on a Parisian street, "wet with rain, brushed at intervals by those passing by" (Tóibín 10) looking up at his friend's window but unable to mount the stairs and knock on his door.

Then, Tóibín shows James trying to write his untold tale of what had happened that night up to the moment he had dared live: "the rest of the story was imaginary, and it was something he would never allow himself to put into words" (10). And Tóibín makes him reflect:

It was something he had written before and had been careful to destroy. It seemed strange, almost sad, to him that he had produced and published so much, rendered so much that was private, and yet the thing that he most needed to write would never be seen or published, would never be known or understood by anyone (9).

### III. Final Words

As I see it, Tóibín's novel reads like a tribute to one of the undisputed masters of both American and English letters in more than one way. *The Master* actually dramatizes some of James's literary precepts. The first being that, as Tóibín's characterization of James shows, through observation, all life becomes a fiction. The second that, as sometime Henry told his brother William, if through his philosophical writings, this last one tried to make sense of life he, through the stories that his family resented for their "insipidity", tried to make life come alive. Finally, the most important Jamesian precept is that as Henry tells William in Tóibín's fiction and, in turn, Tóibín confirms through his characterization of James, "...the moral of literature is the most pragmatic we can imagine. It is that life is a mystery and only sentences are beautiful".

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# “Araby” in Ireland: *An Imperial Wolf in Sheik’s Clothing*

Maura G. Harrington

**Abstract:** *While many believe that “Araby” is a story of a young boy’s early realization of the futility of turn-of-the-century Dublin life, I propose that its detached narrator tells the story in such a way that he acknowledges that he understands how Ireland is being manipulated by the British government and that such a realization is the basis for change. If like the boy, the Irish fall into the not always negative stereotype that they are romantic (that is, “original”) by nature, they run the risk of falling prey to those who would try to capitalize on this tendency. Instead of, as the boy did, trying to fill the national type of the romantic wanderer, the religious crusader, he who blindly loves that which symbolizes his nation, the Irishman should strive to be an individual so as not to fall into the trap of the English colonizer. It is possible that it is not the creating of the “Orient” that is hazardous, but that the Orient created by the wrong people is hazardous. Perhaps in his manipulation of the factual occurrence of the bazaar, Joyce was actually showing that despite the glamour that the English sponsors of the bazaar wanted the Irish patrons to see, so that they would spend money and have a greater reverence for the magnanimity of the Empire, the promise of opulence for the Irish through the Empire is empty, and is self-serving, benefiting only the Empire itself.*

In a study of James Joyce’s 1905 “Araby,” one of the stories of childhood in *Dubliners*, many readers focus on the epiphany of the young narrator as a coming-of-age that could just as easily have been experienced by anyone. A.R. Coulthard (1994), however, considers the real story of “Araby” not what happens within the story itself, but rather the effect that Coulthard believes the realization had on the young, naïve, “dreamy boy,” turning him into a “stern priest” (97). Coulthard asserts that “the antagonist of the story is not the hackneyed reality of a tough world but a repressive Dublin culture, which renders hopes and dreams not only foolish but sinful. ‘Araby’ is not a stock initiation story by the dramatization of a soul-shrivelling Irish asceticism” (97). Others would disagree with Coulthard’s assertions, since there is evidence in the short story that the adult narrator treats his boyhood self with a degree of ironic detachment.

Additionally, exactly what it is that is “soul-shrivelling” is open to debate. Perhaps it is not, as Coulthard suggests, that the Catholicism of Dublin limits the narrator and forces him into a puritanical lifestyle.

Joyce wrote to his brother Stanislaus that the stories of childhood in *Dubliners* were “stories of my childhood” (Jackson and McGinley vii). Having himself attended the “Araby in Dublin” bazaar in May of 1894 when he was twelve years of age, Joyce had first-hand experience of what such an event was like. However, in composing the short story, he changed important details about the bazaar that transform his readers’ impressions of the scope of the actual event. It is likely that the changes which Joyce elected to make have something to do with the other elements of his experience with which he chose to infuse the simple tale of a young boy’s trip to a bazaar. By including plentiful references to the mid-nineteenth century nationalist poet James Clarence Mangan and his work and to Catholic religion (specifically, to the Crusades) and by emphasizing the exotic and “oriental” elements of the Araby bazaar, Joyce points to the significance of the elements of religion, nationalism, and empire present in his short story.

The crux of the different perceptions of the Orient between the Irish and the English is what the Orient represented to the two groups. In *London 1900*, Jonathan Schneer notes that in 1900, the Port of London served as “a crossroads of people and things entering and exiting not merely Britain, but what might almost be termed as the *idea* of British dominion” (39). Things and people, all commodified, which came into the port from various parts of the world proved that the Empire encompassed the exotic, the luxuriant, and most importantly, that which Britain had subjugated. To the Irish, themselves at this time under the political rule of the British, the other subjugated peoples were their counterparts. Also, a tradition in Ireland existed which connected the Irish with Eastern peoples, and this tradition in the time leading up to 1900 gained the support (however misinformed) first of linguistic scholars, then of cultural nationalists. Such an Oriental connection served to separate the Irish as Celts from the English as Saxons.

In “On the Edge of Europe: Ireland in Search of Oriental Roots, 1650-1850,” Joseph Th. Leerssen (1986) traces the development of credibility and the fall from scholarly credibility of direct connections between Irish language and eastern languages. In the eighteenth century, many linguists considered Gaelic to be “the most exotic, and supposedly the most ‘ancient’ archaic language” whose properties demonstrated linkages between oriental and Celtic languages (Leerssen 93-94). Some linguists (the Phoenician Scytho-Celtic school) came to believe that Celtic languages had eastern, rather than the northern roots that the Nordic Scytho-Celtic school claimed. As Irish, Welsh, and Scottish Phoenician Scytho-Celticists “sought to vindicate their Celtic antiquity against the Anglocentric, Anglo-Saxon orientation of the ‘Nordic’ Scytho-Celticists....the impact of Phoenicianism, especially in Ireland, was considerable” (95-96). Such a linguistic idea was backed up by Irish traditional history, recorded by Geoffrey Keating, which suggested that the island was populated largely by the descendants of Milesius, a Spanish

Celt. The connections that linguists of the eighteenth century drew between the Irish and the eastern peoples they had selected proved poignant, showing a political propensity: “in each case, the Phoenicio-Gaelic tradition is runner-up...vanquished by the true number-one nation of the day; but unlike the victors who have their day and decline, they are perennial, and form a tradition which links all these phases of Western civilization” (100). Phoenicianism was politically subversive for the Irish because it

contradicted the axiomatic classicist idea that civilization is by definition a Graeco-Roman tradition. Instead it turned to an orientalist tradition of civility, starting with Solomon’s temple and leading to Rome’s most stalwart opponent, Carthage....An anti-classicist attempt is...made to impugn the Graeco-Roman tradition of civilization as an intolerant, imperialist one, and to link its victims, from Phoenicia to Ireland, into a great tradition in its own right. (101)

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, Irish Celticists, spurred by the growth in interest in primitivism, used the scholarship of the French *celtomanes* and the “native bardic tradition” (99). Ireland’s ancient belief that it had been colonized by eastern peoples came out of the underground and into temporary scholarly respectability. While Celtology gradually began to lessen in scholarly influence because of the discovery that the Irish language was not a direct derivative of Middle Eastern languages, some influential Irish poets continued to cite Phoenician Scytho-Celticism, as it correlated with their long-held traditions. Phoenicianism, “though derided by ‘official’, scientific Celtology, kept [its] authority among a faithful band of amateur antiquarians who, significantly, all belonged to the nationalist end of the Irish political spectrum” (108). Not least among those who subscribed to Phoenicianism and who connected Ireland and the Orient in his writings, influencing writers of the Irish literary revival at the beginning of the twentieth century, was James Clarence Mangan.

The Phoenicianism of Mangan and of other Irish writers had not only linguistic implications (which were, perhaps, never taken very seriously) but also political ramifications.

Phoenicianism, linguistically as well as culturally, aligned the Gaels with those from the East, creating a polarity between oriental and occidental that both surrounded and was encroached upon by the British. By setting themselves up as Other from the British, the Irish nationalist poets of the nineteenth century pushed British ideas of identity to their limits; the Act of Union, then, forced Britain to encompass what the Phoenicianists believed to be a race that was completely foreign to English stock. Because, as Leerssen suggests, “Europe is defined in its periphery and by its margins, in its contact with the unknown past and the alien outer world...Ireland [served as] a testing ground *par excellence*” for defining the identity of the Irish as opposed to the identity of the English (*need a page citation here*). David Lloyd (1986) suggests that such a positive assertion of a unique national identity was an “extreme form of a drive to vindicate and unify Ireland through research...[that] is found in the parallel fashions of Orientalism

and Celticism. The exoticism of both, sustained by the comparative remoteness of their location in popular imagination from the centers of Empire, is involved in the notion of an ‘original people,’ one less removed from the wild and the natural than the citizens of European civilization” (33). Not only was the idea of Phoenicianism influential in the middle of the nineteenth century but, as Leerssen notes, its “characteristic fusion of orientalist and Celtic exoticism was to remain an important tradition in Anglo-Irish literature. As late as 1907, James Joyce brought up the Phoenician theory again” (108). While Joyce might not have fully considered or subscribed to linguistic Phoenicianism, his admiration for Mangan perhaps contributed to his frequent references to the East in his writings.

Mangan’s fondness for Eastern writings presents itself in what he calls translations of Oriental poetry. Lloyd suggests that Mangan’s “persistent recourse to a mode of translation which is refractive, parodistic, may be read as the entirely appropriate gesture of a provincial Irish poet concerned to complicate the ‘mining’ of Oriental – as Celtic – sources and resources by the imperial ‘speculator’ through the constant dissembling of the prospect of an ‘original’ behind the per-vision” (35). While Mangan was writing Oriental poetry, he was doing so for Celtic purposes. Mangan believed that in Oriental poetry, leaving an impression was more important than expressing a certain idea (24). Such a belief about poetry leads to the assumption that the writer might create ambiguous allegories, in the interest of raising questions in the reader’s mind, rather than presenting a moralizing tale. Mangan’s fan Joyce echoes such a mode of operation in *Dubliners*, where he provides an impressionistic image of the city of Dublin, portraying in tableaux the lives of various inhabitants of the city. Also, Lloyd notes that Mangan’s writings “shift the veils that we place over our own ‘counterfeit’ images by making us attentive to our own captivity in them” (35). Likewise, Joyce, beginning his writing career about fifty years after Mangan’s death, frequently points out the stagnancy of Dublin, but provides no possible solution. In *Dubliners*, Joyce echoes Mangan’s interests in Celticism and primitivism, the Orient, and in creating an impression, while challenging his audience to propose solutions to the characters’ problems. Among the *Dubliners* vignettes, “Araby” shows the most significant influence of Mangan on Joyce, making suggestions about the role of Ireland within the Empire, but also stopping short of making a definitive judgment that would preclude the reader from arriving at a unique conclusion. However, considering the short story in the context of its historical background, the literary traditions from which it arises, and the life experiences with which Joyce imbued the story, it becomes evident that the adult narrator, looking back on his childhood, realizes, as a result of his attendance at the Araby bazaar, the inappropriate place of the Empire in Ireland.

In addition to imitating stylistic elements of Mangan’s writing, Joyce sought to emulate Mangan’s use of one culture to evoke another:

The best of what he has written makes it appeal surely, because it was conceived by the imagination which he called, I think, the mother of things...the presence



of an imaginative personality reflecting the light of imaginative beauty is...vividly felt. East and West meet in that personality..., and whether the song is of Ireland or of Istambol [sic] it has the same refrain, a prayer that peace may come again to her who has lost peace....Music and odours and lights are spread about her...Vittoria Colonna and Laura and Beatrice...embody one chivalrous idea...and she whose white and holy hands have the virtue of enchanted hands, his virgin flower, and flower of flowers, is no less than these an embodiment of that idea. ("James Clarence Mangan" 78-79)

Referring here to Mangan's translation from Gaelic of "Dark Rosaleen," a sixteenth-century poem that allegorizes Ireland as a young woman awaiting deliverance from her English oppressors, Joyce asserts that Mangan (1944) uses a specifically Irish national image to evoke universal themes. Joyce's admiration of Mangan is evident in his inclusion in the nameless protagonist of "Araby" of the characteristics that Mangan claimed he possessed as a boy. For example, in Mangan's autobiography, he claimed that he was very bookish as a child, and scorned contact with others because his vanity convinced him that they could not understand him (Magalaner and Kain 28-29). Also, specific incidents, whether factual or fictional, that Mangan included in his autobiography are echoed in the experience of the protagonist of "Araby." In the short story, the young boy falls in love with the older sister of his friend, Mangan (identified in the story only as "Mangan's sister"), and during their only recorded conversation, he promises that he will "bring [her] something" (17) from the Araby bazaar which she is unable to attend because of a religious commitment. In the interim between the conversation and the bazaar, the zealous young narrator lives his mundane life as if it is part of a quest for his lady. However, upon his late arrival at the bazaar, he experiences a revelation of sorts and "saw [him]self a creature driven and derided by vanity, and [his] eyes burned with anguish and anger" (26), for reasons which will later be discussed, and, as the lights go out on the bazaar, the young boy has failed to fulfill his quest. It seems that Joyce's real-life hero Mangan had a comparable experience in his boyhood. When Mangan's beloved older sister died as a child (or left home, in one account), the young Mangan developed admiration for a neighbor girl who was a few years older than he. Fashioning himself as ever a poet, Mangan recounts that he set out on the streets of Dublin in search of a ballad befitting to the girl, and in his extensive searches, effects caused by encounters with the rain caused him to have damaged eyesight (Ehrlich "'Araby' in Context" 324).

By having the young boy identify Mangan as his friend and associating the object of the protagonist's affections with the nationalist poet of the previous century, Joyce makes explicit connections between Mangan and the short story of "Araby." It would be unlike Joyce, however, to end the connections between Mangan and the short story there. Instead, Joyce includes plentiful imagery that resonates with Mangan's poetry (specifically "Dark Rosaleen") and with Mangan's concerns: nationalism (the connection between Celticism and Orientalism) and religion. In "Romantic Ireland, Dead and Gone: Joyce's 'Araby' as National Myth," Joseph J. Egan explores the references to nationalism

in the short story. Additionally, he acknowledges the interconnectedness of religious imagery with nationalistic imagery. Mangan's sister is a touchpoint in the story for nationalistic and religious imagery:

...the sacred and ecclesiastical imagery associated with Mangan's sister, as well as the convent-school retreat she makes, emphasize the idea of the union of Ireland and the Catholic Church. Mangan's sister, then, is not only, as we have seen, the symbol of an idealized Ireland, but also a representation, equally unreal, of the Roman Church as Virgin Madonna. (190)

Frederick K. Lang (1987) furthers the idea of Mangan's sister as a religious symbol, describing her in terms of a religious icon. Of the conversation between the boy and Mangan's sister on the porch, Lang suggests: "This lighting effect seems inspired by the lamps that hang in front of the *iconostasis* [in Byzantine liturgy], especially since the figure of Mangan's sister is presented iconically....[so that] Certain details are always associated with a particular figure" (116). As a result, when the boy thinks of Mangan's sister on the night of Araby, "Now all the details have been incorporated into the boy's imagination and fixed in a definite pattern; at this point the image of Mangan's sister is totally iconic" (116-117). An additional religious symbol, Lang proposes, is the reference that the boy's aunt makes to Saturday "night of Our Lord" (18), as a reference to Pentecost, which he believes "the date of the actual *Araby* bazaar" (118). Although the bazaar was actually a week after Pentecost, Lang believes that based on the importance of feast days in other stories in *Dubliners*, Joyce may have intended Pentecost weekend to be, for the purpose of his story, the weekend of the bazaar. If the story does take place on an imagined day before Pentecost, "the story's last lines evoke a vision of a world bereft of Christ and still awaiting a visible sign" (118). This, of course, has national implications as well for a subjugated nation, suggesting a nation that is awaiting deliverance, not unlike Dark Rosaleen, who significantly, is advised by her beloved:

O My Dark Rosaleen,  
Do not sigh, do not weep!  
The priests are on the ocean green,  
They march along the deep.  
There's wine from the royal Pope,  
Upon the ocean green;  
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,  
My Dark Rosaleen! (II.1-8)

Ireland will be assisted by the Roman Catholic Church and by other Roman Catholic nations (interestingly, including Spain, which also has Moorish connections). In this way, it is clear that by focusing on the Catholic images of Ireland (including the girl's convent retreat and the Christian Brothers education of the boy), Joyce is also focusing specifically on the Irish national experience.

In addition to Mangan's sister's serving at least on some level as a symbol for Ireland, other characters and situations in the short story represent elements of Irish national life. For example, Egan suggests that Mrs. Mercer, although more of a negative character than the legend, evokes the image of the Shan Van Vocht (the poor old woman), another personification of Ireland brought into the popular consciousness by a song celebrating the 1798 rebellion. Egan believes that "her dead husband's surname and trade and Mrs. Mercer's own hypocritical charity suggest that Ireland has become mercenary and petty, 'poor' now in spirit" (191). Egan further believes that by the English accents of the salesgirl at the bazaar and of the two men with whom she is conversing Joyce is suggesting "the exploitation of foreign, 'eastern' influence...[of] England" (191). When the salesgirl declares that the gentlemen are telling a "fib" (19), "her accusation has symbolic reference to the various lies and deceptions practiced against Ireland herself. From the pervasive gloom of Joyce's short story emerges the mythic vision of a country, the victim of 'a throng of foes,' stripped of her nationality by folly and self-delusion and sacrificed to exploitative foreign power" (193). Likewise, Willard Potts believes that the nationality of the characters in the story correlate with their sincerity and depth: "The feeble sexual teasing carried on by the English-accented males is the antithesis of the narrator's passionate and idealistic devotion to Mangan's sister. Likewise, the stall attendant's coyness is far removed from the simplicity with which Mangan's sister accepts the narrator's adoration" (75). Perhaps the boy himself realizes that he is experiencing "a recurring source of disillusionment in Joycean fiction...[:] the grim truth that, in forwarding the destruction of Ireland's independence and integrity, the 'foreigner' is aided by the Irish themselves....the East ever encroaches upon the West" (Egan 192).

Another important trope in "Araby" is that of knightly chivalry, closely related to which is the idea of the Crusades. The narrator speaks of his quest as a young boy for the girl as his journeys through Dublin in which he "bore [his] chalice safely through a throng of foes" (16). The boy imagines that the girl has sent him on a quest to "bring [her] something" (17) from the bazaar, which conspicuously has the name reminiscent of one of the goals of the medieval crusaders. Additionally, the boy's travels through Dublin serve as a veritable gantlet for him, as he sallies forth with his aunt in the "flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a come-all-you about O'Donovan Rossa or a ballad about the troubles in our native land" (16), tempting him to forget his mission. However, he remains steadfast. Also, the boy's uncle's drunken recitation of part of Caroline Norton's "*The Arab's Farewell to His Steed*" (18) explicitly links the themes of chivalry and Orientalism (Jackson and McGinley 27). It is not surprising that Joyce would elect to write a story of a young boy's coming of age (whether generally realizing the cruel ways of the world or coming to a greater understanding of his own precarious place as a mixture of colonial subject and citizen in a foreign Empire) in a medieval

milieu, because of the common perception that the medieval was a time of religious intensity and because of Joyce's own propensities. A friend of Joyce, Arthur Power, writes of Joyce

It was the Medieval and the Medievalists which attracted him most...He maintained that the present age was gradually returning to medievalism, remarking finally, with some bitterness, that if he had lived in the fourteenth or fifteenth century he would have been much more appreciated. Also the Ireland he had known, in his opinion, was still medieval, and Dublin a medieval city in which the sacred and the obscene jostled shoulders. (105)

Joyce also considered Yeats' magic and his later bawdiness medieval, and suggested that the Irish must be medieval and also not "empire" people because "we have never been subjected to the *Lex Romanus*, nor are we Renaissance men" (qtd. in Power 106). For an avowed medievalist such as Joyce, it is logical that he would write a story with medieval themes and a coming-of-age story that encompasses a romantic knightly quest which, in a Catholic city such as Dublin, must also include elements of religion, and in the context of the medieval trope of the story, the crusades are an appropriate religious quest; the Middle Eastern title of the bazaar solidifies the idea that the boy will go on a crusade to bring back a prize for his beloved. However, crusades have not only religious implications but suggest a clash of cultures: specifically, they evoke thoughts of one culture invading and overtaking another. In such a context, the young boy whose religious nature and zeal propel him into a quest for his beloved, whose connections with Mangan and Catholicism allow her to represent a nation, also imitates his own colonial oppressors.

While Joyce's imbuing his real experience of the Araby bazaar with all of these meaningful symbols is fascinating, his additions also involved some changes of the actual bazaar of the same name that he attended in May of 1894. Joyce's childhood schoolmate William G. Fallon remembers Joyce in his childhood: "When he was with us he sometimes appeared to be peering into the future. But he always entered into the spirit of things. One of the most notable things about him at school was his flair for observation linked to an uncanny memory" (48). It is likely, then, that Joyce would have remembered elements of the Araby bazaar that he left out of the story. Also, it is unusual, and probably significant, that Joyce who as a young boy would have been more likely to have exaggerated memories of the grandness of the bazaar, which featured imperial wonders, made the bazaar seem like a small and practically mercenary affair, which dashes the young boy's expectations. Fallon recalls meeting Joyce at the bazaar very late on Saturday evening "when it was just clearing up. It was very late. I lost Joyce in the crowd, but I could see he was disheartened over something. I recall, too, that Joyce had some difficulty for a week or so previously in extracting the money for the bazaar from his parent" (48). Perhaps Joyce's "disheartened" state left him with inaccurate memories of the bazaar, or more likely, considering Joyce's excellent memory and his obsession with detail, he changed the details of the bazaar to enrich his story.

Yet it is significant, if paradoxical, that the *omission* of detail can enrich the meaning of Joyce's story.

In "Joyce's 'Araby' and the 'Splendid Bazaar' of 1894," Ehrlich (1993) describes the actual bazaar, making use of the *Official Catalogue of Araby* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1894).<sup>1</sup> According to Ehrlich, the bazaar was

a huge international traveling fair and trade show embracing many separate buildings and outdoor areas, encompassing dozens of attractions, including professional entertainments, amusements, music hall, theatre, tableaux, sports, orchestras, circus acts, fireworks, sideshows, exhibits, dancing, and a large number of richly costumed charity stalls – not just the closed Café Chantant and single sales stalls described in the story. (19)

Also, the real Café Chantant was "still in full swing" at the time that Joyce describes it closing, and Ehrlich therefore concludes: "Joyce's description in 'Araby' of the bazaar as a small, dark, silent, and lonely place at 9:50 PM on Saturday, May 19, 1894, is an intentional reversal of the historical reality" (19). There must have been something, then, about the bazaar that Joyce wanted to deny. Perhaps it was the decidedly English thrust of the Araby bazaar that Joyce scorned. Citing an *Irish Times* article from 23 May 1894, Ehrlich, in "'Araby' in Context: The 'Splendid Bazaar,' Irish Orientalism, and James Clarence Mangan" describes English influences on the production of the bazaar, as well as English profit from the event: "Most of the entertainments and amusements for Araby were arranged in England, and evidently the lion's share of the production costs were fees for the English entrepreneurs: 'The builders of Araby, Messrs. Womersley and Company, of Leeds, receive a few hundred pounds, and the contractors of Messrs. Goodfellow, receive a fair amount of money'" (313). Not only were English companies responsible for the production of the bazaar, they also profited monetarily from it. Ehrlich's description of the specifically imperial entertainments of the bazaar includes the ways in which "British rule [was celebrated] in a theater called the 'Empire' and in a *tableau vivant* representing a scene called 'Britain and her Colonies'" (315). Ehrlich compares the bazaar, at which British imperialism was celebrated, to small Irish county fairs, at which nationalism ruled the day. However, in the short story, the ballad-singers are relegated to the streets (316), where the boy, in his unenlightened state, sees them as a nuisance, dwelling "in places the most hostile to romance" (16).

Considering that Joyce eliminated from the short story the events at the bazaar which would have glorified the British Empire and that he included a possibly imagined occurrence (the frivolously flirtatious conversation among the English shopkeeper and two young Englishmen) which gives a negative impression of the English, it seems that Joyce is using this story to impugn the Empire for its infiltration into Dublin life, and specifically into the life of the little Dublin boy, a would-be religious and nationalistic hero. Such a reading of Joyce's intentions is perhaps not far off. As Elizabeth Butler Cullingford (2000) notes,

In 1906-07, Joyce was feeling warmer than usual about Ireland and the lecture [which he delivered titled “Ireland, Island of Saints and Scholars] demonstrates his desire to mitigate...[his earlier] harshness....Yet he remains skeptical about Revivalist claims for Ireland’s Catholic virtue and Celtic purity, and about the practical effectiveness of her revolutionary organizations. He condemns the British Empire, and considers rebellion justifiable; but cannot see ‘what good’ it does to fulminate against the English tyranny when the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul.’ We might call this political position indifferent, balanced, or confused – or we might call it “semicolonial.” (221)

While he had not clearly articulated a position on Ireland’s place in the British Empire, the fact that “Araby” raises enough questions about the validity of imperial control shows Joyce’s tacit disapproval of it. Trevor L. Williams (1998) proposes that “Araby,” then, is an appropriate story to introduce the next set of stories about young adulthood, which also focus on national issues:

The conclusion of “Araby,” where “English accents” predominate, and the following three stories – “Eveline,” “After the Race,” and “Two Gallants” – all bring to the surface the subject of Ireland’s colonial dependence. Indeed, if those three stories are viewed as a group, they can be seen as the political manifestation of the boy’s coming to consciousness in “Araby”: while the story traces the confusions of “love,” its end points to the inferior position of the boy as Irish boy. (104)

The thrust of “Araby,” then, is not merely the coming to personal consciousness of an Irish boy, but the coming to national consciousness of a nation.

If the tale of “Araby” explores the relationship between Ireland and England, it does so by making use of the ruse of “Araby” in Ireland. By inserting an imperial image into another colonized area, Joyce provides polyvalent layers of meaning which allow for layers of interpretation about the degree of appropriateness of colonial occupation of Ireland. He does this by using the Orient as it had been used in literature leading up to that time. While Oriental novels usually had settings in an (inauthentic) East, “Araby” is set in an imagined “East” which has been plopped down by the English in Dublin. Prior to Joyce’s use of the Orient in his story, it had been given meanings by others. As early as the 1780s, the East was used in English writings to “offer...in addition to seclusion from the tedium of the quotidian[,]...novelty, self-knowledge and development” (Almond 21). The Orient was portrayed in novels of this time period as a location that was sufficiently distant from Britain to be safe as allegory. Rising in popularity in the 1780s, the Oriental tale was a particularly appropriate vehicle for political statement because British political life was centered on British influence in the East (Grenby 219). Additionally, making use of an Oriental backdrop allowed writers “to construct the world in pretty much any shape they wished, and yet without having to build entirely

from scratch” because the public envisioned the Orient as exotic and unpredictable (218).

In “Orientalism and Propaganda: The Oriental Tale and Popular Politics in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain,” M.O. Grenby (2002) describes the various usages of the Orient in fictional writings during the eighteenth century, which effected significant influences on future usages of the Orient in fiction. The image of the Orient, Grenby asserts, factually inaccurate as it was, was portrayed not as “a place, or a concept, over which Britain could obtain easy dominance [but]...something to be feared, for it represented all that was most corrupt in Britain’s own political identity. For both radicals and conservatives, the Other was already within, and it was faced not with complacency, but with apprehension and disquiet” (234-35). Even before the eighteenth century, the Orient was sometimes used as the setting for political allegories, but these early tales “were almost exclusively utilized by those writing with an anti-ministerial agenda” (215-16). The Orient is “understood as a political dystopia,” that which, depending on the writer’s agenda, Britain already has become or is in danger of becoming (234). Because of its remoteness, “the Orient functions as a tremendously polyvalent abstraction,...able to reflect any image of Britain” (234). However, that it is reflecting an image “of Britain” is significant. Despite its distant setting, the Oriental tale is about not Britain’s response to the Orient, but about its response to the perils that Britain faces at home. Furthermore, in Oriental tales, “protagonists long for, and are temporarily granted, not only extravagant wealth, but also great learning and understanding....And just as the new wealth brings them misery, so their new knowledge brings them nothing but anguish” (225). It is to be surmised that because of the real subject of Oriental tales, the “anguish” that the protagonist experiences is because of his realization of the corruption with which he is faced. However, because of its anonymity, brought about by its failure to “name names,”

an Oriental backdrop could, at least in theory, defend an author against any charge that he or she was writing sedition. Or rather it could give to the reader the *impression* that the text was so dangerously subversive, so daring, defiant and hard-hitting in its satire, that it needed the screen of Orientalism in order to protect the author from the persecution of a putative censor or other government agent who would be sure to pursue the author of so audacious an attack. (219)

Oriental tales, then, were a coded signal for potentially challenging and dangerous messages couched in luxuriant terms. Tales of the Orient, by their nature, were always polyvalent.

In several ways, it seems that Joyce uses the influence of the Oriental tale in “Araby.” The boy’s vision of the Orient is characterized by “Eastern enchantment” (17) and “luxur[y]” (17). These images may be quite inaccurate; however, even these more positive images are dashed by the crass commercialism of the bazaar, at which the boy is treated with impatience by the female shopkeeper who is eager only for a sale. Additionally, the boy’s arrival at the bazaar is greeted with a new realization, as in

Oriental tales, of anguish – this anguish is not brought on by disillusionment with the Orient, but with a realization of his own naivete. Furthermore, the presence of the English Araby bazaar within the Irish city of Dublin that is under the control of the Empire is sufficiently polyvalent to obscure any direct political attack that Joyce might be making. However, it seems that because the bazaar is a creation of the English, taking advantage of what may be perceived as an Irish romanticism (which the boy does indeed demonstrate) by evoking images of the East, any indictment that Joyce is making herein is not against the Irish or against Middle Easterners, but against the English who through the bazaar manipulate and exploit members of the two groups. Irish and “Arabian” become one, as both are objects that play into English commercialism. Through the very affinity that the Irish have towards the “Arabs,” their imagined pre-Celtic counterparts, the English are able to extract the Irish subjects’ money and dreams.

The economic ramifications of the boy’s attendance and inadequacy at the Araby bazaar suggest imperial themes. In “Blind Streets and Seeing Houses: *Araby’s* Dim Glass Revisited,” Margot Norris (1995) suggests that “‘Araby,’ the name of a longing for romance displaced onto a mythologized Oriental geography, suppresses the mediation of commerce and conceals the operations by which the fantasy of an exoticized and seductive East is a commercial fabrication produced by the realm the boy finds ‘most hostile to romance’ – the marketplace” (311). Norris even notes the similarity between the real life of the boy, which he refuses to recognize, and the Araby of his dreams: “The boy, attracted to the Orientalism of ‘Araby,’ fails to recognize in the Dublin street life the colorful gestures and music of an indigenous bazaar, more spontaneous in its diverse cultural productions...than the francophonic affectations of the staged commercial simulacrum, the Café Chantant...he finds in ‘Araby,’ closed, its only music the fall of coins on the salver to announce its mercenary character” (313-14). Attempting to take flight from one world of “Oriental” wonders to another, the boy gets mired in a world of commercialism, one in which both his age and his race make him inadequate and a subject. While Ehrlich holds that in the ending of his short story, “The socialist Joyce avoids the opportunity of turning the story into an outcry against capitalist and imperialist deception and exploitation” (“‘Splendid Bazaar’” 20), it seems that the emphasis on the boy’s inadequacy in this new commercial world which he has entered signals a type of indictment against it. By pointing out the exploitation of which the boy believes himself a victim, and by then not stating a specific motive for the boy’s “anguish and anger” (19), Joyce implies that the boy is rendered helpless, his “eyes burn[ing]” (226) with the realization that he has been had.

Joyce, then, in “Araby,” is suggesting that someone is at fault in the colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain. Vincent Cheng (1995) believes that “the title of ‘Araby’ contains a sharp irony: for this is finally a parable about Ireland as much as about an Orientalized Other. Nor should this be surprising: after all, the same binary dynamics of othering and essentialism...are also built into the England/Ireland relationship” (98). However, Cheng proposes that in “Araby” Joyce indicts Ireland, and



that Joyce presents Ireland as “debased...Dark Rosaleen is not a Gaelic Madonna but a cheap flirt selling her wares and her self for the coins of strangers” (100). To Cheng, Ireland is implicated in its own subservience to England, selling itself to England “as a debased Harlot” (100). Yet the boy’s indignant realization that he is being taken advantage of shows that Ireland is not mindlessly going along with British occupation. Ian Almond comes to a different conclusion: “There is no East, Joyce’s narrator almost seems to be saying, no magical place which will fill our lives with all kinds of colours and passions and sensations – just an empty bazaar. This is a cynical, embittered response to the Orient” (22-23). However, because the bazaar is not actually Oriental at all, but is simply marketed as such, this conclusion which indicts the boy’s (or the Irish) imagination does not seem appropriate.

While many believe that “Araby” is finally a story of a young boy’s early realization of the futility of turn-of-the-century Dublin life, I propose that its detached narrator tells the story in such a way that he acknowledges that he understands ~~of~~ how Ireland is being manipulated by the British government and that such a realization is the basis for change. At the time of the Irish literary revival, Irish writers debated how best to celebrate their tradition in literature. Some writers, of whom the most notable example is William Butler Yeats, chose to retreat to Celticism, writing about myths and legends, magic and mystery: things that other writers, including Joyce, thought were too foreign to actually strike a chord with the Irish. Those who were against the overly Celtic style of Yeats criticized him, saying that it was nearly necessary to read a reference book on Celtic mythology to understand his poetry. One critic, D. P. Moran (1900), a nationalist journalist and member of the Gaelic League, leveled: “Even Mr. Yeats does not understand us [Irish Catholics], and he has yet to write even one line that will strike a chord of the Irish heart. He dreams dreams. They may be very beautiful and ‘Celtic,’ but they are not ours” (971). However beautiful “Celtic” writings were, they risked becoming formulaic, and when people used these Celtic myths and legends to define the Irish people and to imbue them with national characteristics, they ultimately ran the risk of reinforcing stereotypes against the Irish. In fact, if one could master the codes of Celticism, one could indeed “speak the language” of the Celts. Lloyd draws out the fundamental similarity between Orientalism and Celticism:

The “originality” of the Oriental – or Celtic – poet lies in his closeness to the “origins” of human kind and human feeling, and etymological play whose paradoxes, as James Stam has argued are, at the heart of those Romantic aesthetic theories for which the original genius is he who returns to and repeats the original moments of human perception, stripped of the veils of inherited customs and rules. (34)

And yet there is artifice in attempting to return to the origins, since it is impossible to become entirely divested of real life experience. Instead, just as something that is “Orientalized” should be commendable but, like the “Araby” bazaar created by the

English, can be corrupted, so too can Irish (or “Celtic”) literature be coopted and pirated by the Empire as a vehicle for further control.

If like the boy, the Irish fall into the not always negative stereotype that they are romantic (that is, “original”) by nature, they run the risk of falling prey to those who would try to capitalize on this tendency. Instead of, as the boy did, trying to fill the national type of the romantic wanderer, the religious crusader, he who blindly loves that which symbolizes his nation, the Irishman should strive to be an individual so as not to fall into the trap of the English colonizer. Ehrlich proposes, that “In denying the ‘splendid bazaar,’ Joyce showed both the glories and perils of attempting to recreate Arabian nights images in the solitary mind. The displacements would have been better understood by the reader of 1907 or 1914 as matters for powerful euphoria, pity, and irony” (“‘Splendid Bazaar’” 20). However, it is possible that it is not the creating of the “Orient” that is hazardous, but that the Orient created by the wrong people is hazardous. Perhaps in his manipulation of the factual occurrence of the bazaar, Joyce was actually showing that despite the glamour that the English sponsors of the bazaar wanted the Irish patrons to see, so that they would spend money and have a greater reverence for the magnanimity of the Empire, the promise of opulence for the Irish through the Empire is empty, and is self-serving, benefiting only the Empire itself.

## Notes

- 1 No copies of this book were available to me on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, and I was therefore unable to get a copy of it myself. However, Ehrlich’s elucidation of the text provides plentiful information and gives the reader what appears to be an accurate picture of the 1894 festivities from the text he cites from the *Catalogue*.

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# *Fragmented Identities in Circles of Fears and Desires*

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**Abstract:** *What has always been considered indivisible, the individual, is, above all, fragmented. That fragmentation is celebrated through the figure of the vampire in the literary narratives of the XIX and XX centuries, hence the multiple identities of that tormented shadow. This tormented manner of being is the foundation of the permanent state of war typical of the constant tension between the way a person is and the way he/she would wish to be. The figure of the vampire subverts what Michel Maffesoli calls “the phantom of the self”, common in the Western tradition. To the French philosopher the dogmatic reason not only can but also needs to impose a unity. Feelings and affections, in their turn, drive us into a turbulence, a discomfort of multiplicity. Thus, the genealogy of the rebellious spirit presents us with a revolt against the conceptions of the individual as static. It is exactly the fact of being multiple in himself/herself that brings the individual to the lack of recognition of himself/herself in the social rigidity.*

*Establishing a dialogue with Maffesoli’s theory, I shall analyse Bram Stoker’s novel Dracula (1887) and Heloísa Seixas’ short story “Íblis” (1995). These narratives converge as they both reveal the sombre side of our nature which, according to Maffesoli, though it can be domesticated by culture, it continues to enliven our desires, our fears, our feelings. Freud, Kristeva, Beauvoir and Foucault will help in the development of the ideas of the uncanny, abjection, identity, and sexuality.*

It was only with John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819) that English fiction first saw the appearance of the vampire. This novella consecrates the monster as a metaphor of transgression. However, while most critics agree in reading the vampire as a transgressive force, its psychological or social significance can vary according to cultural needs. Dracula, for instance, has been considered a tyrannical aristocrat who sought to preserve the survival of his house by threatening the security of the bourgeois family. On the other hand, according to a Marxist reading the vampire embodies the way in which human life nourishes the machine of capitalist production.

It is important to remember that 19<sup>th</sup> century vampires are not only aristocrats, but also seducers, hence their association with sexuality, policing the boundaries between 'normal' and 'deviant' sexuality.

In early vampire fiction, the representation of the vampire as monstrous, evil and other serves to guarantee the existence of good, reinforcing the formally dichotomized structures of belief which, although beginning to crumble under the impact of an increasingly secular and scientific world, still constituted the dominant worldview. However, by the end of the twentieth century, vampire fiction becomes more and more sceptical about such categories. There is no doubt that the figure of the vampire can still be seen as the incorporation of evil and otherness, but more usually the oppositions between good and evil are increasingly problematized. In other words, instead of seeing it only as the work of the devil, vampirism can be explained in different manners – as a representation of the human condition, for example, rather than as a metaphysical conflict between good and evil (Punter 2004: 268-272).

Thus, what has always been considered indivisible, the individual, becomes, above all, fragmented. That fragmentation is celebrated through the figure of the vampire in the literary narratives of the XIX and XX centuries, hence the multiple identities of that tormented shadow. This tormented manner of being is the foundation of the permanent state of war typical of the constant tension between the way a person is and the way he/she would wish to be. The figure of the vampire subverts what Michel Maffesoli calls "the phantom of the self", common in the Western tradition. To the French philosopher, dogmatic reason not only can but also needs to impose a unity. Feelings and affections, however, in their turn, drive us into a turbulence, a discomfort of multiplicity. Thus, the genealogy of the rebellious spirit presents us with a revolt against the conceptions of the individual as static. It is exactly the fact of being multiple in himself/herself that brings the individual to the lack of recognition of himself/herself in the conventional constructs of social rigidity<sup>1</sup> (Maffesoli 2002: 115).

It is common knowledge that the vampire does not die, or better, it is the undead. Perhaps it would be interesting to try to understand the vampire as a centrifugal force that escapes any limiting connection, and therefore is bound to new significations conveyed by the social, historical and political contexts of which it is a part. Thus, this figure emerges at times of conflicts and tensions. The undead reflects, metaphorically, that which is always on the verge of exploding, of appearing; it threatens the return of the outlaw that characterizes the spirit of the time. The vampires are, therefore, shadows that give meaning to life, conferring a sweet-sour flavour to it. This ambivalence of the vampire signals the organicity of all things. Its double life is full of practices of transgressions, of animality, incarnating that which the enlightenment tries to erase, to throw to the margins. Thus the vampire is a metaphor of the completely Other that is more likely to offer a "site of identification than a metaphor for what must be abjected" (Punter 2004: 271).

Establishing a dialogue with Maffesoli's theory, I shall analyse Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1887) and Heloísa Seixas' short story "Íblis" (1995). These narratives

converge as they both reveal the sombre side of our nature which, according to Maffesoli, though it can be domesticated by culture, continues to enliven our desires, our fears, and our feelings. Freud, Kristeva, Beauvoir and Foucault will help in the development of the ideas of the uncanny, abjection, identity, and sexuality.

## **The erotic body**

Gothic literature, through mechanisms that subvert traditional notions of the real, brings to light that which was hidden so as not to disturb the proper function of the social machine. Hence the Gothic occupies an interstitial space, away from the center, always at the edge. The uncanny region is the space of concealed desire which, according to Freud (1963), is familiar and old – established in the mind and become alienated from it only through the process of repression.

In my readings of the Brazilian author, Heloísa Seixas, and the Irish one, Bram Stoker, I observe the great force of the erotic power that the vampire exerts on women. This desire is in consonance with one of the veins that make the heart of the Gothic beat, namely, taboo. The use of this device has become a consensus with the writers of the genre to give visibility to matters that are normally discarded in order to keep the social and psychological balance of the individual. As we all know, a taboo is one of the most extreme forms of inhibition imposed by a culture to guarantee its survival. However, its violation is manifested in the Gothic genre through narratives of phantasy, displaying ghosts and vampires, where the forbidden is substituted by something that fills the libidinal gap. As the locus of absolute desire, the libido seeks absolute satisfaction, refusing to acknowledge ‘realistic’ restraints (Jackson 2000: 70).

So as to suffocate this manifestation of desire, the vampire was created in the XIX century, a machine that fabricated “a proliferation of discourses, carefully tailored to the requirements of power” (Foucault 1998: 72). Nevertheless, this device was not sufficient, as Foucault observes, for these discourses, although used as deployments of power and knowledge, only intensified pleasures. According to Foucault, at issue is not a movement bent on pushing rude sex back into some obscure and inaccessible region, but on the contrary, a process that spreads it over the surface of things and bodies.

In “Íblis”, by Heloísa Seixas, the inclusion of mystery, the uncanny, is not shown abruptly; on the contrary, as Tavares says in the introduction it slowly appears, “in a gradual dislocation from the axis of perception, impelling the narrative voice, character and reader, each page, a little bit further from the prescribed reality”<sup>2</sup> (Seixas 2003: 116). Already in the first scene of the narrative, the narrator induces the reader to deviate from her/his traditional position to deal with the real, when he compares the sweet smell of mud that penetrates in Camila’s [the protagonist] nostrils with “the bittersweet scent of the withered flowers of dead bodies”<sup>3</sup> (Seixas 117).

The story takes place in Istanbul, where Camila goes to supervise the restoration work of the tiles of the Blue Mosque, and on the train, on her way to Paris, where she

lives. However, before catching the train, Camila stops “with her hands on the cold stone of the windowsill, to admire the blue, almost black, of the waters of the Bosforo, reflecting in its nervous mirror the mishaped domes [...] of the old walls that one day protected the city” (Seixas 117). This scene builds up an atmosphere for the coming of Íblis Vardanián, when the presence of the vampire is consolidated, and the reader makes the inevitable comparison with *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker.

Before Camila boards the train, she sits on a bench in a park, determined to read a book on Islamism; instead she contemplates the book front cover with “a man with a thick black beard, a white turban, a dark cloak over grey clothes, and a machine-gun in his hands” (Seixas 118). Islamism fascinated Camila: “everything she did up to the moment had gravitated around that fascination” (ibid. 118). Unfortunately, she had to put the book aside to catch the train to Paris.

We can observe that in both narratives under discussion the train is used as a means of transportation. In *Dracula*, Harker, a solicitor’s clerk from London, travels towards Transylvania and Dracula’s castle, and in Íblis, Camila travels home. It is important to notice here that the suspense of both narratives depends upon keeping the characters in ignorance of what they are about to encounter – like most vampire fiction, this device works by systematically delaying the acquisition of knowledge. At the same time, the train is important for it provides them with a panoramic perception: “what one sees is panoramic, spectacular, distanced and soon left behind” (Gelder 1994: 3). We can also observe that those dislocations from one place to another signal transitions, such as a transition from life to the un-death, like the awakening to a transgressive sexuality, or the perception that the way to fulfill one’s desire rests on the negation of sexual patterns that have been socially prescribed.

Before entering the train, Camila feels the gaze of a man standing at the platform. Notwithstanding the ironic tone of narrative distancing, the narrator’s description of the male figure forces the reader to make an association with Count Dracula. The stranger has a strong aquiline face and his eagle eyes seemed to want to tear her apart as if they were daggers. His black beard grows profusely around the face, while the nose, arched and blazing, protudes aggressively (Seixas 120). The Count, in his turn, has a face “strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils [...], his hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere [...]. His eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury” (Stoker 1996: 17, 26).

## Abjected body

The vampire in these narratives is nothing but the unconscious projection of desire. For projection, we must understand those feelings “which the subject refuses to recognize or rejects in himself and which are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing” (Jackson 66). Thus, the vampire, as other, is a reflection of the self that makes itself present, just as repressed memories of desire: the knowledge that



must be denied, forbidden. Consequently, the myth of the vampire is, perhaps, the highest symbolic representation of eroticism. Its return in Victorian England, after its appearance in legends and its incursions in Polidori's *The Vampyre*, and many other works of fiction, proves that it is a myth born out of extreme repression. The figure of the vampire brings to light all that is kept in the dark, hence his appearance at night, in the train (as in *Íblis*), "when light/vision/the power of the look are suspended" (Jackson 120).

When desire is accomplished, as in Lucy's case, death usually follows it. As Foucault observes, "strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation" (Foucault 1998: 38). In "*Íblis*", on the other hand, we see that pleasure is welcomed. In both narratives, nevertheless, sexual desire is gradually constructed, which, paradoxically, shows that the most important element to permeate the object of desire is fear. Hence the vampire is desired with attraction and repulsion.

Contrary to the object (that which opposes the subject), the abject is excluded from the realm of meaning, for it cannot be named. Yet, from its place of banishment, the abject is always challenging the subject, refusing to be expelled. Consequently, it is a threat: it provokes the return of the repressed, of that which, though familiar, must be kept at the edge, for it does not respect ideology. Thus, the abject is on the other side of the border, does not respect positions, rules; on the contrary, it draws attention to the fragility of the law. On the other hand, abjection is linked to desire. This process, however, is unconscious, so much so that it is rejected by the subject. This paradox marks its association with the literary Gothic. So, if on the one hand the abject is rejected, on the other, it is violently and painfully desired. And as in *jouissance*, the object of desire "bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other" (Kristeva 1982: 9).

Abjection is above all ambiguity. If on the one hand it releases a hold, on the other it does not allow the other to be free from what threatens it. On the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. Hence pleasure and repulsion. The abject is not identified only with a past repression, but with what constitutes the subject, his/her desires, which, although repressed by laws, social norms, and structures of meanings, are there to be sued for. According to Kristeva, "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'. Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (Kristeva 10). It is important to emphasize that it is through abjection, as represented in literary works, that social and moral values can be questioned. At the same time, the abjected body retains the power to revolt and transgress.

Still in the same line of thought, we see that it is the double of me that is in the game, yearning for infinitude, trying to find, live something else apart from what is ascribed to my social identity. This duality is a basic element in the vampire narratives, which not only recognize but also act the obscure side of the self, not limiting itself to a unilateral rational ideal (Maffesoli 118). Maffesoli calls our attention to this inconstancy between divine and profane values that are related in all human histories. This bipolarity

has been kept in the collective memory through the vampire, a figure that encompasses “a sheer conservatory of concrete wisdom, in which the homology between ‘what is underneath’ and ‘what is above’ used to be a lived reality” (ibid. 119).

## Final comments

There is a crucial difference between Seixas’ and Stoker’s narratives. In the former, the reader has access to the protagonist’s desire through parallel and underlined stories, while in the latter, desire is instigated only when confronted with abjection. In “Íblis”, Camila, though scared, does not resist the aggressive gaze of the man she identifies with the Muslim fighter of the front cover of the book. She is dominated by fear and attraction. It is important to notice that in both works under consideration, the vampire figure functions as a propelling element of the characters’ latent desires, which is awoken by the disturbing effect of the gaze.

Thus, Camila, just by the simple presence of the stranger in the train, “feels a warmth in the nape”. As she moves around she sees him. She tries to control herself, but the piercing eyes “undressed her” (Seixas 121) to such an extent that she brings to mind past sexual fancies. In *Dracula*, in its turn, Harker is visited by female vampires with “great dark, piercing eyes” (Stoker 37). Harker felt he recognized the face of one of them, the one with golden hair and eyes of pale sapphires, as if this recognition had been connected with a “dreamy fear” (ibid. 37) whose origin he could not recollect then: “There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (ibid. 37).

Camila finds out that the name of the man that fascinated her is Íblis Vardanián, and that, as Dracula, he dresses himself in black when he comes to see her in her cabin in the train: “She knows she is lost, his eyes assure her of this” (Seixas 123). There are other moments in “Íblis” when the reader is reminded of Stoker’s novel. The first one concerns the names of the vampires. Camila also finds out that Íblis in Muslim literature means “morning star”, “the link between light, and darkness, symbol of .... Lucifer! Lucifer, the fallen angel, the devil between dark and light” (ibid. 123). This is the definition of the vampire. The second moment concerns the sexual act. In “Íblis”, the hands of the figure of darkness touch her breasts and “move up, with a delicate touch, in the direction of the neck” (ibid. 123); in *Dracula*, in its turn, “his right hand gripped her [Mina] by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom” (Stoker 282).

The figure of the vampire can tell us about sexuality, of course; but it can also be associated with more specific contemporary concerns, such as relations of power and alienation, attitudes towards evil at the end of an unprecedentedly secular century.

To conclude, we could say that the figure of the vampire has, throughout history, and in different cultures, the power to be outside human categorization, which facilitates its appropriation by Gothic writers to reflect the changes of time in the human mind and

soul. In both narratives, notwithstanding the chronological distance that separates them, we notice that the vampire is more of a symptom than of a cause, a symptom of desires which, powerfully repressed, can only emerge in unusual free spaces, such as the one constituted by literary production.

## Notes

\* UERJ.

1 All quotations from Maffesoli's work are translated by me.

2 My translation.

3 All quotations from Íblis are translated by me.

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# Drama

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# *Women in Irish Theatre: the Charabanc Theatre Company and Marie Jones<sup>1</sup>*

Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos

**Abstract:** *If women appear to have contributed relatively little to the theatrical scene in Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century, the same cannot be said about women in the Irish theatre after 1950. Increasing modernization, liberalization and decentralization of Irish society, and of the theatre industry, provided the opportunities for women's voices to be included, not only in writing but also in producing and directing plays – that is to say, to play a role in Irish theatre's social history. This paper focuses mainly on the work of the Charabanc Theatre Company, an all-female group founded in Belfast in 1983, and on the work of its former leading figure and writer, Marie Jones. Their work made a remarkable contribution to revitalizing the energy of Irish theatre in the closing decades of the twentieth century, leaving a significant legacy for national and international drama in the twenty-first century.*

The founding of the Charabanc Theatre Company, in Belfast, in 1983, was a landmark in the history of female contribution to theatre in Ireland after 1950, considering that the first half of the twentieth century can be regarded as a period when there was a relative lack of contribution by women to the Irish theatrical scene. The obvious exception is the presence of Lady Gregory as a strong, business-minded force in the conception of the idea of a national theatre, the direction of the Abbey Theatre, and the selection of its repertoire, apart from the writing and production of plays for that theatre. Yet, Lady Gregory “enjoys a literary afterlife more as a symbolic icon than as an author in her own right”, as Anne Fogarty has put it in the Introduction to the special issue of the Irish University Review dedicated to the playwright in the year that celebrated the centenary of the Abbey Theatre. Indeed her somewhat anomalous figure has most often inspired criticism focusing precisely on her theatrical activity, rather than on her work as a playwright. An earlier periodical, Irish Literary Studies 13 – *Lady Gregory: Fifty Years After*, edited by Ann Saddlemyer and Colin Smythe, also paid tribute to her career in theatre and drama. In Brazil, Marluce Dantas wrote a PhD thesis, at the University of São Paulo, in 1998, entitled *Lady Gregory: Uma Dramaturgia de Confluências Teóricas e Práticas* (*Lady Gregory: A Dramaturgy of Theoretical and Practical Confluence*).

The work of other women in the first half of the twentieth century has often been neglected by critics, and only recently reassessed. Among other names one should perhaps remember Shelagh Richards and Ria Monney, for their somewhat experimental work derived from their activity with the Dublin Drama League and the Gate Theatre. Ria organized the interesting “Experimental Theatre”, in 1937, with the support of the Abbey, on lines similar to those that guided the work of the League and the Gate, while Shelagh directed O’Casey’s world première of *Red Roses for Me* at The Olympia Theatre, in 1943.

More thorough female participation in the history of Irish theatre, however, came about only with the process of modernization and liberalization of Irish society, which is usually seen as having begun or gained strength in the 1950s and 1960s. Among other factors, the end of the so-called De Valera age in the Republic, the advent of television in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, and the changes in the church promoted by the Second Vatican Council contributed to the process, which now not only included but also demanded a space for female activity in society, and in the theatre industry. Thus, in the second half of the twentieth century, one sees the role of women in theatre changing, from almost invisible, to daring, and, perhaps, almost to dominant. In this period, as well as modernization, there was increasing decentralization and regionalization of cultural and theatrical activity in Ireland. Thus, modern Irish theatre, which originated in Dublin, developed from the Abbey in the opening decades, and later the Gate in the 1930s – with their nationalist and cosmopolitan ideologies, respectively – into the foundation of several companies out of Dublin and Belfast, after the 1950s, with alternative voices that interrogated and represented that changing society, with an ever-increasing female contribution.

In 1951, Mary O’Malley co-founded the Lyric Players Group, in Belfast, later the Lyric Players Theatre, which for a long time was one of only three subsidized theatres on the island – the other two being the Abbey and the Gate. The group was influenced by Austin Clarke’s Dublin-based Lyric Theatre and by the socialist-oriented New Theatre Group in Dublin, and modeled on the early National Theatre Society in Dublin and the Ulster Literary Theatre in Belfast, becoming known as a Poet’s Theatre. According to Lionel Pilkington, “this combination of influences was reflected in the Lyric’s formalist commitment to the autonomy of the aesthetic *and* in its view that the theatre might also provide the impetus for an all-Ireland (32-county) cultural movement” (185-6). Most criticism dedicated to the activity of the group recognizes Mary O’Malley as a leading artistic figure, both as director and designer. The poet John Hewitt paid tribute to her on the occasion of the foundation of the Lyric Players’ new theatre in Belfast, in 1965, with these verses:

### **For Mary O’Malley and The Lyric Players**

With all to thank, I name in gratitude  
and set beside the best, with them aligned,



the little band upon their little stage,  
tempered to shew, by that dark woman's mood,  
O'Casey's humours, Lorca's sultry rage,  
Theban monarch's terror, gouged and blind.  
(In Bell, Sam Hanna, *The Theatre in Ulster*, 123).

The Lyric survived the 1970s in Belfast, when to perform plays, especially politically informed ones, in those bleak nights, must have been an act of courage. The company ceased to operate in 1981, having shared its somewhat daring history with other enterprises equally courageously led by women.

The Pike Theatre, co-founded in Dublin, in 1953, by Carolyn Swift and her husband, enjoyed a much shorter life – nine years – staging, however, the Irish premières of Brenda Behan's *The Quare Fellow* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, no less. In the recently published *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, Anthony Roche draws attention to the significance of the Pike's production, considering the sometimes difficult to grasp, or often neglected, Irishness in Beckett's play: "In the Pike interpretation the two tramps were played as markedly Irish, whereas Pozzo became an Anglo-Irish dominating one native (Lucky) and objecting to the presence of two others (Vladimir and Estragon) on his lands" (489). According to Roche, the Irish première, in 1955, had important consequences for the "decolonization" of theatre in Ireland. In a slightly opposite view, although equally full of praise of the Pike, Chris Morash, in his *History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000*, points out another side – perhaps the best-known side – of the legacy of Beckett's first *Godot* in Ireland: "In a sense, the Pike theatre production of *Waiting for Godot* heralded the arrival in Ireland of that oxymoronic beast, a mainstream *avant-garde*" (208).

If decolonization and experimentation remained as the legacy of previous theatrical enterprises led by women, regionalization is recognized as having singularized the Druid Theatre, co-founded by Garry Hynes, in Galway, in 1975. The activity of the Druid, rescuing the Irish dramatic tradition through memorable revivals and launching the work of new Irish playwrights, though still relatively unmapped, has contributed remarkably to shaping the face of theatrical activity in contemporary Ireland, with Garry Hynes as the company's long standing central figure.

The 1980s definitely evoke terms such as plurality and diversity in the cultural and political agendas of the island, particularly in the Republic. The ground prepared by former generations now flourished in the revitalization of theatrical activity and productivity. The iconic event of the decade is the foundation of Field Day, in Derry, 1980, by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, later joined by Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane and Tom Paulin.

In the realm of female participation, Lynne Parker became the key figure of Rough Magic, founded in 1984, in Dublin – now, one of the most successful companies

in contemporary Ireland. Charabanc was founded in Belfast one year before by five actresses – Marie Jones, Eleanor Methven, Maureen McAuley, Carol Scanlan and Brenda Winter, “disillusioned by their own lack of professional employment opportunities and by their evaluation of the traditional theatre roles that existed for women - in their words ‘wives, mothers or the background for some guy on stage’”. (Imelda Foley, *The Girls in The Big Picture*, 36). Since Field Day and Charabanc coexisted, the comparison, most often gender-based, has become inevitable in the criticism of the girls’ company. “Almost binary opposition”, Imelda Foley argued, “in terms of gendered founding membership is matched by opposing ideologies and methodologies. The hierarchical and intellectual base of one is challenged by the collaborative and intuitive operation of the other” (39). According to Eleanor Methven, speaking on behalf of Charabanc, “Field Day was formed ... on a very different basis, on an academic basis, on an aspiration of making a statement ... We came along from the other end of the spectrum. They had academic and literary heavyweights on their board, and we had trade-union leaders and anybody who had been nice to us along the way ... But we were always praised for the rawness and energy.” (in Bort, Eberhard, Ed., *The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties*, 114).

Although often labeled as feminists, they continuously denied a politically feminist perspective as the ideology of the group. “We didn’t think of it in any feminist terms - it was an unconscious feminist - if you like”, explained Methven. Most of their plays, however, depicted the lives of women as characters, either in Belfast or in rural settings, who invariably occupied the centre of the stage. Interwoven with this somehow feminist perspective, critics often pointed out a certain note of non-sectarian socialism – another label, however, which was constantly denied. The label probably reflects the company’s initial link with Martin Lynch, a working-class Belfast playwright who, at that time was writer-in-residence at the Lyric. When asked to create a play for the newly-founded company, he “surprised the Charabanc women by saying he would help them write their own plays” – according to Claudia Harris (in Bort, Eberhard, *The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties*, 106), who has for a long time researched Charabanc’s work, and has just published four of their plays. In fact, writing their own plays became their major strength. From 1983 to 1995, when they ceased to operate, Charabanc produced and performed eighteen new works and three extant works.

Their first play, in spite of the denials about ideologies, already embodied both of the points of view with which Charabanc has traditionally been labeled: feminist and socialist. *Lay up Your Ends*, premiered at the Belfast Arts Theatre in 1983, portrayed women in the Belfast linen mills as protagonists of history. While the plays were initially written on a collaborative basis, soon Marie Jones became the dominant figure in writing, and also, perhaps, in providing and maintaining the company’s repertoire and identity. Indeed, the play that best expresses the spirit of the company was Marie Jones’s *The Girls in the Big Picture*, beginning with the significant title, which allegorizes the whole of Charabanc as a movement, examining theatre in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and the theatrical interrelations between Ireland and the world.

Marie Jones was writer-in-residence till 1990, and remained as the most prominent figure to have emerged from Charabanc. She left the company to start a new venture with Pam Brighton – Double Joint Productions, founded in 1991, which expressed the initial desire in the name chosen for the company: an enterprise that would bring together theatrical initiatives in Belfast and Dublin. Jones’s mature work and most successful play, both nationally and internationally, *Stones in his Pockets*, was written for the new company. With *Stones*, her name definitely became international in terms of recognition. Looking back, then Marie Jones’s career moves from a relatively local perspective, represented by Charabanc in Belfast in the 1980s, to a national one, with the Double Joint initiative, and finally international success with *Stones in His Pockets*. The play was translated into Portuguese by Domingos Nunez as *Pedras nos Bolsos*, and has now enjoyed two seasons of successful performances in São Paulo, Brazil. The staging of Jones’s play in Brazil points to a new dimension in the development of Irish theatre, and also invites further research in this field of its potential for internationalization – surpassing questions of nation and genre, perhaps, and expanding into wider vistas, of geography and language.

## Note

- 1 This paper was presented to the First Symposium of Irish Studies in South America, São Paulo, from Sep 28 to 30, 2006, as part of the Round Table “Travelling Drama: from Ireland to São Paulo”. The ideas conveyed here derive partly from Post-Doctoral research at Santa Catarina Federal University and a period as Visiting Scholar at Trinity College, Dublin.

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# *Thomas Kilroy's The Shape of Metal: "Metal ... Transformed into Grace" – Grace into Metal*

Csilla Bertha

**Abstract:** *Thomas Kilroy in The Shape of Metal, probes into the age-old problems of the relationship between art and life, artist and human being, physical reality and its transcendence, throwing new light on the many ambiguities involved. The essay examines some of the ways Kilroy dramatizes the experience of human and artistic failure through the protagonist, an old female sculptor, and the evocation of giant artists, from Michelangelo through Giacometti to Beckett and argues that the achievements and artistic principles of these artists highlight some of Kilroy's own drama-forming principles as well as aspects of his theatricality.*

Thomas Kilroy's *The Shape of Metal* (2003), focusing on an old female artist poised at the far end of life somewhere between life and death, interrogates the nature of artist-as-parent, or, more exactly, artist-as-mother, art and motherhood, the art of motherhood. Set in the liminal place between lifeless matter and living human suffering, the play addresses questions concerning the relationship between art and life, the power of art and the artist, moral responsibility towards one's creations whether living human being or stone. The Beckettian notion of failure as the condition of art and the almost inevitability of failure in art and life resonates throughout and counterbalances the Yeatsian desire for perfection to be achieved in art and/or life just as incompleteness and unfinishedness – which is deemed more human – becomes juxtaposed to completion, the finished quality of work. The play probes into such philosophical, artistic, and human-psychological areas as these ideas become shaped in the theatrical space.

Heidegger defines the relation between artist and art as "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. ... In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names – art" (17). But artist as human being, particularly as mother, is also the origin of life as life itself is the origin of the human being. Therefore artist as mother extends Heidegger's equation to include life;

artist-mother creating both art and life. *The Shape of Metal* centres on an old woman sculptor and mother of two daughters and keeps these interrelationships richly ambiguous.

The protagonist as a modernist artist, brings the age-old intricacies between art and life, artist and family relations into the limelight of the contemporary time. Nell Jeffrey's story, as it unfolds in conversations with one of her daughters Judith, as well as in flashbacks, dreams and visions, raises as many questions about art and artist as it does about life and human relationships, including the possibility of being a loving mother while devoting one's life to creation, the limits of a mother's interfering with her child's life, the artist's powers to create and destroy pieces of art and human lives.

The complexity of the relationship between art and life appears on the level of plot, action, imagery, and the form of dramatization and stage technique. The naturalism of the opening stage image with the protagonist, the 82-year-old Nell Jeffrey, sleeping in her studio, is disrupted immediately when her daughter's, Grace's head, appears "through the back wall ... illuminated . . . . The effect is of a mounted head, speaking" (11). The image of Grace, sculpture-like and yet speaking life-like, introduces a theatricality that destabilises the borderlines between art and life. Her monologue then verbally reinforces the ambiguity:

Are you going to sculpt my head, Mummy, as promised? ... Busy fingers pressing and shaping, lump of stuff, stone or metal to be transformed into Grace finally at peace, head still and quiet, no terrible dread anymore... Mummy kneading the head. ... Mummy stop everything, head on pedestal, absolutely still. Grace inside the silence. Safe. (11)

The process of sculpting sounds reversible: Grace's head turns into sculpture while matter (stone or metal) turns into Grace. In performance the audience first cannot hear how the word "kneading" is spelled in the sentence "Mummy 'kneading' the head" so it works both ways: Mummy "needing" Grace's head for her creation just as she is "kneading," that is, massaging the head to heal her in life while turning that head into something else – a work of art. What is more, as Ian Shuttleworth noted, the audience cannot hear "the capital letter of [Grace's] personal name" in the opening dream-monologue so the sentence "Stone or metal to be transformed into Grace" can be "interpret[ed] metaphysically" (accessmylibrary). The double-entendre is certainly deliberate since in transforming lifeless matter into a statue, the sculptor breathes life into it and thus reaches beyond the material, into the state of grace. The other side of the process, however, is that life – Grace's life in this case – becomes silenced, turned into stone or metal according to the artist's will. The artist-mother thus, while eternalizing her daughter, metaphorically kills her by shaping her and putting her "head on pedestal ... inside the silence". By doing so, Kilroy puts the Keatsean ("Ode to a Grecian Urn") and Yeatsean ("Sailing to Byzantium") dilemmas concerning the relationship between art and life into palpable stage reality. He also adds to them the aspect of moral responsibility not just for one's artistic creation but also for life in one's immediate

environment as Kilroy's artist-mother is not an innocent creator of art-work but is actually – as the plot gradually reveals – personally responsible for Grace's mysterious disappearance and probable death. Ironically, the reason for the split between mother and daughter is not, however, the predictable one; that is, Nell does not neglect motherhood because of the demands of the artist's vocation. On the contrary, her motherly love and over-protectiveness, complemented by the artist's impulse to act God-like, makes her insist on shaping her daughter's personality and life. As Nell herself admits, "I know I'm a bit of a beast. Sometimes. Go at things with a hatchet, I do" (22). She treats feelings as she treats her raw material – as seen in her drastic interference in Grace's life and love affair that emotionally crushed the daughter.

When a young artist, Nell "stood in one of the centres of the modern world" as she reminisces about Beckett introducing her to Giacometti in 1938 (23). These two giants of modernist art, together with the two sculptors, Michelangelo and Brancusi, who inspired Nell's chief work *Woman Rising from Water*, appear to set the co-ordinates of her art. An examination of what artistic aspects the evocation of these artists highlight, what attitudes to art they share with Kilroy, and how he defines the artist-protagonist Nell against them, illuminates Kilroy's drama-forming principles and some aspects of his theatricality.

Kilroy as a "late modernist writer" (Murray, "Kilroy: the Artist" 90), shares with modernist artists the attribution of special significance to form. He has been known for his incessant experimenting in search of the form that best suits his subject: "I believe form is discovered within the material, not imposed from without, and, therefore, each work finds its own form and style. ... For me the style is determined by the nature of the material" ("Whole Idea" 261). Writing about Synge as a modernist, for example, Kilroy maintains that "[m]odernism ... is not just a preference for one form above another, it is, in its fullest meaning, a mode of perception of knowledge with a very definite idea of how art should express such knowledge" ("Synge and Modernism" 176). *The Shape of Metal*'s central issues of giving "shape" to matter, giving form to life and life to art, are therefore self-reflexive, commenting on the playwright's art and of any art's form, including theatre's nature and possibilities.

Speaking about his adaptation of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* in a 2002 interview, Kilroy says that what interests him "in Wedekind as a writer is that he's filled with failure, that the work fails consistently to achieve anything like a coherent finish. This to me is wonderfully challenging" ("Thomas Kilroy" with Roche, 155). Failure, the necessary failure of art and life, seems to become more and more central to Kilroy's plays, always attached to the artist figures and those close to them. Not just their lives or art fail in important ways but they circle around failure as a basic experience of life and the struggle with themselves. As Douglas says in *My Scandalous Life* (2004), Kilroy's short play on Lord Alfred Douglas written soon after *The Shape of Metal*, failure is "an essential truth about human existence. ... at the heart of existence is this well of failure and ... to look into this black pool is to cleanse oneself, forever, of all illusion, about

others, about oneself" (26). In this sense Kilroy moves closer than perhaps any Irish playwright to Beckett's view that failure is the central human experience, and that the artist's courage lies in daring to fail: "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion" ("Three Dialogues" 21). In Kilroy's plays about artists, from the early farce *Tea and Sex and Shakespeare* (1976) through *The Madame MacAdam Travelling Theatre* (1991), to the two plays on those closest to Oscar Wilde, *The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde* (1997) and *My Scandalous Life* (2004), each depicts artists struggling with failure and daring to fail and daring to "cleanse" themselves "of all illusion". He keeps probing into the human – particularly the artistic – experience of failure to see if this cleansing brings any illumination and redemption or only highlights the blackness of the pool into which the artists look. Or, as Christopher Murray observes,

Like most of Kilroy's plays this latest one [*The Shape of Metal*] has as its protagonist an artist in crisis (the exceptions to this generalisation turn out at the least to be visionaries like O'Neill, Matt Talbot and, in a less obvious way, Mr. Roche, while a play yet to be staged is about William Blake). The key to *The Shape of Metal* may be said to be in some lines from the actress in *The Madame MacAdam Travelling Theatre*: "Can it be that the very source of our art is also the source of our decline? Can one destroy a talent by grossly overusing it?" ("Thomas Kilroy" 181)

Murray sees Nell as a female King Lear "but one who has destroyed her daughters rather than they her. It is a fearsome portrait of the artist as an old woman, who put her art before all else in life" (181). True, she is formed as a monstrous character with a "monstrous ego" (49) and it is also true that she destroys both her daughters as she brings out the worst and most arrogant side of Judith who keeps fighting with her onstage whenever they are together while she forced Grace, who was too delicate to fight, to escape into the unknown. Nevertheless, although she is portrayed as a rather impulsive mother, her monstrosity does not derive from her putting her art before everything else. Her failure as mother arises from her overwhelming personality, her dominating character, her irrepressible creative energy that strives to impose her will on both matter (art) and people (life). It is in that sense that "the source of art" in her becomes "the source of her decline" both as artist and as mother.

Failure, like a leitmotif, goes through *The Shape of Metal*, and so it is no surprise that its presiding spirit is Beckett. His presence above all others, deepens the sense of the constant spiritual quest, the inevitability of human failure and the necessity of expressing in art the testimony to human incompleteness. One aspect of Nell's failure derives from her attempts to avoid or "evade" failure and only now, at the end of her life does she admit that "[a]ll my life I have resisted that word. Failure. ... Failure because I evaded failure. You see, to be human you have to live with failure" (52). Saying that,



she admits indirectly that she became inhuman in aspiring to transcend the human condition of imperfection. But then she continues, in the Beckettian vein: “I have spent a lifetime trying to create perfect form. The finished, rounded, perfect form. Mistake. ... And, I knew it. Knew it was an illusion. And still persisted” (53).

Michelangelo and Giacometti are also evoked not for their exceptional achievement but either through their “failed,” unfinished pieces of art or because they were acutely aware of failure. While Beckett’s many words affirming his “fidelity to failure” are well known, Giacometti’s expressions of very similar feelings might be less familiar but also more hopeful, such as, for instance, that “[t]he more you fail, the more successful you are. When everything is lost and when you keep going instead of giving up, then you experience the one moment when there’s a chance you will get a little bit farther” (qtd. in Hohl, 209). The work by Michelangelo that is mentioned with admiration in *The Shape of Metal*, is characteristically his unfinished *Rondanini Pieta*, the evocation of which deepens the tension between “finished,” perfectly shaped pieces of art and the unfinished / unfinishable, necessarily incomplete human life and experience. Nell, who as sculptor believed that “there is no meaning if [a piece of art] isn’t finished” (15), at the same time admires Michelangelo’s *Rondanini Pieta* just because it is “only half there ... That’s what makes the piece so unbearably – human, the failed touch, the unfinished carving, something which could never, ever be completed successfully” (16). This statue puzzles many artists, to a great extent because, with its extra arm detached from the body of Christ and its differing proportions between the upper and the lower halves, it challenges the consensus that a completed work of art needs to have a unified style. Henry Moore accounts for its singularly moving quality by the very fact that it is left unfinished probably after a previous version had been partly destroyed and the upper part, in different proportions, redone. He claims that

the position of the heads, the whole tenderness of the top part of the sculpture [...is] more what it is by being in contrast with the rather finished, tough, leathery, typical Michelangelo legs. ... So it’s a work of art that for me means more because it doesn’t fit in with all the theories of critics and aestheticians who say that one of the great things about a work of art must be its unity of style (13).

The *Rondanini Pieta* inspires Nell’s own statue, *Woman Rising from Water* while her other source is identified only in the stage directions as Brancusi’s *Sleep* (27) – most likely his *Sleeping Muse (La Muse Endormie)* from 1906, a beautifully carved and polished female face which is only partly emerging from unsmoothed, “unfinished” marble. One of Brancusi’s maxims appears embodied here, “High polish [...] is not always appropriate” (qtd. in Giedion-Welcker 219).

Another artistic problem that Kilroy engages with in *The Shape of Metal* is the relationship between physical reality and its transcendence. In an early essay on Yeats and Beckett, Kilroy expresses his admiration for Yeats’s creation of characters who are

agents “of an action that transcends the physical world while remaining rooted in it” (“Two Playwrights” 193). He seems to have found the same quality in Giacometti’s work and artistic principles, one of which is especially revealing: “an artwork should reach its highest perfection at the point at which its materiality dissolves” (qtd. in Hohl 133). According to his monographer, Reinhold Hohl, Giacometti comes closest to accomplishing this highest perfection “in the figures which owe their effect of a living totality to the very fact that they are but fragments” (133). In Kilroy’s play Nell gives a comic description of a quarrel between Beckett and Giacometti about walking and shoes when Giacometti praised the human ability to walk – one of the most mundane and literally earth-bound experiences – and insisted on the importance of the foot, which touches the ground and is “frequently embedded there.” He demonstrated this so effectively that Nell saw that “his two feet, splayed, did seem to sink into the floor” (55). Giacometti’s performance evidently draws attention to the necessity of keeping in touch with the earthly, ordinary experience, of remaining rooted in reality but then transforming and transcending that reality in the surreality of art. In the period that Nell refers to, the late 1930s, Giacometti actually experimented with taking away as much clay or plaster as possible from his figures to help the observer overlook the material existence of the art work and his efforts were “directed almost exclusively toward expressing the very opposite of material existence – the immaterial presence of another person’s being-in-the-world” (Hohl 134). This objective actually reflects Giacometti’s place between surrealism and existentialism, as he moves towards what Edward Lucie-Smith describes as an “acting out, through the medium of sculpture, some of the leading ideas of existentialist doctrine”. Lucie-Smith goes on to clarify that existentialism in sculpture, while placing emphasis on subjectivity, also “puts stress upon the notion not only of reality, but of responsibility to reality, however ungraspable this may prove to be” (194). It comes as no surprise then that the figure of the sculptor offered Kilroy a potent model in the visual arts of the individual’s quest for a personal vision starting from tangible material reality but one that leads beyond. In an interview Kilroy confesses:

I write a great deal about spiritual quest, the efforts of the individual to find a personal vision beyond material reality. This is one reason why I am drawn to theatricality. It is a way of rising above factuality.... I love the lift of imagination, the way it transcends the ordinary, and I ... believe that this is one of the ways that we achieve transcendence in this life (“Whole Idea” 259).

Giacometti, the sculptor who “introduced the depiction of physical distance into the three-thousand-year old art of sculpture” (Hohl 107), in Kilroy’s play teaches Nell how to see things whole “from a distance, a remove” (28). The lack of keeping a distance may have contributed to Nell’s failure, both in life and in art: she stayed far too close to Grace for her own and her daughter’s good, interfered in her life when she brutally and disgustingly tore Grace away from the young man that she as mother found undesirable.

Also, when she created the bronze statue of Grace's head and modelled *Woman Rising from Water* on Grace, Nell did not hold her at a distance but rather kept too much emotional involvement with her. That may be one reason why the bronze head keeps coming to life to haunt her and why she destroys her much acclaimed marble statue. Thus the expected sources for conflict in an artist's life, the collision between the demands of family and art, appear inverted in Kilroy's play: Nell's art did not distance her from her daughters, on the contrary, she let herself interfere too closely with Grace's love and life, and, as a consequence, she damaged both her daughter and, later, the statue identified with her.

Giacometti's principle of distance must have appealed to Kilroy who is frequently described as keeping a distance from his own characters in his plays. This distance is quite obvious in *The Shape of Metal* where the family quarrels, heated arguments, disturbed relationships, and tragic events are dramatized in a way that keeps the audience constantly engaged intellectually but does not ask it to get emotionally involved. This distance becomes all the more apparent when compared to Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire*, which *The Shape of Metal* deliberately echoes in its three-women cast with the old woman-protagonist being filled with guilt and remorse and the two daughters (granddaughters) struggling with her and their own frustrations. Murphy's characters, with all their sins, frailties and often irritating behaviour, still evoke warm responses from the audience whereas Kilroy's similarly suffering and struggling women, while attracting compassion, remain emotionally distanced both from author and audience, somewhere half-way between individualized human beings and Beckett's images of the human condition. Christopher Murray identifies Kilroy's drama in general as satisfying one of the American drama critic, George Jean Nathan's criteria of "the first-rate playwright": that "the attitude towards dramatic themes is 'platonic'", that is, "crucially detached and at a distance" ("Kilroy: The Artist" 87). This detachment both results from, and creates the feeling, that Kilroy's theatre attempts "to understand but not to judge" (Greene 79).

The stage in *The Shape of Metal*, dominated by the old artist throughout the play even when she is weak and nodding off, places her unfinished-looking sculpture in the very centre; covered in most scenes, revealed in a flash-back scene in the middle, and then destroyed at the end. This statue itself, expressing a process rather than a fixed state, becomes a metaphor for life, personality and art, all being in the making, never reaching perfection. As Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pieta* embodies process and change, so Nell's statue is alive with birth, change, and movement incorporating time in a modernist way. Nell's *Woman Rising from Water*, described in the stage directions as emerging from "rubble" (27), could be regarded as a portrait of the modernist artist – one trying to bring order and harmony into the chaos of the modern world, her art being born out of the (Yeatsian) "mire and blood." The woman arises out of the feminine element, water, to take her place in the world. In contrast with Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* with its male idealization of the female muse, Nell's statue is an image of the new

woman who wants to tell her own story and so has an unidealized, “far less benign, more witchlike” face (27). This image reinforces the parallel between biological and artistic creation and their mutual reflection of each other. As self-portrait, it reflects on the difficulties of a female artist to come to her own in a male-dominated world that is probably more true in sculpture (which, by its nature and media, was long considered physically too difficult for women to handle) than any other field of art. Both her daughters strongly identified with that statue – with the unfinished, therefore human creation. Judith is upset and miserable when her mother destroys it partly because she laments the disappearance of a great work of art, partly because she remembers how Grace had read her own nightmares, her monsters into it that, in turn, she put into her poem on the statue:

Oh, Egg-woman, Egg-woman, what have you seen?  
I’ve seen all the monsters  
That are there to be seen.  
But now I’ve come back to Judy and Grace.  
Feel my old forehead,  
Feel my cold face – (34)

The image, in the centre of the stage, carries the creative and destructive powers of the overwhelming personality of an artist who positions art and life, family and work too close to each other and keeps hammering on the lives of her children as she does on metal and stone, and who, in her recognition of her failure, can do nothing else but smash her work into pieces. In a sense, her frustration derives from what Declan Kiberd succinctly identified as Beckett’s constant fear:

For Beckett, as for the Old Testament God, every act of creation is a ... deliberate courting of failure. Since God was a perfect being, the creation of a flawed universe could only be a sacrifice of his perfection. ... For Beckett every created text is a “stain upon the silence”, a silence which might have been the more admirable without it. (455)

Nell also made “stains upon the silence” with her creations – human and artistic – when she took away the purity of stone: “Stone is pure before we touch it. Marks, daubs, cuts, scratches. I think we’re trying to blend into that purity” (23). She committed further sacrifice when she locked the living into lifeless metal. While the Rising Woman is carved out of, or rather into, marble – a material that dictates the form, and also being a more natural, more living material than metal – metaphorically, she locks Grace, another Woman Rising from Water, her beautiful creation of movement, transformation, process, the unfinished shape, into the finished form, the metal cage of silence, the bronze head on a pedestal. This is how metal achieves its shape. Grace’s last, quite Beckettian dream-

monologue when she appears to Nell, “this time a bronze death head on a plinth, a bronze head which speaks,” repeats her earlier words but now with no mention of stone only of metal – all with the finality of transformation:

Mummy shaped Grace’s head into metal. Mummy’s fingers moulding eyes, ears, nose, mouth, head. Cold. Cold metal. Peace. Silence. All finished. Nothingness. No feel, no fear, no sight, no sound, no touch, no taste. All finished. Nothing-nowhere-no when. Grace’s head. Not Grace’s head. All finished. (51)

This speech, both in its content and in its fragmented, skeletal style, echoes Constance Wilde’s words in the emptied-out house after Oscar has left: “Nothing there. Empty house. Skeletal. No sound. Nothing. Safe. Constance safe. No-one-to-harm-her. See! Empty!” (35) The connection between safety and emptiness in the Constance Wilde play and again, in *The Shape of Metal*, is striking, as if safety could be achieved only through giving up everything, every hope, in death. Life, as long as lived, is full of risks, as is art full of failure. Creating perfection and wholeness for the artist, achieving love and beauty in the world for the sensitive, close-to-the-artist person is fatal. The Yeatsian echo reverberates of life itself ceasing in the vicinity of complete beauty, the 15<sup>th</sup> phase of the Moon. Yet only those dancing at this edge of danger are able to discard all illusion, even the illusion of some kind of moral or spiritual redemption, and then may find some truth. That truth may be the truth of failure itself, for, as Oscar says in *The Secret Fall*, “there is so much truth in failure and destruction” (14). That truth may be admitting one’s inability to arrive at perfection, wholeness in art and life. But that truth may also lead to peace. Nell in *The Shape of Metal* goes through her restless struggle with herself, with her failure to create important meaning in art because she simultaneously destroyed life, and only after she confesses her sins to her surviving daughter, Judith and smashes her masterpiece, does she find peace in going to join Grace “in the garden”.

The speaking head of Grace, however, becomes further complicated in the play through its possible association with the old Irish, Celtic cult of the severed head, which held such heads to be prophetic, poetic, or even healing. This speaking severed head emerges in old tales and in Irish literature in many forms, most recently and, perhaps, most famously in Yeats’s poetry and drama and John Montague’s poetry.

The Celts believed that the human head was the seat of the soul, the essence of being. It symbolised divinity itself, and was the possessor of every desirable quality. It could remain alive after the death of the body; it could avert evil and convey prophetic information; it could move and act and speak and sing. (qtd. in Ó Dochartaigh 199)

Grace’s head, which comes back to haunt the mother, while being the embodiment of Nell’s crime and failure, transforms into a creation of supernatural power, a bronze

statue that becomes the essence of Grace, Grace herself – grace itself. The interconnection between art and life further strengthened by this association, makes the dismal references to the tragedies and failures in life more ambiguous. If the ancient power to “avert evil” remains alive in the speaking head, then Grace, in this shape, will eventually save her mother from the evil of total despair.

The Beckettian echoes of “finished”, both thematical and structural, especially from *Endgame*, run through the play. *Endgame*’s opening words, “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished” (1), gain multiple and quite contradictory meanings in the course of Kilroy’s play. The most direct echo relates to Grace’s life as the mother reminiscences without illusion: “All finished. That’s what Gracie said. All finished” (53). In the context of art, “finished” means the completed, polished piece, Nell’s (and other modernist artists’) desire for “the finished, rounded, perfect form” (53). But a “finished” work of art may also mean the end of everything else, the end of life and possibilities, as it does in Grace’s life. The finished, perfected form of art is no longer living, moving, changing if it does not embody human imperfection. The family’s unfinished story approaches its conclusion after the revelations about Nell’s part in the causes and circumstances of Grace’s despair. These finishing touches finalise Grace’s loss as well as bring Nell’s life closer to its finish. Nell’s frustration and sense of failure culminates in her destroying her *Woman Rising from Water* statue, following Grace’s last dream-vision appearance. Giacometti’s words quoted earlier by Nell: “The piece of sculpture must embody its own particular failure” (44), thus gain additional meaning in the parallel established throughout the play between art and life. Nell’s piece of art, her cajoling the woman to rise from water, does embody its own particular failure, as does her child-rearing. Both of her daughters were emotionally attached to that sculpture, so Nell’s attempt to annihilate it amplifies the question if the artist has the right to destroy his/her work or a parent to destroy the life of his/her child. Smashing *Woman Rising from Water* also brings home once more the feeling of the approaching end of the artist’s lifetime. If any “work of art ... embodies its own dynamic process of coming into being ... an artwork exhibits the temporality of its making” (Deutsch 38), then this statue in particular bears its temporality not only in its form and shape but it also thematizes it in its title and subject-matter. By annihilating it the artist reverses the process of her creating the sculpture, unwinding the time that is encoded in it.

The question of who is to judge if a work is a failure or a masterpiece, remains unanswered. Not necessarily its creator. Judith, the younger daughter, who usually is quite hostile to her mother, expresses her and many others’ admiration for her work as artist. Nell, indeed, must have been judged by peer critics a powerful artist already in her lifetime since her work has been given a whole room in the permanent collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Kilmainham. Perfection in art, as the theoretician Stephen David Ross maintains, is “not a superlative. The value is one of completeness. It reflects the ways in which a work is sovereign, incomparable” (37). But Ross also emphasizes that “[p]erfection in art is not flawlessness but *accomplishment*, fulfilment

by means of and through a resistance of materials” (104, original emphasis). Flaws in a work of art do not equate with failure, therefore if Nell feels that her work is a failure, it may have more to do with her overall experience which includes both art and life. So, if in Ross’s words, “[p]erfection is ... a dominance, prevalence, of the work within and for, relevant to the integrities of, characteristic traits of human experience” (103), then Nell’s frustration derives not so much from any failure of the artistic form itself that she has created but from the lack of its relevance to the human experience. The Rising Woman in her art work contrasts with her experience in life since Grace had fallen back into non-existence and Nell herself is fading out of life. In order to restore the integrity, she has to destroy the sculpture.

But Nell’s sense of failure as artist is also aggravated by her living in what she perceives as an age of “rubbish artists... artistic mediocrity” (53). Her idols were the great modernist artists and her own art, as much as the play allows us to see and understand of it, shares the ideals of modernism. When she laments the death of modernism, the lack of respect for form, for artistry in the postmodern age, she also reflects on the diminishing significance of art itself: “human futility, human failure. ... Scientists are the ones making great imaginative leaps nowadays. Not artists” (53).

The play concludes inconclusively, with Nell approaching death, the fragments of *Woman Rising from Water* littering the stage. The last scene shows Nell still defiant, having accepted her failure as artist and as parent, having “said all [she has] to say in here” (57), turning to her last illusion, that Grace is in the garden and she can find her. To Judith’s sober disillusioning her, Nell admits that she still needs “to dream” (58) and she concludes the play with her words “I am going into the garden” (58). The enigmatic ending suggests to Christopher Murray “a kind of ‘Welcome, o life’ in a new guise”, as the old woman, after having destroyed her statue recognises the primacy of life over art and “decides to go outside her studio for the first time in the play” (“Thomas Kilroy” 182). I, however, see it more as – if not “welcome, o death”, but at least – an acceptance of her failure and her approaching death (that at the beginning of the play she admitted she abhorred and feared) with a brave gesture of going to face it. The last stage direction seems to confirm this, referring to “the gathering darkness” into which she walks (58). From the studio described as a “tomb” in the opening stage direction (1), she now begins to move towards the air of the garden, to join Grace in death, but in the state of death that is beyond the tomb. Obviously the garden image evokes Biblical associations of perfection and wholeness which now may come within reach, and now the giving up of life is not too high a price for it. Completeness, fulfilment thus becomes possible to attain, but only at the cost of life, not through and within the achievements in art and in life.

For Nell meeting Grace is no longer a haunting, nor is it an illusion but rather a poetic, dreamy rendering of the frightening but now accepted reality. Grace’s name once again brings in the possibility of gaining grace, after all and despite all; the possibility of transcendence. Thus a glimmer of the moral and spiritual redemption counterbalances

the bleakness of the “black pool” of failure. Nell, by the close of the play, has become capable of facing herself, her weaknesses, her failures, her guilt, and of embarking on a long journey down into her conscience, a “journey towards transformation [that] needs the sustenance of vision, ways of seeing and dreaming that break open old ways of behaving and suggest new ways of being” (O’Reilly 319). What Anne F. O’Reilly maintains about contemporary “sacred plays” in which such transformation takes place, holds true also for *The Shape of Metal*: “Even when being has been interrupted by destructive patterns of behaviour, whether personal, familial, historical or cultural, new ways of seeing can offer new starting points or horizons, that enable one to move beyond hurt and anger into relationship” (319). This relationship for Nell consists in a reconciliation with her living daughter, Judith, with her (most probably) dead daughter Grace, with the memory of her most important lover, and beyond all that with herself, her conscience, her deeply hidden self. Through becoming more human she seems to have become more in touch with the sacred. The artist, becoming more attached to the earth, becomes able to soar more freely from its grasp.

In the magic world of the theatre Nell’s destroyed statue is made whole again every evening. Similarly, the entire play offers highly polished and finished images which, however, remain forever unfinished, changing in each performance, no matter how many statues are smashed, how many curtains fall. The woman, the artist’s creation and her metaphorical self-portrait, rises from the rubble again and again, to give hope and healing and to be destroyed again. The art of failure, in the last analysis, does not become the failure of art. Although the modern artist cannot perform the healing of the community as the ancient shaman-artists could, nevertheless, the artist can still show images of wholeness in the theatre, paradoxically even in their incompleteness. Theatre, providing the playwright with an empty stage, a sacred space which he, in his turn, can fill with his imagination, may afford the artist the means, as Kilroy believes, to “achieve transcendence in this life.”

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# Performances *and the String Quartet n. 2 – Intimate Letters*

Rosalie Rahal Haddad

**Abstract:** *Speculatively probing the twilight of Czech composer Leos Janacek's (1854-1928) life and career, an enthusiastic PhD student, Anezka Ungrova, cross-examines the dead Janacek – the subject of her thesis. The setting for the play is the present day when Ungrova is interviewing the deceased Janacek for her doctoral dissertation. She is intrigued by the passions of word and music embodied in this story. Of particular interest to Ungrova are the 700 passionate love letters the composer wrote to Kamila Stosslova over the last 11 years of his life and to what extent this relationship influenced and inspired his later quartets, mainly Quartet No. 2 which the composer called Intimate Letters. Janacek wrote his String Quartet No. 2 over a period of three weeks in January-February 1928. He was then in his 74<sup>th</sup> year. He died the following August. While he was composing Intimate Letters, every day he wrote extravagant, passionate, at times barely coherent love-letters to Kamila Stosslova, a married woman 37 years his junior. Performances, Friel's latest play, looks at Janacek's frantic life during those intoxicated weeks, and specifically at his obsession with Kamila and the manifestation of that passion in the themes of the Quartet. Punctuated only by the intrusion by a string quartet, Ungrova's relentless questioning of Janacek gradually assumes a shrink/patient relationship and is elevated above the tedium of mere biographical inquiry. This device allows Friel to expertly portray the broader themes of human longing and love, and their subsequent manifestations in art and music. Friel also explores the issue about the way that we tend to prefer the artist to his art and look to the life rather than the work.*

*Musical constructions abound in the work of Friel and it is not unusual to find him structuring sections of his drama after musical forms. This paper sustains that unlike other plays by Friel such as Translations and Philadelphia Here I Come! which can be considered strong political plays, Performances can be remembered as an impulse to combine theatre and music. However, according to critics, Friel "has written this piece with a carefree, almost reckless and disdainful attitude towards popular acclaim" which may disappoint theatre-goers who attend on the strength of his previous hit outings, such as Dancing at Lughnasa, Living Quarters or Philadelphia, Here I Come.*

Brian Friel was born on January 9, 1929 in Omagh, County Tyrone in Northern Ireland. Friel who is 77 years old is catholic and the most prominent playwright in Ireland in contemporary times. In addition to his plays Friel has written short stories which reflect the problems of the Irish society divided by religious problems. In approximately forty years of literary production, Friel's work encompasses radio-plays and plays staged in Ireland and London. In 1960 Friel no longer wanted to be a teacher in order to dedicate his talent to literary activities. The playwright's first work to be published is the play *The Enemy Within* written in 1962. Friel has been constantly praised by the international press, especially by politicians concerned with the socio-political and cultural problems of Northern Ireland. Friel's work is intrinsically connected with the problems of his country. In this sense, Friel does not believe in art for art's sake but as a tool of criticism of the problems he believes should be changed in Ireland. Therefore, Friel's work is a large laboratory in which the author experiments with new techniques which enrich his works and are in accordance with those used in England and the United States in the past decades. Friel made a valuable contribution to his biographers when, in one of his rare interviews drew the basic lines of his experiences:

I was born in Omagh in County Tyrone in 1929. My father was principal of a three-teacher school outside the town. He taught me. In 1939, when I was ten, we moved to Derry where I have lived since until three or four years ago. I was at St. Columb's College for five years, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, for two-and-half years, and St. Joseph's Training College for one year. From 1950 until 1960 I taught in various schools around Derry. Since then I have been writing full-time. I am married, have five children, live in the country, smoke too much, fish a bit, read a lot, worry a lot, get involved in sporadic causes and invariably regret the involvement, and hope that between now and my death I will have acquired a religion, a philosophy, a sense of life that will make the end less frightening than it appears to me at this moment. (Friel, "Self Portrait", *AQUARIUS*, no. 5, 1972: 17.)

Friel is the author of several plays such as *The Enemy Within* (1962), *Philadelphia Here I Come* (1966), *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1967), *The Freedom of the City* (1973). He became a member of the Irish Academy of Letters in 1975. Friel also wrote *Living Quarters* (1977), *Aristocrats* (1979), *The Faith Healer* (1980), *The Communication Cord* (1982), *Dancing in Lughnasa* (1990) on which occasion he won the Olivier Award for Play of the Year, the Evening Standard Drama Award and the Writers' Guild Award. He staged *Wonderful Tennessee* in 1993. With *Molly Sweeney* (1996) he wins the Lucille Lortel Award and the Other Critics' Circle Award. He wrote *Give Me Your Answer Do!* in 1997, *Performances* in 2003 and finally *The Home Place* in 2005 for which he was granted the Evening Standard Best Play Award of 2005. Friel received the Saoi prize (Wise One) in 2006, the most important title to be presented to an Irish playwright.

Even before the political violence that occurred in Northern Ireland in 1969, Friel's plays center around small communities and not around the metropolis. His plays received awards in London and New York such as the Writers' Guild Award, The Evening Standard Best New Play, The New York Drama Circle Award (twice) and the Tony Award. *Philadelphia Here I Come!* staged in 1964 received an award by the Gate Theatre Productions in the Gaiety Theatre during the Theatre Festival in Dublin on September 28. It deals with the importance of the theme of emigration in Brian Friel's dramaturgy. The exit from Ireland began in the VI century when the Catholic church used to send priests to work in the convents of the continent. Later on, many young people of the more privileged social classes started to go to England and the continent to study at the universities. In the decade of 1840, thousands of people ran away from Ireland and sought residence in the United States, England, Australia and Canada due to the disastrous calamity of the potato crops. During these years, the decade of the "great hunger", the population of the country was reduced by half, in part because of the emigration and the thousands of deaths. On the second half of the XIX century, until the beginning of the XX, 70.000 Irish man, women and children went to Canada; 370.000 departed to Australia and thousands went to the United States.

For the sake of contrast it is important that we mention some facts concerning *Philadelphia Here I Come!* and *Translations* so that we can see the difference of socio-political aspects vis-à-vis *Performances* and those two plays. *Philadelphia* was considered the Best Play of 1965-66 and was the work that best contributed to make the name of Friel known internationally. This play presents the last night of an Irish boy, Gar O'Donnell, in his country town Ballybeg, before he immigrates to the United States. In *Philadelphia* Friel constructed the fictitious town of Ballybeg as stage of the action which was a town supposedly located in County Donegal. Ballybeg first appears in *Philadelphia*, a stagnant, rural backwater, full of people lost in their own delusions because of the meanness of their lives. Ballybeg is a typical small town where everybody knows each other and where the life of each inhabitant is an open book to the neighbors. The town reflects the problems that are characteristic of the other small towns of the regions. For example, there is no perspective of a better future for the young people. The more lucky ones barely manage to find work in the small and decadent business of the parents. Far from the urban centers there is no social life in Ballybeg. The young people can only go to local bars, drink beer or fight with rival groups of other small towns. The power of the church is shown through the authority of the priest who is more loyal to alcoholic beverage than to the commandments of the church. The economic and spiritual poverty portrayed by Friel in Ballybeg, as well as the lack of hope in a better future reflects, in fact, the dominant atmosphere of the whole region.

*Translations* was the first production presented by the "Field Day Theatre Company". The opening night was in Guildhall, Derry on September 23, 1980. In *Translations* Friel sought inspiration in the history of his country, i.e., in the political and cultural facts of the decade of 1830. The critics viewed the play favorably and many

reviewers did not hesitate to consider this play as Friel's most important work. Critics emphasize the theme of *Translations* which is the confrontation between the military and cultural imperialism and the rebellion of the province. Friel chose to report a historical time of his country which represents the beginning of the language and the culture genuinely Irish and the first signs of extinction of the Gaelic civilization as a consequence of the domination of the British Empire. The politicization of the Irish language begins quite early in Irish history. The Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 enacted that the English in Ireland should not use Irish, or Irish customs. The Statutes also forbade intermarriage between English and Irish-speakers, though the practice still continued. These laws were the beginning of the separation of the Irish language from political power. *Translations*, an intensely political play, focus on a hypothetical situation which would have occurred in August of 1833 and which involves aspects of the process of colonization executed by the British military. It also portrays the learned Gaelic tradition of the hedge school against the developing National School system. Traditional Irish names are contrasted with official, registered English ones; unofficial, localized traditional school of Latin and Greek are compared with the new institutionalized system of education. Friel chose as scenario the town of Balle Beag, a Celtic name for the already known Ballybeg. The plot shows the arrival of officers of the British army, captains Longley and Yolland who have the mission of anglicizing the names that are contained in the maps of Ireland. Such act is an insult to the Irish character, both culturally and emotionally. Thus, we may say that language, in *Translations*, is an indication of separation, a sign of cultural and political distinction. Friel, in fact, echoes many writers on post-colonialism who see language as a means both of colonization and of subjugation. It is interesting to notice, however, that the playwright considered the Irish with a higher intellectual capacity than the British. While the British speak only their native language, several Irish natives express themselves perfectly in Latin, Greek, and English.

*Performances* staged in Dublin for the first time in 2003 focuses the love of Janacek for Kamila Stosslova, married and 44 years his junior. Speculatively probing the twilight of Czech composer Leos Janacek's (1854-1928) life and career, an enthusiastic PhD student Anezka Ungrova, cross-examines the dead Janacek – the subject of her thesis. The setting for the play is the present day when Ungrova is interviewing the deceased Janacek for her doctoral dissertation. Of particular interest to Ungrova are the 700 passionate love letters the composer wrote to Kamila Stosslova over the last eleven years of his life and to what extent this relationship influenced and inspired in later quartets, mainly Quartet No. 2, over a period of three weeks in January-February 1928. He was then in his 74<sup>th</sup> year and died the following August. While he was composing *Intimate Letters*, every day Janacek wrote extravagant, passionate, at times barely coherent love-letters to Kamila Stosslova. *Performances*, one of Friel's last plays, looks at Janacek's frantic life during those intoxicated weeks, especially at his obsession with Kamila and the manifestation of the passion in the themes of the Quartet.

The Czech composer Janacek was born in Hukvaldy in Moravia on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1854. Hukvaldy now is more like a small town than the tiny village – Pod Hukvaldy – of his youth but the school in which he was born and the adjacent church are still used. At the age of eleven he was sent to the monastery school in Brno where he sang in the choir. After graduating he went back to the monastery as a teacher and deputy choirmaster, and his earliest organ and choral works date from this period. He decided to improve his musical skills with a view to a career in music and moved to Prague where he trained at the Organ School. He had become a friend of Dvorak in 1877. In 1879 he attended the Leipzig Music Conservatoire to study composition. The next spring he attended the Vienna Conservatoire but left after three months because of an argument with his music supervisor.

Janacek married one of his piano students, Zdenka Schulzova on July 11, 1881 about two weeks before her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. He participated in the foundation of an organ school in Brno which opened its doors in 1882, with Janacek as director. Olga, the Janacek's elder child, was born on August 1882. The couple had separated for some time, but patched up their differences by mid-1884. In 1917 Janacek was holidaying in the spa resort of Luhacovice, where he met Kamila Stosslova who was 25 years old at the time. He became infatuated with her, and she was the inspiration of his late masterpieces. Over 700 letters record his affection for Kamila and his Second String Quartet called *Intimate Letters* first performed in 1928, after his death on 12<sup>th</sup> August, refers to their relationship. Janacek had no qualms the influence this simple woman had on his life. The impact of Kamila Stosslova cannot be emphasized enough considering the success of the *String Quartet*.

Musical constructions abound in the work of Brian Friel, and it is not unusual to find him structuring sections of his drama after musical forms. As early as his introduction to *The Loves of Cass McGuire* he speaks of the characters' soliloquies as "rhapsodies". He continues "to pursue the musical imagery a stage further...I consider this play to be a concerto in which Cass McGuire is the soloist". Music and dancing punctuate *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and music pervades *Aristocrats*, *Wonderful Tennessee* and *Give Me Your Answer Do!* In *Performances* music is the leitmotif of the play. The *String Quartet No. 2* intertwines the play with its *andante*, when the PhD student begins to interview Janacek, the *adagio*, the second movement, the *moderato* when the musician writes to her mistress about the lullaby that he is weaving into the quartet, and finally the *allegro* when he wrote to Kamila: "The last movement is charged with energy and defiance. But it is a movement without fear, just a great longing and something like a fulfillment of that longing." From the beginning of the play the stage directions indicate that *Performances* (beginning from its title which can be interpreted both as Anezka's performance as an interviewer and author of a thesis on the *Intimate Letters* as well as Janacek's composition of the *String Quartet No. 2*) is to be a music play and not a socio-political play as *Philadelphia* and *Translations*. The stage directions read:

Janacek's work-room in Brno, Moravia. The décor, furnishings, curtains, etc. are all in the style of the twenties. A functional bachelor's room. A piano stage right.

The composer's work-table and chair stage left. A few chairs along the back wall. These will be used later by the musicians. Two chairs and two music-stands are already in position – one chair for the cellist, placed below the piano, and one chair for the first violinist, placed below the work-table. All four instruments – two violins, viola, cello – are on stage. On top of the piano a very large bowl of lettuce leaves. A large jug of water on a small table...It becomes apparent very early that Janacek is long dead. It is important that he is played by an actor in his fifties or energetic sixties. (Friel 12)

It is clear that the action takes place in contemporary times. Anezka, the PhD student who is writing a thesis on Janacek's letters to Kamila Stosslova is late for her interview with Janacek because of "Power failure in Prague. So the computer system crashed". Therefore, instead of Ballybeg we have the metropolis, Prague. From the beginning of the play Anezka insists on the sentimental relationship between Janacek and Kamila based on their correspondence. It is clear that Friel explores the issue about the way that we tend to prefer the artist to his art and look to the life rather than the work. This becomes clear when Anezka insists that there must be connection between the private life and the public work of Janacek. Janacek inquires:

Must there?" to what Anezka responds:

O yes. Don't you think so? And I believe a full appreciation of the quartet isn't possible unless all the circumstances of this composition are considered – and that must include an analysis of your emotional state at that time – and these letters provide significant evidence about that."

Janacek is skeptical about this:

Mightn't this kind of naïve scrutiny have frightened off your little statistician?

In fact, replies Anezka, that is really the core of my thesis ...the relationship between the writing of that piece and those passionate letters from a seventy-four-year old man to a woman almost forty years younger than him – a married woman with two young sons – and what I hope to suggest is that your passion for Kamila Stosslova certainly had a determining effect on that composition and indeed on that whole remarkable burst of creative energy at the very end of your life – probably caused it – and only six months away from your death! And she continues: and I will try to show that when you wrote this quartet *Intimate Letters* you call it like that yourself when you were head-over-heels in love with her – my thesis will demonstrate that the Second String Quartet is a textbook example of a great passion inspiring a great work of art and it will prove that work of art to be the triumphant apotheosis of your entire creative life. (21, 22)



In reality, Kamila insisted Janacek destroy most of his letters to her. Briskly Janacek confesses that Kamila was forever vigilant of her good name. A slave to small-town tyrannies. Writing letters, even writing a grocery list sent her into a panic. Kamila was practically illiterate. As Janacek called her she was a woman of “resolute . . .ordinariness.”

The basic issue that Friel explores is that we tend to prefer the artist to his art and look to the life rather than the work. We have Janacek’s statement that

All you (Anezka) have in those stammering pages are dreams of music, desires for the dream sounds in the head. And those pages those aspirations – desires – dreams – they’re transferred on to a perfectly decent but quite untutored young woman. And in time the distinction between his dreams and that young woman became indistinguishable, so that in his head she was transformed into something immeasurably greater – of infinitely more importance – than the quite modest young woman she was, in fact. The music in the head made real, became carnal! Come to know no distinction between the dream music and the dream woman! Foolish old man. (34)

*Intimate Letters* inspired Janacek to achieve the top of his career. To initiate a romantic relationship with this much younger woman was beyond his platonic intentions. Contrary to the PhD student’s point of view, the fundamental issue in his life is not the woman herself but how she inspired him to write the String Quartet. But apart from its use of music, its interaction of different languages and in its illustration of epistemological questions, *Performances* is also typical of Friel in its components. The general frame is again that of a seemingly fruitless journey, during which the communication between the protagonist and the antagonist fails, due to the strong narcissism of one of them.

The above mentioned emphasizes the question as to why Friel decided to write one of his latest plays with such unusual indifference to politics and the Irish cause as he had done in previous plays such as *Philadelphia* and *Translations*. By many critics *Performances* can be remembered as a self-indulgent, idiosyncratic creation by an author enjoying the freedom that his notoriety and previous theatrical works of genius now afford him. We can also detect that Friel wrote *Performances* with little care to the opinion of the critics and public alike. As he himself says, listen to the music and forget the words. The critics of the “Evening Standard”, The “Daily Mail”, “The Guardian”, “The Times”, “The Daily Telegraph”, “The Sunday Telegraph” are unanimous in considering *Performances* as a hiatus in Friel’s career. They all consider that the Brodsky Quartet that plays in the play is sublime but that the play could be taken off the stage and give way to the Quartet. Furthermore, they suspect that Friel has written this piece with a carefree, almost “reckless and disdainful attitude towards popular acclaim.” “The Guardian” emphatically criticizes that Friel

offers little new here (in the play) on the theme of artist as celebrity, except Janacek’s advice to ‘listen to the music’. If only the author would let us. The

final 15 minutes of the evening, when the Brodksky Quartet is allowed to let rip an exquisite, expressive wail of longing fills the grave interior of Wiltons Music Hall, is sublime. All that goes before is so pedestrian, earnest and incompetent that I kept examining my programme to check this really was written by Friel. The impulse to combine theatre and music is a good one, but its execution is summed up in an opening scene that combines prolonged flower arranging with a musician who can't act and an actor who can't play.

Friel's abandon will, therefore, ultimately disappoint theatre-goers who attend on the strength of his previous his outings, such as *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Living Quarters*, *Philadelphia* and *Translations*. Though many critics were negative about *Performances*, from my point of view, it is a beautiful play which may be considered as part of Friel's inner life and is a Friel's play first in its theme: his passion for music, the interaction of different languages whereby music is more important than ever, the hiatus in the career of a man already too much involved with Irish politics and socio-cultural matters which were not manifested in this play where those previous issues were ignored. Moreover, it is my opinion that in *Performances*, Friel wants to separate the author from his work as well as wishes to emphasize the distance between sentimentalism and reality. For that matter, the last stage directions read:

The quartet begins playing the last two movements the *moderato* and the *allegro*. For a long time Janacek stares after the departed Anezka [who leaves his house in a fury, screaming that Janacek is wrong about the interpretation of his relationship with Kamila]. Then he spots the green folder that she has left behind – should he call her back? He picks it up. Very slowly he turns it over in his hands and glances occasionally at the musicians. Now he opens the book [lethargically] and slowly and gently leafs through it, pausing now and then to read a line or two. Now he leans his head back and closes his eyes. Black out the moment the *allegro* ends. (39)

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# Tom Murphy's Alice Trilogy: *Through the Looking-Glass* of the London Critics

Peter James Harris

**Abstract:** *Tom Murphy is generally considered to be one of Ireland's two most important living playwrights. Although Alice Trilogy, which premiered in London at the Royal Court Theatre in November 2005, was his first new play in five years, it was awarded no more than a tepid reception by the London critics. The article begins by tracing intertextual links between Murphy's trilogy and Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there (1872), arguing that an awareness of these links is particularly helpful in understanding the psychology of the angst-ridden central character of the play. A survey of nineteen reviews of the play published in the London press reveals that, for the majority of the critics, the intertextuality between the two works was, surprisingly, not considered to be noteworthy. The article also makes passing reference to the first Brazilian production of Murphy's play, a studio performance of an unpublished Portuguese translation, staged in São Paulo in December 2006.*

Nobody could ever accuse Tom Murphy of being unduly optimistic about the human condition. His plays depict the outcasts of society with a relentless bleakness and, although there is humour in his writing, it is not generally the laughs that remain in the mind after having watched a Tom Murphy play. In his essay entitled "Tom Murphy and the children of loss", in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (2004), Nicholas Grene states that:

Messed-up lives, dead-end states, the extremes of dereliction and despair – these provide the staples of Murphy's drama, whatever the form and milieu. (212)

Nonetheless, plays such as *The Gigli Concert* (1983) and *Bailegangaire* (1985) hold out the redeeming possibility of transcendence of grim circumstances, grotesque though the means may be. Christopher Morash (2002) describes *The Gigli Concert* as being:

[...] part of a theatre of exorcism that emerged in the 1980s, where the past is conjured up, neither to be mocked nor to open old wounds, but so that it might be accepted and healed (259).

In his survey of twentieth-century Irish drama Christopher Murray (1997) registers the reaction of audiences to the play's "combination of compassion and an ethic derived from music":

It was (quack scientologist) King's triumph over tragic circumstances which had Irish audiences on their feet in a standing ovation when *The Gigli Concert* had its première at the Abbey (226).

However, besides the notable hits Murphy has also had a few misses. In her overview of his oeuvre José Laners (1997) recognises that "the extreme reactions evoked by his plays are reflected in the many ups and downs of his career", and concludes her essay by quoting from a 1991 *Irish Times* interview in which Murphy stated:

The risks have sometimes left me with injured legs, but sometimes they've paid off. My motto is, 'If you can do it, why bother?' (231)

\* \* \*

*Alice Trilogy* (2005), which opened at London's Royal Court Theatre on 16 November 2005, was Murphy's first new play in five years, and once again it was an exercise in risk-taking. Like another new Irish play, which followed it onto the Royal Court stage in January 2006, Stella Feehily's *O Go My Man*, the focus was upon the well-heeled middle class of the Celtic Tiger economy. It should have been a surprise to no one that, although Murphy had celebrated his seventieth birthday earlier in the year, neither the advancing years nor Ireland's newfound Euro-wealth had brought about any mellowing in his perception of the human predicament.

The play depicts its eponymous central character at three moments in her life, in the 1980s, in 1995 and in the present. The title suggests that we should perhaps respond to what we see on stage as a series of three one-act plays, rather than as three acts in a single drama. What Murphy offers us is essentially a triptych, three juxtaposed images bound into a single unifying structure. The name of the central character provides the optic through which to view the three pictures, for Alice is an inescapable reference to the heroine of Lewis Carroll's classic tales *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there* (1872), as is made clear by a quotation from the latter work in the third play in the trilogy.

In the second of Carroll's books Alice passes through the looking-glass on the chimney-piece in her drawing-room and finds herself in Looking-glass House, in which the normality of her own world is inverted so that "the things go the other way" and "the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way" (7). She soon

discovers that she is caught up as a pawn in a giant chess game, in which the characters she meets on her journey to the eighth square are dramatis personae of increasing grotesquery in the same game. As in the previous book Alice wakes at the end to find that the whole adventure has been no more than a particularly vivid dream. Carroll describes his book as a fairy-tale, and the story of its creation, improvised to entertain the young Alice Liddell and her two sisters in a rowing-boat on a summer's afternoon, has already acquired a legendary quality of its own. Both books are prefaced with a dedicatory poem, in the first case addressed to all three sisters, but in the second to Alice alone. Carroll was forty years old when the second book was published and, although he was to live for another twenty-six years, the poems, which frame *Through the Looking-Glass* are tinged with a melancholy recognition of life's ephemerality:

Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,  
With bitter tidings laden,  
Shall summon to unwelcome bed  
A melancholy maiden!  
We are but older children, dear,  
Who fret to find our bedtime near. (IX)

The book's epigraph closes with the rhetorical question, "Life, what is it but a dream?"

In Tom Murphy's play, although Alice is no longer a little girl, she is nonetheless trapped in a looking-glass world. In her case, the proportions of this world are no longer those of a dream but of a nightmare. The first play in the trilogy is set in 1981 and it introduces us to an over-stressed, twenty-five-year-old Alice seeking respite from the daily routine of her married life in the solace of her retreat in an attic room. Here, amidst the family's discarded broken furniture, reminded of the mundane reality from which she is trying to escape by the remote thump-thump, thump-thump of the washing machine in the house below, she washes down her Valium with coffee strongly laced with whisky and smokes a cigarette before rushing off to collect her three children from school. (One has a strong sense of having travelled back to the mid-60s and an encounter with the middle-class housewife of the Rolling Stones' "Mother's Little Helper".) It is here too that Alice communes with her alter ego Al. The black and white contrasts of Jeremy Herbert's set for the Royal Court production were redolent of Carroll's chessboard and, when Derbhle Crotty's Al steps out from the frame of a cheval mirror to join Alice in her looking-glass world, she too is dressed in black, wearing whiteface makeup. Juliet Stevenson's blonde Alice wears blue jeans and a light-blue blouse, reminding us of the image created, for better or worse, by Walt Disney's cartoon version of Carroll's character.

The dialogue between alter ego and ego is conducted in the interrogatory form of an inane television quiz-show, opening with, "Your name, age and profession, please?" (4). However, from this very first question there is an ironic sub-text underlying the

banality of the questions and answers, for Alice has no profession. Despite the promise of her top-of-the-class results at the Loreto school for girls, her skills in mental arithmetic, her general knowledge and her command of French, Alice is now restricted to the mundane role of a housewife, a fact underlined by the music-hall misogyny of the later question, “Why do women have small feet?” (15), to which Al herself provides the answer “So that they can stand close to the sink” (22). Of course, the ludic-interrogatory mode is also that employed by Alice’s interlocutors in *Through the Looking-Glass*, particularly in the case of her meeting with Humpty Dumpty:

“In that case we may start fresh,” said Humpty Dumpty, “and it’s my turn to choose a subject – ” (“He talks about it just as if it was a game!” thought Alice.) “So here’s a question for you. How old did you say you were?” (71)

Although it is Humpty Dumpty and Al who are, respectively, the quizmaster and – mistress, Tom Murphy’s Alice shares Humpty Dumpty’s playful attitude to language itself. Just outside the attic room is the wire-mesh-and-timber aviary where Alice’s husband Bill keeps the budgerigars which serve as his relaxation in the odd moments between his work as an up-and-coming young banker and his four nights a week of evening classes. Alice, however, describes it as an apiary, no doubt, in recognition of the alliterative qualities of Big Bill the banker’s interest in “breeding budgies and babies and suchlike” (19):

**Alice** I know that it’s an aviary –  
**Al** But ask her, go on, ask her and she’ll tell you.  
**Alice** I prefer to call it an apiary.  
**Al** She calls things what she likes.  
**Alice** Should I call things by what other people have decided for me?  
**Al** Her mind, her life.  
**Alice** My mind, my life. (12)

Humpty Dumpty likewise sees his relationship with language as a question of control:

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.  
 Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knockdown argument for you!’”  
 “But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knockdown argument’,” Alice objected.  
 “When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”  
 “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean different things.”  
 “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that’s all.” (74-5)

For Tom Murphy's Alice, however, her interlocutor is no nursery-rhyme character: her alter ego is a dark presence seeding her mind with the appalling thought that, if she is to commit suicide by driving her car into the docks, she should take her three beautiful children, aged six, five and four-and-a-half, with her. The budgies also acquire a sinister force in Alice's topsy-turvy looking-glass world. As in Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds* (1963), Bill's pets constitute a nightmarish threat. Twice Al refers to the impenetrable rationale of their daily routine, their occasional outbursts of chirping "for reasons best known or unknown to themselves" (13 + 24), an echo of the leitmotif, repeated eleven times, in Lucky's monologue in *Waiting for Godot*, that rambling catalogue of divine and human irrationality. (Beckett 1965. 42-45) The first play in the trilogy closes as Alice rushes off to collect her children from school and the theatre is filled with waves of head-splitting sound from the budgies, "singing all together like a hacksaw cutting through wire" (24), reminding us of the shrieking violin in another Hitchcock film.

Notwithstanding the irrational shrillness of the budgies there is no murder in the shower for Alice or for her children. The second play in the trilogy takes place thirteen or fourteen years later. It is no longer in her attic hideaway that Alice seeks escape from her humdrum quotidian round. A serious car crash some ten years previously has frightened her off both driving and drinking. It is now her husband who has turned to drink, even though he is the high-flying "area manager for half the banks in the country" (37). Meanwhile Alice seeks what she describes as her "opium for the housewife" (35) in a fortnightly book-club meeting and a creative writing class every Tuesday night. We meet her on one such night walking through a badly lit lane by the gasworks wall. Out of the shadows a voice calls her name and emerges cautiously into the light. The voice is that of the famous television newsreader James Godwin, Jimmy, her former flame of twenty-one years ago, to whom she has written on the off-chance of a meeting. Dressed in black, like Al in the first play, Jimmy likewise serves as a mirror to Alice – they both have three children, for instance, "nearly *touché* there" (34). Like Al too Jimmy reveals an undercurrent of violence beneath his slick surface. To begin with, their meeting, after a separation of more than two decades, seems to hold out the possibility of a return to the halcyon days of adolescent innocence. They hold hands in silence and Alice asks, "Which of us is dreaming this?" (36), the very question that Lewis Carroll's Alice raises at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*:

"Now, Kitty, let's consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear ... You see, Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course – but then I was part of his dream, too!" (Carroll 131)

For Tom Murphy's Alice, however, the dream quickly sours and becomes a nightmare as her 'Red King' surrenders to his paranoia about his colleagues in the television studios. This quickly extends to Alice herself as Jimmy conceives of the possibility that she may have set up their meeting in order to obtain compromising

photographs for the purposes of blackmail. The second play in the trilogy ends as he threatens her with violence:

**Jimmy** Do you realize, because of your ‘fantasising’, that I could hurt you now. I could? I could?

**Alice** You could.

**Jimmy** And I would like to. Would that ‘reality’ suit you? Fear of consequences are (sic) not stopping me. I could kill you right now? I could?

**Alice** You could, Jimmy, but you won’t. (47)

Much to the relief both of Alice and of the theatre audience Jimmy fails to put his threat into action and takes his black-coated malevolence off into the night.

The final play in the trilogy is set in the present. Alice, now nearing fifty, is sitting in an airport lounge with her husband. Although she eats nothing herself he steadily munches his way through a plate of fish and chips during the course of the play. In the final scene of *Through the Looking-Glass* Alice is also sitting down to a meal. At the head of a table of fifty guests, sandwiched between the Red Queen and the White Queen, Alice does not manage to eat anything at all, for the Queens order the waiters to remove every dish before she can make a start on it. In the case of Tom Murphy’s Alice there is a very plausible reason for her lack of appetite, for she and her husband are at the airport in order to receive the body of their son, which is being flown home after his premature death in an accident abroad. While her pragmatic husband eats his meal we hear Alice’s interior monologue. In the first play in the trilogy Alice’s alter ego referred to her ego in the third person: now Alice refers to herself in the third person. Bereft of her favourite son, her “gallant escort” (34) of ten years previously, Alice refers to God as “the Almighty Terrorist” (61). Like Lewis Carroll’s Alice, she is unable to provide a rational explanation for the disorienting world in which she exists:

There is no explanation for what cannot be explained, no comfort for what cannot be comforted. ... But she accepted the explanations and the religious platitudes for the sake of those who offered them. (61)

Trapped in “a nightmare that is pretending to be a dream” (53) she recalls her self of “twenty-five, no, thirty years ago when everything seemed possible” (56):

Dreaming. She was a great dreamer. Back then she was a fool to any kind of suggestion: suggestion did not take no for an answer. ‘It’s no use trying,’ said Alice, ‘one cannot believe in impossible things.’ ‘You haven’t been practising,’ said the White Queen. (56-7)

This, of course, is almost an exact quotation from the conversation that Lewis Carroll’s Alice has with the White Queen on the occasion of their first meeting:



“Now I’ll give *you* something to believe. I’m just one hundred and one, five months and a day.”

“I can’t believe *that!*” said Alice.

“Can’t you?” the Queen said in a pitying tone. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said: “one *can’t* believe impossible things.”

“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day.” (Carroll 62)

However, it is not the White Queen who enables Alice finally to escape from her depressed introspection but the Waitress in the airport restaurant, who unburdens herself of her own nightmare, confiding to Alice that, having lovingly fostered her sister-in-law’s baby for over a year, she and her husband had recently returned the baby to its mother, who, Medea-like, had killed the child just two days previously. Finally, at the very end of the play, Alice is jolted out of her solipsism to extend the hand of empathy to the Waitress, embracing her and admitting that:

... she loves the waitress, Stella, and clings to her for a moment in sympathy and in gratitude for releasing this power within her. (66)

Although this transcendent moment was insufficient to unlock the “strange, savage, beautiful and mysterious country” (23) that Alice had sensed within herself at the end of the first play, the final image in the London production, of tears running down Juliet Stevenson’s equine face, was an indisputably powerful theatrical moment.

Curiously, the London critics failed to detect any intertextuality between Tom Murphy’s play and Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*. Of nineteen reviews published in daily and weekly papers in the ten days following the play’s opening on 16 November 2005, only three even so much as mentioned the nineteenth-century precursor of Murphy’s stage character. In the *Times*, Benedict Nightingale mentioned Alice only in terms of frustrated expectations:

The title of Tom Murphy’s new play suggests that we should expect a three-parter along the lines of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, but with Lewis Carroll’s flaxen-haired princess rather than a doomed king. However, it lasts just over two hours and is called a trilogy because it observes an Irish woman in a doleful 1980, a wretched 1995 and a 2005 somewhere the other side of despair. (*The Times*, 17.11.05)

In the *Daily Express*, Ruth Leon described Murphy’s Alice as emerging “through the looking-glass of her thoughts” (*Daily Express*, 17.11.05), while Susannah Clapp referred

to Juliet Stevenson's portrayal of Alice as being "... a woman trapped behind her own face like Alice behind the looking-glass" (*Observer*, 20.11.05).

On the other hand, two thirds of the critics pointed out parallels between Murphy's writing and that of Samuel Beckett and, in some cases, that of Virginia Woolf. Most of the eleven critics who detected evidence of Beckettian influence saw this as having been inadequately absorbed. Thus, the *Times* reviewer described the play as:

... a short trilogy as might have been penned by Samuel Beckett in collaboration with a dozen depressed housewives. (*The Times*, 17.11.05)

A few days later, the *Mail on Sunday* echoed this analogy:

Imagine *Desperate Housewives* written by a wannabe Samuel Beckett and an exceptionally depressed Virginia Woolf and you'll have the flavour of Tom Murphy's *Alice Trilogy*. (*Mail on Sunday*, 20.11.05)

Carole Woddis, in the *Herald*, asked why Murphy's play sounds "disturbingly like a thin amalgam of Samuel Beckett and Virginia Woolf?" (*Herald*, 25.11.05). In the *Independent on Sunday*, Kate Bassett felt that the play was "too obviously indebted to Samuel Beckett" (*Independent on Sunday*, 20.11.05), while the *International Herald Tribune* stated that "... the show nods in the direction of the greatest Irish playwright of them all – Samuel Beckett – without beginning to approximate his power" (*International Herald Tribune*, 23.11.05). Probably the most seriously pondered view of the question of Beckettian influence, however, was voiced by Michael Billington, the elder statesman amongst the London critics, who has been reviewing plays for the *Guardian* since 1971:

Dramatists, as they get older, often do away with the impedimenta of realism. Tom Murphy here focuses with Beckettian directness on the decline of his eponymous Irish heroine over a quarter of a century. The result is a strange, poetic, poignant study of a life half lived, and of suffering stubbornly endured. (*Guardian*, 17.11.05)

It is regrettable that very few of Michael Billington's colleagues in the press corps were prepared to extend the same level of tolerance towards Murphy's work. The management of the Royal Court would certainly not have wished to adorn the theatre's billboards with such damning comments as:

... fuddled, feeble ... drama-lite ... emptily verbose ... glowering lack of dramatic purpose (*Evening Standard*, 17.11.05);  
... both precious and thin (*Financial Times*, 18.11.05);  
... two hours of relentless misery ... theatrical masochism (*Daily Telegraph*, 18.11.05);

... badly engineered (*Independent*, 18.11.05);  
 ... irritating ... pretentious ... tiresome (*Daily Mail*, 17.11.05);  
 ... very disappointing (*Independent on Sunday*, 20.11.05);  
 ... exasperating (*International Herald Tribune*, 23.11.05);  
 ... rather tedious (*Jewish Chronicle*, 25.11.05);  
 ... often dreary (*Sunday Telegraph*, 27.11.05).

Although several of the critics referred to Tom Murphy's status as one of Ireland's leading contemporary playwrights, second only to Brian Friel, very few saw fit to comment on the play's Irishness. Thus, Murphy's focus on a sector of Irish society that has rarely featured in the work of Irish dramatists was not mentioned by any of the nineteen critics. Only Michael Billington ventured to argue that the virtue of the play is that it "implies some malaise in Irish society not confined to women," although later in his review, rather than attempting to specify what this malaise might be, he fell back on generics. Thus, for Billington, the second play in the trilogy "beautifully brings out both the wan despair of middle-age and some baffled affliction within the Irish temper," concluding his review with the affirmation that, although the play's "final meaning is elusive ... it admits us to the solitude and despair within the Irish soul" (*Guardian*, 17.11.05).

Of more interest to the critics were Juliet Stevenson's struggles with her Irish accent. The reviewers were unanimous in declaring that Juliet Stevenson's performance as Alice was the great strength of the production. They referred to her:

... mesmerising performance (*Guardian*, 17.11.05);  
 ... lyrical self-pity (*Evening Standard*, 17.11.05);  
 ... virtuosic performance (*Daily Telegraph*, 18.11.05);  
 ... talent for sadness (*Daily Mail*, 17.11.05);  
 ... wrenching intensity (*Sunday Express*, 20.11.05);  
 ... tour-de-force of virtually solo acting (*What's On*, 23.11.05);  
 ... mixture of suppressed fury and almost inaudible restraint (*Herald*, 25.11.05).

On the other hand, her unsuccessful attempts to produce a convincing Irish accent were the object of general reprobation. The critic of *The Times* described Juliet Stevenson's accent as "iffy", while Michael Billington wrote that her "Irish roots were only fitfully suggested". Alastair Macaulay said that an Irish accent that "comes and goes" was her only obvious fault (*Financial Times*, 18.11.05). The *Daily Mail* described her accent as "dim to non-existent", while Martina Shawn, writing in *What's On*, said that her accent was "forced to tour all over the place". Given that most critics did not believe the play's Irishness to be of particular significance, Juliet Stevenson's difficulties with her accent were considered to be a blemish on her otherwise outstanding performance, but not a problem as far as the production as a whole was concerned.

Curiously, given their evident dislike for Tom Murphy's text, the critics seemed to think that the production itself was successful, largely due to the positive qualities of Ian Rickson's direction. Here the praise was indeed fulsome: the critics described the production as:

- ... expertly judged (*The Times*, 17.11.05);
- ... wonderfully spare (*Daily Express*, 17.11.05);
- ... sensitive (*Time Out London*, 23.11.05);
- ... characteristically meticulous (*Mail on Sunday*, 20.11.05);
- ... spare, eerie and gripping (*Independent on Sunday*, 20.11.05);
- ... a superb study in claustrophobic detail (*Herald*, 25.11.05).

Writing this now, over a year after seeing the play, I still feel that the London critics were unduly harsh. I took my son, then twelve years old, to see the play and neither of us enjoyed the experience as much as some of the other plays we went to see. A young adolescent can certainly be forgiven for finding the neuroses of a fifty-year-old woman less entertaining than the farcical mayhem of Dr Prentice's clinic in Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw*, for instance (the shared theme of both plays being that of mental health). For my own part, although I was enthralled by Juliet Stevenson's portrayal of the central character, neither she nor Tom Murphy was able to make me *care* very much about her angst. Like many of the London critics, I found myself siding with Alice's long-suffering husband who, dull though he may be, is more sinned against than sinning. Perhaps this was the risk that Murphy took with this play, for he must have known that it would be difficult to write the tragedy of a wealthy married woman whose principal problem throughout the major part of the play is that she has no problems. In this sense, Tom Murphy's Alice is much like her nineteenth-century namesake – both characters are lost in a labyrinth of irrationality, but this does not earn them the right to the theatre-goer or reader's empathy: one observes the plight of both Alices with dispassionate detachment.

By way of a post-script, it is worth noting that, on 6 October 2006, almost a year after its world premiere in London, *Alice Trilogy* opened at the Abbey's Peacock Theatre in Dublin. The production, directed by Tom Murphy himself, and starring Jane Brennan as Alice and Mary Murray as Al, was a sell-out success. There can be no doubt that the Abbey's audience holds Tom Murphy dear to its heart – in 2001, for instance, his work was celebrated with the six-play season *Tom Murphy at the Abbey* – but it is interesting to conjecture that his *Alice Trilogy* may have struck a chord with the Irish audience that failed to resonate with London's theatregoers.

Two months later, on 5 December, I was fortunate enough to be present at the play's first performance in Brazil. In a sensitive translation by Domingos Nunez, who also directed the play, the presentation took place in a small studio theatre high above the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo. Curiously, I found Alice to be considerably more likeable as a character in Brazil than I had found her in London. This may have been

because Marcia Nunes, who played the role, and Sylvia Jatobá as Al, achieved a playful, almost sisterly, empathy between ego and alter ego that was very different from the sinister darkness pervading their dialogue in the London production. Similarly, both Jimmy and Bill were played with an aura of warmth by, respectively, Marco Antônio Pâmio and Walter Granieri, which lent a humanity to the characters that was somewhat lacking at the Royal Court. Granieri's Lear-like stage persona in particular brought a tragic intensity to the Alice's long-suffering husband. Perhaps the Brazilian cast was responding to a glimmer in Tom Murphy's text that Ian Rickson and the London critics failed to spot in the corner of their looking-glass.

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# *Beyond the Accent Limitations: Staging Marie Jones's Stones in His Pockets to a Brazilian Audience*

Domingos Nunez

**Abstract:** *At first sight one might suppose that it would be almost impossible to stage Marie Jones's Stones in His Pockets successfully in any other language but English. As the primary idea of the play is to exploit English accents in order to delineate the characters' social roles as well as their national conflicts, any attempt to reproduce a similar situation in Brazil, a country of continental proportions and therefore with a myriad of accents, would have led us to a biased and prejudiced approach: the Brazilian political and social reality is, in many aspects, radically distinct from the one depicted by the Irish playwright. Nevertheless, when the accent limitations were given less emphasis and the translator focused on the structure of the play, entirely based on American film clichés, it was possible to establish a great number of similarities between a Brazilian and an Irish environment. The Hollywood industry model as a prototype to discuss colonizing processes, an imposed hegemony and hierarchical systems of the power turned out to be very revealing and meaningful to a contemporary Brazilian audience. The main purpose of this communication is to present the options taken in the process of translation and discuss the subsequent solutions for the stage production in Brazil and how they reverberated not only in conceptual terms, but also in the reception of the play.*

One of the first obstacles that can halt anyone interested in translating or staging Marie Jones's play *Stones in His Pockets* in Portuguese or in a non-English spoken country is put at the very beginning of the script when the list of characters is given. All of them are not described according to particularities of their features, but according to the way they are supposed to speak. And the fact that they are almost all part of the crew in a Hollywood film production in progress in "a scenic spot near a small village in Co. Kerry", seems to reveal that the intention of the playwright is to establish tight connections between the characters' accents and their social roles inside the structure of an American production. Thus, the two protagonists, Charlie and Jake, are Irish and play the extras in

the film as well as many of their partners, local people of different ages. The other people involved in the production are not, or wished were not from Ireland. The leading female part, for instance, not by any chance the daughter of a landowner, is performed by a frivolous American star; the director is an Englishman; the actress' security man is Scottish and there is even a crew member who is supposed to have a Cockney accent. All the extras are ordered to act as if they were an anonymous mass of dispossessed Irish people and are said to keep quiet and simply do what they are told. They are expected to behave in accordance to an imposed, strongly and emblematic hierarchy that places at the top those who speak with a British or an American accent, and at the bottom those with an Irish lilt.

When these elements are considered, it would seem virtually impossible to translate such a play into Portuguese or any other language, let alone perform it in any other accent but the English ones at the risk of getting a completely different result from that originally suggested by the playwright. And considering the play in performance the problem might turn out to be of impossible solution. The American star, for instance, struggles throughout the play to sound like an Irish peasant, and the first assistant of direction who having been born Irish, does all his best to sound like British, if a line uttered by one of the extras is to be given any credit. He says: 'you would think he wasn't Irish'. The answer given is that 'he just wishes he wasn't'. The imbroglio is aggravated even more when one has to take into account that all the characters are to be performed by only two actors that, besides the parts of the protagonists, are supposed to give voice to the rest of the crew.

Contrary to all the evidences, though, if one still considers the possibility of translating such a play into Portuguese without being quite unfaithful to the original script, if still wants to evaluate the chances of putting it on a Brazilian stage, the "accent problem" presented in the original is the first and maybe the most important point to tackle. At first sight it would not seem absurd to surrender to the temptation of trying to reproduce the plot imagined by Jones inside an entirely Brazilian setting. Due to its continental proportions it is just understandable that people use different ways of speaking in the various regions of the country and the Brazilian population in general is able to recognize such differences. Of course that some linguistic particularities have become more popular than others, in part because of the number of people who use a certain way of speaking, in part because the mass media, especially television, elected a couple of patterns as standard speaking models. Although most people do not use and do not even like these models, as a rule they are able to recognize them at once as being of such and such region because they are more often exposed to them. But it would be very hard, not to say impossible, to establish the same kind of relations suggested by Jones in her play taking for granted that to achieve a similar effect the characters should speak according to the variety of Brazilian modes. The result would be inevitably a superficial and biased version of the original since the extras would have to be associated to a particular regional mode of speaking and so would the rest of the crew. A consequent



element of prejudice implicit in the choices of which parts of the country the extras are from, which parts the director, his assistants and the leading roles of the film come from would contribute to put a Portuguese version to the script even farther from its English source.

The key for a solution then, should be looked for somewhere else, in unexpected places, in the historical or political field, for instance. Of course that in almost everything, the historical, social and political reality of Brazil is rather distinct from the Irish one. However, a more closely reading of the play can be very revealing in the sense that there is a much stronger line supporting the narrative than that one that just reinforces through the use of different accents, the primary idea of the play. This idea is drawn in a well-defined line able to link both Irish and Brazilian realities, because the play is not primarily about different modes of speaking, but about the power relations and negotiations among individuals and Nations within a contemporary capitalist and industrialized society. The place of accents inside such a scenario is secondary and can be very helpful to generate humour in the discussion of such a serious issue, but definitely they are not the central theme of the play. Thus, any attempt to recreate successfully *Stones in his Pockets* inside a Brazilian setting should not consider the regional linguistic variations as a real possibility, under the risk of not only reducing the scope of the original version but also its dramatic potentialities.

An attentive reading can reveal more evidences in favour of the argument that the different English accents to be used in the play are of second importance when a translation is concerned. Looking back at the list of characters in the very first page of the script and matching it with the additional information about characters' origins and the lines they actually exchange throughout the narrative, it is possible to realize that for most of time the English used is a standard one. Little effort is made to reproduce accurately the accents the actors are supposed to adopt on the stage. Apart from one expression here and there and a particular way of pronouncing a word or phrase with an Irish lilt, there are no strict indications whatsoever to an exact mode of speaking. The stage directions indicates that the action takes place in a small village in Co. Kerry; so, presumably the locals portrayed in the play are expected to adopt the linguistic mode used by the actual dwellers or something close to it. As for the foreigners it is impossible to say whether they come from Northern England or Southern Scotland or a lost place in the middle of the United States. Whatever the actors' choices might be, instructed or not by their dialect coaches, they will be always appropriated because the playwright is playing with linguistic clichés and the only thing that really matters for the narrative purpose is the fact that they are foreigners. Naturally, the fact that these foreigners being British and in a more positive key Americans, might allow an Irish audience to understand the play in a particular way, especially in regard to past and present colonizing processes of Ireland. Nevertheless, up to a certain extent, an American foreigner as a contemporary devastating colonizer is very meaningful to a Brazilian audience too, even when an actual use of a foreign accent is ignored.

Another very important evidence to be pointed out that contributes to put the “accent problem” in a secondary position is the fact that since there are only the two protagonists, that in their turn play all the other characters, it is just natural that all these latter ones ought to be filtered by the formers’ points of view. Besides, it always remains the question whether or not an American audience is able, for instance, to recognize a Scottish accent at once, or whether the options taken by two Australian actors performing the Irish extras would sound authentic.

But presuming that a great effort is made towards the achievement of an accurate accent, it will make little or no difference to the primary ideas present in the play after all. Of course that these accents used by actors who speak English can confer very colorful tones to a particular production in an English spoken country, and it might be even challenge to any hard-working performer, but it suffices the mere mentioning of characters’ origins to reach the very core of the playwright’s intentions with her script. As it has already been suggested, what is at issue in *Stones in his Pockets* is to put into question the position occupied by extras inside a film structure, in this case, emblematically, a Hollywood production. Inside such a structure it is discussed what roles extras are supposed to perform in a given and imposed hierarchy, dictated by American arbitrary and unilateral interests. There might have chances for the extras (and other members of the crew as well) to ascend in their careers, maybe, provided that they accept the American hegemony, the interference of “foreign” values to shape not only the way they have to live and work but also the way they have to interpret their own culture. In this sense the Irish extras could easily be compared with and replaced by Brazilian ones or by any others from any nationality with less power of bargain and that, therefore, have to accept the intervention of alien forces, almost always very unwelcomed. And what accent the extras might adopt to express themselves is completely irrelevant in this equation.

Curiously, the presence of a foreign crew in the Jones’s script determining the social roles of the natives in the film reverberates highly surprisingly within a Brazilian setting. Once one agrees that what is being discussed in the play goes much beyond the accent implications and that there is no need to find equivalent Brazilian regional modes of speaking to confer relevance and interest to the narrative, the foreign intermission, inside a Brazilian context, can assume not the form of actual foreigners, but of “local foreigners”. They are the result of the huge gap created by different educational and cultural backgrounds to which speakers of various modes belong, independently of what region they are from.

Up to a certain extend the American values in general are widely disseminated in the four corners of the Globe and Brazil, like many other Nations around the world, has been redefining its own cultural, social and political identity – consciously or unconsciously accepted by the population, with or without criticism – mixing local aspects with some models that helped to define the American lifestyle. And among them, the Hollywood industry in particular has lured people’s imagination for many

decades and still is a major force not only in solidifying an image of sometimes beloved and patriotic, sometimes cruel America, but also in supplying the world with formal models, not to say rules, of making films. These rules in varied degrees have been followed diligently especially by those who produce for the Brazilian television in such an extent that in some programs, such as the very well known and popular soap operas, it is relatively easy to detect outstanding vestiges of the Hollywood model, especially in regard to the organization of enterprises, based on clearly defined hierarchy, and the fabrication of idols.

Thus, it is neither surprising nor unfamiliar that the situation imagined by Jones in her play has got a vibrant echo in the minds of a Brazilian audience, since it is an usual procedure a whole television crew flying from urban areas and landing in a far-off village to shoot. Of course, local people that might eventually play the parts of extras never play the protagonists. And even when the leading performers try to reproduce the local way of speaking, what becomes clear at once to every spectator is that they do not sound natural and that they are “foreigners” in their own country because they do not belong to that place, they do not look like anyone who lives there. But any dislocation of the original plot towards a recreation of it into an entirely Brazilian setting is totally unnecessary as well as redundant. The ideas presented in the original script in the way it is structured, strongly rooted on the characters’ interrelations can be automatically get across by a Brazilian audience by the simple fact that, for instance, the “movie star” is completely inappropriate for the role and does not know how to play her part properly; the director and the assistants do not hesitate in adopting a superior posture and mistreat the extras and disrespect their habits because they consider themselves somehow “foreigners” too, special individuals separated from the rest by their backgrounds and the urban environment from where they came. As a result, and it might sound paradoxical, the avoidance of using any Portuguese linguistic variations is what gives to the Brazilian version of the play a pleasant sensation that it is very close and faithful to its original source.

For most part the task of transposing the original script to a Brazilian context and the possibility of ignoring the use of accents is facilitated by the cinematic references given by the playwright and their immediate recognition not only by Brazilians but, potentially, also by practically most of the citizens around the world. Jones structures her narrative making references to some clichés of old western melodramas produced by Hollywood industry in its early years. The film that is being shot in the small Irish village of Co. Kerry is a direct and explicit reference to John Ford’s classic *The Quiet Man* dated of 1952 and starred by John Wayne. Actually Ford had been considering to make this film since the thirties, but ‘had been continually thwarted by Hollywood’s doubts about a romantic comedy set in a far-off Ireland’. Eventually the film was produced and peculiar details about the extensive location-shooting period, as it can attest in the program notes of the 1999 London production of the play, seem to reverberate on some situations imagined by Jones in her own work. A couple of examples are fair enough to

give a partial idea of this creative process. In Ford's film there is a passage known as the fight for the Inisfree championship that began at a farm but climaxed at the village pub. There is a long pub scene imagined by Jones in her play that evolves from an exhausting shooting day on the fields in which is implicit a parody of a championship, considering that all men inside the bar 'would get a look in', 'would give [the star] one'; what means that all of them would fight to be the champion on her bed. Another scene of Ford's film that finds its echo in the Jones's play is the "horse-race at Tully Strand", shot in Connemara. The moment in which the extras have to follow the movements of imaginary horses at the end of the first act is perhaps the most hilarious of the play and pays tribute to Ford's film in the form of another parody.

But maybe the most important idea presented in *The Quiet Man* that permeates the plot of the play and goes beyond to establish its connections with the Brazilian production of *Stones in his Pockets* is the image of a desired and idealized situation in contrast with an immediate reality. One of Ford's producers' comments about a particular location that was eventually inserted in the film is very revealing in this sense and provides rich material for considerations. He describes a little cottage as being beautiful, 'with a stream in front and with stepping stones across. One would think that some set designer just dreamed it as it is'. To contrast such an idyllic image it is said in the notes of the program for the 1999 production of the play that the owners of the property 'made so much money from the film that they built a new house alongside and let the cottage fall into ruin'. The film inside the play is about giving back peacefully the land to the Irish peasants since the English landowner's daughter got married to one of them. The wedding is to represent the definite union between the two Nations. Meanwhile the reality emerges back when the extras are informed that a teenage boy committed suicide and the locals will not be allowed to go to the funeral because the final scene of the film, a happy end, is supposed to be shot at the same day.

Now, an intriguing question to be posed at this point is why a play written in 1999 uses as a model a western melodrama produced in the 50's instead of more modern trends such as adventure or science fiction films or any other. The answer seems to be that the playwright is distancing herself to discuss a colonizing process whose methods are to be reconsidered. It has already become a common place and even a cliché inside the Irish history and literature the strenuous Calvary that led so many people to shed blood and lose their lives for the land's sake. From 1999 onwards, an old American western melodrama is just a convenient prototype to make a parody of the past history and show how it contrasts with more contemporary processes of colonizing people that are much more based on 'pretending not to be' cultural and economical impositions. And Hollywood industry as a paradigm of the aspirations of contemporary men – fame, fortune, power and beauty among other consuming products – in contrast with the frustrations brought by the real daily life constitutes perhaps the strongest link that puts together the original script and a Brazilian version for it.

As a conclusion, it can be said then, that these sort of ideas are likely to be understood by any contemporary individual, Irish, English or Brazilian and, therefore, there is no need of accents to illustrate that it is necessary, and even expected, that an attempt be made towards the possibility of finding a local model as an alternative to “foreign”, imposed prototypes, if what men of today is in search is truly to live inside an “authentic” globalised and democratic world. In order to achieve this state of affairs, the individuals first, like Charlie and Jake in the play, and potentially the Nations afterwards have to be more and more conscious and alert about their roles in this game of negotiating the power relations and its possible consequences in terms of future opportunities inside a capitalist and industrialized world.

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# Translations and Historical Narratives

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# *Translating Kate O'Brien's Teresa of Avila: A Comparative Viewpoint*

Noélia Borges

**Abstract:** *This essay attempts to offer a comparative viewpoint of biographies of Teresa of Avila vis à vis the one written by the Irish writer Kate O'Brien. After examining some biographical productions on the Spanish poet, we show that a resistance to the monolithic male discourse marks O'Brien's biography of Teresa of Avila. Whereas other Teresa's biographers produce their texts with a certain degree of formality, according to the data they collect, O'Brien crosses the frontiers of conventional models, subverting the paradigms.*

The biography of Teresa of Avila written by the Irish writer Kate O'Brien (1897-1974) in 1951 is part of the different paths which her literary vein tracked. O'Brien started writing in 1926; her first three pieces were not novels or biographies but plays. Not happy with the level of their dramatic compositions and the weak influence upon the readers, she decided to embrace different genres – historical novels, memoirs, travel books and the biography of a renowned figure of the Spanish tradition – Teresa of Avila.

Becoming attracted to what is different seems to be part of the nature of every human being. Kate O'Brien does not seem to break this natural rule. Although she was born in Ireland, she fell in love with Spain and everything related to its geography, history, politics and culture, as well as its historical figures. It is not surprising that, due to the precarious economic situation of most Irish families in the 19th century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Irish families were obliged to send their daughters to work as governesses in Spain. It was that situation that favored the friendship between the two countries.

O'Brien is a good example of this friendship. She lived in Spain from 1922 to 1923, where she was hired to give private English lessons to the Areilza's children – a rich family who lived in the village of Santurco, on the Biscaya coast (Bilbao). As soon as she became acquainted with the place, she was able to identify many familiar aspects of Ireland in Spain: the mud in Bilbao in the winter time, the poverty, and the degree of misery in some districts. In the Spanish skin, she could recognize her compatriots of the West of Ireland – those people resulting from the miscegenation between the Irish and the Spanish at the time of trade between these countries, as it happened in the Middle Age.

Those and other identifications that O'Brien collected from Spain were soon translated into their fictional sceneries and characters, such as the ones we can see in *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *That Lady* (1946). Spanish political issues and its representative figures are explored in her books *That Lady*, *Farewell Spain* (a travel book), as well as



*Teresa of Avila* (a biography). In short, the Spanish landscape, the people, the style of living and her own experience there influenced both her spirit and her literary production.

As far as Kate O'Brien's biographical production on *Teresa of Avila* is regarded, it is worth remembering that the Catholic are often familiar with books on the life of the famous Saint Teresa of Avila or Teresa of Jesus. In Brazil, we have a great deal of her biographers. In this work, I will choose just a few biographers to analyze. The first one is the Spanish edition – *Vida* – written by Teresa herself in 1592. The second is *Livro da Vida: Santa Teresa de Jesus* (1983) – translated from Spanish into Portuguese by Maria José de Jesus, who belongs to the Convento Santa Teresa, Rio Janeiro. The third one is a Spanish edition – *Teresa de Jesus* (1981) – by Efrén de La Madre de Dios. The fourth one is *Teresa de Ávila*, translated by Rosa Rossi from the Italian source *Teresa D'Ávila: Biografia di una Scrittrice* (1983). Finally, *Teresa of Avila*, by the Irish writer Kate O'Brien.

There is another biography written by Teresa's great companion during her journey to the foundation of the Carmelite's Order, Saint John of the Cross. *Itinerário Espiritual de São João da Cruz* was translated into Portuguese by the Carmelo Imaculado Coração de Maria e Santa Terezinha, Cotia, São Paulo. There we can see a chapter about the close relationship and alliance between Teresa and the friar John during their long journey to enlarge that great religious enterprise – at that time under the spirit of the Reform.

After translating the biography of Teresa of Avila by O'Brien and reading the above mentioned books, I could see that the Irish writer based her translation not only on the Spanish source, that is, Teresa's autobiography, but also on Efrén de la Madre de Dios and San Juan de la Cruz. It is easy to recognize the equivalences when we confront the texts in both versions – Spanish and English alongside the Portuguese biography written by Rosa Rossi. Indeed, we have to consider the differences that operate in the language when one transfers from one semiotic system to another. Within this line of thought, we can point out the visual difference among many others, that is, the extension of the Spanish texts and the concise number of pages in English – ninety-six pages – which O'Brien produces to analyze a life of dedication, deprivation of world vanities, hardship and tenacity which the admirer of Teresa determines for her biographic work. On the other hand, the reader can soon see the complete lack of engagement with the source text or convention of any kind. On the contrary, the Irish writer takes advantage of her free thought and her restless nature before the injustices that women underwent along the centuries to write about that great genius of the Spanish tradition she most admired.

The biographic work O'Brien writes is as relevant as her other works, for it is a way to integrate different discourses and recover voices which have suffered serious injunctions for being marginalized. Thus, she reacts to the exclusion of women from the conventional systems of an andocentric and prejudiced society.

My first concern here is to point out the recurrent aspects of the Spanish culture of Teresa's time, that is, the sixteenth century O'Brien stresses in her text, such as the

exclusion of women from the world of thought. After that, I will try to examine the way she interprets Teresa's and her counterparts' attitudes and behaviors in her discourse, alongside the views of the society and history of her time – metonymic reconstructions and translations within a particular and single view of individuals, time and space.

As we can see, when O'Brien uses the Spanish edition to construct and mold the portrayal of Teresa within the target culture and the expectations of receptor pole, she concisely manipulates the source text and presents another text, free from the ritualistic elements and the enchantment that surrounds the original. The demise of the aesthetic aura, as Scott Lash and John Urry state, is something which prevails in O'Brien's translation, mainly when she cites part of Teresa's speech. It is clear that she read not only *Life* – the source book written by Teresa (taking her confessor's advice) – but also Efrén de La Madre de Dios's *Teresa de Jesus* (Spanish version), and S. Giovanni della Croce's *Itinerario spirituale* (Italian version), considering the most important biographical data which intermingle in her text. Thus, although it is also undeniable the parentage ties which O'Brien captures from these texts, there is no strict formal correspondence. That is, she just presents some fragments of source text with a particular view of the whole. If we compare, for example, O'Brien's and Maria José's texts, we see that whereas the latter seems to negotiate with the whole ideas of the source text, O'Brien just uses some literal part of it to support her free ideas, in a constant dialogic interaction with the ideas of her time, interpreting individuals' behaviors and attitudes.

Tomé todo el daño de una parienta que trataba mucho em casa. Era de tan livianos tratos, que mi madre la había mucho desviado que tratase em casa. Parece adivinaba el mal que por ella me había de venir. Y era tanta la ocasión que había para entrar, que no había podido. [...] A esta que digo me aficioné a tratar. Con ella era mi conversación y plásticas, porque me ayudaba a todas las cosas de pasatiempo que yo quería, y aun me ponía en ellas y daba parte de sus conversaciones y vanidades. Hasta que traté com ella, que fue de edad de catorce años, no me parece había deseado a Dios por culpa mortal ni perdido el temor de Dios, aunque le tenía mayor de la honra. Este tuvo fuerza para no la perder del todo, ni me parece por ninguna cosa del mundo en esto me podía mudar ni había amor de él que a esto me hiciese rendir. [...] (De La Madre de Dios, Efrén, 17-18).

I had a sister much older than myself, from whom, though she was very good and chaste, I learned nothing, whereas from a relative whom we often had in the house I learned every kind of evil [...] I became very fond of meeting this woman [...] she joined me in all my favourite pastimes and talked to me about all her conversations and vanities. Until I knew her [...] I do not think I had ever forsaken God by committing any mortal sin, or lost my fear of God, though I was much more concerned about my honour. This last fear was strong enough to prevent me from forfeiting my honour altogether [...] nor was there anyone in the world I loved enough to my honour for [...] I went to great extremes in my

vain anxiety about this, though I took not the slightest trouble about what I must do to live a truly honourable life [...] [...] the result of my intercourse with this woman was to change me so much that I lost nearly all my soul's natural inclination to virtue, and was greatly influenced by her, and by another person who indulged in the same kinds of pastime [...] (O'Brien 22-23).

Tinha uma irmã mais velha do que eu, no entanto, nada aprendi com a sua exagerada sensatez e virtude. Foi com uma parenta que freqüentava muito a nossa casa que aprendi todo o mal. Tinha modos tão levianos que minha mãe fizera tudo para afastá-la da nossa convivência. Parecia adivinhar o mal que me causaria. Mas havia tantas ocasiões de estar conosco, que não conseguiu impedir. Afeiçoei-me ao seu trato. Com ela conversava continuamente e me entretinha, porque me ajudava em todos os passatempos de meu agrado e ainda me atraía a eles, tomando-me também por confidente das suas conversas e vaidades. Até essa ocasião em que convivi com ela, por volta de meus quatorze anos e creio que mais (para ser amiga, digo, e ouvir suas confidências), não acho que tenha me afastado de Deus através do pecado mortal, nem perdido o santo temor em ofendê-lo. Mais forte que o temor a Deus era o sentimento de honra, o que me deu forças para não perder de tudo. Coisa alguma do mundo me levaria a transigir.[...] Tinha extremos nesse vão apego à honra, quanto aos meios para conservar, de nenhum modo me inquietava. [...] Certo é que essa amizade de tal maneira me mudou, que, da natural inclinação à virtude que minha alma tinha, quase nada ficou. Ela e outra, que possuía o mesmo gênero de passatempos, pareciam imprimir em mim Seus defeitos (de Jesus 16-17).

[...] tinha uma irmã mais velha que eu, de quem, embora fosse muito boa e casta, nada aprendi, enquanto que de uma parenta que morava na minha casa, aprendi tudo o que é de ruim [...] gostava muito de estar com ela [...] ela se juntava comigo em todos os meus passatempos; também me ensinou outros e me contou todas as suas experiências e vaidades. Até o dia em que a conheci [...] eu não acho que tenha me afastado de Deus, através do pecado mortal, nem perdido o seu temor, embora eu me preocupasse muito mais com a minha honra. Esse temor a Deus era bastante forte dentro de mim, o que me deu força suficiente para me impedir de ser privada totalmente de minha honra [...] não havia ninguém no mundo que eu amasse tanto que me levasse à perda da minha honra [...] persegui os extremos na vã ansiedade de mantê-la, embora não tivesse o mínimo problema em relação ao que deveria fazer para viver uma vida verdadeiramente honrada [...] o meu relacionamento com essa mulher desencadeou uma mudança muito grande dentro de mim, levando-me quase a perder a natural inclinação da minha alma à virtude, [...] e deveu-se grandemente à sua influência e à de outra pessoa que me fazia cultivar também os mesmos passatempos (Borges 8).

Now, considering my own translation, as one can see, I have chosen and bent on O'Brien's prescription of keeping the sense, even though we have then another linguistic

code, for it is impossible to fulfill the whole coherence of the source text in the process of building meanings. I believe that this confuse strategy makes us able to understand the identity of the sixteenth-century women, that is, the time in which strict religious principles and mortal sin were the break the Church imposed to refrain transgressions of any sort. Then, putting all translations together - De La Madre de Dios's, O'Brien's, Maria Jose's and my own - what we see is "the transformation of the same in another one, where the transparency meets interdiction, making it impossible to see any univocal voice, as Rosemary Arrojo states (1993, 57). What we can also say here is that even between the translations done by Brazilians and foreigners, the linguistic interchange happens differently, that is, one takes as one's own the other's meaning and translates to one's own language through new linguistic and cultural labels and within the particular perspectives and discourse disposition of the addressers.

In the beginning of Teresa of Avila's biography, O'Brien makes the reader understand her admiration for the woman Teresa as well as her intention to focus not on the saint who was canonized, but on the genius.

The present attempt is a portrait, or rather, it is notes for a portrait; it is an apology not for Teresa but for this writer's constant admiration for her.

.....

I write of Teresa by choice, which is passionate, arbitrary, personal. No one need agree with anything I have to say - but they must not either, be hurt thereby. I am free not writing of the canonized saint. I propose to examine Teresa, not by the rules of canonization, but for what she was - saint or not - a woman of genius. (O'Brien, Kate, p.9-10)

Este trabalho tem como objetivo apresentar apenas um retrato, ou melhor, deixar algumas idéias que possam retratá-la. Na verdade, trata-se de uma apologia não à Teresa, mas à fiel admiração que esta escritora aqui tinha por ela.

.....

Escrever sobre Teresa d'Ávila é uma questão de escolha pessoal, arbitrária e apaixonante. Ninguém precisa concordar com o que tenho para dizer, mas as pessoas não podem também se sentir ofendidas diante do que lhes espera. Sinto-me à vontade aqui para falar livremente sobre essa grande mulher. Mas não vou falar da santa que foi canonizada. Pretendo examinar Teresa, não através das regras que a canonizaram, mas pelo o que ela foi - santa ou não - uma mulher de grande genialidade. (Borges 1-2).

When O'Brien recovers and revalues the original space and time, she identifies particular aspects that marked the enunciation of that time - the sixteenth century - as well as the social, religious and political leaning of their enunciators. As she is writing in the middle of the twentieth century, effervescent ideas of feminism run in her vein,

showing that she was not indifferent to issues which were connected to the difficulties women had, particularly, in Teresa's case, the difficulty she had to assert and make her wishes and purposes come true along the sixteenth century.

Especially important here is the kind of intermediate job O'Brien projects into her biographic text, by recalling representative images of a feminine identity who crosses frontiers and builds her own subjectivity and history through battles of all sort, that is, inner and outer ones. Thus, following O'Brien's narrative, we see that throughout her life, Teresa had to face not only feelings of guilt for having lived situations contrary to her honor and God's laws, but also health problems, the loss of her mother and other hardships. All these difficulties kept her from achieving her projects of reformation and foundation of the Carmelite Order.

By following the development of O'Brien's work, we see not only how much she admired that great sixteenth-century woman, but also her interest in understanding another culture. Among her different interests we have the female genius of the Spanish and European sceneries. Her discourse brings about a kind of purpose to destabilize the homogeneity, the monotony of symmetry and sameness within the andocentric culture, while she exalts the glory of intelligent figures such as Virgilio, Lucrecius, Dante, Ronsards, Shakespeare and Racine, among others. By regretting the exclusion of women from the European scenery, she revises history and recovers a few feminine names of genius, those who were able to assert their own space, such as Jane Austen, Emily Brontë and Safo in ancient times.

It is the resistance to the monolithic male discourse that marks O'Brien's biography on Teresa of Avila. Whereas other Teresa's biographers produce their texts with a certain degree of formality, obeying the data they collected, O'Brien crosses the frontiers of conventional models, subverting the paradigms, as we can see in her text and my translation below:

[...] That dying Europe is thick incrustrated with glories of male intelligence and may presently vanish before women has had time or chance to make her possible impression on a superb, doomed effort – that is clear enough. But, before catastrophe cracks in all our dreaming faces, let us enumerate our precious things and people. Let us say our personal says. I say, with great regret, that within the two thousand or so years that my very poorly trained vision can take in, genius has hardly ever flowered in a woman. We can jump back beyond those two thousand years and boast of Sappho. Bu we have fragments, rumours of her – and in any case we have to wait for a woman to match her until England and the nineteenth century. It is strange; all the variable, definable furies, styles and freedoms could pass over Europe – we could have Virgil, Lucretius, Dante, Ronsard, Racine, Madame de la Fayette and Miss Jane Austen – but there was still no tracking down of a woman who could be called genius until Emily Brontë's burning shadow flung out. Not as broken, not as indefinable as Sappho's, but

strangely sympathetic to her legend, and just as unsatisfactory. And they are the only female geniuses of our recorded knowledge in literature (O'Brien 10-11):

Essa Europa agonizante encontra-se densamente incrustada de glórias da inteligência masculina e pode em breve desaparecer, antes que a mulher tenha tempo ou oportunidade de deixar sua inegável impressão através de um esforço supremo e determinado – o que já se torna, inegavelmente, evidente. Mas antes que a catástrofe se descortine diante de nossos olhos sonhadores, vamos tentar enumerar coisas e pessoas importantes. Quero aqui deixar a manifestação das minhas idéias pessoais. Expresso, lamentavelmente, que dentro desses quase dois mil anos que meus pobres olhos já contemplaram, a genialidade dificilmente desabrochou na mulher. Se retrocedermos há mais de dois mil anos, vamos nos ufanar de Safo. Mas encontramos apenas fragmentos, rumores a respeito dela. De qualquer forma, tivemos que esperar o século dezenove na Inglaterra para encontrar uma mulher que a igualasse. E parece estranho. Todos os ventos variáveis de frenesi, de estilos, de liberdades puderam passar pela Europa. Pudemos ter Virgílio, Lucretius, Dante, Ronsard, Shakespeare, Racine, Madame de La Fayette e Senhorita Jane Austen, mas nenhum sinal sequer de uma mulher que pudesse ser chamada de gênio, até que a sombra incandescente de Emily Brontë se lançasse repentinamente. Não tão fragmentada e tão indefinida como Safo, mas surpreendentemente complacente com a sua lenda e, portanto, insatisfatória. E estas são as únicas mulheres de genialidade que se tem conhecimento na literatura (Borges 2).

It is impossible to analyze O'Brien's narrative without focusing on the subjects involved, that is, her interlocutors, the different, the same. Among the different we have Martin Luther – the male figure that seems to oppose to Teresa of Avila, because of the panic he disseminated with his beliefs, destabilizing the world with his compartmentalizing religious ideas. In the 1550s, those Lutheran's hegemonic ideas invaded Spain, causing unrest and fear, despite the alienation and addition of certain Spanish alumbrados/illuminated to the dogmas of that religion. When Teresa knew about Luther's death in 1546, she rejoiced and thanked God, for she considered him the archenemy of the civilization. Nevertheless, O'Brien recognizes that Teresa had gifts and attitudes as arbitrary as those of that German figure, which she knew as poorly as the people of Avila. She also recalls that Teresa was as passionate, untamed and impetuous and a writer as brilliant and fluent as Martin Luther. Like him, she also used to dominate her followers and, when the situation demanded, she was as authoritarian as Luther. Teresa and Luther were both moved by the same purpose of serving God.

When Teresa tried to share the same space men used to occupy and dominate, better saying, when she tried to reform the Carmelite Order and found new monasteries in Spain, she opened paths for conflicts, quarrels and punishment.

As we can see, the visibility of O'Brien's text comes from the interventions she makes in the source text, by exploring aspects related to the matter of power and

knowledge she found there. It seems that she intends to decentralize the male counterpart or even make that figure equal to the female, without losing sight of the question of grandiosity of the Spanish female genius – an aspect that trespasses the whole narrative.

Although O'Brien develops the biography of that great Spanish woman of the sixteenth century in a very concise way, she does not lose the chance, within the limited number of ninety-six pages, to stress attitudes and behaviors of the time. Thus, she calls the reader's attention not only to the singularity, audacity and genius of the religious woman in face of the circumstances, but also to the way she challenged world pleasures, discontentment and *status quo*. In short, she often evinces Teresa's impetuosity in facing situations which could stop her projects towards God and her sanctity, as we can see in the extract below:

Teresa was all her life sociable, and enjoyed the enjoyment which she could cause in others; it is impossible to read her letters without being made aware of her social gifts, her sense of comedy, her fluent irony, and her warmth of heart. Moreover – she is insistent upon this – she was in vain, desired persistently to be liked, desired to please. [...] “On the one hand, God was calling me. On the other, I was following the world. All the things of God gave me pleasure, yet I was tied and bound to those of the world. [...] I suffered great trials in prayer, for the spirit was not master in me, but slave. I could not, therefore, shut myself up within myself (the procedure in which consisted my whole method of prayer) without at the same time shutting in a thousand in a thousand vanities. [...] It was indeed a long battle, so long and so hard on her that the forces engaged must have been well matched. Now Teresa was always, whatever her other impulses, most poetically and irresistibly attracted to her own vision of God, and to the difficult idea of living in His love and His presence. (O'Brien 43-45). Teresa sempre fora muito sociável e gostava do prazer que proporcionava aos outros. É impossível ler as suas cartas e não perceber sua sociabilidade, seu senso de humor, sua frouxa ironia e o seu coração amoroso. Ademais – ela insiste nisso – era uma pessoa vaidosa; desejava que as pessoas gostassem tanto dela quanto desejava agradar. [...].

Por um lado, Deus me chamava, por outro lado, seguia as tentações do mundo. Todas as coisas de Deus davam-me um prazer incrível, embora estivesse amarrada e presa às coisas do mundo. [...] Sofri grandes tentações ao rezar, porque o espírito não era mestre, mas escravo. Não poderia, portanto, fechar-me em mim mesma (procedimento baseado em todo o meu método de preces) sem, ao mesmo tempo, fechar-me em mil vaidades (Borges 12).

Another important fact to be considered here is that not only in the pagan world but also in the religious one, Teresa was seriously threatened by the *Office of the Inquisition*, mainly after the publication of her books *Life* and *The Way of Perfection*.

However, she never felt intimidated before that possibility. On the contrary, according to O'Brien, it was this indifference that kept her from being molested.

It is relevant here, before concluding, to refer to the figure of Saint John of the Cross, who, differently from those who were against her work, represents her most faithful friend and ally. Together, they built projects for the foundation of the Carmelite Order. Together, they suffered all sort of adversity in their enterprise, without losing faith and courage, despite The Fathers Provincial's and the Mothers Superior's prohibitions and determination to put a stop to her work. Instead, Teresa would only listen to one voice – His Majesty's.

Summing up: all of us, especially writers and translators, speak about a real, live and particular world and so points of view, perspectives, codes, and positions are inevitably lined up. Not even painters, photographers and the most realistic writers are able to capture the 'real world' in its wholeness and fluid entirety, its partial and apparently concrete nature, without using a particular language, code, angle of vision to filter that reality. Every writer assumes a style and the reality is seen through rather particular dimensions, lenses and perspectives, according to what he/she experiences within the society he/she lives in.

The different historical and cultural backgrounds between the sexes state that male practices are much more prioritized and hierarchical than those of the females – a kind of inequality women have been facing. What is currently seen, and what O'Brien also recognizes, is the construction of a feminine identity, which brings a libertarian and emancipating tendency, for it questions absolutist and totalizing conceptions that circumscribe feminine experiences. The subject is constructed within systems of meanings and cultural representations through reading or 'culturalized' narrative of the real, in which the relations of power interpenetrate, counteract and support the subject's own constitutive mechanisms. Taking those principles into account, O'Brien contests the Western logocentric tradition, with its misogynist and imposing status. She then enters the public space, the space of knowledge, and relocates, questions and radically transforms the feminine subject, defending the relativism of feelings and reason, body and mind, active and passive, proposing the co-existence of multiple feminine roles.

According to O'Brien's point of view, we see that theories do not support and express the true nature of the real, but they are just propositions to be evaluated before the intrinsic asymmetry peculiar to the systems of gender. It is from that conflicting and imposing situation, founded in hierarchy between the genres, that bursts the claim of the rights of those who suffer imposition. As it happens in every situation of imposition, the agent can, for a while, ignore, repress or come to be revolted to the point of having a need to invert the situation, that is, to occupy the position of the other, installing a new phase – a phase of displacement, of an identity which loosens ties of cohesion and opens the possibility of another logic different from that that sets opposition. This impulse of going beyond – disrupting the chains of binaries – is a renewed approach which O'Brien embraces and meets resonance in Stuart Hall's, Derrida's and Heidegger's proposals. That strategy of dislocation disrupts classic assertions about feminine, by



including a new transaction between the elements of man/women relations – the desire for the same sex. Either the relationship within the same sex or with the opposite, there is always the disruption with the ontologic dialectic position – man/woman – disarticulating frontiers. The metaphysical limit of opposition breaks the distance – the abyssal structure that operates not only in the relationship within the same sex but also within the opposite sex – promoting the expropriation of a fixed identity.

If the translator is often considered an invisible person, O'Brien seems to break that invisibility, when she rejects a neutral position before the source-text and holds a dialogue with it, making her presence clear as an agent and promoter of a feminist view, while giving emphasis to aspects which come to deconstruct other biographies of Teresa of Ávila – a way of destabilizing the supremacy of the *logos*, subverting the question of fragility of the feminine sex.

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# *War, State Formation and National Identity on the Fringes of the Atlantic World*

Eoin Ó Néill

**Abstract:** *This article looks at the relationship between war, state formation and national identity in England and Ireland. Focusing on the Elizabethan and Stuart periods, I show how English rule was extended over Ireland in a series of wars. As well as ending the possibility of the development of an alternative type of state in Ireland, where a centralised colonial state emerged instead, this also had a profound impact on state formation in Britain. In addition, this process also contributed to a new type of national identity in both countries, which was geographically restricted and based on religion.*

## **The Concept of the State in British and Irish History**

The state has long been at the core of modern social science. History, political science and sociology are all state centred to the extent that the unit of analysis adopted or the political framework in which analysis is carried out are based on existing states. Furthermore, in many works the existing state is projected backwards, with ‘History’ (whatever that may be) being made to conform to the geographical and cultural requirements of national histories or is made to fit into the boundaries of a modern state. The complexities, twists and contradictions of social processes over many hundreds of years are collapsed and simplified into the history of England, Ireland, France, etc.

The ‘History’ of England – Britain after 1603 – is illustrative of this. The English state is commonly presumed to have existed more or less unaltered from the invasion of William of Normandy, despite many significant regime changes (the Wars of the Roses and numerous other medieval disputes, the ‘English’ Civil War, the Jacobite Wars, the emergence of democracy etc.). England is a socio-political concept that is taken for granted. England then is the same as England now<sup>1</sup>, likewise the English now are those who have always been English (with the necessary proviso for non-white immigrants from former colonies). The fact that the English crown governed for long periods large parts of France and Ireland that are no longer part of Britain – and that many people in these areas once considered themselves English – is found to be irrelevant by this history shaped by modern states. This is even more ironic considering the fact that England is at present neither a modern state nor a local region. Indeed, officially it may only exist as

an independent entity in football, rugby and some other sports! Furthermore, even before 1603 the English state, as compellingly put by Ellis, was not a nation or national state, rather it was a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic state, encompassing English, Welsh, Irish and French:

“In reality, both the English state and its 17th-century successor, the British multiple monarchy, were multi-national states. The Tudor monarchy, for instance, ruled four different peoples (English, Irish, French, Welsh), but the intrusion of modern definitions of nations and national territories fundamentally distorts the context of Tudor monarchical government. The English state is envisaged not as a multi-national state and multiple monarchy, but as a nation-state (and a very precocious one at that!). Yet, it cannot properly be so described after the conquest of Anglo-Saxon England by the dukes of Normandy in 1066 – Wales was added by conquest in the 12th and 13th centuries; half of Ireland in the 13th century, and the rest in the 16th century.” (Ellis 101).

Moreover, the Scots would be added to mix after 1603, when James VI of Scotland assumed the English throne, transforming the state into a multiple monarchy consisting of three kingdoms – England, Scotland and Ireland. Furthermore, James’ assumption of the throne occurred in the middle of a long process of the re-forging of national identity in different parts of this multiple kingdom. Being English increasingly came to be restricted to those (Protestant in religion) born in England, with the resulting exclusion of long-standing English communities in Ireland and France. In Ireland, correspondingly, a new Irish identity was formed as opposed to the previous identities which differentiated between the Irish English (also Anglo-Irish or Old English) and the Gaelic Irish. Following the defeats of the largely Gaelic Catholic Confederacy of Hugh O’Neill in the Nine Years War (1594-1603), the Catholic Confederacy in the 1640s and the Jacobites in the 1690s, and the resultant social transformations – notably the ever increasing eradication of Catholic landholders – the antagonistic division between Gaelic and Old English Catholics was broken down and replaced with a new category of Catholic Irish.

Illustrative of this is the coining of the word *Éireannaigh* in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. This was the first word for Irish in the Gaelic language. However, although it, on the one hand, pointed to the forging of a (Catholic) Irish *natio*, it also signified the rupture of the Gaelic world. The Gaelic world was characterised by a divided polity with multiple competing nodes of power and a unifying and homogenising culture. It was traditionally divided between the *Gaedhil* and the *Gaill* – the Gaelic people and the others, the foreigners. The area of Gaelic culture, the *Gaeltacht*, covered both Ireland and Scotland. Until the accession of James to the English throne the impact of this political division on the Gaelic world was mitigated by the inability of both London and Edinburgh to impose their will on their Gaelic peripheries. The unification of the English and Scottish thrones under James represented the beginning of the rupture of the Gaelic world, mostly due to the collapse of Gaelic military power and autonomy following the defeat of Hugh O’Neill and his flight to the continent in 1607, as well as attacks on Gaelic power in the highlands of Scotland.

Similar complexities can be identified for almost any current European state – including those at the core of the European state system. States altered forms considerably. Nation states, city-states, trade leagues and multiple kingdoms overlapped, intermingled and completed with each other. In the end the nation state (or as better expressed by Tilly, the national state) triumphed. Moreover, due to the colonial Empires of the European national states, this form of state has become dominant throughout the world. Yet even the concept of the nation or national state involves a vast array of different state forms. These include traditional nation states such as Ireland or Finland, multiple/composite states such as the United Kingdom or Spain, modern city states, Singapore for example, continental states such as the United States and Brazil, and huge multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural states such as China or Russia, with the latter offering a multitude of spheres of powers and levels of autonomies.

This causes a difficulty for historians and other social scientists – deciding the appropriate macro unit of analysis. Social science tends to be shaped and structured by current national states. Although this has advantages, it can also create difficulties, especially when any sort of historical analysis is needed.

None of the above is intended to question the importance of the state, or its centrality in social science. To the contrary I see the state as being a fundamental concept, but it should not be understood as something that is transcendent or ‘eternal’ and unchanging. States are social institutions, socially constructed institutions. Although they have a significant degree of permanence and institutional stability, states are dynamic. They evolve and change. For example, the modern British state, which has lost its empire and has fallen from its leading role on the world stage – and whose per capita GDP has been exceeded by that of its former colony the Republic of Ireland – is obviously not the same as the English state of Henry VIII, which included England and Wales (though not Scotland) as well English territories in Ireland and Calais. Nor is it the same as the British state in the 1940s, which was still a world power and still had an empire. Another example of the significant changes that can occur in states – even within short periods of time – can be found by comparing the Western European welfare states of the 1950s and 1960s with their counterparts in the first decades of the twenty-first century, when the welfare state has been substantially modified.

States are not reified institutions that are somehow frozen in time. Rather, as I have indicated above, they are institutions that are constructed, adapted, changed, reformed and destroyed through social processes. An infinite number of factors contribute to the social process of state formation, both internal and external. These can include financial and economic factors, religious factors, natural disasters, cultural changes, ideologies, or even wars and invasions. Also of crucial importance are relationships between and within elites and other significant social groups. I believe that the role and structure of the contemporary state cannot be properly understood without being aware of the historical process which a particular state has undergone. Thus, the particular nature of the state in Ireland – where the state is extremely centralized and powerful, though its ‘power’ is

hidden to a large extent – cannot be understood in separation from the country's colonial relationship with Britain, especially the centralized nature of British administration, the role of Catholicism and the impact of the War of Independence and the Civil War.

Furthermore, when looking at the process of state formation in an individual country (or nation, region, or state), we need to be able to identify the key periods in this process. In relation to European states many historians take the end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century to be one of these key periods – roughly speaking the age of the wars of religion. Other key periods were the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era (1789-1815) and the 1930s and 1940s. When we turn to individual countries, especially ones that are on the periphery, these periods can be somewhat different. In the case of Ireland, as I have argued in my doctoral thesis, the essential turning point was the Nine Years War (1594-1603) which saw the final English conquest of country and the subjugation of the autonomous Gaelic lordships<sup>2</sup>. This hard fought victory is of such importance to Ireland because it represented the end of a potential alternative model of development. Furthermore, it was also of crucial importance to the future development of the English state – though this point seems only to have been acknowledged by Irish or Irish based historians and ignored by most English ones<sup>3</sup> – because defeat may have endangered the Stuart succession to the English throne and probably would have imposed some checks on Stuart absolutism. Victory also assured access to the west – to the Americas and beyond. It is very probable that had the Confederates led by Hugh O'Neill not been defeated, the British Empire would have been far different and far smaller. Finally, victory was achieved at a huge financial cost, bequeathed to the Stuarts and of great significance in undermining relations between English elites in the 1630s and 1640s. It also introduced a destabilising element (Ireland) into the British polity – a question that despite significant advances in recent years has still not been fully resolved<sup>4</sup>.

### **State Formation in Colony and Metropole: England and Ireland in the Long Seventeenth Century**

English intervention in Ireland began in the twelfth century. Ironically, as in the Elizabethan era, the first Irish policy of the English crown was driven by private individuals. Initially uninterested in the country (to which he had conveniently been granted lordship by the Pope) Henry II only actually got involved following the success of some of his knights in the country, when there was a possibility that some of these lords might actually set up an independent kingdom. Although the Anglo-Normans rapidly conquered large parts of the country, they failed to win control of the whole country. Furthermore, despite the influx of a relatively large number of colonists over a number of generations, the previous Gaelic culture was never completely replaced, even in areas controlled by Anglo-Norman lords. In fact, the opposite happened in many cases. The new lords adopted Gaelic customs and culture, becoming in the famous – but perhaps not completely accurate phrase – 'more Irish than the Irish themselves'.

Within a century or so of the Norman invasion, the colonists were on the defensive. In the west and north of Ireland, Gaelic lords managed to push back Anglo-Norman control, with the decline and collapse of the Earldom of Ulster being especially notable. The Gaelic recovery was partially due to timing – the attention of the English crown was focused on France, while the Anglo-Norman lords themselves were bitterly divided. Another important factor was external intervention. From the thirteenth onwards Gaelic lords began to import mercenaries from the Isles and Highlands of Scotland (the Gallowglasses), while at the beginning of the fourteenth century Edward Bruce, brother of Robert, landed in Ireland. Although Bruce was defeated his intervention seriously weakened the English colony.

By the beginning of the Tudor era, Ireland was more or less divided into three broad, flexible zones. First, the Pale – also known as the English Pale –, the eastern coastal and midlands region centring around the counties of Dublin, Kildare and Meath; English by culture and to a certain extent accepting the rule of the government in Dublin. Also part of this zone (though with much more privileges and autonomy) were the cities and corporate towns elsewhere in the country, especially in the south. The second zone was composed the lordships of the old English (or Irish English) magnates, the three earldoms of Kildare, Desmond and Ormond, but also numerous other smaller lordships. Though possessing greater autonomy than the Pale, these lordships were relatively amicable towards the government – once their autonomy and privileges were respected. The final zone was the Gaelic (or Gaelicised) lordships, the O’Neills and O’Donnells in Ulster, the O’Briens and MacCarthys in Munster, the MacWilliam Burkes in Connaught, the O’Byrnes in Wicklow. Despite possessing great autonomy, these lordships were not necessarily opposed to the government (indeed many minor lords were favourably disposed to the government, seeing a government in Dublin or London as preferable to an overlord nearer home), once autonomy and privilege – and later religion – were respected. However, successive Tudor monarchs proved unable to do this provoking a series of convulsions in the country. It should also be noted that these three zones were not mutually exclusive and that there was considerable interaction between them<sup>6</sup>.

In a similar way the population of Ireland was divided between the Gaelic Irish<sup>6</sup> and the Old English, with the latter composing most of the inhabitants of the cities and the Pale. There was much intermixing between these groups. This is widely recorded among noble families and presumably it took place among the more invisible classes. Indeed, one of the main criticisms aimed at the Old English by the English and the new settlers in Ireland – called the New English – was that they had degenerated into Irish. The most eloquent of the new settlers, the poet Spenser, specifically identifies the use of Gaelic wet-nurses as being responsible for this degeneration: “they moreover draw into themselves, together with their sucke, even the nature and disposition of their nurses: for the minde followeth much the temperature of the body” (1997: 71).

For the Tudors the situation in Ireland – especially due to the continued existence of ‘overmighty subjects’ (whether Gaelic or English speaking) – was ideologically and politically unacceptable, a situation that was aggravated by the English crown’s forced

reliance on some of these ‘overmighty subjects’ to rule the country. Moreover, the fact that Ireland was used as the springboard for several invasions of England by Yorkist pretenders and by England’s continental enemies to stir up trouble, made the curbing of the autonomy of the Irish lordships an urgent strategic necessity. Yet this proved to be an immensely complex and costly enterprise, one that destabilised the Tudor regime and whose resolution fatally undermined the Stuarts. The blame for this lies with the Tudor monarchs, especially Elizabeth whose regime was probably the bloodiest in Irish history<sup>7</sup>.

The political situation in Ireland was further complicated by the Reformation. Although Henry VIII’s split with Rome was initially rather passively accepted, further more radical reforms failed. In contrast, despite a rather lukewarm reception at the beginning, the Counter-Reformation made great progress, with both the Gaelic Irish and Old English remaining Catholic. This contributed to the change of attitudes in England towards the Old English, whose loyalty to the state now came to be suspected. The Old English community to the contrary, despite rejecting the established church, still clung to their Englishness and to their concept of loyalty. They remained loyal to the English monarch (after 1534 also king – or queen – of Ireland), but they also refused to give up their political and economic privileges, resisting as far as possible the absolutist tendencies of the London regime. It was this sense of loyalty that prevented the Old English nobility from supporting Hugh O’Neill’s Catholic Confederacy in the Nine Year’s War, though it did allow them to participate in the Confederation of Kilkenny in the 1640s, which was, at least ostensibly, royalist.

Although both Old English and the ‘New English’ advocated the reform of Gaelic Ireland, their idea of reform were considerably different. Generally speaking, the Old English tended to favour political reform based on general humanist principals. The New English, however, influenced by Puritan and Calvinists ideals, tended, especially by the end of the sixteenth century, to favour the sword as a means of reform. A near-genocidal policy was advocated, which, as the situation in the country got steadily more complex, got steadily more radical. By the 1590s many, especially new settlers, wanted to root out and exterminate Gaelic culture, lords and the Gaelic upper class. Various rebellions and conflicts, especially the Desmond Wars and the Nine Years War, provided ample opportunities for these policies to be implemented.

A further complicating factor was the ‘privatised’ nature of the state. The English government was fundamentally corrupt. Offices were bought and sold – and once an individual occupied a position it was often very difficult to dislodge them. Since the price of offices was high, and salaries low, the most obvious way to recoup ‘investments’ was through corruption. This also encouraged state officials to pursue their own interests, even to the detriment of state policy<sup>8</sup>. Although in London and England it was possible to control government officials to a certain extent, in Ireland, to the contrary, officials and army officers were often able to build up small empires, such as those of Richard Bingham in Connaught and George Carew in Munster. The impact of the activities of

officials concerned with enriching themselves was considerable, undermining the trust of Gaelic lords in the state. For example, the corruption of William Fitzwilliam, lord deputy in the early 1590s, was one of the causes of the outbreak of hostilities between the state and Hugh O'Neill's confederates.

The Nine Years War (1594-1603) was the essential turning point in modern Irish history – and one of the most important in British history. What began as a regional conflict involving a coalition of disaffected Gaelic lords was turned by the *virtú* of the Gaelic leader, Hugh O'Neill, and the incompetence of Elizabeth and her government, into a nationwide war that became part of the continent wide struggle between Spain and its allies on one hand and the Netherlands, England and France, on the other hand. The success of the Gaelic confederacy threatened English rule in Ireland – and the structure of the English state itself. Gaelic victory (or 'non-defeat') would probably have resulted in a much less centralised state where a number of quasi-autonomous lordships, and potential sources of opposition to the state, would have continued to exist. This in turn would have hindered the extension of English law and the cash nexus throughout the country. Due to the Spanish contribution to the Gaelic war effort, Confederate victory would most likely have introduced a significant non-English presence into the polity, representing another potential source of hostility/conflict. This could well have hindered the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne, since the Spanish monarchy had a competing claim.

A final – and from an international point of view perhaps the most important – potential impact in related to the future trajectory of England/Britain as an international imperial power. Geo-politically Ireland was both a route to attack England and the latter's gateway to the west. Throughout the middle ages and for most of the Tudor period, English monarchs looked east to France and the continent. English trade was also European orientated. During the final decades of the sixteenth century, after the loss of the final English foothold in France, and attracted by opportunities of piracy and plunder in Spanish possessions, the strategic viewpoint of the English state began to shift westwards. Nevertheless, this viewpoint was still dominated by war with Spain, with the main fighting taking place in the Netherlands, Brittany and Ireland. It was only after Ireland had been fully subdued that the path was open for England to become a global power. Furthermore, as shown by Canny (1988) and others, English (and British) colonial experiences in the New World were intimately linked with those in Ireland. The plantations in Ireland, especially in Ulster and Munster, absorbed far more people and resources than those in the Americas during the seventeenth century. They were also far more successful – and to a certain extent less risky. In addition, many of the same people were involved in colonisation schemes in Ireland and the New World, with experiences and skills learned in Ireland being put to good use in the Americas. There were also ideological links, with many of those involved in colonial ventures in Ireland and the Americas providing the same ideological justifications for their actions.



In relation to future paths of state development in Ireland, the victory of the government in the Nine Years War represents the end of possible alternative paths, such as the emergence of an 'Irish' state. Instead, Ireland was now fully subdued to the English state, becoming a centralized colonial state, rather than a sister kingdom where the rule of law was based on coercion<sup>9</sup>, the old rights and privileges of the loyal Catholic community were eroded, a parliamentary majority was constructed among Protestant settlers, and land ownership reverted more and more through extra-legal and economic processes to the new settlers. Furthermore, despite the concerns of numerous writers about the abuses of Gaelic law and the need to civilise the Gaelic Irish and thereby 'improve' them, once Gaelic Ireland no longer seemed a threat these concerns fell by the wayside. Indeed, several important Gaelic lords, such as Cormac MacBaron, the brother of Hugh O'Neill, and Niall Garbh O'Donnell, were imprisoned for life without charge. Others were executed on trumped up charges. Thus, the colonised, once conquered, were subject to a new form of warfare – in which the main weapons were legal. English law was used to attack and remove inconvenient legal mechanisms from the previous system, as well as to weaken land tenure, to undermine the power of individual lords and to weaken opposition. In his interesting study of this 'legal imperialism', Pawlish (1985) has pointed out how, based on the experience acquired in Ireland, similar experiences were later tried by the British in future colonies and conquest.

Naturally this created a reaction. The Gaelic Irish and Old English were not passive receptors of the fundamental changes that were occurring. Rather, there were a wide range of political, military, religious and ideological reactions. Large numbers of Gaelic Irish and Old English went to the continent, especially to Spanish possessions. Some joined the Irish regiments of the Army of Flanders, or became permanent political exiles. Others sought an education or became priests in the numerous Irish colleges set up on the continent. This contributed to a sort of Gaelic renaissance where scholars (who were usually in religious orders) attempted on the one hand to preserve their culture, and on the other contributed to the formation of an Irish identity. The word *Éireannaigh*, the Gaelic for Irish, a word that had never previously existed, was coined at this time. The new identity was based on Catholicism, rather than on ethnicity. The previous divisions between Gaelic and Old English were eroded, eventually being replaced with a new category – Catholic Irish. However, this identity would only assume full embodiment at the end of the seventeenth century, and conflict between both groups continued, to the detriment of both. Furthermore, it was formed in opposition to the state. Despite attempts to find accommodation with the protestant state, loyal Catholics were ultimately unsuccessful. Their loyalty was rejected by an increasingly anti-Catholic English polity which both suspected Catholics and refused to accept the Old English as English<sup>10</sup>.

The convulsions of the English state during the regime of Charles I further complicated matters. Stuart political and religious absolutism allowed no room for compromise, despite the fact that this was sorely needed because of the appalling financial situation of the English crown – much of which can be traced to the Nine Years War. This led to conflict in England between crown and parliament, and between the crown and the Scottish religious covenanters. Attempts to use Catholic Irish to aid Charles in

his war with the covenanters failed and Charles was forced to make a humiliating peace. Then war broke out in Ireland following the rising of Catholic nobility in Ulster in 1641, which rapidly spread throughout the island. The reasons for this rebellion are complex, but in short seem to rest on the collapse of the trust of the Catholic elites in the crown, the widespread fear among Catholics of the virulently anti-Catholic parliament in Westminster, and the fact that much of the Catholic Irish gentry were heavily in debt. The 1641 Rising in Ireland was the direct trigger of the English Civil War – now referred to as the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

England, Scotland and Ireland were torn apart by war during the 1640s. Ireland suffered the most though. Despite the Confederation of Kilkenny which brought together the Gaelic Irish and Old English, mutual suspicions and divisions fatally undermined this unity. Weakened by faction fights of bewildering complexity, and by the death of their best military commander, Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill, the nephew of Hugh, the Confederates were no match for Cromwell when he landed in Ireland in 1649. Two years later Ireland had been fully subdued and Cromwell had earned the highest place on the Irish pedestal of hate. Victory was followed by further plantations and colonisation scheme. Large numbers of Catholic landholders lost their lands, some being sent to the poorest Irish province, Connaught, while many soldiers and women and children were sent as slaves or indentured labour to the new English colonies in the West Indies.

Despite the hopes of Irish Catholic royalists, the Cromwellian land settlement was confirmed after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The accession of the Catholic James II to the throne appeared to threaten this settlement – certainly many Catholics and Protestants believed this. Although some anti-Catholic legislation was repealed in Ireland, and there were plans to revise the land question, the overthrow of James II was essentially due to, despite the eloquent propaganda to the contrary, anti-Catholic bigotry. Consequently it dramatically worsened the position of Catholics in Ireland. After the surrender of the Jacobite forces in Ireland in 1691, and the subsequent departure of large number of soldiers into exile, the infamous anti-Catholic Penal Laws were introduced in Ireland. This resulted in the virtual elimination of the Catholic nobility in Ireland and of Catholic landholding in general.

## **State Formation and the Emergence of National Identity in Ireland and Britain**

The period 1590-1691 was the key period in the formation of modern states in Ireland and Britain. Whereas in 1590 Scotland was an independent kingdom, and Ireland still had an ambiguous relationship with England, and possessed a considerable degree of autonomy, in 1691 all three were united under the same crown, Ireland had been fully conquered (three times), the autonomous lordships had been eliminated and Gaelic political culture had been virtually eliminated in Ireland (and within sixty years they would suffer the same fate in Scotland). The kingdom of Ireland had been transformed

into a colony. Furthermore, the social and economic structure of Ireland had also been transformed. Despite the fact that the majority of the country was Catholic, virtually all the land was held by Protestants, in addition, the previous division between Gaelic Irish and Old English had been replaced by a new Irish identity based on Catholicism. Similarly, a new English identity had emerged, based on Protestantism and which explicitly rejected the claims of Old English to be English, since by stubbornly remaining Catholic they had degenerated into Irish.

In the following two centuries Britain would become a world power, with an empire that spanned the globe. The path to becoming the dominant power in the world was opened by the English victory in the Nine Years War. Yet at the same time the subjugation of Ireland, the 'colonisation' of Ireland, created an Irish problem for Britain. Despite progress made in the last decade, this problem has yet to be resolved. Furthermore, the incorporation of Ireland also aggravated the tensions inherent in the British state, creating a British problem – how to forge a unity among three states (and four nationalities if the Welsh are included) that had forcibly been brought together. In the long run this proved impossible because of the Catholic Irish. This does not mean that the Catholic Irish were consistently opposed to the idea of Britain or the British Empire. To the contrary, many Catholic Irish willingly participated and took advantage of this. However, the core ideological bundles that were used to unify, to 'create' and 'invent' Britain systematically excluded the Catholic Irish (as well as creating various contradictions for Catholic English and Scots). These axes were centred around the intermeshed themes of the crown, religion (Protestantism, both Anglicanism and Calvinism, and anti-Catholicism), the British Empire and its civilising colonial mission, a very Calvinistic sense of destiny and belief that the English (and to a certain extent the Scots and the Welsh) were God's chosen people, (and corresponding discrimination/racism against those peoples who had not been so fortunate), belief in the settlement of the so-called 'Glorious Revolution', as well as a sense that British was equivalent with English. These principles – which had a very real impact on the formation of the state in England and in Ireland – fatally undermined the long-term incorporation of Ireland within Britain<sup>11</sup>.

It is interesting to compare the consistent difficulties with the incorporation of Ireland into Britain with their relative absence in Scotland. Like Ireland, Scotland had a Gaelic fringe that was similarly despised by the civilised inhabitants of Edinburgh. Its political elite were also descendants of colonists and English speaking. Unlike Ireland, Scotland was an independent kingdom. Yet this independence was given up relatively easily. Although there were a series of Jacobite rebellions in the eighteenth century, these did not (including the most successful, the 'Forty-Five') really threaten the British state. Furthermore, these rebellions involved only a small number of Scots and were not aimed at winning Scotland independence, but at restoring the Stuarts to the crown of the Three Kingdoms. Finally, the Republic of Ireland exists today as a sovereign state, Scotland does not. Three points need to be considered in any explanation of this. First, whereas the Protestant reformation failed in Ireland, it was successful in Scotland. Second, while in Ireland Gaelic, Old English and New English all intermingled, in Scotland the

geographic distinction between the Gaelic (the Irish speaking) Scots and the civilised Scots was much sharper, allowing the isolation of Gaelic Scotland, and letting English speaking Scotland exist and operate as if Gaelic Scotland did not exist. Third, while in Scotland once the Gaelic culture had been destroyed, stereotypes of its images and representations could be appropriated (most notably the kilt)<sup>12</sup>, in Ireland this did not occur. The Gaelic savage did not become – except in nationalist, anti-British, literature – the noble savage. Contrast, by way of example, the romanticised version of the Highlanders, where the descendants of the House of Hanover could/can put on kilts and ‘become’ Scottish (but never Gaelic), with the apelike cartoons and portrayals of the Irish commonly found in nineteenth and twentieth century English literature.

### **Conclusion: the State and National Identity**

In summary, the period in question (1590-1691) was vital for the formation of the state in Britain and Ireland. It involved a number of not always successful and sometimes contradictory processes. These included the strengthening of the power of the government vis-à-vis local nobles and local sources of power, such as cities and corporate towns. Yet in many ways this extension of state power was self-defeating as it triggered off crises and wars that involved massive financial outlays, restricted the freedom of the monarch to act and imposed agreements with other power sources. In addition, especially at the beginning of the period in question, state power was privatised to a considerable degree. Many offices (including military ones) were bought and sold – and holders enjoyed a considerable degree of protection from removal, even against the monarch –, while office holders were often more interested (and able) to pursue actions involving their own interests. Another important process was the reworking of national identities. While in Ireland a new national identity was formed to incorporate both Gaelic Irish and the Old English tied together by their Catholicism, in England a religious based identity was also formed, though this was used more to exclude people from Englishness, especially the Old English who were seen as having degenerated into Irish<sup>13</sup>. There was an ideological factor tied to the religious question. Inspired by Calvinism, many English came to see the Gaelic Irish (and then all the Catholic Irish) as something less than human to whom the rules of civilised warfare did not apply, thereby making legitimate horrific means of war as seen in the Nine Years War and the Cromwellian Wars. This in turn probably contributed to the ‘colonial’ ideology, which ignored the previous historical existence of Ireland as a kingdom under the British crown, and whose citizens were therefore entitled to the protection of the law, to seeing the country instead as ‘sword land’, as a place to be conquered, plundered, exploited, the traditions and entitlements of loyal elites notwithstanding. Despite the success of the new ‘conquest’ of Ireland and the displacement of its Catholic elites, the incorporation of Ireland into Britain presented a political and ideological challenge – one that in the long term was unable to be met.

A final point worth considering is that although in this article I have discussed the history of Britain and Ireland, I am also dealing with world history. In a way the history of the modern world was decided in early 1602. English victory in the Nine Years War resulted in the full control of Ireland for the first time and prevented the emergence of an alternative path of development, a possible 'Gaelic State'. This in turn permitted and encouraged a turn to the West, away from the European continent among English elites and towards a process that would result in the British Empire. Had the Gaelic forces not been defeated at Kinsale, it is extremely likely that the future British Empire and the path followed by the English state would have been different, with considerable consequences for the rest of the world.

## Notes

- 1 In 2005 on H-Albion, an important academic discussion list of British and Irish history, the statement that the last invasion of England had been that of William the Conqueror went unacknowledged. This important historical 'fact', the date of the founding of modern England – and its *de facto* separation from 'the continent' is somewhat contradicted by a long line of military interventions: numerous military interventions from abroad occurred throughout the medieval era culminating with the invasion of England by Henry Tudor in 1485, subsequent Yorkists invasions from Ireland, the invasion of England by William of Orange in 1689 – perhaps the last successful invasion of the country – and the Jacobite invasion in 1745-6.
- 2 Ó Néill, Eoin, 2005, *O Estado Que Nunca Foi: guerra e formação do estado na Irlanda do século XVI*, Doctoral dissertation, IUPERJ, 2005.
- 3 In the majority of histories concerned with the Elizabethan era (with the notable exception of Wallace MacCaffery) the war in Ireland is either largely ignored with the exception of some generic mentions and footnotes, or discussed in a chapter by an Irish author. Admittedly in 'post-Pocock' academic history there has been some attempt to tackle the non-English (in the contemporary sense) part of the English/British state, nevertheless 'popular' Elizabethan history continues to conveniently ignore Ireland.
- 4 Bradshaw has referred to Ireland as "*the* British problem" (1998: 112).
- 5 Steven Ellis has argued that parts of England, notably the upland border regions in the north were very similar to the Gaelic (and some of the Old English) lordships in Ireland, in that they were outside the political, social and economic core, similar social conditions existed (continual small scale raiding, the existence of 'name groups', collective punishments, etc), and lords were semi-autonomous. However, no matter what radical and harsh solutions were implemented to discipline these areas – which included transplantation to Ireland! – they were still not as harsh as those implemented in Ireland during the Nine Years and Confederate Wars, which amounted to genocide in some cases. (See Ellis, 1995)
- 6 It is very interesting to note that there is – after so many hundred years of contact, going back even before there was an English language! – no proper noun for the Gaelic Irish, with the exception of the nineteenth century 'Gaels'. It is also worthwhile noting that the Irish for English is Sasanagh, literally Saxon,
- 7 Elizabeth – 'Gloriana' and 'Good Queen Bess' – is still highly regarded in England. In 2005 the BBC ran a competition to name the best Britons and she came in the top ten. (See: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002/10\\_october/19/great\\_britons.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002/10_october/19/great_britons.shtml) accessed on 17 December 2006).

- 8 These attitudes and actions went all the way to the highest levels. For example, as Kerney Walsh shows, in the first decade of the seventeenth century several members of the Privy Council (the equivalent of the cabinet) were receiving 'pensions' from the Spanish. (1986: 31-2).
- 9 See: Edwards, David. 2004. "Legacy of defeat: the reduction of Gaelic Ireland after Kinsale." In: Morgan, Hiram (ed.). 2004. *The Battle of Kinsale*. Wicklow: Wordwell.
- 10 See: Caball, Marc. 1998. "Faith, Culture and Sovereignty: Irish Nationality and its Development, 1558-1625." in: Bradshaw, Brendan. 1998. *British Consciousness and Identity: The making of Britain, 1533-1707*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Lock, Julian. 1996. "'How Many Tercios has the Pope?' The Spanish war and the sublimation of Elizabethan Anti-Popery." *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*. Vol. 81, 261, 1996.
- 11 An example of this can be seen in the Curragh incident in early 1914 when 60 British officers stationed in Ireland resigned their commissions in the army rather than having to enforce the Home Rule (i.e., the restoration of a parliament in Dublin) that had been passed by the Westminster parliament and which was supposed to come into effect at the end of 1914. These resignations were not accepted and no officers were punished in the only blatantly political intervention of the British army in modern times. Home Rule was postponed upon the outbreak of World War I.
- 12 See: Trevor-Roper, Hugh. 1983. "The invention of tradition: the Highland tradition of Scotland." in: Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (eds). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 13 And also, ironically, at a later date the descendants of the New English who became 'Anglo-Irish' and more recently British, but never English.

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# Angela's Ashes – A Memoir: Images of a Particular View of Limerick, Ireland

Brunilda T. Reichmann

**Abstract:** *This paper deals with some still images from the film Angela's ashes: A memoir, directed by Alan Parker and based on the Pulitzer-Prize-winning memoir with the same title, by Frank McCourt. The analysis of the images shows that Parker sometimes transfers and at other times adapts (according to Brian MacFarlane's theory of film adaptation) the material of the memoir or the narrator's experience as a boy, and his specific view of Limerick, Ireland, at a particular time in history.*

Nature is not only all that is visible to the eye – it also includes the inner pictures of the soul.

Edvard Munch

The expression “a particular view” in the title of this paper and the quotation which follows were included to bring to the reader's attention the intricate meanderings of imagination in the creation of a fictional universe or the intricate paths towards recollections long kept within one's memory. Limerick, the city where Frank McCourt lived for more than ten years while he was growing up, from the late 30s to the 50s, is depicted by him, in his memoir *Angela's ashes* (1996), as a place of suffering and death. Most readers know, however, that reality can be distorted and that harsh times can become worse, depending on the gaze of the observer, especially if he is a child. This is not to say, however, that Limerick, at the time when Frank lived there as a child, was not an inhospitable place. This reminds us that reality is always filtered by the observer's, in this case a child's, perception of it.

While searching for information on Ireland and Limerick in the years of the memoir, some historical and economic information proved to be helpful for understanding the hard times Frank knew in the land of his parents. The Great Depression, which began in the United States in 1929, “quickly turned into a worldwide economic slump owing to the special and intimate relationships that had been forged between the United States and European economies after World War I.”<sup>1</sup> Ireland had already lived through



a civil war which ended in May 1923, with approximately 5000 military deaths and an unknown number of civilian casualties. The “disillusioned decades” which followed the civil war and the Great Depression were evoked in McCourt’s memoir as they were apprehended by the boy he then was and, at the time of writing the memoir, by the older man who recovers the inner pictures of his soul. Limerick, from Old Irish, translates ironically as “vulnerable land” – ironically because its inhabitants, in this case the McCourts, became quite vulnerable in this vulnerable city. The River Shannon, one of the main characters in the memoir, considered by Frank’s father as a murderer, has shaped the destiny of the city since the Middle Ages, when it was the main route of access to the center of Ireland. Depression was to last nearly two centuries, through famine, war, and emergency, until the boom times of the 1990s. Limerick, like Ireland as a whole, prospered as never before in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a trend that has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “The city now boasts a rich and growing multicultural population” due to government measures, but “the first stirrings of prosperity, in Limerick and in the country as a whole, followed the anti-protectionist economic reforms of the late 1950s.”<sup>2</sup>

On October 10, 2005, *Jornal Nacional*, a Brazilian TV news program, presented a report about the changes that have occurred in Ireland since the 1990s. According to this report, 60% of the young population now attend university, the country has one of the most stable economies in the world, and its *per capita* income surpasses England’s. The descendents of Irish people who left the country long ago in search of prosperity are now returning because of the better living conditions and the possibility of studying and researching in the country of their ancestors. *Jornal Nacional* showed several statues of inhabitants of the city which tell of the devastating poverty that prevailed in the country during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are images that reveal misery, abandonment, and death. It is this particular view of Limerick from the late 30s to the 50s of the last century that is retrieved in the memoir and subsequently recreated in the film *Angela’s ashes* (1999).

*Angela’s Ashes: A memoir*, McCourt’s first published work, revisits the miserable childhood that he, his brothers and their parents experienced in Ireland, by recovering his past of suffering and hunger in Limerick. The writer does this, however, without any trace of bitterness or resentment, even though at the beginning of the narrative he seems at times to lack smooth articulation, which functions as a metaphor for Frank himself, who sees, learns, but does not understand; who listens, registers, but remains quiet; who suffers aggressions, without knowing why; and who confronts hunger and misery, without rebelling against them. As the account continues, the narrative flows more smoothly, for the protagonist is growing up and begins to have a better understanding of his situation. At the end, the memoir registers the victory of dream over reality – in other words, Frank’s dream of returning to the USA. The reader’s reaction is one of relief, as the young man, still less than twenty years old, then frees himself from the misery he had to endure for more than ten years. The film shows, through very strong images, a state of

misery as devastating as in the memoir, a misery reconstructed by Alan Parker, a well-known British movie director.

In “The Making of”, on the DVD of the movie, Parker talks about his impulse to create a monochromatic film, prompted by the very theme of the memoir – the misery of an unemployed family in Ireland between the years of 1935 and 1950. Although Parker does not produce a B&W film, he gives us the impression that he did. From the first shots of *Limerick*, the use of warm colors is restricted, and many of the shots are bathed with a blue luminosity, enhancing the effect of coldness, abandonment, and death, in what appears to be a monochromatic background.

The misery in the memoir, and consequently in the film *Angela's ashes*, is neither associated with the war nor the result of ethnic conflicts; it does not refer to the Holocaust, even though it takes place during the years of World War II. It does not include weapons, yet death surrounds the lives of the people – death from sicknesses caused by undernourishment, dampness, lack of sanitation, and the cold weather. *Angela's Ashes* records the return of the McCourt family to Ireland from the USA after the death of a baby girl. The misery in this memoir is McCourt's lonely suffering as a boy who does not understand the verbal and physical aggression of adults (including family members, State representatives, and members of the Roman Catholic Church); who does not accept the father who spends his welfare money or sporadic wages on drinking, with no heed whatsoever for the needs of his desperate hungry family; who did not know why the family had to return to Ireland where the cold weather, dampness, and lack of sanitation kill its inhabitants, or why his little brothers are put inside little boxes in a hole in the ground and covered by earth.

Hannah Arendt (1970, p.18) commented that “what we are up against is a generation that is by no means sure that it has a future.” That is what the reader realizes in McCourt's narrative; the protagonist does not know if he will have a future. He will arrive at a point of despair in which death seems the only way out, especially when he is attacked by typhoid fever. Thus, the book depicts the misery of daily life and the casual violence of human beings against one another, and this paper deals with it by analyzing some still images of the film, and, when necessary, establishing a dialogue with the memoir. Judith Evans Hanhisalo, commenting on the film on the Internet, said that “There are no explosions, no aliens, no car crashes, *no easy answers* in *Angela's ashes*” (my emphasis). Sometimes we notice that there is no answer at all in the miserable life depicted in the memoir and in the film.

The still images chosen concern the bad weather in *Limerick*, the close-up shots of Frank McCourt's facial expression (onscreen scenes and their relationship with the offscreen space), and the representation of the system of social assistance in the city. In the still images, the elements of interest are the positioning of the camera, the framing of the scenes, the positioning of the characters in the scenic space, and the different representational planes.

The beginning of the film shows some shots of *Limerick*, without the viewer knowing what place the filmed narrative is referring to. The *voice over*, which starts a

few seconds after, will give us an indication of the country by referring to a childhood spent in Ireland and by the speaker's accent. This voice repeats in its totality the most remarkable statement of the first page. The narrator says:

When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. (p. 3)

This sentence accompanies the various takes or shots at the beginning of Parker's film. The first one, in a low plane or low-camera, shows a sloping alley, suggesting that the camera-man is in the puddle at the bottom of the slope in the gray alley. The second shot, from a high plane, or high-camera, shows the same alley as seen by someone at the top, from a higher level of the street, looking down at the flooded area at the bottom. After that, there are several shots, with a fixed camera from a normal angle, showing other lanes, the River Shannon, and the image of the Virgin Mary in a niche in the wall of a house, surrounded by lighted candles. All of these shots are on a fixed plane; there is no movement of the camera. The movements are restricted to those caused by the natural elements, and this contrast between the fixed camera and the movements caused by the natural elements becomes quite impressive. As Aumont et al. point out (1992, p. 9): "there are tremendous differences between the individual film frame and the image on the screen – to begin with, only the projected image creates the impression of movement [...]".

The movements of the elements during these first shots are the insistent rainfall, the water running down the lanes, the seagulls flying over the River Shannon, the ruffled surface of the water, and the flickering of the candles. Eliminating these movements, we could say that we have pictures, for the camera remains static in each shot during the first scenes. The immobile camera seems to say: "We are stuck in life!", but the natural elements seem to respond "in trembling and fear." The gray scenery, bathed with a blue luminosity, increases the sense of sadness, cold, dampness, misery, and imminent death. The whole memoir, except for the first chapter, takes place in this town of incessant rain. The film, with the exception of the scene in Brooklyn in 1939, the scene of the ship moving away from the Statue of Liberty, or, at the end, that of the ship approaching the Statue, takes place in Limerick and its bad weather. The scenes of the ships, the first the one taking Frank and his family to Ireland and the second the one bringing him back to the USA, work as a frame in the memoir.

In the first scenes of the film, the bad weather is therefore the protagonist. It will become the villain by contributing to the death of the twins, Oliver and Eugene, who due to cold and hunger, as well as the dampness of the weather, die of tuberculosis. The bad weather then becomes the background against which the story takes place,

returning to the foreground again when the boy Frank writes a composition entitled “Jesus Christ and the weather”, which will be discussed a little further on.

These first scenes of the Irish town, when they reappear as the background during the film, are peopled mainly by Frank and his brother Malachy, running in the rain and kicking at the water when entering the flooded house where they live at the end of the sloping alley, next to the only lavatory in the street. We can interpret the positioning of the camera in the first shots (low camera shooting the upper end of the alley) as someone’s longing – someone who lives in the floods of anguish, destitute even of food to eat – for a place that offers comfort, and who looks towards the upper end of the street in an attitude of hope. On many occasions during the memoir, Frank imagines himself being the son of other women, mothers who feed their children; once he imagines he is the son of another man, a man who works in the lighthouse, protects his children, and provides for his family. His salvation could come from above; however, as we follow the camera, which in the next shot is located at the high end of the alley, the distancing in level and in space does not seem to provide any comfort to the suffering of those who are living at the lower end of the street. The scenes which show the streets at a normal angle seem to say that it is all the same. Nothing changes; nobody seems to care, not even the Virgin Mary, who seems unmoved by all the suffering of the poor people of Limerick, represented by Her passivity amid the uncontrollable flickering of the candles.

To compose the first scenes, Parker uses information which permeates the memoir from page 90 on, when the McCourt family, after the death of three children, “move to Roden Lane [...] our house is at the end of the lane, the last of the six. Next to our door is a small shed, a lavatory [for the whole lane], and next to that a stable”.

It is not in this description of the alley in the memoir, however, that we learn about Limerick’s bad weather being responsible for the death of its inhabitants. Frank’s father repeatedly calls the River Shannon a murderer, for he believes that the dampness of the river contributes to the tuberculosis of its people. The writer, on the other hand, inserts various passages describing the constant rain invading his house, flooding the ground floor, bringing residues from the lavatory, and forcing the family members to abandon the ground floor in the rainy months to use just the top floor as their living space. Possibly the climax concerning the effects of the weather on the people is found in the above-mentioned composition by the young Frank, when he is made to go back to fifth grade because of his weeks of absence in hospital with typhoid fever. Frank describes the scene as a miracle of Saint Francis of Assisi, the saint who he prayed to help him return to the sixth grade class he had belonged to before his stay in hospital. At the end of his composition “Jesus Christ and the weather”, he writes that, if Jesus had been born in Limerick, there would be no Christianity on earth, because He would not have survived the bad weather; but would have died of tuberculosis in childhood.

These various images of Limerick’s bad weather give Parker the necessary material to begin his film with static, unpopulated images of the gray, flooded Roden

Alley and its surrounding streets, pretty much anticipating Frank McCourt's fictional narrative, but also thereby creating the prevalent physical and psychological atmosphere in this narrative. While they are in Limerick, Frank and his brothers spend most of their life in this alley.

The reader of the memoir only comes upon these scenes when the McCourt parents lose their seven-week-old daughter in Brooklyn and go back to Ireland with their four sons, who are still very young children. Frank, the eldest, is about five, Malachy between three and four, and the twins, Eugene and Oliver, almost two. In the film, Frank and Malachy are older.

Soon after the depressing, unpopulated shots of Limerick at the beginning of the film, the director recreates a scene of exuberant joy involving the parents of the McCourt family in Brooklyn in 1939, with the birth of a beautiful girl, called Margaret Mary. The death of this girl, who had changed her father's life, seven weeks after her birth will plunge the mother, Angela, into deep depression and cause the father to start drinking again. The interference of two middle-aged cousins of Angela's mother who, with a total lack of compassion, describe the calamitous situation in a letter to her, results in Angela's mother sending tickets so that her daughter's family can return to Ireland – their home country. The boisterous cousins made up their minds to get rid of the problem called "Family McCourt". However, the McCourts' life in Ireland will be no different, for neither Malachy's nor Angela's family will have them in their houses. In the film, we do not know how Malachy and Angela met, we do not know about them being forced into marriage by Angela's family due to the fact that she was pregnant, nor do we know about the first years of their life as a couple. Although these facts are mentioned in the memoir, Parker's choice not to include this information does not make it any harder for the viewer to understand the difficulties the Irish family experiences in the USA during the last years of the Great Depression. What they cannot imagine is that the suffering in their own country will be a lot more intense and devastating than in the USA. In Brooklyn, although the father is the same irresponsible person, the McCourts have the help of other immigrants who live in the same neighborhood. In Ireland even the family – Malachy's parents and Angela's mother and brothers – deny them shelter and assistance, and Frank, as a child, observes these events with an inquisitive, scrutinizing eye.

The physical and climatic difficulties are paralleled by the difficulties that the protagonist has in relating to the people and the religious entities that surround him. The shots which best show the difficulties the boy protagonist has in learning and understanding the reality around him are registered by the camera in close-ups of Frank's face: the first one after Margaret Mary's death, still in America, in which the close-up of his face reveals an inquisitive look, frightened, looking for answers which the immediate reality refuses to give; the second one after the death of the second twin, Eugene, when the father kneels down with his two oldest sons in front of the image of the Holy Mother and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is important to stress that, in these scenes, the viewer's

impression of the scene with the close-up of Frank's face includes the onscreen as well as the offscreen space, for Frank observes whoever and whatever is around him. Actually, in the first scene the viewer becomes the noisy cousins – out of the frame – and in the second there is a shifting of the camera so that it takes the place of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (as well as the viewer's), also out of the frame, in a close-up shot. Aumont et al. (1992, p. 13), talking about onscreen and offscreen space, say:

The film image creates an analogy with real space; the resulting impression is usually powerful enough to make us forget not only the flatness of the image, but also, for example, the absence of color if the film is black and white or the absence of sound in a silent film. In addition, while we may not be led to forget the edges of the image, which are always more or less consciously present in our perception, we may be made to forget the fact that beyond those edges there is no image. Moreover, the onscreen space is habitually perceived as included within a more vast scenographic space. Even though the onscreen is the only visible part, this larger scenographic space is nonetheless considered to exist around it. It is this notion that allows André Bazin's famous formula translating the screen image as a "mask" or a window onto the world, a phrase borrowed from Leon-Battista Alberti, the great Renaissance theoretician. Bazin's point is that if the image works like a window to make a fragment of the (imaginary) world visible, then there is no reason to suspect that this world would stop at the image's edges.

There is much to criticize in this extreme embellishment of the image as window. Nevertheless, this excessive stance (which is always partially valid when we are watching a film) does reveal that an imagined space exists that is invisible yet extends the visible; we call it "offscreen space."

It is with the innocent and scrutinizing eyes of a child, captured in a close-up shot, that Frank observes, and the viewer knows that he observes the invasion by his grandmother's cousins of their Brooklyn apartment – where his mother lies apathetic and completely still in bed, in deep depression, and the four very young boys lie in a deplorable state, with soiled clothes and crying for food – and the way they criticize everything and decide about the destiny of the McCourt family. They do not decide to take them in or to help them, but to find a way of getting rid of them. In this scene, Frank is threatened by corpulent, boisterous, aggressive women, who tell him off severely when he tries to explain, by telling the truth, why the odor in the apartment is so terrible. Michaud (2001, p. 60), writing about the strategy of violence, says that "the development of an atmosphere of a cold war, without real peace nor open war, in which the violence remains on the horizon of relationships, at times explodes, at times threatens, without escaping completely from the control of the adversaries who make their game as rational as possible".

Other more intense and tragic situations will occur, such as Frank's lack of understanding on seeing his brothers inside little wooden boxes being put in a hole in the ground. He fears passing through a similar experience. Then we have the close-up

shots, inside the frame, Frank's face with his hands joined in prayer, and, outside the frame, the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the image of the Virgin Mary, which give the viewer a feeling of shock. Ironically, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, although it is in a place bathed with light, remains enveloped in shadows, as the result of the construction of the scene. In these two close-up shots, Frank's gaze is directed towards people or objects on a higher plane, intensifying the idea that he is just a little child at the mercy of others, older and more powerful than him, hoping for help that will never come. We see and hear in the close-up scene, from a high camera, the pleading of the child in front of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He is afraid he is going to be placed in a wooden box and buried like his younger brothers. The two scenes find parallels in the memoir on two different occasions: soon after the death of Margaret Mary (p. 42-43), and after that of Eugene (the second twin, p. 84). There are then only the two older boys left, Frank and Malachy. Considering their "fidelity" to the scenes in the memoir, the reader can classify these shots as transferences. According to Brian McFarlane's theory of filmic adaptations in *Novel to Film: An introduction to the theory of adaptation* (1996, p. 23),

This distinction [between transference and adaptation] is central [...] to any systematic study of what happens in the transposing of novel into film.

[...] In broad terms, this involves a distinction between narrative (which can be transferred) and enunciation (which cannot, involving as it does quite separate systems of signification).

Regarding the violence of the religious social system, the framing of the most shocking scene – Angela pregnant with her sixth child, with just her two sons alive and present, in the center of the room, and with no possibility of escape – makes it the one that best illustrates the repression and the lack of respect by the religious social system for people at the mercy of misfortune, in the years covered by the memoir. The representatives of the social services of the St Vincent de Paul Society are in front of them. In the background, bathed in light from a window out of the frame, is an enormous crucifix. The light also touches the McCourts' backs, suggesting to the viewer that they walk in the shadows, that there is no light to illuminate their path. Behind the McCourts, on the right side, a group of women, encouraged by the social assistance representatives, laugh at the inappropriate jokes of the men at the table. Behind them, other women, silhouetted and pressed against the glass windows on the left side, also wait to be helped. To compose this scene, Parker used at least two different moments in the narrative. In the film, when Angela seeks help at the St Vincent de Paul Society, she had already lost three of her children, but the scene includes details from the memoir of more than one visit to the Society: the first is when, on finding out that the Department of Labor would not pay her enough subsistence to survive, Angela leaves the twins in the father's care and goes with the two older boys to ask for help (p. 62); the second one is after the deaths of Oliver and Eugene, when they are moving to Roden Alley and need coupons

to exchange for some used furniture (p. 90-91). This scene is an adaptation or recreation, where at least two scenes from the memoir are reworked and become one. In the film Angela had lost three children and was pregnant with Michael when she visits the Society; in the memoir, on her second visit to the St Vincent de Paul Society, Angela had just had a miscarriage after the death of her twins. Concerning the creation of the *mise-en-scène*, McFarlane (1996, p. 20) says:

[...] the enunciation [...] characterizes the process that creates, releases, shapes [...] the ‘utterance’. [...] Film may lack those literary marks of enunciation such as person and tense, but in the ways in which, for example, shots are angled and framed and related to each other (i.e. in matters related to *mise-en-scène* and montage) the enunciatory processes are inscribed. Film enunciation, in relation to the transposition of written works to the screen, is a matter of adaptation proper, not of transfer.

When Parker transfers or adapts scenes from McCourt’s memoir to the screen, when he positions his camera, frames of the scenes, positions of the characters in the scenic space, and produces different representational planes, he recreates, in an emphatic and powerful way, the endless human suffering in Limerick: the victimization of Frank and his brothers, the lack of respect and even open cruelty on the part of members of the family and the social welfare system of the time. The film, considered as the most popular form of narrative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as popular as the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, creates an illusion of reality and of 3D, allowing scenes of suffering to remain strongly present for a long time in the eyes and mind of the audience. With regard to films based on novels, Robert Stam (Naremore, ed., 2000, p. 59) says that “...the cinema has not lesser, but rather greater resources for expression than the novel, and this is independent of what the actual filmmaker has done with these resources”. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, neither ethnic conflicts nor wars are necessary for us to read about or see unbearable conflicts. Everyday events are sufficient to reveal a Machiavellian system in which children, adults, and elderly people suffer without any possibility of consolation or escape.

## Notes

- 1 <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/depression/about.htm>
- 2 [http://uk.holidaysguide.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-96874-limerick\\_history-i](http://uk.holidaysguide.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-96874-limerick_history-i)

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# Irish Studies in South America





# *Interview with Juan José Delaney: Irish-Argentine Literature, A Personal Account as a Writer*

Laura P. Z Izarra

Juan José Delaney has been writing short stories since he was fifteen, a genre that, in his case, is historically double bound by an Irish literary tradition led by James Joyce, Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, and the Argentine writers Benito Lynch, Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. Prior to that he used to enjoy creating brief sketches for his schoolmates; because of this he believes that his first (hidden) vocation is writing for the stage.

The fact is that, while he was finishing secondary school, *The Southern Cross*, which is the newspaper of the Irish community in Argentina, published his first story: "Los dos sueños". That was the first of many contributions to the paper and paved the way for his first collection of short stories: *La carcajada*, typeset and printed at the printing house of the Irish-Porteño newspaper. The book was eventually published in 1974 and, much to the surprise of the young author, praised by Jorge Luis Borges, his hero, who suggested that Delaney had a duty to continue.<sup>1</sup> In 1978 he published a second collection, *Los pasos del tiempo*, which included a story related to the Irish in Argentina: "Los papeles de Nicholas Coughlan". Fifteen years later, in 1993, while taking part in the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa (USA), he revised a number of sketches and unfinished stories concerning the Irish-Porteños. The result was *Tréboles del sur*, which he completed that year. Back in Buenos Aires he continued teaching Argentine Literature at the Universidad del Salvador, contributing to newspapers and magazines such as *La Prensa*, *Ámbito Financiero*, *Letras de Buenos Aires*, *Proa* and *Todo es Historia*, among others.

Juan José Delaney was invited to the *First Symposium of Irish Studies in South America*, held at the University of São Paulo in September 2006, and delighted his audience with his personal account as a writer always concerned with creative ways of representing the unofficial version of Irish-Argentine historiography seen through contemporary eyes.

**LI** - *In your articles and presentation you affirm that there is an Irish-Argentine Literature. What kind of characteristics does it present that makes the difference? Is there a specific aesthetics in the Irish Literature of the Diaspora?*

**JJD** - The question is: what marks the belonging of certain literary works to a given literature? Is it language? I wouldn't say. Samuel Beckett was Irish but he wrote most of his works in French. Still his characters, his humor, in a way his sense of life, are deeply Irish. Is it the setting? Although written in English, William Henry Hudson's principal works are settled in the Province of Buenos Aires and according to some handbooks of English and Argentine literature it seems that his works belong indistinctly to the English and to the Argentine literature. The other topic is: who cares? In relation to your question it is clear that there is a more or less significant *corpus* of literature written by Irish who lived in Argentina and whose work refer to the experience of their people in that country and, in cases, to the struggle with an unknown language. I believe that the most important samples of this phenomenon are: *Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin, *You'll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin, and, in Spanish, four short stories by Rodolfo "Rudy" Walsh: "Los oficios terrestres", "Irlandeses detrás de un gato", "Un oscuro día de justicia" and "El 37". I consider this Irish-Argentine literature because it has been written by Irish or writers of Irish ancestry for whom migration, language and cultural confrontation appear as a problem. I wouldn't say that these works share a specific aesthetic, but certain pessimism runs through them. We can see the same thing in the tango, that other creation of the European migrants in Argentina.

**LI** - *Tell us about your experience of being noticed by Jorge Luis Borges who praised the inner force of your stories and encouraged you to continue as a writer.*

**JJD** - I'll never forget that, as I won't forget when I went to see him to thank him for his comments on my first book. "Delaney? It sounds Irish", he said in perfect English, after which he started recalling Irish authors to finish stating that the most important English writers are Irish. I met him two more times and that was it. He was a great man, rather melancholic. He was a writer who wrote for the writers.

**LI** - *When did you decide to focus your narratives on the Irish-Argentine community and why?*

**JJD** - At the beginning of the 1990s, a friend of mine addressed me saying: "Listen, you should write the story of the Irish in Argentina from a fictional point of view. You're the one". Although I had already published one story related to the Irish-porteños, I understood that since I had been immersed in the Irish community all my life, going through all kind of situations concerning that small European community in America, I was in a good condition to do the job. So I decided to start a collection of tales on the topic, given an account of the Irish in Argentina, their struggles and their ups and downs, ignoring the triumphal official version. The result was *Tréboles del sur*, followed by *Moirá Sullivan*, my first novel, and a play, *La viuda de O'Malley*. I just completed *El arpa y el océano*, a new series, and I am planning a second novel. The experience confirmed me that we all have at least one story to tell: our own.

**LI** - *Tell us about your first novel.*

**JJD** - *Moirá Sullivan* was published in 1999. It gives an account of an Irish-American fictional scriptwriter for the silent movies, her crack-up when she is silenced forever in 1927 with the coming of the sound into the motion pictures, her marriage to an Irish-American executive who is sent by the Company to Buenos Aires where he dies still a young man, and her end in St. Patrick's Home, in La Plata.

**LI** - *Moreover, you also went back to your first experience of writing for the stage – a play published in ABEI Journal in 2005 – where you focused on the effects and various transformations of a diasporic subject due to the inner tensions provoked by the encounter of cultures. What kind of play is it?*

**JJD** - I completed a comedy called *La viuda de O'Malley*, which will be probably presented during the Second Symposium of Irish Studies in South America, in Buenos Aires, next year. The story is settled in a farm in Capitán Sarmiento, Carmen de Areco, flat countryside in the province of Buenos Aires during the 1920's. The family group is composed of the mother and her three children; she has a combative relationship with them because of her strict Victorian principles and authoritarian personality. A Spanish, Catholic priest is also part of this group, who being their spiritual advisor, visits them regularly. Not only does the widow struggle against the ambitions of her eldest son who is planning to fly off to Ireland and against the relationship of her daughter with a Jewish boy, but she also feels that the mental deficiency of her youngest son is a terrible curse. The play gives also an account of how difficult it was for many Irish to become part of a completely different culture.

**LI** - *You have explored different genres in your writing – short stories, essays, a novel and a play. Which of them do you feel most at ease with?*

**JJD** - As a reader and as a writer, I feel that the short story is my genre. I always enjoyed telling stories – usually big fat lies – and when I discovered my vocation I decided to write short stories. I started in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe, namely tales with a fixed structure (introduction, development and an unexpected ending) in order to provoke an *effect* on the reader. Gradually I moved to a different kind of fiction in which the accent is put not in a strong plot but in a situation, a character or an atmosphere. Anton Chekhov, James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield are the leaders in the field. Most of the stories of the collection I am completing just now fit into this narrative mode that I consider more realistic.

**LI** - *Could you describe your experience of the creative process of writing? Is there any historical, cultural or family research that triggers your act of writing? What is it that stirs your imagination? Is there any magic at the moment of writing?*

**JJD** - It is known that the usual sources are: our experience, what happens to others and, since literature also comes from literature, what we read. In fact, a familiar anecdote, a document (an old letter, for example), a situation I witnessed when I was a boy and that after apparently disappearing suddenly reappears with a new meaning or sense, even a photo... might be the beginning of a story. I recently wrote one called "Salguero 550" and the inspiration came from a photo of the Irish Girls' Home. I remember that I went to visit the place, only to discover that the building didn't exist any more. In fact it had been demolished in 1960. Anyway, what I had was enough: I imagined that many (perhaps funny) situations went on within that community of nuns and Irish-porteño girls who lived there while working in Buenos Aires or looking for a position in the city or in life. So the single document and a few interviews to survivors of the Irish Girls' Home were enough for me to write a piece of fiction. And since one thing brings another, now I find that I have material for an extended Salguero 550 series. The process continues when I imagine a situation or a character, an interesting or strange character (life is full of them); then easily comes the beginning and the end of the story. The hard work is to complete the body of the text. When the character that appears in my mind is strong enough, then I consider writing a novel. And to give an answer to the last part of your question, I believe the moment of writing is magical in the sense that it becomes a cathartic experience conveying a certain kind of revelation.

**LI** - *The way you explored characters in your short stories is different from the way you explored them in your short novel Moira Sullivan. Tell us about the process of writing this novel. In my opinion you succeeded in describing the inner turmoil of a solitary human mind and, even more, in getting into the imagination of an Irish-American woman doubly dislocated and conscious of being always elsewhere, always unsettled, either geographically or psychologically. To what extent does the postmodern fragmentary narrative help you portray a disintegrated mind?*

**JJD** - *Moira Sullivan* is a consequence of the existence of an old aunt who passed away years ago, and my taste for music and the silent movies. These three components were enough to bring out the idea that there are other intensive and effective ways of communication rather than language. Although I knew that I couldn't give an account of a whole detailed lifetime and that the best thing I could offer was a character in certain revealing situations, I wasn't aware that my novel was matching the so-called postmodern fragmentary narrative. The story is organized as a kind of a collage. This has to do with my experience as a short-story writer; in fact, the invented movies recalled in the novel were originally conceived as short stories. But it was because of the strong character that in the end the project became a novel. After planning the work in a very general way, I started writing unconnected fragments. The hard part was to put them together, giving the sequences a secret, unseen order.

**LI** - *Your recent book is the biography of Marco Denevi. What difficulties did you face as a biographer if you compare this task with that of being a novelist, playwright or short story writer?*

**JJD** - I love reading biographies, even of people whose work I don't know. At one moment I thought of writing one for the sake of writing and learning. Considering that Marco Denevi's work was not sufficiently known and praised, I asked him permission to take the job. The main problem was that the author, who at the beginning had a positive attitude and assured he would be willing to help me, was a great liar. Anyway, my intention was to write a literary biography. This means that the accent would be put on the story of Denevi's writings and on the writing process. Because nothing really interesting happened in his life: he hardly traveled, he was never prosecuted... My original intention was to give an account of the inner life of a writer, and in this sense the book helped me to better understand in what way a literary work is a result of different factors: family, education, formation, readings, experiences and so forth. If there is talent, then you have a piece of literature which always is an aesthetic product and an interpretation of life.

## Note

1 Cfr.: Gente, Buenos Aires, September 19, 1974, page 33.

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# *Walking the Land of Irish Studies*

Maureen Murphy

**Abstract:** *Using the old rural Irish custom of walking the land, this essay locates the Irish presence in the old and new world and surveys the global territory of Irish studies. It considers shared themes of language and cultural, responses to colonialism and history and national identity, and it charts the development of Irish Studies from Ireland to North and South America, to the continent, to Africa, to Asia and the Pacific. Perhaps the most astonishing development is the new page in Irish Studies, the New Irish of the twenty-first century.*

In Ireland up until the 1930s, rural marriages among farming families were usually arranged by the parents, generally the fathers, sometimes with the help of an intermediary known as the matchmaker. The match involved a dowry on the part of the bride that was commensurate with the value of the land and stock of the groom. While the bride's family often knew almost to the penny the groom's family's value, a ritual of the matchmaking was a formal visit to the groom's family's farm to see for themselves the amount of land, its quality and the stock. The walk was a demonstration of good faith that the land was as it had been represented. There was also the expectation of an appropriate amount of hospitality toward the intended bride's party: her family and friend. The custom was known as "walking the land," and I use it today in the sense of walking the territories of Irish Studies with an eye to new partnerships and collaborations.

First, why Irish Studies? Why Irish Studies now? Why this Irish Studies initiative here in Brazil? Interest in Irish Studies has developed for a number of reasons. First, there is the Irish presence abroad. As early as the sixth century, Irish monks established their foundations across Europe; seventeenth century exiles distinguished themselves in the continental armies of Spain, France and even Russia; eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish emigrated to the Americas while others sailed to Australia in the holds of convict ships. In the twentieth century, Irish missionaries and lay workers have served as educators and health care providers particularly in the southern hemisphere where they encountered liberation theology.

In his book *Ireland and Latin America: Links and Lessons* (2002), Peadar Kirby notes that many missionaries have returned to Ireland having absorbed the lessons of Liberation Theology; the Irish feminist theologian Mary Condon returned from

Harvard announcing that liberation theology had “turned her around” and provided her with a spirituality that has reached women who have fallen away from the tradition of Irish Catholic Church to work among the dispossessed. While its influence on the Irish is often identified as coming from these Irish missionaries, in fact it was the great nineteenth-century parliamentarian Daniel O’Connell who created an awareness of the matter of justice for the dispossessed that led to the Irish taking to heart the cause of justice for the disenfranchised. While he is remembered most for Catholic Emancipation, the right of Catholics and indeed members of all religious groups to sit in the British parliament, O’Connell opposed slavery as vehemently. He had the reputation for never shaking the hand of a slave-owner.

Kirby has also argued in his *Poverty Amid Plenty: World and Irish Development Reconsidered* (1977), that Ireland’s economic boom at the time flowed equitably through the society. Unfortunately, that is not so. There is a wide gap between rich and poor with the result that many young Irish who were/are not part of the Celtic Tiger economy have joined the tens of thousands of undocumented Irish in the United States.

Irish clergy in South America have lived their commitment to human rights, and in some cases have died for it. During Argentina’s “Dirty War” (1976-1983), that left as many as 30,000 dead or “disappeared,” three Irish/ Irish-Argentinian Palatine priests and a seminarian were murdered by the government on July 4, 1976 on the altar at their Church in the Belgrano section of Buenos Aires. (They are buried in the Palatine plot in the San Patricio parish cemetery outside of the town of Mercedes, the “Irish capital of Argentina.”)

The city’s oldest Irish Catholic parish (1894) is the Irish Passionists’ Holy Cross, a church built with the wages of Irish servant girls. It offered meeting space and support to the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of those who disappeared and who gather with their supporters in the plaza across from the Casa Rosada, wearing white scarves and carrying photographs of family members to confront the government with the missing. In retaliation for their outreach, French nuns in the parish were kidnapped and they too disappeared. Their faces are painted on a mural on the wall across from Holy Cross and a bronze marker placed at the door of the church in 1997 formally honors all the victims of the terrorism of the 1970s. So the Irish presence has its place in the history of Argentine human rights.

Ireland and Brazil share the history of colonized peoples and the failed rebellions to assert their own sovereignty. W.B. Yeats’s play “Cathleen ní Houlihan” rescued Ireland’s failed Rebellion (rebellions) of 1798 from oblivion and placed it in the context of national myths of restoration. So far no one has considered the similarities between the Irish ’98 Rebellion and the April 1789 rebellion of the Inconfidência in Minas Gerais: their mutual silences and betrayals, but there are some striking similarities.

In her Introduction to *Romanceiro da Inconfidência*, Cecilia Meireles describes going to Ouro Preto for Holy Week and feeling the presence of the Inconfidência merging with the figures in the religious procession. Surprised at first not to find a history of

1789 by some eighteenth century writer, she later realized the reason: the trauma of the episode, the punishments and reprisals and the fact that the bloody conflict which transformed the world were in large part framed by secret institutions and invisible archives (Meireles 19). She expresses her sense of the silence in the last stanza of her introductory poem “Fala Inicial”:

O silenciosas vertentes  
Por onde se precipitam  
Inexplicáveis torrentes  
Por eternal escuridão.(Meireles 37)

O overflowing silences  
Hurling down  
In inexplicable torrents  
To eternal blackness

Likewise, in Irish tradition, John Kells Ingram’s “The Memory of the Dead” interrogates the Irish Rebellion of 1798:

Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight?  
Who blushes at the name?  
When cowards mock the patriot’s fate.  
Who hangs his head for shame?  
He is a knave, or half a slave,  
Who slights his country thus;  
But a true man, like you, man  
Will fill your glass with us.

The last stanza expresses the consolidation of the myth of the restoration of the rightful kingdom:

Then here’s their memory – may it be  
For us a guiding light  
To cheer our strife for liberty,  
And teach us to unite –  
Through good and ill, be Ireland’s still,  
Though sad as theirs your fate,  
And true men, be you men,  
Like those of Ninety-Eight

A central episode in the narrative of failed rebellions of colonial peoples is the betrayal, often by an informer from among the people. Meireles accused the betrayer of the Inconfidência with the words:

Melhor negócio que Judas  
Fazes tu, Joaquim Silvério:  
Que ele traiu Jesus Christo  
Tu trais um simples Alferes (Meireles 134)

There is a similar strand of informers in the 1798 tradition; their ghosts stalk the Cyclops chapter of *Ulysses* where Bloom fuses personal and national betrayal: Boylan betrays Bloom as Mulligan betrays Stephen and Castle spies betray the men of '98 and Robert Emmet. In the earlier Siren chapter, Bloom broods about Boylan as he listens to Ben Dollard sing "The Croppy Boy," the ballad that describes the betrayal of a '98 rebel. In some versions of the song the informer betrays his family and his country simultaneously:

As I was going up Wexford Street  
My own first cousin I chanced to meet  
My own first cousin did me betray  
And for one bare guinea swore my life away

The version of "The Croppy Boy" that Joyce used in *Ulysses*, the version contributed by James McBurney of Belfast under the *nom de plume* Carol Malone to *The Nation* in 1845, describes a betrayal that Joyce would have found irresistible: the betrayal of a young rebel by a sham priest who hears the boy's confession before the youth goes to Wexford to replace his father and brother, both of whom had died in the rebellion. When the boy finishes his confession, the priest reveals that he is in fact a yeoman captain and the boy is hanged as a rebel.<sup>1</sup>

Post-Joycean Irish literature continues to explore the troubling theme of the informer. Liam O'Flaherty's novel *The Informer* (1925), set in Dublin during the twenties, is probably better known as the film (1935) directed by John Ford starring Victor McLaughlin as Gypo Nolan who betrays Frankie McPhillip. (McLaughlin won an Academy Award for the role. Interested enough in O'Flaherty to write a biographical note about him (wrong in some details), Borges reviewed the film criticizing an opening scene that "did not ring true" and Gypo's excessive motivations for his action (Borges 147-8).

Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1996) unravels yet an autobiographical puzzle of family and community betrayals in Catholic Derry in the 1930s. What the young narrator discovers is that his maternal grandfather was responsible for his father's brother's murder. The informer who set up the murder married his mother's sister and the two of them emigrated to Chicago. Burdened with this knowledge, the narrator chooses not to reveal what he knows to his parents though his decision comes at the price of emotional separation from both parents.

Retrieving the past from the silence of history offers historians and writers the chance to transform events into a new media. Meireles constructed her dramatic poem of the Inconfidência rising in a way that balanced recorded history with the emotional

force of her poet's voice. In reinterpreting another failed Irish Rising, Robert Emmet's 1803 Rebellion, into the medium of film, director Pat Murphy negotiated the silences not only of the event itself but of the role of Emmet's servant Anne Devlin who chose silence and imprisonment rather than betray Emmet. Emmet himself chose a sort of silence. In his Speech from the Dock, a speech memorized by generations of Irish school Children, Emmet concluded, "When my country takes its place among the nations of the world, then and only then will my epitaph be written". The Irish film critic Luke Gibbons (156) has described the way the Irish cinema has addressed certain public or institutional silences.

Colonized peoples often have issues with languages when indigenous languages are suppressed by colonizers. The Young Irelander Thomas Davis (1814-1845) wrote in his essay "Our National Language" (1843), "To lose your native tongue, and learn that of an alien, is the worst badge of conquest – it is the chain on the soul." John Montague's poem "A Grafted Tongue," a poem about the imposition of English on the Irish-speaking countryside recalls the poet's own humiliations as a stuttering child. In its comic aspect in Flann O'Brien's *An Béal Bocht*, Irish-speakers dress up a dozen piglets in grey-woolen clothing who squeal and grunt when the language inspector comes to see how many English-speaking children reside in the house: "Twalf, sor", says the grandfather. The Irish language as an agent of subversions features in the widely-told legend of how Daniel O'Connell missed being poisoned when an Irish servant girl warns him about the tea he is about to drink.

Joyce had other issues with the language. In the firelighting scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus's uneasiness with the Irish language is tied to his association of Irish with provincialism; he rejected the location of the national literature in a cultural heartland untouched by urban progress, sophistication and economic prosperity, but when he speaks with the English Jesuit, Stephen realizes that while they both speak English, they speak different Englishes.

The little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe. He felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson. He thought:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (Joyce 189)

The parallels mentioned above could generate research on different historical aspects. The issue of the language, for example, may become an important target in comparative studies. Seamus Heaney revisited the two language matter in "Traditions," a poem in his 1972 collection *Wintering Out*. He too speaks of the difference in English

as it is spoken by natives and by settlers in Ireland, but Heaney's sense of community is broad enough to be comfortable with the two traditions.

Joyce exemplified the European aspect of Irish identity. International in his vision and impact, but always intellectually rooted in his native city of Dublin, Joyce could be said to represent the spirit of modern Ireland, confidently Irish, comfortably European, fearlessly global in outlook. "He is a metaphor for the globalization of Irish Studies". Colin McCabe experienced Brazil's European sensibility in a Joycean context when he visited Sao Paulo in January, 1982:

It was in Brazil that I felt that vitality of spirit and the instinctive recognition of the human which European society had all but buried by 1914. Ulysses is nothing less than the effort by a European, who could identify with European culture only in the Dark Ages, to unwrite that equation between knowledge and mastery, an equation written in the symbols of masculine dominance and economic inequality. And that unwriting is never finished, the keys are given but every reader has to remake them haunt us. (McCabe 19-21)

Jorge Luis Borges, who claimed to have been the first Spanish-speaker to read *Ulysses*, turned to John Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" for the metaphor of the ancient explorers who described new lands to their nomadic amazement.<sup>2</sup> Borges recognized the linguistic virtuosity in the book:

In James Joyce were are given a twofold work. We have those two vast and – why not say it? – unreadable novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. But that is only half of his work....the fact is that he took on the almost infinite English language. That language – which is statistically larger than all the others and offers so many possibilities for the writer, particularly in its concrete verbs – was not enough for him. He knew all the languages and he wrote in a language invented by himself, difficult to understand, but marked by a strange music. Joyce brought a new music to English.<sup>3</sup>

Some later twentieth-century writers, who are currently not studied as much as they deserve, have demonstrated their European connections. One thinks particularly of Seán O'Faoláin editing of *The Bell* during Ireland's isolation of the 1940s and of his own romance with Italy (*A Summer in Italy*, 1954), short stories like "One Night in Turin" and "The Time of their Lives."<sup>4</sup> Mary Lavin's autobiographical Vera Trask stories locate an Irish widow with three girls in Italy where she comes to terms with her search to recapture the happiness of her life with her husband. There is Kate O'Brien's Spain: *Mary Lavelle* (1936), *That Lady* (1946), her travel book *Farewell to Spain* (1937) and her monograph on St. Theresa of Avila (1951). And of course there is the Paris of Joyce and Samuel Beckett and in later years John Montague, and in the twenty first century the young Irish poet Justin Quinn lives and works in Prague.

Texts, translations, bibliographies and critical studies of these writers have fostered the teaching of Irish literature and the situating that literature in an Irish cultural context. Let me just put down two markers here: the magisterial *James Joyce* by Richard Ellmann in 1959 which set the bar for biography and the publication this fall of two-volume *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* edited by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary. Between those markers are such milestones as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* Volumes 1-3 but especially 4 and 5; translations from Old and Middle Irish by Thomas Kinsella (*The Táin*), and Seamus Heaney (*Sweeney Astray*), back to Kinsella again for *An Duanaire* and most recently the sensible decision to support bilingual editions of Irish language texts like Paul Muldoon's translation of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poetry.

Other disciplines have had similar support. Starting with the eleven-volume *Gill History of Ireland* edited by Margaret Mc Curtain and James Lyons, the one-volume *The Course of Irish History* (1967, rev.ed. 1984) edited by T. W. Moody and F.X. Martin, Joe Lee's sweeping history of twentieth-century Ireland and finally the completion of the ambitious multi-volume *New History of Ireland* which concluded this year with the simultaneous publication of the first and the last volumes, and moving to studies of periods (Emmet Larkin's history of the nineteenth century church), persons (Marianne Elliott's biography of Wolfe Tone) and events (James Donnelly's study of the Great Irish Famine), a coherent Irish historiography developed, a valid and dependable model for the historiography of modern nations. This historiography is not without controversies. Revisionist historians challenged the nationalist interpretation of the Irish War of Independence.

The study of the Irish language has been a major beneficiary of the technological revolution. Pedagogy has improved with interactive on-line instruction, on line resources and on-line opportunities to communicate with other learners have turned the international Irish language community into Thomas Friedman's "flat earth" environment. The 1996 inauguration of an Irish language channel on Radio Telefís Éireann, the Irish national television service, reaches some 800,000 viewers daily who watch it not only for its soap opera *Ros na Rún*, but also for its features that have won international awards. The language achieved another landmark when it was accorded the status of an official European Union language in 2005.

There is institutional outreach to the community provided by some of the larger Irish Studies programs notably Boston College, Glucksman House at NYU, the Irish universities and here in Sao Paulo;. Some institutional Irish Studies program partner with Irish cultural and historical societies to provide outreach to members of the community. Some Irish cultural societies like the American Irish Historical Society (1896) and Irish American Cultural Institute offer publications and programs to students and faculty in local Irish Studies programs. Partnerships with the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs' Cultural Relations Committee.

Given the positive conditions for the development of Irish Studies, how did academic Irish Studies organizations develop? Let's start with the oldest of them, the



American Conference for Irish Studies. The idea for Irish studies was actually articulated by President Theodore Roosevelt in June 1905 when he addressed the men of Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. A friend of Lady Gregory's who read her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* with enthusiasm, he spoke of his hopes that Irish literature would be studied at American colleges and universities prophesizing that there would be a growing "...awakening to the wealth of beauty contained in the Celtic sagas, and I wish to see American institutions take the lead in that awakening" Irish Studies in the United States." (Murphy 478-9).

The beginning of an organized effort to found an association for Irish Studies would wait another half century till September, 1957, when Professor R. Dudley Edwards, co-editor with T.W. Moody of *Irish Historical Studies*, suggested to Lawrence J. McCaffrey, an American historian on leave in Dublin to study the Irish liberator Daniel O'Connell, that he organize a North American version of the Irish Historical Society. McCaffrey followed up the suggestion by contacting other historians with Irish research interests (December, 1958). They worked out their plans for an organization at the meeting of the American Historical Society in 1959; however, instead of the North American Irish Historical Society envisaged by Edwards, the American broadened their brief to include other disciplines so that it became the American Committee for Irish Studies with a Prospectus that read "The American Committee for Irish Studies has been formed to stimulate and encourage significant research and writing in Irish studies by establishing means of communication between scholars interested in Irish folklore, history, language and literature. We hope to achieve our objectives through annual conferences, information bulletins and, if possible, a journal."

McCaffrey describes the decision to become an inter-disciplinary organization as both idealistic and pragmatic. At the end of the 1950s (and still today) more Irish literary scholars than Irish historians were teaching Irish subjects and publishing. ACIS held its first annual conference at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana in 1963; its growth led to the 1976 decision to establish regional branches that hold short fall gatherings, gatherings that encourage graduate students and young scholars to present their work.

Over the years ACIS sponsored five different publications: an early reprint series of classics in Irish Studies long out of print and ground-breaking new work like John V. Kelleher's study of James Joyce's "The Dead" and the Old Irish saga "The Destruction of De Daga's Hostel." The quarterly *ACIS Newsletter* was supplemented in 1977 when O'Casey scholar Robert G. Lowery took a leaf from the *Times Literary Supplement* and founded an Irish counterpart called *The Irish Literary Supplement* which is published twice-yearly. While officially affiliated with the Irish Studies program at Boston College, the *ILS* has been associated with ACIS from its beginning and members have a subscription to the *ILS* as part of their ACIS dues. In addition to the reviews, the *ILS* includes news, features, bibliographies and research report. (Its interview series has been reprinted separately.)

While I have been the long-serving features editor of the *ILS*, my work on the *ACIS A Guide to Irish Studies in the United States* (1979, 1982, 1987, 1994) is probably best-known. Coming as it did, fairly early in the history of Irish Studies, the purpose of the *Guide* was to identify Irish Studies programs and courses taught in American colleges and universities for the purposes of information and of sharing resources. In its last print appearance in 1994: 454 colleges and universities or about 10% of America's some 4500 post-secondary institutions offered some kind of opportunity to study about Ireland. Literature topped every list with a number of courses devoted to the work of Joyce and Yeats. Over the years, we saw a growth in opportunities to study in Ireland and to study the Irish language as people became aware that it was essential to any full program of Irish Studies. The other development was an interest in Irish-American studies largely as the result of the pioneering studies of Hasia Dinar, Charles Fanning, Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Kirby Miller, Janet Nolan and the late Ambassador to Ireland William V. Shannon.

Given the ACIS welcome to everyone interested in Irish Studies, elementary and secondary school students became active members and brought Irish Studies to their own students. In 1997, leaders of the New York-based American Irish Teachers Association proposed that the Great Irish Famine be taught in the State's Human Rights curriculum and they went on to be instrumental in the passage of the NY State Education Bill that resulted in the development of that Curriculum, a curriculum that won the 2002 National Council for the Social Studies Award for Excellence.

Our surveys of Irish Studies in the United States gave us data about the health of Irish Studies and suggested what needs to be done to keep programs thriving. First, Irish Studies programs need to be institutionalized. If they are viewed as a faculty member's special subject, the courses will disappear when that individual retires or leaves. While most Irish Studies programs have started in departments of literature, they branched out into other disciplines: history, social sciences, cultural studies, film, Irish language, folklore, and the visual arts; they need to continue to develop these wider contexts. In its own efforts to institutionalize the organization, we have established an archive at the Burns Library at Boston College. We have also established annual AICS Books Prizes in the disciplines and for a first book. There is a dissertation prize in memory of Adele Dalsimer. We have been told that these designations have helped young scholars find jobs and stand successfully for re-appointment and for tenure.

Canadian Association of Irish Studies first appeared on the organization's letterhead in 1973, but the idea for a Canadian Association to the ambitious celebrations of Irish arts and culture in Toronto was organized by Robert O'Driscoll.<sup>5</sup> Founded to encourage study and research in all fields of Irish culture, CAIS, with generous funding from the Canadian, Irish and Northern Irish governments have featured Irish writers and artists at their annual conferences at Canadian universities.

Founded in 1970, the brief of the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature was literary and third level: the promotion of the teaching and

study of Anglo-Irish literature at university level, the fostering of communication between researchers and the promotion of Irish writers and Irish writing to wider audiences. With a newsletter, an annual bibliography in the *Irish University Review*, annual conferences (every third year in Ireland) with conference proceedings, IASAIL made Anglo-Irish a global phenomenon. Their shift of name in 1998 from the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature to the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures recognized literatures beyond Anglo-Irish literature to include literature in the Irish language and the Irish literatures of the diaspora.

Those diasporic literatures have developed societies of their own: The British Association for Irish Studies (1986), the Asociación Española de Estudios Irlandeses and the European Federation of Associations of Irish Studies (EFACIS). The Asian-Pacific symposium of Irish Literature was held at the Australian Graduate School of Management at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. The Pacific Rim gathering produced the inter-disciplinary *Irelands in the Asia-Pacific* (2003) edited by Peter Kuch and Julie-Ann Robson.

Having talked about Irish Studies programs around the world, let me come to Irish Studies in Brazil which began in Brazil in 1977 when Professor Munira Mutran completed a doctoral dissertation for the University of Sao Paulo titled “A Personagem nos Contos” de Sean O’Faoláin. It was the first of thirty studies developed at the University of São Paulo (USP). In their first twenty-five years, besides dissertations and theses, there were productions of Irish plays in Brazil, the availability of translations, the visits of Irish writers, critics and scholars sponsored by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. *Irish Studies in Brazil* provides a very useful list of productions, dates, venues and reviews that would inform a study of the reception of Irish literature in Brazil.<sup>6</sup>

In this Beckett year, let me say that the plays of Samuel Beckett lead the list with Portuguese translations from English and French, such as *Happy Days*, *End Game*, *Act without Words I*, *Act without Words II*, *La Dernière Bande*, and the most frequent and widely produced Irish play in Brazil *Waiting for Godot*. At Bloomsday celebrations translations of two of Beckett plays, *Vaivém* and *Ping*, collaborations between the late Haroldo de Campos and Maria Helena Kopschitz, were presented. Irish Studies in Brazil began as a literature based discipline, but over the years it has moved into cultural studies and into Irish diaspora studies.

What needs to be done to help scholars and others who are interested in the Irish in South America? Immigration records, census and parish records are vital as are indices to newspapers such as Marshall Oliver’s *The English-Language Press in Latin America* which includes *The Irish Argentine* and *The Southern Cross* newspapers can provide primary sources for a study of the social history of the Irish in Argentina.<sup>7</sup>

I spoke earlier about Joyce and Borges. Borges’s essays on Irish writers indicate his wide-ranging knowledge of modern Irish literature: Lord Dunsany, Oliver St. John Gogarty, George Moore, Flann O’Brien, Liam O’Flaherty and, his favorite, Oscar Wilde<sup>8</sup>.

Irish writers in turn have set their work in South America. Colm Tóibín set his third novel *The Story of the Night* (1996) in Argentina during the military dictatorship. The politics of the time is the background to Richard Garay's personal struggle with his sexuality, a struggle that involves his fears of exposure, a private anxiety within a public/political anxiety. Paul Durcan's *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil. One Hundred Poems* (1999) opens the title poem and a sequence of fifteen Brazilian poems and a coda: "The Mary Robinson Years," a poem celebrating the Robinson presidency and its 1997 farewell party at the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio which includes in the usual Durcan display of verbal pyrotechnics: fireworks over the beach, high talk, a meeting with a transvestite from Tipperary and a final gesture of humility, faith and hope, by kneeling on the sand to light a candle in a parody of the Candomblé's New Year's tradition.

Various disciplines offer opportunities for a comparative approach. Here are some ideas, some nothing more than questions or hunches, but there may be a graduate student who would be interested. There is the work of the American anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Professor of Medical Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, who has done studies of family life (both controversial) in Ireland and Brazil and the degree to which she has been unsuccessful in her "attempt to reconcile her responsibility to honest ethnography and respect for the people who once shared their homes and their secrets with her." (Scheper-Hughes 117) She was a Peace Corpsman assigned to rural health programs in Timbaúba in 1964-1966. Her work in the sugar mill town of Bom Jesus da Mata was the beginning of a long term study of what she calls the "violence of hunger," but before she published her research, she produced *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics* (1979), a study of rural bachelors in Ballybran (Brandon) Co. Kerry, which considered the possible cultural reasons for the high incidence of schizophrenia. She identified the low marriage rate, the high emigration which left the farm inheriting sons behind, the damaging family dynamics and the isolation of these men as precipitating causes. Eileen Kane, Professor of Anthropology at NUI Maynooth and other Irish anthropologists questioned her broad generalizations about rural Ireland but also for her methodology.

The Mayo-based *Irish Times* ecologist and journalist Michael Viney who visited Brandon after the publication of *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics* criticized Scheper-Hughes for her writing in such a way as to make her informants recognizable. It left the community hurt and angry, so angry that when she returned to the village twenty years later in 1999, she was expelled.<sup>9</sup> In 1992, she published her Bom Jesus da Mata research in *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. She argued that an environment of poverty and chronic hunger where infant mortality is high can account for mothers' indifference to infant death.<sup>10</sup> Once again her conclusions were accepted with reservations. The essential question: does lack of emotion imply that affection is absent? (*ibid.*) The question invites a cross cultural examination.

Roger Casement's consular experience in South America has been studied mainly due to his notorious Black Diaries which reveal his homosexuality. They also raise the

question whether they were authentic or forgeries designed to discredit a man knighted for his work for the Empire. Current scholarship has established that the Diaries are an authentic record of a man troubled by his sexuality. My question is: how did Casement mediate between his commitment to the cause of Irish nationalism which led to his execution for treason in 1916 and his life as a British colonial administrator in South America? Has anyone looked at his consular work in the context of British and the diplomatic histories of Brazil and Peru?

While colonialism oppressed native peoples, immigrant people suffered at the hands of American nativists. Did the Irish in South America experience similar prejudice from continental Europeans? Did they resist? If we extend the geographical brief of this organization to Central America, there is the example of the San Patricios. While the Irish served on both sides in the American Civil War, the discrimination they faced led them to follow John Riley across enemy lines to fight for Mexico in the Mexican War of 1846-48. Under their Battalion flag, a Celtic harp on a green field, they fought fiercely against the Americans inflicting high casualties. When the Mexicans were defeated, San Patricios were whipped, branded and hanged as traitors.<sup>11</sup>

What about comparing music and social justice in Brazilian and Irish popular music? Caetano Veloso's autobiographical *Tropical Truth. A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil* (2002) suggests comparisons with U-2's Bono's music and advocacy for the dispossessed.<sup>12</sup> In his review of *Tropical Truth*, Gerald Marzorati spoke both of Caetano's generation and Bono's somewhat younger cohort:

He has a following too, among the more with-it tenured types who participate in conferences devoted to postcolonial studies and such. In ways similar to, say, Salman Rushdie, Caetano, who turned 60 [in 2002] came of age in the developing world absorbed with questions of center (America and England in his line of work) and periphery (everywhere else) – of where “hereness” and “thereness” met or might meet. His music, or much of it, can be construed as an inventive response to such questions. (*New York Times Book Review*. 2002)

Bono represents a younger musical generation of urban Dublin rock musicians who used music to promote global peace and justice. Bob Geldorf of the Boomtown Rats produced the Live Aid concert was first of Irish musicians in aid of World hunger, a gesture from a country with a nineteenth century history of famine to their twentieth century counterparts. Following Geldorf, Bono expanded the Live Aid concept to a broader mission. His international standing has given him entrée to heads of state to remind them of the promises they made at the Millenium G8 summit and such is his influence that his name is on the short list for the Nobel Peace Prize. U2's music, his website, his concert appearances and his own journeys to distressed areas of the world reinforce Bono's mission to engage everyone to become activists in the effort to end world hunger, racism, and AIDS. What informed their mission; how does their music

advance their commitment to social justice and what, if any, are their shared values and how were they shaped?

I have saved the most intriguing topic to last, the newest dimension in Irish Studies in South America: the Brazilian diaspora to Ireland. Since 2001, the records show a net immigration of some six hundred Brazilian immigrants to Gort, County Galway (Lister 2006). A Local sausage manufacturer recruited butchers and slaughtermen from Anápolis (Goiás). Satisfied with the better wages, wives and girlfriends followed the men to Gort and that led to a chain migration from Goiás to Galway. Brazilians have imported their own traditions to Ireland. This spring they staged an impromptu carnival in the Gort square. Other Brazilian settlers in Ireland have settled in Roscommon, in Meath and in the south Liffey inner city where Brazilian music provides immigrant pride and solidarity.

The Dublin Samba School MaSamba School ([www.masamba.com](http://www.masamba.com)) has combined community services for Brazilian immigrants with a cultural exchange. They created a ten-day tour for youths and community workers to Rio and the northeast where they danced the samba, the batucada, samba reggae and maracatu. They met Brazilians from all parts of the community and talked with them about the history and social context for the dance and musical tradition. How did samba music evolve through slavery to become a national symbol? The experience gave tour members an opportunity to compare the issues of marginalization and multiculturalism in the two societies.

The Latin American Solidarity Center ([www.lasc.ie](http://www.lasc.ie)) and the North Dublin community radio station Near FM worked together with MaSamba to produce a three-part radio programs: encounters, relationships and resolutions that documents the MaSamba school tour; the series as funded by the Irish National Committee for Development of Education (now DCI) with the Broadcast Technical Services and Total Broadcast supplying technical assistance. (Copies of the programs are available from the Latin American Solidarity Centre or [www.lasc.ie](http://www.lasc.ie))

Brazilian immigration to Ireland is not without its difficulties. There have been cases of workers who have been exploited (the 2002 Neusa da Silva case) and there have been some who have been refused admission to the country, but for the most part Ireland has welcomed the new Irish from under the Southern Cross and from this “commodius vicus of recirculation,” we will see a new Brazilian-Irish dimension to Irish society when we walk the land again later in the twenty-first century.

## Notes

- 1 “The Croppy Boy” was a favorite song in Joyce’s own repertoire. Richard Ellmann (1959, 53) described the song as one that Joyce sang during musical evenings at the Sheehys’ because Joyce believed that the song showed his light tenor voice to advantage.
- 2 A Spanish translation of the novel did not appear until 1948. “El *Ulises* de Joyce,” was published in *Proa* 6, Jan. 1925 and later included in *Inquisiciones*. Respectful of *Ulysses*, Borges was

critical of *Finnegans Wake*. “I have examined it with some bewilderment, have unenthusiastically deciphered nine or ten calembours, and have read the terror-stricken praise of the N.R.F. and the T.L.S.” He dismissed the *Wake* is a concatenation of puns committed in a dreamlike English that is difficult not to categorise as frustrated and incompetent” concluding that “Jules Laforgue and Lewis Carroll have played this game with better luck” (Borges 195).

- 3 Jorge Luis Borges, “Blindness”. “La ceguera” *La Opinión*, 31 August 1977. See Weinberger’s edition.
- 4 One of O’Faoláin’s best stories, “Lovers of the Lake,” describes the transforming experience of the Lough Derg Pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory in Donegal. It too has European connections: a church in Todi (Italy) has a fresco dated 1346 that depicts the cave associated with Patrick. The late Dorothy Molloy Carpenter wrote her UCD dissertation on manuscript of the Journey of Ramon de Perellós to St. Patrick’s Purgatory and Michael Haren and Yolande de Pontfarcy edited a Patrician collection titled *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory. Lough Derg and the European Tradition* (1988).
- 5 Conversation with James MacKillop who is writing the authorized history of the American Conference for Irish Studies. His source was Joseph Ronsley’s history of CAIS.
- 6 O’Neill ‘s list also identifies Brazil major archival source for theatre research, the FUNARTE Library in Rio.
- 7 See Oliver Marshall’s *The English-Language Press in Latin-America*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996. In 2005, Santiago O’Durnin edited *The Southern Cross*; Associate Editors were Teresa Deane Reddy and Florencia Sulta Kiernan. See [www.thesoutherncross.com.ar](http://www.thesoutherncross.com.ar)
- 8 Borges is especially interesting – however brief – on the Joyce/ FLann O’Brien connection. “I have enumerated many verbal labyrinths, but none so complex as the recent book by Flann O’Brien.” *At Swim Two Birds* is not only a labyrinth: it is a discussion of the many ways to conceive of the Irish novel and a repertory of exercises in prose and verse which illustrate or parody all the styles of Ireland. The magisterial influence of Joyce (also an architect of labyrinths; also a literary Proteus) is undeniable but not disproportionate in this manifold book. (Weinberger 162)
- 9 Public criticism of Scheper-Hughes’s methodology was expressed first in Michael Viney’s critique in THE IRISH TIMES, September 24, 1980. In her response, Scheper-Hughes said that while she revealed “many commonly-known and widely accepted community secrets,” she “trusted that she betrayed no personal, individual or family secrets.” “Reply to Ballybran,” IRISH TIMES (February 21, 1981).
- 10 “Mother Love and Infant Death in a Brazilian Shantytown [Alto do Cruzeiro], *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ( June 10, 1992), A 7.
- 11 Peter F. Stevens, *The Rogue’s March. John Riley and the St. Patrick’s Battalion 1846-48*. Washington: Brassey’s, 1999. There is a San Patricio video produced by Day Productions in 1996.
- 12 Caetano Veloso, *Tropical Truth. A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil* . trans. Isabel de Sena. New York: Knopf, 2002. See also Larry Rohter, “A Revolutionary Who’s Still on the Move” NYT Nov 17, 2002 Arts 27,32.

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# Essay

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# *How's the Form?*

Chris Arthur

## I

My father used regularly to inquire of family and friends, “*How's the form?*” Despite its familiarity, the question sounds peculiar to me now. It has become one of those odd, archaic regional locutions that no longer belongs in current diction, even though it occupies so secure a place in memory. I must have heard it asked a thousand times. The particular phrasing in which Dad's inquiry was cast was not unique to him, but its use was restricted both by age and locale. I've never heard it spoken outside Northern Ireland, or by anyone of my own generation or younger. We prefer the simpler “*How are you?*” or some variant on this more widely recognized form of address.

In part, the peculiarity that now accompanies “*How's the form?*” stems simply from the fact that time has passed and I've moved on. My father's generation has gone, taking with them – as every generation does – a handful of expressions unique to them, forged by their particular encounter with history and, for whatever reason, not taken forward into the store of common talk by those who followed in their steps. In any case, long before their tongues had fallen silent I'd left the County Antrim environs where the words they shaped determined what was commonplace and unremarkable.

As well as these obvious reasons of time and place, the aura of peculiarity that nowadays wreaths “*How's the form?*” is generated simply by seeing it written down. It is, so far as my experience of its usage goes, an entirely oral expression. Though my father wrote to me regularly after I left home, it was only face to face, or on the phone, that I was met with this particular form of words. There's a disconcerting mismatch when what was only ever spoken appears upon the page. It's like encountering an always casual friend dressed in a sharply tailored business suit. It looks all wrong.

\* \* \*

The question was a favourite standby in the lexicon of ordinary social greeting used by men of my father's age and class. Curiously, I can't recall more than one or two instances of a woman using this exact phrase – a reminder of the fact that in the patois of our everyday parlance there are gender dialects as surely as there are those of region, class, religion. If you listen hard, it's amazing how much can be heard behind the deceptive simplicities of speech.

*“How’s the form?”* was designed to elicit a response that was as brief, superficial and formulaic as the question. Usually it was met with either *“Not so bad”* (sometimes repeated, often paired with *“I can’t complain”*), or *“Not too good”*, sometimes *“Not great”* (both usually paired with *“I’m afraid”*). Why *“How’s the form?”* was never met with a simple robust affirmative in reply – *“OK”*, *“Good”*, even *“Great!”* – I don’t know, but it had less to do with how the respondents were actually feeling than with the ritual expectation that had grown up around this question like ivy on some old stone building. Tradition demanded that any reply be prefaced with a negative and couched in such familiar terms as to be blandly uninformative.

## II

“Form” is an interesting word. Derived from the Latin *forma* for shape, it is perhaps appropriate that it offers so malleable an array of shape-shifting meanings. Not only can it denote shape, but a pattern or mode of being, order, regularity, style and arrangement. It can mean a socially accepted mode of behaviour, such that good form and bad form in this context refers not to how someone’s feeling, but to whether they’re acting in accordance with the norms of polite society. It can be used to denote structural unity in music. Form can name a document that needs to be completed, or can refer to having a criminal record. It can be applied to a racehorse’s varying potential for success on any given day, or to a class in school. In the sense in which my father and his generation of Ulster speakers meant it, the nearest dictionary-listed definition would be “condition of fitness”. Interestingly – though I’m reluctant to accept the criticism implied – the dictionary, with grammatical hauteur, dismisses as “colloquial” any usage prefaced by the definite article.

*“How’s the form?”* was a way of inquiring after someone’s general health and happiness, a means of asking along life’s path how things are going. We have various such devices for unobtrusively taking the pulse of our fellows in casual conversation. *“How’s the form?”* is a blood-brother of *“How are you doing?”*, *“How’s things?”*, *“Are you OK?”*, *“How’s yourself?”*, or Ulster’s much parodied *“Bout ye?”* – a contraction of *“What about you?”* (i.e. *“How are you?”*). This is usually found – at least in comic conjunction – as an answer to *“On ye?”*, an even briefer way of asking the same thing, but as first speaker. *“‘On ye?’ ‘Bout ye?’*” has become a kind of stereotype of vacuous local buffoonery, summing up entire conversations in four words. But as so often with humour, there’s an acute observation embedded in the jest. For a great deal of our discourse, however many frills of distraction we may weave about it, is concerned with establishing little more than *“How are you?”* and expecting very little elaboration in reply.

Questions like *“How’s the form?”* are not intended to elicit more than the crudest approximation to one’s actual state and assume an answer of conventional superficiality, usually accompanied by a mirror question returned to the first speaker and meant to spark a similarly low-key response. It would be bad form to reply to *“How’s the form?”*

with a detailed specification of one's actual condition. It operates in the realm of convention, not in-depth communication, inviting reciprocal ritual, not revelation, in response. It's simply a means of greeting, an approved opening gambit, a recognized way of starting a conversational exchange of niceties, rather than a means of establishing in any depth, or with any detailed accuracy, how someone is really faring upon life's hard journey. It is the verbal equivalent of grooming.

### III

*"How's the form?"* has become a kind of aural familiar that I'm sure will always haunt me. It's one of those unintended fractional prisms in which – through no design of mine – remembrance of my father is stored, so that every now and then, as the restless mind tends its crop of memories, this is one of the grains it harvests. It's something rooted deeply in the loam of remembering and it produces a regular crop of recall, but over the years the way in which the light of present consciousness reflects off its surface has altered. When I think about *"How's the form?"* now, two things about it strike me which didn't occur to me when it was part of the ordinary conversation with which I was surrounded every day. First, I now see as strange the way in which one's wellbeing is phrased such that it seems to be an independent – even impersonal – entity, existing apart from the self. Not *"How are you?"*, or *"How's your form?"*, but *"How's the form?"*, as if it was something separate that could be examined as it stood beside you, as if it was sufficiently distant and impersonal to allow a kind of detached scrutiny and comment. I suspect this use of the definite article was quite deliberate and due to a more interesting cause than the "colloquial" with which the dictionary haughtily dismisses it, implying that this is merely the kind of slipshod error one might expect in the rough hewn dialect of provincial poltroons. Far from being a mistake, it is a strategy, something designed to keep things superficial. Its intention is to promote a certain detachment, distance and impersonality, to maintain a gliding over of surfaces rather than any falling into depths. The second (and obviously connected) thing that strikes me whenever I hear *"How's the form?"* now – or, rather, remember it, for I never hear it spoken in the world outside my mind – is the huge gulf that lies between the sort of dialogue it engenders and the way things really are.

Of course, "the way things really are" is – at least to some extent – a matter of opinion, temperament, circumstance, rather than an unvarying verdict of plain fact (if fact is ever that). The hands we are dealt by the unevenness and unpredictability of personality and fate clearly foster different views as to how things really are. William James, mapping the diversity of people into types, identified two polar extremes of mentality. There are the so-called "sick souls", who see the human condition as a wretched plight. For them, existence is a pain-filled experience that gives rise to tears and terror. In contrast, there are the "healthy minded" who see life as a thing of joy and wonder. They do not see – or choose to overlook – the shadows. James's two psychological

types bear out Wittgenstein's observations that "The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man".

#### IV

Only rarely do we occupy the simple, unambiguous extremes that James and Wittgenstein identify. Mostly, happiness and unhappiness are infused with each other's colour, even if it is no more than the faintest tinge of memory or hope. Mostly we are located somewhere on a continuum, a psychological gradient, between the sick soul and the healthy mind, between joy and misery. It is comparatively rare to be at the extreme of either pole. But despite all the variations in our outlook and experience, all the gradations of personality and position, there are some nonnegotiable facts, to do with time and death and loss, which constitute some of the basic features of experience and have strong claim to substantially determine the way things are, however differently we may be disposed to interpret and react to them.

One of the most striking sketches I've come across of these basic features, of the way things really are, what life's like in its elemental as opposed to incidental sense, occurs in an ancient Eastern story. It's found in different sources and versions, making it difficult to be certain about its date of composition and original author, but one particularly good version is given by the seventh century Jain writer, Haribhadra, in his *Samaradityakatha* – the story of Samaraditya. Ted Hughes once described stories as "little factories of meaning". The best ones' productivity is unaffected by chronological or national boundaries. They seem able to supply meaning on a near universal basis. Certainly Haribhadra's story has gradually migrated into the Western consciousness, where – among others – it has had a profound effect on Tolstoy, who cites it at length in his *Confessions*, precisely as a statement of the ways things really are.

In very condensed form, the story goes like this. A certain man (Samaraditya – but the name is unimportant, this individual is meant to represent anyone and everyone) was walking through the countryside. Suddenly he is surprised by a wild elephant which charges him, trumpeting ferociously. Desperate to escape, the man looks around frantically for some place of sanctuary. A massive tree is growing nearby, so he makes for it, hoping to climb to safety. He finds that its branches are too far off the ground for him to catch hold of one and pull himself to safety. Then, at the foot of the tree he notices an old well. Terrified by the closeness of the enraged elephant, the man jumps into this apparent haven. It turns out to be deeper than he thought, but as he falls he reaches out and grabs hold of some vegetation growing halfway down the well-shaft. For a moment he thinks he is safe. The elephant can't reach him and he has managed to break his fall. Then he begins to take his bearings. As his eyes become accustomed to the dim light, the true horror of his plight becomes clear. At the bottom of the well there is a giant serpent waiting to devour him. Not only are his arms tiring, but the roots of the plant from whose fronds he is precariously hanging are being steadily gnawed by two mice, one white, one black. It is only a matter of time until he falls.

Meanwhile, back on ground level, the elephant continues to charge madly about. In its rage it crashes against the tree whose branches overhang the well. This dislodges a bees' nest from its upper branches. It falls into the well and hits the man on his head. He is stung by a swarm of angry bees. But a drop of honey trickles into his mouth and, in the moment of savouring its flavour, he forgets all about the dangers surrounding him and is lost in the enjoyment of its sweetness.

## V

*"How's the form?" "Not so bad, not so bad. I can't complain"* – never mind that the serpent of death is waiting below me and that my arms are tiring. Time's unstoppable elephant charge has catapulted us into the well-shaft of life, where we are stung by numerous afflictions. Day and night, caricatured by the white and black mice, steadily saw at the precious stem of our life-span. *"How's the form?" "Not great, I'm afraid"*, referring to some minor, passing ailment – a cold, perhaps, or a headache, or a recent bout of flu. But we almost never mention the incurable aspects of our situation. We shy away from the way things *really* are and concentrate on the honey, whether its sweetness is given or withheld. What else can we do? I don't have any answer, nor am I decrying the efficacy of *"How's the form?"* and the level of concern and communication it weaves around us, swaddling us from fear. With its determinedly conventional sphere of operation, its deft distancing via the definite article, *"How's the form?"* is less any species of inquiry than a screening device devised to weave a dense curtain of superficiality across the savage imponderables that underlie us and in whose depths meaning flounders. Sometimes, though, glimpsing the horrors of history, remembering the stacked skulls and ash-pits of genocide, knowing that all around us savagery and illness, hunger, pain and unhappiness rage – and that whatever our current form may be it is fated for annihilation – a primal yell of agony, a convention-smashing howl, would seem the most fitting answer to any inquiries about our condition. Seen in this light, meeting *"How's the form?"* with a primal scream of terror seems saner than the niceties of any socially sanctioned reply. But perhaps it is precisely our sanity that we seek to preserve in opting for the accustomed camouflaging superficialities.

The French diarist, Henri-Frédéric Amiel, once remarked that "the universe seriously studied rouses our terror". Serious study can, of course, bring less terrible rewards, but there is no denying the fact that certain aspects of existence *are*, frankly, terrifying, and the more we think, the more likely we are to discover them. In his psychoanalytic study, *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker sums up well the kind of terror-arousing insights thought can foster:

It cannot be over-stressed that to see the world as it really is, is devastating and terrifying. I believe those who speculate that a full apprehension of man's condition would drive him insane are quite literally right. Anxiety is the result of the perception of the truth of one's condition. What does it mean to be a self-con-

scious animal? The idea is ludicrous if not monstrous. It means that one is food for worms. This is the terror: to have emerged from nothingness, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die.

My father and his generation have all lost their hold on the sheer wall of life's terrifying well-shaft and fallen to their deaths. Stung by cancer, stroke, pneumonia, heart attack, or some other of the myriad of blades that speed the severing of our life-thread more ruthlessly than any mouse's nibbling. The serpent has devoured them. They have become food for worms. Their savouring of life's honey has ended and our turn comes next. Even now, our arms are tiring. Listen carefully and you can hear the saw of passing time as it cuts ever deeper into the vein of our continuance. There are angry buzzings all around us and the serpent's cold eye shines undimmed. It beckons, however extravagantly we try to screen out its unwavering glare with temporary expedients of comfort, indulgence or distraction.

\* \* \*

Thinking about the way in which "*How's the form?*" tends to be answered with a negative – "*Not so bad*", rather than a simple "*Good*" – I wonder if it was perhaps considered a reckless tempting of fate to lay claim too confidently to wellbeing since, at the back of everyone's mind, there must surely be some awareness of the fact, no matter how little public voice is given to it, that "the form" is really far from OK. Whatever wellbeing we may claim for it is perilously founded and will one day be snuffed out completely. Everyday existence – our world of routines and the commonplace – is inextricably entangled with things of a different order altogether. We wake up, get dressed, go downstairs, have breakfast and are lulled by the mundane routines of the ordinary. But somewhere dwells the certainty that one night we may go to bed and never be downstairs again. That some breakfast will be the last one that we ever eat. Is there any consolation to be had beyond whatever precarious wellbeing the present moment may offer? Is there any succour more lasting than some honeyed drops of accidental sweetness? Perhaps it's bad form to raise such matters at all; maybe the essayist's questions exhibit the metaphysical equivalent of being ill-bred. Be this as it may, beyond the demands of civility and the illusions of piety, it's hard to grant much credence to a positive answer when we're asked "*How's the form?*". "*Not so bad*" and its cognates (and the same holds for "*Not so good*") suggests a talent for incredible stoicism, understatement or sheer blind stupidity.



# Book Reviews





# *Patrick McCabe: “Romantic Ireland’s Dead and Gone”*

Rüdiger Imhof

Patrick McCabe is unique among contemporary Irish fiction writers. John Banville, in his blurb for *Winterwood*, the author’s most recent novel, calls him “a true original”, and he is quite right to do so. McCabe came to prominence as a writer in 1992 with the publication of his extraordinarily arresting novel *The Butcher Boy*, which he adapted for the stage under the title of *Frank Pig Says Hello* and which was turned into a well-received film by Neil Jordan. *The Butcher Boy* marked his third published attempt at serious fiction, after *Music on Clinton Street* (1986) and *Carn* (1989). Two of the thematic concerns that he has explored in these and other works are especially noteworthy. One is the effect of the modern world on rural Ireland, or, put differently, social changes in Ireland since the 1960s; the other is the fathoming of abnormal mental states, which McCabe achieves with uncanny brilliance. The incontestable strongpoint of his narrative art is the immediacy and intensity of the narrative voices employed in the majority of his books, for example in *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dead School* (1995), *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), *Emerald Germs of Ireland* (2001) and now *Winterwood*.

Almost single-handedly, McCabe has invigorated the Anglo-Irish Gothic tradition in fiction, which dates back to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker *et al.*, and which during the first half of the twentieth century had, relatively speaking, fallen into disuse – a tradition said by Declan Kiberd to have “encouraged a besieged Protestant elite to dramatize its fears and phobias in a climate of inexorable political decline” (383). This is a rather incontestable contention and it doesn’t apply to McCabe, who is not a member of that elite at all. He has, furthermore, added priceless specimens to the plenteous array of unreliable narrators who have haunted twentieth-century fiction in particular, and who were first made the object of serious narratorial consideration by Wayne C. Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).

McCabe’s *œuvre* to date is too extensive to be treated in full within the space available here. Thus, preference must be given to some of his books at the expense of others. Already in *Music on Clinton Street*, McCabe skilfully contrasts the past and the present, while at the same time evoking powerful portraits of rural Ireland throughout the century. Basically a state-of-Ireland novel, *Music on Clinton Street* aims to examine a society in violent and bewildering transition, of the conflict of the static old order and the influx of transatlantic culture which transformed Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s. A

comparable interest informs *Winterwood*, significantly enough. *Carn* charts a couple of years in the history of the market town Carn, “half a mile from the Irish border”, focusing upon a handful of characters whose lives become intertwined. Josie Keenan, for instance, comes back after years of serving in bars and pleasing men on the flat of her back in England, whither she escaped after a man had made her pregnant; hallucinatory voices drive her to attempt suicide; however, the water is too cold and she fails to drown herself; later she is raped by a barman and finally burns to death in a house set on fire by an IRA man. One has to search long and hard in contemporary writing to find lives delineated with such empathy and in such a striking manner as in *Carn*. The narrative style is extremely impressive and the effect is sheer delight. Carn’s history is seen as a process of eternal recurrence – an Irish eternal recurrence, with violence and murder playing a disproportionate role.

*The Butcher Boy* has Francie Brady, now in an asylum for the criminally insane, tell of events that happened “twenty or thirty or forty years ago”, when he got involved with the Nugents, in particular Mrs Nugent, who called the Brady family “pigs”. Francie is the son of an alcoholic father and a mother who is in and out of the local mental hospital, “the garage” in Francie’s terms. The Nugents are ordinary, respectable people, or so it would seem; it is only in the narrator’s increasingly unhinged mind that they develop into despicable and punishable ogres. Francie’s only friend is Joe Purcell, whom he met one day when hacking at the ice on a big puddle with a lolly stick. One of the mean tricks the Nugents play on Francie, according to his warped reasoning, is that they wean Joe away from him and foster a relationship between Joe and their son, Philip. All Francie longs for is to go on living in a make-believe world of cowboys and hide-outs in the woods with Joe. But Joe, in the meantime, has grown up. He has discovered music and is a boarder at an expensive school in Bundoran, the very town where Francie’s parents spent their honeymoon in a guest-house in which his father used to sing “I dreamt that I dwelt in Marble halls”. All the alleged acts of humiliation and injustice take on excruciating proportions in Francie’s schizophrenic and paranoid mind, and in order that these haunting ghosts be laid to rest, Francie knows he must take the captive bolt pistol to Mrs Nugent. The heinous deed and its aftermath are played out against the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis and much local ballyhoo about an apparition of Our Lady. The use of such socio-cultural details, possibly in order to lend wider frame of reference (Irish-town-life-in-the-sixties fashion) to the Francie story, jar the reader a bit; or rather they fail to make full sense.

*The Butcher Boy* offers a deeply moving, wholly devastating account of loneliness, jealousy, evil and madness. It is utterly astonishing how McCabe has succeeded in penetrating the deranged mind of his psychopathic narrator. What at first seems the rather innocent logic of a difficult, emotionally crippled child surreptitiously develops into the fiendish, feverish ravings of a maniac. One of the main questions that the narrative raises is this: why does Francie Brady’s mind disintegrate? Does Francie become a psychopath, does he go insane, for hereditary reasons? After all, his mother is

in and out of “the garage”, being psychologically unstable. Or does McCabe put the blame for Francie’s decline on social causes? McCabe seems to come down in favour of certain social causes in small-town Ireland in the 1960s. During the difficult period, or in the no-man’s land between adolescence and manhood, Francie failed to discover his identity, failed to find his own voice. As a result, his world, to some extent, degenerated into ceaseless role-playing – local roles, such as the Bogman and Francie Brady Not a Bad Bastard Any More, and more exotic roles gleaned from popular culture, such as Algernon Carruthers and various Hollywood heroes. He quotes all, but is none of these characters. Francie tries to make all the disparate voices battling in his head conform to some kind of coherent narrative that will explain how things got so bad. But all he is able to attain is a phantasmagoric jumble of nightmarish impressions towards the end of the novel, reminiscent of the ‘Nighttown’ section in *Ulysses*. And so he takes the captive bolt pistol, or “the humane killer”, as the doc in the institution for the criminally insane calls it, to Mrs Nugent and kills her.

*The Butcher Boy* is less impressive as a so-called state-of-Ireland narrative, as some critics, for instance Gerry Smyth, are inclined to view it. Smyth discusses the book together with Roddy Doyle’s novels and Dermot Bolger’s *The Journey Home* as socio-cultural analyses of Ireland in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Social issues are no doubt addressed in *The Butcher Boy*, but the account is ill-equipped to diagnose social wrongs in small-town Ireland during the 1960 and 1970s for the simple reason that all that is offered is filtered through the bewildered, sick mind of a fiendishly unreliable narrator.

*The Dead School* is about two schoolmasters, Raphael Bell and Malachy Dudgeon, and how the twain met in St Anthony’s School, Dublin, where Raphael was headmaster, in the 1970s. Two themes that run throughout the novel are the changing of traditional values during the time in question and the dying of love. Raphael grew up as a model child, head altar boy, top scholar dripping over himself with brains in St Patrick’s Teacher Training College, Drumcondra. His father was killed by the Black and Tans, “God Save Ireland!”. He is offered the post as headmaster of St Anthony’s and marries the beautiful Nessa Conroy, “Macushla!” Their son is stillborn. Malachy is less fortunate. His youth was overshadowed by the fact that his mother carried on an affair with a cowman; his father knew and in the end drowned himself. Love went into the grave for Malachy. On top of that, he was bullied by older boys from early on. Then he strikes up a relationship with a woman, Marion, who has had an abortion. In his job at St Anthony’s, he proves a sorry failure, not measuring up to Bell’s standards.

There are two things about *The Dead School* that are most impressive. One is the narrative voice, which tells the intertwining stories of Malachy and Raphael with exceptional vividness and immediacy. The other is the manner in which McCabe manages to render the process of Bell’s growing insanity after he has handed in his resignation and imagines he is still teaching in the dead school of his own house, as well as the way in which the set-upon Malachy succumbs to drink and drugs in London. All this happens

in the excellent last third of the book. Good Old Ireland, the Ireland as represented by “The Walton Programme” on radio, with its heritage of the “songs our fathers loved”, is gone for ever. One of the reasons for Bell’s decline is that he feels he is fighting a losing battle against the likes of one Terry Krash and his radio and TV shows on which the quality of brass is brazenly discussed. Additionally, there are women such as Marion who have had abortions and carry condoms around with them and try to impose their newfangled ideas on the running of his school. Romantic Ireland is dead and gone, indeed.

*Breakfast on Pluto* shares a number of features with the earlier *The Butcher Boy*. The most conspicuous of these is the narrative voice, which, in its idiosyncrasy and immediacy, recalls Francie Brady’s voice. Moreover, Patrick ‘Pussy’ Braden, resplendent in housecoat and headscarf, sits in Kilburn, writing his story “The Life and Times of Patrick Braden”, for Dr Terence, his elusive psychiatrist, bringing to light the truth behind his life in 1970s Ireland and the chaos of his days in a country, Ireland, and a city, London, filled with violence and tragedy. Like Francie, Patrick essentially recounts the events in his life to establish sense and meaning. The root cause of the slings and arrows of Pussy’s outrageous fortune is lack of love and a failing sense of belonging or home.

Sweetie-pie Patrick’s predicament unfolds against the background of political and sectarian violence, especially early 1970s IRA violence. Thus the jubilee commemoration in 1966 of the 1916 Rising is evoked. On another occasion, thirteen people are reported shot dead by the parachute regiment in Derry. We are reminded of Bloody Sunday, of course. A boy afflicted with Down’s Syndrome is shot during the Northern Ireland troubles. Patrick’s friend Irwin Kerr, who becomes an IRA activist, is murdered for allegedly having turned informer. Charlie, who loves him, suffers a breakdown as a consequence and takes to drink. A soon-to-be-married man is abducted, tortured and eventually killed by terrorists. A bomb goes off in a restaurant and another one in a disco pub. Discord, hatred – the opposite of love, as Leopold Bloom knew – violence and alienation loom large. Even the helpful psychiatrist, Dr Terence, eventually betrays Patrick by disappearing from the scene. And in the midst of all, Patrick ‘Pussy’ Braden is hankering after a family, love, and affection and searching for familial security.

Patrick’s account in his “Life and Times...” is a cry for help, affection and love as well as a document of alienation. In compositional terms, its short chapters hopscotch about somewhat, but then Dr Terence told Patrick to write it all down “[j]ust as it comes to you”. The music of the 1960s and 1970s – including Don Partridge’s song “Breakfast on Pluto”, which was a UK chart hit in 1969 – with which the book is seasoned, adds some local colour, for what that is worth. Above all, it contributes to that world of fantasy and make-believe into which Pussy Braden escapes from his unbearable, ashen existence.<sup>1</sup>

Redmond Hatch, in *Winterwood*, tries to win a strange sort of freedom from a world that has uncannily got on top of him, or so he makes out, in the wood of the title,

as cold and unaccommodating as the term suggests. The novel is rather difficult to review, since so much depends for its effect upon each individual reader's discovering the ramifications of the plot for themselves. Going into too much detail would end in giving too much away, thus killing the joy of immersing oneself in what is no doubt a superb narrative performance. So let us confine ourselves to simply remarking this much: when Redmond Hatch, in the autumn of 1981, returns home to Slievenageeha to do an article on folklore and changing ways in Ireland for his paper, the *Leinster News*, he falls under the spell of Ned Strange, "Auld Pappie – the wild and woolly rascal from the hills" (p. 5), a fiddler and an inexhaustible font of old-time stories. He is, in short, an embodiment of the authentic spirit of heritage and tradition, of Romantic Ireland. The mothers send their children to Ned – "he is so terrific with the kids" – to be coached in music and folklore. Step by step it transpires (or so it would seem, for the accounts are quite contradictory and whether we can trust Redmond is all but certain) that Ned killed the woman he loved because she was having an affair with another man. He also killed a boy, "the bestest friend of Ned", for which he was arrested; during the arrest he hanged himself in a shower cubicle. Redmond is torn between loathing and sympathy for Ned. For a time, he even feels physically haunted by Ned's ghost. Meantime Redmond gets married himself and has a daughter, but before long he catches his wife in bed with another man. The marriage dissolves, and Redmond assumes a new identity and leads a new successful life in Dublin with a gorgeous American woman. That is to say: he does so after taking his child to winterwood. Later his wife will follow. The idea of winterwood, where the snow princess lives, was derived by Redmond and his daughter from TV shows for children, such as *My Little Pony* and *The Snowman*, which the girl loved.

All this and a good deal more develops against the backdrop of a changing Ireland. From Ned, Redmond learns about a proposed motorway near Slievenageeha. The Temple Bar area is developing into the epicentre of Dublin's hedonistic empire. George Bush reigns supreme in the White House. Lidl has conquered the market in Ireland. Such details are there to suggest that the world is in a state of flux – constantly changing; an old, almost ancient, way of life may appear to be vanishing in front of our very eyes. But the anarchic impulses of men and women do stay the same. "Things now is the same as a thousand year ago", Ned Strange has it, and so the novel suggests.

Something seems not quite right with the chronology of events in the second half of the book. But then Redmond Hatch jumps about in his account and is a devil of an unreliable narrator. What McCabe achieves admirably is the way in which the Ned skein and the Redmond skein are stealthily intertwined in order for *Winterwood* to make its trenchant point. Not least because of that, Patrick McCabe is unique.

## Note

- 1 Eccentricity is all very fine, but there are limits, and McCabe went over them in his collection of stories *Mondo Desperado* and his penultimate novel, *Emerald Germs of Ireland*. The former

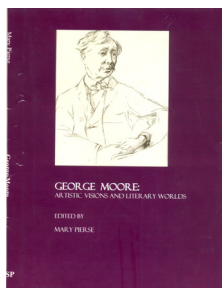
offers whimsical goings-on in Barntrosa, a whacky Irish backwater rife with bitter shut-ins, nefarious schoolboys, cheeky prostitutes, lesbian nurses and Declan Coyningham with an air hose inserted „snugly between his sad but acceptant buttocks”. One story stands out, „the Valley of the Flying Jennets”, about the monsters in the hills, in which McCabe is little short of out-Poeing Poe. The story, in *Emerald Germs*, of Pat McNab, forty-five years old, would-be ‚Cleaner’ or ‚Regulator’ and possibly serial killer, which covers Pat’s post-matricide years is so over the top that over the top is not the term.

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Nicholas Grene

In her essay, 'His Father's Son: the Political Inheritance', Mary Pierse, the editor of this volume, argues for a continuing political commitment in George Moore's work. It may not always be as overt and polemical, she maintains, as it is in *Parnell and His Island*, the book in which he came closest to the political attitudes of his nationalist MP father, but it is implicit through Moore's fiction of the 1890s including his best-known novel *Esther Waters*. Those politically challenging attitudes, together with his preoccupation with language, Pierse concludes, make it valid to class his work as 'minor literature' according to the definition of Deleuze and Guattari, literature written against the grain. This book as a whole, however, raises the problem of why Moore should continue to be treated as a 'minor writer' in the more conventional sense of the term, so little read and so little studied in the academy.

Adrian Frazier, in the volume's opening essay, '“I No Longer Underrate Him”: the Question of Moore's Value', attributes much of the blame to Yeats, whose cannily negative portrait of Moore in *Dramatis Personae* 'has caused more damage to Moore's reputation than any other of the multitudinous disparagements of this often-disparaged master of the modern novel'. Frazier's essay itself is suggestive of the frustration he has come to feel at the lack of appreciation of Moore, the subject of his superb biography published in 2000. That book was very widely and positively reviewed, but often by reviewers who continued to belittle Moore's work: Denis Donoghue is cited as a notable example. As a result, the present essay is written in a spirit of partisan apologetics, just the spirit Frazier avoided in the biography, which in its sympathetic reading of Moore's work never tried to make a case against his detractors. Why is Moore not taken seriously as the major writer that Frazier and the other scholars represented in this volume clearly take him to be?

On the face of it, there is a great deal to be said for Moore. There is his international cosmopolitanism as a writer who first established himself in Paris as companion and associate of Manet and Zola, took a major role in the Irish Literary Revival, and ended his life in London celebrated as the great master of English prose. The range of scholars represented in this volume, based on an international conference held in Cork in 2004, reflect his interest for different literary and linguistic traditions. So Siofra Pierse compares Moore with Voltaire as 'briseurs de fers', liberatory breakers of shackles, while Munira Mutran in her essay on *Confessions of a Young Man* analyses the exemplary value of its form as autobiography from within a Brazilian context. Konstantin Doulamis examines what was involved in Moore's 'translation' – he knew

no Greek and was working from a French version – of *Daphnis and Chloe*, the third century romance by Longus. We are shown in a number of essays the continuing relevance of some of Moore's less well-known later works, such as *The Brook Kerith*, which Peter Christiansen relates to the traditions of the search for the historical Jesus. Many of the contributors, however, concentrate on the central period of his more realistic fiction from *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) through to *The Lake* (1905). Ann Heilman looks at various pathologies of the artist manqué in *Vain Fortune* (1891-5), Fabienne Gaspari at portraits of the artists and the exhibition of women's bodies in *A Mummer's Wife* (1885) and *Evelyn Innes* (1898). The significance of the collection of short stories, *The Untilled Field* (1903) is examined from very different points of view by Fabienne Garcier as a pivotal work in the history of the Irish short story and, in its first translated Irish form as *An t-Úr-Ghort*, by Pádraigín Riggs. The issues of Moore's politics is brought into focus not only in Mary Pierse's own essay but in the contributions of Elena Jaime de Pablos who makes a strong case for Moore as a committed feminist, and Catherine Smith who sees Moore's feminism in *A Drama in Muslin* in a more qualified light. The intersections between politics and aesthetics are highlighted in two essays, by Michael O'Sullivan and Mark Llewellyn, on Moore's treatment of the theme of celibacy.

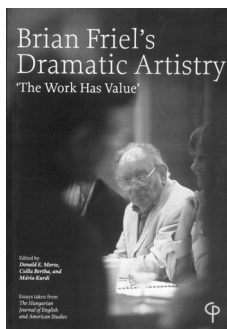
The volume thus gives us a renewed sense of the sheer range and volume of Moore's work, its political engagement, its contemporary relevance and its characteristic thematic preoccupations. Yet the evidence of Alberto Lazaro's essay, fascinatingly revealing as it is about the practices of censorship in Franco's Spain, brings home how little known until very recently Moore has remained to Spanish readers, while it does not appear from Munira Mutran's contribution that Moore is much more widely read in Latin America, for all the words of praise for *Hail and Farewell* she quotes from Borges. Only indifferently honoured in his own country, long unfashionable in Britain, not much translated even in countries where his work might seem of relevance, why does Moore remain in the marginal status of minor writer for all his accomplishments?

One partial answer might be derived from two of the essays in this book that analyse Moore's incurable tendency to re-write. Brendan Fleming comments on an early forgotten serial version of the story 'Mildred Lawson' from 1888, and how it differs from the revised novella that appeared in *Celibates* (1895). He shows the stylistic significance of the first text as an early marker of Moore's desire to break away from Zola's realism and his immediate reaction to the device of the interior monologue pioneered by Edouard Dujardin in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* published just the year before in 1887. But what he does not bring out is how many of the changes to the 1895 version must have been animated by Moore's vituperative revenge on Pearl Craigie, in the wake of an ignominiously ended love-affair, a biographical source revealed in detail in Frazier's biography. Moore constantly revised previous work in the grip of the strong feelings of the moment, often unbalancing the writing as a result. He was equally prone to indulge whatever was the latest in his stylistic passions. Moore notoriously swung from decadence in the manner of Huysmans, through earnest Zolaesque naturalism to

-muted impressionism, and on finally to the fully-blown rhythmic aestheticism of his late style. Christine Huguet in her essay 'Charting an Aesthetic Journey: the Case of *Esther Waters*' shows the remarkable instability of Moore's narrative style in the novel from its first manuscript drafts to the last revision of 1920. One is bound to feel, irritably, that Moore was unable to leave well alone. What is more, though one may agree with Frazier that 'Moore committed himself heart-and-soul to being a great author and to bringing the dignity of art ... to the production of English prose fiction', virtually every one of his books is flawed by his uncertain touch and his personal volatility.

Frazier places Moore with a small group of the most important modernist writers of his time – James, Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf – but points to his uniqueness among them in that 'he never forsook his sense of personal absurdity and self-doubt'. That is absolutely right, and may hold a clue to his continuing (relative) obscurity. Moore's greatest work is *Hail and Farewell*, the book in which he most tellingly and effectively exploits just that sense of personal absurdity in the achievement of his autobiographical memoir. Lucy McDiarmid's brilliant essay 'Face to Face, One on One: George Moore in the Contact Zone' shows the subtlety of the way Moore constantly adjusts the focus in his evocation of his encounters with peasant figures in *Hail and Farewell*, encounters that expose his own gauche uneasiness, as in the hilarious episode where he leaves behind his underwear in a cottage in payment for a bowl of milk. *Hail and Farewell* is a splendidly mocking evocation of the enterprise of the Literary Revival, but nothing is better achieved in it than the mocking self-portrait of the author. The trouble is that it runs to three volumes, and a great chunk of it is devoted to what now feels like an impossibly dated cult of Wagnerism. So it remains, and probably will remain, one of the great unread Irish books, not even making it into Declan Kiberd's *Irish Classics*. *George Moore: Artistic Visions and Literary Voices* is a valuable addition to the still fairly small shelf of Moore scholarship, but it may not be enough to win him the larger readership that the essayists obviously feel he deserves.





**Morse, Donald E., Csilla Bertha, and Mária Kurdi (Eds)**  
***Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry. 'The Work Has Value.'*** Dublin:  
 Carysfort Press, 2006, 342 pp.

Andrea P. Balogh

*Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* features essays selected from *The Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, an internationally-recognised English language academic journal published by the University of Debrecen (Hungary). Of the fifteen essays included in the book, twelve originally appeared in three different Irish Studies special issues of *HJEAS* (Irish Drama Issue (1996), a Special Issue in Honour of Brian Friel at 70 (1999), Irish Issue (2002)), while the concluding interview with Richard Pine, a leading authority on Friel, originally appeared in another Hungarian academic journal, *AnaChronisT* (2003). *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* thus makes visible to an Irish as well as international reading audience the range and riches of Friel scholarship by both Hungarians and non-Hungarian scholars accumulated in *HJEAS*.

In his "Introduction: Transparent, Oblique Voices," Paulo Eduardo Carvalho similarly observes that the uniqueness of *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* lies in this Hungarian dimension, this scholarly "initiative [that] comes from a non-English-speaking country [...] where there are already sufficient grounds for a study on the reception of Friel's plays" (2). The last decade has witnessed both a growing interest in Friel's dramas by Hungarian theatre practitioners and audiences and a gradual strengthening of Irish Studies in Hungary. *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* brings together a broad spectrum of academics and theatre practitioners from Ireland, England, and the United States as well as from non-English speaking countries like "Germany, Italy, Portugal and, naturally, Hungary, thus opening up possibilities, if not for more varied, at least for more alien perspectives on the work of this deservedly celebrated playwright" (3).

Therefore, as Carvalho suggests, *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* is a unique contribution to Friel Studies not solely because the book's origin lies in Hungary but also because of being realized through an international collaboration among Friel experts from different countries. Of the twelve contributors; six are from the English speaking territories dominating Irish Studies while the other six are from non-English speaking European countries where Irish Studies has become more and more powerful in the past two decades. The variety of authors indicates the globalisation of Irish Studies and the operation of a transnational framework for a more and more inclusive international Irish Studies network coordinated by such organizations as the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL). It is enough to think of 2002 and 2003 when,

after IASIL met in Brazil, it moved to Hungary, where the conference was co-hosted by Bertha and Morse at the University of Debrecen.

The power-dynamics of the international network within Hungarian Friel scholarship, however, might also suggest an academic neo-colonization. Whereas the international character of *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* is clearly discernable, it is open to question what aspects would identify the selected essays as unique to Hungarian Friel scholarship. There is only one essay altogether, Márton Mesterházi's "The Hungarian Translator's View of *Translations* and the Problems in Translating it into Hungarian," that introduces a Hungarian dimension to Friel Studies, thus opening a new perspective on Friel's dramatic language. In his introduction, Carvalho assesses Mesterházi's contribution as "one of the less scholarly, but not less stimulating" works (4). While 'scholarly' is generally an elusive term, Mesterházi's essay should be praised for not meeting this category, if 'scholarly' is equalled by using academic jargon, obscure expressions, and a professed objective position. His English text can only indicate that which is palpable in his Hungarian works on Sean O'Casey and on Anglo-Irish dramatists (1983; 1993; 2006.). His style is personal and anecdote-like but his treatment of his subject-matters is thorough, careful and intimate, making his discourse accurate and enjoyable at the same time. In not less clear and illuminating ways, all the other authors approach Friel in accordance with the Western received understanding of Friel's work. Thus the essays featured in *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* suggest partly the hegemony of a Western point of view in *HJEAS* and partly the significance of Friel in our global culture. In this respect, the essays taken from *HJEAS* hardly differ from the ones published elsewhere in the field of Friel scholarship.

The editorial concept of *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* is in line with the recent tendencies in Friel scholarship to guide the readers through Friel's dramatic work (e.g. *A Companion to Brian Friel* edited by Richard Harp and Robert C. Evans (Locust Hill Press, 2002), *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* by Tony Corbet (Liffey Press, 2002), *About Friel: The Playwright and His Work* by Tony Coult (Faber & Faber, 2003), or *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel* edited by Anthony Roche (Cambridge University Press 2006)). *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry*, however, does more than offering an overview of Friel's *oeuvre*. It also provides a portrait of Friel as an artist through the interpretations spotlighting various facets of Friel's dramatic achievements. The essays are arranged into thematic sections. The headings outline, however, not only the typical themes and structural patterns of Friel's dramas but also the issues characteristic of Friel scholarship ("Portrait of the Artist," "Ambiguities of Language," "Psychological and Spiritual Torments," "Ritual and Ceremony," "Disability and Empowerment," "Politics in and of the Theatre"). The key-concepts in the titles of the sections and the essays reflect the hermeneutic framework determining the dominant reading strategy of *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* ("artistry", "work", "value," "artist", "language", "ambiguity", "motif", "meaning", "structure", "characterization"). The majority of the contributions approach Friel by drawing on the assumptions and reading

strategies of the formalist-modernist paradigm. With the exception of Carvalho's essay, "About Some Healthy Intersections: Brian Friel and Field Day," the book's general conception of the author, the work and the relationship between the two coincides with the idea emerging from Leoš's Janaček 'theory of interpretation' in Friel's *Performances*. As Janaček puts it towards the end of the play, "but finally, [...] the work's the thing. That must be insisted on. Everything has got to be ancillary to the work" (Friel 38).

As a result of the formalist reading strategy, *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* provides an insight into the processes of how the interpretations of the Work shape the public image of the Author. Opening the portrayal of Friel's dramatic achievements by essays exploring the figure of the artist in Friel's dramas is arguably a powerful arrangement (Bertha and Morse "'Singing of Human Unsuccess': Brian Friel's Portraits of the Artist," 13-34; Giovanna Tallone, "Restless Wanderers and Great Pretenders: Brian Friel's Fox Melarkey and Frank Hardy," 35-60; Bertha, "Music and Words in Brian Friel's *Performances*," 61-72). The first two essays, on the one hand, highlight Friel's variations on the theme of the artist, and, on the other hand, outline the notion of the artist underlying *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry*. As the essay co-authored by Bertha and Morse shows, Friel's dramatic representations of the artist rework the Romantic 'theory of the poet-genius' and the high-modernist idea of the suffering, failed artist in the everyday context of contemporary Western culture and society. Tallone's comparative reading of *Crystal and Fox* and *Faith Healer* shows Friel's earlier dramatic treatment of the figure of the artist in terms of subjectivity and identity politics while Bertha's discussion of *Performances* demonstrates how this recent play crystallizes Friel's concept of art and, at the same time, explicates the themes underlying Friel's *oeuvre* from the very beginning.

These readings of the artist enable the reader to identify and, in turn, historicize the concepts of art and artist on which the majority of the essays draw in constructing Friel's artistic identity. In "Palimpsest: Two Languages as One in *Translations*," Christopher Murray argues that Friel is a true artist, being essentially apolitical, aesthetic-centred and self-referential (94-96). In the interview conducted by Kurdi, Pine also affirms Friel's cultural value and aesthetic quality in terms of the idea of true art as the one which is detached from any kind of politics and expresses universal truth or eternal human values (314; 323). As Frederic Jameson argues in "Modernism and Imperialism," the notions of the true artist and true art as being apolitical, turning inward and away from social realities, and being committed exclusively to the ideology of the "supreme value of a now autonomous Art," is "part of the baggage of an older modernist ideology" informed by the formalist reading of the modern on "purely stylistic or linguistic" terms (Jameson 45.).

In "About Some Healthy Intersections: Brian Friel and Field Day," Carvalho takes up Jameson's critique of the formalist reading of literature in contesting the formalist construction of Friel through a re-reading of Friel's extra-dramatic discourse in terms of political and social intentions. As he points out, the "renunciation of the individual

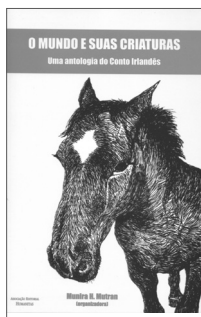
artist's aura of detachment" is generally seen on negative terms concerning its effects on the work's aesthetic quality (252). The apolitical character of Friel's aesthetic is thus rather inherent in the "ideological position" informing the formalist reading and aiming at dehistoricizing art than in Friel's dramatic works.

*Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* manages to show that the meaning of Friel's dramatic work is inexhaustible and thought-provoking. From this perspective, the book achieves the goal to testify to Friel's artistic talent in the Irish as well as in the global context. In another respect, it demonstrates that the essays taken from the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* both individually and as a collection are informative and authoritative contributions to Friel scholarship, thus indicating the value of the work done in Hungary in the field of Irish Studies. The book is useful for anyone interested in Friel's *oeuvre* or in Friel Studies.

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**Mutran, Munira H. (Org.), *O Mundo e suas Criaturas. Uma Antologia do Conto Irlandês*. São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas, 309 pp.**

Maureen Murphy

*O Mundo e Suas Criaturas. Uma antologia do Conto Irlandês* (The World and its Creatures. An Anthology of Irish Stories) is one of the translation initiatives that has emerged from the colaboração amigável between students and graduates of the University of São Paulo Irish Studies program and ABRAPUI Irish Studies colleagues. These collaborations have produced other anthologies: *Guirlanda de histórias: Antologia do Conto Irlandês* (1996), annual Bloomsday programs that have involved multilingual readings of *Ulysses* and especially the *ABEI Journal*. The *Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* feature that presents multiple translations of Irish texts.

The reader is neither surprised that editor Munira H. Mutran, an animal lover herself, proposed a collection on the theme nor that she has provided “Nota sobre *O Mundo e suas Criaturas*,” a postscript with an historical and literary context for her theme and that she has selected stories that are informed by their place in the writers’ oeuvre, by their literary value, and by their variety of narrative conventions and styles. The focus of the collection is a consideration of the relationship between humans and animals, narratives that could complement studies of the affective relationship between animals and people like *Melancholia’s Dog. Reflection on our Animal Kinship* (2006).

Mutran traces the long presence of animals in Irish literature. The Irish epic *Táin Bó Cualigne* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley) was fought over a brown bull. Poems of the Early Christian era feature such creatures as blackbird (“The Blackbird by Loch Neagh”) and a cat hunting mice in the ninth century (“Pangur Ban”), and a poem from fifteenth century *Duanaire Finn* describing a cage used for trapping birds. There is a visual counterpart to “Pangur Ban” in the cat and mice that appear in the Chi-Rho page of the Book of Kells. (Mutran provides her own visual gallery) “O Mundo e suas Criaturas na Arte” to complement her *O Mundo* texts.

Mutran points out that animals are well represented in the world’s mythology and in every genre of its literatures from an Old Testament Psalm (#8) to Donne’s flea, Blake’s tiger and lamb, Poe’s raven and Yeats’s swan. She identifies the creatures of modern Irish literature beyond those in the short stories, its oral tradition: the creatures of the international tale types that have been collected by Irish folklorists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as animals who roam the poems of contemporary poets such as Moya Cannon, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. To Mutran’s mention of Heaney’s “St. Kevin

and the Blackbird “ as an example of inter-species literature, one might add the ultimate inter-species relationships: Ní Chuilleanáin’s “The Girl who Married the Reindeer” and Ní Dhomhnaill’s “Parthenogen,” poems based on Irish legends of women with animal spouses or seal women with human husbands.

Liam O’Flaherty is the most represented writer with eight stories: “O Congro” (“The Conger Eel”), “Os Três Carneirinhos” (“Three Lambs”), “Esporte: Matar” (Sport: The Kill), “O Coelho Preto” (“The Black Rabbit”), “A Morte de Vaca” (“The Cow’s Death”), “O Gato Preto” (“The Black Cat”), “A Tola Borboleta” (“The Foolish Butterfly”) and “O Primeiro Vôo” (“His First Flight”). While this reader prefers the stories of Aran life among them “Spring Sowing,” “Poor People,” “Going into Exile,” and “The Touch,” many critics prefer the simplicity and the clarity of the animal stories. O’Flaherty himself called “The Cow’s Death” “the best thing I have done.” For Mutran, the story provides parallel between human and animal life that provide metaphors for the situation of our existence. O’Flaherty also contrasts the empathy of the woman for the cow “for she too was a mother” with the response of the men who drive the cow away, seize the stillborn calf and drags it away.

The story is of further interest to this collection for its own translation history. O’Flaherty published the story first in English in *The New Statesman* (June 30, 1923); two years later he translated the story into an Irish version, “Bás na Bó,” for *Fáinne an Lae* (July 18, 1925). The story was included in O’Flaherty’s collection *Dúil* (1952) which has become a canonical text for literature in the Irish language. The Irish versions are more focused, have less repetitions and more precise diction. The anthropomorphic elements of the story: the cow wondering where the trail went and her stupidity are missing in the Irish version. In “Bás na Bó” the cow reacts to her missing calf with a mother’s instinct; she moves clumsily but never stupidly. Mail Marques de Azevedo’s translation of “The Cow’s Death” and Heleno Godoy’s translation of an episode from *The Poor Mouth* are interesting for the way that, occasionally, a Portuguese word is an interstice between the English and Irish texts: “errante” is closer to the sense of “a muc cheachráin” than the simple “rambling” (*Poor Mouth* ).

Brazilian readers of *O Mundo* might be interested to know the basis of Flann O’Brien’s satire in “O Dia em que Nosso Porco Desapareceu.” (The novel *An Béal Bocht* was published in 1941; its English translation *The Poor Mouth* appeared in 1973.) The English government did not have a cash scheme to promote English; they used the National Schools where the language of instruction was English, but the Irish government had such a capitalization scheme for Irish speaking families. There are stories of children shuttled to and fro so they could, like the piglets, increase the population of little Irish speakers in a household. (One night I witnessed children materialize in a childless household.) The “porco errante” satirizes the folklorists and linguists who went to Irish-speaking regions to record local dialects and collect oral tradition and who particularly sought the exotic.

Mutran has organized her stories by elements: earth, water and air. “A Morte da Vaca” and “O Dia em que Nosso Porco Desapareceu” are grounded in the Irish countryside. Seán Ó Faoláin’s “A Truta,” one of the water stories, is a coming of age story that tenderly describes the tender concern of a nine year old girl for a trout that has been trapped in a hole in a rock at the side of the road. At the end of the story, the girl rejects her mother’s morality story about the fish, and she releases it in the river. Embedded in the story are the traditional beliefs about the trout’s association with magic and wisdom and captive stories of trout in wells.

In Oscar Wilde’s symbolic “O Rouxinol e a Rosa,” the first of the stories of the creatures of the air, it is the nightingale, not the student or indeed his beloved, that understands the mystery of love. The theme of Wilde’s story appears again in his poem “Humanidad.” In this as in the other stories of *O Mundo* the writer appreciates what

Seán O’Faoláin called in *The Short Story-a Study in Pleasure* “de vôo da imaginação,” an imaginative flight which he judged to be “único teste da grandeza de um conto.”

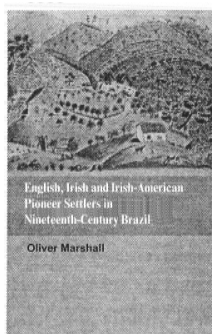
*O Mundo* concludes appropriately enough with Maria Helena Kopschitz’s translation of Samuel Beckett’s “Pássaro Passa” translation of Samuel Beckett’s surreal “Afar a Bird” from his *Collected Short Prose*. While Beckett has been widely translated by Brazilians from French as well as English, Maria Helena Kopschitz’s Beckett translations, some done as collaborations with the late poet and translator Haroldo de Campos have been pioneering contributions to Beckett Studies in Brazil. (*ABEI Journal* No. 8 is dedicated to Dr. Kopschitz in recognition of her work for Irish Studies.)

“Afar a Bird” appeared first as one of Beckett’s: short *foirades* (fizzles or farts), but critics like Kumiko Kiuchi see the writer’s bird songs as functioning as an intermediary between human and non-human language, between sound and music. Taking the point, in 1981, the Polish musician Tomasz Sikorski’s composition “Afar a Bird,” *W Dali Ptak* (1981), scored for “three voices”: a reciter (whispering), a clavichord and a pre-recorded keyboard.

Like translation that mediates between the borders of languages, Munira H. Mutran’s collection *O Mundo e suas Criaturas* demonstrates the rich reading that an encounter between Portuguese translators and English texts can produce, an encounter enriched by the metaphor between human and non-human lives and relationships.

The translators, respectful of the language and culture of the original texts, have provided a collection that is an interesting introduction to Irish literature and a valuable collection of readings for students.





**Marshall, Oliver. *English, Irish and Irish-American Letters in Nineteenth-Century Brasil*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.**

**Sandra Guardini T. Vasconcelos**

In spite of the pre-eminent role played by Great Britain in Brazilian political and economic affairs in the nineteenth-century, which has been the object of attention of many scholars, few are the studies which have examined in more detail aspects of the history of British communities in Brazil. Of course, one must not forget Gilberto Freyre's ground-breaking work on the British influence on Brazilian life, landscape and culture (1948); José Antonio Gonsalves de Mello's *Ingleses em Pernambuco* (1972); Francisco Riopardense de Macedo's *Ingleses no Rio Grande do Sul* (1975) or, more recently, Louise Guenther's study of a British merchant community in Bahia (2004), just to mention a few. Oliver Marshall's *English, Irish and Irish-American Settlers in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* [Centre for Brazilian Studies, University of Oxford, 2005] comes, therefore, as a most welcome addition to this list, as one more step towards exploring new territories in the investigation of migration policies and of the British presence in nineteenth-century Brazil.

Relying on abundant documentation and a wealth of diverse sources and materials – reports, travel books, diaries, letters, petitions, depositions, newspapers and periodicals –, the book offers a very interesting view on the issue of immigration, discussing how promises of cheap land, job opportunities and the possibility of economic independence attracted hundreds of English and Irish immigrants to work on the agricultural settlement schemes set by the Brazilian government in the second half of the nineteenth century. A more general introduction focussing on the agricultural colonization in Brazil between 1808 and 1867 (Part II) is followed by specific chapters about the Irish and Irish-Americans and the English, recreating the circumstances which made these people decide to leave their homeland and try a new life abroad.

Part III deals specifically with the Irish Diaspora and how a “New Ireland” was formed in Brazil, with Irish workers being practically expelled from New York City or the English Midlands due to the appalling living and working conditions which they faced in these locations. As the outcasts of British capitalism and Victorian Britain, the Irish were a dispossessed, rejected and despised community and it is not surprising that they were an easy target for the Brazilian government's propaganda. Being a Catholic country, where the Irish immigrants would enjoy religious freedom, Brazil was constructed as a dream new homeland, where wages would be higher, land plentiful and life much cheaper.

The recruitment of English immigrants is examined in Part IV, preceded by an overall view of the situation of the agricultural labourers in mid-Victorian England, with their customary fare of low wages, want and poor living conditions. Understandably, “these white slaves of England”, as a contemporary defined them, were convinced to confront “the passage” not only by the descriptions of a beautiful, attractive and welcoming country but also by the favourable testimonials of friends and relatives who had already taken the plunge. The stark reality of the pioneering venture was, however, one of appalling conditions and personal suffering.

The image of Brazil as a heaven, where a life of happiness awaited those who had been courageous enough to cross the Atlantic, would prove to be far from true once these pioneer settlers reached their final destination, one of the state agricultural colonies in the south of the country [mainly Colônia Príncipe Dom Pedro, in Santa Catarina; Assunguy, in Paraná; and Cananéia, in São Paulo]. Maladministration, insufficient land or financial support, unsuitable settlements, and the “whims of nature” were some of the hardships they encountered in a country they knew very little and had fantasized a lot about.

In many instances, Marshall vividly reconstructs scenes which give the narrative a special touch and flavour, once the reader can almost visualise, for example, the immigrants’ departure from Wednesbury’s London and North Western Railway Station, the union meetings organised to present Brazil as a possible destination for the villagers of rural Warwickshire, or the reception the immigrants on board the steamer *Lusitania* got in Rio de Janeiro and their surprise at what they saw there. The controversies over emigrating to Brazil and the conflicting views of those involved in the venture – promoters and agents on one side and immigrants on the other – add to the overall picture and offer the reader an insight into the battle of arguments that waged at the time, depending on the role each individual played in the process.

The reasons and explanations for the almost complete failure of the southern state colonies in Brazil are explored in the conclusion (Part V), where the confrontation of different points of view held by different parties reveals how the unsuitability of the immigrants themselves for these land settlement schemes, greedy agents, inadequate planning, poor central and local government administration, and mounting debt all led to what many described as a disaster, with people dying or starving and being reduced to rags, having to be repatriated back to England.

Vestiges of the presence of those hundreds of English, Irish and Irish-American immigrants are hard to trace, since they have not left such clear and impressive imprints as the British expatriate communities of Rio de Janeiro or Bahia, whose power and influence can be measured through their participation in the world of Brazilian politics, trade and cultural life. Of the few *colonos* who remained in Brazil Marshall gives final notice, by telling us about their descendants, very few of whom have any knowledge of or show any interest in their origins.

The book closes with three appendices, of which the third is the most interesting, for it includes a “partial listing of British *colonos*”, with, among other pieces of

information, names, occupations, places of origin, colonies and last known destinations. Behind the anonymous term “immigrant”, with which they are normally referred to in histories, these are shown to be real people, whose dreams of a better life made them cross the Atlantic, face the unknown, and venture into a completely new world. For each of the names on the list, one can imagine hopes, expectations, a life of toil and lost illusions.

*English, Irish and Irish-American Settlers in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* shows the plight of those hundreds of people in their search for a new life, a destiny shared by immigrants of other nationalities who had also been enticed to come to the tropics, mostly landless, rural labourers driven away from their homeland by poverty, deprivation and very harsh working and living conditions. It also reveals how recruitment schemes and practices, promotional materials and false promises created a world of expectations that would eventually end in cultural shock and frustration. The land of opportunity very frequently proved to be an everyday struggle against the climate (heat, torrential rains), poor housing, strange customs, and an experience of strain and endurance. The image of the fine country where “anything will grow if you put it in the ground” [cf. letter quoted by OM] is shattered by the harsh reality of human failings, cultural difference and governmental incompetence.

Even if these groups were too busy trying to cope with all sorts of difficulties and had to dedicate too much of their time and effort to survive, one would have wished to read more about how these families organised their private lives or daily activities, if they had any social life, apart from work, any reading habits (those who were not illiterate)... This may be an unjust demand on such a rich book, and most probably one impossible to meet, in view of the documentation available, but by comparison to the information about the ways of living of the other British communities in Brazil, one can only wonder how these people’s everyday life was actually lived.

The striking differences, however, between the Rio and Bahia British communities examined by Freyre and Guenther respectively and those Marshall discusses in his work cannot escape the attentive reader. Incommensurably more powerful and influential than their fellow-citizens, the former had full access to the world of politics, commerce and culture and to the spheres where decisions were made, and it is only too obvious that their presence should be strongly felt in Brazilian social, political and cultural life. Not so with the poor, illiterate and helpless families and individuals who had few resources rather than their workforce. In spite of ethnic and cultural differences, which are always absolutely central and should never be left aside in our examination of these migratory processes, what one confirms here, by comparing the two experiences – of those who have and those who have not –, is that class issues still deserve serious consideration.







**Praga Terente, Inés (Ed) *La novela irlandesa del siglo XX*  
Barcelona: PPU, 2005. 272pp.**

David Clark

The field of Irish Studies is currently going through a period of quite incredible fruitfulness in Spain. It is surprising, perhaps, to contemplate the sheer amount of scholarship on Irish matters appearing from a variety of different Spanish universities. One of the most important figures in this boom is the editor and co-author of the volume under discussion, Inés Praga Terente who, from her Chair in Humanities at the University of Burgos, has founded the Spanish Association of Irish Studies and has consistently encouraged young scholars from a number of institutions in the different regions of Spain to delve into the field.

This volume, as the title suggests, presents a refreshing study of the Irish novel in the twentieth century. Written in Spanish, its accessibility for readers in Spain and in other Spanish-speaking countries is undeniable, and the volume provides a wonderful starting point for students wishing to broaden their knowledge on the subject.

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which examines a specific area of the Irish novel in the last century. Chapter One, written by Praga herself, is entitled “About the Irish Novel: Notes towards a Tradition” and gives a general overview of the history of the novel in Ireland. Praga Terente, supporting the views of one of Ireland’s most interesting contemporary writers, Dermot Bolger, claims that the novel has now overtaken the short story as constituting the “national art form” in contemporary Ireland. Recognising the enormity of the shadow cast by Joyce, the author takes the reader painlessly through the diversity and quantity of Irish long fiction in the twentieth century with an admirable sense of tact and of taste, resuscitating the importance of often unrecognised early writers such as Eimar O’Duffy and Mervyn Wall, whilst recognising the status deserved, but so grudgingly awarded, to James Stephens. Her analysis of contemporary writers is just and illuminating – nobody is overstated, and few writers are missing.

The second chapter, by Mará Amor Barros Del Río, under the title “To Name the Unnameable: Women and Literature in Ireland” reviews the situation of women’s fiction in the island. Whilst acknowledging the early predominance of Ascendancy writers in the woman’s novel in Ireland, Barros Del Río links the Anglo-Irish tradition to the contemporary novel in that there exists a common concern in “the presentation of the female psyche subjected to social force”. Accepting J.M. Cahalan’s grouping of Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Lavin, Kate O’Brien, Maura Laverty and Molly Keane as “a literary generation”, the writer stresses the importance of a novel like Bowen’s *The Last*

*September*, in which “the knot of loyalties which members of her social class felt towards Ireland and England” are stretched to limits which, like Kate O’Brien in her treatment of the Catholic middle-classes are based on an intensity of personal experience and the public revelation of the personal consciousness. Barros Del Río cleverly equates the generation of writers which came to the fore in the early 1960’s – Julia O’Faolain, Jennifer Johnston and Edna O’Brien – with Judith, the elderly protagonist of Julia O’Faolain’s *No Country for Young Men* because, like Judith, they can be seen to be “re-writing multiple sub-histories, or marginal histories which had not before that time been related”. Contemporary writers are covered with competence and skill, although one perhaps misses reference to such magnificent writers as Anne Enright and Anne Haverty, as well as the rising star of contemporary Irish narrative, Lia Mills.

Leonardo Pérez García is responsible for chapter three, “Representations of Dublin in the Contemporary Irish Novel”. In this thoughtful essay, Pérez García provides a fascinating journey through twentieth-century Dublin as reflected in its narrative. For the author, the Dublin of the earlier years of the century retains the characteristics of the “knowable community” in which the individual has an identifiable place and accepts an identifiable role. Thus the characters that haunt the worlds of Joyce and Stephens, for example, are in a sense rural urbanites, inhabiting a community which is without any intrinsic hostility and which is, to all intents and purposes, generally protective. This contrasts with the Dublin of the mid to late twentieth century – a city where the new housing estates in the North and South of the city are linked, correctly or not, with the collapse of the traditional values which the Church and State struggled to maintain. Pérez García gives a detailed analysis of novelists such as Ardal O’Hanlon, Bolger and Val Murkens before centring his discussion on the works of Roddy Doyle.

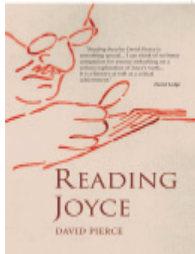
Chapter Four is the only chapter in the book which deals specifically with an individual writer. “A Treasury of Irish Memories: Secrets and Lies in the Novels of Patrick McCabe”, written by Ana Esther Rubio Amigo, provides an analysis of the work of the “bad boy” of contemporary Irish fiction, an analysis which concentrates mainly on *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dead School* and *Breakfast on Pluto*. It is, undeniably, an extremely risky affair to single out any individual writer for such special treatment, and I am sure that many readers will not agree with the choice of McCabe. Why not McGahern? Banville? Or Colm Tóibín? Personally, I defend the choice of McCabe, whose sheer subversion of the traditions of “Irishness” must be seen as a breath of fresh air in a world of Irish theme pubs and green wigs on St Patrick’s day. It is precisely this air of subversion which Rubio Amigo celebrates in this chapter. McCabe holds “iconoclastic views towards the cultural symbols of postcolonial Ireland” which he uses to “revise the most significant aspects of the recent history of Ireland”. The author, according to Rubio Amigo, reflects “the effects of the clash between tradition and progress” while at the same time analysing “the pressure exerted on the subject by the community” and the futility of traditional mythical structures.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, is again written by the General Editor, Professor Praga Terente, and is entitled “The Novel in the North”. Here Praga Terente convincingly argues in favour of a separate treatment for the novel from the North without implying any ideological reasoning behind such a decision. The Troubles are obviously central to her discourse, but the writer also stresses the fact that the “bad press” to which the city of Belfast (and the North in general) has been submitted is nothing new, predating not only the Troubles but, in fact, the twentieth century itself. Praga Terente, following A. Bradley, makes some interesting comments with reference to the different attitudes towards place in the writings of authors from both communities in the North. For Catholic writers, “place” is generally celebrated in atavistic terms, whereas for Protestant authors “place” often responds to a sense of alienation, and hence the tendency towards the Gothic. Thus the atavism of the early Michael McLaverty can be contrasted with the Gothic decadence of Sam Hanna Bell. Belfast, like Joyce’s Dublin, is for many writers from the North, a city of paralysis, and Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* inhabits the same spiritual and geographical territory as that which later writers such as Robert McLiam Wilson, Eoin McNamee and Glenn Patterson would use. Deirdre Madden is afforded her just role in the pantheon of great contemporary writers from the North, as are Bernard MacLaverty and Linda Anderson. Interestingly, perhaps, Praga Terente justly praises Mary Beckett’s *Give them Stones* but does not mention Anna Burns’ masterful *No Bones*, perhaps one of the most poignant studies of the Troubles to appear in any novel.

*La novela irlandesa del siglo XX* is, in conclusion, a most welcome addition to the steadily growing Spanish-language contribution to Irish Studies. The bibliography provided in the book is extensive without losing a sense of perspective, and the scale of Praga Terente’s scholarship (and that of her collaborators) is amply demonstrated by the constant reference to existing materials in the field. Particularly illuminating, perhaps, is the amount of Spanish bibliography cited by the authors. As well as being a generous gesture towards Spanish scholars working in the field, this also bears testimony to the flourishing status of Irish Studies in Spain today. This volume provides the raw material for the formation and training of new generations of students of Irish literature, as well as supplying an intelligent and reliable reference work for Spanish speakers working in the field of Irish Studies.



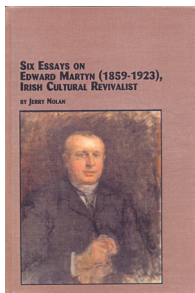
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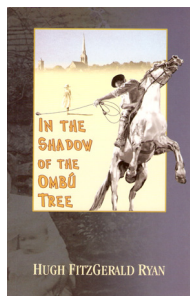
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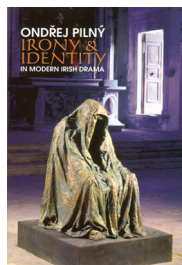
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