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Introduction

This special issue is part of the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Irish Studies at University of São Paulo (USP). The fact that the *ABEI Newsletter*, published from 1989 till 1998, gave birth to the *ABEI Journal*, now in its seventh issue, makes us very proud. It reflects the support of colleagues and scholars abroad and in Brazil that we have received throughout this quarter-century.

The present volume pays homage to A. Norman Jeffares, whose recent death has deprived the Irish Studies community of a figure of major importance. At our request, he had kindly sent this article on Iseult to be reprinted with the agreement of David Coakley and Mary O'Doherty, the editors of *Borderlands: Essays of Literature and Medicine in Honour of J.B. Lyons*. *ABEI Journal* No. 7 also includes articles on drama, fiction, cultural intersections, Juan José Delaney's first play previously unpublished and book reviews.

The Postgraduate Course in Irish Studies, the only one of its kind in Brazil, took in its first students in 1980. Since then its production tally includes a postdoctoral thesis, eleven PhDs and nine MAs. Many of these postgraduates have gone on to become multipliers of Irish Literature in English in their own work at different Brazilian Institutions. These academic activities have resulted in various publications such as theses and dissertations in book form and translations into Portuguese of Irish short stories, plays and poems, which are listed here in the section Academic Production in Brazil.

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, through the Cultural Relations Committee, has been supporting this Programme since 1986 with donations of books and by funding the visits of Irish lecturers to give postgraduate courses at USP and other Brazilian universities. Thus, we have been privileged to receive Maurice Harmon (UCD), Terence Brown (TCD), Nicholas Grene (TCD), Declan Kiberd (UCD), Terence Dolan (UCD), Patrick Sheeran (NUI-Galway), David Norris (TCD) and Margaret Kelleher (NUI-Maynooth). Other academic exchanges have enabled us to receive visits from David Harkness, Ronald Buchanan and John Cronin from Queen's University Belfast; Richard Allen Cave and Ann Varty from Royal Holloway College; Maureen Murphy (Hofstra University, NY), James Doan (Nova Southeastern University), Heinz Kosok (Wuppertal University) and Dawn Duncan (Concordia College, USA).

In 1988 The Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI) was founded by professors and students of the Programme. This Association published 13 Newsletters and the *ABEI Journal*. It has organised the Bloomsday celebrations since 1988, which have become a feature of the cultural and social calendar in São Paulo, with presentations of Irish plays, poetry and music for the general public.

The University of São Paulo received the state visits of President Mary Robinson in 1994, the Taoiseach Mr. Bernie Ahern in 2001 and President Mary McAleese in 2004, thus confirming the significance of the research done on Irish Studies at the university.

In July 2002, it hosted the Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL), with the support of Brazilian and Irish government funding agencies. The opening ceremony was presided over by the first Irish Ambassador in Brazil Mr. Martin Grene. Among the writers that honoured us with their visit along the years were Paul Durcan, John Banville, Michael Longley and Billy Roche.

As a sign of our deepest gratitude, this issue is dedicated to all those who have been part of this challenging project of bringing the cultures of Ireland and Brazil closer together.



Museu Paulista USP (Photograph by Helio Nobre).

Biography



Iseult *

A. Norman Jeffares

Abstract: *Who, you may well ask, was this woman who, within the three years between 1917 and 1920, had the experience of being proposed to by W. B. Yeats, seduced by Ezra Pound, pursued by Lennox Robinson and married to Francis Stuart? In the process of editing her letters to W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound with her granddaughter Christina Bridgwater and her mother's granddaughter Anna MacBride White, I have had to form a picture of her life for myself, not yet complete, for there is still much to read, to discover. This essay is, then, a progress report upon one aspect of her life, her relationship with W. B. Yeats, founded upon his letters, upon her letters to him, her journals in French and English and her literary work, published and unpublished. It will give an account of her childhood, her becoming a young woman, her two years in London, and the part Yeats played in the early days of her marriage.*

Iseult in France

Iseult's mother was Maud Gonne, famously celebrated in W. B. Yeats's poetry. He fell in love with her after their first meeting in 1889, they shared a desire for Ireland to be independent, his a cultural aim, hers a political. Whereas she was independent and well-to-do, he lived at home, had no money and was struggling to make his way in the literary world. Despite doubts as to the kind of wife she would make for a student, as he then saw himself, he plucked up the courage to propose to her in 1891. She refused him, as she did on later occasions, saying that they should remain friends and he would go on writing lovely poems to her. He did. And he went on doing so, even after he learned about the realities of her life in 1898, the year of their strange platonic mystic marriage.

He learned she had had two children by Lucien Millevoye, a well-connected French politician and journalist, with whom she shared a dislike of England. Their first child, a boy, Georges Sylvére, died of meningitis at the age of nineteen and half months in 1891, their second, Iseult, was conceived on his tomb in the mausoleum built in his memory at Samois – Maud then believed in reincarnation – and was born in 1894.

Maud kept Iseult's existence well concealed, confined to France, where she lived in Maud's various homes. Maud did not acknowledge her as her daughter, calling her "a charming girl I had adopted" and later her "adopted niece" (she alluded to her

thus to me when Iseult was over 50). Iseult was not allowed to call Maud “mother” but addressed her as “Moura”.

The relationship between Maud and Millevoye if passionate was not easy. He reneged on his promise to divorce his wife (from whom he was separated) and marry Maud, possibly keeping his marriage in being for the sake of his legitimate son Henri. He infuriated Maud in 1890 by appearing in Donegal, where she was campaigning on behalf of evicted tenants, and falling ill there. Public knowledge of her liaison with a married man, her having an illegitimate child, would have destroyed her social position, especially her political career in Ireland. The affair ended in 1900 when she discovered that he had a new mistress, a café singer who shared his desire for the return of Alsace Lorraine to France. Maud’s political philosophy was fundamentally different from Millevoye’s; his French nationalism was counter-revolutionary, her Irish nationalism extremely revolutionary.

Her self-imposed political activity, her journalism and inflammatory oratory as well as secret work for the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) often kept Maud away from France and Iseult. She had little time for domestic life when her energies focussed on the plight of the evicted, the famine-struck, the imprisoned and the poor in Ireland. Iseult’s childhood was shaped by this, but it was not so different from Maud’s upbringing, for after their mother died Maud and her sister Kathleen were put in charge of a nurse and a series of governesses in Dublin, London and the south of France. Their lives were punctuated by visits from their father, a dashing soldier, who served in Ireland and twice in India, was an attaché in Vienna and in St. Petersburg before becoming Assistant Adjutant-General in Ireland, where he died of typhoid in 1886 at the age of 56. Once she inherited her money Maud travelled widely, renting an apartment in Paris.

She did not take Iseult with her on her travels. Scandal had to be avoided, but in view of her own unsettled upbringing Maud can hardly have considered Iseult unduly deprived of parental attention. She lived in Maud’s new residence in Paris, now in the Avenue d’Eylau and added to by a house in Semois-sur-Seine, the households put in charge of an elderly woman, Madame de Bourbonne.

In 1900 Iseult met her cousins, the children of Maud’s sister Kathleen Pilcher, in Brittany, and formed a close friendship with Thora. Maud wrote to Yeats the next year to say Iseult had “passed first in nearly every subject”. She had, however, overtaxed herself, and collapsed when Maud brought her to Switzerland. A visiting French doctor, pronouncing one of her lungs affected, and describing her as “fearfully delicate”, looked after her well there. But Iseult’s health continued to cause anxiety. Maud’s mother had died of tuberculosis; Maud’s potential career as an actress had been cut short by haemorrhaging of her lungs; and Millevoye also had weak lungs – he and Maud had met at Royat while recuperating.

In 1902, Eileen Wilson joined the family; she was 16, Maud’s half sister, an illegitimate daughter of Colonel Gonne born at the same time as his death. Maud respected her father’s dying wishes. Despite the objections of her guardian, she provided for Eileen’s

mother, subsequently finding her a post as governess with a Russian family, and placing Eileen in charge of "Bowie", Mary Anne Meredith, the nurse who had brought up Maud and Kathleen. Bowie's death was the reason for Eileen's arrival in France. Iseult did not get on well with her. The girls were now in charge of Iseult's godmother, Madame Suzanne Foccart, who, when the convent at Laval was secularised, founded an association for the nuns to specialise in embroidery. Iseult's private comments on Madame Foccart were sharp.

After Iseult's baptism in 1902 she had a holiday with one of Maud's friends, who persuaded Maud to buy a house at Colleville, "Les Mouettes", an ugly, but commodious house on the edge of the shore line. Iseult, back at Laval, was horrified when Maud announced her intention of marrying John MacBride. An Irish nationalist hero, he had fought against Britain in the Boer war in the Irish Brigade, and arrived in Paris, to avoid the likelihood of being arrested for treason if he returned to the United Kingdom. Maud had gone to help him in America where his lecture tour was going badly. He proposed to her there, she refused him, but now, the unexpected news of her sudden intention of marrying him caused consternation among her friends as well as his, and horrified his family. Yeats (who had himself proposed to her only recently) wrote her impassioned letters telling her not only would she destroy her own soul but would lose political credibility in Ireland, reminding her of their spiritual marriage. Iseult took the news badly, as Maud remembered 20 years later, giving a sad but somewhat insensitive account of this:

She was such a beautiful and such a strangely wise child. She had cried when I told her I was getting married to MacBride and said she hated MacBride. I told her I would send her lovely things from Spain where we were going for our honeymoon, but she was not consoled. Canon Dissard, of whom she was very fond, was delighted about my marriage and told her we would have a great time when I returned and he would give a banquet in our honour in his little house outside the convent gate and she would be dressed as a queen on our return. She had only cried the louder and clung to me, and Sister Catherine had to drag her away.

The story became sadder still once MacBride joined the family, his excessive drinking soon in evidence. Maud cut short their honeymoon in Spain, the location chosen to facilitate a daring plot to assassinate Edward VII on his visit to Gibraltar. Maud was acting as a decoy to draw off the secret service men who were trailing them, but the plan was abandoned at the time MacBride was meant to carry it out because of his drunkenness. Yeats, relaying rumours of MacBride's drinking to Lady Gregory, called this "the last touch of tragedy".

Worse was to come after the family spent their first holiday at Colleville, where Iseult "more beautiful and wild and fairylike than ever", would have fascinated Yeats, Maud told him, "by her wildness and originality, there is nothing banal about her". Maud had now found a house in Paris, 13 rue de Passy, where Jean Seaghan

(later known as Seán, which name will subsequently be used here) was born on 26 January 1904.

MacBride's behaviour became increasingly distressing. He terrorised the women in the house: he exposed himself to Iseult; his behaviour with Eileen Wilson was described as indecent. (He was accused of raping her). She was married to his brother Joseph on 3 August 1904. Maud, physically assaulted by him and continually horrified by his drunkenness, began divorce proceedings in February 1905. She managed to keep Iseult out of testifying, recording how "she used to wake at night screaming that MacBride 'with his eyes of an assassin' was running after her". Iseult was afraid to go upstairs alone after dark in case he was hiding and would pursue her. The divorce case dragged on till 1906, Maud realising on a visit to Ireland that year how true Yeats's prophecies had been when she was hissed at a performance in the Abbey Theatre.

After Seán's birth Iseult had become part of a unit, "the children". Once at the Lycée in Paris, however, she saw more of Maud, who had substituted painting for politics. Iseult lacked her mother's restless, often hectic energy (possibly owed to her tubercular constitution) often seeming lackadaisical, perhaps having outgrown her physical resilience.

Maud's letters to Yeats mention Iseult more frequently now. Her drawing of Iseult at eleven justifies her comments on her daughter's beauty; she praised her imagination, her appreciation of art, her blend of child and tomboy, but she worried about her laziness at the Lycée. Iseult hated, Maud said, the thought of working hard at anything and wouldn't learn what didn't interest her.

Iseult's own first letter to Yeats thanked him for a present of Andrew Lang's *Tales of Troy and Greece* (1907). Maud began to think Iseult might be a writer, telling Yeats that she was trying her hand at translating Ella Young's Irish legends into French. Iseult began a *Journal* in French in January 1911, which reveals something of her intellectual interests, her strong sense of being pulled between Christianity and paganism. (Maud had earlier told Yeats she knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* better than her prayer book.). Her attractive sense of humour emerges too in accounts of conversations with her cousin Thora, of flirtations, of kissing sessions with her cousin Toby, of teasing Madame Dangien (who was now running the house and helping Iseult with her school homework), Madame Foccart and Barry Delaney, a pious and bigoted Irish journalist who acted as Maud's secretary, with ideas on marriage and love that she knew would outrage them. She was reading a nicely balanced mixture of Plato and Pindar, Marcus Aurelius and St. John of the Cross. We know from her letters to Yeats that by 1917 her reading included Loyola, Sir Thomas Browne, Shelley, Keats, Walter Pater, Nietzsche, Voltaire, Huysmans, d'Annunzio, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Rudolf Steiner. The *Journal* contains various stories, dialogues, and "The Desire", a piece of "oily elucidations as Malya would say which I prefer to call philosophic study."

Iseult had proposed marriage to Yeats in a joking way when she was 15, to be rejected similarly on the grounds that there was too much Mars in her horoscope. Had

she realised the relationship between Yeats and her mother was reverting to their former friendship? Their “spiritual marriage” had been succeeded by a brief sexual relationship in 1908, Maud saying she belonged more to him in renunciation. (He began a primarily physical affair with Mabel Dickinson in 1908 that lasted until 1913). However, he went to Colleville in 1910 and 1912 and their correspondence continued, Maud telling him in 1912 that the thunderclap of Iseult’s growing up hadn’t yet arrived. She was wrong. Apart from the flirtation with Toby Pilcher which had caused family scenes when she was in London in 1913, in France there had been verses from M. Pelletier, and flattering attention from Jean Malya, whose *La Litterature Irlandaise* was published in 1913. More intense was a friendship with Divabrata Mukerjee, who had studied at Calcutta, Exeter and Cambridge, whose translation of Tagore’s *The Post Office* was staged at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1913. That year Iseult visited her aunt Kathleen in London and Yeats introduced her to Tagore, advising her to learn Bengali. Other friends of his admired her beauty, Lady Cunard praising her complexion, Arthur Symons thinking her strangely exotic. Yeats still saw her avuncularly as a child, his earlier poems to her “To a Child Dancing in the Wind”, (written in 1910/ 12) and “Two Years Later” (written in December 1912 or 1913), based on his visits to Colleville, emphasising her unselfconscious innocence.

After the war broke out the Tagore translations were abandoned, Mukerjee, who had been teaching Bengali to Iseult and her friend Christiane Cherfils, going back to India, having fallen in love with Iseult (which, Maud commented, had complicated things a bit). Perhaps because of this news Yeats may have written “To a Young Girl”, in May 1915, which, in effect, suggests Iseult’s awakening into sexuality, though in “Presences”, written seven months later, she is still a child “That never looked upon man with desire”.

Iseult’s health continued to worry Maud, whose letters transmitted her anxieties to Yeats. Her heart had been pronounced weak, she had been told to give up smoking, eat meat and keep her windows open, “all of which she refuses to do”. From being a wartime nursing assistant she became a secretary to an aviation committee in Paris, a post found for her by her father. During a visit to Maud’s cousin May Bertie Clay in London in 1916 Yeats introduced her to Ezra and Dorothy Pound, brought her to Sir William Rothenstein to have her portrait painted, discussed literature with her, lent her books and talked about how her illegitimacy affected her. Though now known as Iseult Gonne, she did not want to have to supply details of her parentage for passport or other purposes, a matter she alluded in letters to him. She also told him that her father, whom she used to visit regularly to receive her “pocket money” had infuriated her by suggesting she should become an Aspasia, the cultured mistress of some important men. Yeats wrote wistfully to Lady Gregory that Iseult made him sad, for he thought that if his life had been normal, he might have had a daughter of her age. This meant, he supposed, that he was beginning to get old.

Iseult returned to France accompanied by Yeats, to whom she had brought Maud’s request for help in getting a passport to travel to Ireland. She had told him how Maud

was sleeping badly, was lonely and very upset. Yeats stayed at Colleville for the summer, writing “Easter 1916” there. As MacBride had been shot for his part in the Rising the way was clear for him to propose to Maud *comme d’habitude* and for her to refuse him in the usual terms. To her surprise he then asked for permission to propose to Iseult, which she gave, saying that the child would not consider it. He thought her “a tall beauty very mystic and subtle”. She enjoyed flirting with her mother’s admirer, who made her sit down “at that dreadful table with two hours of work in front of me and three cigarettes doled out with a grudging hand”. He thought, he wrote to Lady Gregory, that he was managing Iseult very well: “The other night she made a prolonged appeal for another cigarette.”

She translated the young French Catholic poets for him, Jammes Samain, Claudel and Péguy whose work she later wanted to translate into English, enlisting Yeats to find an English publisher, only to have Madame Péguy refuse permission for this. Yeats dictated part of the second volume of his *Autobiographies* to her, and she commented sagely that while he gave his memories a lasting life in the soul he also had to give the last death stroke to many old pathetic illusions.

Although flattered by Yeats’s proposal, she wrote to her cousin Thora that thirty years difference was “a little too much”, thinking he had proposed “out of his mad code politeness”. As well as entering into serious discussions she was able to treat him with some teasing mockery. He wrote to Lady Gregory that “as father, but as father only, I have been a great success.”

He left to spend the winter in London but returned to Colleville in 1917, dating the Prologue and Epilogue to *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918) addressed to Iseult [as Maurice, a name she used] 11 May, 1917. Here he referred to one of their many walks the previous summer accompanied by her black Persian cat Minnaloushe, who later got his tribute in “The cat and the Moon”, another poem written in Colleville in 1917. From there Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory, who favoured his marrying Iseult (who, unlike her mother, had no dangerous interest in politics), that Iseult was showing him many little signs of affection. He began, however, to despair of gaining her love, a realisation underlying “The Living Beauty”:

O heart, we are old;
The living beauty is for younger men.
We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.

Maud had had difficulty in getting permission to travel to England, but eventually this arrived and Yeats accompanied the family to London:

Poor Iseult was very depressed on the journey, and at Havre went off by herself and cried. Because she was so ashamed “at being so selfish in not wanting to marry me and so break her friendship with me.” I need hardly say she had said nothing to me of “not wanting.”

Once in London he delivered an ultimatum to Iseult. She would have to give him a definite answer in a week's time when she met him in an ABC teashop. If she would not marry him there was someone who would. When Iseult rejected him he married Georgie Hyde Lees, whom he had known since 1911, on 20 October, 1917.

Despite the comment of Arthur Symons that Maud had laughed at Yeats's marriage – "a good woman of 25 – rich of course – who has to look after him; she might either become his slave or run away from him after a certain length of time" – Maud and Iseult took the news of his marriage well. Maud had told him that she found his betrothed charming, "graceful and beautiful", while Iseult liked her and wrote to him wishing him and Georgie great happiness and mutual understanding: "She is (it seems to me) one of those minds who can give generously and, which is even a finer quality, hold back more than they give, and I feel sure she will only increase our friendship."

Iseult in London

Iseult had two crowded and stressful years in London. Yeats lived up to his promise to be her friend, getting her a post in the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) through Sir Denison Ross, the Director. After a week there Iseult found it "a delightful place". Still bothered at having caused him unhappiness, she urged him to be happy; she would share his joy when he told her "All is well."

Yeats, feeling guilty at having made three women – Maud, Iseult and his wife – unhappy, still hankered after Iseult, writing the two sections of "Owen Aherne and His Dancers" four and seven days after his marriage. The poem ended with a despairing cry, seeing that he could not persuade "the child" to mistake her childish gratitude for love: "O let her choose a young man now and all for his wild sake." Not an auspicious beginning to a marriage. Symons's report of Maud's prediction might have come true, and Yeats's wife might have left him had it not been for her automatic writing that assured him "with the Bird [Iseult] all is well at heart". The automatic writing captured his imagination, and occupied him in ordering and expanding the thought of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* into *A Vision* (1925), the scaffolding of his magnificent new poetry.

He found that Iseult and his wife became friends, first for his sake then for each other's, Iseult spending Christmas with them in Sussex and later visiting them in Oxford. In London she made other friends, among them T. Sturge Moore and Arthur Symons, who dedicated his *Colour Studies in Paris* (1918) to her and wrote her a poem, "Song for Iseult". His poem "Deirdre" celebrated a dinner with her in a Café Royal, and she helped him with his translation of Baudelaire.

In January 1918 Maud, disregarding the authorities' prohibition of her travelling to Ireland, successfully disguised herself and arrived secretly in Dublin with Seán. Once there she began househunting and purchased 73 St. Stephen's Green (the house was to belong to Iseult).

By March the lease Maud had taken of the furnished flat in Chelsea, 265 King's Road, would lapse. Iris Barry, also working in SOAS, had been staying there with Iseult, and

the girls decided to take another flat in Chelsea, 54 Beaufort Mansions. They moved into it on 25 March, the day of Lucien Millevoeye's death. Iseult wrote to her mother in case the news had not reached her:

... my eyes are sore with weeping. One doesn't know how much affection one has for others till they die: then one remembers with distress all one could have done for them and all that one failed to do, and worst of all, the hard things one has thought, and this feels so unjust and cruel. I can't pray anymore, but you'll pray I'm sure.

In a letter telling Yeats that her father's death had upset her, she added that Ezra Pound had tried to kiss her. Pound had offered her a post as his secretary; but she told Yeats she agreed with his conclusion and decided to stay on at the School.

In May came the news of Maud's arrest in Dublin and transference to Holloway Prison at the time of the alleged German plot. Visits were not permitted and Iseult, now joined by Seán, did not get letters from Maud until June. They brought food to the prison every day.

Tension arose in the flat between Iris Barry and the homesick Josephine Pillon, the maid who had accompanied the family from her native Normandy. By June Iseult herself was no longer happy with Iris Barry's company, disliking her Bohemianism – she lived with Wyndham Lewis, by whom she had two children between 1918 and 1920 – and Yeats and his wife came to London from Galway and “separated” them. Mrs Yeats organised the removal of Iseult's things to Yeats's rooms in Woburn Buildings, where, he told Maud, Iseult could live without rent to pay as he and his wife were going to move to Oxford. Iseult had feared to be unkind to Iris Barry but was glad to be rid of her.

Yeats and several others persuaded the Chief Secretary for Ireland that Maud, the door of whose prison cell bore the label “unsentenced prisoner”, should be examined by a specialist who reported she was suffering from a recurrence of pulmonary tuberculosis. She was sent to a nursing home in late October, from which she quickly went to Woburn Place. She was renting 73 Stephen's Green to the Yeatses (for £2,10 a week) as Yeats wanted his first child to be born in Dublin.

Iseult had begun to work for Ezra Pound in July. Between then and September Yeats wrote “Two Songs of a Fool”, the first emphasising his responsibilities in looking after the speckled cat (Mrs Yeats) and a tame hare (Iseult), the second depicting a cat asleep on his knee but neither of them thinking where the hare might be.

That, now, it may be, has found
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

Iseult liked the poem, but when she considered it as applied to her, thought she didn't belong to that order of things, the hare a symbol of a personality as helpless but more active than hers. And another poem written in the autumn, “To a Young Beauty”, conveys Yeats's dislike of the Bohemian company Iseult now seemed to be keeping in London, chiding his fellow artist.

Why so free
With every sort of company,
With every Jack and Jill?

“Michael Robarts and the Dancer”, the poem written to Iseult in 1918, echoes the mirror theme in “To a Young Beauty” (one to surface again in “A Prayer for my Daughter”). In the dialogue “He” queries book learning in favour of beauty, her lover’s wage “Is what your looking-glass can show”, a dictum queried by “She”, who ends the poem by remarking “They say such different things at school”. Yeats had probably been alarmed by Pound’s letter announcing he had taken Iseult on as his typist, not altogether liking to call her his secretary: “my poems are much too ithyphallic for any secretary of her years to be officially in my possession.” Ezra and Iseult fell in love and consummated their passion. She was “his great love”; he wanted to leave his wife (who said it wasn’t Iseult who broke up the marriage) for Iseult; but there was no question of his leaving Dorothy. After all, he depended upon her income. But he later wanted to christen his daughter Iseult, something vetoed by her mother, Olga Rudge. He wrote, pensively presumably, that Iseult misunderstood his reason for leaving her at the bus stop in Kensington High Street opposite Barker’s.

Iseult went to Dublin, when Maud Gonne, again disguising herself successfully, arrived there in the late November. Yeats fearing the effect of likely police raids upon his wife, who was seven months pregnant and gravely ill with pneumonia, refused to let Maud stay with them in 73 St. Stephen’s Green. Iseult’s racy account of this famous quarrel is worth quoting:

Strange rumours may reach you about Uncle W. [Yeats] and Moura’s fight. The truth is they have both behaved as badly as they could, so badly that I greatly fear they have this time quarrelled for good; and it is from an impartial point of view impossible to say which is most in the wrong, or which has been most tactless, or, rather, thinking it over, I should say Moura has been more tactless and Willy more in the wrong.

I have spent 3 days running from one to the other trying to soothe matters, but with little effect, and as profit have only been enforced in my conviction that there should be a law by which after 50, people should be placed under the tutelage of their juniors.

Meanwhile she and W. are the gossip of the city. They each go to their friends confiding their wrongs so that there is now the W. clan and the M. clan. Russell [George Russell, AE] and I are the only two who refuse to take sides with this only difference that Russell says they are both right and I maintain they are both wrong. The climax came the day before yesterday. They met in the Green, and there, among the nurses and the perambulators proceeded to have it out finally.

M.: If only you would stop lying!

W. (gesture of arms): I have never lied, my father never told a lie, my grandfather never told a lie.

M.: Now, Willy, you are really lying.

By Christmas Maud had her house back. Iseult's relationship with Maud had deepened and once the Colleville house was sold some of the money had bought Baravore, a small house at the head of the then remote Glenmalure Valley in County Wicklow where Iseult thought she would live as much as possible, the "worldly world" holding nothing for her. However, she began to know more people in Dublin now, among them Lennox Robinson. Yeats thought he would make her a suitable husband but the idea got short shrift: "How can you seriously think that I could marry him". In the same letter she tells him she has made great friends with a youth called Stuart, not yet nineteen, who has written poetry that even Yeats would like: "He has an adoration which amounts to religion for you, but he is very shy and I cannot get him to send you any of his work."

Iseult, still pursuing her interest on Eastern religions, was herself modest about her own writing. Her published work included "Silence", published in *The Guest* in 1919, which, like "The Poplar Road", which appeared in *Tomorrow* in 1924, is written in an English prose that flows easily and gracefully (despite her disclaimer to Yeats that English was, after all, only her second language), the style influenced, no doubt, by her earlier study of the symbolists. Several of her essays which remain in manuscript form, probably written before her marriage, convey her intense reactions to nature, recorded in the *Journals*, which were an integral part of her life. When Maud's old age was enlivened by frequent visits from her, "the same lovely wise thing as ever", Iseult used to tell her mother of her joy in the land and the mountains.

Iseult in Ireland

The story of Iseult's marriage has not yet been fully told; the accounts of Stuart's best novel *Blacklist, Section* (1971) and Geoffrey Elborn's *Francis Stuart: A Life* (1990) do not give an adequate picture of it. Here constraints of space compel concentration on Yeats's part in it. His views of Stuart fluctuated, but he praised his writing, thinking it "cold, strange, detonating." Iseult's critical views of his novels were often more searching.

In common with Iseult, Francis Stuart had experienced an often unsatisfactory childhood; like her he had a disregard which, at times, amounted in his case to an unawareness of convention. On leaving Rugby School in 1918 he decided he would be a poet; he was completely uninterested in working for Trinity Entrance, vaguely influenced by Russian novels, idle and self-indulgent, self-absorbed. He and Iseult ran off to London in January 1920 where they spent three months; they were married in Dublin before returning to London, Stuart sharing Iseult's capacity for boredom, alleviated by visits to the cinema. Then they returned to Ireland, living in Baravore in Glenmalure. They often quarrelled. The immature Stuart was unkind to her; on one occasion he set fire to the clothes in her wardrobe after she had broken a plaster cast of a heron he made at school. They had to walk about ten miles in the rain to Rathdrum station to get a train back to Dublin. Iseult was pregnant, a responsibility he could hardly face. Yeats, then living in Oxford, got a letter from Iseult which conveyed some of her despair. Maud gave him a more detailed account of Stuart's failings, followed

by a telegram asking him to come to Dublin. He found Stuart had taken a flat in Dublin, leaving Iseult in a wretched state in Glenmalur. Yeats arranged that she should go to a nursing home, appalled that no financial arrangements had been made for her support. He set about remedying the situation, devising tough measure for their reconciliation; and they subsequently tried to patch up the marriage, though, when their daughter Dolores Stuart was born in March 1921 Stuart typically chose not to attend the christening. He had been in London, where he fell in love with Karsavina, a Russian ballet dancer.

After Iseult's daughter, just a few months old, died of spinal meningitis, Iseult was desolate. Maud took the Stuarts on a European holiday, Seán accompanying them as far as Brussels to buy arms for the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Stuart persuaded Iseult to have a holiday from this holiday, and they went to Prague, where Karsavina was dancing. Returning from meeting her he was surprised, typically, to find Iseult sobbing in bed. The holiday ended in a farcical attempt to return in a dud secondhand Mercedes Stuart had bought. When they got back he took part in the Civil war and was interned at Maryborough (Portlaoise). There he shaped his ideas about the role of the writer. Iseult continued to see great promise in his writing. She told Yeats she had pondered what good she was doing in her life and thought she might as well spend the rest of it with Stuart. If, as his Northern Irish uncles maintained, he was mad (his father had committed suicide in a private asylum in Australia) then, she thought, he needed her more.

It is tempting to regard her marriage as a delayed rebound from the impossibility of her affair with Ezra Pound, with whom she kept up a correspondence. She seems to have needed literary mentors though her own critical judgements were both original and sound. Pound was a successor to Yeats; she had enjoyed her friendship with Arthur Symonds and found Lennox Robinson's literary conversation interesting, and Stuart's career was something she could aid, and she did so effectively, arranging the publication of some of his poems in pamphlet form. It was probably her friendship with Pound that led to Stuart's winning a prize awarded by *Poetry* Chicago. And it was her friendship with Yeats that led to his aiding the young author. He wrote the first editorial for the short lived *Tomorrow*, giving the editors, Stuart and Cecil Salkeld his poem "Leda and the Swan". He praised the strange thought and beauty of metaphor he founded in the poems of *We Have Kept the Faith* (1923), crowning him with a laurel wreath when Stuart won a Royal Irish Academy award at the Tailtean Games in 1924.

Stuart then turned to writing novels, Iseult encouraging him by telling him Yeats considered him a genius, certainly a more enthusiastic view than Yeats had taken of him in 1920 when he considered him a sadist and then, more simply, as someone who had never grown up. Yeats, however, found the young man dull company because he always agreed with, or pretended to agree with the older famous man. Stuart disliked the somewhat detachedly whimsical, even teasing way both Iseult and Maud spoke of and to Yeats. (It was not unlike the tone that Ezra and his wife adopted when discussing Yeats, "the eagle"). It was a contrast to Mrs Yeats's devotion, yet when the Stuarts stayed with the Yeatses in Merrion Square in 1926, and Yeats embarked on a long disquisition it was Mrs Yeats who winked at

the young couple, something Iseult might well have done herself. Yeats pondered the strangeness of sexual selection:

Iseult picked this young man by what seemed half chance half a mere desire to escape from an impossible life and when he seemed almost imbecile to his relations. Now he is her very self made active and visible, her nobility walking and singing.

The Stuarts lived for a long time in a cottage near Enniskerry but when their son Ian was born in October 1926 this was too confined and Maud bought them Laragh Castle near Glendalough in County Wicklow where they established a poultry farm. They had another child, Catherine, known as Kay, born in 1931. Yeats visited them at Laragh, his poem “Stream and the Sun at Glendalough”, written in June 1937 and prompted by the visit. Six months before this he had made in “Why should not Old Men be Mad?” a disillusioned comment on Iseult’s marriage. One of the answers to the query of the poem’s first line (used as the title) was that some had known

A girl that knew all Dante once
Live to bear children to a dunce.

The questions, of course, remain. What did Iseult want out of life? Was it, perhaps, personal peace? Yeats once asked her why she was so pale and she replied “Too much responsibility”. Her insecurity is entirely understandable, given the situation at that time of her illegitimacy, but why did she remain a beautiful but peripheral figure whose talents were wasted? She was, after all, very well read, independent in thought, in command of writing skills in both English and French, sensitive and perceptive, at times sharply witty. Was her delicate physique not up to conquering her enjoyment of laziness, or did she lack the ruthless capacity for continuous and concentrated work a driving ambition might have supplied? Given the self-centred selfishness of her husband, given as he was not only to womanising, gambling, drinking and financial unreliability, she could probably hardly have done more, while also looking after her mother-in-law, than create a good life for her talented children (to whom she was in effect a single parent from the time of Stuart’s going to Germany in 1940) in the countryside she loved and appreciated so intensely.

Note

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Drama



*Denis Johnston's Nine Rivers from Jordan: A Centenary View**

Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos

Abstract: *Nine Rivers from Jordan – The Chronicle of a Journey and a Search* is Denis Johnston's autobiographical record of World War II, during which the dramatist worked as radio correspondent for the BBC. His post-war and last original plays – *A Fourth for Bridge* and *The Scythe and The Sunset* – somehow echo his war experience and his reflections on the global conflict. The object of this article is to describe and analyze *Nine Rivers from Jordan* and its reverberations in Denis Johnston's last plays, for these texts are, in many ways, representative of the playwright's view of humanity, life and history.

The year 2001 evokes odysseys, journeys and quests. A centenary prompts us to take a fresh look at a lifetime, its achievements and legacy. In 2001, the birth centenary of Denis Johnston (1901-1984) was celebrated; his varied career has often been the source material for articles around the quest theme. In fact,¹ Johnston's career, particularly his dramatic work, was largely focused on the search for an appropriate means of representing reality and for an appropriate place among Irish dramatists.² Johnston himself adopted the journey and search themes in some of his theatrical texts as well as in his non-dramatic writings, such as the autobiographical record of the time he spent as a radio correspondent for the BBC, during World War II: *Nine Rivers from Jordan – The Chronicle of a Journey and a Search* (1953, 1955). After the war, Johnston wrote his last plays, *A Fourth for Bridge* (1948) and *The Scythe and The Sunset* (1958), both of which contain, more or less directly, echoes of his war experience and reminiscences of the reflections developed in *Nine Rivers from Jordan*.

Perhaps the best way to describe the structure and origin of *Nine Rivers from Jordan* is to quote Johnston's own words in the preface, interestingly located two thirds of the way through the book, where he points out to some of the most significant aspects of his journey account:

The present brochure had its origin in a collection of diaries, personal papers, radio scripts, *graphitae* and pamphlets that were annotated, elaborated and finally

put into some sort of shape. [...] Its puzzling and perhaps irritating changes of style, tense and point of view – all of which it has not been possible to eliminate in this present *splendid emendax* – are due to this synthetic growth, rather than to any deliberate plan to make the book into a disjointed series of literary experimentations or imitations. Most of it was written under varying conditions of stress during the last three years of the war – sometimes in retrospect, sometimes in the midst of the events that are described. [...] We are here discussing a world holocaust. [...] The book is a palimpsest, drawing its strength from the blood of more than one parent. It does not aim to represent the experience of any particular man, but of a concourse and of a generation. [...] However, a note on the author is here added. [...] It throws some light not only on his personal background, but also on his credo of reporting fact (1955, 333-335).

The chapters, grouped in three parts, are presented under various literary forms, anchored, according to the author, on standard works such as *The Odyssey*, *The Bible* or Dante's *Inferno* and include references to several other texts as well as ballads and songs. "Denis carried a copy of Joyce's *Ulysses* with him wherever he went in the desert, and the style and structure of Joyce's book heavily influenced *Nine Rivers*" (2002, 220), affirmed Bernard Adams, who published Johnston's biography quite recently. The complexively allusive method also reminds us of the experimental structure of *The Old Lady Says "No!"* (1929), Johnston's first play, portraying the leader of the 1803 Rising, Robert Emmet, in an anti-romantic demythologizing fashion, making use of expressionistic techniques. Concurrently with the *palimpsest* of texts and styles, reflections upon different issues are interwoven together. While describing the war, Johnston reflects upon an infinity of subjects: his personal life – present and past; the socio-political situation in Ireland; his role as a journalist as well as the role of journalism itself; the use of propaganda, particularly of war propaganda and the exercise of censorship, both of which he is extremely critical about; and, finally, but briefly, his role as dramatist.

Yet, Johnston never loses has been always concerned with the absurdity of war. His attitude changes gradually throughout the book, though. Playfulness gives way to a perception of the tragedy of war and of the violent dismantling of people's lives. At first, Johnston's view includes, mingled with a sense of devastation and destruction, some sort of positive, almost romantic aspect, which makes him wonder: "In what way can one describe this confusing mixture of rascality and gallantry, of bloody murder and of common sense, of intolerable grimness and of surprising joviality? (1955, 258). Nevertheless, the perception that "the gallant war is over" grows and is finally sharpened in Buchenwald, the Nazi concentration camp. His attitude changes completely into one of absolute revolt and despair:

Cruelty I have known, and sadism, and the rascalities of red-hot anger. But mass dehumanization as a matter of planned policy has not so far come my way.

[...] I have done my best to keep sane, but there is no answer to this except bloody murder” (1955, 445).

It is the motif of the journey, however, that really provides the structure of the narrative, tying all the different layers of texts, references and reflections together. From the opening pages of Homer’s *Odyssey*,³ which he quotes, Johnston selects his *prototype*, his motivation – the wanderer, the committed observer:

The man for wisdom’s various arts renowned
Long exercised in woes, O Muse, resound,
Who, when his arms had wrought the destined fall
Of sacred Troy, and razed her Heaven-built wall,
Wandering from clime to clime, observant strayed,
Their manners noted, and their States surveyed. (1955, 12)

Thus, we follow the reporter’s actual journey and quest in Africa and Europe. His trajectory includes the crossing of nine rivers, which was supposedly predicted by a dragoman who read Johnston’s palm soon after he arrived in Egypt:

Before long you will start on a journey – a journey over earth, over fire, over air, and over water. I do not know where this journey will lead you, but I think that it is from where it is white to where it will be white again. It is from a depth to a summit. And here in your hand I see nine rivers that you must cross. [...] When you have reached the last river, you will be at the end of your journey, and there you will find what you have been looking for (1955, 34-35).

Johnston crosses the Jordan, the Nile, the Sangro, the Tiber, the Seine, the Liffey (for he shortly returned to Ireland during the war), the Rhine, the Danube and the Inn. In his account, the rivers are named after the nine Greek muses – Polymnia, the muse of song; Terpsichore, the muse of dance; Euterpe, the muse of lyric poetry; Clio, the muse of history; Erato, the muse of love poetry; Thalia, the muse of comedy; Melpomene, the muse of tragedy; Calliope, the muse of epic poetry and Urania, the muse of astronomy. This inevitably leads to Herodotus’ *Histories*,⁴ which is divided in nine chapters named after the nine Greek muses.⁵ One should also observe that Herodotus, apart from narrating the Persian wars themselves, makes numerous digressions about mythology, geography, politics and anecdotes more or less directly linked to the main account. Johnston, however, never alludes to *The Histories* as a source book.

In his odyssey the author is engaged in different levels of quest: he obsessively looks for a girl named Anneliese Wendler, to whom the book is dedicated, in order to return to her a bundle of letters he encountered; he pursues a satisfactory answer for his somehow permanent disillusion with the ways of Irish politics; he searches for the comprehension of his own self and his role in life. He eventually searches for the

understanding of life itself, the existence of Good and Evil, and, ultimately, for the existence of God.

Critics have interpreted and explained several aspects of the book such as its triadic structure, the nine crossings, the quest, its eventual double ending (existent in the 1953 British edition, but excluded from the 1955 American edition), the many symbolologies imbued in the complex development of *Nine Rivers from Jordan* and its relation to Johnston's dramatic career. The aspects we selected for considerations here are Johnston's personal view of the conflict and the reverberations of the war experience in his post-war dramatic work

Johnston struggles to see the good as well as the failures of all parties involved in the conflict. Thus, he remarks, about the enemy: "I suppose we are all becoming conscious of the surprising fact that these Germans whom we are fighting are actual people, and not mere symbols represented by so many blue marks on a map, and we are interested in our attitude towards them as individuals" (1955, 95). Even after the concentration camp experience, which he faces and transcends, it is this extreme respect for human life in the attitude of the committed observer which prevails. Towards the end of the book, Johnston describes the following conversation with a German schoolteacher whose house had been destroyed by the allied forces:

"I do not understand," she said. "They were not fighting here. Yet they have done this to my home and have taken away many of my things. Do our German soldiers behave like this in the countries which they occupy?" [...]

I thought [...] of Buchenwald, and of everything that I had seen there. And I looked at that schoolteacher whose home had been tossed about, but who was still a human being like myself, and not a wretch squatting over a sewer or laid out upon a shelf.

"*Gnadiges Fräulein*," I said. "There is a train of goods wagons on a siding outside Landsberg, and every wagon is packed to the doors with the corpses of people who have been starved to death. That is what your people have done." [...]

"Maybe we are both guilty in a sense," I went on. "Neither spectacle is edifying." (1955, 475-476)

And it is this disposition towards an attempt to deal with the complexities and contradictions of existence which brings us to Denis Johnston's post-war plays.

A Fourth for Bridge, Johnston's only one-act play echoes directly an episode narrated to him during the war.⁶ A group of soldiers of various nationalities, including capturers and prisoners, initially looking for a fourth person for bridge, end up together, leading to intriguing incidents. The play turns the anecdote into a comic representation of a war situation which shows "half a dozen of friendly enemies trapped in an aeroplane". Johnston's argument was that "war as a phenomenon can no longer be regarded,

melodramatically, as a struggle between villains and heroes” (1979, 167). He wanted to continue in the theatre a campaign for the de-mythologizing of manicheist or romanticized history. Johnston’s attitude in the play, thus, reflects the prevailing tone in his judgement of war in *Nine Rivers from Jordan*.

The echoes of the war experience in *The Scythe and The Sunset*, Johnston’s Easter Rising play, which somehow speaks to O’Casey’s *The Plough and The Stars*, are not so obvious. This makes the parallels between *Nine Rivers* and *The Scythe* interestingly subtle and extremely significant. The first aspect to be noticed is that from the very beginning of the war narrative, Johnston reveals a determination to relate the truth: “I was not going to concern myself with propaganda. I was going to describe soberly and sensibly exactly what I saw, and give the people at home the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, whether happy or unfavourable” (1955, 12). However, despite his commitment to truth and realism, the first sensations he experiences in Egypt are comparable to the fantasies of childhood:

My breast was filled with the delightful apprehension that I used to experience when, as a small boy of five or six, I was taken in a horse tram to see my earliest pantomimes. There were monsters and demons ahead of us in the depths of this stony, sandy waste, towards which an endless line of telegraph poles was leading us (1955, 16).

Secondly, one should mention that the impression of the war as a “welter of bored indifference, confusion and buck-passing”, while he observes the common soldier, permeates the narrative:

He is not interested in the exhibitionist side of the game. It is not his business, and very sensibly does not intend to get killed if he can avoid it. He did not ask to come here, and he intends to go home unless he is unlucky. This attitude has nothing to do with bravery or cowardice. It is just a feeling of indifference to the whole issue” (1955, 47).

Finally, his overall attitude towards the ordinary soldier is not of glorification but of sympathetic admiration: “Heroes are not on the whole as heroic as they are popularly supposed to be.[...] The more I see of good soldiers the more I like them” (1955, 127).

Similarly, Johnston presents his personal, therefore “true” recollections as his main inspiration in the introduction to *The Scythe and The Sunset*. Besides, he shares with his reader a satirical but sympathetic view of the combatants, with a perception of confusion and indifference:

I was a schoolboy at the time of the Rising, and for the greater part of the three days my home was occupied and fortified by four male members of the De Valera's battalion, while we of the family were held, supposedly as prisoners, but actually as hostages. [...] It all sounds more dramatic than it was. Our captors were soft-spoken and apologetic young men who did the least damage they could, compatible with their orders to turn the house into a fort and prevent us from leaving. [...] Of the rebels, I principally remember their charm, their civility, their doubts, and their fantastic misinformation about everything that was going on. Of the man in khaki there remains an impression of many cups of tea, of conversations about everything except the business in hand, and of a military incompetence of surprising proportions, even to my schoolboy's eye (1977, 87).

Both *Nine Rivers from Jordan* and *The Scythe and the Sunset* are, then, built upon a combination of personal impressions and historical facts. Written more than ten years after the end of the World War, Johnston's last play is still imbued with the author's attempt at a re-examination of a historical moment, divested of romanticism and propaganda and his dramatic characters are endowed with humanity. Besides, in 1958, when *The Scythe and The Sunset* was written, a process towards what later became a widespread debate – historical revisionism – was already in the making in Ireland.⁷ Johnston's play meets, then, not only his personal view of war, but also the historical and political debate in Ireland in the late fifties.

Some of the keys to understand Johnston's view of humanity and history in his literary work can be found in his war experience, as narrated in *Nine Rivers from Jordan*, his somehow permanent disillusion with the ways of Irish politics, his commitment to Irish history and his constant revisionist attitude. And however bitter or destructive he may sound in the course of his texts, his final tone is most usually one of redemption, rebirth and hope.

The closing speech in *The Old Lady Says "No!"*, suggestive of Robert Emmet's actual discourse, is significant in the context of this article, for it beautifully brings forth a note of hope for agreement and peace:

Strumpet City in the Sunset

Suckling the bastard brats of the Scots, of Englishry, of Huguenot.
 Brave sons breaking from the womb, wild sons fleeing from their Mother.
 Wilful city of savage dreamers,
 So old, so sick with memories!
 Some they say are damned,
 But you, I know, will walk the streets of Paradise
 Head high, and unashamed.
 There now. Let my epitaph be written. (1977, 74)

The often cited last line of *The Scythe and The Sunset* – “Winter gives back the roses to the frost-filled earth” – reveals once more Johnston’s disposition to believe in the transcendence of historical moments of conflict and tragedy towards regeneration and redemption.

Finally, the double ending in the British edition of *Nine Rivers from Jordan* brings a similar transcendental shift from confusion and bitterness to the possibility of rebirth and joy in man’s responsible construction of history. In both the British and the American editions, Johnston is killed and adds a *post mortem* chapter. The conclusion of the chapter presents an image of bitterness and revolt in his personal reading and adaptation of Homer’s epopee. Odysseus, his prototype, now transformed by the experience of the horrors of war, in Johnston’s view, would have said:

How Vain Your Hope

For all your bitter tongue,
For fools who slay the Oxen of the Sun
To feed their anger or to ease their dread
Shall eat Damnation as their daily bread. (1955, 493)

And with the words *Ite missa est* the narrative finishes. But there comes an unexpected question in the original text: “Or would you prefer a different ending?”. Johnston offers and provides his readers with a second ending and once more concludes with a possibility of choice and an alternative of transcendental hope.

I borrow from one of the most renowned critics of Denis Johnston, Harold Ferrar, the conclusive words in this paper:

Like Blake, Johnston finds God in the tiger as well as in the lamb; and he emerges from his quest a great yea-sayer, singing the song of God. On a level far beyond the logic he adores, he repudiates the wasteland vision, the *nada* of the modern perspective. This beautifully affirmative spiritual dimension of Johnston’s work is inspiring and, unfortunately, still utterly necessary. To encounter this stirring vision is to move a step closer to living it (201-202).

Notes

- * A first version of this paper was presented at the IASIL 2001 conference – “Odysseys”, at DCU, Dublin, as part of a larger research project which later resulted in my Doctoral Thesis: “O Teatro Revisionista de Denis Johnston” (“Denis Johnston’s Revisionist Theatre”), University of São Paulo, December 2003.
- 1 Some of the articles in the collection organized and edited by Joseph Ronsley, *Denis Johnston – A Retrospective*, for instance, address the search theme.

- 2 Christopher Murray, among other critics, in *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama – Mirror up to a Nation*, deals with the fact that Johnston's plays alternated between the Gate and the Abbey throughout his career, reflecting his search for a place where to belong (122-3).
- 3 I used the translation of the *Odyssey* from Greek into Portuguese by Jaime Bruna.
- 4 I used the translation from Greek into Portuguese by Mário da Gama Kury.
- 5 Both François Hartog, in *O Espelho de Heródoto* (translated into Portuguese by Jacyntho Lins Brandão), as well as Paul Harvey, in *Dicionário Oxford de Literatura Clássica* (translated into Portuguese by Mário da Gama Kury), explain that the division of Herodotus's *History* in chapters with the names of the muses were not included by Herodotus himself, but added by later editors (32-3).
- 6 See *Nine Rivers from Jordan* (134-5).
- 7 Several critics point out to the development of the process of a revisionist approach to the interpretation of Irish history, among which: Terence Brown in *Ireland – A Social and cultural History – 1922-1985* and Luke Gibbons in his chapter dealing with the subject included in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (ed. Seamus Deane). In my doctoral thesis I devoted one chapter to the development of historical revisionism in Ireland.

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The Concepts of Time, Memory and Identity in Beckett's Essay on Proust

Anna Stegh Camati

“...you went along making yourself up again for the millionth
time forgetting it all...”
(Samuel Beckett *That Time*)

Abstract: *Beckett's essay on Proust, in which he examines the philosophical concepts of time, memory and identity, has exerted enormous influence on modernist and post-modernist writers, who have consciously adapted and re-synthesized the ideas he developed not only in the essay but also in his plays in general. Although he was not the creator of the “memory play”, Beckett has helped to establish the new genre by reflecting upon philosophical problems and adapting psychological phenomena for dramatic theory, besides extending the limits of the dramatic. His theatrical experiments have been considered as examples of the strictest form of the “memory play”.*

Although Beckett has refused to be involved in literary exegesis of any kind,¹ he has, nevertheless, agreed to participate in several interviews and has written three, long critical essays entitled “Dante ... Bruno, Vico” ... “Joyce, Bram van Velde” and “Proust”. The latter appeared in English in 1931, having been subsequently reprinted in London in 1965 and 1970.² It shows Beckett's concern with the aesthetic and epistemological implications of time consciousness, an issue that had also obsessed Proust to such an extent that he translated it to the level of aesthetic form in his novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. In *Proust*, Beckett makes an extensive analysis that is one part description of the “inner chronology” of Proust's artistic development, and another part an assessment of his own personal perspective on time, memory and identity.

Proust has invariably been considered the novelist of time *par excellence* – the literary interpreter of the phenomenon that Henri Bergson (1859-1941) called “duration”: real or lived time intuited by sensibility, as distinguished from the abstract, chronological time given by the conceptual intelligence. According to the French philosopher, time is

mobility, everything moves – the external reality, which he denominates “durational flux”, and the reality of the mind or “inner duration”. In order to provide us with a concrete image of this process of constant becoming, he uses the analogy of a river flowing incessantly, a river without bottom and banks. In one of his seminal works, *The Creative Mind*, Bergson postulates that there is no consciousness without memory (179). If there were no “survival of the past in the present there would be no duration but only instantaneity”. He argues that our present thought and feeling is always mediated and modified by the memory of past events, since there is an uninterrupted prolongation of the past into the present, which simultaneously is already blending into the future. Immersed within the flow of “inner duration”, “the past becomes identical with the present and continuously creates with it – if only by the fact of being added to it – something absolutely new” (156).

Bergson has also pointed out that not only does the past transform the present, but the present also tends to modify the past.³ He explains that “backwards over the course of time a constant remodelling of the past by the present, of the cause by the effect, is being carried out” (104). And this backward and forward movement is, according to him, necessary, since “the human mind is so constructed that it cannot begin to understand the new until it has done everything in its power to relate it to the old” (108). Thus, he asserts, all knowledge and understanding is relative, because it is our mind that imposes the order we find in things.

To understand Beckett’s critical analysis of Proust’s work, it is important to recall another important theoretical premise of the Bergsonian vision, that concerns the several possible ways of apprehending reality. The French philosopher distinguishes between two modes of cognition: the “spiritual-mental” and the “instinctive-intuitive” consciousness⁴, which are polarities, being at the same time opposite and complementary. He believes that the intellectual consciousness impels us to go all around the object, apprehending the relative, while the non-rational intuition allows us to enter the object, thus attaining the essence or absolute (159). However, in the course of evolution, intuition and instinct have been sacrificed in favour of the development of the intellect, resulting from the excessive mechanization of the industrialization process. Thus, man has been set apart from the natural sources of life, becoming too deeply rooted in habit and the utilitarian process. Nevertheless, Bergson argues, if we turn our attention away from the reality that interests us from a merely utilitarian viewpoint, and turn it back towards what serves no practical purpose, by an “effort of intuition”, we can develop a “supplementary attention” that will enable us to transcend ourselves, thus getting immersed within the very flow of duration. This intuitive impulsion, once seized, carries us forward of itself (178).

Throughout the essay on Proust, Beckett refers to the quasi-mystical experiences, described in detail by the French novelist, mainly in the last volume, *Le Temps Retrouvé*, of his novel. He reports that these occasions provided the writer with a spiritual technique for transcending time, and as such enabled him to escape from time’s domination.⁵ He

also reports that Proust believed that these transcendent moments contained the seeds to the ultimate nature of reality, and he desired, through the medium of his art, to communicate the full impact of these moments of revelation, as he himself had felt them.⁶ For Proust, a sound, an odour or any other sensory stimulus is apt to discharge a series of associations in the mind which bring the past flooding back in order to fuse it with the present. At such moments, the past is recovered and apprehended as it actually has been, and not as we might think it was if we forcefully try to recall it. It is possible to grasp past and present simultaneously in a moment of “pure time”. The famous Proustian incident of a spontaneous revival of a childhood memory, through the taste of what has become known as the “madelaine cake”, is an example of what the French novelist has denominated “involuntary memory”, a kind of explosive, spontaneous, mystic experience or epiphany (Beckett 1970, 34-9).

To agree or not to agree whether Proust’s art achieves such a triumphant transcendence is a personal choice; however, any reader who is well acquainted with Beckett’s *oeuvre* will reckon that such a victory over time is completely out of question in the latter’s cosmovision. The outlook of the Irish dramatist is completely different from the Proustian equation: in his universe time does not grant release nor enables salvation. He does not believe in such direct and purely experimental contact between subject and object because our mind is utility oriented, and as such the object loses its purity and becomes a mere intellectual pretext or motive.

In the part of the essay where he outlines his personal vision, Beckett discusses extensively the utilitarian tendency of the human intellect, rooted in habit⁷, that is always censoring new experiences and rejecting all the elements that do not fit with its pre-conceived ideas, rejecting them as being irrelevant, illogical or insignificant. He reckons, however, that this constitutes a necessary defense mechanism, because reality would be intolerable if we had to face it as it really is. To circumvent the boredom of the interminable hours and days of our existence, our mind is always manipulating reality, distorting, suppressing threatening details, creating fictions, adapting, falsifying and faking evidence in order to adjust our organism to the conditions of its existence. This adaptation is achieved with the aid of “voluntary memory”, a mental process that, according to Proust, is of no value as an instrument of recovering the past, since “the images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by the imagination, and are equally remote from reality [...] There is no great difference, says Proust, between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality” (1970, 32-3). Proust’s concepts of “voluntary” and “involuntary” memory roughly correspond to what Bergson has denominated “spiritual-mental” and “instinctive-intuitive” consciousness.

Proust and Beckett have given expression to the Bergsonian view that time is not simply an attribute of reality, but reality itself. They have disseminated the theories of the French philosopher among the literary milieu, where their work has been the inspiration and source of a number of literary techniques and devices. Beckett’s essay

on Proust has exerted an enormous influence on contemporary writers that have tended to experiment with form and time consciousness. Concerning contemporary British and American drama, the list of representative playwrights presenting variations on the “memory play” is endless: Peter Shaffer, Christopher Hampton, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Shelagh Stephenson, Brian Friel, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Paula Vogel, Margaret Edson – to mention only a few. As far as drama is concerned, the achievement of Beckett and his disciples is twofold: first, they have reflected upon philosophical concepts and adapted literary phenomena of novelistic practice for dramatic theory and, second, they have contributed to the creation of a theatre of the mind, establishing the “memory play” as a new genre.

Tennessee Williams has been appointed by drama critics as the creator of this new genre. He has coined the term “memory play”, which first appears in the production notes of his play *The Glass Menagerie* (Browne, 229). In the stage-directions that introduce the first scene of the play, he strives to conceptualize the newly created term: “The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic licence. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart” (233).

As concerns literary criticism, the term “memory play” was first mentioned by Paul T. Nolan in his article *Two Memory Plays*, in which he examines Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller’s *After the Fall*. He argues that this kind of play attempts to go beyond the traditional drama in order to reach the source of action, i.e., the mind itself. He provides a tentative definition of the genre: “The new “memory play”, unlike the dream play and expressionistic drama, is a projection of the conscious mind; and, unlike the traditional drama of action, it is concerned only with that action that is understood and retained in the mind of the protagonist” (Parker 144).

There are many possible variations upon the basic technique for dramatizing the mind’s activity, and no modern dramatist up to now has employed them more effectively than Beckett. *Krapp’s Last Tape* (Beckett 1959, 9-20),⁸ written in 1958, foregrounds the problem of the ever-changing identity of human beings and the impossibility of recovery of selfhood by means of retrospection. The play consists of a monologue delivered by old Krapp, which comes over as a dialogue conducted between his present older self and his middle-aged more hopeful former self. There is even a shadowy presence of a third self of his in the late twenties.

Krapp is the writer-protagonist, who tries to recollect what exactly happened to him when he was younger by playing back a set of reels on which he had recorded his impressions over forty years. As he listens to the tape-recording, an act which constitutes a kind of ritualistic re-enactment of the experience of his earlier selves, he is intrigued particularly by a certain moment, when fearful of being invaded by someone else, he rejected love which probably ensured his present loneliness. However, none of the tape-recorded memories of the past trigger anything close to a Proustian

revelation, in which time and meaning are recovered and a sense of unity of being is achieved. The self-performing voices on tape do not help Krapp to connect the past, present and future into a meaningful causal chain. There are “only questions without answers, suffering without purpose, consciousness without identity”, as Thomas Postlewait has aptly put it (476). For Beckett, the past is essentially irretrievable.

Echoes of Beckett can be found in several of Harold Pinter’s plays, notably in those where he has inclined towards the internal monologue, such as *Landscape* (1968), *Silence* (1969), *Old Times* (1971) and *No Man’s Land* (1975). His debt to Proust can also be fathomed, since he devoted a whole year to writing a screenplay for Proust’s novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, a project that had been idealized by Joseph Losey, but was never concretized.

Old Times notably experiments with the effect of the past on the present through memory. The same story is told by three characters from different points of view and time. The ideas of the play converge upon the major premise that “one can never be certain that the past existed as one remembers it, for the past is gone and only memories of it remain. Furthermore, one’s memories are not necessarily accurate recordings of the past, for they often redefine it, either distorting it to hide what is threatening or creating a totally fictitious past, to fulfill one’s current psychological needs” (Colby 80).

In *Old Times* we have a love-triangle: a verbal battle goes on between Deeley and Anna for the possession of Kate. The past is the battleground where the conflict takes place, and memories are the combatants’ weapons. What makes the play exciting is that each character has a different version of what actually happened during the period when Kate gradually transferred her affection from Anna, with whom she appears to have had a lesbian relationship, to Deeley to whom she decided to get married. The play shows a power-struggle; the question is whose version will be accepted as true, whose story will predominate and control the future lives of the people involved. There is evidence throughout that recollection can be misleading, memory unreliable and truth impossible to uncover.

By the end of the play, Anna turns out to be victorious in the battle for possession, because she is cunning and knows how to manipulate reality. She is very self-conscious when she professes that it is not important whether certain incidents actually happened in the past, what is vital is that she believes they did occur, and if she is able to contrive means to convince other people they took place, then it follows that they do happen in the present, because they can be experienced in the minds of all those who gave credibility to her story. It is worthwhile to quote her own words from the text: “There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened, but as I recall them so they take place” (Pinter 31-2). The reversal of roles that takes place by the end of the play denotes that Anna has succeeded in turning her version of the past into reality. Her victory shows how subjective and utilitarian we are with “truth”.

Tom Stoppard is also indebted to Beckett, as he himself has declared in several interviews and personal pronouncements. In *Travesties*, he devises means to portray his protagonist's stream of consciousness visually and aurally on the stage. However, he complicates the communication between stage and audience by constructing a series of overlapping frames to indicate the limited points of view within each (Groff 274-277). These complex framing techniques dramatize, in highly ingenious theatrical language, the philosophical concepts of the unreliability of memory and the illusive nature of reality that the playwright had wished to project in the play.

Some critics have seen the outer frame of *Travesties* as a respectful parody of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. In fact, to show that the past cannot be recovered, Stoppard portrays his protagonist, Henry Carr, as the opposite of Marcel in many respects. Whereas to Marcel the past presents itself unbidden with the lavishness of a revelation (involuntary memory), Carr struggles to extract the past events by a conscious act of the mind (voluntary memory). Unlike Marcel's past, the routine of Carr's days has been unadventurous and intensely monotonous. This unbearable monochromatic landscape is precisely what motivates Carr to reconstruct his past in a forcible way. He not only creates a fictional version of his life to flee from the uneventfulness of his existence, but also, in his dotage and state of confusion in old age, tries to create an order of what he perceives as chaos. However, he is never certain of facts, letting fantasy take over.

Furthermore, to compensate for the lack of glamour of his life, he sets the real world against a fictional scheme, seizing upon Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a play in which he had once enacted the role of Algernon Moncrieff and which he remembers as a personal triumph and success, as a superstructure, in which to reassess his personal experience, assuming the functions of author-narrator, character and stage-manager. Besides assuming the part of Algernon once more, he casts James Joyce and Tristram Tzara into the fictional roles of Lady Augusta and Ernest, entrapping himself and the historical characters into someone else's order.

Travesties is a play-within-a-memory-play: through the superimposition and juxtaposition of different framing devices, Stoppard reveals to the audience the mechanisms of vision creating (Camati 95-125). The play constitutes an interesting commentary not only on the unreliability of memory, but also on the fictionality of the practice of writing memoirs, biographies, autobiographies and even history.

Of the three plays briefly discussed in this essay, that dramatize the mind's activity, Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* can be regarded as the strictest form of the "memory play". In addition to the Irish playwright's specific influence on modernist and post-modernist writers, who have consciously adapted and re-synthesized his vision of time consciousness, memory and identity, which he expressed not only in his essay on Proust but also in most of his plays, Beckett has established a new frame of reference for the contemporary theatre by redefining and extending the limits of the dramatic.

Notes

- 1 When Alan Schneider, who directed the first American production of *Waiting for Godot* asked Beckett who or what was meant by Godot, the author answered: "If I knew I would have said so in the play". (Quoted in Esslin 1980, 40).
- 2 Beckett's essay on Proust translated by Arthur Nestrovski was edited in Brazil in 2003, by Cosac and Naify. It came out more than seventy years after its first publication.
- 3 The ideas expressed in the published works of Bergson, in French and other languages, had been disseminated by himself in lectures and essays in literary magazines since the turn of the twentieth century. His philosophical theories have exerted great influence on literature and art in general. The voice of the French philosopher reverberates in T.S. Eliot's essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1951), first published in 1917, in which the poet states that all great art involves "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence", and that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past".
- 4 D. H. Lawrence has also valued and written about the "instinctive-intuitive" consciousness in his work. He has denominated this mode of knowing as "blood-knowledge", which he defines as a kind of pristine, immediate consciousness, prior to mentality, that roughly corresponds to the Bergsonian concept of intuition. See Lawrence's essay entitled *Hector St. John de Crevecoeur*. (In: Arnold 60).
- 5 Beckett asseverates that the solution that Proust offers consists in "the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because of the negation of Time. Death is dead because Time is dead". (Beckett 1970, 75).
- 6 The idea of the Proustian revelation is similar to the Joycean concept of epiphany, a moment of insight or illumination into the ultimate nature of reality. (See Baker; Staley, 1969, p. 8-11).
- 7 In his reading of Proust, Beckett also investigates the nature and importance of habit in human life, consisting of "a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds" (Beckett 1970, 28). Habit, for Beckett, is not only a "great deadener" (Beckett 1979, p. 91), but a redeeming grace. He believes there is no recovery of selfhood possible by means of retrospection and no revelatory moment to provide us with a sense of coherence and purpose.
- 8 Besides *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett has written a great number of works where he shows his concern with time, memory and identity, mainly *Embers* (1959), *Cascando* (1963), *Eh, Joe* (1965), *Come and Go* (1966), *Not I* (1973), among others.

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Bernard Shaw's Novels: a Critical View

Rosalie Rahal Haddad

Abstract: *The aim of this article is to demonstrate the importance of Bernard Shaw's fictional writing for his dramaturgy. Severely rejected by the critics, Shaw's fiction rarely receives the credit it deserves. His novels are important principally because they portray the end of the Victorian century in the light of the rigid and conservative values of English society. They disobeyed the dictates of the period by criticizing society in accordance with the author's iconoclastic style, which characterized his later theatrical work. It is important to establish a link between Shaw's novels and his dramaturgy. In his fiction it is already possible to detect the inversion of morality in the Victorian social and cultural context, which becomes more profoundly accentuated in his plays.*

George Bernard Shaw was in his mid-twenties when he resolved to make a major effort to launch his literary career by writing five novels in five years: *Immaturity* (1879), *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882) and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). Since almost nine years elapsed between the writing of his last novel and the completion of his first play in 1892, the isolation of the five novels at the beginning of his career offers a useful opportunity for a critical study of the young Shaw and his "jejune" work. Both Shaw and his early work have been much condemned by critics and biographers who have failed to understand that without the rigorous discipline that Shaw imposed on himself sometimes working for up to six hours a day without interruption, he would possibly never have become the mature playwright who so radically transformed the Victorian stage. Shaw himself is not to be trusted in his critical statements about his early work. His genuine fondness for the novels contrasts with his uncomfortable feeling that others might think them unworthy of the famous dramatist he turned out to be. Furthermore, because his later work was so successful, he was naturally uneasy about the failure of his early writing. Critics and biographers give one the impression of having glanced superficially through the novels and taken Shaw's comments at face value. If the author himself was not appreciative of his early works and offered no more than superficial explanations for his novels' origins and aims, it is less than surprising that critics should have been

equally skeptical about his fiction. These novels reveal how Bernard Shaw created his artistic persona by trial and error, laboring from immaturity to success until he finally became the iconoclastic playwright that everyone later took for granted. Above all, the novels serve as the basis for his drama of ideas.

In his art, music and theatre criticism, as well as in his own drama itself, Shaw never hesitated to attack the Victorian cultural and literary tradition and the ethical structure upon which it was founded. He began to break with that tradition, in ideological if not stylistic terms, in the novels he wrote in the 1880s. Despite his profound discontent with life and letters in that period, Shaw was initially unable to find any terms in which to express his ideas other than those provided by Victorian tradition itself: serialized novels with a large population of “ladies and gentlemen” and numerous marriages, with upper-class characters who speak well-phrased sentences replete with a wide variety of punctuation marks, and drop “aitches” or speak in comic dialect at the other end of the social scale, and where young, single women do not stand unescorted at social events, at least not without feeling uncomfortable. However, Shaw’s “jeune” novels reveal his unease with this conventional world. His heroes and heroines tend to be, like their creator, outsiders making their way in an alien world, rather than middle-class Victorian insiders at home in a familiar world. Shaw’s themes and incidents depart from the typical problems and solutions of marriage, crime and morality, since his characters are prepared to defy convention, refusing to accept the pre-established roles dictated by Victorian society. It is assumed by most critics, anthologists and biographers that, since Shaw’s novels failed, they were somehow *supposed* to fail, so that Shaw could fulfill his true destiny and become the playwright, wit, socialist, and iconoclast that he later turned out to be.

The fact is that publishers in the 1880s, when Shaw was attempting to become a novelist, were highly aware of the new, semi-literate but not “educated” class (education had been made compulsory in England by the Education Act of 1870) who were far less likely to be interested in novels of ideas than those of adventure. Publishers understood that the buying public was little disposed to read original, “non-received” morality and with their eyes on the profits to be made at a time when novels were the most widely consumed genre after the newspaper, were understandably reluctant to publish “brainy” novels, or those without the stock ingredients of a thrilling plot, a handsome hero and a beautiful heroine. The 1880s were the decade of Robert Louis Stevenson, who published *Treasure Island* in 1883, which was much praised by his friend Henry James in “The Art of Fiction” the following year. With the building of the Savoy Theatre in 1881 the decade saw a succession of wildly popular Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas, like *The Mikado* in 1885, which introduced the late-Victorian mind to the mysterious land of Japan, in the same year that Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* took readers to Africa. The decade also witnessed the arrival of Sherlock Holmes in 1887. Thus, a vast production of escapist literature was becoming tremendously popular.

Shaw’s first novel was entitled *Immaturity* and was, according to its author, a conscientious attempt to fulfill Victorian requirements of “length and solidity” in order

to qualify it for inclusion in “Mr. Mudie’s Select Lending Library of three-volume novels.” In spite of the publisher’s complaints that the novel had no plot, it is obvious that Shaw did his best to satisfy the popular demand for intrigue and suspense by introducing a number of complicated romantic relationships. However, like so many other first-time novelists before and after him, Shaw’s primary interest, unconscious though it may have been, was in the search for his own self. More than half a century later Shaw would express his contempt for the autobiographical impulse:

All autobiographies are lies. I do not mean unconscious, unintentional lies: I mean deliberate lies. No man is bad enough to tell the truth about himself during his lifetime [...] and no man is good enough to tell the truth to posterity in a document which he suppresses until there is nobody left alive to contradict him. (Shaw 1949, 71).

The novel tells the story of Robert Smith and the persons and places in his life in 1878, when he comes to London at the age of eighteen. It is divided into four Books: “Islington”, “Aesthetics”, “Courtship and Marriage” and “Flirtation.” Though Shaw did not find a revolutionary language for his novels and their themes, he handles the only marriage in this novel unconventionally in the sense that the courtship and marriage take place well before the end of the novel; thus, “Courtship and Marriage” comes before “Flirtation,” an original contribution to the form of the traditional Victorian novel. Intellect and marriage do not mix well in Shaw’s novels. He is unwilling to accept romantic love because he fears its glorification of the “self” will lead lovers to ignore the “demand of the Life-Force rejection of the self.” She describes “romanticism” as a heresy to the progress of the mind. In *Immaturity* he subconsciously comments on his young self, too close to Ireland to be able to portray London society without Irish traits. Smith is portrayed as rather old-fashioned, emblematic of a culture which is centuries behind the British Empire, economically and socially. Most critics have failed to comment on an aspect that can be considered of the utmost importance in Bernard Shaw: his dual point of view, the Anglo-Irish critical vision, from which he is able to shrewdly criticize both cultures.

Perhaps the least popular of Shaw’s published novels was *The Irrational Knot*. However, the author considered it “a fiction of the first order” in which the morality is original and not “ready-made”. Indeed, as it was written long before Shaw had read translations of Ibsen’s work, he goes so far as to say that it “may be regarded as an early attempt on the part of the Life Force to write *A Doll’s House* in English by the instrumentality of a very immature writer aged 24.” (Laurence 190) Shaw’s comments raise several important issues. First, in bringing forward original morality as a major criterion for fiction and applying it to Ibsen and himself, Shaw, in his own words, “assaults” two distinct critical traditions – the old one which argued that literature should endorse society’s moral ideals, and the new one which “either relegates aesthetics and morality to separate compartments, or drastically subordinates the importance of moral

content.” Second, his linking of *The Irrational Knot* with *A Doll's House* establishes an important literary affinity between Ibsen and Shaw which critics have yet to take seriously. When Shaw describes Ibsen as “a bold pioneer,” a unique “realist” in his moral attitudes, he is also implicitly referring to his own “jejune work.” For Shaw, the rare “realist” is one who perceives with unusual clarity and conviction that conventional morals may be “pernicious” because they “derive from little more than social consensus, a consensus commonly used to mask human realities, support an obsolete status quo, and suppress important qualities of individual freedom”. The characters and action of the novel are carefully constructed to provide a solid basis for its theme. Its protagonist, Edward Conolly, is a rationalistic American electrical engineer and inventor who is pursuing his work on the state of Lord Carbury, a nobleman with a scientific mind. Shaw creates an artist who is not an aesthete but a practical engineer, whose art takes the form of railways, machines and other utilitarian tools. This inversion must be seen in the context of nineteenth-century aestheticism and all the “follies” perpetrated, according to Shaw, in the name of “art” and “art for art’s sake.” Conolly proposes marriage to Marian Lind and she, attracted by his brilliance and unique personality, accepts, against the advice of her feminist friend, Elinor McQuinch, who labels marriage as a form of prostitution. The marriage turns out to be less than ideal and Conolly, losing respect for his wife, treats her like a doll in the house.

In Shaw’s third novel, the hero is Owen Jack, a composer modeled on Beethoven, as far as looks, manner and temperament are concerned. Jack was the first of a line of historical characters whose imputed share in Shaw’s powers of entertainment makes them a good deal more pleasant than the originals could have been. A major theme is that of “genius neglected” and “genius ultimately vindicated.” The point is made repeatedly by contrasting the authentic genius of Owen Jack with the uninspired work of Adrian Herbert, contrast which finds its female equivalent in the difference between Madame Szcympliça, a Polish pianist of international reputation, and Mary Sutherland, a dilettantish painter. Adrian Herbert is Shaw’s most detailed portrait of the aesthete-artist. He is “but a pose,” who willingly abandons art for love, being what Jack Aurélie and Shaw himself most despise in art: “a duffer” and “a humbug.” Before his marriage Adrian does, however, achieve a kind of success because, in Jack’s words, he is neither too good for the Academy people nor too bad for the public. Shaw believed that the true artist should never marry. Adrian Herbert’s decline begins with his adoption of aesthetic art and his conventional marriage. Owen Jack, the genuine artist, on the other hand, remains single. In his third novel, the only “realists” are artists, only they are in touch with the “real,” while all the other characters are to be judged by comparison with them and with “reality.” According to Shaw, “the artists themselves stand for the value that lies behind the search.” Opposite them stands society, “equally representative of an absolute, the absolute of inert anti-reality.” Thus, the artists and society must be kept apart; and it is the artists themselves who must defend this vision for, according to Shaw, society, conscious only of its desire for value, constantly strives to attain to the

reality for which the artist stands and which he in his person is. The unenthusiastic reception accorded to his first novels undoubtedly persuaded Shaw that he was somehow on the wrong track. Had he persisted in the same course he would have remained at best a minor Victorian novelist. There was, however, a way out. In his fourth novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession*, Shaw began to free himself by creating the genre that would establish him as a famous playwright in the 1890s: the ironic comedy that would demolish Victorian conventional ideas which served to bolster prejudice against unorthodox professions, Creative Evolution, the independence of women, and other thorns in the flesh of the traditional Victorian frame of mind. In *Cashel Byron's Profession*, Shaw expounded his own symbolism of the mind and the body. According to Shaw, just as the body represents itself, it also stands for the largest and most important part of the mind. The man who "thinks" with his body like the pugilist Cashel Byron can be as much of a "genius" and a "visionary" as the man who thinks with his mind alone. Indeed, Shaw's point is that the man who thinks with his mind alone cannot be considered a genius unless he uses the muscle of his brain in the same way that Cashel Byron uses the muscle of his arm. Shaw came to see that the trouble with conventional nineteenth-century rationalism was that it assumed that the brain is exclusively a machine and, furthermore, a machine constantly at war with the "flesh," rather than the "super sophisticated muscle or organ that it really is." Boxing also attracted the iconoclast in Shaw. The novel was the first in his defenses of notorious professions, which he would return to when he discussed prostitution in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Boxing was not considered a completely "respectable" sport but it must have pleased Shaw to write on an outrageous subject. Cashel Byron is a hero out of romantic comedy, a hero in whom social opposition must be merely temporary and who will ultimately find himself reintegrated into society. However, Shaw goes one step further and renders his protagonist an ironic "outsider," a hero whose role as a "professional prizefighter" is an almost pure expression of the idea of opposition. By presenting a hero who is only a temporary outcast, Shaw is introducing his own, more confident self.

By the time Shaw embarked on his fifth novel, he had arrived at a far better understanding of himself. He had come to see that the difference between himself and most other people was one of degree, in the sense that his mind was a little further developed than most. Henceforward a most profound change comes over Shaw's art. *An Unsocial Socialist* is by no means the first nineteenth-century novel in English to advance a left-wing political or economic theory, but it is the first "Georgite/Marxist" novel written in English. *An Unsocial Socialist* is the work of a converted "Georgite/Marxist," a novelist advocating a social program. We can see the germination of Shaw's socialist ideas in this novel. Critics were to see the characters and many of the situations in *An Unsocial Socialist* as "frivolous"; but it is possible to say that such was Shaw's intention. The comic contrast is between the irresponsible world of English society and the dark crime of "social mismanagement" of which it is guilty. Shaw's aim was to present precisely the contrast between "upper-class levity" and the economic burden of

the poor. So utterly convinced was he of the Marxist point of view that he dared to demonstrate its relevance in *milieux* far removed from Manchester: a country school for girls and the rural estate of “landed gentility.” The protagonist, Sidney Trefusis, “a gentleman by birth,” but whose money comes from tainted sources, becomes a teacher for ideological reasons in a girls’ school and tries to preach socialism to his students. This boarding school is neither a place of learning nor, to the disappointment of Shaw’s implied sentimental reader, “romance.” Shaw’s project might be described as the interrogation of the “aesthetic” using the Victorian sentimental novel as “exemplum”, demonstrating that its key components, the hero, the heroine, marriage, and the middle- or upper-class setting, are units of cultural perception which encode and so uncritically reproduce contemporary social relations of class and gender inequality. Shaw intended to be “un-social,” to deconstruct “society.” In choosing the novel form, he set out to deconstruct the Victorian sentimental novel. It seems that the process of writing *An Unsocial Socialist* also taught Shaw that the novel form was not an adequate vehicle for his social, economic and political views.

Shaw’s novels anticipated many of the trends which were later to figure in his mature work as a playwright. The embryonic presence of the novels is discernible in all Shavian drama. It is possible to observe not only a structural and thematic connection but also an affinity of characterization and incident. Shaw introduces characters that were considered unacceptable in Victorian times and refuses to accept the conventional dichotomy between villain and hero. These were new elements in the novel which he would later develop in his drama. The topics of tainted money and notorious professions are mainly present throughout Shaw’s writing from his earliest days as a novelist to his maturity as a playwright. In Shaw’s fifth novel, *The Unsocial Socialist* as well as in his first play *Widowers’ Houses*, even the most frivolous situations and characters are shown to have a dark and weighty economic significance. Trefusis as well as Henry Trench, the protagonist of Shaw’s first play, are rich capitalists and preach socialism but do not intend to return their tainted fortune which allows them to live well. The characters similar to those in *An Unsocial Socialist* neither conduct pleasant conversation nor accept the device of romantic situations to solve their problems. Shaw entirely confused critics and playgoers alike when he refused to comply with the convention of standard theatrical situations and, for that matter, with what he called “modern commercialism.” Just as in his last novel he condemned the sentimental novel form, so, in his first play, he rejected the convention of the well-made play as a bad school for art, emphasizing that his art was the expression of his sense of moral and intellectual “perversity rather than of his sense of beauty.”

Shaw made the relationship between *Cashel Byron’s Profession* and his third play, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1894) abundantly clear:

The tremendously effective scene – which a baby could write if its sight were normal – in which she [Mrs. Warren] justifies herself is only a paraphrase of a

scene in a novel of my own. "Cashel Byron's Profession" (hence the title, "Mrs. Warren's Profession"), in which a prize-fighter shows how he was driven into the ring exactly as Mrs. Warren was driven onto the streets. Never was there a more grossly obvious derivation. (Weintraub 328).

The novels are full of other elements which can be found in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. We can refer to Lydia Carew's resistance to a relationship with Cashel Byron because of his profession. In spite of his protests that, as an occupation, pugilism is more decent than colonial imperialism and war, Lydia remains adamant and states that society has a prejudice against Cashel's profession which she, herself, cannot overcome. Society nurtured a prejudice against women with a past. Mrs. Warren, a former prostitute herself, owns several brothels in Europe; the play provoked Shaw's first clash with the Censor. In "The Author's Apology" to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* Shaw criticized the conventional well-made play for its inherent hypocrisy just as he had criticized society for rejecting Cashel Byron:

....an unwritten but perfectly well understood regulation that members of Mrs. Warren's Profession shall be tolerated on the stage only when they are beautiful, exquisitely dressed, and sumptuously lodged and fed; also that they shall, at the end of the play, die of consumption to the sympathetic tears of the whole audience [*La Dame aux Camélias*], or step into the next room to commit suicide [*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*], or at least be turned out by their protectors and passed on to be "redeemed" by old and faithful lovers who have adored them in spite of their levities. (Shaw 1988, 186)

These are examples of what Shaw considered to be the dishonest conventions of the Courtesan Play, which formed the basis of his strong reaction against nineteenth-century melodrama. In *Cashel Byron's Profession*, Shaw, the iconoclast, began to criticize the hypocrisy of society by making a pugilist physically and intellectually more authentic than Lydia's friends, who belonged to the upper-middle class and had had the opportunity of a formal education. Shaw had depicted other notorious professions in his novels. Ed Conolly in *The Irrational Knot* is an engineer and was rejected by upper-class society. Owen Jack in *Love Among the Artists* refuses to compose music in honor of the aestheticism of the times. Trefusis in *An Unsocial Socialist* and his socialist activities are emphatically banned by society.

Notorious professions can also be related to *Major Barbara* (1905). That virtue is often a parasite upon sin is the paradox Major Barbara's Salvation Army must accept (in spite of the hypocrisy of such a morality) if its good works are to be furthered. Thus the Army – to the initial horror of the idealistic Barbara Undershaft – accepts contribution from a distiller and a munitions manufacturer. In a similar fashion gentility fattens upon immorality in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Concerning this Shaw observed that there was an economic link between Cashel Byron, Sidney Trefusis, Henry Trench, Mrs. Warren

and Undershaft because all of them prospered in questionable activities. The action of *Major Barbara* revolves around the characters of Andrew Undershaft and his daughter Barbara, who want to convert one another to their respective religions. Barbara, a major in the Salvation Army leads her father to her shelter in the East End of London, but fails to impress him. Undershaft first proves to her that the Salvation Army is not what she thought it was by “buying it” with a large donation, then leads her to his model works and induces her to participate in his work by making her figure husband his junior partner. This solution inevitably reminds one of Mrs. Warren and her daughter. There was something curiously tormenting in the problem which compelled Shaw to take it up again and again. The parallel is obvious. It is again the problem of tainted wealth, and the opposition of the daughter to the parent who represents this tainted wealth. *Major Barbara* is indeed a great triumph of artistic creation, in the sense that it combines the intense seriousness and social consistency of *An Unsocial Socialist*, *Widowers’ Houses* and *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* with the power and artistic vision Shaw attained later on. In fact, scrutiny of these two plays leads to the conclusion that, after more than ten years of deliberation, Shaw has come down on the side of Mrs. Warren. Barbara’s position is essentially that of Mrs. Warren. Prostitution, said the latter, is “far better than any other employment open to her [a good-looking, well-behaved, sensible girl]. I always thought that oughtn’t to be... I stick to that: it’s wrong. But it’s so, right or wrong; and a girl must make the best of it.” (Shaw 1988, 250)

Although Shaw empathizes with the poor, he does not sentimentalize or idealize them, his argument being that, if poverty actually improved people, this would justify making poverty compulsory. Shaw insists, rather, that poverty is unequivocally demoralizing: its fruits are not simple piety, honest rectitude, and altruistic sentiment; they are more likely to be, at best, hypocrisy, cynicism and shattered self-respect and, at worst, unthinking brutality. In his Preface to *Major Barbara* Shaw writes that... “Undershaft, the hero of *Major Barbara*, is simply a man who, having grasped the fact that poverty is a crime, knows that when society offered him the alternative of poverty or a lucrative trade in death and destruction, it offered him, not a choice between opulent villainy and humble virtue, but between energetic enterprise and cowardly infamy.” (Shaw 1960, 17) Undershaft, the super capitalist, is “right” in terms of a society and a social morality Shaw believes to be wrong, where strength and wealth are virtues, and where theft and murder may be the only means for a man to keep his self-respect. The germ of an idea which was discussed initially in *An Unsocial Socialist* and further developed in *Widowers’ Houses* has now blossomed fully in *Major Barbara*: were society to organize itself more intelligently Undershaft would be an impossibility. Undershaft is presented in the play as an ambiguous figure, a paradox, “right” and “wrong” at the same time, and yet beyond such distinctions. It seems right to conclude that Undershaft is a thoroughgoing realist. As an arch-capitalist, his realism is dedicated to exploiting the follies and idealisms of society, but it is also his realism that “educates” Barbara. Far from being an “incoherent farrago of ideas,” *Major Barbara* appears to have a carefully

worked out intellectual and dramatic structure based in part on the idea of a dialectical opposition. It seems evident, then, that, although the seeds of Shaw's socialism were planted in *An Unsocial Socialist*, it is only in *Major Barbara* that the form of the resultant tree can be clearly discerned.

Shaw's novels are important not only because they give us glimpses of the dramatist but also because they offer a fascinating portrait of a young artist with an open mind. Bound to no particular convention in art or science, unlike most other English authors of his time, Shaw welcomed every new revolutionary point of view or idea he came across. In the young Shaw one can see, above all, a rebel against the accepted traditions and *mores* of his time, an individualist, determined to think for himself, who has yet to find his philosophy. However, his novels provided training, discipline, and a social, political and cultural background for his future drama. They reveal a young man who is intensely curious about human nature and is keenly observant of its ways of thinking and talking. Above all, he is a reformer, interested in improving mankind and society, but nevertheless equipped with genuine wit, optimism and a tremendous gift of laughter.

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*Shadows from the Past: Sean O'Casey and the Abbey**

Peter James Harris

Abstract: *This article examines the programme of the Abbey Theatre's Centenary commemorations, "abbeyonehundred", culminating in the Theatre's one-hundredth anniversary on 27 December 2004. In particular, the absence of plays by Sean O'Casey is noted from all but a touring programme, which, in his case, occurred after the anniversary itself. It is argued that this may be seen as a belated repercussion of the controversy surrounding the rejection of The Silver Tassie in 1928, and that a significant opportunity was lost by the current directorate of the Abbey Theatre to celebrate the memory of one of the most important Irish dramatists of the twentieth century.*

In the field of human endeavour a centenary is always a worthy cause for celebration. In the fickle world of the performing arts, any institution that can clock up a century of activity is particularly deserving of its royal or presidential telegram of congratulations. The Abbey's one-hundredth anniversary, on 27 December 2004, was a proud moment in the nation's history, and Ireland had every reason to commemorate the inaugural performances by the Theatre. The seed planted by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, with Annie Horniman's all-important backing, has borne some fine fruit, and the tree would appear to be as vigorous as ever. Set up as the embodiment of the Irish National Theatre Society, the Abbey Theatre is today arguably Ireland's flagship cultural institution, as much a national icon as the shamrock itself. On the occasion of the Abbey's coming-of-age, in 1925, the Dublin correspondent of *The Times* registered the role that the Theatre had established for itself in the life of the nation in the following terms, "The stimulus of its imaginative criticism of Irish life has been felt throughout the land. Its satires have done much to break down barriers of prejudice between castes and creeds, and to bring realism into Irish intellectual life" (*The Times* 28 December 1925: 14). The writer associated the theatre directly with the country's recently achieved independence by recalling that "the rebels of 1916 were headed by two playwrights whose works in Gaelic and English respectively had been written for the Abbey stage and had foreshadowed their revolt." An auspicious start indeed for a national theatre.

The honour of planning the birthday celebrations for such an illustrious centenarian must also have been something of a headache. Appropriately enough the Theatre's management elected to commemorate its century of achievement with a carefully chosen programme of new productions and revivals, performed throughout the year. Drawing up the guest list for this year-long bash was therefore an exercise in honouring the giants of former times whilst at the same time paying due homage to the talents of today, upon whose strengths the Abbey's future depends. However, the name of one dramatist was conspicuously absent from the list. Although the Abbey's celebrations included a touring production of *The Plough and the Stars*, no play by Sean O'Casey was staged at the theatre itself as part of "abbeyonehundred". The members of the selection committee would undoubtedly have argued that no offence was intended to the memory of the playwright, and would probably even have said that there was no difference in status between those plays taken on tour and those performed on the Abbey stage itself. Were he alive, however, Sean O'Casey would most certainly not have agreed.

In *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* Christopher Murray had no hesitation in arguing that "O'Casey stands out as Ireland's greatest playwright of the century," justifying his statement as follows: "He it was who most passionately, most powerfully and most memorably dramatised the traumatic birth of the nation. He it was who gave to the twentieth-century theatre a greater range of vivid and original characters, male and female, than any other Irish playwright" (88). In the history of the Abbey, O'Casey's three Dublin plays were of pivotal significance in the Theatre's second phase, in the 1920s, as Declan Kiberd recalls when he points out that O'Casey "saved the Abbey from financial ruin by wooing large numbers of the Queen's audience to his plays" (220).

O'Casey's halcyon period with the Abbey was, of course, brought to an abrupt and premature end by the notorious rejection of *The Silver Tassie* by the board of directors on 30 April 1928. This questionable decision and the ensuing controversy provoked a rift between O'Casey and the Abbey that was never satisfactorily bridged. In addition to the centenary of the Abbey itself, 2004 also marked the eightieth anniversary of the Abbey première of O'Casey's most enduring success, *Juno and the Paycock*, on 3 March 1924, as well as the fortieth anniversary of the playwright's death, on 18 September 1964, either of which could have been profitably commemorated in the course of the abbeyonehundred celebrations. Were he alive today Sean O'Casey would undoubtedly have interpreted the relegation of *The Plough and the Stars* to the Abbey's outreach programme as proof of the long shadow still cast by the *Silver Tassie* decision, a ghost not yet laid to rest.

A close reading of the six volumes of Sean O'Casey's autobiography, published over a fifteen-year period from 1939 to 1954, leaves no doubt as to the significance that O'Casey attached to the Abbey directors' decision. The first evidence that O'Casey had begun work on his "semi-biography" comes in a letter to Charlotte Shaw in November 1931 (Krause 1975, 441), just three and a half years after the rejection of *The Silver Tassie*. The timing is highly significant, for the *Autobiographies* offer a very different

perspective on O'Casey's former colleagues at the Abbey from that provided by the letters that he wrote prior to the traumatic affair. (For an extended investigation of this question, see Harris 2004.) O'Casey's attitude towards those whom he considered to be directly or indirectly involved with the rejection of his play was marked by a profound ambivalence, a characteristic which is not discernible in relation to writers who deceased prior to 1928 or those of his contemporaries who publicly expressed their solidarity with him during the controversy itself.

In 1928, the board of directors of the Abbey Theatre was made up of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Lennox Robinson, as well as Dr. Walter Starkie, the Irish Government's representative, appointed to safeguard the administration of the state subsidy to the theatre, who was strongly in favour of O'Casey's play being produced. Although O'Casey's relationship with the Abbey Theatre and its directors was by no means entirely negative, the rejection of *The Silver Tassie* in 1928 had indelibly stained his recollection of his former associates by the time he started work on the first volume of his autobiography in the 1930s. *The Silver Tassie* was not, of course, the first play of O'Casey's that the Abbey had refused. In 1920 the Theatre had turned down his first two plays *The Frost in the Flower* and *The Harvest Festival* and, two years later, *The Seamless Coat of Kathleen* and *The Crimson and the Tri-Colour* were also rejected. O'Casey finally got his toe in the door in November 1922, when the board accepted *On the Run*, which received its première as *The Shadow of a Gunman* on 12 April 1923.

In *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well*, the fourth volume of his autobiography, begun in 1945 and published in 1949, O'Casey provides an accurate summary of the positive critique of *The Crimson in the Tri-Colour* that Lady Gregory wrote in October 1921, and of which a copy was sent to him in confidence by Lennox Robinson on 5 November (Krause 1975, 96). Despite her initially favourable reaction, *The Crimson in the Tri-Colour* was eventually rejected by the Abbey board, the decision being communicated to O'Casey by Lennox Robinson in a letter dated 28 September 1922. The reason for the delay of almost a year in the Theatre's directors coming to their final decision was that Lennox Robinson lost the manuscript for a time.¹ The shocking news that the manuscript had been lost only served as a renewed incentive to the eager playwright to prepare another play for submission:

He had made up his mind years ago that the Abbey Theatre curtain would go up on a play of his; and up it would go, sooner or later. First decide slowly and deeply whether it is in you to do a thing; if you decide that you can, then do it, even though it kept you busy till the very last hour of your life. Maybe, too, the play would be found again; and so, in the meantime, he would go on writing another play (O'Casey 98).

It is a measure of the profound ambivalence that O'Casey felt towards the Abbey that the very same paragraph that opens with this expression of the determination of his

forty-two-year-old self to have a play staged at the theatre concludes with his reassessment, with the hindsight of sixty-six years, of the relative insignificance of the plays actually staged by the Theatre:

It was years after, when he had left Ireland forever, that bitterness, mingled with scorn, overtook him, for he began to realise that the plays refused by the Abbey Theatre were a lot better than many they had welcomed, and had played on to their stage with drums and colours (O'Casey 98).

Almost two decades after the rejection of *The Silver Tassie* O'Casey's rancour continued to render his view of the Abbey Janus-faced.

Sean O'Casey was to deny consistently that he had suffered any influence from W.B. Yeats. However, he was never to forget the terms employed in the notorious letter that Yeats dictated to his wife on 20 April 1928 (Krause 1975, 267-78), and we see them echoing throughout his writing well into his advanced years, rankling away in his subconscious like a festering sore. Yeats was thus an inescapable negative influence on O'Casey's thinking and writing. Even Yeats's remark, clearly intended as a compliment, that, in the Dublin plays, O'Casey had "moved us as Swift moved his contemporaries" seemed to be salt in O'Casey's wounded pride. On 3 April 1939, eleven years after Yeats's wife had penned the fateful letter, O'Casey, writing to Gabriel Fallon, insisted that he had read nothing by Swift:

Like W.B. & L.R. once saying I was the present-day Swift (maybe I am), but no thanks to Jonathan – I never read him, either – not even "Gulliver's Travels". All I know of him is "The Writing on the Window Pane" [by W.B. Yeats – 1934], & "Yahoo" [by Lord Longford – 1933] (Krause 1975, 789).

Almost twenty years later, O'Casey was still pointedly denying anything more than a superficial knowledge of Swift's writing, as may be seen in his letter to Robert Hogan of 25 April 1958 (Krause 1989, 598).

In O'Casey's immediate reply to Yeats's criticism he reserved particular scorn for the precept that "the whole history of the world must be reduced to wallpaper in front of which the characters must pose and speak," which he described as containing nothing but "the pretentious bigness of a pretentious phrase." He went on to argue that it was in their very attempts to follow the terms of this prescription that the Abbey playwrights of the time were revealing themselves to be most deficient in their craft, since this was exactly "... what most of the Abbey dramatists are trying to do – building up little worlds of wallpaper, and hiding striding life behind it all." (Krause 1975, 272). Like any generalisation, such a statement is as easily challenged as confirmed. It would scarcely be fair, for example, to describe an ambitious attempt at analysing the changing state of Ireland like Lennox Robinson's *The Big House* (1926) as a mere world of wallpaper. On the other hand, the plays of George Shiels, produced at almost annual

intervals between 1921 and 1948 are considered by Peter Kavanagh and others to be a “great vulgarizing influence on the Abbey Theatre.” Kavanagh goes on to say:

Shiels was a dramatic journalist rather than a playwright. His work proved vastly amusing to audiences interested only in the superficialities of life. Any subject was good enough; many of his plays really had no subject at all. There was never any danger of his offending the crowd, and everyone was satisfied except those interested in genuine comedy” (147).

Whether or not the Abbey playwrights in general were heeding Yeats’s advice, O’Casey was unable to erase the phrase from his consciousness. Thus, on 28 July 1928, about three months after receiving Yeats’s letter, when he read of Lennox Robinson’s impending lecture tour of the United States, he wrote to his friend Gabriel Fallon, commenting scornfully that, “The Boston Sun has it that LNX R[obinson] is going this Winter to tour America lecturing about how to pattern properly Yeats’s worlds of Wallpaper” (Krause 1975, 302).

The phrase surfaces again, sixteen years later, as the subtitle of one of O’Casey’s least successful plays, *Oak Leaves and Lavender*, written in 1944 and first performed in 1946. The play is an attempt to pay homage to Britain for the stand taken against Hitler during the Battle of Britain in 1940. The subtitle, *A World on Wallpaper*, fuses the words “war” and “world” in a satirical reference to Yeats’s comment. More than a decade later, when O’Casey himself was almost eighty years old, we can detect his angry words to Yeats underlying his comment, in a letter to Ronald Ayling, at that time a twenty-three-year-old student working for his MA at Nottingham University. Writing on 21 March 1958 he stated that *The Silver Tassie* was written at a period when he had become aware “how meagre and mean were the plays that the Abbey did” (Krause 1989, 570).² Meagreness and meanness are the essential qualities represented by the ambiguous metaphor of wallpaper which, for Yeats, represented a static backdrop against which to stage a drama, but which O’Casey understood to be a superficial covering hiding an ugly and rotten structure beneath it.

The ambivalence in O’Casey’s attitudes before and after the Abbey’s rejection of *The Silver Tassie* is seen most dramatically in the case of Lennox Robinson. The correspondence exchanged between O’Casey and Lennox Robinson before the events of April 1928 presents a remarkably different picture of the relationship between the two men from that drawn in the *Autobiographies*, so much so that one might be excused for believing that there were two Lennox Robinsons. Although the number of letters in question is not great (David Krause collected five letters written by Lennox Robinson to O’Casey, and ten written by O’Casey to Robinson in the period prior to the letter of 9th May 1928, when Robinson returned the manuscript of *The Silver Tassie* to its author), they nonetheless enable us to draw some reasonable conclusions about the relationship between the two men at that time.

Despite the fact that the majority of these letters deal with the formal process of the submission and rejection of O’Casey’s early manuscripts, it is immediately

apparent that they contain no suggestion of the irony with which O'Casey was to view the figure of Robinson in retrospect. Indeed, they reflect a mutual respect, not to say admiration, that existed between them. On 29 December 1923, for example, O'Casey wrote Lennox Robinson a letter thanking him for what was probably a Christmas present:

I was delighted with the volume of Tchekhov's Plays for two reasons: because I wanted to read them – I have read some by the same Author, lent to me by Arthur Shields, *The Cherry Orchard*, etc – and was anxious to read more; and because your name is in the book, a fact of which I shall be a little proud. It was a thoughtful gift and a kindly tribute, and I thank you very much. I spent a most enjoyable evening on Friday looking at, and listening to your White-headed Boy.

It is a glorious work – I mean *glorious*, mind you – and as you envy every word of Lady Gregory's Jackdaw, I envy you every word of the White-headed Boy. This is no hasty opinion, for I read the Play before I went to see it, and though honestly, I thought at first, I was going to be disappointed, I soon found myself laughing, and it takes a good man to make me laugh, now (Krause 1975, 107).

Although O'Casey was forty-three years old when he wrote this letter, one could be forgiven for thinking that the words are those of a star-struck teenager. At one point in the autobiography O'Casey does indeed admit to having idolised Robinson before disillusion set in. He registers the change in his attitude as occurring around about the time of his imprudent criticism of the Abbey's revival of Shaw's *Man and Superman* on 10 August 1925. Lennox Robinson's reaction, upon being shown O'Casey's tactless letter, was to murmur "in an ethereal voice ... 'It's just like Sean!'" On the following page O'Casey writes, "He began to question in himself the once-held thought that Lennox Robinson was as near to knowing all about things theatrical and literary as any educated man could be" (157).

O'Casey's correspondence at this time, however, reflects no significant change in his opinion of Lennox Robinson. On the contrary, in a letter written just a couple of weeks after the *Man and Superman* incident, he suggests that his opinion of Robinson's professional capacity was as high as ever. On Saturday, 22 August 1925, O'Casey had arrived at Coole Park, where he was to spend a summer holiday of two weeks in the company of Lady Gregory. On 30 August, in the second letter he wrote to his closest friend, the part-time Abbey actor, Gabriel Fallon, whilst he was there, he confided that he was eager for Lennox Robinson to produce *The Plough and the Stars*, "What do you mean by a "good Producer"? I'm anxious that Lennox Robinson should produce the play. As soon as he returns to Dublin I'll ask him" (Krause 1975, 143).

Since the beginning of his career as an Abbey playwright O'Casey had had ample opportunity to compare Lennox Robinson's work as a director with that of others.

Apart from all the other plays that he had watched at the Theatre, there was also the fact that his first two plays (*The Shadow of a Gunman*, in April 1923, and *Cathleen Listens In*, in October of the same year) had been directed by Lennox Robinson, while the next two (*Juno and the Paycock*, in March 1924, and *Nannie's Night Out*, in September that year) had both been directed by Michael J. Dolan. Sean O'Casey obviously had no doubt about which of the two was the more competent.

Although the last reference to Lennox Robinson in *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* presents him as a figure of ridicule in the March 1924 production of *At the Hawk's Well* – “Passively funny was the sight of Mr. Robinson doing a musician,” (O'Casey 233) –, thus implying that it was in this light that O'Casey saw him as he set sail for England in early March 1926, O'Casey's correspondence gives the lie to this too. For example, on 1 October 1926, after he had been living in London for almost seven months, he wrote to Gabriel Fallon mentioning the fact that, “Robbie sent me a copy of “White Blackbird & Portrait” [two plays by Robinson which had been first performed in 1925], which I (shamefully) didn't even acknowledge yet” (Krause 1975, 207). The intimate use of Robinson's nickname seems to suggest a continuing cordiality between them. In another letter to Fallon, written just two days afterwards, he seems to criticise his friend for underestimating the quality of Lennox Robinson's *The Big House*, which had opened at the Abbey Theatre the previous month (Krause 1975, 208). A couple of months later, on Christmas Eve, in fact, he wrote to Lady Gregory expressing his sincere hope that the Abbey was doing well, and reporting enthusiastically that, “The “Whiteheaded Boy” is doing splendidly here” (Krause 1975, 211).

O'Casey's apparent enthusiasm for Lennox Robinson and his works was reciprocated by Robinson himself, so much so that, in mid-March 1928, he greeted the arrival of the manuscript of *The Silver Tassie* with an uncharacteristically hearty “Three cheers!” (Krause 1975, 232). Even after reading the play and believing that O'Casey would need to rethink the last two acts, when Robinson wrote to Lady Gregory in April, he still referred to the playwright's “genius” (Krause 1975, 238).

It is only after the rejection of *The Silver Tassie* that the tone of O'Casey's epistolary remarks about Lennox Robinson undergoes the profound transformation that was to be reflected later in his *Autobiographies*. Gone are the chummy references to “Robbie.” In letters to Gabriel Fallon, the nomenclature employed by O'Casey passes progressively from the impersonally contemptuous “Robinson,” on 16 May 1928 (Krause 1975, 247), to the anonymous “LNX R,” on 28 July, (Krause 1975, 302), and “LNXR,” on 3 September (Krause 1975, 310). A letter to Lady Gregory on 7 November that year refers to “L.S.R” (Krause 1975, 319), sarcastically invoking the second names, Esmé Stuart, that Robinson elected not to use. In a letter to Gabriel Fallon, penned the same day, O'Casey refers to “Links” (Krause 1975, 322), and, by 9 January the following year, in another letter to Fallon, he reached the nadir of anthropomorphic satire with “Lynn” (Krause 1975, 331).

At the same time, O'Casey's previously held opinions about Lennox Robinson as a playwright and a theatre director were subjected to exhaustive revisionism. The

same man who had so breathlessly praised the dialogue in *The Whiteheaded Boy* in 1923 now wrote to Fallon, on 16 May 1928, profoundly offended by the suggestion that he should take Robinson's dialogue as an object lesson in dramatic technique, "And did Yeats really say that "if I could only write dialogue like Robinson?" Holy God, he's adding insult to injury!" (Krause 1975, 247). In a letter to Lady Gregory on 7 November 1928 he declared that, "What Robinson does, or does not, doesn't matter much – he'll never add one jot or tittle to life or literature ... " (Krause 1975, 319). Writing to Gabriel Fallon the same day he rejoiced in the *Dublin Opinion*'s negative review of Robinson's latest play, *The Far-off Hills*, arguing that Robinson had never produced any work as good as his very first play, "Dublin Opinion's opinion of "Far Off Hills" seems to say the play's not the thing. Anyhow, you can't build flesh & blood structures on tea and toast. He never rose above his "The Clancy Name"" (Krause 1975, 321). In the light of such causticity, it is scarcely surprising that the comments on Lennox Robinson in *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well*, notwithstanding the long interval that had elapsed before it was written, should be so unremittingly satirical.

Although it only took the Abbey seven years to reverse its decision and grant *The Silver Tassie* its Irish première on 12 August 1935, it took Sean O'Casey considerably longer to exorcise the ghosts from his past. In the case of Lady Gregory, of course, he left it too late, for her death in 1932 deprived him of the chance to make amends for his petulant snubbing of her request to visit him in London in 1929. Lady Gregory had written to him from Dublin, a couple of days before setting off to London. Her letter was written on 11 October, the same night that *The Silver Tassie* opened at London's Apollo Theatre, and she wished it success, saying that she hoped to see it and also to see him and his wife and son, whom she had never met, whilst she was in London (Krause 1975, 368-698). In his reply, dated 15 October, O'Casey wrote that he felt "it would be much better to set aside, for the present, the honour & pleasure of seeing you & talking with you" (Krause 1975, 369), justifying this by arguing that he might say things about Yeats and Robinson that might hurt her. In a note to the letter, David Krause records that he read this letter to Sean O'Casey in 1963, when he was compiling the first volume of the *Letters*. O'Casey groaned when he heard it and said, "That was one letter I should never have written, especially that cruel last sentence, to my poor dear Lady Gregory! But I suppose my wounds were still raw and I wasn't strong enough or wise enough to forgive and forget" (Krause, 1975: p. 369 n.). Pricked by remorse over this error of judgement, O'Casey made his peace, on a personal level at least, with Yeats before the latter's death in January 1939. He was also prepared to temper his dismissal of Lennox Robinson's play-writing skills. At the age of seventy-seven, when *Juno and the Paycock* was selected for the 1957 Tostal Week, O'Casey wrote to Eric Gorman on 14 May and went so far as to say that Robinson's *Whiteheaded Boy* would have been a worthier choice for the festival (Krause 1989, 429).

What remains, however, is the evident rancour towards the Abbey that fuelled the writing of the *Autobiographies*, whose final full stop was penned on 20 September

1953. Perhaps as a result of his Protestant upbringing as much as of his combative personality Sean O'Casey found it extremely difficult to forgive and forget. Almost exactly half a century later, on 19 November 2003, the Abbey Theatre announced its centenary programme. An attentive analysis of the menu for this thespian feast leads one to the conclusion that, as far as the Abbey's current directors are concerned, O'Casey still does not deserve inclusion as a main course.

On the Abbey's Internet homepage, Artistic Director Ben Barnes described the abbeyonehundred programme as "both diverse and extensive" and anticipated that "the Abbey will have over thirty openings and hundreds of performances in Ireland and throughout the world in 2004 as it reaches out to over a million people" (<http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/abbey100>). Grouped around five themes or seasons, the plays were chosen with evident care to reflect the full range of the Abbey's work throughout its one-hundred-year history. Given that the Birthday itself fell on 27 December, the five seasons were scheduled to fill the year from January to December. Thus, the season entitled "The Abbey and New Writing" ran from January to June 2004, "confidently celebrat(ing) and showcast(ing) a range of plays from leading Irish writers both new and established," including work by Paula Meehan, Peter Sheridan, Stuart Carolan and Eugene O'Brien, and returned in December with an additional play by Paul Mercier. From January to May, "The Abbey and Europe" season included Tom Murphy's new version of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a play which, like the Abbey itself, was completing its first century. The season also comprised Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*, based on Sophocles' *Antigone*, and the guest appearances of three European theatre companies.

From May to September the "Summer at the Abbey" season was calculated to "celebrate the range and depth of the repertoire and to appeal to a local and visitor audience". The season included Boucicault's *The Shaughran* and Stewart Parker's *Heavenly Bodies*, as well as a new play by Colm Tóibín, *Beauty in a Broken Place*. The centrepiece of the season, however, with a month-long run from 5 August to 11 September, was Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Ben Barnes's production, which "promise(d) to celebrate and commemorate one of the classics of Irish theatre on a national and international scale", entered the Abbey repertory in between the two stages of its Irish and American tour. Prior to its arrival at the Abbey the production was seen by Irish audiences, from June onwards, at venues in Galway, Letterkenny, Belfast, Dundalk, Cork, Kilkenny and Sligo. After its Abbey slot the production went on to a three-month US tour, taking in New Haven, Philadelphia, Stamford, New York, Boston and Chicago. In addition, the "Marking and Remarking" section of the centenary programme, dedicated to commemorative initiatives in print and other media, underlined the *Playboy*'s position as flagship production for the year with the publication of a "book describing the page to stage process of the 2004 production of this Abbey classic play with an accompanying DVD".

On the Abbey stage, the "Summer at the Abbey" season was followed, from September to November, by "The Abbey and Ireland", a season comprised of seven

“classic plays from the repertoire” and ten “rehearsed readings of plays representative of each of the decades of the first one hundred years”. The full productions included Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, Marina Carr’s *Portia Coughlan*, Yeats’s *Purgatory* and Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*, as well as plays by Bernard Farrell and George Fitzmaurice. (Plans to give an airing to Lennox Robinson’s *Drama at Inish* in this section were quietly shelved after the initial announcement of the programme.) At the beginning of October, Abbey audiences also had an opportunity to see a revival of Ben Barnes’s 2001 production of Tom Murphy’s *The Gigli Concert*, upon its return from its tour to the Australian cities of Sydney and Brisbane. The “Reading the Decades” fortnight of dramatised readings in the Abbey Theatre Rehearsal Room ensured that a series of important names were included in the festivities: Lady Gregory, G.B. Shaw, T.C. Murray, Denis Johnston, George Shiels, M.J. Molloy, Walter Macken, Thomas Kilroy, Tom MacIntyre, Sebastian Barry and Brian Friel, – a resounding roll-call.

Finally, for some of those unable to get to Dublin, there was “The Abbey on Tour”, an outreach programme taking three of Ben Barnes’s productions to cities in Ireland, Australia, the USA and the UK, supposedly from June to December. As we have seen, two of these productions also made their appearance on stage at the Abbey as well. The third play to be taken on tour was the 2002 production of O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*. At first sight, the inclusion of a “critically acclaimed” staging of O’Casey’s powerful play was apparently an appropriate acknowledgement of the importance of a dramatist who played such an instrumental role in the Abbey’s history in the 1920s. However, further analysis suggested that this was a somewhat half-hearted homage. Unlike the other two touring productions, O’Casey’s play did not get a look-in on the Abbey stage itself. More significantly still, the tour of *The Plough and the Stars* did not take place until January 2005, after the champagne corks had popped on 27 December. The “tour” in fact consisted of a staging at a single venue, London’s Barbican. It is perhaps symptomatic of the appendant nature of this final item in the Abbey’s celebratory programme that, in late October 2004, the Barbican’s information officers were unaware that the Abbey players would be coming in the New Year!

Any reader of “The Sleeping Beauty” will need no reminding of the difficulties inherent in drawing up guest-lists. While the abbeyonehundred programme paid due recognition to the significance of Synge and Yeats in the Theatre’s history, supporters of Lennox Robinson were undoubtedly mystified by the axing of *Drama at Inish*, and Lady Gregory’s fans were peeved that her work received no more than a dramatised reading. However, neither of these playwrights was involved in a much-publicised dispute with the Theatre such as that generated by the rejection of *The Silver Tassie* in 1928. The staging of *The Plough and the Stars* in the UK after the finale of the year-long centenary commemorations sent out a regrettably mixed message. As we look forward to the Abbey’s next hundred years it would have been welcomed by all if the current board of directors had dealt more unequivocally with the Theatre’s shadows from the past.

Notes

- * Acknowledgements are due to FAPESP (The São Paulo State Research Support Foundation) for financial assistance received under Grant no. 04/02342-7, which made it possible to present this paper at IASIL 2004 at the National University of Ireland in Galway.
- 1 The first play that O'Casey submitted to the Abbey in typescript was *The Seamless Coat of Kathleen*, on 10 April 1922, after he had bought a second-hand typewriter. Prior to that, all his plays were hand-written and, for that reason, he had no second copy of them. See O'Casey's letter to R.D. Dougan, written in 1957, for the full story of the lost manuscript. Even then, thirty-six years after the event, it appears that Sean O'Casey and his wife were still obliging Lennox Robinson to search for the manuscript! (Krause 1989, 428, 428n).
 - 2 Later in the same letter O'Casey refers to articles by David Krause and Brooks Atkinson analysing the impact that *The Silver Tassie* itself had on later drama, and citing Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as a play that had suffered such an influence. It was perhaps due to her wish to explore this link that, on leaving America for her trip to England in 1956, Marilyn Monroe was reported as saying that Sean O'Casey was the one man she wanted to meet there!

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Theatre Links – Ireland and Australia: The Early Years

Peter Kuch

Abstract: *The Irish have made a significant contribution to Theatre in Australia since the beginnings of European settlement in 1788. The first play known to have been staged in the new colony was Farquar's *The Recruiting Officer*. The most prolific of the convict playwrights was the Dublin medical student Edward Geoghegan. The first free settler to write a play and have it performed was the Irishman, Evan Henry Thomas. Particularly following the gold rushes in Victoria and New South Wales, the Irish figured as playwrights, actors, actor-managers, theatre managers, and impresarios. Gustavus Vaughan Brooke toured, as did Lola Montez, as did Dionysius Lardner Boucicault. In the event Boucicault's son, "Dot", stayed to manage theatres in Melbourne and Sydney and to be the first to offer Oscar Wilde's plays to Australian audiences. While not all the theatre links between Ireland and Australia throughout the nineteenth century were as symmetrical as a Wilde play, and while not all the characters won through to happy endings, there can be little doubt that the "plot" of Australia's theatrical history would have been entirely different without the significant contribution made by the Irish.*

That the Irish have made a significant contribution to Theatre in Australia from the beginnings of its European settlement should come as no surprise. Statistics were in favour of it. Australia has more people of Irish descent per head of population than any country outside Ireland. Tradition too has favoured it. The first play believed to have been staged in the new colony was a "fit up" of George Farquar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), performed on 4 June 1789 by a troupe of convicts before Captain Arthur Phillip and his fellow officers in a wooden hut near the newly constructed Government House as part of the 2nd anniversary of official colonial celebrations of the birthday of His Majesty, King George III.¹ At that time some 40% of the colony's population were Irish, the mix of social classes ranging from Irish-speaking peasants transported for crimes against property² to the senior law officer, Judge-Advocate Lieutenant-Colonel David Collins, whose mother was from Park in King's County.³

The manifest of the Second Fleet of 1790 tells a similar story; while the first shipment of convicts direct from Ireland – 133 males and 22 females and 4 children – occurred when the *Queen* arrived from Cork on 26 September 1791; the youngest convict on board being David Fay of Dublin aged 11 years, the oldest, Patrick Fitzgerald at sixty-four.⁴ As Patrick O’Farrell has pointed out: “How far the clank of convict origins echoed into the future of Irish Australia is suggested by the life-span of Michael Lamb, eighteen when arriving on the *Queen*, dying aged eighty-six, in 1860”.⁵ How long they continued to echo in the popular imagination, Australian as much as British and American, is suggested by the character of Magwitch, the transported convict who makes his fortune in New South Wales, in Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860/61), and Peter Carey’s prize-winning reinterpretation, *Jack Maggs* (1997), as well as the international success of books like Robert Hughes’ *The Fatal Shore* (1987).⁶

But what remains to be appreciated, the more so since the recent publication of Robert Jordan’s magnificently researched *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788-1840*, is the vital role played by the Theatre in the cultural life of the new country, and the extent to which the Irish contributed to that role. As Watkin Tench recorded in his diary of the 1789 convict performance of *The Recruiting Officer*:

The exhilarating effect of a splendid theatre is well known: and I am not ashamed to confess, that the proper distribution of three or four yards of stained paper, and a dozen farthing candles stuck around the mud walls of a convict built hut, failed not to diffuse general complacency on the countenances of sixty persons, of various descriptions, who were assembled to applaud the representation. Some of the actors acquitted themselves with great spirit, and received the praises of the audience: a prologue and an epilogue, written by one of the performers, were also spoken on the occasion; which, although not worth inserting here, contained some tolerable allusions to the situation of the parties and the novelty of a stage presentation in New South Wales.⁷

Continuous theatre, in the sense of dedicated premises licensed for the performance of plays, dates from within five to fifty years of the founding of each of the colonies – 1832 in Sydney, founded in 1788; 1834 in Hobart, founded in 1804; 1840 in Adelaide, founded in 1836; 1842 in Melbourne, founded in 1835; 1864 in Brisbane founded in 1824/1839; and 1879 in Perth, founded in 1829. Again, the Irish were a presence from the beginning. For example Sydney’s first theatre building, The Theatre Royal, opened on 5 October 1833 with the double bill: *The Miller and his Men* and *The Irishman in London*⁸, and closed the year with a performance of Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (14 November 1833). And one of the earliest free settlers to write for the Theatre was the Irishman, Evan Henry Thomas of Launceston. His *Bandit of the Rhine* (1836) is arguably the first play written and performed in Australia, though, unfortunately, it seems, no copy has survived.⁹

By comparison, a substantial body of work has survived of one of the most prolific of the convict playwrights. This was the Dublin medical student Edward Geoghegan, who was sentenced in Dublin on 6 June 1839 to seven years transportation to the penal colony of New South Wales for “obtaining goods under false pretences”.¹⁰ Shortly after he arrived in Sydney Cove on 25 January 1840 on the *Middlesex*, he seems to have met the Irish actor Francis Nesbitt, “the leading tragedian at the Victoria Theatre and generally regarded as one of the better actors of Sydney”.¹¹ A poetical review of Sydney actors published in *The New South Wales Magazine* in 1843 proclaimed Nesbitt “the hero, the star of our stage”.¹² Whether or not Geoghegan’s meeting with his fellow countryman inspired him to begin writing for the theatre or whether he had long harboured a desire to be a playwright remains unknown, but what is certain is that, like one of the characters in his best known play, “the sun of Australia seem[ed] to possess wonderful powers in fertilising genius”.¹³ Within six years of his forced arrival, Geoghegan was seeking permission from the Colonial Secretary, E. Deas Thompson, to have his seventh play licensed for performance, convicts at that time being expressly prohibited from either performing in the Theatre or writing for it without due regard to the prevailing legislation.¹⁴ The letter, dated 16 September 1846 is valuable on two counts, for it not only gives a list of Geoghegan’s works but it also gives some indication of the repertoire of early Colonial Australian Theatre. The plays listed are: *The Hibernian Father* (1844), Original 5 Act Tragedy; *The Currency Lass* (1844), Original 2 Act Opera; *The Last Days of Pompeii* (after Bulwer Lytton, 1844), Adapted 3 Act Drama; *A Christmas Carol* (after Dickens, 1844), Adapted 5 Act Drama; *The Royal Masquer* (1845), Original 2 Act Drama; *Captain Kyd* (1845), Adapted 3 Act Drama; *Lafitte the Pirate* (1845), Adapted 3 Act Drama. Both the attributions and the generic classifications are Geoghegan’s. Since the letter of 16 September 1846 was seeking permission for the staging of *The Jew of Dresden*, and since subsequent scholarship has also added *Ravenswood*, an adaptation of Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, to the list, Geoghegan appears to have written at least nine plays for the Sydney and Melbourne Theatres during his seven year sentence.

By this time, splendid theatre, in the sense of magnificent buildings, world-renowned actors, entrepreneurial management and productions ranging from Shakespeare to vaudeville and from Opera to animal acts was being financed from the gold rushes, firstly from Edward Hargraves’ discoveries in the Bathurst area of New South Wales in January 1851 and then from Thomas Hiscock’s discoveries at Warrandyte in Victoria five months later combined with the young Irish prospector, James Esmond’s discovery at Clunes also in Victoria at about the same time.¹⁵

The consequences for the Theatre were fourfold. Firstly, the population of the entire continent quintupled within twenty years (220,9681 in 1841 to 1,168,1491 in 1861). Secondly, the cessation of transportation to the eastern colonies in 1840 (when it ended to New South Wales), 1853 (when it ended to Tasmania)¹⁶ and 1868 (when it ended to Western Australia) meant that the rapid growth in population was largely due to the influx of free settlers in search of self-improvement and a better life. Thirdly, with

the opening up of Ballarat and Bendigo, reputedly the richest goldfields in the world, enormous wealth flooded into the cities, specifically into Melbourne and to a lesser extent into Sydney. Fourthly, this wealth proved irresistible to actors and actresses and to Theatrical entrepreneurs, particularly those with established networks in, or a willingness to travel to and from, England and America.

For example, the so-called “father” of the Australian theatre, George Selth Coppin,¹⁷ was a young English actor playing comic roles in Dublin when, in 1843, he decided to try his luck in Australia. After highly successful seasons at the “Royal Victoria Theatre” in Sydney and in Hobart, followed by financial ruin in Adelaide, Coppin set up on his own in Geelong, near the Bendigo and Ballarat goldfields, where he met with considerable success.¹⁸ Within four years, that is by 1855, he had amassed sufficient wealth to ship from London the prefabricated cast and corrugated iron, timber and glass for an entire theatre and have it assembled in Melbourne in just thirty days. Named the “Olympic” and known affectionately as the “Iron Pot”, it was initially designed to showcase the Irish Shakespearian actor Gustavus Vaughan Brooke (1818-1866).¹⁹ Brooke, who had toured Ireland, England and America, not only performed the popular roles from *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* with great verve and considerable financial success, but he also introduced Australian audiences to the wider Shakespearean repertoire, though he eventually found, particularly when he began to tour the country towns, that the popular taste was for melodrama and farce, such as *The Irish Lion* (1838) and *His Last Legs* (1839). Brooke gave his final Australian performance on the gold fields in Ned Kelly country at the “The Star Theatre” at Beechworth in 1860.²⁰

Sydney, Melbourne and the goldfields also figured largely in the 1855-56 Australian tour of another Irish performer, Lola Montez, in that she encouraged her audiences to express their appreciation by showering her with nuggets rather than applause – though her famous “spider dance” (much imitated three-quarters of a century later by James Joyce when inebriated) was doubtless more theatrical than splendid.²¹

But not all was burlesque, bravura and bluster on the goldfields. Anthony Trollope, who first visited Australia in 1871 and 1872, but whose commendations need to be qualified by the fact that his mildly satirical novels of the *petit bourgeois* of mid to late nineteenth century England had earned him the soubriquet as “the chronicler of small beer”, was nevertheless sufficiently impressed by his visit to the goldfield’s town of Gulgong, New South Wales, to record in his journal: “and there was a theatre, at which I saw *The Colleen Bawn* acted with a great deal of spirit, and a considerable amount of histrionic talent.”²² In fact, Boucicault’s most popular plays were enormously successful in Australia. Throughout the 1860s and 70s, when two and three night runs were customary, *The Flying Scud; or, A Four-Legged Fortune* ran for 27 performances (1867); *After Dark. A Tale of London Life* for 29 (1869), and *The Shaughraun* for 37 (1875). Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that in the mid to late nineteenth century in Australia, the Irish were a force in the provincial as well as the metropolitan theatres – whether it was Boucicault, bawdy, burlesque, Ballad Opera, or the Bard.

Nor was George Selth Coppin a lone figure when it came to management. In Melbourne he had to contend with rival projects such as the “Theatre Royal”, which also opened in 1855 and which boasted an auditorium and stage to rival the largest London theatre. And he also had to compete with fellow impresarios such as William Saurin Lyster, Dublin born and of a well-to-do family – he took his middle name from a relative who had been Attorney General for Ireland – who made a reputation and a fortune for himself touring opera groups, drama companies and variety acts throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s. It was Lyster, as one theatre historian has remarked, who “brought to Australia the first full-time opera group with a consistently high standard of performance”.²³

The closing decades of the nineteenth century – despite the droughts, strikes, and the bank failures of the 1890s – was a golden age for the Australian Theatre. Within a quarter of a century Sydney acquired more than half a dozen major theatres – The Royal (1875), The Criterion (1886), Her Majesty’s (1887), The Garrick (1890), The Lyceum (1892), The Tivoli (1893; burnt down in 1899; rebuilt in 1900), and The Palace (1896). During the same period Melbourne saw the opening of The Royal (1872), The Prince of Wales Opera House (1872), the Bijou (1880), The Alexandra (1886) The Princess’s (1886) and the refurbishment of Her Majesty’s (1900).

More theatres, meant more business, meant more management. In the event, acts and assistants recruited by Coppin and Lyster provided the impresarios who went on to form the theatrical agencies that were to dominate Theatre in Australia well into the 1950s. Chief of these was an American actor James Cassius Williamson (1845-1913) and his actor wife Maggie Moore, both engaged by Coppin in 1874. Against all advice Williamson opened his Australian tour in Melbourne with a play entitled *Struck Oil* on the first of August of that year and was immediately rewarded with a run of 43 consecutive nights. The play was equally successful in Sydney, where it ran for 50 nights, and even more successful when Williamson and his wife continued to tour it in India, England, Scotland, Ireland and America. But Australia must have held a special appeal, for in 1879 the Williamsons returned to Melbourne with the rights to HMS *Pinafore*. By 1880 they had decided to go into Theatre management and by 1882 they had formed a partnership with Arthur Garner (1851-?) and William Saurin Lyster’s nephew, George Musgrove (1854-1916). Known around Melbourne as “The Triumvirate”, and subsequently as “The Firm”, this partnership provided the foundation for J.C. Williamson Enterprises, Australia’s main theatrical agency for the next half century.

Again, there was a significant Irish presence. In 1886 George Tallis, a 17 year old cadet reporter with the *Kilkenny Moderator*, who was in Melbourne to visit a sick brother, knocked on Williamson’s door and asked him for a job. Impressed by the young Irishman’s confidence and energy, Williamson tried him in a number of menial jobs – messenger, clerk, usher, and general assistant – before appointing him as his private secretary. Tallis’s rise through the Company was as assured as it was steady. From 1902

he was regularly being sent around the world to liaise with the Company's offices in New York and London and to study theatre management and theatre buildings and to recruit acts and actors. Not surprisingly, when Williamson died of kidney failure in Paris in 1913, it was Tallis who became Chairman of Directors, a position he held for the next eighteen years.

By then the Australian stage had seen an impressive cast of actors – the Shakespearians Charles & Ellen Kean who toured throughout 1863-64; Barry Sullivan, a great favourite with Irish audiences, who came to Melbourne in 1862 and met with such success that he took out a four-year lease on the Theatre Royal; Walter Montgomery, whose interpretation of *Hamlet* during his 1867-9 tour provoked heated debate and who was the first to introduce Australian audiences to *Antony and Cleopatra* (1867-69); Adelaide Ristori renowned as the greatest tragedienne of the day, whose eighty-five recitals in 1875 entirely in Italian of the lives of Mary Stuart, Marie Antoinette, Medea, Phedre, Judith and Lucrezia Borgia in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and the gold-fields netted her £13,336; George Rignold who first brought his internationally famous *Henry V* to Sydney in 1876; and the English Shakespearean actor William Creswick who, though coming towards the end of an illustrious career, nevertheless played to packed houses in Sydney in 1877.

Undoubtedly one of the most infamous was Dionysius Lardner Boucicault, the Irish playwright, actor and theatre manager who reaped enormous wealth from the American theatre – *The Shaughraun* (1876) alone is said to have made him well over half a million dollars – though little of it remained in 1885 when he suddenly left his wife Agnus Robertson in New York and bigamously eloped to Australia with Louise Thorndyke, an actress not much older than the eldest of his five children.²⁴ Then in 1889 there was the English actor Janet Achurch, who produced and acted in *A Doll's House* at the Princess's Theatre in Melbourne, the first of Ibsen's plays to be staged in Australia. Finally, in 1891 Sarah Bernhardt opened her Australian season in Melbourne with *La Dame aux Camélias* and followed it with performances of *La Tosca*, *Théodora*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Frou Frou*, *Fédora*, *Pauline Blanchard* (world premiere), *Jeanne d'Arc*, and *Cléopâtre*.

Also important in their own way, in terms of Irish-Australian theatre links, are the tours that did not take place. Within the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde's is the most notable. Australia was a temptation to which he never yielded. Plans for a visit were first drawn up by D'Oyly Carte, who had brought him to America in January 1882 as the inspiration for Bunthorne to lecture throughout the country on the aesthetic movement. By then *Patience* had not only enjoyed considerable success in America but had also been staged in Australia, the first performance having taken place at the Theatre Royal in Sydney on 26 November 1881.²⁵ Australia continued to beckon throughout the year Wilde spent touring America and Canada. In April 1882, barely three months into his travels, he wrote from St Joseph Missouri to his friend Norman Forbes-Robertson: "I still journey and lecture: it is a desperately exciting life. They want me now to go to

Australia but I think I will refuse. I am not sure yet”.²⁶ From Boston in early October he informed Colonel Moore, D’Oyly Carte’s agent who was managing his tour, that it might be possible for him to go in November, though if Mary Anderson took his play *The Duchess of Padua*, which he hoped to have staged in America, he would have to delay. “I wish you would tell Hayman”, J.C. Williamson’s New York agent, he advised Colonel Morse, “that I accept his offer for next October, 1883. That would be equally good and more convenient”.²⁷ Plans for the visit however remained uncertain. Writing from New York a short time later he enquired of Henry Edwards, another of D’Oyly Carte’s agents: “I am anxious to ask you about Australia, and my trip there, and under whose management I should go”.²⁸ The “trip”, it seems, was to affect a transformation of continental proportions. *The New York Tribune* of 31 October 1882 reported Wilde replying to an enquiry from Lilly Langtry: “Well, do you know, when I look at the map and see what an awfully ugly-looking country Australia is, I feel as if I want to go there to see if it cannot be changed into a more beautiful form.”²⁹ In the event Wilde returned to London and then went on to Paris – while Australia remained as it was.

Yet the country continued to engage his imagination. His first theatrical success, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, which opened at the St James’s Theatre in 1892 has The Duchess of Berwick remarking what “a curious shape it is! Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country, isn’t it”.³⁰ Her next remark, that it must be a “pretty country with all those dear little kangaroos flying about”, which she immediately retracts once she discovers her daughter wants to marry Hopper and live in Australia,³¹ probably had its origins in a visit to Australia that was actually made. While Sarah Bernhardt was playing *La Dame aux Camélias* at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne in May 1891, the *Australian Theatre Story* reported that “Madame’s baby kangaroo was proving to be a “little bundle of trouble” having been found hopping along a Melbourne Street with a card tied around its neck – I belong to Sarah Bernhardt”.³² It is highly likely that Wilde heard about the “little bundle of trouble” when Bernhardt returned to Paris for the winter of 1891, because he was there too, working on *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and on *Salomé*, a title role he hoped would prove seductive to Bernhardt.

That the Duchess of Berwick identifies Australia with the kangaroo in a play performed in 1892 is itself noteworthy. In 80s and 90s London the wombat was the exotic pet of the day – Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s was probably the most famous, not only accorded a portrait but also regularly invited to trundle around the well-shod feet of guests. Yet, when the colonies formed themselves into a Federation as The Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and were granted a coat of arms in 1908, it was the kangaroo, the emu and wattle that were chosen and not the wombat. Unwittingly or not, the Duchess of Berwick with her off-hand remark about “dear little kangaroos flying about” in fact proved herself more knowledgeable of Australian culture and less the slave of London fashion than even she would have cared to admit.

And there were other ‘nineties connections. Sometime in 1894 the English actor Mrs Bernard Beere wrote to Wilde apparently seeking permission to include one of his

plays in a projected tour of Australia beginning at the Bijou Theatre in Melbourne, at that time managed by Dot Boucicault, the nickname of Dionysius George Boucicault (1859-1929), son of the famous actor and playwright. By then Wilde, Mrs Bernard Beere and Dot Boucicault had known one another for some thirteen years, “My dear Bernie”, as Wilde called her having agreed to play the title role in his first play, *Vera: or the Nihilists*, which was to be staged at the Adelphi in London towards the end of 1881 but which was summarily cancelled because it was considered offensively topical following the recent assassinations of Czar Alexander II and President Garfield. Responding to Mrs Beere’s 1894 enquiry for performance rights Wilde replied: “Of course: we must fly to Australia:” – his insouciance most likely a tilt at Boucicault senior’s elopement a decade earlier:

I could not let you go alone. I have written to Cartwright – a bald genius who is dear Dot’s agent – to ask him if it can be arranged. They have also *Mrs Tanqueray*, in which I long to see you.

I have also asked Cartwright if Dot is coming over – or I suppose I should say coming *up* from Australia. I believe that absurdly shaped country lies right underneath the floor of one’s coal-cellar.³³

And though Mrs Bernard Beere did not travel to Australia for at least another year, Wilde’s plays certainly did. Dot Boucicault, who ran the Bijou Theatre in Melbourne from 1886-1896 and also the Criterion in Sydney, staged performances of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*³⁴ as well as Pinero’s *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. Over time *The Importance of Being Earnest* was to prove enormously popular – it is said to be one of the most frequently performed plays in Australia – despite its playful denigration of the antipodes. You will recall that when Cecily informs Algernon that Uncle Jack has gone to buy him an “outfit” because he wants him to emigrate, Algernon replies that if he has to choose “between this world, the next world, and Australia”, he will choose “this world” because “The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not particularly encouraging.”³⁵

People did however return from “Down-Under”. The English actor Irene Vanburgh (1872-1949), who toured Melbourne and Sydney in the early 1890s, went back to London to join Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket and then George Alexander’s company at the St James’s Theatre where she played the role of the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax in the premiere of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in February 1895. Finally, as if to give her own life the symmetry of the plot of the well-made play, she married Dot Boucicault in 1901.

While not all the theatre links between Ireland and Australia throughout the nineteenth century were as symmetrical, and while not all the characters won through to happy endings, there can be little doubt that the “plot” of Australia’s theatrical history would have been entirely different without the significant contribution made by the Irish.

Notes

- 1 Robert Jordan, *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788-1840*. Sydney: Currency House, 2002, 29: "Since the prologue specially written for that production spoke of the "novelty" of the occasion, there can be little doubt that it actually was Australia's first full-scale theatrical event". For a romanticised fictional account see Thomas Keneally's *The Playmaker*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987. See also Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Our Country's Good: Based on The Playmaker, a novel by Thomas Keneally*. London: Methuen in Association with The Royal Court Theatre, 1988.
- 2 Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*. 1986. Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1993. 24: "Approximately four-fifths can be described as ordinary criminals, mostly thieves". For incidence of theft for transportation to Tasmania see John Williams, *Ordered to the Island: Irish Convicts and Van Diemen's Land*. Sydney: Crossing Press, 1994. 38-59; 64-83. Compare Portia Robinson, "Thank God it can be no worse". Ed. Trevor McClaughlin. *Irish Women in Colonial Australia*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998. 17: "women were convicted almost exclusively for some form of larceny".
- 3 *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, I, 236. See John Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000. 10.
- 4 Con Costello, *Botany Bay: The Story of the Convicts transported from Ireland to Australia, 1791-1853*. Cork: Mercier Press, 1987. 17 gives the manifest as 133 men, 22 women and 4 children. Note however *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with Remarks on the Depositions, Customs, Manners, &c. of that Country. To Which are added, Some Particulars of New Zealand; Compiled, by Permission, from the mss. of Lieutenant-Governor King. By David Collins, Esquire, Late Judge-Advocate and Secretary of the Colony*. London: Printed for T. Cadell Jun, and W. Davies, in the Strand, 1798. 179-80: 'The officers party on board the *Queen* with 126 male and 23 female and 3 children.
- 5 O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*. 22.
- 6 See Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of The Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*. London: Collins, 1987. 181-95 for a stereotypical albeit flamboyant "portrait" of the Irish convict.
- 7 Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years being a reprint of A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, with an introduction and annotations by L.F. Fitzhardinge. Sydney: library of Australian History, 1979. 152.
- 8 Ian Bevan, *The Story of the Theatre Royal*. Sydney: Currency Press, 1993. 26-7. Eric Irvin, *Dictionary of the Australian Theatre 1788-1914*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985. 274: *The Irishman in London* (1792).
- 9 John Alexander Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia*. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1986, entry 2053.
- 10 Janette Pelosi, "Colonial Drama Revealed, or Plays submitted for Approval" in *MARGIN: Life & Letters in early Australia*, July-August 2003: 1. 13.Jan.2005 at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PEH/is_60/ai_108114095
- 11 Quoted in Roger Covell, ed., Edward Geoghegan, *The Currency Lass or My Native Girl: A Musical Play in Two Acts*. Sydney: Currency Press; London: Eyre Methuen, 1976. xviii.
- 12 Quoted in Harold Love, ed. *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*. Kensington: New South Wales University Press in Association with Australian Theatre Studies Centre, School of Drama, UNSW, 1984. 35-6.
- 13 Covell, ed., Geoghegan, *The Currency Lass or My Native Girl*, 31.
- 14 Ibid. xix.

- 15 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Year Book Australia: Articles Released Prior to 2002 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs%40.nsf/0/cc0c058e907e3c35ca2569de00271b1e?OpenDocument> It was Hiscock however who received the Government reward for the Victorian discovery. Note that "Discoveries" of gold were reported by convicts and in 1841 by the Reverend W.B. Clarke though the news was suppressed for fear that gold-fever would create turmoil.
- 16 Williams, *Ordered to the Island*. 2-3, 5, 14 and 114: "No convicts tried in Ireland came directly to the colony before 1840. All those who did arrive came as transferees from Sydney".
- 17 See Eric Irvin, *Dictionary of the Australian Theatre 1788-1914*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985. 75-6. See also Alec Bagot, *Coppin the Great*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965.
- 18 Michael and Joan Tallis, *The Silent Showman*. South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1999. 18-9.
- 19 See Richard Madelaine and John Golder, "*O Brave New World*": *Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*. Sydney: Currency Press, 2001. 56-71 *passim* and particularly 61-2 for evaluation of Brooke's acting (*contra* Irvin). See Eric Irvin, *Dictionary of the Australian Theatre 1788-1914*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985, 55-7 for an assessment of Brooke's acting on the London and Belfast stages. William J. Lawrence, *The Life of Gustavus Vaughan Brooke*, Tragedian. Belfast: W & G Baird, 1892. See also William Kelly, *Life in Victoria: or Victoria in 1853 and Victoria in 1858*. London, Chapman & Hall, 1860, II, 124-5.
- 20 Not all Irish actors were as successful. Shiel Barry (1842-1897) is a case in point. After having himself starred as 'the Irish comedian who would put all other Irish comedians into obscurity' in Melbourne in 1865, Barry was left with no alternative but to go to London, where by dint of hard work he eventually became a respected actor. Irvin, *Dictionary*, 42-3.
- 21 See Helen Holdredge, *The Woman in Black – The Life of the Fabulous Lola Montez*. New York: Putnam, 1955, and Horace Wyndham, *The Magnificent Montez*. New York: Hillmann-Curl, 1935. See also Kelly, *Life in Victoria*, II, 281-2.
- 22 P. D. Edwards and R.B. Joyce, eds., Anthony Trollope, *Australia*. 1873; St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1967. 295. The Australian writer, Henry Lawson, was born on 17 June 1867, on the nearby Grenfell goldfields.
- 23 Irvin, *Dictionary of the Australian Theatre*, p. 167. See also Harold Love, *The Golden Age of Australian Opera: W.S. Lyster and his Companies 1881-1860*. Sydney: Currency Press, 1981.
- 24 Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979. 226-7. For Boucicault's views of his Australian tour see Love, *The Australian Stage*, 102-6. The Templeman Library at the University of Kent at Canterbury holds the Transcript of an agreement between Dion Boucicault and J. C. Williamson of the Theatre Royal, Melbourne relating to Boucicault's proposed tour of Australia in 1873 at pressmark: UKC/BOUC/BIO: 0648716 in The Richard Fawkes Dion Boucicault Collection.
- 25 With a Melbourne revival at the Princess Theatre in July 1883. See John Willis, *Oscar Wilde and the Antipodes*. Melbourne: Privately Printed, 2002. 7.
- 26 Oscar Wilde to Norman Forbes-Robertson, 19 April 1882 in Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, eds., *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. London: Fourth Estate, 2000. 164.
- 27 Oscar Wilde to Colonel W.F. Morse, [Late September 1882], *Letters* 183.
- 28 Oscar Wilde to Henry Edwards [early November 1882], *Letters* 189.
- 29 Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987. 196.
- 30 Oscar Wilde, *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Centenary Edition*. London: Harper Collins, 1999. 433.
- 31 Wilde, *Complete Works* 440-1.
- 32 From George Lauri, *Australian Theatre Story*. Sydney: Peerless Press, 1960, quoted in Willis, *Oscar Wilde and the Antipodes* 22.

- 33 Oscar Wilde to Mrs Bernard Beere *Letters*, [? April 1894], *Letters* 590.
- 34 *Lady Windermere's Fan* as announced in *The Age* (Melbourne) 8 September 1894: 10. Season ran until Friday 21 September 1894. *An Ideal Husband*, 8 June 1895 as announced in *The Age* (Melbourne), 8 June 1895: 10. Season ran until 21 June 1895. I have not been able to verify Willis, "Checklist of Theatre Programs Listed", *Oscar Wilde and the Antipodes* 53-7: *An Ideal Husband*, May 1895, Princess Theatre, Melbourne; *Lady Windermere's Fan*, April 1895, Princess Theatre, Melbourne; Sept 1895. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, September 1895, Criterion, Sydney.
- 35 Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works* 379.

Cats and Comedy: The Lieutenant of Inishmore Comes to Sydney

Frank Molloy

Abstract: *In recent years major Australian theatre companies have increasingly relied on successes from London's West End to attract audiences. In 1999, Martin McDonagh's The Beauty Queen of Leenane was so successful for the Sydney Theatre Company that the production went on a national tour. Sydney's Belvoir Street company were therefore delighted to be granted the rights for a recent McDonagh play, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, which had its Australian premier in 2003. In pre-show publicity, reference was made to the "savage" satire but most attention focused on the technical challenges of the production. The confrontational nature of the violence and difficulties of presenting it were analysed, while the demands of handling live cats on stage seemed to bring out an unusual level of journalistic curiosity.*

This article reviews the Sydney production of The Lieutenant of Inishmore arguing that the comedy overwhelmed the satire, and the technical achievements threatened to overwhelm everything.

By all accounts, Martin McDonagh is not a regular theatregoer but in 2001 he was so impressed by performances of a Sydney company in London that he ensured it was given the Australian rights of his latest West End success, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The company, based at the Belvoir Street theatre in Sydney, was chosen by the playwright in preference to a Royal Shakespeare Company proposal to tour their production to Australia.¹ That acquiring the rights to the play would be seen as a major coup does reveal something of the selection priorities of the major metropolitan theatres in Australia, as well as the status of McDonagh's work there. And both these issues will be briefly examined here. The main focus of this article, however, is the way the Belvoir Street production of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was marketed to the public, as well as an evaluation of the production itself which ran for six weeks in late 2003.

One year earlier, when the company's program for the following year was announced, this play was promoted as "the centrepiece of the 2003 season" (Albert 14).

That such prominence should be given to an overseas work in preference to an Australian one highlights an attitude that has become insidious in theatre circles in recent years. For a couple of decades from the late 1960s, local playwriting flourished and audiences responded enthusiastically to seeing their own society on stage for the first time. Regularly set before them were plays where long-held views on political and cultural issues were challenged. Theatre was controversial: it shocked and disturbed. This so-called “new wave” did not last, however. Australian audiences gradually settled back into a comfort zone of entertainment, and a cultural cringe – a hallmark of theatre for over a hundred years – reasserted itself. Rather than clamouring to see their own culture represented on stage, they became more enamoured of fashionable overseas successes. Not that Australian plays disappeared, but they are no longer dominant. Nor indeed has political theatre disappeared, but is now limited to issues affecting the Aboriginal people: “the indigenous theatre practice that thrives on our stages today is Australia’s real political theatre” (Bennie 9). Unfortunately, this remains a small serving in the menu of metropolitan companies. With an eye to the box office, they must ensure that the yearly program is based on what will satisfy people seeking diversions from the workaday world, mainly middle-aged, middle-class audiences, or in the words of one disgruntled playwright, a program that will “appeal to older professional women at the end of a hard week” (Sewell 10). As competition for the public’s entertainment dollar has grown, marketing of plays has become significant: nowadays a “product” must be “sold”. Promoters of sporting events, rock concerts, glamorous musicals and the like go to extraordinary lengths to woo large attendances, mostly the young, but people of all age groups. To promote a play, a label such as “West End success” or “controversial Irish playwright” is likely to grab the attention of potential audiences much more than “new work by unknown local writer”.

Martin McDonagh first appeared on the Australian theatregoer’s horizon in 1998 when the Druid Theatre Company presented the Leenane trilogy at the Sydney Festival. The venture was such a success with critics and audiences that a year later the Sydney Theatre Company, in conjunction with Druid, mounted its own production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* which then toured the country in 2000. Everywhere, the play was confidently advertised as a crowd pleaser. Its Irish setting, albeit one removed from a tourist-board romanticised one, was projected as enticing, and references in the play to emigration had resonance for many Australians, particularly those of Irish origin. No press item failed to mention the humour – always a drawcard – although again qualified by a tantalising infusion of horror. Comments such as “mischievous and incredibly funny”, “bitter humour”, “dark Irish comedy” (for example, Tsitas 54, Lambert 97, Tracy 121) appeared with almost monotonous regularity. The play’s universal qualities, evident in “the fractious mother-daughter relationship” (Lambert 97), were also highlighted. The specific context might be Irish, but the circumstances that gave rise to the relationship could occur anywhere. Publicity was often centred on one of the two actors playing the roles of Maureen and Mag, Pamela Rabe and Maggie Kirkpatrick.

Both are well-known to the general public, so a human interest story could be compiled in which highpoints in their careers, their thoughts on the play, and their role in it were featured. The result was always a successful run for the *Beauty Queen*. Everywhere, the reception was enthusiastic; reviews were positive, and audiences flocked to see how local stars would handle this unusual mix of Irish comedy and horror.

Little wonder that the artistic director of the Belvoir Street theatre, Neil Armfield, was delighted to be granted the Australian rights for the most recent McDonagh work. No doubt, he hoped *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* would also be a hit, and even as the play was being staged in Sydney, the Melbourne Theatre Company announced that this production would be included in its 2004 season. An initial press release from Belvoir Street referred to the play as “controversial” and “a brutal black comedy dealing with Irish terrorism” (Albert 14), and inevitably its London success was favourably reported. But whether this would be sufficient to woo potential audiences had to be considered. For this play, there were no major actors to present to the media, no human interest stories centred on well known figures. Concentrating instead on political messages, especially about somewhere as distant as Ireland, might not prove enticing enough for theatregoers who wanted to be entertained.

So, promotional features took a different tack: they revealed, indeed revelled in, the technical demands of the play. The Belvoir Street theatre is a converted factory rather than a purpose-built theatre. There is a small triangular stage, barely raised from the floor, which juts out from one corner. Tiered seating comes very close to the playing area. As one critic remarked some years ago, it is “a devil of a place in which to try to bring off anything on a scale much bigger than a cockfight” (Radic 72). The technical demands of staging this play were rarely mentioned in discussions of the RSC production, either at Stratford, or the Barbican Pit, or the Garrick, although one comment on the Garrick, that the “the chocolate-box theatre [robbed the play] of impact, making it seem too safe and distanced” (Gardner 21) acknowledged that the theatre space could affect the play’s reception. During rehearsals, Armfield stressed the difficulties of the Sydney venue:

It’s very challenging ... particularly for a theatre like Belvoir where the audience is watching from three sides. It’s much harder to cover your tracks. [The play] is written for a theatre where sleight of hand is a bit more available. I was aware when I first read the play that it needed a special budget and that there would be extraordinary items that were as much a part of the show working as the brilliance of the performers. It’s written in a style of modern splatter-film hyper reality, and for an audience that’s seen *Pulp Fiction* or *Reservoir Dogs* you have to provide that. This play wouldn’t have been written before those films were made (Austin 1).

This would in fact be the most expensive show ever staged by the company in its twenty-year history. With a certain awe, the press reported that a team of film-industry professionals had been hired. There was a special effects manager, an armourer who had to create “some fine splattered-blood effects” (McCallum 14) from the many

gunshots, a props-maker whose job it was to come up with dismembered limbs for Scene Nine which would be so convincing from the front row that when a leg was sawn through it would make the appropriate crunching sound. In the view of the production manager, “this show [was] going to be about, is the next effect going to work, and the one after that” (Austin 1). In addition, the production manager’s taking on such unfamiliar work as sourcing dead cats and taking them to a taxidermist to be stuffed was the subject of a special feature. Unlike the Garrick, fake cats just wouldn’t work in Belvoir Street.

All unusual pre-show publicity certainly, but cleverly designed to arouse audience interest. Quentin Tarantino’s latest film, *Kill Bill Vol I*, was about to open so the company could take advantage of his work being again in the public’s mind. There was also a hope, as Armfield implied, that a technically-adept production of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* would “appeal to people who wouldn’t normally consider going to a play”, (Austin 1) presumably men and/or younger audiences. Furthermore, by dwelling on the play’s technical challenges theatre journalists were exploiting what has become a national preoccupation. Australians, particularly men, can quickly become engrossed in working out practical solutions for difficult problems or critically examining how others do so. Perhaps it’s a throwback to pioneering days when outback settlers, far removed from expert help, had to rely on their own resourcefulness to solve everyday problems. Over time, this has led to a fascination with the question, “how are they going to do that?”, and “will it work”? The media were tapping into this fascination by demonstrating in great detail how the production team was going to extraordinary lengths to bring about a confronting, almost film-like realism to the violence on stage, while hinting at the possibility that their efforts might not succeed.

Of equal interest but calculated to appeal to a very different audience was the acquisition and management of live cats. The Tarantino-type violence might attract those who enjoyed such films, especially younger men, but potentially scare off middle aged or female audiences. However, there was also waiting in the wings, as it were, an alternative story to tell, a story about a cat. On the production team no one received more publicity than Rhonda Hall, a trainer of animals for stage and screen. For this play, the story of how Rhonda had saved Meg, an orange cat, from being put down at a suburban pound and turned her into a star was the subject of several newspaper articles. Discovered just by chance was a tabby who after a few rehearsals could sit backstage “unfazed at the guns and bloody mayhem unfolding around her” (Morgan 15), and then calmly take her role in Scenes Four and Seven. Moreover, it was revealed, her two kittens were proving successful understudies! As with the revelations of the technical innovations, a tantalising prospect of uncertainty ran through these articles. Armfield was going against an old adage, never work with animals on stage. Would it all be right on the night?

And of course it was. Brains spilling out of a stuffed dead cat in the first scene and the gruesome punishment of James, the drug pusher, as he’s suspended upside down in Scene Two produced the required *frisson* of audience revulsion. Then in Scene Four, when Meg was taken out of a cardboard box to sit on Davey’s knee and be covered in

watercolour paint masquerading as black polish, there were audible gasps from the audience as the sentimental element came to the fore. After the violence, this was a relief, and everyone became absorbed in how the scene would turn out. But night after night, the cat behaved impeccably, and was still blissfully unaware of all the excitement it was provoking a couple of scenes later as Davey's futile attempts to make it black were again apparent. For Scene Eight (after the interval), when Padraic arrives, the cat was supposedly out of sight in its box, although frequent [recorded] meows reminded the audience that this was the same cat they had seen earlier. When Padraic, now infuriated at the discovery that his cat, wee Thomas, is dead shoots this half-blackened orange one in the box, the first of the blood-splattered effects came into play. Tarantino-like, the nearby wall was covered by just the appropriate amount of fake blood. More gasps of horror from the audience as the now much-loved orange tabby was dispatched in such a gruesome fashion.

As many would know from reading or seeing the play, this is just the first of many episodes where special effects are required. The three INLA men with their eyes shot out must stagger on to the stage later in Scene Eight with fake blood pouring down their faces, to be followed with more gunshots requiring the skill of the special effects expert to instantly splatter the walls, and even the floor, with blood. Scene Nine features the three men's supposed corpses being hacked up by the reluctant Donny and Davey. The appearance of their heads and limbs, together with sounds of cutting through bones and wrenching out of teeth were all conveyed with gritty realism. An ordinary laundry basket, used as a receptacle for the dismembered "bits", and a scattering of limbs near the front row were cleverly placed to underline the horror for a fascinated yet repelled audience. And the corpse of the blackened orange cat made a final appearance in the same scene, and proved to be another successful product of the taxidermist's workshop. One reviewer concluded that the technical staff were "the stars of this production" (McCallum 14), and the cat trainer even took a bow with the actors at the end.

Commentators on the original English production emphasised the serious message lying behind the blood-splattered mayhem. McDonagh himself, in an interview with the *Independent*, claimed that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* "was inspired by 'pacifist rage'. The play's deadliest thrust is at the political hypocrisy which says it's OK to murder innocent civilians for the greater good" (Hoggard 10). Reviewers tended to concur. At the heart of Michael Billington's approval, for instance, was McDonagh's "clear moral viewpoint, ... [that] in the struggle for a united Ireland, violent means have long overtaken legitimate ends, and the fanatical hardcore blend maudlin sentimentality, sexual Puritanism and a highly selective sense of history". Billington concluded, "like all first-rate satire, the play attacks excess and endorses reason" (17). Irish critics have been more subdued in their reactions, tending to see the satire as overly grotesque. The RSC production in particular was judged as "utterly unsubtle and about as funny as the bubonic plague (O'Toole 16).

Commentators in Sydney did not ignore the play's portrayal of the incongruity of ludicrous affection for cats outweighing concern for people, but in the end there was

unease that the vividly-realised violence was blotting out everything else. Indeed, this production failed to bring out the play's message. Arguably, this stemmed from the absence of a primary requirement of satire: that the object of ridicule should be close at hand. From news reports over the years, many Australians would know something about the violent campaigns of Irish republican organisations, but little about how they function from day-to-day. Their *modi operandi* where the legitimacy of drug money funding terrorism is unquestioned, where "valid targets" are coolly discussed, where English politicians such as Airey Neave are singled out to be shot because he has "a funny name", (McDonagh 29) and where male obsession with freeing Ireland is considered tainted by the intrusion of women are largely unknown. As is the tendency of terrorist organisations to divide into splinter groups. Since these are all subjects of ridicule in the play, they were lost on Sydney audiences. In the pre-production period, the director expressed a view that parallels with Islamic extremists, about whom Australians are concerned since recent bombing outrages in Indonesia, would emerge, so making the satire more meaningful (Litson 11). But in the end the play was too deeply embedded in an Irish context for that to occur.

Another reason why the satire was blunted was due to actors' poor control of an Irish accent. Australians find any Irish accent very difficult to master, the experience described by one actor as battling with "a demon in the mouth" (Verghis 14). To convey a satiric thrust with rapier precision, the accents needed to be assured as well as unobtrusive, and neither was the case at Belvoir Street. The actors playing Padraic, Mairead and the three northerners had no more than an awkward grasp of an Irish accent. The consequences were obvious in several key episodes. In Scene Five, for example, where Christy is explaining Padraic's sin of punishing drug pushers, listeners should sense the rhetoric of fanaticism behind his bizarre rationale:

It won't be so quick then he'll be to go forming splinter groups, and knocking down fellas like poor Shank Toby, fellas who only do the community a service and do they force anybody to buy their drugs? No. And don't they pay us a pound on every bag they push to go freeing Ireland for them? Isn't it for everybody we're out freeing Ireland? That's what Padraic doesn't understand, it isn't only for the schoolkids and the owl fellas and the babes unborn we're out freeing Ireland. No. It's for the junkies, the thieves and the drug pushers too! (29).

However, when the actor is moving uneasily from a general Ulster accent to Belfast tones to a mishmash of others, including Scottish, the statements just appear ludicrous. Audiences miss the point. Instead, they are diverted, even entertained, by the actor's attempt to control how he is speaking, and inevitably drift away from judging his opinions towards amusement.

Former Druid actor and advisor to the production, Maeliosa Stafford, had warned that "the characters are not funny ... [they] are deadly serious" and [the play] "has to be played for its danger and not for its comedy" (Litson 11). But it was difficult to prevent comedy taking over. For any audience, responses to the illogical nature of decisions such as Mairead's shooting

out the eyes of cattle to damage the meat export trade will always include ripples of incredulous laughter. While comic respites from the violence are necessary, intentionally or not, this production went further. Early in the play, for example, grossly inflated responses of Padraic to the news that wee Thomas was poorly, provoked an outburst of laughing, and in such heated moments the actor's control of an Irish accent was wobbly, further distracting the listeners from his display of malevolence. This was not an isolated incident. For Australians in general, used to seeing British television programs such as *Father Ted*, overblown or absurd situations, performed in an Irish accent invariably produce gales of mindless laughter.

The director did make the most of comic possibilities especially in scenes with Padraic's exasperated father, Donny, and long-haired neighbour, Davey. Both represented a sort of normality against which the mayhem exploding around them could be judged. Their comments, especially Davey's, as he milked the pauses before or during his expressionless one-liners, always guaranteed a reaction. Such as his adding a fatuous detail to the feeble explanation to an infuriated Padraic that wee Thomas had a disease causing him to go orange, and [pause] "smell of boot polish" (39). Or his response to Donny's lack of concern when Padraic is taken out to be killed by the INLA men: "No. After your son tries to execute you, your opinions do change about him" (49). Or in the final moments when wee Thomas suddenly appears and the futility of all the violence begins to sink in, Davey muses: "Four dead fellas, two dead cats ... [long pause] ... me hairstyle ruined" (68). As the play developed, he was increasingly seen as a sort of gormless idiot whom the audience loved. They couldn't get enough of his deadpan humour, leering smiles, and pathetically futile aggression against Padraic. In the end, Sydney audiences just sat back and relished the Irishness of the bizarre incongruities, like painting an orange cat black – just what Irishmen would do – placed in conjunction with the brutal violence of crazy terrorists who get overly emotional about cats yet are liable to shoot anyone.

In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in February 2003, Edward Albee insisted that the theatre needs to be "inquiring, imaginative and bold" (Hallett 15). He went on, "theatre has become cautious. ... People may want something safe and a nice night, but as far as I'm concerned, it's a waste of time if you leave an audience where you found them". As critics have acknowledged, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is far from "cautious" and "safe", and audiences in Sydney were rattled out of their comfort zone. The Belvoir Street company took a risk with such a confronting play as well as a challenging one to mount. Yet in spite of difficulties, technically the production was an undoubted success: the special effects worked to perfection throughout the run, and the cats were everyone's favourites, but it was not the success Armfield had hoped for. Attendance numbers were unremarkable. The administrator felt that reviews had overemphasised the violence, and that older people had been put off (Healy). Unlike *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* where comedy was always in the foreground, messages about this play were mixed. Towards the end of the season, word-of-mouth ensured that numbers picked up as the comedy became better advertised. But there was a feeling that something was missing; some critics wondered what was the point of it all. Whereas in the earlier play, the universal context was easy to relate to, this was not the

case with *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The satire was too fixed in its Irish environment, and failed to make an impact. Instead, for many people, grotesque violence amidst a sort of comic romp was the lasting impression. A lot of dead bodies in a pool of laughter just about summed it up.

Note

- 1 While McDonagh clearly approved of the play being given to Belvoir Street, the final decision was actually made by the London producer, Adam Kenwright.

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*Death and the Playwright: Chris Lee's The Electrocution of Children (1998) and The Map Maker's Sorrow (1999)**

Donald E. Morse

Abstract: *The award-winning Irish playwright Chris Lee's The Electrocution of Children (1998) was produced at the Peacock Theatre in 1998 while The Map Maker's Sorrow became the Abbey entry in the 1999 Dublin Theatre Festival. The Electrocution of Children, an intellectually ambitious play depicts a world in which people have forgotten how precious the gift of life is, and how fragile human beings are. Characters in the play squander opportunities to be creative, turn their backs on relationships, fail in their attempts to communicate, and prey upon one another. Like the characters in Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi (1896), those in Lee's play often appear to be wayward children who fail utterly to follow any rules of logic or propriety. The play itself moves sequentially through a series of scenes drawn from the debris of lives and the isolation of relationships. In contrast, The Map Maker's Sorrow begins abruptly and confusingly with the suicide of a character the audience has not met and, therefore, does not know and then proceeds through no clear development to a harmonious end. (The play's structure reflects Lee's use of a map's "simultaneous spatial logic" [40]). At the very beginning of the play, the audience finds itself in a position similar to that of the bereaved family in the play or that of any survivors who find a member of their family dead by his or her own hand. Suicide, like Lee's opening scene, declares the strangeness of the other that the play then explores.*

"There is [...] in this humour the very seeds of fire." Robert Burton, *An Anatomy of Melancholy* (1:431)

The Irish playwright Chris Lee, the Abbey Theatre Writer in Association for the 1999-2000 season, had an auspicious Abbey Theatre debut with his brilliant *The Execution of Children* that shared the annual Stewart Parker Trust New Playwright Bursary for 1998.¹ *The Electrocution of Children*, an intellectually ambitious play superbly directed by Brian Brady with an outstanding cast, depicts a world in which people have forgotten how precious is the gift of life and how fragile are human beings.

“Humans [...] here by the luck of the draw” (Gould 175) and as “glorious accidents of an unpredictable process” (Gould 216),² in the play squander opportunities to be creative, turn their backs on relationships, fail in their attempts to communicate, and prey upon one another.

Underlying *The Electrocutation of Children* – as underlying all contemporary Irish drama – is Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Lee successfully builds upon Beckett and those other contemporary Irish playwrights who depict “an imposed situation in which the characters find themselves and which they either disguise or subvert through rituals of language, gesture and play” (Roche 6). Yet, one of *The Electrocutation of Children*’s distinguishing marks remains that none of these rituals “of language, gesture and play” leads away from the imposed situation but, rather, leads directly back to it. At the end of the play, an audience must view the ultimate “imposed situation,” that which is found in the very order of existence/creation and which the play defines as “change through catastrophe.” What Anthony Roche concludes when discussing other contemporary Irish plays from *Waiting for Godot* to *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, aptly applies as well to *The Electrocutation of Children*: “There is no solution to be found within the stage space and the dramatic fiction. Instead, the appeal is directed to the audience and to the creation of a possible community out of the bonds that briefly unite those on and off the stage” (12). The community created by *The Electrocutation of Children* must confront and then accept the accidental and unpredictable nature of human existence. “[T]he great protector, your ally in the solar system” becomes not a beneficent God but a planet, Jupiter. “Jupiter is your shield against calamity. Your friend. Remember, love thy neighbor” (*The Electrocutation of Children*). Like Jean-Paul Sartre’s audience for *Huis Clos* (1943), Lee’s audience, rather than identifying with one or all of the interdependent but isolated characters on stage is invited, instead, to share in the playwright’s distanced view of all humans, God, and the very order of existence/creation. While this conception builds clearly upon contemporary Irish drama, it is as old as the King of Brobdingnag’s incisive view of Lemuel Gulliver, in particular, and humanity, in general, and as distinct as the book of Job’s confrontation with unmerited suffering in human experience.

Like the characters in Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (1896) a century earlier, the characters in *The Electrocutation of Children* often appear to be wayward children for whom “the rules of logic and propriety simply do not (or do not yet) exist” (Beaumont 118). Such unbridled action results in the ubiquitous death and excrement in *Ubu Roi*, while a similar series of corpses – the immolated Gordon and his murdered father, the still warm body of Gary, and the Killer’s last victim, anonymous Man – litter the stage. Although no one blatantly boasts, like Père Ubu, of killing everyone and anyone, life in *The Electrocutation of Children* has almost as little value as it does in *Ubu Roi*. Moreover, in Lee’s play, death often leaves the strongest impression when at the furthest remove from people and immediate events. The electrocution of children in the play’s title, for instance, does not occur on stage but is merely an event anonymously reported as part

of a radio news program. This electrocution involves neither an individual nor a relative of any individual in the play, but occurred quite coincidentally to “another child, also called Angela [who] was electrocuted when an overhead cable fell down during a storm. She’d been out playing with her friends.” When Margot, alarmed at hearing the name of her daughter in the news report, rushed frantically to investigate, she found her own Angela unharmed, and was so relieved she embraced her wildly. The imagined hurt and fanaticized peril to the daughter, provoke a stronger reaction in her as mother than does Angela’s later real hurt and actual danger when she finds Gary murdered. Then, Margot ignores her, telling her to go away so she can love her at long distance. In retrospect, the story of the child’s death describes an unreal situation leading to excessive, equally unreal emotions.

Lee’s play concludes with a third appearance by God on a small television set lowered from the flies echoing his two previous such appearances at the beginning and in the middle of the play. This symmetry, along with the episodic structure of the play, is typical of contemporary Irish drama in general. As Roche contends: “Contemporary Irish drama does not so much rely on a plot as on a central situation, whose implications are explored and unfolded in a process which is likelier to be circular and repetitious than straightforward” (6). The central situation in this play – the randomness of violent events or “change through catastrophe” in God’s quotable phrase – appears mirrored in each individual scene, culminating in God’s third and last speech. His appropriately ironic final word about earth and its human inhabitants. “A slight error,” he confesses. “A minor, but none the less significant oversight on my part which has grave consequences for you. [...] in the year 2003, a giant asteroid [...] will crash into central Europe and knock the Earth off its orbit. [...] it will result in, well frankly, the end of everything. I’m terribly sorry.” God may be somewhat apologetic for this coming event, but it will nevertheless happen exactly as all the play’s human incidents have occurred, inexorably, inevitably. This macrocosmic central catastrophic situation of God’s world with its built-in mistake becomes repeated in the microcosm of the killer’s arbitrary choice of which victim to spare and which to kill and in several other equally arbitrary actions such as Gordon’s immolation, Gary’s death, and Margot’s killing.

At the end of the twentieth century, humans discovered anew the precariousness of life on Earth in the realization of the important role that random, extra-terrestrial events have had in determining its fate. “Every few million years a comet or asteroid hits Earth with enough force to cause global devastation. [...] It is becoming increasingly clear that cosmic impacts have had a major influence in shaping the evolution of life by triggering mass extinctions” (Davies, *Fifth Miracle* 125). One reputable theory declared that humans most probably owed their origin to an asteroid that crashed into Earth wiping out the dinosaurs and thus creating an opportunity for mammals to develop.³ (In much the same way, life itself plausibly arose thanks to a passing comet’s gift of water to the planet.) What happened to the dinosaurs could well happen to humanity, as God Himself testifies in the opening scene of Lee’s play. “One chance encounter with a

comet, and for humans at least, it's goodnight." That "chance encounter" or an equally chance encounter with a careening asteroid is not only plausible but now has also become recognized as highly probable. In one of those odd coincidents that are a publicist's dream, as *The Electrocuting of Children* neared its opening night, newspaper headlines in March 1998 proclaimed that an asteroid was hurtling towards Earth to destroy all human life early in the new millennium. More complete calculations released a few days later indicated, however, it would miss Earth by a fair margin.⁴ Much like Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* – that most prescient play at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century where "[e]verything depends on what you can get away with" (Shattuck 10) – *The Electrocuting of Children* on the cusp of the new millennium in its disquieting and often unnerving portrait of an atomized humanity in a catastrophe-prone universe yields a new disquieting way of seeing our selves and our world.

A year later, the 1999 Peacock entry in the Dublin Theatre Festival, *The Mapmaker's Sorrow* reunited Lee with director Brian Brady, the imaginative designer, Paul McCauley, and several key actors from *The Execution of Children*, including Chris McHallem (as Henry the freelance polysomnographic technician, feckless husband, and father) and Catherine Mack (as an alluring and very self-assured Death). Ingrid Craigie played the title role of Morag the map-maker of the play's title, reluctant teacher, and mother experiences a mid-life crisis involving fundamental questions about her profession and marriage. Her professional life appears stagnating. She and her husband, Henry, have split-up leaving unsettled his considerable gambling debts. Jason, their son often assumes the guise of an unfathomable alien who refuses to share her cherished assumptions – ones that she has based her life upon. A workaholic, she does, however, take time for her son but most of their encounters end in temper, frustration, and his abrupt departure. An expert on cartography, she now faces an ultimate act that lies beyond any rational or public map-making. The central and inexplicable event in *The Map Maker's Sorrow* occurs when Jason, son of Morag and Henry, decides coldly and quite deliberately to kill himself. "At the moment I'm attempting to decide on the best method [...]. [...] Hanging is most likely the best way" (42), he tells an acquaintance the week before his death. This is no random accidental death, nor is it one caused by some inexplicable "act of God," as in *The Execution of Children* but one that occurs precisely because of his inability to believe he is "worth saving" (44).

Although Lee deals with the important, but often unacknowledged, social problem of young adult suicide, he uses this occasion – somewhat in the manner of Thornton Wilder in *Our Town* (1938) and Jean-Paul Sartre in *Huis Clos* – to discuss larger issues, such as the place of death in contemporary society and the ultimate relation of death to life. There is, for example, an observable paradox that people are living longer yet there is also a great increase in numbers and rates of suicides (Lee 22).⁵ The play exfoliates out to include "Death the nightmare" (6) of contemporary society and "Death the mystery" (6) – the ultimate mystery of life and death in the cosmos of space-time. Lee deliberately abandons the traditional image of life as an arrow coming from

the past and going into the future, moving from birth through life to death. Instead, at the end of act one, Death modifies the image by using quantum mechanics:

It might be said that a life is fixed like a line on a map of space-time. Science says there is fate. Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, celebrates the chaos of unpredictability. [...] a life is like a sub-atomic particle. You can never know where it will be if you also want to know how fast it's moving. (54)

So the most anyone can hope for is partial knowledge.

Lee's insistent look at contemporary society's inability to face death in *The Map Maker's Sorrow* focuses on contemporary western society's current practice of hiding death. To do this, he uses suicide as an unavoidable means of revealing death to the living. Only in hindsight do the pieces fall into place in the puzzle that is Jason's suicide but even then those left behind have mostly unanswered questions. For his parents, Morag and Henry there is a life to grieve and "No one tells you how to grieve" (88). When Morag prompts Henry "Let's cry. Let's start from there" (90), she suggests that their tears will slowly wash grief away leaving memory and love (90). Her admonition becomes strengthened in the play's last scene where Death urges humans generally to accept their own and others' death as the natural end of all life including that of a suicide. Death warns her audience: "You are more terrified of death now than at any time in history. [...] Death and dying have become strange events that take place in strange surroundings watched over by strangers" (91). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, most people will face death in isolation and with terror – two of the characteristics of the suicide's death.

As God was the guiding, highly ironic presence in *The Electrocution of Children*, so death – much like Whitman's "lovely and soothing death" (l. 135) – governs all life in *The Map Maker's Sorrow*. Rather than the stock figure of bones, hourglass, and scythe, Lee's death appears as a beautiful, purposeful, and composed woman offering the last kiss of forgetfulness to those who embrace her "the best kisser in the universe" (23). Within this human as well as cosmic context, Morag and Henry confront the inexplicable to wrestle themselves with Albert Camus' question of life's purpose or lack of it.⁶ For the essential nature of suicide remains non-rational and intensely private, unknowable and terrible – even to the person committing suicide. Several of Sylvia Plath's poems, for instance, appear to verge on the hysterical in her attempt to bring coherence to what has no coherence – her embrace of self-destruction. To maintain the verbal coherence necessary to communicate thought and emotion, the poet used poetic form as the control rather than logical reasoning, sequencing of events, or symmetry in details. All of which are absent in suicide. "Dying / Is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well," but this is Plath, the poet speaking and not Plath, the silent suicide (245). Suicide rarely if ever becomes "an art." Instead, it usually produces a chaotic unformed mess that others are left to clean up. Lee makes that point clear in *The Map Maker's Sorrow*

by placing Jason's death by hanging at the very beginning of the play rather than elsewhere. (The end of the first act was surely another possibility, if he wanted to emphasize logical or progressive development.) In doing so, he announces his subject while at the same time negating or at least forgoing logical development, clear sequencing of events, and symmetry of scenes.⁷

The play's structure itself reflects Lee's use of a map's "simultaneous spatial logic" (40) rather than his heeding the mapmaker's imperative to "reduce complexity in order to be useful" (6). While the division into scenes in *The Map Maker's Sorrow* superficially resembles that of *The Electrocution of Children* here it serves a quite different dramatic purpose. *The Electrocution of Children* progressed serially from a clear ironic beginning through a development of action and character to a bleak but still ironic conclusion. *The Map Maker's Sorrow* begins abruptly and confusingly with the suicide of a character the audience has not met and, therefore, does not know and then proceeds through no clear development to an harmonious end. At the very beginning of the play, the audience finds itself in a position similar to that of the bereaved family in the play or that of any survivors who find a member of their family dead by his or her own hand. Suicide, like Lee's opening scene, declares the strangeness of the other. In contrast, *The Electrocution of Children* moves sequentially through a series of scenes drawn from the debris of lives and the isolation of relationships to the seemingly more remote but all-too probable collision of the earth with an asteroid. In *The Map Maker's Sorrow's* non-linear spatial form, rather than one scene logically following another, scenes are grouped by contiguity. "Maps are not mirrors of reality," warns Morag (5). But maps still do relate to reality however approximately, as the scenes in this play relate to but do not attempt to reproduce bereavement or elucidate what remains inexplicable. Lee's subject by definition resists conventional knowledge – there are no forms, no shapes that fit this act. "Suicide will have seemed to its perpetrator the last and best of bad possibilities, and any attempt by the living to chart this final terrain of a life can be only a sketch, maddeningly incomplete" (Jamison 73). Kay Redfield Jamison in her authoritative study of suicide, *Night Falls Fast* contends:

Suicide is a particularly awful way to die: the mental suffering leading up to it is usually prolonged, intense, and unpalliated. There is no morphine equivalent to ease the acute pain, and death not uncommonly is violent and grisly. The suffering of the suicidal is private and inexpressible, leaving family members, friends, and colleagues to deal with an almost unfathomable kind of loss, as well as guilt. Suicide carries in its aftermath a level of confusion and devastation that is, for the most part, beyond description.(24)

It is this level of confusion that *The Map Maker's Sorrow* dramatizes.

One reviewer ignoring Lee's mapping of this harsh, confused reality, erroneously described as a negative dramatic effect what proves to be a positive one. "Although

every scene has its point, like a sound-bite, few last long enough to develop into something probing or revealing, and many end with punch lines that effectively abort what might otherwise have moved into more complicated terrain” (Louise 21). But this objection confuses dramatization with characterization. To take the reviewer’s own example of Jason and Jess’s conversation about his approaching suicide in the scene “Fuck” (41-45), their dialogue ends with two hard-hitting “punch lines” but both emanate from deep within the character’s experience and personality.

JASON I’ll fix us something to eat.

JESS You know I don’t have any money.

JASON It’s not a problem.

JESS Are you asking me to fuck for my rent?

Pause.

JASON Look, I’ll be dead before you learn to hate me. (45)

Given Jess’s profession as a young prostitute, her suspicion of a sexual trade-off for food is clearly warranted and it might appear strange if she did not confront the issue. Jason, on the other hand, has worked hard at disengaging feelings and avoiding confrontation as well as nursing his low self-esteem. His line is doubly in character first in reiterating his preoccupation with suicide and second in devaluing himself. Moreover, Jason’s “I’ll be dead” within either the context of his announced plans to commit suicide or of his having killed himself appears neither boastful nor pretentious but purposely consistent. In a landmark study of one hundred and thirty-four suicides, Eli Robbins and his colleagues at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis conclude that “The high rate of communication of suicidal ideas indicates that in the majority of instances it is a premeditated act of which the person gives ample warning” (qtd. in Jamison 237). Jamison agrees: “Most who commit suicide explicitly and *often repeatedly* [italics added], communicate their intentions to kill themselves to others [...] before doing so” (236). Such communication “is fortunate it allows at least the possibility of treatment and prevention” (236). True it does – unless that suicidal person communicates to someone, such as Jess in Lee’s play, who remains aloof, uninvolved, and indifferent (42, 45).

Throughout the play, such short scenes (such as those between Jess and Jason) become those last bits “of confusion and devastation” that give form, although not a linear one, to *The Map Maker’s Sorrow*. Since suicide produces fragmentation, a work of art focusing on it may well be fragmented itself. Further, Lee’s series of vignettes, fragmented scenes that are themselves in turn only fragments – those post-modern fragments shored against our ruin – prevent an audience from a too-easy sympathy with any of the characters. As Morag says – “Fragmentation defeats empathy” (89). Those relatively short scenes of varying length continually interrupt any emotional engagement

by the audience thus avoiding even a semblance of sentimentality. “We ache for more of the relationship between parents and son,” perceptively wrote Dorothy Louise, “hints at first tantalize, then irritate, as we realize that we will never get closer to any insights on why these relationships have developed as they have” (22). For Louise, this irritation over the course of the play proves negative. But surely Lee’s point remains valid that there is no real insight to be had – these relationships simply happened. There is no why. In this particular mind-body problem there can be no answers to questions about human motivation and relationships. (The key informant cannot be interviewed or testify being dead.) We are meant to face the insoluble nature of this ultimate act.

Lee does give voice to the suicide, however, through retrospective exposition where all the seemingly innocuous remarks, frustrations, inexplicable temper tantrums acquire significance when seen in hindsight. As we follow Jason’s scenes sporadically inserted in the action, we can see the potential suicide’s “slippage into futility [...] first gradual, then utter” (Jamison 104). This progress into futility mirrored in the play is far truer to the experience of suicides than if Jason had “report[ed] the causes of his feelings” as one reviewer naively wished (Louise 21). This same reviewer apparently would have liked to see a different play – one that tidied up all the emotions to show logically and clearly exactly why Jason felt the way he did and how that led him inevitably to his hanging himself (Louise 21-22). But such wishes, as understandable as they are and as frequent as they are, cannot be granted.

When [...] Morag asks Jess [Jason’s recent acquaintance] if Jason hated her, Jess replies: “He didn’t hate you. He was hurt by you. He couldn’t bear the weight of expectation. That’s why he cut himself off.” But this is feeble because we never see Morag pressuring Jason, so we have to wonder about Jason’s accuracy in reporting the causes of his feelings. And why could he not just as well have been spurred to accomplishment by his mother’s ambition for him, assuming she harbored such a prospect? (Louise 21)

But an audience might equally wonder about Jess’s accuracy in reporting what she did or did not hear Jason say. She certainly wants to wound Morag and lower her self-esteem since she sees the older woman as behaving as if she was her superior. As for why Jason “could [...] not just as well have been spurred to accomplishment by his mother’s ambition for him,” there can be no answer. Morag is a good mother – ambitious for herself and one could presume for her son as well. We see her and Jason together in scenes where neither one understands the other. For instance, Jason has mastered various arcane statistics about the solar system at his mother’s request but fails to find any meaning in them. Finally, as the scene builds he rattles off a complicated recipe in all its detail only to run off in frustration shouting, “Who cares? Who cares about anything?” (17). Each of the living Jason’s scenes ends abruptly either with his physically leaving or his clearly ending the conversation (17, 45, 63, 78).⁸ The visual image of Jason fleeing not just

from his parents but also from any true confrontation with them or with his own feelings typifies not only his actions in the play (compare 48) but those of virtually all suicides. Suicide is an escape from what has become intolerable. Why life should become intolerable is rarely known. What the reviewer noted as negative – “we remain in the dark about what his [Jason’s] parents have done” (22) – is positive dramatically and true psychologically. Not only do “we [in the audience] remain in the dark,” but so also do Henry and Morag and everyone else Jason left behind to clean up his mess. Jason’s bleak closed-in view of his diminished life does not include or permit his lending anyone a hand. This critic objects, however, to Jason’s inactivity. “[...] Jason describes watching an old woman pulling a shopping trolley against the wind for an hour to prove his point [that ‘life is shit’]. ‘Then I had to look away. That’s how hard life is.’ Can we help wondering why it apparently never occurs to him, over the course of that hour, to offer the woman a hand?” (Louise 22). But surely the point of his story is that as with all of Beckett’s characters there is “Nothing to be done” (*Godot* 7). Jason identifies with the old woman only in her helplessness for it reflects his own. “I understood that that woman was the future. The future for all of us,” he concludes (43). By which he means that in his experience it is impossible to “achieve [...] something in the course of [...] time” (43). So there would be no point in going to her aid. Instead, her plight reinforces his determination to commit suicide.

“Death is the mother of beauty” declared Wallace Stevens (l. 63). The psychiatrist Rollo May went further suggesting that

This awareness of death is the source of zest for life and of our impulse to create not only works of art, but civilizations as well. [...] awareness of death also brings benefits. One of these is the freedom to speak the truth: the more aware we are of death, the more vividly we experience the fact that it is not only beneath our dignity to tell a lie but useless as well. (103)

Jason, all too aware of death, still has no zest for life nor does he wish to help create a civilization but he does feel free to speak the truth as he knows it – often shockingly so.

Nietzsche suggested that “The possibility of suicide has saved many lives” (qtd. in May 103). But Nietzsche must have been describing a person intellectually engaged with the question of suicide rather than one prone psychologically or emotionally to commit suicide. One of the great strengths of Lee’s play lies in his refusal to either intellectualize or rationalize suicide but instead to tightly focus on the pathology of suicide framed by other non-suicidal lives, since the mind-set and emotional state of the suicide is fundamentally at variance with those of others. Jamison wisely cautions:

Although it is tempting to imagine suicide as obituary writers often do – as an “understandable” response to a problem of life, such as economic reversal, romantic failure, or shame – it is clear that these or similar setbacks hit everyone at some point in their lives. [...] For every grief or strain that appears to trigger

a suicide, thousands of other people have experienced situations as bad or worse and do *not* kill themselves. The normal mind, although strongly affected by a loss or damaging event, is well cloaked against the possibility of suicide. (199)

In *The Map Maker's Sorrow*, for instance, Jason's parents find themselves individually and together in almost impossible positions economically, emotionally, and professionally yet neither contemplates suicide. Henry has gambled himself into huge debt to underworld figures that threaten to maim and/or kill him if he fails to repay the loan within a very short time. He has also wrecked his marriage, alienated his son, and lost his job. Still, he perseveres creating a freelance consulting business based on his profession as a polysomnographic technician and meeting adversity and danger armed with an ironic sense of humor, verbal agility, and a baseball bat. Morag has had the very foundations of her research and lifework destroyed. What she took for a bright new wave of the future in the building of the Rajasthan Canal in India (45-50) turns out to be a tatsumi that drowns and destroys people, their lives, work, and culture (88-89) – a “savage waste of progress,” as Henry calls it (89). Her only son, in whom she believed and for whom she had such high hopes, killed himself, yet she, like Henry, never thinks of killing herself. Like Henry and millions of others she may drown her sorrows in alcohol to the point of endangering her health but this is a short-term non-remedy that she appears capable of jettisoning. Both parents feel understandably shattered by Jason's suicide coupled with their own failures, yet unlike Jason and those who are genuinely suicidal they do not feel total paralysis of “all the otherwise vital forces that make us human” (Jamison 104). They are not confined to the suicide's world that A. Alvarez described so fittingly as “airless and without exits” (293). They appear baffled but not buffaloed. There is no “slippage into futility” so typical of suicides (Jamison 104). By contrast, Jason experienced continually the utter futility of his life.

Unlike Willy Loman, one of the most famous suicides in modern drama, Jason's death is not motivated by a desire to solve any problem either of his own or his family. In *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Willy decided to kill himself because he believed his death would actually solve all of his and his family's problems through the proceeds from his life insurance. In his mind, the insurance becomes “a guaranteed twenty-thousand-dollar proposition [...] like a diamond shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand” (442-43). But Jason has no prospect of diamonds. Moreover, through his death, Jason attempts to deny the very premise of lived life itself. By denying the future, suicides like Jason attempt to negate the past carried in memory. The suicide emphasizes instead that memories are too much to live with, bring not consolation but pain, provide no enjoyment through recall, and are to be destroyed rather than built upon. The twin goals of the suicide thus become to lessen the hold of the living and the compulsion of memory. Thornton Wilder put the promise of death well for such people: “the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long” (76).

Jason's life and death form part of the acute, painful mystery of young adult suicide that in many countries has reached almost epidemic proportions. "One percent of all suicides occur in the first fifteen years of life, but 25 percent occur in the second" (Jamison 202). "Suicide in the young, which has tripled over the past forty-five years, is, without argument, one of our most serious public health problems. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in young people in the United States and the second for college students" (Jamison 21 see also 22-24).⁹ "[F]inding no comfort, no remedy in this wretched life, [. . .] Jason is] eased of all by death," as Richard Burton so memorably put it several centuries ago (1.431-32).¹⁰ "I want you to live and to live beautifully," concludes Death in *The Map Maker's Sorrow*. "Live, but remember also to die" (91). The last word in the play is not verbal, however, but visual and given, not to Death, but to Nature that rains "upon all the living and the dead" (Joyce 173) as the curtain falls.

Having put humanity in its rightful place quite a bit lower than the bacteria in *The Electrocution of Children*,¹¹ Chris Lee in *The Map Maker's Sorrow* negotiates human relationships at the very edge of unrefined experience. *The Electrocution of Children* presents a disconcerting and often unnerving portrait of an atomized humanity in a catastrophe-prone universe. *The Mapmaker's Sorrow*, in contrast, portrays an estranged couple who despite their talents, intellect, energy, and good will are, nevertheless, fundamentally unequipped to deal with a teenager who wants nothing to do with them and appears hell-bent on killing himself. Whatever their limitations, the death of their son forces them in the end to deal with one another and the reality of loss. "Being a parent means watching a beautiful energy slowly spiral out of your control. You can't mark the boundary where your failure meets his pain," says Morag to Henry at the play's conclusion (90). Mourning their loss becomes yet another beginning as they attempt to accept the death of their son along with their own mortality. Confronting one of the most difficult of all human situations in the loss of their child compounded by that child's suicide, Morag and Henry struggle to accept their loss and to accept their son's choice of death over life as the means of ending his torment (89).

W. H. Auden once distinguished between two kinds of necessary art: "There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love" (341-42). *The Map Maker's Sorrow* belongs in Auden's second category of parable-art – art that teaches people "to unlearn hatred and learn love." Poignant, playful, comic, and desperate by turns Lee once again demonstrates an impressive mastery of his craft.

Note

- * I wish once again to thank Ms Judy Friel and the Peacock Theatre, Dublin for graciously supplying me with the unpublished script of *The Electrocution of Children* and to thank Chris Lee for permission to reproduce its text.
- 1 Chris Lee was born in Dublin and now lives and works in London. He has written fourteen full-length plays over the past dozen years. Productions in London include *Hummingbird* (1996),

The Optimist's Daughters (1997), and *Eat the Enemy* (1999). RTE recorded his radio play *The Parallax of Jan Van Eyck*. His most recent production is *Vermilion Dream* (2004). For an in-depth analysis of *The Electrocution of Children* see Morse, "'The Simple Magnificence of Bacteria.'"

- 2 Lee here enters into the debate over evolution, psychology, and the brain raging in biology by having God take the side of paleobiologist Stephen Jay Gould in opposing various sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists whose work is perhaps best exemplified by that of Steven Pinker. (See Alden M. Hayashi's interview with Pinker for a spirited defense of evolutionary biology.) Lee recalls reading Gould's *Life's Grandeur* and *Eight Little Piggies* and declares that "God is certainly a fan [of Gould's writing]" (Letter to author). Because of the repetition and overlapping of ideas among Gould's various essays and books, I have felt at liberty to quote from *Full House* although that was not Lee's immediate source of ideas or vocabulary.
- 3 See Davies, *Three Minutes* 1-7 and especially 1-2 for a description of this disastrous eventuality of an asteroid striking the earth.
- 4 Those new predictions about Asteroid XF11 failed to create front-page headlines. For a full discussion of the possible role of comets and asteroids in seeding life on earth, see Bernstein, et al.
- 5 Suicide does remain an option for many elderly people, however. Although Jamison's "focus is on suicide in those younger than forty," she emphasizes that "this in no way means to downplay the terrible problem of suicide in those who are older. Study after study has shown that the elderly are inadequately treated for depression—the major cause of suicide in all age groups—and that suicide rates in the elderly are alarmingly high" (21). For an extensive discussion of *The Mapmaker's Sorrow* see Morse, "'To Cry with Terror.'"
- 6 Albert Camus famously asserted in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* that "Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (3).
- 7 The Peacock production created confusion by inserting a scene before the action of the play began in which all the characters walked somewhat somnambulistically around the stage. This intrusive scene was followed by a blackout then followed by the first scene "Hanging" (compare with the published text 5). That unnecessary intrusion of the characters before the first scene muddled the issue of the incomprehensibility of suicide for those left behind by violating the play's structure.
- 8 "Look, I'll be dead before you learn to hate me" is, of course, verbally abrupt. It is not, however, a solid ending for a "sound-bite" as Louise contends (21) but a viciously effective, narcissistic termination of a discussion.
- 9 "In England and Wales suicide rates per 100,000 among 20-24 year old males more than doubled between 1960 and 1981" (National Center for Health Statistics 1984 qtd. in Hawton 22). "In 1975 [. . .] suicide was the second or third leading cause of death in 15-24 year olds in several European countries, with the rates for males generally higher than those for females" (Hawton 25). "[I]n the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a very serious increase in deaths by suicide among older teenagers and those in their early twenties, this being more marked among males than females, and among whites as compared with nonwhites" (Hawton 21). "Between 1960 and 1975, rates among 20-24 year olds rose by 130%. Since 1975, the rates in this age group have remained relatively stable" (19).
- 10 Suicide was vividly described by Robert Burton in his monumental *An Anatomy of Melancholy* close to four hundred years ago. "There is [. . .] in this humour the very seeds of fire. [. . .] In the midst of these squalid, ugly, and such irksome days, they seek at last, finding no comfort, no remedy in this wretched life, to be eased of all by death [. . .] to be their own butchers, and execute themselves" (1:431-32).

- 11 Gould in several books maintains that “We live now in the ‘Age of Bacteria.’ Our planet has always been in the ‘Age of Bacteria,’ ever since the first fossils – bacteria of course – were entombed in rocks more than three and a half billion years ago.”
- “On any possible, reasonable, fair criterion, bacteria are – and always have been – the dominant forms of life on earth. Our failure to grasp this most evident of biological facts arises in part from the blindness of our arrogance, but also, in large measure, as an effect of scale” (Gould, *Full House* [176]).

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Conjuring and Conjecturing: Friel's Performances

Hedwig Schwall

Abstract: *Though most critics were negative about Performances I believe this is a vintage Friel play, first in its theme: (1) its interaction of different languages (whereby music is more important than ever) and (2) its illustration of epistemological questions (especially the question of performativity), but also in its components: (1) the seemingly fruitless journey, (2) the opposition Dionysiac-Apollonian forces, (3) the communication which fails, due to the strong narcissism of one of the protagonists. As Performances is really the staging of the epistemological journey of a PhD student, Anezka, who probes into the force of Janacek's passionate desire for his muse Kamila Stösslova, desire will be a key concept in the play. This interaction between the student and the dead author's work is represented by a live Janacek. Though Friel used this device before (in Faith Healer) it is more to the point now, as it allows the playwright to stage the postmodern awareness that "the author is dead": it is his work that is alive, and challenging both readers and performers. It is interesting that a pronounced division between two kinds of reading is sustained throughout the play. On the one hand, Janacek appears as a self-centred figure who refuses to have his authorial position challenged, and sees language as a representative-imitative tool. Anezka, on the other hand, looks at expressions in a more Deleuzian way, not focusing on the product but on the production, its heterogeneity and inconsistencies. Though Janacek keeps turning Anezka's interpretations down, she will turn out to be the more convincing, as she discovers the maestro's discordant desires, not only in his social relations and in his poetics but also in the way he maintains his authorial position. His own solipsistic stance will be unmasked by the echoes in his own text, by his use of shifters and by the "general iterability" Derrida considers essential to language as such, but which is exacerbated in the quoting practice which is even more visibly effective in research work as well as in music performances.*

Style is no longer the privileged access to essence, it is an assemblage of enunciation (and as such always collective, even if associated with a proper name and a "celibate" author), and a becoming [...] the main object of philosophical enquiry for

Deleuze ... is not the single “thing”, or the static structure of objects, but always a becoming a series of acts “expressed in a certain style”. ... So style is a name not for a form of diction ... not for a deliberate organisation of language, ... but for the discord, the disequilibrium, the stuttering that affect language at its most alive. (Lacercle 221)

Introduction: Leos Janacek and Brian Friel

When Friel’s play *Performances* was premiered on 30 September 2003, the critics were almost unanimously negative. According to Ian Shuttleworth in *Financial Times* “the problem is the damned material. It can’t decide what it wants to be”. I fully disagree, and want to argue that Friel comes to the core of his business here: as Seamus Deane indicated, “his drama evolves, with increasing sureness, toward an analysis of the behaviour of language itself” (13). The over seven hundred passionate love-letters Leos Janacek wrote to his unattainable beloved over the last eleven years of his life form the core of the play. Anezka Ungrova, a PhD student from Prague university, is so excited about the intense language of these love letters that they inspire her to investigate the links between Janacek’s life, his love letters and the string quartet which he named after his “intimate letters”. This investigation is staged as a visit to the “living quarters” of the composer – that is, to the workroom of the dead composer, which is enlivened by the performance of a string quartet that actually plays *Intimate Letters*. Opposing all negative critics, I want to show in this article just how the multiplicity and range of expressions, the interaction of verbal, musical and body language makes *Performances* into a vintage Friel play. Whereas Shuttleworth sees the play as “merely a dramatic doodle” I intend to show that *Performances* is indeed a doodle of interacting citations, but a very intricate and therein surprisingly interesting one. The “doodle” that will be under scrutiny is formed by desire – a powerful vector in the thought systems of Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler. Indeed, the one positive critic, James Boylan, focuses on how “Ungrova’s relentless questioning of Janacek... is elevated above the tedium of mere biographical inquiry. This device allows Friel to expertly home in on the broader themes of human longing and love, and their subsequent manifestations in art and music”.¹

The problem, how desire can “perform” a bridge, realise a continuity from emotion to letters to a quartet seems interesting enough to me. So what is it some critics think so “damned” about “the material” of Janacek’s life and art? Let us take a brief look at that first, and then see how it might have appealed to Friel.

Aspects of Janacek’s Life (1854-1928)

The composer’s life seems to have been marked by two contradictory emotions: on the one hand, his biographies show a controlling streak; on the other, he was dependent on and driven by strong desires.

That he was of a strongly individualistic cast of mind shows in the many conflicts he had with masters and colleagues from his early days in the Vienna Conservatoire onwards. This was further illustrated by his rivalry with his old friend Antonin Dvorak² and by the troubles in his marriage. In his sexual relations too he seemed to want to be in command, as we can deduce from his marriage with Zdenka Schulzova, a former student who was not quite sixteen when he married her. His second great love was also incited by a much younger woman: Kamila Stösslova, a housewife with two sons, was thirty-seven years his junior, and intellectually less sophisticated; yet she inspired him to his most glorious operas and most complicated chamber music.

The most important structural aspects of his oeuvre can best be summarized in four sets of opposites. First, the link between *life and work* was always very strong. Here, both the controlling and desiring forces alternate again, as we find very *descriptive* passages (Janacek is said to have carried a notebook along all the time to register peculiarities of human speech or birds' song, as Friel indicates in the passage where Anezka has to recognise the nightingale sound in the music) but also very *imaginative* ones. The opera *Katya Kabanova* (1921) for instance is modelled on and dedicated to Kamila³ but some dramatic romantic motifs, like the suicide, are invented. This brings us to a third important tension in his work: whereas the composer *disdained* "*Wagnerian romanticism*", he was often prone – especially in the eleven years of his passion for Kamila – to cast his expressions in a *romantic* mould; so that all critics consider "his two quartets are quintessentially romantic"⁴. The links between *life and death* are a fourth motif which recurs: it is the theme of an operatic trilogy but also of the series of lullabies Janacek composed for the birthday of his son who died when he was two. Finally, it is significant to note that all sources underscore that Janacek was outstanding in that the melody of his operas always closely follows the words⁵, and that he was a prolific word artist as well, as the over seven hundred letters to Kamila record, which in turn led to the composing of his second string quartet called *Intimate Letters* first performed in 1928 after his death.

The appeal to Friel

If Janacek tended to closely follow words in his music, Friel is a playwright who tends to insert music in his words. This is the case in the vast majority of his plays: *Aristocrats*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* are full of it, *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer* have some, as does *Fathers and Sons*. In *Performances* the "insertion" is more intricate than ever before. The play's title, which contains the Frielian keyword "performance"⁶ in the plural, indeed covers a range of performances, on, say, four different levels: (1) in the libidinal undertow of the verbal score, (which contain an imagery rich in body language) (2) and in that of the musical notation, (3) in the performances by Anezka and the musicians, who both perform and comment on respectively the intimate letters and the quartet *Intimate Letters*; (4) in the interaction of the "literal" and the musical

interpretations of Anezka and the members of the quartet. It is important, however, to realize that the “consecutive” aspect, the genesis of these sources can only be settled in a “simultaneous” way: the Janacek on the stage is “dead”; he is merely their master’s voice that is interpreted by Anezka and her contemporaries. Again, in this sense *Performances* is a vintage Friel piece, as it is primarily a play which dramatizes the very act of interpretation. What we get on stage here is *the epistemological journey* of a PhD student, Anezka, who probes into the relation between the composer and his beloved muse, Kamila Stösslova; she is thereby assisted by four musicians, who also interpret Janacek’s work in interaction with her research. We could further nuance Deane’s remark that Friel offers “an analysis of the behaviour of language itself”, i.e. an interaction between music, verbal and body language.⁷ Two things are striking in these forms of language: all three utterances have that in common that they all respond to a written form of language; and they all fully correspond to what Gilles Deleuze calls “style”. Let us briefly look at the graphic aspect first. Indeed, this is, especially with regard to Anezka’s sources, constantly underscored. The PhD consults other biographies alongside with the information she gathers from Janacek’s autobiographical writings. These sometimes clash, as is the way with sources in research, and so we find Janacek complaining about Anezka’s work.) To my surprise, several critics are surprised to find Janacek on stage while others and he himself often talk of his death.⁸ This is a device we are familiar with from Friel’s *Faith Healer*, who is repeatedly represented as an artist, thus allowing the playwright to literally represent the “artist” as dead, illustrating the postmodernist tenet that “the author is dead”. Indeed, the interpreters have to grope their way solely by means of the written traces he left. This is also the reason why Janacek is given “presence” on the stage, while Kamila is omitted: almost all her letters were destroyed, she did not leave many traces for the researcher. But not only does Friel make Anezka stress the written nature of her verbal sources (she sits at the work table over his papers and talks about other written sources on Janacek’s life), he also clearly marks that without the performers there is no Janacek, so he makes his Janacek figure state explicitly “Where would I be without their company? They’re my life-support group” (28). Without the musicians, Janacek is gone, and this seems also to be the case with Anezka’s “verbal” work. After Anezka’s interview with the composer (her interaction with his work), the musicians come in and remark “You’re looking energetic today, Maestro” (36). Indeed, it is thanks to Anezka’s work and the quartet’s that Janacek will “live” on⁹.

Second, the epistemological journey of the young people, Anezka and the quartet; focuses on the Deleuzian concept of “style”; in Janacek’s language¹⁰, “style” meaning “an original syntactic treatment of language, called stuttering or stammering, and the capacity to take language to its frontiers with silence, but also with other media, notably music” (Lecerle 222). Especially in the moments when Janacek is overwhelmed by his passion for Kamila, and when his quartet still sounds like “a whistle in the dark”, the composer reaches this extreme aspect of his expression, where language strains and wavers between being complete and not quite language any more. As the Janacek figure puts it: “All you have in those stammering pages are dreams of music, desires for the dream sounds in the

head. And in those stammering pages those aspirations – desires – dreams – they're transferred on to a... quite untutored young woman. And in time the distinction between his dreams and that young woman became indistinguishable..." (34). (This will be the question at the core of the interaction of the different kinds of language: how desire of the desire, and desire of recognition, will be represented by the two groups of interpreters: the lonely, academic literary scholar Anezka and the humorous, creative quartet of musicians.)

So in general we may say that *Performances* is a thematization of the force of performativity, and in that sense the 2003 play is an elaboration of *Faith Healer*. Simultaneously, it is an objectification or bold representation of the act of interpreting, and in that sense the play under scrutiny is an elaboration of *The Communication Cord*, which is the farcical counterpart of this play¹¹. *Performances* is much more complex. It seems as if the "dead" Janacek represents the traditionally representative, essentialistic, narcissistic, imitative interpreter, while Anezka will prove to be the curious, enthusiastically comparative and creative researcher. Yet, the positions are not that easy to delineate: one cannot simply maintain that the old Janacek represents old, biography-focused hermeneutic methods of reading and Anezka the more postmodern ones. As the Janacek figure complains when Anezka deviates from his own letters, yet protests (too) much when she sticks to them, the "dead author" illustrates how the "material" of his life and work resists research.

But apart from its use of music, its interaction of different languages (not only verbal, as in *Translations*) and in its illustration of epistemological questions (especially the question of performativity), *Performances* is also typical of Friel in its components. Like so often, the general frame is again that of a (seemingly fruitless) journey, during which the protagonist (i.e. Anezka) is stuck between two interpretations¹²; the opposition of the Dionysiac and the Apollonian forces is one of the central lines of conflict; and communication between the protagonist and the antagonist fails, due to the strong narcissism of one of them¹³. In Richard Pine's terms, *Performances* would be as much a love as a language play, as both are in constant, tense interaction. Indeed, Judith Butler's observation that communication is always a plea for love, whereby the need for recognition always implies the danger of destruction of the Other, is at the core of *Performances*, as we will see in Janacek's belittling of others.

Desire for Ignition, Desire for Recognition: the Maestro Enslaved

With the question of how Janacek's passionate desire produces the chain of performances we come to the core business of Friel's play. We will therefore mainly focus on the relationship between Janacek and Anezka, the subject and its author, or vice versa. What catches the eye here is the different attitudes both have towards language. Janacek is the one who seems to see language as a representative-imitative tool while Anezka concentrates on the passages of performative use of language and on transitions. While he focuses on identities and positions, she keeps an eye and ear peeled for metamorphoses and variations. As a result, we might try out the hypothesis that Janacek

stands for the traditional interpreter, who follows Buffon in his definition that “style” “involves notions of individuality , ... of subjectivity , ... of authorship” (Lecerle 220) while Anezka sees style more in a Deleuzian definition: “language is in a state of continuous variation. This continuous variation creates heterogeneity and imbalance: language is not a stable system” (Lecerle 224). In this context we can indeed speak, with Lecerle, of “vitalist metaphysics” (Lecerle 255) – and so it should not surprise us to find Janacek alive on the stage, as his work appeals so strongly to all those present in his “house”, his cosmos. But again as the whole dialogue is meant to show the interactionality between the compositions, composer and interpreters, we will see how questions about representation and production will alternate.

Anezka chose to work on the links between Janacek’s love letters and the quartet *Intimate Letters* because she felt ignited by the ecstatic, and almost “literally” dionysiac language he uses in these letters: “Anezka: ‘And what can I tell you of that great love that inspired this work? It is a fire that boils like strong wine’. ...And where did it come from, this inextinguishable flame?’” (30). Kamila, it seems in the letters, is the one that breaks all boundaries in the composer so that they both *com*-pose the quartet together: “how *our* very first meeting set my soul ablaze with the most exquisite melodies. And this will be *our* composition because it will be quick with *our* passion” (23). Sheer emotion seems to have annihilated the boundary between the composer’s body, that of his beloved, and of his art: the dionysiac aspect of “raw life” hurtles things into being: the love letters are “written kisses”, “‘This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh’” (30). The emotionality is underscored by the fact that Janacek’s most “dionysiac” passages are larded with the greatest amount of performative verbs. So he wrote to Kamila about the quartet “as I wrote it I trembled with such joy, such happiness, that every bar is a proclamation of my desire for you because my whole creative life takes its heartbeat from you” (24). The words “calling” and “proclamation”, performative verbs par excellence, are combined with strong words denoting intensity like “desire, whole, heartbeat”. In a later passage of the letters, Janacek characterises his idea of performativity in seeing it as a direct effect of *his emotions*, rather than of speech itself: “‘But with this quartet, my *Intimate Letters* to you, my love, I wrote from feelings experienced directly and vividly. This was composed in fire out of the furnace that is our great love’” (30) – thus proving once more the minor impact of the “dead author” and the major one of the “living letters”. But this is not the only peculiarity, discrepancy, in the interpretation of texts we find in *Performances*. On the one hand, Anezka loves the dionysiac language, on the other she thinks of Janacek and Kamila as a Dante and Beatrice. The wild yet spiritual nature of his passionate language indeed reveals a discrepancy in Janacek, who will insist, on the one hand, that his language was cut out of his own flesh, while maintaining, on the other hand, that the beloved of the “Intimate Letters” was purely conceived by his own mind¹⁴.

In summary, what we find in *Performances* is exactly what Deleuze means by “style”: “style is ... the absence of style ... the moment when language is no longer

defined by what it says, even by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow and to explode – *desire*. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process, and not a goal, a production and not an expression” (Lecerle 222). Indeed Janacek shows an interesting schizoid pattern in his sayings.

In the “biographical” information about Janacek we saw that his life and art was riddled with opposites. No wonder: the human being is a “dramatic construct”, the psychic system lives from the assimilation and balancing of conflict. Janacek even states this explicitly, when he advises Anezka to combine the image of her Italian ex-friend with the image of a “blonde Swede” in her head, thus showing that the “com-poser” sees the combination of opposites as the method of his work. Indeed, we further find the artist saying that in the middle of his final, violent tryst with Kamila he found innocence intoned; in the most complex relationship he finds something trivial¹⁵. And Janacek’s paradoxes also work the other way round: the “quite untutored woman” (34) incites him to write “that complex architecture again, probably the most intricate structure a man can put together ... getting the precise balance between a statement and its qualification, maybe even its denial” (28). Statement and denial are combined, as well as contrary emotions: while Janacek points out that “I was terrified tackling that complex architecture again” (28) his letters speak “again and again about the great joy and excitement of composing” (28). Finally, Janacek suggests that, when at his richest, he was the most threadbare; and when his death was impending, he wrote a song expecting new life: “if he could sing, maybe Adam sang something like this to his Eve. (*Laughs*) Or maybe ... Maybe at that point the old composer was finally threadbare. And he called it “I’ll Wait for You”. Silly title: his time had run out by then” (25)¹⁶. So Janacek is aware of certain oppositions, but not of others. We will now come to the crux of the play – the “schizophrenia”, “the discord, the disequilibrium, the stuttering that affect language at its most alive”).

We will first see how the author’s discordant desires are realised in Janacek’s **social** relations, secondly in his “**poetics**”, where he sets out the differences between good and bad art, and finally we will see how language itself, in the actors’ citational games, will undercut the authorial position and become **co-author**.

Janacek’s Social Relations: Desire for Recognition or for Power?

Janacek’s social interactions are represented by the quotes from his “intimate letters” which we hear from Anezka, and by Janacek’s reactions to her quoting. Thereby the discrepancy between both sources strikes us immediately. On the one hand the letter-writer Janacek stresses how the late quartets were made “between him and Kamila”: he stresses their first “meeting” and how the work will be “... *our* composition because it will be quick with *our* passion, and our *mutual* love” (23); in his comments on Anezka’s reading, however (which are the symbolisation of her having consulted other sources apart from Janacek’s own), he *belittles* her: she is metaphorized as “small-town granite” (38). But not only Kamila is described as “small”: all women who threaten the maestro’s

control over his image are dwarfed. So, Janacek's wife, who wrote her autobiography, is diminished as "Moravia's [sic] supreme fantasist", while Anezka, felt to be threatening in her persistence in probing his relationships, is constantly linked up with "belittling" words: she "has her own ... impish way of classifying events" (19) and was in love with a "little statistician" (22). Finally, the first violinist, Ruth, is bagatellized to "an accomplished fiddler" (18) and kept in an almost exclusively ancillary position, as she can help the master to food and drink, but is subsequently sent out of the room. Interestingly, the PhD student who had come in with glorious addresses to the maestro, whom she described as "generous", "courageous, so faithful" "just noble", even "august" (33) is later found to be "cruel and heartless and deeply misogynistic" (36). The latter definition, however, is too narrow, because men too are belittled by Janacek. Especially his rival Dvorak's music is described in diminutives "Much too folksy-themes-and-dirndl-skirt for my taste" (16, my emphasis). Yet, when the rival composes a *Requiem* for the "real master", Janacek, the addressee's effect on Dvorak's work is that it becomes all of a sudden "august" (17). Moreover, the passage where Janacek passes this judgment on his rival is ambiguous as to what exactly was so grand: the music or the occasion? "Janacek: And you should have heard his *Requiem* at my funeral service. It was ... august. In the old Opera House where they had me lying in state. Curious expression that – 'lying in state' isn't it?" (17). As Janacek can see himself as the giant mainly by belittling all others, we find here an illustration of Judith Butler's tactics of the performativity of someone who moves from a position of authority to one of power. "If the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that ... 'undo' the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power" (Butler 2004, 2). This is precisely what happens to the Janacek figure: when Anezka delves further into his writings and in those of his circle, she finds that the man had his generous moments, but that his hunger for power was very strong as well. Along with that hunger came a denial of it, and thereby a denial of self-knowledge. As a result of her readings, Anezka moves from seeing the composer as an "august" figure to a self-centred one. Indeed, rereading the play shows how the artist has been "self-centred" all along. The Janacek figure only thinks of his own health, forgets Anezka's name all the time and never lets her finish a sentence; he quotes himself when he pleases, but when she does he denies he ever wrote it. This egocentrism becomes most clear in the passage when Janacek jealously remembers an American musical that was much more popular in Bruno than his own music. The composer recalls merely one line from the musical, and does not even finish it: "I want to be happy but I won't be happy". Like an evangelical hymn, isn't it?" (21). First of all, this contradictory statement reflects Janacek's contradictory frame of mind, and the paradoxical nature of desire at that: desire, by definition, is never fulfilled, since it is desire of the desire. But also significant is that this song, which punctuates *Wonderful Tennessee* – another play which has the endlessness and potential destructiveness of desire for its theme – is quoted there in its full form: "*I want to be Happy ... But I won't be happy / Till I make you happy, too*" (Friel 1993, 3. My emphasis). Significantly, the "altruistic" aspect about the "you" is left out by the Janacek figure, underscoring his egocentrism.

Janacek's Poetics

Even in his assessment of the verbal and musical arts Janacek sports a need to belittle the former in order to let the latter shine in greater glory¹⁷. I will limit myself here to refer to two of his main statements and show how the author contradicts himself. First, the language of music is declared to be the sole and perfect language; second, this perfect language consists of a “unified” expression.

Indeed, Friel's Janacek strongly hierarchizes the different languages he knows, and therein displays an anger with words in general that betrays the attitude of one who “doth protest too much”. “The people who huckster in words merely report on feeling. We speak feeling” (31), he maintains. He even applies W.B. Yeats's line that one should choose either perfection of life or of the work to his own situation, trying to impress Anezka with his self-sacrificing attitude with regard to Kamila:

“Janacek: I never considered the life all that important. I gave myself to the perfection of the work. Did I make the wrong choice?

Anezka: Crap.” (37)

The PhD is duly unimpressed: Janacek contradicts himself in many ways here. First, he writes over seven hundred letters to his beloved Kamila, stressing that the music flows directly from his fascination with her, which is a *contradictio in terminis*: first, the composer apparently needs these hundreds of letters to master “the ferment” as he calls it, and secondly he later maintains that not Kamila Stösslova was the source of his inspiration, but his own mind – his letters. Moreover, the unity of both the verbal and the music work is symbolised by their common title, *Intimate Letters*. So Anezka is right to say that the composer's alleged suggestion of a heart-rending choice is “crap” as if the letters were no work, and the work no letters.

Second, there is Janacek's definition of the perfect expression which also contains a paradox. In the ideal utterance, he says, “we reach into that amorphous world of feeling and sing what we hear in *the language of feeling itself*; a unique vocabulary of sounds created by feeling itself” (31, my stress). The composer stresses that the chosen expression is unbroken, coinciding with itself and with the outside world. Yet he himself contradicts this twice in blatant ways. First, because the very motif, impetus of the work, desire, is exactly that which cannot be contained, and that is the very reason why his work remains fascinating. Second, Janacek totally denies the impact of the young Kamila Stösslova in order to retreat to a totally solipsistic kind of idealism. Not the real woman made him write, he says, but the woman in his head, some self-conceived ideal:

Janacek: The thing realized. The aspiration fulfilled. All you have in those stammering pages are dreams of music, desires for the dream sounds in the head. And in those stammering 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. Indeed in time he came to see her – miraculously – as the achieved thing itself! The music in the head made real, become carnal! Came to know no distinction between the dream music and the dream woman!

...

Anezka (*Total shock*) You're teasing me, Mr Janacek, aren't you? (34)¹⁸

Language as Co-author

But not only the content of what the Janacek figure says contradicts his other utterances: both the verbal and the musical *forms* of the maestro's statements turn against himself. This brings us to the third point where Janacek's style shows its Deleuzian disequilibria – in the ironies that result from the tricks language plays upon its author. To streamline the playful aspects of language somewhat, we will limit ourselves to three kinds of ambiguities: those created by echoes, those brought about by shifters and finally those originating in the quoting practice, the "Excitable Speech" shared by all actors involved.

As far as the *echoes* go, let us look at two instances to see how they work. First, there is the signal word "enslaved". In one of his letters, Janacek writes to Kamila that "'I've just completed the opening movement and it is all about our first fateful encounter and how you instantly *enslaved* me'" (19) Only, the maestro later maintains that she, Kamila, was the one who was enslaved, and more specifically by public opinion: "Forever vigilant of her good name. A *slave* to small-town tyrannies. ...practically illiterate... Mrs Stösslova was a woman of resolute ... ordinariness." (25) However, there is a double irony in this double enslavement. First, it is precisely because she did bow to the so-called "small-town tyrannies" that she could both respond to his love and be responsible to her own family, which allowed the artist eleven years of desire, and an apotheosis in brilliant quartets. But on a second level, the author is ironized in his fulminations against Kamila's "grocery thoughts", as it is the composer himself who turns out to be the one enslaved by the small-town tyranny, as he is ashamed of the "ordinariness" of the woman who had fascinated him into his major work. A second set of signal words are the qualifications Janacek gives the two ladies that threaten to overrule him with their interpretations: the first violinist, Ruth, and the PhD, Anezka. He describes "Ruthie" (another diminutive) as "a skilled do-it-yourself woman" (18) whereon she plays the beginning of the quartet which she then interprets: "Ruth (*Sings*) Ta-ra-ra-ra – Ti-ra-ra-ra. 'I'm my own man', that's what it says to me." (19) So, with her interpretation of Janacek's music she echoes what he, that is his music, says about her: *interpreting* is a matter of interaction¹⁹. Simultaneously, Janacek introduces Anezka to Ruth as a "persistent" lady. These adjectives, however,

will boomerang back on the maestro himself: the play will plainly show that it is Janacek who is the persistent do-it-yourself man, as he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the influence his wife, Kamila and Anezka have on him. Though Kamila fired his artistic abilities into full action, he inverts the situation and pretends to have invented her. Only, the composer's language – his own name to start with – show us a downsized kind of speaker.²⁰

Secondly, the *shifters* show us a different picture of the author than the one he himself intended. As Derrida pointed out in his study of shifters in Husserl, it is these pronouns which are most liable to create ambiguities of reference. So Janacek says a few disparaging things about Kamila and her husband: "What you must understand is that Mrs Stösslova was a woman of resolute ... ordinariness. Wasn't *he* a real pig!" (25) As Anezka switches to the second person singular: "I just know *you* did love her" with Janacek switching back to the position of the artist "Aren't *all artists* users?" (26 all stresses are my own) the referent of the signifier "pig" becomes unclear: is it Mr Stösslova or Janacek? This ambiguity is confirmed when Janacek dismisses Kamila's role again: "Anezka (*Incredulous*): Oh, Mr Janacek, you – / Janacek: Look at that – disapproving face! Yes - yes - yes - a real pig, I know" (34-35).

Thirdly, and most importantly, there is the praxis with quotations – representations par excellence – which oust the speaking subjects from their controlling position, thus proving to be "creative" after all. Of course it should not surprise us that in a play entitled *Performances*, Austin's remarks about performativity will prove to be very useful, especially his observation that "the performative breaks the link between intention and meaning: not my intention but the social and linguistic conventions are determining" (Culler 507). This is exactly what we have just seen: language has its own ways of situating its speakers. Yet more striking is that the Janacek figure uses the very method Austin presents, in order to negate his own previous utterances: "A performative utterance will... be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage ... or spoken in a soliloquy" (Culler 507). Indeed Janacek treats Anezka's reading of his work as but an utterance by an actor on stage, whose performance makes the sayings void. Anezka's point of view, on the other hand, is that observed by other literary theorists, who maintain that whether an utterance is performative or not depends on whether it is felicitous or infelicitous, i.e. whether they fit well into the conventions of a genre (Culler 508). The very goal of her PhD is to show the interaction of "The work and the life! Inextricable! Indistinguishable! Identical!" (24), but before she checks this with Janacek she wants to make sure with the man whether she works on terms which are acceptable to him. So, in her concern about the legitimacy, viability, felicity of her approach, to link life and work, Anezka brings in another interesting criterion of performativity: its acceptability. As Mary Louise Pratt remarks: "a literary composition is felicitous only when accepted as such ... it is like a bet, which becomes a bet only when it is accepted" (Culler 508).

Anezka: I did scruple over this, Mr Janacek: is it an area of honest exploration or is it just vulgar curiosity? And I came to the conclusion that it is totally honest.

Janacek: Well scrupled. Congratulations.

Anezka: Because there must be a connection between the private life and the public work, Mr Janacek.

Janacek: Must there?" (21)

But Janacek does not take up the bet: his congratulations were only ironical, thus symbolizing Anezka's insecurity about the approach in her PhD. And yet the authorial position is once more ironized. While Austin tried to distinguish between serious and nonserious or citational utterances, Derrida, in *Signature event context*, points out that "a general iterability" is one of the laws of language as such (Culler 509). This is an aspect of quotations which Friel's Janacek figure wants to use in order to undercut the "authorial power" Anezka borrows from her quoting practice. By multiplying authors, he wants to wipe out the dionysiac unicity he once was proud of, in order to hide it behind reference upon reference:

Anezka: "This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh."

Janacek: I never wrote that!

Anezka: "Before this I composed from emotions remembered, out of feeling recollected in perfect calm."

Janacek: That's true. (*Laughs*) Pinched that line from some English poet. Name's gone, too" (30).

Though the reference to Wordsworth's "emotions recollected in tranquillity" is not exactly a quote – or not an exact quote – Janacek wants to pretend that it is a quote. Therein he proves Derrida's observation right, that to distinguish between quotes and non-quotes in a clear-cut way is impossible, and that, as a result, the power of the performative cannot simply be delineated. However, the corollary of this is that no "author" can have "the final word" about himself: performativity belongs to the language itself and to the situation, not to the author.

The musicians, too, are invited by Janacek to add quote to quote. Here, the most significant passage is that where the composer asks Judith to play the "flautato", whereby Anezka is tested. In his request that she should be able to recognize which bird he represented in the flautato figure Janacek once more proves to be of the representative rather than of the creative type. The fact that Anezka first does not know what is expected of her, and then finds it a ridiculously simple question shows that indeed she belongs more to the Deleuzian approach which researches the infinite variations that great art should engender. She is herein assisted by John, who volunteers to play a variation on the passage the maestro had ordered his colleague to play; only, he plays it in a joking

way²¹ which displeases the maestro who feels, once more, betrayed by the creativity of others and the unexpected turns of (ex)citational exercises.

Conclusion

In the biographical information on Janacek we saw that his work was moulded by several tensions: that between life and work, life and death, between an anti-romantic stance and a romantic one, and between a descriptive and imaginative tendency in his compositions. When we looked at the interactions between Anezka and the “subject” of her PhD we noticed indeed that these contradictions steered Janacek into a stuttering style, and his desire often sent him into rapturous language. The “dionysiac” passages clearly showed how “Stuttering for Deleuze is, therefore, an equivalent of poetic language. ... The hero of stuttering, the philosophical character needed to support the concept, is the exiled poet, who subverts *langue* and aims at the noble form of silence, the silence of the ineffable ... And the problem with this, of course is that it is a Romantic pose” (Lecerle 234). Being opposed to romanticism, however, Friel’s Janacek disavows his passionate writings but therein becomes totally unconvincing as he constantly contradicts himself. In the process, Anezka’s research is represented as an act of interpretation in which the performative aspect is foregrounded, and in which two paradigms constantly interact in non-intentional ways. On the one hand, there is the essentialist narcissistic author who considers style in a traditional way, like Buffon, seeing it as a tool with which to fashion one’s own self-image. On the other hand we have the dogged and the playful interpreters, Anezka and the musicians, who see style more as “an assemblage of enunciation (and as such always collective, even if associated with a proper name and a ‘celibate’ author), and a becoming” (Lecerle 221), thus illustrating a Deleuzian idea of style which shows language in its interaction with others rather than as an individual’s possession. In this opposition, Friel added one more masterful play to an oeuvre which always shows “language at its most alive”: one in which to play is to work, to work is to play.

Notes

- 1 James Boylan, <http://www.rte.ie/arts/2003/1003/performances.html>. Whereas *Making History* concentrated on the transposition from life into text, *Performances* doubles the stakes and also tries to see how life, text and music interact.
- 2 Friel refers to this circumstance several times in *Performances*. “Janacek: An American millionaire paid Dvorak’s heirs two hundred thousand dollars for just six of his manuscripts. Isn’t that astonishing? And that was eighty years ago!” (17) The jealousy may be due to the commonly received opinion that “Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) is the best known and world’s most-played Czech composer of all times. His musical inventiveness was bottomless, and the beauty of his melodies unique. He composed everything – from symphonies and operas through songs and various chamber compositions to spiritual music such as oratorios and cantatas”. (<http://>

- dvorak.musicabona.com); his works display the influences of folk music, mainly Czech ... but also American (pentatonic themes), Classical composers & Brahms. *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music*, ed Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan. Indeed Friel's Janacek will complain to Anezka that the citizens of Brno were more taken by an American musical than by his own compositions.
- 3 The plot is relatively simple. Boris loves Katya who is unhappily married. While Katya's husband is away, servants can arrange a tryst. The husband comes back, Katya confesses her love for another and commits suicide. http://www.naxos.com/NewDesign/fintro.files/bintro.files/operas/Katya_Kabanova.htm)
 - 4 Janos Gereben/SF www.sfcv.org <http://home.ease.lsoft.com/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind0310&L=classical>
 - 5 In his play, Friel makes Janacek test the PhD student Anezka by playing piano pieces, mostly quotes from his own work, which she has to recognise. In order to confuse her, he sometimes plays Dvorak, and then Anezka guesses wrongly: "I know. From your opera Katya Kab – " (16).
 - 6 Even surgeons like Dr Rice and his colleagues in *Molly Sweeney* refer to their operations as "performances": "We're not mechanics. We're artists. We perform." (*Molly Sweeney*, Friel, Brian. *Plays I*. Introduced by Seamus Deane. ff Contemporary Classics. London: Faber & Faber, 1996. 488)
 - 7 One might even say that Janacek's love letters are a kind of 'written body language', as he wrote that "This quartet might have been cut out of my living flesh" (30). Unfortunately, we cannot go into the aspect of body language, which is especially relevant in the musicians.
 - 8 "...there's the whimsy. No mention at all of the oddity of Janáček being alive in the present; he takes mild exception whenever student Anezka blithely refers to his death in 1928, but is barely less casual about it himself." Shuttleworth, <http://www.cix.co.uk/~shutters/reviews/03065.htm>
 - 9 Throughout the play, Janacek will comment on and change his version of his own life as Anezka finds it in Janacek's letters to Kamila. In an early interview, Friel had indicated that there are no "facts" in an autobiography: "A fact is something that happened to me ... It can also be something I thought happened to me, something I thought I experienced. Or indeed an autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that." Pine, Richard. *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*. London/NY: Routledge, 1990. 19.
 - 10 Though Friel repeatedly thanks George Steiner for his inspiring essays, I believe Deleuze works equally well with Friel, and even in more elucidating ways, as I hope to show in some longer article.
 - 11 *Performances* is an elaboration of the previous play on communication, but this one is much more implicit and focused on form than the former. *The Communication Cord* was very explicit in its thematizations, like when Tim explains what his PhD is all about: That response cry – the imprecation – the expletive", the protagonist goes on about "conventionalized utterances" (*The Communication Cord* 30), "communicational possibilities" (34) and the like. Here, the focus is much more on passionate language itself and the ironies it can generate.
 - 12 She is stuck between different interpretations as Cass McGuire is between Ireland and America, the past and the present; as Molly Sweeney is between life and death, seeing and not-seeing; as Hugh O'Neill is between fact and fiction, as Christopher Gore will be between being English and Irish.
 - 13 "The works of Brian Friel ... are studies in broken communities – failures in sharing, and shared failures." RTE, Radio Telefís Éireann. Paul Delaney, Ed. *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: U of Michigan Press, 2000. 178-191. 180.
 - 14 As this information endorses Anezka's interpretation that their relationship is to be compared to Dante and Beatrice, or Petrarch and Laura, it is ironic that the Janacek figure mocks his interpreter.

As Janacek will, in the course of the play, deny his love and move further to the solipsistic position, he will further underscore Anezka's parallel, as the famous Italian lovers met when he was in puberty and she a child, and they were never lovers, but Dante nevertheless went on writing about a Beatrice which had nothing in common with the living woman – which is exactly the image Janacek tries to convey to Anezka.

- 15 “Janacek (*Quietly*) A time of frenzy. Violence even. Despair too. And then when all that ferment was about to overwhelm me - a few minutes of sudden peace - no longer - an amnesty sent from above maybe; and this fragment came to me, a little melodic tendril. Trivial, I know. But I remember placing those limpid notes on the page with such care, so delicately, as if they were fragile. And I remember thinking: simplicity like this, innocence like this, that's closer to the heart of it, isn't it?” (24).
- 16 Because the theme of never-ending desire is so important in this play, JANACEK This is the last thing I ever wrote. ...*He begins playing “I'll Wait for You”* (24).
- 17 F.C. McGrath is right in observing that “it is Friel's awareness of the intimate relations among language, discourse, illusion, myth, politics, and history that distinguishes his mature work from his early work. (McGrath 1)
- 18 Here it would be interesting to compare the poetics of the Janacek figure with W.B. Yeats's as he propounds them in his famous poem “Michael Robartes and the Dancer”. The passage “Paul Veronese/And all his sacred company/Imagined bodies all their days/By the lagoon you love so much, /For proud, soft, ceremonious proof/That all must come to sight and touch” seems here realised in an exemplary way (Yeats 198).
- 19 A similar thing happens to Anezka: after Janacek has half-mockingly called his folksy works “The Loodles of Deos Danacek” (16), Anezka will echo this in her lapsus as she addresses “Mr Danacek” (21); thus showing how one internalizes one's object of study.
- 20 The fact that the composer's very name is a diminutive (-cek being the diminutive suffix in Czech) brings another fine shade of irony in the context of one who tended to belittle the great personalities in his direct environment.
- 21 *Judith plays the flautato*. Janacek: Kamila identified the song immediately. She was very good at birds. Well?
Anezka: Well what?
Janacek: What bird is it?
Anezka: (Immediately) A nightingale.
Janacek: Clever!
Judith: Well done, Anezka.
Janacek: A nightingale in mourning, a lamenting nightingale.
John plays the same flautato figure – very slowly and woozily.
John: And that, Maestro?
Janacek: (To Anezka) They're comedians, too. (To John)
All right, what is it?
John: The same mourning nightingale on the way home from the pub.
Janacek: Out – Out – Out! (27)

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Darkness Visible. Insight and Visual Impairment in Brian Friel's *The Enemy Within*

Giovanna Tallone

All I know is a door into the dark.
(Seamus Heaney, *The Forge*)

Abstract: *Considering the development of Brian Friel's plays since the mid-60s, one looks back at his first successful play The Enemy Within (1962) with fascination. In retrospection the play is seminal work as it develops the themes of exile, quest, displacement, nostalgia and memory that mark his later production. The Enemy Within is Friel's first investigation into darkness, as it deals with the prototype of a split character, St. Columba, and the obscurities and shades of a psychic division later expressed in Public/Private Gar in Philadelphia.*

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to elements of darkness in Friel's oeuvre and to the unifying motifs of darkness and blindness in The Enemy Within, which characterize the play and make it interesting per se. In fact, in spite of a certain naiveté in structure, The Enemy Within is built around a compact imagery based on polarities and parallelisms, in which darkness, disease and decay are counterbalanced by maybe too overt hints to light, resurrection and rebirth, thus highlighting a variety of "enemies within" to be fathomed and faced.

In the "sporadic diary" Brian Friel kept while working on *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, a Russian folktale is briefly mentioned, in which the small town of Kitezh "vanishes from sight when marauders approach" (Murray 167). The fascination of the story lies in the faculties of seeing and hearing. Kitezh "encased itself in a mist and shrank into it and vanished from sight", but "the church bell never stopped ringing" (180). Friel exploits the auditory quality of the plot as a powerful metaphor for the resonance of the theatre, a bell that "reverberates quietly and persistently in the head long after the curtain has

come down and the audience has gone home” (180). The visual dimension, however, the town that disappears making itself invisible, also has a significantly vivid impact, drawing attention to the long-established and powerful metaphors of blindness and insight, darkness and light, which recur in Friel’s plays.

The motif of darkness is a conscious presence in Friel as a catalyst for the mystery of self and identity and the privacy of souls. In a famous interview he expressed his views on the art of writing with imagery of darkness:

You don’t have anything to say about anything. You delve into a particular corner of yourself that’s *dark and uneasy*, and you articulate the confusions and the unease of that particular period. (O’Toole 22, my emphasis)

Likewise, he said of *Translations*: “The play must concern itself only with *the exploration of the dark and private places of individual souls*” (Murray 77, my emphasis).

Friel exploits darkness in different forms of technical experimentation to disclose interiority (Szondi 1987, 16). When *Philadelphia, Here I come!* opens, “The only part that is lit is the kitchen [...] Stage right, now in darkness, is Gar’s bedroom” (Friel 1984, 26-27). This is the location for “the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the ALTER EGO, the secret thought, the id” (27). Frank Hardy’s litany of placenames in *Faith Healer* (1979) begins in darkness and each monologue concludes with a rapid fading to black. In *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) the dark stage is broken by a “pool of light” (*Dancing at Lughnasa*: 1) cast on the narrator, Michael, so that the interplay of light and darkness allows fluidity between past and present. Likewise, Gerry Evan’s arrival is highlighted by “Dancing in the Dark” played “softly from the radio” (32), a “subtle metaphor” (Corbett 136) for Chris and Gerry’s mutual ignorance of each other’s lives.

In the opening scene of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (1997) Tom Connolly’s soliloquy addressed to his mentally disabled and unresponsive daughter, Bridget, is interrupted by the remark “It’s dark in this basement” (13). The protagonist repeats the same words at the end of the play in a parallel scene, where he pours down on his daughter a similar river of words (83) and makes the physical darkness of the ambience a catalyst and a metaphor for Bridget’s mental darkness.

If *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* is in a way Friel’s personal revisiting or rewriting of his previous work (Pine 1999, 177), his choice of framing the play in two parallel scenes set in the dark also draws attention to the use of darkness in his plays and its interweaving with related themes of blindness and insight. This also belongs to the leit-motif of disability in Friel’s plays, featuring “people who are lame, deaf, colour-blind, blind or dumb” or “have suffered nervous breakdowns” (Niel 1999, 144)

Deteriorating eyesight plagues Daniel Stone in the early play *To This Hard House*. In *The Freedom of the City* the protagonists are blinded by CSgas. *Wonderful Tennessee* (1993) revolves around blurred vision. Oilead Driachta, the island of mystery,

is impossible to be seen, because “it keeps shimmering” (*Wonderful Tennessee*: 28). Its shape is in turn “like a ukulele”, “a perfect circle”, “a rectangle” (27). The island is a sight unseen, the physical and metaphorical response to the protagonists’ uncertain vision.

In *Molly Sweeney* (1994) Friel openly deals with seeing and not seeing, and with finding a different way of seeing (Upton 1997, 348). When restored eyesight after a lifetime spent in blindness, Molly gets lost in an alien world. The only form of survival, “the only escape was [...] to [...] immerse yourself in darkness” (50). Dr. Rice, the ophthalmologist, the giver of sight, recounts the failures of a lifetime saying: “for seven years and seven months [...] I subsided into a terrible darkness” (47). And Ballybeg is the place where “the terrible darkness lifted. Where the shaft of light glanced off me again” (48).

In *The Yalta Game* Anna is worried by her husband’s Nikolai’s “serious eye infection” (Friel 2002, 21, 24). Her obsession with blindness is enhanced by the practical need for light: “we need paraffin for the bedroom lamp” (28).

In his early play *The Enemy Within* (1962) Brian Friel already exploits the motif of darkness in what can be considered his first investigation and exploration of the “dark and private places” of an “individual soul” remote in time, Saint Colum Cille/ Columba of Iona, the third great patron Saint of Ireland with St. Patrick and St. Brigid. His status derives mostly from tradition and local folklore (Lacey 7), he was “the most renowned missionary, scribe, scholar, poet, statesman, anchorite, and school-founder of the sixth century” (Hyde 1967, 166), the founder of the city of Derry – Daire Colum Cille – and the performer of miracles as described in Adomnán’s *Life of Columba* (Anderson, passim). The multiple facets of his identity are reduced to a minimum in Friel’s play, which is built around two “contending versions” of the main character (O’Brien 42), his public persona as a nobleman of the Uí Néill clan and his private self striving for transcendence and sanctity.

Therefore the history and hagiography provided by texts in Irish and Latin (Hyde 1967, Herbert 1988, passim) do not play a relevant part in Friel’s reading of the Columban story. Friel describes *The Enemy Within* as “an *imaginative account, told in dramatic form*” of a short period in St. Columba’s exile in which to shed light on “the *private man*” (*The Enemy Within*: Preface, my emphasis). Columba is in turn “a priest or a politician” (34), “Columba of Iona” and “Columba of Kilmacrenan” (62), an actor cast into different and contending roles, ranging from the military leader his family expects to the saint he represents for the novice Oswald. Such polarities enhance the mutually exclusive loyalties of his love for Ireland and his religious vocation.

The eponymous “enemy within” is surreptitious and polymorphic, it is both seen and unseen. It is given visual perception by two visitors to Iona. The messenger Brian asks for Columba’s help in a battle between clans. After hesitating, he gives in. The second visit, from Columba’s brother Eoghan, and nephew, Aedh, requests the abbot’s help in a family dispute. When he refuses, he is cursed by his family. *The Enemy Within* thus focuses on the ambiguity of loyalties and of commitments (Corbett 2), on

the confusion and self-doubt engendered by the impossible reconciliation between different sides of self wrestling with each other.

Considering the development of Brian Friel's plays since the mid-1960s, one looks back at *The Enemy Within* with fascination. It was his first successful play, and "the earliest play he is still prepared to acknowledge" (Maxwell 200), "a solid play", "a commendable sort of play" (Murray 1999, 8). In different respects it is seminal work, as all the themes Friel will later develop appear in the play – exile, self-discovery, displacement, nostalgia, memory. In its "conventional three-act format" (O'Brien 1989, 45) and chronological development it shows variety and consistency in characterization, even though too overt visual impact suggests a certain naïveté in structure. For example, at the end of Act One, Columba's inner debate is given the form of a medieval allegory of good and evil, a psychomachia (Murray 1999, xiii). His position between Grillaan and Brian (Friel 1979, 33) makes him subject to the ever present elements of tribalism (Corbett 3). However, a net of crossreferences and unifying motifs provides the play with a structural cohesion and coherence of its own. The activity of fieldwork is a metaphor for Columba's debate: "Out at the corn there, Cormac was cutting, and I was behind him tying" (Friel 1979, 22). Cutting and tying are significant on the denotative and connotative level as they stand for the family bonds from which Columba cannot get free. In the crucial moment of choice, Grillaan says to him: "The last tie, Columba. Cut it now. Cut it. Cut it" (34). A similar pattern of unity is provided by the recurring references to food. Caornan's fall early in Act One foreshadows his death, but also Columba's "fall" out of the Iona community into the community of his family and their expectations. And the circular movement of the play is expressed in Columba's way to salvation. In Grillaan's words:

In some men [...] sanctity is a progression [...] In other men, it is the will and determination to start, and then to start again, and then to start again, so that their life is a series of beginnings. (49)

New beginnings are suggested at different stages by putting fresh straw on the stone bed, and in spite of his sixty-six years, Columba feels "as fresh as a novice" (39). The play closes on the triple repetition "to begin again" (77). And among the various meanings of the name Iona, besides yew-tree, is also the source due to a misspelling of Jonah (Room 1988, 185), the symbol of death and resurrection, of a new beginning.

The Enemy Within resounds with the familiar echoes of later plays and is a storehouse for themes, expressions and phrases that are easily identifiable. *Translations* is potentially present in the play and *The Enemy Within* is called back in Hugh's explanation of the words "*endogamein*" and "*exogamein*" (Friel 1984, 446). *The Enemy Within* deals with a marriage outside the tribe, *exogamein*, as Columba's nephew Aedh married a Pict convert, and with the consequences of crossing borders (Pine 1990, 172). In Act Two, Scene Two, "Columba and Grillaan are seated at the table looking at a map" (Friel 1979, 47), anticipating the close map-reading by Yolland and Owen in *Translations*.

Here light is shed on the ambiguity of the double role played by Columba, the saint and the military strategist, and the “war-room atmosphere” (Boltwood 2002, 55) is relieved only by Columba’s lack of interest in the survey of territory. The role of memory – both a friend and a fiend – sheds light on the painful power of retrospection. “I remember everything” (Friel 1979, 17) says Columba, which is contradicted eighteen years later by Hugh in *Translations*: “To remember everything is a form of madness” (Friel 1984, 445).

In *The Enemy Within* plot and structure are built around the division and interaction between the world of visible reality, political power, secular love for Ireland, and invisible reality, the “quest for spiritual perfection” (Robbins 76). The tension between the visible and the invisible and their mutual exclusion are supported by a network of references and imagery related to the unifying motif of darkness, with its variations of blindness and visual impairment that sustain the protagonist’s confusion.

The stage directions set the atmosphere and the mood of the play. Act One takes place on an “autumn afternoon” (Friel 1979, 11) so that impending darkness informs the subtext of the play. It is the time of prayer, the time when twilight announces both the end of the day and the cyclical return of the sun – to begin again. It is the liminal time between day and night, in the same way as Columba lurks between the visible and the invisible. When the play opens, old Caornan the scribe is busily working in Columba’s cell. The stage directions are informative: “*His eyesight is weak*. He stops occasionally *to rub his eyes* (11, my emphasis). The dialogue between Caornan and Dochonna points out the intertwining of light and darkness which underlies the tension between the visible and the invisible:

Dochonna – When did you start working in his room?

Caornan – The day before yesterday. My own room faces north. *Too dark*.

Dochonna – *More light* here?

Caornan – (Nodding in agreement) That’s it. Yes.

Dochonna – How are *the eyes*?

(11, my emphasis)

Disease – blindness, short-sightedness, deafness – contrasts with the impression of strength and energy created around the character of Columba off stage, who – we are told – is “out giving a hand with the corn” (11), and who brings “vitality, verve, almost youthfulness” (15) when he comes in. His first words to the novice Oswald anticipate darkness: “we had to get the field stooked *before the light fails*” (15, my emphasis). His casual remark works on a double axis, underlying the stability of the natural world of daily cycle and the uncertainty of impending night, the world of the visible and of the invisible. The physical darkness gaining ground on stage – Caornan’s room facing north, Columba’s room getting dark – is a coreference to Columba’s inner darkness, the “enemy within”.

The subtext of hagiography is present in the continuous references to sight and visual impairment early in Act One. In fact, the three parts of St. Adomnán’s *Life of*

Columba concern respectively the Saint's prophecies, miracles, and visions (Anderson, *passim*). In hagiographical tradition Columba is endowed with the power of divination, "his faithful followers most often credited the saint's visions of distant events" (Herbert 16). Columba's power of divination, of second sight, is contradicted in the action of the play, so that hagiography undergoes a process of compression. Significantly Columba does not foresee Caornan's death or the arrival of guests, he does not recognize Brian, and so has to rely on his sense of sight. He thinks he knows him from "his bones and his eyes and his neck and his shoulders and his walk" (Friel 1979, 25), in other words from the outward appearance of things, from visible reality.

The arrival of Brian is preceded by a moment of peace and prayer, when "It is getting dark" (24). The storm, which closes Act One, is an objective correlative for the explosion of Columba's inner struggle that has darkened his senses. By choosing to stand by the visible world, Ireland, his family, war, Columba deliberately turns blind to the invisible world, the transcendence of Iona. Act Two opens with Columba's return from battle, as a leader and a conqueror, laden with gifts for his community that resemble booty. His language has the concrete flavour of the objects he is displaying before the monks' eyes. His words "And wait until you *see* what I've got for you here" (39, my emphasis) emphasize visual perception as the substance of visible reality (42-43). When told about Caornan's death, Columba's darkened senses come back to light. Because of his incursion into the visible world he has turned blind to the blind man's death. Scene One in Act Two closes on an invocation that borders with a confession: "Merciful Christ, give me the *sight* of Caornan your scribe" (46). Columba's prayer to be given the sight of a blind man's eyes contains the paradox of sight in blindness and has a reference in Grillaan's words: "How *blind* can you be" (61). And what he had said about Caornan could be said about himself too: "*His sight is going* and his health is poor" (23, my emphasis).

Caornan's physical blindness is accompanied by the insistence on Brendan the farmer's colour blindness. The polarity between life and death, beginning and end, light and darkness is given substance by the birth of calves, one of which is dead-born (22). Brendan wants to call the surviving calf Rufus, a red one, yet it is "Black as a raven" (22). Confusion increases when Columba brings Brendan a curry comb for the calf, "With a black handle to match his coat":

Brendan – The calf is red – but that doesn't matter.

Columba – Stupid me! It was the black one that died, wasn't it?

Brendan – It was white, Columba. (43)

This confusion in sight and perception enhances Columba's mixed feelings and divided loyalties. In Act Two and Three blindness and darkness leave room to invisible enemies being made visible.

The disorder of colour blindness has a parallel in Columba's contradiction: he is sixty-six "but *looks* a man sixteen years younger" (15, my emphasis). Perception by sight is thus deceiving. His "strong, active body" (48) is the body of a conqueror, which

belongs to the visible world and so betrays him. The awareness of old age recurs and is intensified in the development of the plot. “I am old” (20) Columba says to Caornan in Act One; he repeats the same words to Brian (27-28) and to his brother Eoghan in Act Three (73). In the autumn of his life, when cursed by his brother, for the first time ever Columba is capable of identifying the protean quality of his enemy within, the “damned” but “soft, green Ireland – beautiful, green Ireland” (75) of his past.

The violent words Columba addresses to his brother in a triple repetition – “Get out of my monastery! Get out of my island! Get out of my life” (75) – reveal the ambivalence of his feelings, but draw attention in particular to the “spatial temptation” of Ireland that is also a “temporal seduction” (Pine 1990, 18). In Act One the obsessive repetition of phrases such as “do you remember”, “I remember that”, “So well you remember”, “I remember too”, culminating in “I remember everything” (Friel 1979, 16-17) anticipates Columba’s alluring memory of Ireland, nearly personified in lushness and beauty. And it is this Ireland that represents the most evident, most dangerous and most demanding “enemy within”:

Out at the corn there, Cormac was cutting, and I was behind him tying [...] and I was stooped over, so that this bare, black exile was shrunk to a circle around my feet. And I was back in Tirconail; and Cormac was Eoghan, my brother [...] and there were trees at the bottom of the field *as long as I did not look*; and the blue sky was quick with larks *as long as I did not lift my head*; and the white point of Errigal mountain was behind my shoulder *as long as I kept my eyes on the ground*. And when we got to the bottom of the field, Cormac called me [...] But *I did not look up* because he was still Eoghan, my brother, and the earth was still Gartan earth; and the sound of the sea was the water of Gartan Lough [...] And when Cormac spoke I did not answer him because I could not leave them. (20, my emphasis)

In this waking vision Columba is “assaulted by his past” (Corbett 2002, 5). Time is suspended in the confusion memory generates and in the impossibility to distinguish between here and there, now and then. It is a confusion of sight, in which what is seen is not what it is, and a coreferent to Columba’s inner confusion. The past is brought back to the present by the insistence on seeing, or rather not seeing, or the choice of not looking at the real world, so that the boundaries Columba imposes on his visual perception provide a sort of blindness to the rest of the world that fosters the insight of memory.

Columba’s recollection could go on forever, as the iterative use of the conjunction “and” provides a connection between the different parts of the mosaic and is suggestive of a natural development and growth. Columba brings back to his present the sound of invisible larks, real and imagined, in the same way as in the story *The Saucer of Larks* their music acts as a pleasantly disturbing catalyst: “they heard the larks, not a couple or a dozen, or a score, but hundreds of them, *all invisible* against the blue heat of the sky” (Friel 1983, 140, my emphasis). The evocation of invisible larks, invisible places, invisible family magnifies Columba’s memory, in which past and present overlap. The whole retelling

is highly marked by the presence of visual perception. A triple repetition focuses on sight: “as long as I did not look”, “as long as I did not lift my head”, “as long as I kept my eyes on the ground”, which reaches an act of choice: “I did not look up”. It is this choice of not looking, of deliberate blindness, which sheds light on the complications of memory, on the eponymous unseen “enemy within”. The ambivalence of memory allows Columba total freedom, but it also imprisons him: “I could not leave them”.

The temptation of memory is enhanced by the repetition of personal names and placenames, whose mesmeric effect evokes past moments emerging out of darkness. Brian’s discourse is full of such obsession: O’Neill, Colman Beg, the Cumines, Hugh, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Sligo, Cúl-Dreibhne. Each of them opens a box of darkness in memory, stirring involuntary emotions and tensions between Columba’s visible and invisible worlds.

The imagery of darkness and blindness provides a unifying motif in such an early Friel play. The darkness and half-light in stage directions is the visual counterpart to darkness and blindness as a sustaining motif in the play. The insistence on visual imagery provides *The Enemy Within* with a metaphor for disclosing interiority, scanning private darkness and shedding light on the inner man. In his next play, *Philadelphia, Here I come!*, Friel will experiment with different techniques to disclose the man within, the man you cannot see, the secret thought, the id.

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Fiction



*Demystifying Irish History in Roddy Doyle's A Star Called Henry**

Juan Francisco Elices Agudo

Abstract: *Despite its appearance of rigour, the claims of reliability put forward by history have been repeatedly contested. Although this discipline pursues an accurate recollection of objective facts, it seems that it has been exposed to subjective criteria and ideological constraints that have often resulted in biased considerations of particular events. In the case of A Star Called Henry (1999), Roddy Doyle approaches life in Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period in which the Irish nationhood underwent a decisive transformation. The novel, however, explores these crucial years from the perspective of an ordinary character, Henry Smart, whose sceptical approach to the turbulent reality of his time clashes with the atmosphere of patriotism and nationalistic fervour of the pro-Irish combatants. The aim of this study is to analyse Doyle's re-examinations of Irish history, which, in the novel, emerges as the metaphorical landscape that embodies the entire narration. My analysis will, therefore, seek to detect the way A Star Called Henry subverts and ironises about assumptions that have been long unquestioned, presenting, instead, a vision that demythologises key moments in Ireland's past.*

Whenever history or particular historical moments are approached or debated, it seems very difficult to overlook the controversies that have been traditionally associated with this discipline. However, when it comes to Irish history, these discrepancies are further intensified since the attempts towards objectivity and reliability have often collided with Ireland's stagnant binarisms. Furthermore, it could be also argued that Irish history encapsulates some of the most influential and painful events in the socio-political construction of the British Isles. Being such a decisive matter, it is no wonder that Irish authors have found in history a source of themes and motifs through which to anatomise their country as regards both its internal affairs and the complexities underlying its relationship with Great Britain. From Jonathan Swift to Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth and George Bernard Shaw, among others, Irish writers have problematised on issues related to Britain's colonial policy over Ireland and the responses it had from

the country's political and intellectual spheres. In this line, Swift's "The Drapier's Letters" or "A Modest Proposal", Edgeworth's "An Essay on Irish Bulls" or Shaw's play *John Bull's Other Island* sought to evince that, in spite of their conspicuous geographical and linguistic proximity, Britain always regarded Ireland as a colonial or, as Timothy Mo would denominate, an insular possession. These works, therefore, manifested a deeply critical attitude towards Britain's positioning and the dreadful conditions in which the country was immersed due to the metropolis' harsh treatment.

Although this question has formed and still forms intrinsic part of the Irish historical background and has permeated the writings of most Irish authors, some of them, among whom we should mention Roddy Doyle, approach Ireland's history from a more sceptical and even demystifying stance. Their views, in this sense, have challenged the self-inflicted victimisation the country has historically endured to present Ireland as co-responsible for the situation it has undergone in the past centuries. From his *The Commitments* (1987) to *Paddy Clarke Ha, Ha, Ha* (1993) and the so-called *Barrytown Trilogy* (1992), the narratives of Roddy Doyle explore contemporary Ireland from various angles; being themes such as poverty, domesticity and familiar relationships recur; in his entire literary production.¹ Nevertheless, up to *A Star Called Henry* (1999), Doyle had never attempted to tackle such an ambivalent issue as Irish history, although as he himself confesses: "This time the storyteller in me wanted to write about big history and big politics" (Davis 1999). *A Star Called Henry* appears as the book that opens the trilogy Doyle entitles *The Last Roundup* and which the author devises as an examination of key moments in Ireland's historical development through the figure of Henry Smart, a roguish Dublin-born character whose attitude allows the novelist to picture the miseries of twentieth-century Ireland. The purpose of this study is, thus, to study how this novel – though built on strictly historical facts – emerges as a serio-comic demythologisation of events such as the 1916 Easter Rising that bear such an important symbolical and sentimental meaning for the Irish.

As suggested above, *A Star Called Henry* narrates the life of a Dublin underdog, Henry Smart, son of Melody Nash, his alcoholic mother, and Henry Smart, a one-legged brothel bouncer and killer-for-hire. Henry's birth in 1902 symbolically represents Ireland's turn of the century, a fact that, as the novel will show, epitomises a crucial moment in the country's history. Through the character's physical and psychological growth, Doyle manages to delineate a series of parallelisms with the events that took place in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a period that determined the consolidation of Ireland's social, political, economic and cultural foundations. In this like manner, Henry can be categorised as a self-made individual whose practical vision of reality clashes with the heroic mysticism of the 1916 Easter Rising and of those figures that took part in it. Doyle creates a character that challenges assumptions that have been historically taken for granted and which, as the following passage reveals, leads Henry to hold a visibly sceptical – and occasionally critical – attitude towards Ireland in a moment in which political commitment turned out to be a must: "Ireland

was something in songs that drunken old men wept about as they held on to the railings at three in the morning and we homed in to rob them; that was all” (69).

Nevertheless, the protagonist cannot eschew being involved in the outbreak of the Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and the War of Independence, facts that, instead of awakening Henry’s dormant Irishness, strengthen even more noticeably his pragmatism. Contrarily to the ideals that were utopically defended by the Citizen Army’s and Volunteers’ leaders, Henry’s sheer detachment unmasks the incongruities that lay beneath the causes that triggered the 1916 uprising. In this sense, the Easter Rising emerges as a central event in *A Star Called Henry* since it constitutes the first step in the formation of the character’s own thoughts about the ongoing events. Henry’s ironic coming of age, represented by his participation in the seizure of Dublin’s General Post Office on Easter Monday, 1916, gives an idea of his uncommitted stance and of the peculiar reasons that move him into action. In the following passage, Doyle accurately describes the atmosphere that surrounded the outburst of military operations:

There was nothing outside, beyond the broken windows and the pillars, except the street and the usual noises that came with it – whining trams, the yells of children, shoe nails on cobbles and pavement, the women at the Pillar Stall shouting the prices and varieties of their flowers. Only the shock and curses of people dodging the falling glass outside stamped significance on the morning. (87)

According to Kostick and Collins, the moments that preceded the charge against the G.P.O did not in the least predict that a rebellion was about to take place, let alone the ensuing Proclamation of the Irish Provisional Government. Everything in Dublin, as Doyle depicts and as Kostick and Collins bear out, was so apparently normal that the impact of the rebel’s strike was insignificant: “The Post Office was open for business on that fateful Easter Monday morning when the order was given by James Connolly to charge for the building. The public had by now grown accustomed to the Irish Citizen Army commandeering buildings in mock attacks” (88). Historians agree that the revolt’s leaders, especially Padraic Pearse and James Connolly, wanted the G.P.O’s take-over to be a symbolical turn of events in the British domination of Ireland and also, and more importantly, to demonstrate the Irish determination towards an independent and self-governing rule, although, as Coogan suggests, they assumed that the Rising was “bound to fail” (19).

However, once Doyle’s narrative moves inside the G.P.O, readers appreciate how these ideals of patriotism and national identity begin to backfire. Henry’s response to the confusion he perceives reinforces the aimlessness of the rebellion and the lack of logistic effectiveness of the Irish troops. He, thus, becomes the vehicle through which Doyle reveals the foundational weaknesses of the Rising, since, as this character, demonstrates, a significant number of revolutionaries were not moved by their Irish

fervour but simply by their own personal interests.² This is precisely Henry's case, who contemplates Dublin's post office as the perfect place to get some money: "We were locked into the biggest post office in the country, and even though it was now the centre of the new republic, it was still a post office, a land of opportunity, a great big building full of money. And I wanted some of it. My conscience wouldn't let me ignore it" (89). During the initial stages of the upheaval, Henry feels that Ireland must make up for all the suffering and destitution he and his family had been forced to endure. Curiously, the British assailants are no longer his primary target but all the shops that had declined to help out Henry and his little brother, Victor. The scene Doyle describes is tinged with very meaningful contrasts, since, whilst some soldiers only seek to keep up the patriotic spirit, Henry simply aims at quenching his personal rancour against Ireland:

My aim was true and careful; every bullet mattered. Two for Lewer's & Co., and their little boys' blazers, suits and knickerbockers.... But I kept on shooting. A bullet for Dunne & Co., and their hats danced in the glass.... I shot and killed all that I had been denied, all the commerce and snobbery that had been mocking me and other hundreds of thousands behind glass and locks, all the injustice, unfairness and shoes – while the lads took chunks out of the military (105).³

This passage also points to considerations that hint at Henry's dubious involvement in the course of events. Besides their tactical and technological inferiority, the Easter Rising rebels realised that they could not guarantee a firm opposition to the British troops because soldiers lacked weapons and ammunition.⁴ It is well known that the hopes of the leaders lay on the shipment of military supplies that was expected to arrive in the *Aud*, a German steamer that was eventually intercepted by British troops on its approach to the Irish coast.⁵

In relation to this event, Doyle also recounts the "Magazine Fort" fiasco, in which a group of Irish Volunteers planned to blow away this British arsenal as the signal that would mark the outbreak of the Easter Rising. In spite of the impact – both physical and psychological – the rebels were seeking to attain, history demonstrates that it was another blatant failure. Doyle manifestly proves it for he simply devotes an aside comment in which Henry listens to a soft explosion in a park nearby: "And a soft thud that might have been an explosion; the Magazine Fort up in the park" (91). The lack of transcendence of this operation reinforces the demystifying intention of Doyle's novel and points to the fragile foundations that sustained the Rising. Once again, the expectations generated by the effect of particular events such as the Magazine Fort takeover clashed with the harsh reality of a totally unprepared and ineffective move. As Kostick and Collins suggest: "Rather than a huge boom, the explosion was more like a dull thud. As a signal for the Rising to begin this action was, therefore, a failure, but as a tactical move the rebels could at least derive satisfaction from the partial destruction of the Magazine Fort" (46). Henry's reaction to the explosion enables Doyle to strengthen the idea that the

mythology of the Rising and the symbolical implications that its ideological leaders aimed to bestow upon it vanished in an atmosphere of vacillation and detachment, which Smart clearly evinces.

Bearing this issue in mind, Henry reveals himself as a character whose unrestrained individuality clearly challenges the spirit of comradeship that was postulated by the leaders of the Rising. For him, Pearse's haranguing speeches, the fight for his country's freedom or his expected self-sacrifice are only abstractions that do not fit into his earthly conception of life. It is precisely as an ironic debunking of all these ideals that Doyle creates and shapes the character of Henry Smart. There are certain figures that historians have lately recuperated which point to highly significant contrasts with respect to Henry and which Doyle draws on in order to highlight these differences. As the following conversation shows, there is a moment in which Henry becomes a kind of blue-eyed apprentice to Connolly, a position that seems to be an excessive reward for his dubious merits: "Is there anyone better than you, Henry?' 'No, Mister Connolly.' That's right. No one at all. Do you ever look into your eyes, Henry?' 'No, Mister Connolly.' 'You should, son. There's intelligence in there, I can see it sparkling. And creativity and anything else you want' (127). What history tells us is that Connolly actually had a kind of young apprentice whom the leader highly trusted. His name was John MacLoughlin and he was a sixteen-year old medical volunteer who embraced the spirit of the Rising unreservedly. The parallelisms that can be traced between these two characters reveal oppositions that heighten the novel's intention. Whereas Henry appears as a roguish, selfish and conceited character, MacLoughlin is described as a gregarious and devoted individual, always ready to serve the demands of the rebellion: "MacLoughlin had already earned a reputation for himself as a clear thinker and a brave fighter. He had been taken messages between the Mendicity Institution, the Four Courts and the GPO – so he had learned the hard way where British positions were and had dodged many a sniper's bullet" (Kostick and Collins 99).

In a highly representative episode as the 1916 Rising was, Henry deflates some of the icons that were supposed to be an emblem of pride for the combatants. Uniforms, in this vein, were not only part of the soldier's outfit but also a symbol of their Irish activism. In *Irish Rebellions* (1998), Helen Litton includes a document in which the Irish Volunteers asked their members to be appropriately equipped for the fight (1998, 103). Nevertheless, Henry shamelessly affirms that his uniform of the Irish Citizen Army has been the result of his forgeries and robberies: "It was Monday, the 24th of April. Just after noon. A beautiful, windless holiday. And Henry Smart, stark and magnificent in the Uniform of the Irish Citizen Army, was ready for war. In a uniform, he had bought bit by bit with money he had robbed and squeezed. In the uniform of the workers' army" (1999, 90). Henry's open declaration of his delinquent activities can be linked to historical facts Doyle also debunks in *A Star Called Henry*. Kostick and Collins argue that rebels were warned by the officers in charge not to take any economic advantage of the chaos brought about by the Rising, since they insisted that lootings would surely stain the image of the new republic to be (55).⁶

Doyle's demythologisation of the 1916 Easter Rising also seeks to dissect events that were considered epitomes of the fight for Irish freedom. In this sense, Liberty Hall became one of the key enclaves during the revolt since it garrisoned the most subversive and, occasionally, anarchic positions in the city of Dublin. Yet Liberty Hall was also protagonist of an emblematic event in the course of the Easter Rising. Responding to the growing accusations that Ireland depended on Germany in its struggle against Britain, James Connolly – at that moment leader of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union – decided to stretch a huge banner across Liberty Hall's façade. The banner – which read: "We Serve Neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland" – was taken as a token of the Irish opposition against British rule and also as a declaration of the nation's capacity to establish an autonomous state. However, Henry soon deflates the sentimental significance of the banner, offering, instead, an alternative slogan that faithfully captures his sceptical personality: "I liked it that way. *We Serve Neither King Nor Kaiser*. So said the message on the banner that hung across the front of Liberty Hall, headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. If I'd had my way, *Or Anyone Else* would have been added, instead of *But Ireland*. I didn't give a shite about Ireland" (91).

With this statement, Henry sounds as a mercenary who is not concerned with anything but himself, an attitude that explains why he is often characterised as a conceited and egotistical figure. He prides on believing that he has become a legend, when, in fact, he is often exposed to his own mediocrity. It is even more paradoxical that the character that most frequently boasts on his manliness throughout the novel is repeatedly discredited by the courage of women characters that take part in the Rising. In this case, Miss O'Shea – Henry's wife-to-be – seems to be a fictional correlate of Countess Markievicz, one of the leaders and co-founders of the so-called Cumann na mBan or Woman's League. Miss O'Shea's readiness for combat, which contrasts with Henry's cowardice, defies commonly accepted stereotypes and points to facts that took place during the revolt. When the Rising broke out, men assumed that women's sole function would be to serve food and tea to rebels as well to provide first aid, although members of the Cumann na mBan – at least fifteen – were allowed to participate in the military action (Kostick and Collins 76). In the following two passages, it can be appreciated how these traditionally accepted male-female roles are inverted, producing, thus, a highly ironic contrast. In the first one, Henry hides away when the British troops begin to shoot at the barricaded G.P.O:

... and I could see the bullets, the air was packed with them and, for a fragment of a second, I could think and I jumped at a doorway and hid.... And there was Plunkett, held up by two men, trying to hold his sword up, one spur hanging crookedly and alone from one of his boots. He saw me. He stopped and made the two men stop in the sea of bullets and shouted. "Come out and fight, you cowardly cur" (134)

Whilst Henry runs away from the confrontation, Miss O'Shea claims that: "'I can fire a gun as well as any man'" (132), proving that her fighting disposition clearly surpasses that of the "legendary" rebel.

It was argued above that the merit of *A Star Called Henry* is the way Doyle selects crucial episodes during the development of the Easter Rising in order to lay bare their lack of transcendence. One of these moments was the Proclamation of the Irish Provisional Government, a document that was elaborated by Pearse and Connolly and signed by Eamon Ceannt, Joseph Plunkett, Thomas McDonagh, Sean McDiarmada and Thomas Clarke. The military and ideological leaders of the Rising conceived it as a kind of *magna carta* where they put forward the social and political upon which the prospective Irish Government should be sustained. The Proclamation emerges, thus, as a partly political, partly literary writ in which Pearse's language permeated his exaltation of Irish myths, traditions, folklore and language.⁷ According to George Boyce, Pearse arouse as the poet who gave voice to the Irish sagas that encumbered the warrior figure of Cuchulain and all the pagan heroes of pre-Christian Ireland (168). Politically speaking, Pearse's conception of Ireland was founded on all the ideals Henry repeatedly debunks and, which according to Boyce, were based on "intensely communal and totally insular" premises (1996, 168).

This image of passionate defender of the Irish nationhood was reinforced at the most crucial moment of the Easter Rising, the Proclamation of the Irish Provisional Government, in which Pearse proceeded to read the aforementioned manifesto outside Liberty Hall. For the spirit of the rebels, the Proclamation bore a deeply symbolical significance, for they perceived that the military operations and blood sacrifice were worth the effort. However, this event leads Doyle to enlarge his demystifying vision of the upheaval and, more specifically, of the blind patriotism Pearse conveyed during the reading of the Proclamation. Instead, he presents a completely ridiculous image of the leader, who is suddenly interrupted by her sister's command to return home: "Connolly was on the steps now, and Pearse behind him, and other officers coming out of the Hall.... A woman ran up the steps and shouted at Pearse. 'Come home!' 'Who's your woman?' I asked Paddy Swanzy who was standing to my left. 'Can't say that I know,' said Paddy. 'She's put the colour into Pearse's cheek, though, look it.' 'She's his sister,' said Seán Knowles" (93).⁸

It seems that Doyle that does not only seek to produce laughter but also to unveil a historical reality that ensued the Easter Rising and its aftermath. Although the rebel leaders pursued the strengthening of an Irish consciousness – so far restrained and ostracised by the British domination –, they eventually realised that the public reaction to the Rising became unexpectedly hostile. As Brendan O'Brien puts it: "When [the Rising] was over, much of central Dublin lay in ruin and many of the city's working-class slum areas were damaged by stray over-fire. The people were not amused by the antics of the insurgents, their seemingly farcical Proclamation and their extraordinary claim to be the provisional government of the country. Political and press reaction was hostile in the extreme" (11). It is also historically acknowledged that Dublin citizens

adopted a vituperative stance against those who took part in the Rising, a fact that Doyle draws on in order to reinforce the demystifying tone of *A Star Called Henry* and also to question the nature and validity of a revolt that, in the long run, proved to be a failure. Like many other Irish writers before him, Doyle portrays Dublin and, generally speaking, Ireland itself, as passive and conformist, which, as the following conversation between Michael Collins and a Dubliner reveals, led many people to claim for the preservation of the British rule over their country:

“Get down out of that now, missis. There’s a war on.” “I know there’s a fucking war on,” said the woman back at Collins. “Over in France, with my Eddie.” “This a fuckin’ post office,” said another one who was climbing up beside her. “You can’t come in,” said Collins. “Who’ll stop us?” “The Army of the Irish Republic.”? “he Irish wha.’?” “Republic.” “e don’t want a republic.” “That’s right. God save the fuckin’ King” (102).

The previous passage points first to the fact that Dublin citizens did not know anything about the outbreak of a revolution and, as the woman states, the only war they were aware of was the First World War, in which Irish soldiers were massively called up to enrol in the British troops. Secondly, this woman gives voice to the generalised position adopted by the Irish during the Rising, that is, they felt that the establishment of a Republic and the subsequent withdrawal from the British crown would be a complete disaster for the country.

Nevertheless, historians also suggest that this initial opposition turned into sympathetic reactions once the executions of the Rising leaders began. Although Pearse publicly stated that the path for the salvation of Ireland would be sacrifice and martyrdom, the killings orchestrated by the British government and effected by General Maxwell caused consternation among Dubliners.⁹ These executions, therefore, emerged as the best exponent of the spirit of self-sacrifice defended by Pearse and which was undergone by the rebels.¹⁰ For Henry, however, the shootings of the rebel leaders did not arise any particular emotion or mourn because, as Doyle satirically describes, he was making love to a prostitute while the executions were taking place:

One more exee-cution! One more exee-cution! John Mac Bride. *It is hoped*, said General Maxwell, *that these examples would be sufficient to act as a deterrent against intrigues, and to bring home to them that the murder of His Majesty’s liege subjects, or other acts calculated to imperil the safety of the Realm will not be tolerated...* “Four more exee-cutions!” Heuston, Mallin, Con Colbert, Éamonn Ceannt. Annie was out foraging. I pushed away the sacks she used for curtains and looked down from her window at the top of the house (143-44).

It has been argued above that Henry’s attitude towards the Rising is marked by the irreverence with which he faced crucial events in its development. While for some Irish

rebels, the blood shed during the combat was a sign of patriotic commitment, Henry once more is more inclined to safeguard his most personal and selfish interests.

The demythologisation of Ireland's history has been a motif among Irish authors of all times. However, the significance of Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* is that he tackles a historical moment that encapsulates a profoundly symbolical meaning for the Irish. Through the eyes of Henry Smart, Doyle approaches the Easter Rising and its aftermath from a position of relative detachment, which enables him to endow the narration of such tragic week with recurrent serio-comic tinges. It is no wonder, thus, that Doyle's biting novel debunks leaders and soldiers alike, disregarding the political faction or ideological foundations they might stand up for. *A Star Called Henry*, in this sense, emerges as a story in which idealism is repeatedly flouted whereas Henry's egotism eventually finds its way in the ever-lasting complexities of Irish history.

Notes

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- 1 For a comprehensive study on Roddy Doyle's fiction, see Caramine White's *Reading Roddy Doyle*, 2001.
- 2 Related to this idea, Davis points out that: "Many of the revered heroes of the Irish war of independence whom Henry encounters, Doyle implies, were really more interested in improving their own fortunes than in freeing their country", 1999.
- 3 A similar reflection is elaborated by Brooke Allen who states that: "When it is Henry's turn to wield a gun, he betrays the real object of his rage by his unconventional choice of targets" (Allen 61).
- 4 In this respect, Helen Litton points out: "However, the commandants who assembled on Easter Monday morning found that most of their troops had simply not turned up, and those who had were very poorly armed and very short of ammunition" (Litton 102).
- 5 It is also very ironic that Henry's most recurrent weapon is his father's prosthetic leg, which does not only reveal the rudimentary military equipment of the rebels but also becomes the banner of the Republic: "'Henry,' said Connolly, 'Get out your father's leg.' 'Yes, sir,' I said. I took my daddy's leg and lifted it into the air. The Citizen Army had seen it before, and seen what it could do; it had broken heads and rozzers's fingers during the Lockout. 'Up the Republic,' I shouted" (133).
- 6 Doyle also refers to this fact in *A Star Called Henry* and, once again, the pretended idealism of the rebel leaders clashes with the pragmatism of the combatants. Whilst Henry and Paddy Swanzey consider that looting Irish shops is feasible since they are being robbed by Irish citizens, some others argue that this would constitute a shameful drawback in the process of the country's maturity (Doyle 114).
- 7 These were precisely the premises that originated the so-called Gaelic League, promoted by Eoin McNeill, who considered that Ireland should revive a past that had been historically overshadowed by the British rule.
- 8 The deflated image of Pearse responds to Doyle's intention to present a more human and down-to-earth image of a series of characters that had been long regarded as myths: "I wanted them all

- to be human beings. When I was eight, in 1966, for the 50th Commemoration of the 1916 Rising, these men were presented to us as mythical figures as saints" (Watchel 55).
- 9 In this respect, J. J. Lee points out that: "The consensus among historians is that an initially hostile public opinion was transformed by the executions into retrospective support, and romanticisation of, the rebels" (Lee 28-29).
 - 10 Especially painful was James Connolly's execution. After being severely wounded in his leg and shoulder during the besiege of the G.P.O., Connolly was sent to Kilmainham Prison where he was tied to a chair and shot on May 12, 1916.

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Sexuality and Eroticism in Kate O'Brien's Novels: Mary Lavelle, That Lady and As Music and Splendour

Noélia Borges

Abstract: *This article aims to investigate questions concerned with sexuality and eroticism in Kate O'Brien's novels – Mary Lavelle (1936), That Lady (1948) and As Music and Splendour (1958) – recognizing that her feminine characters are individuals who disarticulate prejudices and stereotypes, opening up new possibilities for new subjects with personal autonomy, so that they can fulfill their own desires and needs.*

Living in a world in which identities are often in crisis and constantly undergo the process of fragmentation and discontinuity as part of the dynamic of transformation of modern society, we cannot speak for very long, or with precision, of one stable identity. Instead, we should think of identity as a production of the positions we have constructed and are constructed by the Other. That is to say, identity is not a fixed essence at all, but is constituted within representation, as Stuart Hall states.

To deal with feminine sexuality and eroticism in this beginning of XXI century does not seem to meet the same degree of public resistance as in the beginning of the previous century. It does not mean that the subject matter was erased from our everyday lives before that time. On the contrary, reality intruded abrasively into our dreams and lives, breaking on the barriers of prejudice and resistance. As a matter of fact, if we go back in time and examine the history of humanity, we will certainly encounter attractions and wars between the sexes, conflicts between gender and sex, scenes of idylls between lovers and waves of sexual scandals involving divinities, kings, queens and famous writers. We could list here many famous people who are part of our history and who shocked humanity with their improper sexual behavior, such as Adam and Eve, Mary Madeleine, the goddess Aphrodite, Anthony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, Caligula, Henry VIII, Casanova, Oscar Wilde and Virginia Wolf. It is worth remembering that for thousands of years civilizations and ancient cults considered Mother Earth or the Great Goddess as supreme beings. Those cultures took into account the mystic adoration of

sexuality, fertility, death and rebirth as the central axis of the universe. As the biological dynamic of reproduction was still slow within those cultures, the interaction between the essence of masculinity and femininity was the matrix strength which energized their mysticism and philosophy. It was with the advent of Christianity that man's attempt to sustain a position considered correct according to current moral patterns came about. Christian patterns inevitably led women to abdicate their sexuality in order to be respected. The adoration of the Virgin Mary was the way out which helped them to negate their sexuality and independence, precipitating them to subservience to male power and control. At that time, the sexual life of those individuals was controlled by their male dogmatic principles. Thus, the Church can be identified as one of the main institutions responsible for the stereotypes which women have carried for all their lives, such as their lack of intelligence, reason and responsibility as well as other disparaging qualities.

Within the XX century, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical studies based on associations between sexuality and pathology had broad and obsessive repercussions. His justification that mental illness comes from sexual repression and traumatic experiences in childhood can be analyzed as a byproduct of his time in conjunction with his own personal history. The contribution of this Viennese physician's investigation in the field of human behavior was undoubtedly of vital importance to the beginning of discussions about sexuality. Further research within the same area followed, such as that of his disciple Carl Jung (1875-1961) (1980, 25-6). However, Jung's ideas took a different direction, for he considered his master's view-point on sexual impulses and libido reductionist and limiting. Rejecting Freud's scientific rationalism, Jung proposed that all human experiences originate *a priori* in the mind, which in turn translates, filters, allegorizes and falsifies the images. The mind houses a world of images that offer an ambiguous language to be deciphered. Although irrepresentable, their effects can be visualized. Those images which are present in individuals' minds are called *archetypes*. Jung not only wanted to reconstruct and recover primitive human beliefs but also to present a new scientific approach to the development of the human psyche. In other words, he wanted to give credit to the fact that conscious mental roots lie in unconscious archaic material. As we see, whereas Freud based his work on sexual theory and saw the unconscious as a kind of repository of repressed sexual desires, Jung considered the unconscious a matrix from which the conscious material springs.

The sexual revolution in the Western world in the 1960s, particularly with the advent of the contraceptive pill, provided a new road for feminine sexuality. Women could then enjoy their sexual freedom without the fear of pregnancy. The fast global diffusion of radio, television, and other communication media had far-reaching practical effects and helped to re-interpret concepts of gender, sex and sexuality in novel ways. The concepts of feminine, masculine or other intermediate positions underwent modification for they now depended on socio-cultural interpretation. Sexuality became unquestionably connected with procedures, rules and psychological transgressions rather

than with the process of interpretation of the sexual orientation libido. Accordingly, a growing number of societies had to revise old-fashioned stereotypes of gender, sex and sexuality. Thus, history teaches the lesson that social order and the knowledge which individuals need to play their part in the world depend on their actions and are in accordance with their needs.

Starting from the point that nothing is static, correct, real or stable, we reach the conclusion that everything is susceptible to change and may be seen in different perspectives. Given this premise, it is easy to understand the constant changing of individuals' sexuality. It is a dynamic process, although they may not be aware of what is happening. Feelings of regret and shame related to sexuality which may pursue individuals all their lives may be interpreted as a product of their societies. For example, the limited sexual freedom of women in patriarchal societies – a way to limit and control women's circulation and power, keeping them slaves in the domestic sphere. Gays, lesbians and other minorities in gender and sexuality have also for a long time suffered discrimination and punishment for crossing the boundaries of the heterosexual norms of their societies.

It is impossible to discuss the theme – sexuality and eroticism – without including sex and gender. Sex, gender, sexuality and eroticism are parts of the same identity of the individual. They have been components of personal identity since time immemorial. These parts have, naturally, undergone modification and adaptation according to individuals' perspectives, time and place. Alongside these constituent chains, we have family, culture, religion, national pride and profession as relevant parts of the overall composition.

The theme – sexuality and eroticism – comes into play here on account of the amount of erotic representation that pervades Kate O'Brien's text. Scenes of bullfighting in *Mary Lavelle* (1936), the sensory elements which enter into the description of Ana Mendoza's room in *That Lady* (1948), together with the themes of opera in *As Music and Splendour* (1958) illustrate the question raised here. These erotic motifs which O'Brien imports from other cultures or which are part of the individuals she creates have the function of making absolute and dogmatic concepts relative, prompting debate about prejudicial and censured representations.

By dealing with sexual identity, we ally our thoughts to those of Lynne Segal in *Sexuality, Identity and Differences* (1999) to sustain the idea that gender and physiological features help to define the differences between "masculine" and "feminine". For her, identity is in the first instance a category of gender, but its characteristics derive fundamentally from the difference of sexuality between "masculine" and "feminine" genders. Needless to say, fixed and acceptable patterns of behavior and desires within the norms of heterosexual societies are the only ones expected to be followed. Psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and, more recently, the "queer" theory have resisted beliefs in stable sexual behavior and desires, considering that sexual life and social codes are constantly assaulted by conflicts, contradictions and fluidity. These different

and contradictory readings of sexuality give birth to differing thoughts on the matter. The feminists, for example, consider sexuality a means by which men can control women's bodies and pleasure. The Foucauldian perspective, in its turn, adopted by gay and lesbian theories, suggests sexuality to be the ideal site to regulate and control social precepts, mainly those which are in charge of maintaining the family unit as the reproductive nucleus.

It is also relevant to remember here that the Victorian Age was a period strictly marked by the dichotomy of gender within its society. That is to say, the unequal and ambiguous culture, language and values of that time excluded women from public life, restricting their activities and needs to domestic tasks, whereas men were free to embrace broad perspectives of living, without any criticism or constraint. Thus, holding power and authority, men used to control and oppress their feminine counterparts by silencing their voices and needs. Women's desire in Victorian society was officially classified as abnormal and rare. On the other hand, erotic images of women can be found in the Arts of the time, but they tend to stress the female appetite as obnoxious or unnatural. In general, Victorian women were considered frigid – a situation which demanded medical treatment to correct such deviation. Silence and metaphoric codes replaced their knowledge about sex.

After this brief overview of the issue of sexuality and eroticism, it is time to examine what happens in Kate O'Brien's novels. First let's consider *Mary Lavelle*. Written a year before De Valera's Constitution, this novel interrogates the premise of that document which restricts women to the domestic sphere, whereas allying the heterosexual desire to the homosexual one, as both belonging to the same source. O'Brien's women are aware of their desires and enjoy the eroticism which comes from them, without being inhibited by the burden of sin. Mary and Juanito as well as Agatha and Mary are impossible relationships within the moral parameters of patriarchal society, but their desires are clearly manifested without the subterfuges of prejudice. The representation of Mary's and Agatha's sexual desires bursts into the story's narrative as natural impulses, questioning the Irish conventions which laid down the role of mother and wife to women. The same natural treatment of the theme also happens in *As Music and Splendour*, when Clare declares her love for Luisa, as well as in Rose's heterosexual choices and Luisa's bisexuality. The eroticism which gives life to the representation of their desires is verbalized or expressed through voyeurism or metaphors.

Eroticism in O'Brien's novels is revealed as a kind of stimulus to sensibility and emotions. It is manifested in the body as a natural urge of being human, independent of moral values, laws and cultures. The body is the "locus" through which the individual exposes to others and to him- or herself what he or she feels, as well as the way to act in the world. What one person considers erotic another may not, but rather considers it silly or unappealing. Thus, the determinants of eroticism are arbitrary, contingent and may change from one individual to the other. In O'Brien's novels, eroticism is a recurrent element and is expressed in different ways. Looks, sensory images, words verbalized or suggested are forms of representation of eroticism in her work.

The fire of eroticism in *Mary Lavelle* concentrates its power in heterosexual passion, spreading sparks no less dazzling among individuals that share the same feelings within the same sex. The look full of desire which Agatha Conlan, the Irish “mannish girl” (the stereotype used by the narrator to describe lesbians’ features), admits and assumes to be directed towards Mary since the first time she saw her, cannot be analyzed within the same pattern as Juanito’s, the girls’ brother of whom Mary is the tutor. O’Brien makes it clear that both are possible and natural. However, whereas the former is cloaked with desires for control and power, the latter is characterized by comprehension, abnegation and renunciation.

The spectacle of the bullfight in *Mary Lavelle* can be considered the most vivid, dynamic, seductive and terrorizing manifestation of eroticism. Bullfighting is thought to be not only a sport, but also a military art of the Spanish tradition, in which the main actor is not the bull, but the bullfighter or *matador* – the national idol or hero. O’Brien enacts the bullfight scene as an extravagant and foreshadowing metaphoric representation of sexual intercourse between Juanito and Mary. The narrative web of the ceremony, the characters’ emotions, excitement, curiosity and apprehension before the spectacle of the bullfight, as well as the pronounced sense of smell which comes from the environment of the “Plaza de Toros”, are entwined in a range of voluptuous eroticizing apparatus, preparing the reader for the moment when Mary will be facing her personal battle field, her own sexual desires, in short, her alterity. The juxtaposition of denouncing phallic elements and actions, such as horses, swords, the bull itself and the pouring blood complete the representation of sexual intercourse in the dramatic brutality of the bullfight:

The matador drew his enemy to his breast, and past it, on the gentle lure; brought him back along his thigh as if for sheer love; let him go and drew him home again. He took the bull’s blood on his coat, but never looked up out of his zone of silence to advertise the decoration. Again and again in classic passes he allowed the horn to skim him, then drawing back from the great, weary but still alert antagonist, he profiled and went over the horn, as gently as an angel might, to kill. The sword sank where the stud ribbons fluttered, in to the hilt, as bravely driven as if the dealer believed himself to have dipped in Achilles’ river [...] He stood, his muleta almost furled, very closed to the bull’s shoulder while it staggered to its knees, and tried with savage nobility to rise again. But this bauble, this gleaming hilt among the ribbons, darts and streams of blood, was the last honour. He rolled over, dead, and the matador stood unsmiling at his side (114-115).

The dramatic act of the mutilation of the bull’s body does not represent, in a symbolic way, the mutilation of the heroine’s body, but rather the mutilation of her own identity. Similarly, the death of the bull metaphorically implies the end of a life cycle – a phase of change and transformation from innocence and ignorance to one of knowledge and maturity. Knowledge here is not only concerned with the new country – Spain – and her experiences there, but is also related to her inner world, the dark side of her

unconscious universe, which, according to Carl Jung, houses our most hidden and repressed desires, taboos and frustrations. Thus, the writer's fascination with the issue of subjectivity and identity does not seem to be different from many other Irish female writers, and it happens with the opportunity she offers her heroine – the dialogue with differences, with alterity.

In *That Lady*, O'Brien turns her back on Ireland when she once more chooses the same foreign country – Spain – as the scene for another novel. The fascination for the Other – the different – appears as the *leitmotiv* for the construction of the heroine's identity. Here the reader meets the most mature of O'Brien's heroines, Ana de Mendoza – one who does not repress her sexuality, but leaves her free to make her own choices, resisting the absolutist monarchy's oppressions and demands. This is clear when she is married to Ruy Gomez, the King's secretary, and later, after his death, when she engages in a love affair with a married man (ironically, another king's secretary). Ana believes that her attitudes are true and natural, subverting the moral conventions of her time. In doing so, she converts public demands into private ones. As we can see, whereas Ana verbalizes and feels free to welcome her erotic desires, entwining them with care and charity, the anti-hero, King Felipe II, silences and suffocates the passion he feels for her. The despotism of his power and the Puritanism of his religious conventions are above his individuality. The eroticism of the novel comes not only from Ana's awareness and acceptance of her own sexual energy, but also from the sensory resources that the intruding narrator uses without evincing any prejudice.

In analyzing *As Music and Splendor* in the light of eroticism, the reader will certainly note that the erotic desires of the characters blend harmoniously with the operatic production – the backbone that sustains and advances the story plot – as a result of the complex interaction between nature and culture. The sexual leanings of the main characters – Clare, Rose and Luisa – interact with the specificity of their vocal talents as well as with the musical pleasure that their performances exert upon themselves and their audience. Lovers' dates, sex and eroticism – favorite themes in literature – become the motto for the operas. The pronounced exuberance of the singers' physical features, often characterized by abundance of breast and body, alongside voices which aim to reach auditory zones never previously explored (notes that cause impact such as the deepest bass notes and the highest sharps, trills, vocalizes, new runs and rhythms) are challenges that demonstrate the author's or interpreter's capacity. Alongside all that hyperbolic profusion of things, strong feelings and emotions burst from their themes, spreading erotic pleasure over the singers that resonates with their audience. As we can see in the excerpt below, this libidinous and intense interaction among singers, themes, and audience is recurrent in O'Brien's novel:

[...] and as the light went out and they turned and ran to their dressing-rooms, hand in hand, they went on singing. The music they both loved had carried them far tonight, together and above themselves. Their descent was slow and

reluctant, and their hands did not fall apart when they paused in Clare's doorway (113).

Here, fantasy and reality meet and continue their existence beyond the text, sometimes blurring the frontier of the extremes. Emotions abounding in passion and sexuality that achieve life in an operatic performance continue in another space – a mythical space – without the farcical and static make-up of the scenic art. In fact, the characters' desires are not fulfilled as we would expect, but rather leave the idea of their true nature, that is they are as contingent and fluid as the Art itself. For example, although Clare holds Luisa's hand when they leave the stage and seem to share together the same erotic empathy of the representation of the opera, they understand that the body's drive and needs cannot be so easily fulfilled as those of the protected world of the Art. Again, it is clear in the text that the lacunar space of desires, where feelings of alienation and decentration connive (O'Brien's recurrent theme) is part of the process of transformation and emotional maturity of her characters.

Taking into account what has been analyzed so far, we believe that there is no space in Kate O'Brien's work that configures a reductionist view of gender. Needless to say, the strategies she uses to represent sexual identity are mere simulacra which inevitably invite the reader to make conjectures, allowing the coincidence of simulated models with the actual ones. This simulation – an aspect which threatens the difference between true and false, real and imaginary – constitutes the worst form of subversion. And subversion seems to be the main concern of the writer. The orbital recurrence of the metonymic model of homophobia and the invisibility of eroticism between women show the writer's strong concern with stating that women are neither submissive to men's control nor vulnerable to heterosexual models, but that they create their own social and cultural space to live their own desires. The web of artificial signs is as authentic as the elements of the real world, so it is difficult to isolate reality from the illusions of desire, leaving space for a hypertext. Thus, it is quite artificial to categorize or label those of her characters that develop desire for the same sex as lesbians, considering only the desires expressed by their body, similar to those of eating or feeling pain. On the other hand, it is rather difficult to characterize human sexuality in precise and definite terms, for there is an infinitive graduation of interests, tastes and wills, which vary from person to person and even within the same person.

To sum up, O'Brien's novels represent the feminine world in a provocative and challenging way. The main characters of her stories neither accept life within the boundaries of the domestic sphere nor within the traditional parameters and expectations of patriarchal society. They resist the models that threaten women's free will, giving rise to more advanced attitudes and behavior. When she inverts consecrated roles by using themes that subvert social order, such as adultery and homosexuality, O'Brien goes beyond the barrier prescribed to women and female writers. Thus, instead of stressing the dichotomist representation between the sexes, which would reinforce

the experience of feminine alienation, she decentralizes and destabilizes the discursive practice of monoglossic voices, stimulating the conclave of those with other ones.

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Elizabeth Bowen's Suburbia: Life After the Big House

Derek Hand

Abstract: *This essay focuses on Bowen's short story "The Disinherited". It is an appropriate title because it deals with a world of disempowered aristocrats who inhabit the new world of housing estates and suburbia, ghostly remnants of an older order. What elevates this story beyond a simple lament for an impotent aristocracy is the introduction of the character Prothero: a murderer on the run who is presented writing the story of his crime night after night. He is a mysterious and ultimately threatening image of modernity and all that it may entail. It is a story that essentially draws a picture of the conflict between the old world and the new world, between those who are "made" out of a class structure which is passing away and those who "made" themselves. In "The Disinherited" Bowen allows herself to express her very real fears about the emergence of a new world order where power and authority have shifted away from her class and caste. The element that gives "The Disinherited" such a menacing air is the presence of the character Prothero. It allows Bowen to widen her focus beyond the new middle classes and the failed aristocracy and consider, in the person of Prothero, those whom she believes are set to inherit the modern world.*

From an Irish critical perspective Elizabeth Bowen is usually read quite simply and straightforwardly as a Big House novelist. For instance her novel, *The Last September* (1929), is read as an elegy for the passing away of the Anglo-Irish community and the traditions and culture they represent. Her less well known late novel, *A World of Love* (1955), is also understood in this way, though in this work she seems prepared to let go of the Big House as a viable space for contemporary living. However, in a handful of short stories from the 1930s, Bowen engages with the possible consequences of life after the Big House. While these stories are set in England and do not deal directly with Irish themes or an Irish landscape, they can be read as throwing light, in general, on Irish concerns. In particular, the story "The Disinherited" (1934) offers a nightmare vision of the modern world cut off from the certainties of the past. Unlike the end of *A World of Love*, it is a story unable, or unwilling, to imagine anything other than a continuation of this nightmare.

It is a story that essentially draws a picture of the conflict between the old world and the new world, between those who are “made” out of a class structure which is passing away and those who “make” themselves. In “The Disinherited” Bowen allows herself to express her very real fears about the emergence of a new world order where power and authority have shifted away from her class and caste. The title of the story points obviously to her concerns, and her sympathies.

There is a real, palpable menace in Bowen’s description of the “new estates” that are springing up on the outskirts of large towns and metropolitan areas in Britain during the 1920’s and 1930’s. The mood is set from the beginning of the story when the narrator describes the first phase of autumn as “lovely”:

Decay first made itself felt as an extreme sweetness: with just such a touch of delicious morbidity a lover might contemplate the idea of death.¹

The sense of things “ending”, passing away, is registered – as is common in Bowen’s work – in the movement of the seasons: “Everything”, it is said, “rotted slowly” (375). Out of this rotting decay a transitional place is coming into being. It is a place where the grass has “lost its nature, being no longer meadow and not yet lawn” and where “half-made roads” map the hills. On the other side of the village to which this estate is attached are the “stretching brick-red tentacles of the city [making] their advance over the water-meadows tufted with lines of willow” (376). It is a threatening sign of what is to come.

A hint of what is lost can be discerned in the character Davina’s attitude to this new arrangement in living. It is said of her that she was “naturally aristocratic” and “loathed refinement.” Her difficulty centres round homogeneity: this new world disregards difference in favour of regimented and stifling sameness. In an almost throwaway fashion Bowen is able to cut to the heart of the matter:

[Davina] liked chatting late across counters in the dark lamplight and charming unauthorised people into selling her stamps. (376)

Here the old order of class and difference is seen to be at work. The use of the word “unauthorised” is telling, encapsulating perfectly the fundamentals of power at the centre of “traditional” class relationships.

Davina’s predicament links her to the Anglo-Irish. Like them she is at a loose end, living on the memories of past glory while the present situation in practice leaves much to be desired. She has not been able to, or has been reluctant to, engage with the modern world and its possibilities. As such, it is said, “Her existence was temporary” (377). Another connection with the Anglo-Irish condition can be discerned when mention is made of where Davina is living. She is staying with her aunt:

Her aunt’s house had been the manor, and Mrs Archworth, though she had by now disposed of all other property, still looked on herself as patroness of the village. (377)

Old habits die hard even when the reality has irrevocably changed. Crucially Bowen describes the house having:

A high, narrow face, with dark inanimate windows, and looked like the frontispiece to a ghost-story. (377)

As with the Anglo-Irish Big House, the manor's continued existence is presented as anachronistic. The employment of "ghost" imagery attests to such a reading: the Big House/manor being a remnant of the old world and, wraith-like, persisting tenuously in the present. Those living there are the disinherited: their position and their power and authority a fading memory.

Bowen succeeds in this short story in bringing two seemingly disparate narrative strands together. It is only as the story draws to a close that they come powerfully together for the reader. One part deals with an evening that Davina and her friend Marianne, who has recently moved to new, raw estate of the opening pages, spend visiting a decaying country house.

The country house belongs to "Lord Thingummy", as he is called in his absence (389). The level of respect for the old order is here enshrined in this comic use of language to name what no longer matters. His not being there, too, gestures toward the essential "lack" at the centre of what remains of the old order. Those at the party are left to shift about uneasily and uncertainly without a focal point to revolve round. And yet, Lord Thingummy's presence is still felt, again almost ghost-like, as "the party's unconscious host" (389).

The real "host" on the night, however, is Oliver; a friend of Davina's with whom he shares a similar distaste for the modern world he finds himself inhabiting:

He was, like Davina, an enemy of society, having been led to expect what he did not get ... Oliver despised the rich and disliked the poor and drank to the bloody extinction of the middle classes. He wished to call no man brother, and disbelieved with ferocity in himself. The old order left him stranded, the new offered him no place. (388)

Their shared dilemma is clear. It is not simply a case of "what" to be in the modern world, but also more fundamentally "how" to be. His position fills him with debilitating hate for himself and for everyone else. His admission that he "despised the rich" highlights the fact that for both himself and Davina the answer to their problem lies, they feel, in the possession of money. Bowen can be observed being both critical of the passing away of the old order while also being critical of that old order. Here, through Oliver and Davina it is seen as a failed aristocracy which has reduced a, perhaps, spiritual sense of "tradition" and "culture" to the all too material level of money. This attachment to money is also, consequently, responsible for their collective aimlessness and dissolution: there are no high ideals to be held on to or recreated in the modern world; they have been replaced with, and ruthlessly narrowed to, the shallow desire to survive at any cost.

At one point in the evening Marianne suddenly realises how drunk she is, and exclaims that she feels “lost” (390). Being from the new estate and thus representative of the new way of life, this place holds no attraction or fascination for her. Her being “lost” is not simply a reaction to the alcohol but a deep felt realisation of where it is she actually belongs. It is certainly not here, in Lord Thingummy’s home. Bowen emphasises this by having Oliver take Marianne on a tour of the house. He uses it as a pretext to seduce her but his first fumbling attempts fail miserably:

Oliver swooped on her two hands in the dark and kissed the side of her cheek as she leaned away.

“This isn’t the way to behave –”

“It’s how I behave!” he said with a touch of hysteria.

“I’d rather go home.” (401).

The difference between the two of them is made clear: she has a home and the security it offers, even if it is a home on the new estate; while he is homeless, set adrift in an indifferent world. Her rejection of him sets him off crying and sobbing, but it could be argued that it is her use of the word “home” which is more problematic for him. She inadvertently confronts him with what he does not possess; that is, a place to be. This becomes clearer for the reader when she openly, yet innocently, asks: “Haven’t you got any home?” Her question produces a “fresh burst of tears” and some swearing:

“Why do you keep saying that?” [She is commenting on his use of bad language]

“This is not how I feel,” he said angrily (401-2).

So completely out of touch with his emotions and feelings is Oliver that he is reduced to swearing as his only form of expression: bad language being a substitute for real words which might connect him with his true self.

However, he does triumph in the end. It appears that Marianne does succumb to his charms because Oliver chastises himself the next morning for having, “unwillingly, deluded her with tears.” It is an empty victory, though, for he goes on to acknowledge the essential lack in his character: “He longed to see himself otherwise, like any other man, with a sound and passionate core” (403). He has made a connection with another human being but, basically, it counts for nothing: it has been achieved under false pretences.

Davina in conversation with one of the other guests remarks that Marianne has a “dull life” (402). And yet, from the evidence presented in the story her own life and the lives of her friends is, if anything, filled with *artificial* “events” and gatherings. She is more honest however when she goes on to declare: “I hate having no power. Tonight, for instance, I’m furious with someone.” (403).

Not unlike Oliver, who detests all classes – those who “have” and those “have not” – Davina is angry with someone else and not herself. She does not think to blame herself for her own predicament and thus deflects “blame” onto others. The next morning she is in a forgiving mood:

“At least we are honest” ... She and her friends had come to the same sad age when one can change no longer, and only become more oneself. They could enthrall and bluff each other no longer – but still, to meet is to meet. They had made some kind of hearth, and its warmth remained ... Davina thought of them kindly, regretting their premature autumn. “We are not so bad,” she thought. (403)

She has learnt nothing from her experience and admits that change and adaptation is not possible for her or her companions. It is interesting to note the use of “homely” imagery here – the hearth – by Bowen, again emphasising her real concerns in this story: home and the possibilities for home. The reader witnesses Davina appearing to happily accept her lot. She fools herself into believing that some kind of life is being lived and that it is worthwhile. She is one of the “disinherited” but chooses, most of the time, to ignore this fact.

The element that gives “The Disinherited” such a menacing air is the presence of the character Prothero. At first seen to be, perhaps, a minor, inconsequential character (he is the chauffeur for Davina’s aunt), Prothero is central to the story. His inclusion acts as a sinister balance to the forced and exaggerated gaiety of Davina and her companions. It allows Bowen to widen her focus beyond the new middle classes and the failed aristocracy and consider, in the person of Prothero, those whom she believes are set to inherit the modern world.

From the outset he is perceived as mysterious. Davina recognises that he has a “past” and declares to Marianne that he is a “crook” and that: “I know he knows I know. He’s lying low here. I’ve seen his photograph somewhere – something once happened.” (383).

The irony of her statement should not be lost on the attentive reader because later Davina implies, as mentioned earlier, that Marianne’s is a dull existence in which nothing happens, deflecting onto her friend the reality of her own life (402). Crucially, Davina never discovers the story behind this enigmatic character. It is as if by yoking these two disconnected stories together without letting one influence or link with the other, Bowen wants to emphasise for the reader – who does learn about Prothero’s past – the true nature of Davina’s and her friends’ dilemma. They are so removed from the “new” world that they are unable to fully grasp their loss of power and authority, unable to “know” who or what the world now belongs to.

Form and content unite powerfully here for Prothero’s narrative – that is, the narrative he writes – is inserted halfway through the “main” story thus disrupting, in every sense, that narrative even if, as is being argued, the two remain fundamentally disconnected from one another. I would argue that one of the functions of Bowen juxtaposing the two narratives is that it enables her to set up an ironic self-reflexive commentary on each. Thus Prothero’s stark honesty can be compared with Davina and her friends’ evasions and deflections. The fact that he is able to confront head on his actions – the murder of his lover – and in doing so try desperately to come to some form of understanding about those

actions and in turn come to understand himself and his motivations produces, perhaps unintentionally on Bowen's part, a certain sympathy for the character.

In contrast to Oliver, for instance, Prothero is seen to be creative. He in fact writes a narrative, whereas Oliver merely catalogues the decaying books in Lord Thingummy's library. Interestingly, as a narrator, Bowen intrudes upon the story at this point and offers a comment on Oliver's efforts, saying he never completed his task, which once again underlines the utter ineffectualness of aristocracy in the contemporary situation. Prothero's story also sees him being interested in companionship and love, recognising their centrality – by being absent – to the modern human condition, rather than money as Oliver and Davina consistently declare.

I want to underscore these positive or sympathetic aspects to Prothero's portrayal because at one level, it can be argued, Bowen could be said to be objectively describing the modern condition for *everybody* rather than simply condemning the emergence of a new class into a position of power and authority. In other words, Bowen is beyond "blaming" anyone – be it the failed aristocracy or those who are now set to inherit the earth – for the predicament she feels is now being faced. Consequently, Prothero is a more complicated character than being merely the nightmarish embodiment of a threatening new order. It is not his fault, as it were: he is as much a victim of this new world as is any other character; he is the product, rather than the wilful initiator, of a disconnected existence where alienation and isolation are endured and not chosen.

Nonetheless, Bowen also wants to register the horror of the new dispensation for those who are set to lose their place: that is, for people like herself. Accordingly, as the story draws to a close Davina confronts Prothero, declaring she will let his secret out – though, of course, she does not actually know the gruesome details of his tale. His reply displays clearly the shift in power from the old order to the new:

"I do what I want. And I take what I want, I don't hang about for it. I wonder it doesn't sicken a girl like you, hanging about here, waiting ... I'm buying not selling, these days..."

"Who *are* you?"

"My own man," he said, and shut his door vigorously. (406-7)

He is the one in control now, basically because he is in control of himself, of his own destiny: he is his "own man." A phrase, which under different circumstances would have to be considered positive and affirming, here takes on a sinister and threatening tone. The "inheritor", as opposed to the disinherited, is in this position precisely because he has no baggage, nothing to lose or to let go of. He can, in other words, create himself out of nothing.

And yet, this is but an outward appearance that puts Davina and her class firmly in their place as the disinherited. Prothero's story – a story told only to himself – betrays the cost of this declaration of freedom. Here again, form interacts with content: his narrative, embedded midway within the enveloping and containing story of Davina and her friends, never escapes this confinement. It ruptures the main

narrative, certainly, as has been demonstrated, yet crucially it remains unknown to anyone but Prothero.

His narrative tells of his affair with, and the murder of, his lover: it is his dark menacing secret, giving his presence among the faded gentry and the quiet suburban village a threatening, dangerous air. It is also, importantly a narrative concerning the creation of a new identity: he is simultaneously both Prothero and not Prothero. He has, thus, created himself but, in turn, does not know who he is or what he wants to do with himself. Bowen's description of him as he writes is telling:

The pen rushed the hand along under some terrific compulsion, as though something, not thought, vital, were being drained out of him through the point of the pen. Words sprang to their places with deadly complicity, knowing each other too well ... Once or twice when a clinker fell in the stove, or the outside staircase unaccountably creaked as though a foot were upon it, he looked up, the tyrannic pen staggered, he looked round the room with its immutable fixtures as though he were a ghost. (392)

His efforts to make himself "real" through writing fail: like the others, he too is a ghost despite his creative attempts at corporeality. Prothero, at one point declares: "I like what I am, a free man." (393).

But this is exactly what he is not: he is not a free man. His narrative at times contains a tone of bravado concerning his deadly deeds: he has done what he has done and regrets nothing, or so it would seem. However, the final passage of his text negates what has gone before, and indeed, negates his words to Davina:

Anita, I love you Anita, where are you? I didn't mean that, that was not me, I didn't, I can't bear you away. I see your eyes on my pillow, I can't lie alone, I cannot get through the night, come back, where are you, I won't hurt you, come back, come back, come back. (397. Bowen's italics.)

His act of writing falters at the close and he can no longer continue with the "fiction" that he does not care. We also witness his difficulty in discerning who he is and what the "real" person would or would not do. There are, as well, crucial absences in his text. He is unable to repeat the words that Anita uttered which led her death:

You turned over slowly between your cheek and the pillow and said that again slowly. You said that again. You said what you meant. You said what you'd said before. I saw a red mist where your face was, just a mist on the pillow. I took the pillow and smothered you. (395)

His narrative, then, is as much about concealment and deferring final truth as the stories Davina tells herself. In the end, neither is capable of overcoming this obstacle

and both are thus trapped and unable to move on. The utter desolation faced by all the characters at the end of “The Disinherited” is a manifestation of the nightmare which Bowen believes could lie ahead for those who live on after the demise of the Big House and the tradition inherent within it. There appears to be no way to move on and engage productively with the future. Prothero – the “new” man – has no story to tell but this one and it concerns only how he became this “new” man. He is condemned to repeat it over and over again and is, consequently, trapped within a narrative with no future or possibility for change. Nothingness yawns frighteningly before him and, consequently, before the reader.

If the conclusion of *A World of Love* saw Bowen somewhat positively recognising the Big House’s continued existence in fiction, then in “The Disinherited” – through Prothero’s narrative – she acknowledges the fraught nature of such a continued existence. In other words, she realises that perhaps it is not, after all, an adequate compensation for the reality of the Big House. She realises, too, that a new world – a new Ireland – requires new, original narratives and that the desire to rehearse only what has gone before leads to stagnation and dislocation. After all, when looked at closely Prothero’s narrative is another version of Davina and her friends’ stories. Their conclusions are certainly alike – they cannot have what they most desire.

Perhaps, then, “The Disinherited” is a narrative of transition because it shows the reader, if not the characters within the story, that something different is required. Bowen is apprehensive about this transition and the liminal space she finds herself in. In a sense, this story qualifies the upbeat ending of *A World of Love* in that it offers a bleak, nightmarish vision of what actually might face Jane Danby in the world she is propelled into at the close of that novel. Like a character from a work by Samuel Beckett – a writer who also “inherits”, and inhabits, a nightmarish world – she will be forced, while admitting its impossibility, to “go on”. *That* is what life after the Big House demands.

Note

- 1 Bowen, Elizabeth. *Collected Short Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. With an Introduction by Angus Wilson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980,1983). All future references will be made in the main body of the text.

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The “Tinker” Figure in the Children’s Fiction of Patricia Lynch

José Lanthers

Abstract: *This article explores the representation of Travellers or “tinkers” in some of Patricia Lynch’s children’s books from the first half of the twentieth century. One of the first children’s writers to create a world directly recognizable to her young readers, in which she used to shape a concept of “Irishness,” Lynch establishes the “tinker” as a bridging figure between the realism of rural Ireland and the magical “other world” of the supernatural, but belonging properly to neither. Tinkers are tools through which the child is taught, by negative example, to value the domestic realm and to be a good citizen. Relief from the domestic routine should be found in fairy tales, and not in the actual world of the tinkers. Excluded from both the real world and its acceptable alternative, Travellers are denied a legitimate status within an Irish context. Lynch suggests that the only way for a Traveller to become legitimate is to cease being a Traveller.*

Patricia Lynch (1898-1972) was a prolific and popular author of children’s fiction. Growing up in Cork, she was inspired by the folktales and legends told by her mother and by Mrs. Hennessy, a famous “shanachie” who visited their house, and she subsequently saw herself as a storyteller in the wake of that tradition. She characterized most of her books as “stories, with an Irish background, stories of fairs and firesides—with the turf glowing on the hearth—of journeys and of home” (Patricia Lynch, n.p.). In her work, these realistic elements of country life “are transformed and rendered fluid and unpredictable by the addition of a supernatural or magical element... Action is linear and directed toward the achievement of a moral resolution; standard figures from Irish legend... intervene to populate the author’s fantasy realm. There is no complexity of situation or motive in Lynch’s stories and little attempt at character differentiation” (Leen n.p.). Lynch herself felt that the line between the real and the fantastic should not be so strictly drawn: “It is time we saw life as a whole and realized its magic. What I have tried to do in my books is to reveal the magic of ordinary life” (Patricia Lynch n.p.).

In the decades after the declaration of Irish independence, writers like Patricia Lynch and Eilís Dillon were pioneering a new national children's literature and shaping the distinctive characteristics that would instill in Irish children a sense of Irish identity. Several recent articles have made the point that Lynch was a major force in establishing a literature that Irish children could recognize and relate to, by creating a fictional world "rooted in the situations in which they lived" (Watson 345). Lynch's Ireland is rural, its infrastructure dominated by farms and cottages, bogs, markets and fairs; she has "very traditionalist ideas about Ireland, and what it means to be Irish" (Burke 99). Irish children's literature, and Lynch's work in particular, "largely reflected the dominant ideology and indeed continued throughout much of the twentieth century, despite major changes in Irish society, to perpetuate an image of Ireland remarkably similar to the over-simplified pastoral envisioned by de Valera in 1943" (Ní Bhroin 112-13). At the same time, Lynch's world is populated with supernatural figures such as leprechauns, changelings, and characters from Irish heroic legends, which, while representing a facet of Irish traditionalism, also reveal a "wild and unruly subconscious" beneath the conservative surface; their magic provides "a way out or escape, a place where pent-up emotions can be released" (Burke 98).

In several of Patricia Lynch's books, including *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey* (1934), *King of the Tinkers* (1938), and *Tinker Boy* (1955), Travelling people or "tinkers" play a prominent role. In her autobiographical account *A Storyteller's Childhood* (1947), which depicts her early years from a limited child's perspective, in much the same style as her children's fiction, Lynch relates her own encounters with the tinkers of Cork in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Travellers were, above all, a spectacle: "Canvas-covered carts with babies hanging over the front and back: tousled women, hidden in ragged shawls, carrying armfuls of shining tins: wild, barefoot boys and girls with blank, staring eyes and tangled hair running alongside: thin, watchful men in tattered clothes, leading horses" (SC 3). The details of her childhood encounter with one of the Travellers, "a tall, dark man" wearing "a yellow handkerchief... twisted about his head" (SC 24) were subsequently embellished in Lynch's children's stories. In the autobiographical account, the tinker, who remains nameless, finds young Tricia and her companion "mitching" from school, and suggests to the terrified children that they might want to join his tribe. Lynch also describes a later encounter with the same man, when she asked him for help after losing her way at the fair, no longer afraid of the now familiar figure. The tinkers fed her stew and once again asked if she would "jine us an' be one of Yalla Hankercher's tribe" (SC 80), before delivering her safely to her relatives. Young Tricia later defends "my tinkers" against accusations that they are "a bad lot" (SC 83). In Lynch's children's books, variations on these situations in the context of encounters with "Yellow Handkerchief" and his inscrutable tribe are recurring features.

Literary interest in the Travellers in the first half of the twentieth century was, of course, not confined to children's fiction. The first decade in particular produced a large number of texts featuring tramps and tinkers, to the extent that Paul Botheroyd

dubbed that period in Irish literary history “the years of the Travellers.” Revivalists like W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J.M. Synge inscribed such figures with “an anarchic and vigorous potential which was supposedly at odds with the material interests of the emerging bourgeoisie” (Delaney, “Migrancy,” 179). Many of the dramas and stories about tinkers of the Revival period are based to some degree on folk tales or traditional anecdotes rather than on first-hand experience of the actual lives of the Travellers; in that sense their presence in the literature forms part of the Revivalists’ endeavour to find material for a national literature in the mythology and folktales of Ireland. While tinkers were sometimes romanticized, they were more often regarded with fear and suspicion. Here were Irish people who refused to settle down—the plot of land coveted by so many of their countrymen apparently holding no attraction for them—and who appeared to be incapable of obeying the Irish law. When Ireland gained autonomous status and established the parameters of a civil society (and thus became “modern”), the Travellers increasingly were represented as the unacceptable other against which that modernity was defined. Consequently, the “tinker”—which quickly became a pejorative term—was frequently represented as animalistic, dirty, criminal, and incapable of self-control: the very terms, that is, by which the Irish as a people had been represented within the colonial framework.

While Patricia Lynch and Eilís Dillon have been credited with shaping the fictional characteristics that would come to embody Irish identity for the children of the newly independent nation, neither the tinkers nor the trappings of rural Ireland were entirely new to children’s literature, even that produced outside of Ireland, when these writers began publishing their works in the 1930s. A tinker couple, for example, are the focus of a book for young children, *The Black Cats and the Tinker’s Wife* (1923), by English author Margaret Baker. Its protagonists are both the stuff of fairy tales and a tool for teaching children the values of domesticity, characteristics also associated with Lynch’s tinkers, but that is where the similarity ends. The book’s silhouette illustrations represent the couple as a kind of Peter Pan and Cinderella: he is wearing a feathered cap, fringed tunic, tights and soft pointed shoes, while she is barefoot in a flowing ankle-length dress.¹ While her husband mends pots and kettles, the tinker’s wife, who can dance “as lightly as a fairy” (Baker n.p.), tells the local children “tales of elves and dwarfs and water-sprites” (Baker n.p.). At the same time, while they were “as happy as could be” (Baker n.p.), their lives are depicted as incomplete. The wife often looks longingly at the cosy village homes, and the tinker would “think sadly of how little he could earn—so little that perhaps he would never be able to give her a home at all” (Baker n.p.). For their kindness and good deeds, and aided by a little magic, they are eventually rewarded with their dearest wish: a home of their own, albeit in a cave. The association of tinkers with otherworldliness and magic on the one hand, and poverty and homelessness on the other, is commonplace in literature: good behaviour can remedy some of the otherness, as a result of which the characters are socialized and humanized by acquiring some of the trappings of the settled world.

Patricia Lynch's rural Ireland bears a remarkable resemblance to Irish country life as depicted in *The Irish Twins* (1913) by American children's author Lucy Fitch Perkins. This was the third book in Perkins's highly popular "Twins of the World" series, which included *The Dutch Twins*, *The Japanese Twins*, *The Eskimo Twins*, and so on, and which was designed to "foster mutual respect and understanding between people of different nationalities," particularly those represented by immigrant communities in the United States (Smith 1). The story is set in the village of Ballymora in the late nineteenth century. In the opening scene of the book, we see Granny Malone in her thatched cabin on the edge of a bog, knitting and making tea by the turf fire, a bag of potatoes in the corner and hens on the doorstep, hoping that the priest will come by soon to read her the letter that has arrived from her son Michael, now an alderman in America. When the twins, Larry and Eileen McQueen, pay her a visit, she tells them a story about leprechauns. Since *The Irish Twins* is aimed at an American audience, the book goes on to show how the entire family, exasperated by the prohibitive rent imposed on their neat little farm by the English landlord's agent, emigrates to the United States. The final chapter shows the twins twenty years later, when Larry is a traffic cop, and Eileen the wife of a hard-working husband and mother of three fine Irish-American children.

In Patricia Lynch's post-independence fiction, rural Ireland is still poor, but emigration (in spite of Lynch's own childhood, which was partly spent in England) is not presented as an option or a necessity, as hard work provides the families in these stories with a decent enough existence. In *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey*, Eileen and Seamus "lived in a cabin just beyond the crossroads at the edge of a great bog," where their father's turf-cutting provides them with "a grand little cow from Kerry, an elegant pink pig in a neat, tidy sty... and any number of hens and chickens, so they didn't do too badly" (TD 1). The bog is the children's playground. The child-hero of *King of the Tinkers*, Miheal Fahy, also lives in a remote cabin, with a green door, clean white muslin curtains to the windows, and flowers to brighten its aspect. His poor widowed mother busies herself with knitting, which provides enough money to buy tea and sugar and other essentials, and at night tells her son stories of leprechauns and mythical beings. The boy looks after the potato patch and the turf, and makes clothes pegs for sale at the market.

The stock setting of early twentieth-century children's fiction about Ireland, then, is a small rural cottage or farm, kept neat and clean thanks to its occupants' hard work, which also provides them with a frugal but satisfying diet of potatoes and cabbage, and with the warmth of a turf fire. Stories about leprechauns, fairies, and mythological figures keep the children entertained and also provide them with a cultural framework that encourages them to be proud of and excited about their Irishness. The tinkers who also appear as stock characters in this type of Irish children's fiction fulfil a multiple role: they are a natural and familiar presence in the rural Ireland of the early decades of the twentieth century; their way of life is presented as the opposite of the domestic family routine which these books are designed to encourage children to value; and their

elusiveness and otherness is invariably associated with the otherworldliness of fairies and leprechauns. The role of the tinker, then, is that of a go-between, a bridging figure between the realism of rural Ireland and the magic of fairy land. Tinkers are introduced into the story as tools to teach the child by negative example: a temporary escape to the world of the tinkers reveals to the child the values and benefits of a settled and domestic routine. Relief from that routine should be found in stories about the otherworld—not in the actual other world of the Travellers.

In Lucy Fitch Perkins's *The Irish Twins*, the tinkers are the cause of the twins' adventures at the core of the book. When Grannie Malone sends the children home with a story about leprechauns and a warning to beware of the Little People, they run into a band of tinkers instead. Whatever about the book's promotion of "mutual respect and understanding" between nationalities (Smith 1), the tinkers are clearly an exception to the rule. Investigators of racism in American children's literature have noted that American Indians are often put into the same category as witches, ogres, giants, and fairies (Byler 29), and in Irish literature, this is also the case with the Travellers, who are "othered" in this way, and thereby also represented as less than fully human. Travelling people in children's books typically have no names or individual identities but are collectively referred to as "the tinkers." They also act collectively and are usually depicted as travelling in large groups, led by a "king" or "chief." In Lynch's fiction, they often sing in chorus as they travel. In *King of the Tinkers*, they do so in praise of Yellow Handkerchief's thieving skills: "Right from under yer nose he'll lift all he wants / An he'll dar yez to say him nay!" (KT 37); in *Tinker Boy*, they sing, "We live, and we live without working. / We ask, though no beggars are we. / Refuse and ye'll surely be sorry, / For we are the wild and the free!" (TB 121). The tinkers, unlike the child protagonists in Lynch's novels, always speak non-standard English.

Typically in these books, the tinkers are, at least initially, observed from a safe distance. Paul Delaney has made the point in relation to late nineteenth-century representations of the Travellers that their otherness meant that "the only way to know them was to observe them unobserved," so that they were "translated into a dramatic spectacle of cultural Otherness, and their bodies were symbolically inscribed to indicate many of the fears and fantasies of their thoroughly reputable audience" (Delaney, "Representations," 55). In Lynch's *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey*, Eileen and Seamus spy on the tinkers' encampment "[t]hrough a gap in the bushes" (TD 3), and observe its occupants going about their business "while a tall, ragged man, with a bushy black beard and a bright yellow handkerchief twisted about his head, was making a speech. At the end of every sentence he brought down a big stick on the back and sides of a donkey which was fastened to a tree" (TD 4). The Irish twins in Perkins's novel also chance upon the tinkers on the bog and peek at them from behind a wall, as if they were studying a pack of wild and dangerous animals: "The Twins were afraid of Tinkers. Everybody is in Ireland, because the Tinkers wander around over the country without having any homes anywhere. They go from house to house in all the villages mending

pots and pans, and often they steal whatever they can lay their hands on” (Perkins 47). The causality between fear and homelessness reveals the book’s ideological stance, in which the noble desire of the twins’ father to own his own land is implicitly contrasted with the frightening rootlessness of the tinkers.

In the course of Perkins’s story, one of the tinkers, “a rough scraggly man with a beard on him like a rick of hay” (Perkins 61-62) steals the family’s geese. Tinkers are depicted as inherently flawed (which is inscribed in their physical appearance): when Mrs. McQueen wonders where the tinkers got “the badness in them the way they have” (Perkins 63), her husband explains that it was the tinkers who led St. Patrick astray when he was in Ireland, and that the holy man put a curse on them so that they had to walk the roads of the world forever. The same tinker man who stole the birds later comes to the house, asks for a drink, and attempts to sell Mrs. McQueen her own geese back, but she tricks him into releasing the birds and then chases him away, threatening to call “the man working behind the house to put an end to your thieving entirely!” (Perkins 98). The tinker leaves in a hurry, taking the mug from which he had been drinking with him, “but it was cracked anyway!” (Perkins 99). The twins catch a final glimpse of him at the fair later on, and when their father hears the news he takes it as a sign to return home: “I’d rather not be meeting the gentleman on the road after dark” (Perkins 156).

In Patricia Lynch’s fiction, tinkers are a dramatic spectacle, but to be observed by the Travellers in turn is a disconcerting experience precisely because their faces are unreadable. In her autobiography, Lynch mentions the “blank, staring eyes” of the older children, and the “dark faces with glittering eyes” (*SC* 81) of the assembled crowd. In *The Turf-Cutter’s Donkey*, Eileen is rescued and fed by the tinkers, but made shy by “all those bright eyes watching her” (*TD* 80). When Miheal, in *King of the Tinkers*, is discovered hiding in the tinkers’ cart, he tries to be brave, but “when the tinkers formed a circle round him and their bright eyes watched unwinkingly, he was terribly afraid” (*KT* 141). Tessa Nolan, the protagonist of *Tinker Boy*, makes friends with the MacDaras, a Traveller mother and son who aspire to a different way of life, but “the other tinkers... watched her with their blank, unwinking eyes and she was afraid of them” (*TB* 37). The impenetrable, inscrutable stares suggest both the essential unknowability and otherness of the tinkers, and the threat of being known and mastered by them.

In Patricia Lynch’s novels of the 1930s, the tinker (the outsider) represents both a threat to the stability of the social and familial order, and a desire on the part of the child to be free from the constraints of a world ruled by adults. The “subaltern” position of children in relation to adults has been a feature of recent academic discourse about children’s literature. The general contention (put forward by Jacqueline Rose and others) that children are the colonized subjects of colonizing adults is forcefully expressed by Roderick McGillis when he argues that “children continue to be the subaltern and their literature continues to serve as colonizing (socializing, taming, wrecking...) agent *par excellence*” (McGillis 224). Regardless of whether one accepts the colonial metaphor,

commentators on children's literature commonly agree that the literary category itself is a myth or a facade, in that there is "no body of literature which rests so openly on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee" (Rose qtd in Chapleau 130), and in that "it creates a childhood that is controlled, shaped, constructed according to adults' wishes" (Rose qtd in Chapleau 132). However one approaches the notion of difference, then, it is the case that "children's fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience" (Stephens 8).

For child characters who are subject to rules and restrictions imposed on them by adults, the apparently lawless and carefree life of the tinkers is attractive—"They had a fine life," Miheal thinks in Lynch's *King of the Tinkers*: "Nothing but holidays" (*KT* 37). Once the child has acted on the desire to join the tinkers, however, it soon comes to the realization that home and family, including their hierarchical power structures, are to be preferred to the alternative. A learning process has brought the child to the point where it willingly accepts that it must be socialized and civilized according to the adult order. In Lynch's later works, particularly in *Tinker Boy*, the socializing and civilizing effort also extends to some of the tinkers, who are therefore placed into the same category as the non-tinker child characters. Colonized subjects are typically infantilized by their colonizers; in postcolonial Ireland, Travellers are infantilized in much the same way by the settled Irish population. In Irish children's literature, non-Traveller children fear the tinkers (as adults and strangers) but also patronize them (as tinkers and inferiors). Tinker children are doubly colonized, but also considered more redeemable than the adult Travellers, precisely by virtue of their child-status.

In *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey*, Eileen learns to appreciate the care and attention she receives at home when she decides, in a grumpy mood, to run away with the gipsies and never to return home again. In stark contrast to the tinkers, the gipsies are represented as overly house-proud. Their caravan has a door with a knocker and a brass handle, "just like the door to a house in the street of a town" (*TD* 69). Inside, the gipsy woman is manically cleaning furnishings and knick-knacks and silverware, and the caravan "was the cleanest, tidiest place Eileen had ever seen" (*TD* 70). Eileen is made to feed the woman's screaming baby twins, while her intimidating hostess sings: "All day long I scrub and sweep, / While the babies scream and weep. / All day long I clean and shine. / What a busy life is mine! / Shine and clean, sweep and scrub. / Rub-a-dub! Oh, rub-a-dub!" (*TD* 74). When Eileen is told that more caravans are on the way and she will soon be minding twenty even more unruly babies, she escapes, and in the woods she runs into the Tinker Chief. He takes her to the camp where a huge cauldron of stew is being tended to by an old hump-backed woman, surrounded by "scattered basins, cups without handles, empty tin cans, cracked plates, enamel plates with the enamel chipped off, lids of saucepans, battered spoons" (*TD* 78). Eileen eats stew while the chief compares the tinkers favourably to the gipsies, although Eileen is privately not persuaded, especially when one of the girls tries to steal her hat. When the chief offers to take her home,

Eileen jumps up: “She was just as eager to escape from the tinkers as she had been to get away from the gipsy caravan” (*TD* 82). A young girl, Lynch seems to say, should not face the demands and responsibilities of womanhood too soon, but neither should she grow up in a lawless and unstructured environment. Home is the golden mean to which Eileen gladly returns: “The cabin door was wide open. When Eileen saw the glowing fire on the hearth, the shining blue-and-white delph on the dresser, and the table laid for the dinner no one had eaten, she was so glad she could hardly speak” (*TD* 86). The lesson learned, she resolves never to get out of bed on the wrong side again.

In *King of the Tinkers*, Miheal’s magical hens are stolen by Yellow Handkerchief, and when the chief returns in the middle of the night, the boy follows him and his band of tinkers in a dream-like state. They are joined by the strange, otherworldly creature called Red Lanty (who had given Miheal the eggs from which the magical chickens emerged), and together they make for “The Secret Valley”—which Miheal remembers from his mother’s stories as the place where Finn MacCool and the Fianna live “until the great days of Ireland would come again” (*KT* 62). Red Lanty is unhappy about the tinkers’ presence and urges Miheal to be quick: “we’ll shut them rascals out!” (*KT* 63). The little men in charge of the valley are unsure what to do: “they didn’t want the tinkers in their valley, but they were terrified of being called inhospitable” (*KT* 65). Miheal warns them: “They’ll never leave the valley. They’ll turn you out. They’ll spoil the valley” (*KT* 66), at which point the little men close the valley to all comers, including Miheal, who blames the tinkers for the fact that he will not now see Finn and the heroes of ancient Ireland. The episode seems to imply that the tinkers are a major impediment to Ireland’s return to its former greatness.

Miheal is left in the company of a poor old woman (a mythical creature who morphs out of and into a gnarled old tree), a baby (who turns out to be a changeling), and Nora, a little tinker girl. Of these three “otherworldly” beings, all capable of transformation, Nora is the only one who can be humanized and domesticated. Miheal recognizes that she is pretty and decent underneath the layer of dirt that covers her, qualities borne out by the fact that she soon decides never to return to the tribe. The generic “tinkers” in the book are represented as being without the concepts of home and family: Nora “was ashamed” to tell Red Lanty that “she had no home” (*KT* 122), and she later marvels at the idea of belonging to a proper family “when she had only been one of the tribe” (*KT* 239). Offered the choice by Lanty between the “otherworld” of the Secret Valley and the domestic reality of the Fahys cabin, she eventually chooses the latter. Miheal’s mother welcomes her as her own daughter, dresses her in new clothes, and promises to teach her all the domestic skills.

Miheal himself has gone after the tinkers to retrieve his poultry and his father’s stolen magical fiddle, which he does after many adventures, in the course of which he increasingly comes to resemble a tinker boy. Yellow Handkerchief asks him, “Did ye never want to join the tinkers, Miheal Fahy? ... Did ye never want to share our wild, free life?” (*KT* 144), and Miheal agrees that he did. While the role reversal leads to a permanent

salvation and liberation for Nora, for Miheal it amounts to a temporary aberration and confinement. Very soon he realizes that “already he was tired of the tinkers and wondered how long he would have to stay with them” (*KT* 153). Fortunately for him, Nora—now converted to a settled existence—has taken it upon herself to rescue him, with the help of the old woman and the changeling. She arrives when the tinkers are fighting among themselves about whom to crown as their new king. Nora is handed the King of the Tinkers’ crown by the changeling, and places it on Miheal’s head (implicitly suggesting that his leadership might lead to improvements in the tribe), but the changeling disapproves of her choice and explains that Miheal would “never be happy stravagin the country, takin what he wants and never payin a penny piece for it” (*KT* 234). The crown is abandoned and Yellow Handkerchief, who obviously fits the bill much better, crowns himself with it. Nora and Miheal return home with the widow Fahy. In *Tinker Boy*, Patricia Lynch also introduces the idea of an outsider as king of the tinkers, who would act as a civilizing force to the tribe, and there, too, the plan is thwarted by the essential incorrigibility of the tinkers. Mrs. MacDara reveals that her late husband (originally a settled carpenter) failed to become king due to the jealousy of Yellow Handkerchief. Her husband “would have made us all rich!” and “could have joined us in one tribe and made us respected!” The other tinkers counter that they do not need respect and that the carpenter “Wanted us to work, he did! Him and his work! Asking dacent tinkers to make baskets. Moyah!” (*TB* 96). Lynch suggests both that tinkers are in need of correction, and that their essential “tinkerish” qualities make it impossible for them to be corrected—a catch-22 that legitimizes their marginalisation and exclusion from civil society.

In the opening chapter of *Tinker Boy*, twelve-year-old Tessa Nolan observes the tinkers unseen from her bedroom window as they are passing by on their way into town. One of the horses is limping, and her first thought is, “These aren’t the kind of tinkers I like! ... Tinkers are cruel!” (*TB* 5-6). On reflection, she modifies her opinion by admitting that she could like the woman and the boy she sees “if they were kinder” (*TB* 12), and by acknowledging the lure of the exotic: “She liked everything strange and this tawny-haired woman was very strange” (*TB* 15). As Tessa passes the tinker camp on her way to school, the woman appears from her caravan and asks the girl to accompany her son, Dara MacDara, on his first trip to school. He has never attended before and faces suspicion and discrimination from fellow-pupils and teacher alike. Tessa takes it upon herself to protect him.

Tessa likes her new friends, who live in a cosy but untidy caravan which sports a bookshelf in one corner. She envies them the romantic freedom of “driving into strange towns and out into the country again, of camping by the seashore and hearing the waves all night long” (*TB* 26). If only one could be a tinker without being a tinker: “She wouldn’t want to stay with the other tinkers. If this caravan were hers, she’d take it where the roads were empty and not a soul would know who she was” (*TB* 26). Tessa’s attitude to the tinkers is one of conflict between loathing and desire: “I do wish Dara

and his mother weren't tinkers!' thought Tessa, ... 'Only they are and, in a way, I'm glad. I almost wish I was one. It must be grand to travel everywhere, to stop where you like, drive all through the night and never be bothered'" (*TB* 38). The MacDaras are not like other tinkers, however, who frighten Tessa and who are not good neighbours. The Wards are the worst, and "Not a tinker in the country wished for their company but it wasn't easy to escape them" (*TB* 67).

For Dara to be accepted in school, he must excel and rise above the tinker stereotype—the typical minority predicament. Soon the teacher realizes that Dara "wasn't the ordinary kind of tinker boy at all" (*TB* 43): he can already read, picks up the principle of the long division in no time, and is a master poetry reciter. Soon the whole class is full of admiration for him. Dara's mother explains to Tessa why she and her son are different. Her late husband was no tinker but a carpenter, "a good tradesman" (*TB* 28), who was tricked by the tinkers and ended up falling in love with Maura, soon to be Mrs. MacDara. His was a civilizing influence, as he taught his wife to read, and she in her turn taught her son. Dara's mother explains that he also advocated kindness to animals, a novelty in the tinker camp, and something that comes as news to Dara, who immediately begins to treat his horse more humanely. When he asks his mother why she had not told him this before she replies, "Sure, I didn't think! Even if yer father wasn't a true tinker, I am!" (*TB* 63).

Dara, who is only half a tinker to begin with, vows that he "won't always be a tinker... One day I'll be something grand, mebbe a horse dealer" (*TB* 36). Tessa supports his wish, in the face of friends' and relatives' belief that tinkers cannot change. When a crate of turkeys belonging to Tessa's aunt goes missing, the woman blames Tessa's new friends, but the girl decides that "It must be the Wards!" (*TB* 128). In order to prove that the MacDaras are "good tinkers" rather than "bad tinkers," aunt Bernadette orders that they "make the thieves give back my turkeys!" (*TB* 129): as a generic category, all tinkers are responsible for each others' actions. With the help of Dara, Tessa and her brothers retrieve the stolen turkeys from the Wards. After an accident with the Wards' caravan while they are fleeing from the law, Dara rescues both his friend Tessa and his enemy Paud Ward from the river. The act definitively separates him from his tinker origins in the eyes of the law, as Garda O'Keeffe makes a clear distinction between him and Paud: "There's one poor half-drowned young tinker and a hero—that's what Dara MacDara is—a hero!" (*TB* 172). In the Nolans' home, Tessa's heroic "tinker friend" is welcomed and given her brother's suit to wear. His mother, also invited to join the family, knows her place and prefers to stay on her "creepy" by the fire, but Dara sits between Tessa's brothers at the table. Garda O'Keeffe offers Dara a position with his uncle, who is setting up a horse dealership. Dara "won't always be a tinker" (*TB* 36), largely because he was only a half tinker to begin with. Horse-dealing, moreover, is a traditional Traveller occupation, so that his rise in the world is appropriate for his station and consists largely of becoming legitimate within a settled context. In that context, he must be subordinate to the policeman's uncle: legitimacy is irreconcilable with the "wild, free life" of the tinkers.

In Patricia Lynch's children's books, the presence of tinkers is used to enhance the Irish quality of her narratives: like the bogs, cottages and fairs, the tinkers are represented as an inalienable part of the national infrastructure. At the same time, tinkers are shown to be "different" from the Irish protagonists of the novels, but their function is not to challenge the settled cultural norm but rather to emphasize it: always focalised through the majority culture, their presence is not about "alterity" but about "cultural continuity" (Stephens 207). Their representation suffers from the same stereotypes and prejudices that researchers have detected in children's books about African Americans, American Indians, and other minorities. Tinkers are generically represented as inferior, although there are "good tinkers" and "bad tinkers." Bad tinkers are violent, work-shy, homeless thieves who spoil the countryside. Good tinkers are passive and non-violent, have romantic traditions, are eager to prove their worth, and some have the potential to become "just like us." Their highest aspiration is to stop being tinkers, and kind settled people are around to help them do the right thing. Patricia Lynch's fiction of the first half of the twentieth century teaches young readers how to behave properly in an Irish context. Being a good Irish citizen, the lesson implies, is incompatible with being a tinker. Irish Traveller organisations are today working to dispel that widespread cultural bias, by promoting "an understanding of Travellers as full and equal citizens of Ireland with their own culture and identity" (McDonagh 10).

Note

- 1 The illustrations in Patricia Lynch's fiction—by Jack B. Yeats in *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey*, by Katharine C. Lloyd in *King of the Tinkers*, and by Harry Kernoff in *Tinker Boy*—all represent the tinkers as women in shawls and men in battered hats, driving horse-drawn barreltop wagons.

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On Local Disturbances: Reflections on Joyce's Use of Language in "Sirens"

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Abstract: *This article explores the issue of language in the "Sirens" episode of Ulysses. "Sirens" begins enigmatically with "Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing". Glossing this requires something more than tying it to the consciousness of the two barmaids or indeed to the wider theme of the episode. With the help of some such awkward sentences and phrases taken for the most part from the Overture or Prelude to "Sirens", I want to consider the processes at work here and especially how they might connect with politics and the colonial encounter. In particular I focus on how Joyce translators "French, Spanish, German, Italian, and modern Greek "tackle such phrases such as 'Imperthnthn thnthnthn". The sounds in the Overture are often detached from meaning, or their meaning is deferred until later in the episode, or their semantic field or phonological system is peculiar to English. In wrestling with Joyce's texts, the translators remind us of what we might describe as "local disturbances", which surround not only the Overture to "Sirens" but Joyce's language in general. I then complicate this idea by suggesting a possible parallel in "Sirens" "an episode which is sometimes read in terms of the 1790s when the United Irishmen attempted to break the connection with the United Kingdom and which includes repeated pointed references to the '98 song "The Croppy Boy" " between local disturbances in language and local disturbances in Irish history.*

From the "pok!" in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" and the "pick, pack, pock, puck" sequence of sounds in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the constant play on sounds throughout *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce reveals he is a sound writer.¹ While in the earlier texts the sounds can be quickly identified and eventually slotted into the narrative or characterisation or theme, in *Ulysses* this is often less possible as if something else is at work. My focus in this article is "Sirens", for this episode is where a peculiar kind of tension can be most keenly felt. The tension I have in mind concerns not so much the figure of the Arranger or linguistic contamination as what we might term the "local disturbances" that surround particular passages or sentences.

“Sirens” begins enigmatically with “Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing” (*U* 11:1). Glossing this requires something more than tying it to the consciousness of the two barmaids or indeed to the wider theme of the episode. With the help of some such awkward sentences and phrases taken for the most part from the Overture or Prelude to “Sirens”, I want to consider the processes at work here and especially how they might connect with politics and the colonial encounter.

Whether in terms of syntax or phonology, symbols or themes, character development or narrative unfolding, the Overture is frequently seen as a forerunner for the music episode which follows. John Gordon, in keeping with his stress on “reality”, adopts a more agnostic view. The Overture he describes as a “cacophony” which resembles, “simply, the random plonks, toots, and sawings of an orchestra tuning up, waiting for the conductor to begin” (Gordon 75). But music still exerts an influence over Gordon’s view: a “cacophony” is a collection of sounds, the conductor is tapping on his baton, and the orchestra is preparing to play. My own preoccupation in this chapter is not primarily with the way sounds connect with meaning (whether that is understood in metaphoric or literal terms), but with the gulf between sounds and meaning. At times the phonological and semantic fields overlap; at other times there is no overlap and all we are left with is sound sense. At times a translator – and translation gives us the sharpest insight into what’s at stake here – may emphasise sounds independent of meaning; at other times the translator may resort to a semantic equivalent independent of the original sound. A focus on the gulf between sounds and meaning helps to reduce the pressure to read the episode in the light of the Overture, and at the same time it frees up the possibility of interpreting “Sirens” in terms of “local disturbances” or of establishing an analogy or parallel between language and politics.

As if to thwart or prevent a smooth or Conmee-like reading, the language of “Sirens” is surrounded by “local disturbances”. We are constantly delayed in this episode and frequently have recourse to micro readings which yield a peculiar kind of local satisfaction. “Bronze by gold” is often read in terms of the previous episode and the colour of the barmaids’ hair. After the Vice-Regal cavalcade comes the female reply to the metallic sound of the horses and their tackle. As with other opening sentences to episodes in *Ulysses*, “Sirens” begins in search of meaning, in this case with metonymy, with parts for the whole, with coins of the realm, with a commodity, with barmaids and service and commodification. My purpose in deploying the phrase “local disturbances” is to give shape to something that might otherwise go unnoticed. The phrase itself I have borrowed from George Cornwall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland and On the Irish Church Question* (1836), and the direction of my argument is toward establishing not so much a connection as a parallel between local disturbances in language and local disturbances in Irish history.

Lewis’s study begins: “For the last seventy years Ireland has been the scene of constantly recurring disturbances; sometimes consisting only of the murder of a few persons, or the burning of a few houses, and sometimes rising to general insurrection.”

(Lewis 1) The disturbances Lewis has in mind date from 1761 with the appearance in Munster of the Whiteboys, an agrarian association which was formed initially to resist the payment of tithes to Protestant clergymen but which later broadened out to agitate on behalf of the peasantry and tenant farmer against landlords and their agents. The 1780s witnessed the rise of militancy in the north of Ireland with the establishment of the Peep or Break-of-day-Boys, a sectarian militia who took to searching for arms among the homes of their Catholic neighbours; Catholics responded by forming their own association, the Defenders. Then in the 1790s the temperature increased significantly when the Peep-of-day-Boys founded the Orange Order and the Defenders merged their interests with Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen. The reference by Lewis to "general insurrection" is to the 1798 Rising ("rebellion" according to Lewis), which sought by a series of military risings largely centred on the South East, the Midlands, and the North of Ireland, to break the connection with Britain and establish an independent republic. All these are considered "local disturbances" by the Whig commentator Lewis, but, inadvertently, in summarising all these in a single sentence, he provides us with a way of connecting the local with the national, the land question with the nationalist issue, history and politics. In "Wandering Rocks", the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland smiles benevolently on the King's subjects, but in "Sirens", away from the gaze of the Crown, the colonised are impertinent, mock the conquering hero, and sing rebel songs about the croppies who cropped their hair as a sign of sympathy with the French Revolution. According to Lewis, "every Irish Catholic was presumed to be disaffected to the State, and was treated as an open or concealed rebel" (Lewis 46-7). "Sirens" is not a revolutionary tract, but its local disturbances suggest it can be read in rebellious terms and this is what I attempt to do here.

Imperthnthn thnthnthn

Anyone approaching the Overture to "Sirens" with meaning in mind is in for a bit of a shock. Simply filtering the sounds that jostle in the ear is enough for many readers. "Imperthnthn thnthnthn", to take one example, will challenge anyone not advanced in elocution. Eleven letters in one word and nine in the other with only two vowels and those in the first word. Im-per-thn-thn – four syllables in the first word; thn-thn-thn – three in the second. To make sense of the pronunciation is to pronounce the words, or, vice versa, to pronounce the words is a sign that they have been understood: that seems to be the challenge. The individual sounds can be broken down into phonemes, or gathered together into syllables, into morphemes, but, whichever approach is adopted, top-down or history-from-below as it were, the aim is to produce a sound for the whole word. Reducing the word to, say, I-m-p-e-r-t-h-n-t-h-n wouldn't be right – more like a not very good English lesson, one that would certainly have been avoided by a good teacher at the Berlitz School in Pola or Trieste. The pressure lies in achieving a sound for the whole word.

The sound in this case seems suspended until some other clue comes along. Im- indicates a negative, as in the English words "imprecise" or "implausible". Imper-

suggests the beginning of a number of English words such as “impermanent”, “impermissible”, or “impersonal”. Add the “thn” and you almost have “impertinent”. “Impertinent” is not quite the same as “not pertinent”, unlike “impermissible”, which is “not permissible”, or “impermanent”, which is “not permanent”. The word itself is odd, and so too is the other word used later by Miss Douce “insolence”, which again is not “not solence”. When we return to the sound, we find that deciphering the sound is dependent on meaning, on there being a word to link with the sound. But at this point in “Sirens” there isn’t a word. We have to wait for “bootssnout”, the general helper, to set down the tea for Misses Douce and Kennedy before we can connect sound and meaning:

– There’s your teas, he said.

Miss Kennedy with manners transposed the teatray down to an upturned lithia crate, safe from eyes, low.

– What is it? loud boots unmannerly asked.

– Find out, miss Douce retorted, leaving her spyingpoint.

– Your beau, is it?

A haughty bronze replied:

– I’ll complain to Mrs de Massey on you if I hear any more of your impertinent insolence.

– Imperthnthn thnthnthn, bootssnout sniffed rudely, as he retreated as she threatened as he had come. (*U* 11:91-101)

It becomes clear that you can only translate or read this phrase in the Overture in the light of what’s to come in the episode, so delay and re-reading, as Fritz Senn has rightly suggested, are part of the reading experience. “Imperthnthn” is a negative, and close to negation, to parody. It offers itself as a parody of subservience, a parody of female dominance, a parody of sounds in search of meaning, and perhaps also a parody of those who imagine difficulty belongs to major protagonists, for what is this but a minor spat among the junior staff in the Ormond Hotel. As it happens, the discourse on class repeatedly surfaces in this episode, often linked with gender inequality, as if Joyce’s aim is to suggest that, even if they are unfocussed, the local disturbances have a political point. Miss Douce shares a joke with her fellow barmaid Miss Kennedy about a “snuffy fogey” with a “goggle” eye they encountered at the Antient Concert Hall. The narrator informs us that Miss Douce “snorted down her nostrils that quivered imperthnthn like a snout in quest”. Here the nose is in quest of haughty imitation, but haughtiness evades her as the sound she makes is compared to snorting like a pig, the snout an echo of “bootssnout”, close that is to parody or merely answering back, a rebel without a cause.

What do translators make of “Imperthnthn”? How in other words do they tackle the issue of sounds raised by Joyce in this episode? Unlike “Rrrpr. Kraa. Kraandl.”, the farting sound at the end of the Overture, “Imperthnthn” is more than just a physical sound but contains a lexical item. The French translation by Auguste Morel, who was assisted by one of Joyce’s tried associates Stuart Gilbert, has “Impertnent” followed by “tnentnent” (Morel 392). This is closer to meaning than sound, but, ironically, to English ears this

could suggest the letter “i” is missing or that someone has a speech impairment, given to slurs in speech. “Impertintín” followed by “tntntn” is how it is rendered in Spanish by Valverde (Valverde 229). Valverde provides a surer reflection of the original effect where a gulf divides sounds from meaning. “Impertinente” is impertinent with an e. “tntntn” is nasal, the sound reverberating round the nose, the after-effect. In this translation the first word is close to meaning, the second to pure sound. Bona Flecchia’s Italian translation is near to the original except that she adds a syllable to both words as if to give them an extra twang: “Impertntntn tntntntn”. Giulio de Angelis’ 1960s Italian translation is more reliable: “Impertnt tntntn” (de Angelis 345). These different versions, then, each have their own effect, but all these translators are keen to allow the sounds to stand as sounds. The Argentine translator J. Salas Subirat mixes things. In the Overture he has “Impertnent tntentnt”, two pages later “Impertntn tntntn” (Subirat 285, 287). In the most recent Spanish translation, Francisco García Tortosa reads the phrase in the light of what’s to come, placing more weight thereby on meaning than on sound, in the process inadvertently collapsing Miss Douce and the insolent boy into the one figure: “Impertintnt insolentnt” (Tortosa 293:2). In this regard, Senn makes the valuable point, sometimes missed by translators as here by Tortosa, that once we learn “Imperthnthn thnthnthn” means impertinent insolence “we are likely to think [it] actually *means* “impertinent insolence”, but it only does so by proleptic and unwarranted foresight” (Senn, 1995: 84). But then, looking back on history sometimes allows us to discern that what appear at the time merely spats, such as the Whiteboy disturbances, are in fact part of a larger struggle for articulation.

A Husky Fifenote Blew. Blew. Blue Bloom is on the.

These lines, which provide another example of sound sense, present a different challenge, for the focus is in part on homophones, on words with same sounds but different spellings. We can begin, however, with grammar and history. “Blew”, the past tense of verb to blow, requires a subject and it is only later in the episode that we learn that the reference is to Simon Dedalus blowing into his pipe and transforming it into a musical instrument, producing the sound of a fife. Fife in turn recalls drums and the military and the period of the croppy boys and the local disturbances throughout Ireland in 1798, the Year of the French. The word “husky” recalls the “fury hoarse” of the yeoman captain in “The Croppy Boy” as he casts off his priestly robes to reveal his true identity (see Appendix 1 for the song’s lyrics). The phrase “husky fifenote” is not meant, therefore, to be lyrical. Deception or “decoy” is one of the themes of this chapter, a view also in evidence in the series “blew Blew Blue”, which suggests frustration rather than flow. Morel, we might notice in passing, possibly on account of the “Soft word” which follows or of Lenehan’s lisping to Miss Kennedy a “low whistle of decoy” (*U* 11:328), mistranslates “decoy” as “séduction”, and Subirat, Hans Wollschläger and de Angelis follow in his wake with “Seducción”, “Verlocken” (to entice) and “lusinga” (flattery).

Lenahan would like his decoy to be part of a seductive encounter, but that is another matter. In answer to Stephen's expression of desire in "Proteus" – "Touch me. Soft eyes." (*U* 3:434-6) – "Sirens" replies "Decoy. Soft word." "blew", another Sirens word, is continued in the next line. "Blew. Blue bloom is on the". The alliteration is nicely captured in the German translation: "Blus. Blau Bloomelein im" (Wollschläger 355). A characteristic procedure in this episode is the switching from one consciousness to another via the same word or sound. Normally it marks a shift to Bloom, who doesn't arrive at the Ormond until much later in episode. At this point there is a switch from Simon Dedalus and his pipe blowing to blue Bloom. In the song "The Bloom is on the Rye" it is late spring, summer is coming, and the bloom is on the rye (rye does have a blue colour when in bloom). We might also discern another aspect to this switch from Simon to Bloom, from biography to fiction, from sound to association, history to the present, for Joyce's father sang this particular song to May Joyce. The song is upbeat, Bloom, on the other hand, is blue. "Blew. Blue bloom is on the."

The Spanish translation by Valverde is "Sopló. *Bloom* (italicised), flor azul hay en el." The translator makes no attempt to reproduce the assonance of bl bl bl or ew ue oom. As for Bloom, he is described as "flor azul", a blue flower. This is not without merit, especially the lower case "bloom", which allows scope for the song to be heard first. But it is not so much a translation as a paraphrase, a paraphrase which makes no attempt at a phonological equivalence either. We know the reference is to Bloom; indeed, in the Rosenbach manuscript Joyce writes it in upper case. The English is not "Bloom, blue flower" but the more enigmatic "Blue bloom". A little later in the episode, "en el" is completed by "centeno" or rye, but this would only work if there was a song or phrase such as "flor azul hay en el centeno". Otherwise the missing word is entirely dependent on the unfolding text. Tortosa invites a different reading when he suggests an alternative meaning to "Blue", not the colour but blue, the substance once widely used in washing clothes: "Sopló. Brotebloom añil en el" (Tortosa 293:8). "Brotebloom" brings together Bloom's name and a word which contains several meanings: to sprout or appear as in plants; to rise as in the morning; an outbreak (of violence) or rash. In translating this back into English, the literal reading – "He blew. Sprouting Bloom blue in the" – conveys the idea of something that is forced or being forced. Other translations produce a slightly different effect: "Bloom appears blue in the" or "Bloom rises blue in the". Less dramatically, the sentence is later completed, like Valverde, with "centeno" or rye, but then the blue in washing looks even more out of place. Subirat's translation also departs from the original and insists on closure at this point: "Floreció. La azul floración está sobre los cabellos coronados de oro" (Subirat 285). Literally: "He bloomed. The blue flowering is on the crowned gold hair." Here "blew" has been changed into bloom and "rye" has been rendered metaphorically and painted a different colour.

Contrary to what one might think given Joyce's choice of blue and white (the Greek flag) for the cover of the Shakespeare and Company edition of *Ulysses*, the Greek translation amends blue to milky white. Again, this provides an interesting modification especially in the light of the reference to the Milky Way in "Hades" or when we recall the derivation of

the English word galaxy: “Galaxios anthos pano ste” (Ἐάθ’ ὅς ἐστι 304). A milky white flower is in bloom. Here Bloom is “anthos”, a flower, and linked therefore with the word anthology, his identity composed of little refrains, flowers that adorn an anthology. “Sirens” repeatedly anticipates the language of *Finnegans Wake*, and in retrospect we can discern how in the character of Bloom Joyce is learning to exploit the “paradigmatic ear”, one of the distinctive features of the *Wake*. In the Greek translation Bloom’s name is Mploum, the sound made on diving into the sea; sometimes it means the dive itself as in the phrase “let’s go for a mploum” (mp constitutes the equivalent of b in modern Greek). In the Greek translation there is a descant of sorts on Bloom’s name and flowers. The French translation, which elsewhere plays ingeniously on “florit”, “fleury” and “fleuri”, has Bloom “aux champs” or in the fields as if he were in some physical location. Bleuet is cornflower; French Canadians use bleuet for blueberry. “Bluet Bloom est aux.” There is little suggestion here of melancholy unless the bleu in bleuet can carry that inflection. “Boccio” in Flecchia’s Italian translation is bud. “Blu boccio è sulla.” Blue bud, where an attempt at assonance can be discerned in bl and b, but this is not quite the meaning of bloom on the rye. De Angelis’ “Bloom blu è la patina sul” brings together “blu” and “sul”, blue and on, a colour adjective and a preposition without an object. “Patina”, for “bloom”, sets up a different set of associations, not yet a flower but a glaze or varnish. Later, the sentence is completed with “fior de segale”, flower of rye (de Angelis 353). In German, blue little Bloom is blooming in a cornfield: “Blau Bloomelein im Kornfeld blüht” (Wollschläger 363). Few translations give us anything of blue’s range of meanings in English (blue as in melancholy, blue as in blue joke, blue as in the blues, blue as in bolt from the blue) or of its recurring interest both for the author of the “Blue Book of Eccles” (FW 179:26) and for critics alike from John Addington Symonds’s *In the Key of Blue And Other Prose Essays* (1893) to William H. Gass’s *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (1975).

Idolores

“Trilling, trilling: Idolores.” In the song “The Shade of the Palm” the line goes “O my Dolores, Queen of the Eastern Sea”. In Miss Douce’s rendition she alters “my Dolores” to “Idolores”; in other words Lydia becomes the object of worship, she as I, as idol. This is a nice touch by Joyce, unconscious on her part, for Miss Douce is what she hears or thinks she hears. Trilling, trillante, trinando, trillernd, fredonne in English, Italian, Spanish, German and Italian. In whichever language, she is like a bird: Idolores. Like a bird, she also wants to be noticed. Look at me, she says, sensuous barmaid, recently returned from my holidays down the country with my body suitably tanned, or hopefully giving the impression of being tanned. In the one word, Joyce combines an array of associations: I, idol, Dolores, dolours, sorrows. The word also allows Joyce scope later in the episode to substitute the “I” for “he” when Bloom, listening to Ben Dollard’s rendition of “The Croppy Boy”, expresses a confusion as to the identity of “he”: “At Geneva barrack that young man died. At Passage was his body laid. Dolor! O, he dolores!” (U 11:1131-2) The French translation of the original is more

narrowly conceived. “Adolores” (Morel 392) is an acceptance that there is no idol here. In Subirat’s and Valverde’s Spanish translation “Ay dolores” carries “ay”, perhaps an expression of pain. Even if it remains outside the category we might assign to an insight, it is worth noting that the initial syllable in “Idolores” can also be spelt “eyed”, precisely the word that the narrator deploys in connection with Boylan’s male gaze on hearing Miss Douce’s garter smack against her thigh: “Boylan, eyed, eyed” (*U* 11:419). Here the comma separating the subject from the verb reminds us of the constant recourse to metonymy throughout this episode; it also highlights the rush of blood and the idea of an action not symbolising but enveloping the person, for Boylan is all eyes. Boylan is also being eyed by Miss Douce; hence the repetition “eyed, eyed”. In Valverde’s translation the original is reproduced as “Boylan observaba, observaba” (Valverde 340), in Subirat as “miró, miró” (Subirat 296), but observing and eyeing are not the same thing. Tortosa, in contrast, reminds us that Spanish, too, has a similar way of indicating what is at stake here: “Boylan, ojeaba, ojeaba.” (Tortosa 306:526) “Boylan la fixe, fixe” (Morel 409) is the French translation, which picks up on one aspect of the original for, while Miss Douce is gliding, the male gaze fixes her, fixes.

Later in the episode, we learn that the mare carrying Boylan for his rendezvous with Molly is too slow for the carriage’s occupant: “Too slow for Boylan, blazes Boylan, impatience Boylan, joggled the mare” (*U* 11:765-6). Uncharacteristically, at this point Valverde decides to throw caution to the wind and produce a translation for “blazes Boylan” that potentially links him with every playboy of the world including Synge’s western playboy Christy Mahon: “playboylan” (Valverde 350). Nowhere in *Ulysses* is Joyce tempted to make such a comparison, or even call Boylan a “boyo”, yet, in spite of confining his day to 1904, he might have done so by a form of “retrospective arrangement”. Not to be outdone, Tortosa in the next phrase plays on Boylan’s name: “Boylando de impatencia” (Tortosa 317:979-80), where, alongside the Spanish “bailando” or dancing, the English “boiling” can also be heard in the gerund construction, boiling with impatience – in contrast with the patience of the modern Odysseus or indeed Molly’s “penelopean patience” (*FW* 123:4-5). De Angelis also plays on Boylan’s name as here with “impazienza Boylante” (373), a collocation he had anticipated when he translates “With patience Lenehan waited for Boylan with impatience, for jinglejaunty blazes boy” by making use of the phrase “Boylan boylente d’impazienza” (355). Wollschläger, too, enjoys this combination “die boylende Ungeduld”, where “boylende” perhaps carries the idea of a bruise or swelling, and perhaps also a page boy plus loin, a loin boy.

Peep! Who’s in the...Peepofgold?

The preceding line in the Overture begins “Trilling, trilling”, and one can see why some translators have felt the pressure to continue with the sound of a bird such as a cuckoo. This is how Valverde and Morel render “Peep”, complete with flying exclamation marks: “¡Cu-cú!” and “Coucou!” Presumably the intention is to suggest an

analogy between the bird which steals nests and Boylan stealing Bloom's bed and thereby cuckolding him. Tortosa imagines "Peep" is simply a bird sound, a tweet, "pio" in Spanish. The problem with this line of interpretation is what to do with the "peepofgold", for, unless it's the fleck or markings in flight, there's little that is bird-like in "peepofgold". Valverde, following Morel and de Angelis, is inventive and coins a word "cucudeoro" ("coucoudor" in French, "cucudoro" in Italian), a golden cuckoo, but that seems strained: "Who's in the golden cuckoo?" Tortosa, who is equally astray at this point, takes his cue from Subirat's "piodeoro", shortening it to "piodoro", a golden tweet or peep. Unfortunately, the confusion is compounded by Morel: "Coucou. Ah la voilà!" (Morel 402) "Cuckoo. Ah here it is!" Ironically, these versions pay too much attention to sound, too little to meaning. "Peep! Who's in the corner?" (11:242), not "Who's in the peepofgold?", is how the sentence later appears in "Sirens", where "peep" refers not so much to a bird sound as concealment, a meaning incidentally available to both the French and Spanish translators in their own languages. This is its primary meaning here, a switch, therefore, from sound to meaning, a move which is confirmed by the odd joined-up phrase "peepofgold" and by the later reference to "corner". "Kiek mal an", the German translation for "peep", is a dialect expression used in Berlin and Northern Germany, but it is more straightforward, free of ornithology or sexual association, restricting itself to the idea of being curious, perhaps with cheek added on.

I would like to suggest two other ways of interpreting this phrase, one of which emphasises the idea of a peepshow, of the part for the whole. The "gold" in "peepofgold", we might agree, is a reference to "goldgirl" Miss Kennedy. Miss Douce sings "Idolores", shows off her figure, and smacks her thigh with her garter. Miss Kennedy shrieks and stops her ears but, as "gold flushed more" suggests, she is more reserved than her colleague. She also has something to show but not to Lenehan. At this juncture in "Sirens" she is reading, her head is down, and her face is concealed by her golden hair. "Who's in the peepofgold" seems to concern the printed matter Miss Kennedy is reading. "Did she fall or was she pushed?" (U 11:333) Lenehan enquires, only to be rebuffed. Who or what in other words is absorbing her attention? And what is she reading? Could it be a salacious novel such as *Sweets of Sin*, the novel which Bloom has bought for Molly and which carries in its title a pun on the English name of her rival Miss Douce? Joyce leaves it open, in line therefore with the enigma of the phrase itself. We might also discern a link with the confession scene in "The Croppy Boy", where in the phrase "Who's in the corner?" can possibly be heard "Who's in the confessional?"

A second line of interpretation, which is essentially historical and political, might seek to anchor the phrase in the period of "The Croppy Boy". Behind the phrase "peepofgold" I hear "Peep-o'-day-Boys". In contrast with the Whiteboys, who would attack the landowning classes and their agents at night wearing white sheets, the "peep of day" boys would attack their Catholic enemies at break of day, an idea continued four lines later in the Overture in "The morn is breaking". We might also recall at this juncture that at the Christmas Dinner in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Simon Dedalus

points to a portrait of his grandfather to remind his family that he was condemned to death as a whiteboy. So “peepofgold”, which has a specific sectarian origin, seems to invoke a wider context which links eighteenth-century agrarian agitation with the emergence of Irish nationalism and Joyce’s own family history.

Beneath the robes of the yeoman captain who’s impersonating Father Green, the croppy boy catches sight of the soldier’s scarlet:

The priest said nought, but a rustling noise
Made the youth look above in wild surprise;
The robes were off, and in scarlet there
Sat a yeoman captain with fiery glare

“Peep” carries an echo of that period when the Irish were cornered by various decoys and betrayals and suffered defeat at the hands of the Crown. Many of the exclamation marks in the Overture – not all, as references to Verdi’s *Otello*, Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*, Flotow’s *Martha* remind us – capture a sense of loss and alarm associated with that period in Irish history. The episode also marks Bloom’s closest identification with Irish nationalism, perhaps providing a backdrop to the “Cyclops” episode which follows. The last reference in the Overture, which is also the most scurrilous, is to Robert Emmet’s Speech from the Dock in 1803: “When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth then and not till then, let my epitaph be written. I have done.” But Joyce is not out to destroy but to enforce the connection. In this regard, we might also make something of the way “Sirens” begins with “Bronze by gold”, a phrase normally interpreted as the colour of the colour-co-ordinated barmaids’ hair or, following Gifford and Seidman (1989), as connected with “the principal metals in the Homeric world”. But the phrase also lends itself to a reading in terms of the scarlet and the green, the harp and the crown. Bronze and gold are traditional colours of merit and of regiments in the British Army. It is “Bronze by gold”, not “Bronze et Or” or “Bronce y hierro” as Morel and Subirat have it, a deliberate placing to convey an order or rank. Against the yeoman captain’s wish forcibly expressed in “The Croppy Boy” “may all traitors swing!”, and against the “steelyringing” of the stately procession of the Vice-Regal cavalcade that concludes “Wandering Rocks” and that begins “Sirens”, “Bronze by gold” and Ben Dollard’s rendering of the song provide a modern less dramatic reply. It may be only a “peepofgold” but it’s enough to suggest that the crown doesn’t have a monopoly on worth and esteem.

Sonnez.... La cloche!

In the Spanish, Italian and Greek translations, “Sonnez” and “La cloche” are left as in the original and italicised; in the French only “sonnez” is italicised. The clock sounds in French but the primary reference is not to a clock – often a word for something

else in *Ulysses* – but to Miss Douce’s garter smacking against her thigh, the sound Lenehan is anxious to hear again. Appropriately, it is French, the language of the “beau”, that carries the erotic note. In contrast to the more business-like Boylan, who has an instrumental view of his body, Bloom, who’s more in tune with his body, knows that “Time makes the tune” (*U* 11:841). It’s a view he shares with the blind piano-tuner, who has left behind his tuning-fork at the Ormond Hotel. With “prongs buzzing” (*U* 11:316), the tuning-fork is given new life in the Spanish translation where it is rendered as “cuernos zumbando” (Valverde 337), and linked with the phrase “Horn. Hawhorn.” from the Overture where it is translated as “Cuerno. Cocuerno.” In Valverde’s translation, the horn in the Overture suggestively anticipates the prongs of the piano-tuner’s tuning-fork. Traditionally, piano-tuners were blind but handy and they feature in English folksongs (and European folktales) playing their part in scenes of seduction. “Zumbando” is also suggestive – insects “zumbando”, insects buzzing, but the image cannot be sustained. A little later we read that a clock buzzed – “Zumbó el reloj” (Valverde 339) – when in the original text the clock “whirred” (*U* 11:380). Subirat has “Cuerno. Corneta”, horn, bugle. The play on horn as penis is continued with “Cuerno. ¿Tienes el? Cuer cuer cuerno” (Subirat 299). Words and sounds, therefore, set up different associations. At times the phonological and semantic fields overlap; at other times they create interesting divergences. De Angelis renders the original “Corno. Coccocorno” (345), which mixes something that is heard with something that is eaten, a horn with a coconut or an egg (or the berry that lurks in the “haw” of “hawhorn”). With “corno” in Italian close to “cornuto” or cuckold, Bloom’s predicament is never far from the sound. The German translation pulls no punches: “Ständer, Stistaständer” (Wollschläger 355), a stand (for an instrument), a stutter, a “hawhorn”, an erection that is.

Wait While You Wait. Hee Hee. Wait While you Hee.

The meaning of this line becomes clear later in the episode. “Pat is a waiter who waits while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. Hee hee. A waiter is he. Hee hee hee hee.” A possible source for this particular series of puns might be the song that keeps recurring in “Sirens”. In “The Croppy Boy”, the rebel wants to make a last confession:

“But you must wait till I go and see
If the holy father alone may be.”

The potentially inane, jingling, repetition of “see” and “be”, together with the heavy obligation to “wait” and the deception regarding the true identity of “he” (“the holy father”), point to a potential source. “But wait” is a phrase also from the song and it is later used by Miss Douce in gossipy conversation with her colleague: “But wait till I tell you” (*U*: 11:128). A little later in the Overture the song is also recalled along with

the stress on “he”: “*Naminedamine*. Preacher is he”. The glee of the yeomen who capture the boy can also be possibly heard in the triumph of “hee hee”. As for “wait”, Pat is a deaf waiter, is “bothered” (Irish: “bodhar”, meaning deaf), so hears nothing in an episode devoted to sounds, but he does wait on those who wait. In translation, the play on wait-as-waiter and wait-as-waiting is less straightforward than might be imagined. Morel distinguishes two meanings: “Pose pendant que vous pausez. Hi hi.” (Morel 304) He avoids “servir” (à table) or “attendre” and can make nothing of “wait” and “waiter”. “Rest or pose while you pause or take a break.” The “pose” and “pausez” is a good attempt at phonological insistence. However, it isn’t “Wait while you wait”, which is how Subirat renders it “Espera mientras esperas” (Subirat 286), but something much more ordinary and transactional, like a management notice on the wall of an office or factory. Valverde makes use of “sirvir”, to wait, *sirvir a la mesa*, to wait at table, and, instead of the more normal *camerero*, he deploys “*sirvidor*”, a waiter, in his translation. “Sirve a un sirvidor. Ji Ji.” In contrast, Tortosa attends or takes care of: “Atiende mientras atiendes. Je je.” “He attends or takes care of while you attend or take care of” is a possible translation, which shows something of the problem in getting the same word to face each other in Spanish. “Attento mentre attendi” (de Angelis: 346), careful while you attend, looks a similar construction in Italian but, in the interplay between the letters t and d in “attento” and “attendi”, de Angelis manages to capture something more of the original. As for “Hee hee”, this is difficult enough in English. There is clearly a play on the personal pronoun, for what is “Sirens” but a language exercise in identifying deictic markers? Joyce sets up a constant play in this episode on “he”, and the reader needs to be, like the reader of the *Wake*, wideawake, ever alert as to the identity of “he” throughout. The phrase also conveys an attitude which is part cynical, part gleeful. “Hee, hee, serves him right” is a common enough idiomatic phrase in the language. “Hee-haw” is the sound of a donkey braying, and, not unexpectedly, both “hee” and “haw” can be heard in the Overture. “Hi hi” in French, “Ji ji” or “Je je” in Spanish, capture something of the inanity of the original but little or nothing of the identity issue.

None Nought Said Nothing.

If everything in *Ulysses* speaks in its own way – door hinges creak, noses snort, back passages fart, sometimes with a p, sometimes with a double ff – then so too does nothing. “None nought said nothing” (*U* 11:224) is a phrase that might well have appeared in the Overture but in fact it comes later in the episode. The context can be quickly noted. Simon Dedalus has been musing on his name, his drink, the Mourne Mountains, holidays, Miss Douce, and now his musing, his music, has come to a stop. “Musing. Mute” (11:223). The next line is “None nought said nothing.” In many respects, this is the strangest sentence in “Sirens”, and this is true even if one includes the lines from the Overture, nearly all of which can be on reflection deciphered. It isn’t “There was nothing to be said” but “None nought said nothing.” Like other interruptions to word order, “said” is here the problem

word – as it is elsewhere in phrases such as the Arranger’s “as said before” (in connection with eating liver) or the delightful cautionary moment in “Sirens” itself “Who said four?” (in connection with Boylan’s rendezvous with Molly). As a verb we assume it is surrounded on either side by a subject and an object. “None said nothing. Nought.” Or “Nothing said nought. None.” Or “Nought said none, nothing.” The muse, that is, runs out of anything to muse on. “Nothing, nought, none.” But even negatives have a voice, make some sound. As we learn from “The Croppy Boy”, the priest listens to the boy’s confession and because he doesn’t reply we sense danger for the boy – “The priest said nought.”

“Ninguno no decía nada” (Valverde 335) is Valverde’s Spanish translation, not dissimilar to de Angelis’ Italian translation “Nessuno non diceva nulla”. No-one said anything / nothing, where a double negative would sometimes produce a positive. Either way, this isn’t really what the original is asserting. The alliteration in the initial “n” in the Spanish has merit, but the original is “None nought...nothing”, which, unlike “ninguno no decía nada”, is not something you’d hear in ordinary conversation. “Naide cosa nada decía nada” is Tortosa’s translation. “Naide” is a humorous rendering of “Nadie”, not Blake’s Old Testament God “Nobadaddy” but closer to a regional non-standard form of the word, perhaps akin to a word like “naybody” in English – or “Noman”, the name Odysseus gives to the Cyclops. “Naide” conveys something of the oddness of the original but it isn’t the sober statement “None nought said nothing.” Tortosa reminds us of another problem. In English there is an ambiguity at the level of both syntax and meaning: “none” can be both a person and a thing; “nadie”, on the other hand, is restricted to a person. The process of disentangling a meaning to the original sentence leads us to further entanglements in part because an ambiguity is made unambiguous. “Pas un mot, personne ne sonne” is the French translation, “not a word, nobody makes a sound”. Again, this isn’t nothing, and, moreover, in the original “nothing” is governed by something.

The sentence is clearly a problem, as much for native speakers as for translators. What does it mean? With its emphasis on “nichts” and the philosophical associations that accompany “nichts”, the German translation gives us a clue: “Keiner nichtsagte nichts” (Wollschläger 362), Nobody said nothing. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* was the old Thomist / Aristotelian adage, which Joyce would have been familiar with from his schooldays, that out of nothing nothing comes. The sentence we might read as a one-sentence reply or challenge to the philosophical issue of *esse* and *potentia*, of being and potentiality, an issue that occupied the Medieval, Jesuit-educated Joyce as well as his character Stephen. The theme of Yeats’s Medieval play *Where There Is Nothing* (1902) is the individual’s search for authenticity away from civilisation as embodied in the monastery. This is not Joyce’s concern here. For Joyce, nothing is indeed something, nothing can occasion something; it also has something to say, for negation is also a positive. In this we might compare it with the opening of “Proteus” where we catch Stephen responding to the solipsist dilemma about external reality: “Ineluctable modality of the visible” (*U* 3:1). In “Sirens”, the philosophical moment is disturbed by the sexual encounter in a hotel bar. None of the males make much headway in interesting the barmaids; they might

hold their hands but, except for the “smack”, there is little by way of reciprocity. So nothing is in part a rejection. Perhaps, like three strokes referred to at the beginning of “The Sisters”, there is something decisive about three zeros – none nought nothing. The answer they’re looking for is Yes, a Molly O word, the word that completes Simon Dedalus’ musing. “Yes.” But the males get nought at this juncture, only the sonnez of Miss Douce’s smack (which might be all they are seeking).

As for “Musing. Mute.”, Valverde and Tortosa provide contrasting views of the thinking process. For Valverde, Simon is “cavilando”, thinking deeply, deliberating; for Tortosa he is “recapacitando”, recalling to mind. Neither manage to capture the echo in the vowel sound between musing and mute. Indeed the – ando ending tends to dominate in a way that –ing in “Musing” does not. Partly because it can also be used as a noun, “Mudo” is a strong word in Spanish, much stronger than “mute” in English (whose field today is largely confined to adjectival use), but in this collocation the mudo effect is softened. Simon’s musings, not his deliberations or indeed his recalling to mind, have come suddenly to a dead end: this is how “Musing. Mute.” with the period repeated after each word reads in English. Without the two words and just with the punctuation it reads: ... Musing is close to reverie, the mind turning things over, not so much recalling as allowing images and associations and half-formed thoughts to surface and run on. In this episode it is a Sirens word, the male held by the female muse unable in the end to speak. “Rêveur. En silence.” (401) is the French translation: “Dreamy. In silence.” But this misses nearly all of the inner drama of “Musing. Mute.”

From the rock of Gibraltar... all the way.

“From the rock of Gibraltar...all the way” (*U* 11:515). In the Rosenbach manuscript there are no elliptical points but in inserting them Joyce must have realised that these too have a sound or contribution to make. In the same passage we read that Marion was “a daughter of...” and the reply is “Daughter of the regiment”. In the sentence “From the rock of Gibraltar...all the way”, the elliptical points might suggest one of her exotic advertising puffs as a singer – all the way from Hickville, Tennessee or wherever. On the other hand, in an episode about Boylan going all the way, the phrase might hint at her sexual determination or indeed prowess. Elliptical points are missing points, are cryptic in that they hide something, but nevertheless also make a sound in writing. What’s left out also has a noise to make, none more so we might add than the wink and nod by males in conversation about women. “Del peñón de Gibraltar...nada menos” (Valverde 343) is Valverde’s and Tortosa’s Spanish translation. From the rock of Gibraltar...nothing less. Not quite. De Angelis keeps the meaning slightly ambiguous: “Dalla roccia di Gibilterra... tutta quella strada” (de Angelis 363), from the rock of Gibraltar... all that road. The French translation seems innocent by comparison. No elliptical points and this: “Du rocher de Gibraltar, en ligne droite” (Morel 413). From the rock of Gibraltar in a straight line. Au contraire, as Beckett might say.

Concluding Remarks

Suggest a connective tissue and, as I indicate in my article on the Berlin Wall, Joyce blocks it. This is partly why I have drawn back from suggesting a strong link between disturbances in language and disturbances in history. After all, Bloom leaves the Ormond Hotel before Dollard finishes “The Croppy Boy”, and, in an episode devoted to music, the Odyssean figure, strapped as it were to the mast, gives voice to the most heretical and double-edged remark in “Sirens”: “Music. Gets on your nerves” (*U* 11:1182). Equally, not everything fits, for Bloom does not speak Irish, does not, like Haynes, collect Irish sayings, and might only recognise “*buachaill*” as boy because of its continuing use in an Ireland no longer bi-lingual. Moreover, Bloom does not love his country above his king, for, as we learn in the following episode, his nation is simply the place where he was born. But, as other scholars have noticed, there is enough in “Sirens” to suggest a link between Bloom and the events surrounding 1798. My concern in this essay has been slightly different, not to go over this old ground for the sake of it but to set out a case for drawing a parallel between local disturbances in Ireland with local disturbances in language.

“The Croppy Boy” begins:

Good men and true in this house who dwell,
To a stranger *buachaill* I pray you tell.

Bloom is the stranger, the Ormond Hotel “this house”, “Good men” the company in the bar (or the reader). Like the croppy boy, Bloom is on the point of being dispossessed of his home, if only temporarily. He is both of this house and a stranger, both Irish and not-Irish. But without the song and the issue of identity it trails, “Sirens” would be a poorer episode. Bloom’s predicament intensifies as the song’s tension builds, but it a predicament that affords no release in confession. Instead, Bloom tries the art of distraction amid his familiar comfort zone as human observer: “What do they think when they hear music?” (*U* 11:1049), where “they” refers to women in general. As we see with Maria in “Clay”, lyrics have the capacity to speak to people directly and even reduce them to a catatonic state. They can play that is on the nerves. Hence Bloom’s attempt to remove himself from the bar, for he knows enough of identity and himself to stop it, to keep his distance from “good men and true”. In all these moves Joyce shows us that the representation of identity never fits like a glove, but we would be wrong to conclude there is no lyrical soul behind the “poisoner of his word” (*FW* 463:13).

A strong reading might want to insist that before the dramatic staging of late-nineteenth-century Irish nationalism in the cave of the “Cyclops”, Joyce provides in the episode of the “Sirens” a tying down, a securing, of Irish nationalism to its eighteenth-century roots in the agitation of hidden Ireland. But I wouldn’t go that far. “Sirens” is about impertinence, corners, avoidance, things not meeting, feelings of betrayal, the struggle for articulation. Sounds in “Sirens”, along with their exclamation marks, resemble the

local disturbances in rural Ireland in the eighteenth century, disturbances which a commentator such as Lewis in *On Local Disturbances in Ireland* (1836) was anxious to stress were not national in origin or purpose. But such a line became more difficult to sustain after the activity of the United Irishmen and the 1798 Rising, for then local disturbances in various parts of Ireland heralded in one sense the end of localism. Hence the fusion in the Joyce family mind between the Whiteboys in the 1760s, an organisation which was not national in character, and the Fenians in the 1860s, who were nothing if not national. Perhaps this is an added reason that sounds and meaning present particular problems for translators, for the local disturbances seem to have a separate life of their own but they also partake of a wider struggle which because of Joyce's characteristic use of overdetermination has been insufficiently noticed. As I have suggested elsewhere in relation to "pick, pack, pock, puck" and cricket (Pierce 2005), Joyce is a politically sound writer, but, in the light of "Sirens", we might also add he shows us how all kinds of sound are waiting to be folded into the political landscape in Ireland.

Appendix 1

"The Croppy Boy" (1845) by "Carrol Malone" (James McBurney)

A Ballad of '98

"Good men and true in this house who dwell,
To a stranger *buachaill* I pray you tell
Is the priest at home, or may he be seen?
I would speak a word with Father Green."

"The Priest's at home, boy, and may be seen,
'Tis easy speaking with Father Green.
But you must wait till I go and see
If the holy father alone may be."

The youth has entered an empty hall;
What a hollow sound his light footfall!
And the gloomy chamber is chill and bare,
With a vested priest in a lonely chair.

The youth has knelt to tell his sins:
"*Nomine Dei*," the youth begins;
At "*mea culpa*," he beats his breast,
And in broken murmurs he speaks the rest.

"At the siege of Ross did my father fall,
And at Gorey my loving brothers all,

I alone am left of my name and race;
I will go to Wexford and take their place.

‘I cursed three times since last Easter day;
At mass-time once I went to play;
I passed the churchyard one day in haste,
And forgot to pray for my mother’s rest.

“I bear no hate against living thing,
But I love my country above my king;
Now, father, bless me and let me go
To die, if God has ordained it so.”

The priest said nought, but a rustling noise
Made the youth look above in wild surprise;
The robes were off, and in scarlet there
Sat a yeoman captain with fiery glare-

With fiery glare and with fury hoarse,
Instead of blessing, he breathed a curse-
“Twas a good thought, boy, to come here and shrive,
For one short hour is your time alive.”

“Upon yon river three tenders float;
The Priest’s in one, if he isn’t shot-
We hold his house for our Lord the King,
And, amen I say, may all traitors swing!”

At Geneva barrack that young man died,
And at Passage they have his body laid.
Good people who live in peace and joy,
Breathe a prayer and a tear for the Croppy Boy.

Appendix 2

Overture with references to “The Croppy Boy” in bold and possible associations in italics

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing
Imperthnthn thnthnthn.
Chips, picking chips off rocky thumbnail, chips.

Horrid! And gold flushed more.
 A *husky fifenote* blew.
 Blew. Blue bloom is on the.
 Goldpinnacled hair.
 A jumping rose on satiny *breast* of satin, rose of Castile.
 Trilling, trilling: Idolores.
Peep! Who's in the...peepofgold?
 Tink cried to bronze in *pity*.
 And a call, pure, long and throbbing. *Longindying call*.
Decoy. Soft word. But look: the bright stars fade. Notes chirruping answer.
 O rose! Castile. The morn is breaking.
 Jingle jingle jaunted jingling.
 Coin rang. Clock clacked.
 Avowal. Sonnez. I could. Rebound of garter. Not leave thee. Smack. La cloche!
 Thigh smack. Avowal. Warm. Sweetheart, goodbye!
 Jingle. Bloo.
 Boomed crashing chords. When love absorbs. War! War! The tympanum.
 A sail! A veil awake upon the waves.
 Lost. Throstle fluted. *All is lost now*.
 Horn. Hawhorn.
 When first he saw. Alas!
 Full tup. Full throb.
 Warbling. Ah, *lure!* Alluring.
 Martha! Come!
 Clapclap. Clipclap. Clappyclap.
 Goodgod henev erheard inall.
 Deaf bald Pat brought pad knife took up.
 A moonlit nightcall: far, far.
 I feel so sad. *P. S.* So lonely blooming.
Listen!
 The spiked and winding cold seahorn. Have you the? Each, and for other, plash
 and silent roar.
 Pearls: when she. Liszt's rhapsodies. Hissss.
 You don't?
 Did not: no, no: believe: Lidlyd. With a cock with a carra.
 Black. Deepsounding. *Do, Ben, do*.
 Wait while you wait. Hee hee. Wait while you hee.
 But wait!
 Low in dark middle earth. Embedded ore.
 Naminedamine. Preacher is he:
All gone. All fallen.

Tiny, her tremulous fernfoils of maidenhair.
 Amen! He *gnashed in fury*.
 Fro. To, fro. A baton cool protruding.
 Bronzelydia by Minagold.
 By bronze, by gold, in oceangreen of shadow. Bloom. Old Bloom.
 One rapped, one tapped, with a carra, with a cock.
 Pray for him! Pray, good people!
 His gouty fingers nakkering.
 Big Benaben. Big Benben.
 Last rose Castile of summer left bloom I feel so sad alone.
 Pwee! Little wind piped wee.
 True men. Lid Ker Cow De and Doll. Ay, ay. Like you men. Will lift your
 tschink
 with tschunk.
 Fff! Oo!
 Where bronze from anear? Where gold from afar? Where hoofs?
 Rrrpr. Kraa. Kraandl.
 Then not till then. My eppripfftaph. Be pfrwritt.
 Done.

Abbreviations

U James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text* (ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior) (London: The Bodley Head, 1986).
 Chapter number is followed by line number.

Note

- 1 I would like to thank the James Joyce reading group at the University of Leeds for their unwitting help with this article which is the genesis of a chapter in a forthcoming book provisionally called *Joyce and Company*. This is also the place to thank Alistair Stead, Ursula Zeller and Ruth Frehner, who kindly commented on the details and direction of this article.

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Cultural Intersections



*Banshee, an Irish Feminist Newspaper (March 1976 – October 1978): Style and Themes**

Brigitte Bastiat

Abstract: *In March 1976 a feminist newspaper called Banshee was launched in Dublin. By overtly taking a stand in favour of contraception and abortion and criticising the role and place of the Catholic religion in Irish society, Banshee became one of the main vehicles for the emancipation of women. The style and the themes of this publication were unique: original, subversive and funny. In the end, the internal and external tensions created by the different political stands led to the disappearance of the paper in October 1978, but it contributed significantly to the modernisation of the country.*

At the beginning of the 1970s the Irish women's movement became stronger with the arrival of younger and more radical women involved in far-left parties, trade-unions and the Republican movement (Levine 1982). In April 1975 some of them decided to organise a conference at the 'Liberty Hall' in Dublin to draw up a charter on women's rights, based on a British model which seemed new and applicable to Ireland. During the conference, which was held on June 8, 1975, they took the name of 'Irishwomen United' or IU.

A few months later, in March 1976, some IU members decided to launch a newspaper called *Banshee*, on which women alone would collaborate collectively. The publication was created because, according to them, the debate on feminist issues was impossible in the traditional media. If the style and the themes tackled in this publication were similar to those in other European feminist papers of that time¹, one can nevertheless point out some Irish specificities. In fact, by overtly taking a stand in favour of contraception and abortion and criticizing the role and place of the Catholic religion in Irish society, *Banshee* became one the main vehicles for the emancipation of women and the modernisation of the country.² The publication was subversive, original and dominated by what can be called 'a discourse of tension', both internal and external, which made the women's movement appear fragile, although its members had a strong sense of solidarity and wanted to avoid power relationships and conflicts.

First, the choice of a Charter was original and interesting: it was practical because it allowed women to unite around a series of clear and simple claims and rights and, in particular, it enabled them to distinguish themselves from male Irish militants who, traditionally, have always preferred proclamation. The IU members were, in fact, inspired by “The UK Working Women’s Charter” drawn up at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s by British women unionists. The IU was influenced by trade union methods³ and decided to widely diffuse its Charter, just like a political tract, by publishing it on the very last page of each *Banshee* issue. By so doing the IU acted like a trade union, claiming its rights and demanding that legislation be passed by the government. Among the seven points in the Charter, the right to abortion was mentioned for the first time. A lot of women across the country signed the Charter and this gave the Women’s movement popularity and legitimacy.

By choosing *Banshee* as a title for their publication the IU chose a symbolic name indeed. The paper’s name is a pun: a “Banshee” is a malicious fairy and “Ban” means woman in Gaelic. Like other European feminists, Irish women selected a feminine word that has a negative connotation –because the Banshee is actually closer to a witch than to a fairy –made it their own and gave it a powerful and positive meaning too. This title represented a political stance, situating Irish women in a feminine and dreamy pre-celtic world. In fact, in the second issue of *Banshee*, there is the following explanation concerning the title:

The fairies were a real Stone Age people who inhabited Northern Europe before the arrival of the Celts.

It is stated that the Fairies were also a non-agricultural pastoral people, who had magical powers; their religious and social organisation was matriarchal and based on the worship of nature. Free union ruled and the notion of illegitimate children was non-existent. They celebrated life and believed in the positive reincarnation of the soul. The authors of the second issue of *Banshee* concluded by stating: “The Banshee cries the death of oppression, the rebirth of woman.” The reference to a pre-celtic era may appear surprising for a movement whose paper bore a Gaelic name and had Republicans among its members. Nevertheless, a lot of IU members remained suspicious of violent tendencies within the Republican movement. Actually, the title chosen for their paper represents a powerful symbol to express both their attachment to a specifically Irish and Northern European culture and also a desire to distance themselves from the male world; it also represents an aspiration to an ideal of freedom based on a mainly feminine culture, that of the “Fairies”. It is important to point out here the use of the generic term “woman” in the quotation, revealing a feminine essence close to nature and anterior to male rational culture.

The launching of *Banshee* was not ignored by the traditional media, and the journalist Christina Murphy from *The Irish Times* welcomed the new paper with these words:

Banshee – An inspired title – It's not very professional, but very lively and provocative. (*The Irish Times*, 2 August 1976).

It is true the publication was not professional. However, the symbols of the Charter and the title of the paper were powerful indeed and showed the Irish women's will to obtain political autonomy and express themselves poetically, two wishes which were typical of European feminist movements in general and of the Irish women's movement in particular. As the French sociologist Christine Delphy put it in 1993: "Feminism is a place where you can dream". Besides, these desires clearly pointed to a desire to escape from male conceptions of organisation and Irish culture; they were expressed in a way that worried the Establishment, dominated by the authoritarian and highly-hierarchical Catholic Church. Consequently, *Banshee* articles clearly created a discourse of tension.

Because of the clashes of opinion and the strong personalities of its members, the IU and its paper *Banshee* bore the seeds of its own demise (Connolly 60): for example, there were republicans supporting the armed fight and women rejecting all forms of violence, left-wing women wanting to integrate feminism into the socialist programme and women who wanted nothing to do with traditional political parties, as well as Catholics rejecting abortion and women in favour of free contraception and sexuality. By letting the different factions express themselves freely in turns in their publication, the IU thought it could reduce the tensions but the organisation eventually disappeared in 1977 and *Banshee* in October 1978. Nevertheless, for two and a half years, the IU managed to publish a paper which tackled new themes, expressed challenging ideas and proposed a more egalitarian vision of society.

Of the four sections always present and announced at the beginning of each issue, "Father Church" is by far the most original and the most interesting. The title is ironical, of course, because usually it is referred to as "Mother Church", a so-called protective and motherly institution. To call it "Father" was to take a radically opposite stance to the nationalist Catholic Eamon de Valera, Irish Prime Minister (from 1937 to 1948) and later President of Ireland (1959-1973). It denounces the patriarchal organisation of the Catholic Church and the minor role devoted to women in the 1937 Constitution.

In the Constitution's reference to women's "life within the home" reveals that the document was drawn up by men, mainly Eamon de Valera in collaboration with the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. Although Article 2.1. declared that "the State recognises that without the support of the woman, the common good cannot be achieved", and Article 2.2. stated that "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour", the State gave very little financial and legal support to mothers in the ensuing 40 years, as stipulated in Article 2.2. (Hussey 419). These two Articles categorically situated the life of women in the home and defined it in terms of "motherhood" and "duties". They had no choice and their own motivations were not taken into account.

Banshee tried to contest the repressive and authoritarian Catholic moral code by showing that it was neither “natural” nor an element of Irish identity. Extremely well-documented and critical articles in the section “Father Church” explained the construction of the dogma by the Roman Catholic Church and the role played by the Catholic hierarchy in Irish society. In the first issue, the author wrote provocatively:

The debunking of the theological support for male superiority, the reclaiming of the Word of God, are surely prophetic tasks of our time. The history of women prophets is a history in which women can take pride. I believe it is our task today.

She solemnly asserts that “the debunking of the theological support for male superiority” is a “prophetic task”, implying that this work should be included within the propagation of faith. In fact, it is not a question of rejecting religion, but of reclaiming it in a feminist way, i.e. by integrating the notion of equality between men and women. She adds that the history of religion must be re-read and re-written in order to make people aware of the role played by women prophets, which had been widely ignored by male theologians until then. Moreover, according to the Bible, humans were created in God’s image. Consequently, she advocates freeing the creative power attributed to God, and therefore to women, to urge them to assume their share of social and political responsibility, i.e. to turn women into active agents of their own history:

To be made “in the image of God” could be interpreted as our embodying in some form the same creative potential which men attribute to God, a creative potential which no longer allows us to lie down and let life flow over us as the patriarchal image of God would suggest, but which both enables and challenges us to take full responsibility for our lives.

Here the author subverts Catholic dogma because she views the woman as a thinking subject acting out her own life: she is no longer considered to be passive and limited to reproduction, the education of children and the running of the home, she has creative and spiritual potential too. Furthermore, *Banshee* examines pre-Christian celtic society, freer and in favour of women, thus allowing its readership to discover the hidden face of the official history. For example, the fifth issue informs us that divorce had been allowed under the Celtic Brehon Laws and that it was St Patrick who carried out the sixth revision of these Laws ⁴, making the man the head of the married couple.

On the whole, Irish women remained rather ignorant of sexual matters in the 1970s because, according to certain authors such as Ailbhe Smyth, Director of the Women’s Studies Department at UCD, “the sexual Revolution” did not have the same impact in Ireland as in the USA and continental Europe (Smyth 245). Although the non-married Irish had to wait until 1979 for legal contraception (married couples had been allowed to use contraception since 1973), the first issue of *Banshee* declared that 34,000

women had taken the pill in 1974. Despite being the object of a government ban, *Banshee* tried to give information on this subject, as well as on articles on hetero –and homosexuality. The second issue, for instance, defended total sexual freedom in an article entitled “Beyond the fringe – A view of sexuality”, while another article ascribed a political and revolutionary dimension to lesbianism:

To ignore lesbianism is to ignore the major challenge to invidious sexism which pervades all systems of exploitation, oppression and repression. Thus the assertion of lesbian identity has a political significance and is an important step in the overthrow of the oppression of all women.

What is new in the message of the feminist press, and which this quotation illustrates well, is that feminists insist on the idea that the roots of women’s oppression lie in the body and intimacy. Moreover, the emergence of a private discourse establishes a point of rupture with the previous discourse in which feminism had found its inspiration, i.e. the political discourse of the Black American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, of trade-unions and, in the case of Ireland, “The Northern Civil Rights Association” (1967), in as much as it makes sexuality a form of domination and liberation at the same time.⁵

However, the criticism of obligatory heterosexuality imposed by patriarchal society, the rejection of the maternal instinct and the prospect of a sexuality linked to pleasure and distinct from procreation was too extremist a discourse for some Catholics and more traditionalist women participating in *Banshee*. Readers also criticised the stands taken by some authors. For example, in *Banshee* 7, Geraldine Moane reacted to the articles published in the previous issue, which, according to her, reduced the impact of the paper on the population:

I find more examples of the emotionalism that is putting down the standard of *Banshee* and limiting its appeal. The articles on prostitution ⁶, our bodies ourselves ⁷, are all very well for women that have rejected marriage and the Church [...] but for a majority of women, for whom marriage is a very important part of their lives, this kind of article is not going to have any effect [...]. *Banshee* is the perfect excuse to dismiss the whole feminist cause as extremist and irrational.

Here, the reader accused the militants working for *Banshee* of cutting themselves off from the majority of their readers by attacking the institution of marriage, which was widely respected, and portraying it as a sort of prostitution by consent, especially when women were not working outside the home. According to her, such radicalism may have frightened a lot of women and wasn’t of any help to the feminist cause. It’s true that subjects such as prostitution, abortion, lesbianism and republicanism were difficult to tackle in *Banshee*. But wasn’t the editorial board of the publication trying to overturn the values of a self-righteous society, stifled by hypocrisy anyway?

The Belgian philosopher Françoise Collin said in 1979: “We don’t deal with pertinence but with impertinence” (Collin 333). The quotation applies perfectly to the humour used in *Banshee* and the sarcastic remarks directed against all institutions, especially the Pope and the Catholic Church, which could be found mainly in the section entitled ‘Red Biddy’. In fact, language allows us to manipulate symbols and plunge into the subconscious, then to transgress these symbols, linguistically and socially speaking. Thus, inverting the discourse usually reserved to politicians’ wives, a writer in the eighth issue reported that:

Mrs Cosgrave’s husband [...] left wearing a natty little outfit styled by Jeremy at the “Dandy Salon”. He wore a bowler hat from Dunne’s stores.

Usually, whatever her place in society, the media portrayed the wife of a Prime Minister only in relation to him. Here the situation is reversed: consequently Mrs Cosgrave is depicted as an important figure. Besides, Mr Cosgrave’s clothes seem more interesting than his political speech. The journalistic style is diverted and caricatured in order to emphasize the underlying discourse on the role of women in politics: in fact, they were (and still are) less numerous than men and tended to take on minor responsibilities. This quotation also shows that *Banshee* was trying to make its readership aware of a big difference in how political news was handled, according to whether journalists were writing about female or male politicians: for women, they laid the stress on their physical appearance, for men on their ideas.

Another article ridiculed the robes worn by Pope, who had previously warned feminists about their lack of femininity. In so doing, the authors encouraged their readers to think about the social representations of femininity and masculinity, thus to question the sexual roles attributed to men and women. As an example, in the fifth issue “Red Biddy” is supposed to have seen “the Pope’s cat playing in the Holy Father’s silk stockings”. Of course, silk stockings are usually associated with women’s clothing, although this can vary according to countries and historical periods. The paper also printed drawings. For example, in *Banshee 1*, the woman is represented as victim under the boot of “Father Church” who, stepping on her head, prevents her from thinking and dreaming. He is also holding his sceptre as a symbol of prestige and power. This caricature is a good example of the provocative sense of humour of *Banshee* writers. They wanted to show that social values can change and that Irish women should question the basis upon which their society was founded in order to find their identity and liberty by redefining these premises. Also, if one could attack the Pope, a taboo subject in the 1970s, everything was possible. A revolutionary concept is implied in these amusing remarks, which irritated the Church and men in general, because this institution, which comforted them in their domineering position, was being ridiculed.

Banshee also dared to use four-letter words and talk openly about sexuality. The sixth issue accused the magazine *Cosmopolitan* of supporting sexist stereotypes. The IU members expressed their anger in explicit language, for example, “I’m a Cosmo girl! – Fuck me!” This violent and vulgar sentence targets the readers of *Cosmopolitan*

as well as the magazine's editorial staff. It is argued that, by reading the magazine, the former suspend their critical faculty and comply with the feminine image and norms that are imposed on them; while the latter take advantage of the ignorance of the readership and of their models' bodies to sell their magazine. As shocking as it may have been to read those lines for women strongly influenced by Catholicism, such a stance could but force women to react and ask themselves questions about femininity, fashion, diets and sexuality. The eighth and last issue also used humour to warn nuns against the fact that the 'encyclical letter' was not a Vatican condom!

In less than three years the internal and external tensions created by the different political stands led to the disappearance of the movement. Some women had seen the future of the movement in lesbianism and wanted to break away to express themselves more freely. In addition, the frustrations felt by some socialist men, unable to bear any longer their exclusion from IU and *Banshee* meetings, also contributed to the disappearance of the paper. In fact, a small group of male left-wing militants decided to destroy the magazine's premises and equipment, thus precipitating their demise. A lot of members who were already active in other organisations continued their feminist activities in associations such as ADAPT or CHERISH (both founded in 1974) which took care of single parents. However, there can be no doubt that, thanks to their bold and daring political actions as well as their articles in *Banshee*, IU members had contributed to a long-overdue shake-up of Irish society, forcing the Irish to examine taboo subjects and question the dominance of men and the Catholic Church.

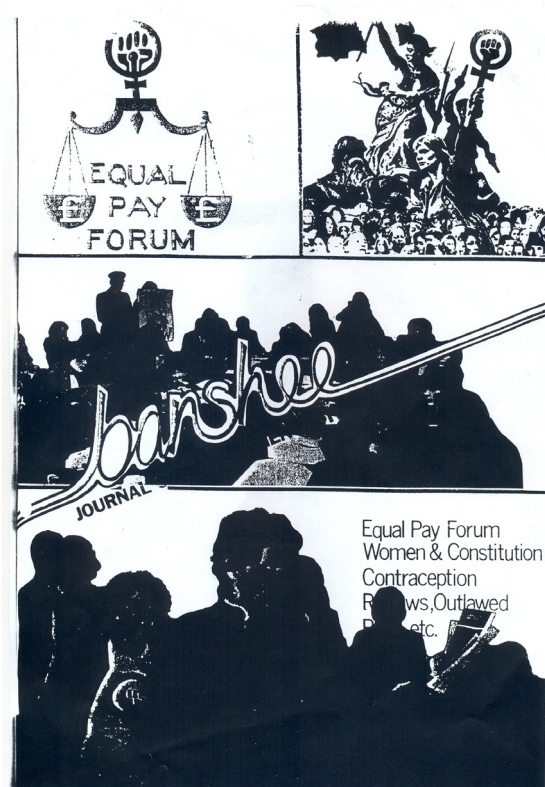
Notes

* Text revised by Peter James Harris.

- 1 See Brigitte Bastiat, *Presses et mouvements féministes : étude comparative France – Irlande – Suisse (1970-2000)*, PhD in Media and Communication Studies, University of Paris 8, June 2002.
- 2 For my study I analysed the 8 issues of *Banshee* published between March 1976 and October 1978, thanks to Roisin Conroy who allowed me to consult her private archives in June 1999. Roisin Conroy was, with Mary-Paul Keane, the co-founder of Attic Press in 1984 in Dublin, which played a major role in the diffusion of feminism in Ireland. The Attic Press was sold to the University of Cork in 1997 and a collection of the *Banshee* issues was transferred to the Boole Library at the University of Cork in the same year.
- 3 For example, Anne Speed, who was also part of the ITGWU (Irish Transport and General Workers' Union), was an IU member and wrote in *Banshee*.
- 4 The Celtic Brehon Laws from the fifth century. B.C. inspired the King of England Alfred the Great in the ninth century in the drafting of Common Law.
- 5 Marina Yaguello analysed the linguistic influences of the different social movements on feminism in *Les mots et les femmes*. Paris: Payot, 1978.
- 6 "Prostitution – Legal or otherwise", *Banshee* 6.
- 7 "Our bodies ourselves", *Banshee* 6.

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Banshee n°1

An Island Called Brazil: Irish Paradise in Brazilian Past

Geraldo Cantarino

*On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell,
A shadowy land has appear'd, as they tell;
Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,
And they call'd it "O Brazil – the Isle of the Blest".*

From the poem *Hy-Brazil, The Island of the Blest*,
by Gerald Griffin (1803-1840) in Walsh (1998)

Abstract: *What is the origin of the word "Brasil"? Is there any relation between the naming of the South American country Brazil and the Otherworld place of Hy Brasil – an imaginary island, born in the Celtic mind and cherished in the west of Ireland as an earthly paradise? Does the presence of this phantom island in medieval maps, before the discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese in 1500, have any special hidden meaning in the history of cartography? To try to answer some of these questions, embarked on a journey in search of the enchanted island of Hy Brasil, that inspired poets, charmed seamen and tricked cartographers for 500 years. The result of this investigation is the book, Uma ilha chamada Brasil – o paraíso irlandês no passado brasileiro, which gathers many different references scattered throughout space and time about this island. This article is a summary of the book, which was published in October 2004 by Mauad Editora, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*

The Brazil of Ireland

Where does the name *Brasil* or *Brazil* come from? The answer seems to be on everyone's lips. Following the definition of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, it comes from *brasa* and is associated with the reddish colour of *brazilwood*

(*pau-brasil*, in Portuguese), a dye-wood tree commonly found on the Atlantic coast of South America at the time of its European discovery in the sixteenth century. But if we try to investigate further the origin of the word *brasil*, we will find various and unclear paths ahead. Which is the right one? The *Houaiss Dictionary*, considered to be the most comprehensive dictionary of the Portuguese language, tells us in its 2001 edition that the “etymology of this toponymous” (i.e. the word from which this placename is derived) has been the object of the most varied hypotheses. The dictionary then goes on to list no less than sixteen possible explanations for the origin of *brasil* – the word, not the country name. Among them, one stands out: *brasil* could have its origin in the Irish language, more precisely in *Hy-Brazail* or *Hy Brasil*, an ancient island of the Atlantic Ocean.

It must be said that this possible explanation is not well known among Brazilians and it certainly not what we were taught in school or find in the majority of history textbooks. This precise point was highlighted by Roger Casement, an iconic figure in the Irish nationalist movement, while serving as a British consul in Brazil. In 1908, Casement delivered a lecture entitled *Irish Origins of Brazil*, in the city of Belém do Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon region, to a small, mainly commercial, English-speaking community. After his opening line – “The name Brazil is probably the sweetest sounding name that any large race of the Earth possesses” – Casement states very clearly his point of view:

Strange as it may seem, Brazil owes her name not to her abundance of a certain dye-wood but to Ireland. The distinction of naming the great South American country, I believe, belongs as surely to Ireland and to an ancient Irish belief old as the Celtic mind itself (Mitchell and Cantarino 23).

Casement blamed the historians writing for the English-speaking world, who dealt with American discoveries, saying that they failed to trace the origin of the name. To them, believed Casement, “Ireland was a name that denoted a land steeped in poverty and ignorance”. The historian Angus Mitchell, who found and brought to light the lecture *Irish Origins of Brazil* among Casement’s manuscripts at the National Library of Ireland, reinforces this idea:

Casement argued that there had been a deliberate forgetting of the significance of ancient Irish civilization. Irish culture had been dismissed by historians, just as African and Amazon Indian culture were dismissed by the mind-set of his own day (Mitchell and Cantarino 11).

At the end of his lecture, Casement summarises his opinion:

That Brazil owes her name to Ireland – to Irish thought and legend – born beyond the dawn of history yet handed down in a hundred forms of narrative and poem and translated throughout all western Europe, until all western Europe knew and dreamed and loved the story, and her cartographers assigned it place

upon their universal maps, I think has been made clear enough in the forgoing article (Mitchell and Cantarino 28-29).

Casement's words triggered my investigation and sent me on a journey to find out more about the possibility of another explanation about the name of my country.

In Search of Hy Brasil

What is Hy Brasil? Legend tells that somewhere off the coast of Ireland there was an island, always covered by intense fog and only seen on very rare occasions. Every seven years, the fog would fade away, revealing the entire enchantment of this fabulous land. Mountains, green fields and a glowing city were briefly visible. This Celtic land was home of fairies, magicians and wizards. Legends and myths of ancient Ireland had many references to heroes that, attracted by this fantastic vision, launched into the sea in search of this magical land. Anyone able to touch the island would achieve eternal life in a delightful paradise. But every time they approached it, the island disappeared again below the sea.

According to Barry Cunliffe (2001), Professor of European Archaeology at Oxford University, Hy Brasil is considered to be the most intriguing example of all the legendary islands of the Atlantic, said to lie not far off the west coast of Ireland, so named and placed on charts from the fourteenth century:

The legend goes back much further, probably into pre-Christian times, appearing first in the seventh century in the Irish text known as "The Adventure of Bran Son of Febal", which tells of Bran's visit to this Other World island supported on pillars of gold where games are played, people are always happy, there is no sorrow or sickness, and music is always to be heard – truly a land of the blessed. (13)

Peter Berresford Ellis, author of several books and dictionaries about the Celtic world, also confirms that the Irish mythology and old chronicles contain many stories of Hy Brasil, dating a thousand years before the Portuguese discovery of Brazil. Berresford Ellis explains that the term *Hy Brasil* derived from the Old/Middle Irish, around the tenth century. *Hy* is a variation of *í*, which means *island* and that is why we also find the form *I-Brasil*, or the Island of Brasil. The word *Brasil*, argues Berresford Ellis and many other authors, comes from the root *bres*, meaning mighty, great, beautiful, which gives origin to the name *Breasal*, a god in Irish mythology. This explanation is used by many Irish authors to support the argument that the country Brazil was named after the Irish origins of the word and not from the well established brazilwood version.

Although not common knowledge, this claim is not totally unknown in Brazil. Recent books, such as the new approach to the history of Brazil executed by Eduardo Bueno (13), have mentioned Hy Brasil. In the past, the Irish legendary island generated

heated debates among Brazilian historians. The most complete work so far about it can be found in the book *O Brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga*, by Gustavo Barroso, published in 1941. Barroso, the first director of the National Historical Museum in Brazil, believed in a parallel development of the two concepts – the legend of Hy Brasil and the dyewood tree – until the name Brasil Island and the name brazilwood were merged together in a definite geographical term. After explaining and documenting the two separate roots, Barroso stated that we were entitled to ask ourselves: “What do Brazilians prefer: that the name of its own nation signify Blessed Land, Fortunate Land, Land of the Blest, or refer solely to a ordinary and utilitarian commerce of a dye wood?” ([19-]16)

Possible Origins

What is the origin of Hy Brasil? Although Hy Brasil is essentially a Celtic tale, it finds echo in old Atlantic legends that portray lands of great delight and pure immortals, where it is always spring and flowers never die. Ancient Greek poets were probably the first to describe the so-called Happy Islands, Blessed Islands or Fortunate Islands. This dreamlike place was supposed to be out there, somewhere, in the uncharted waters of the Atlantic, beyond the “Pillars of Hercules”, the Strait of Gibraltar. But the idea of the Islands of the Blest is very old, and it was probably born of the Egyptians, who believed that after disappearing on the horizon, the sun would carry on radiating life in distant lands, where everyone would be very welcome after death. Hy Brasil also finds some parallel with the famous Atlantis, described by the Greek philosopher Plato as a large island with powerful kingdoms that sunk beneath the waves after a major cataclysm. For its similarity, Hy Brasil is sometimes referred to as the Irish Atlantis.

Like its counterparts, the speculation about whether Hy Brasil had its origin in a real island ignited the imagination. For the writer Graham Hancock (2002), Hy Brasil is a “topographical ghost”, another example of islands inundated in the Ice Age. For Hancock, Hy Brasil is evidence of a coastline exposed to the surface of the sea almost 12,000 years ago. After Hy Brasil was swallowed by the waters, its existence was perpetuated through tales, legends and secret cartographical records.

SeaPeople

One can argue that the legends about islands that disappeared in the deep sea, like Hy Brasil and Atlantis, have common characteristics with the Phoenicians, a seafaring race of Semitic origin. In this case, the tales of fabulous islands would have started from imprecise reports or narratives with the intention of hiding the Phoenician’s true commercial interests. For Professor Cyrus Gordon (1971), Hy Brasil is a typical Phoenician name. According to his studies, the word *brasil* would be related to *BRZL*, which in Ugaritic and other Semitic languages means iron. The question now is, was there any connection

between Celts and Phoenicians? A hypothetical encounter between the two races remains unclear.

Emerald Isle

Despite its complex origin, it is extremely interesting to observe that the legend of Hy Brasil managed to travel through time and its vision was registered in several accounts. In 1188, the medieval historian Giraldus Cambrensis includes in his work about the topography of Ireland, to the king of England, references to a “phantom” island among the islands of the Irish coast (Wales 1982). In 1684, while describing the region of Connaught, Roderick O’Flaherty (1846) tells that from the Connemara coast and from the Aran Islands an enchanted island called O’Brasil became frequently visible. In fact, some Irish authors argue that Hy Brasil is a submerged land of which Aran Islands are reminiscent (Coghlan 1985). Travelling through Ireland, also called Emerald Isle due to its green fields and valleys, I visited the Aran Islands on the west coast and realised that the story of Hy Brasil is still alive among its inhabitants.

The belief in this imaginary island was very much sustained by Irish mythology, considered to be one of the richest in Europe. In the *Book of Invasions*, a twelfth century collection of tales and narratives with a central role in the mythology and folklore of Ireland, we learn about *Bres*, or *Bress*, and later *Breas*, one of the first leaders of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* (People of the Goddess Danu). The name, as mentioned before, means beautiful, powerful and serves as the root of the word *Breasail*. According to Peter Berresford Ellis,¹ when the People of the Goddess Danu, the ancient gods and goddess of Ireland, were defeated by the Milesians, they left immediately to Hy Brasil. In this context, the island could be seen as the Island of Bres. We also find *Bresal* as the High King of the Celtic world and the island of Bresal was known as the place where he used to establish his court every seven years. Hy Brasil is also compared to *Tír na nÓg*, the Land of Eternal Youth, one of the most popular legends in Ireland.

Religious Meaning

In the transition from paganism to Christianity, Hy Brasil took on another meaning. The Celtic ideal of the island of the Other World – a place with all good things, a land of the eternal youth, an environment of dreams and fantasies – is incorporated into the concept of an Earthly Paradise.

It was in search of this Promised Land that the Irish monk St Brendan, also known as the Navigator Saint, would have embarked on his fabulous adventure in the sixth century. (Severin 1996) With St Brendan, we find the fusion of the Celtic idea of a land of eternal life in the West with the Earthly Paradise and the Promised Land, mentioned in the Bible. The land allegedly discovered by St Brendan became associated

with Hy Brasil. The paradise, which for many years lived in pagan dreams, was finally found by the holy man. That's why the island is also called Hy Brasil of St. Brendan.

Presence in Maps

The story of St Brendan traversed Europe and became well known even in isolated monasteries, like the ones in the north of Italy, visited by Irish monks. It was probably from there that the idea of an Earthly Paradise discovered by the Navigator passed on to nautical charts and medieval maps designed by Italian cartographers.

The first known cartographical appearance of the Island of Brasil was in 1325 and the last one was probably in 1870. This means five hundred and forty five years of mystery. Why did it take so long for the island to disappear from the maps? One detail pointed out by researchers is that the Island of Brasil is depicted for a long time in the same cartographical position. Although it appeared in some nautical charts among the Canary Islands, Azores, Madeira and even on the coast of Canada, the island was mostly faithful to its position to the west of Ireland. The book *Antique Maps* by Carl Moreland and David Bannister (1993) gives a brief account of the island's presence in maps in its chapter *Myths and Legends on Old Maps*:

Where better to start than by looking at the mythical island of Hy Brazil which appeared out in the Atlantic to the west of Ireland in charts as early as 1325, in the famous Catalan Atlas dated 1375 and, subsequently, on numerous maps for the next zoo years, including Waldseemuller's map of the British Isles issued at Strasburg in 1513 and its later editions. It was also shown on Toscanelli's chart dated about 1457 which was said to have been used by Columbus on his first voyage. [...] It is hard to believe that as late as the eighteenth century seamen were still seeking these islands, and so often had Brazil been "sighted" that geographers were reluctant to abandon the possibility of its existence; in fact it was not finally removed from British Admiralty charts until the 1870s.

Discovery Era

Once anchored in maps, mythical islands like Hy Brasil were no longer the uncertain target of trivial adventure and became the destination of more experienced explorers. In case it really existed, the island would be strategically positioned on the route to lands beyond the sea and could be used as a stopover for resting and for collecting fresh water during long journeys. It could also be seen as a land in its own right to be conquered and colonised. Therefore, Hy Brasil entered the Era of Discovery.

According to Fridtjof Nansen in *Northern Mists* (1911) a great ship belonging to John Jay Jr. set off from Bristol towards the *insulam de Brasylie*, in 1480. After two months at sea, they returned to Bristol without finding Hy Brasil. In the following year,

two other ships, *Trinity* and *George*, left England in search of the Island of Brazil, but also returned unsuccessfully.

But among these attempts, one of them had a great achievement. Taking his ship even further west, the navigator John Cabot or Giovanni Caboto, probably from Genoa, officially discovered, in 1497, the island of Newfoundland, on behalf of the English crown, establishing the first step for the British settlement in Canada. Inspired by Columbus, Cabot's main objective was to discover a short cut to the Indies, but also expected to find Hy Brasil on his way.

On 25 July, 1498, the Spanish minister in London, Pedro de Ayala, writes to the Catholic Kings of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, reporting the British effort in searching for Hy Brasil or the island of Brasil.

I think Your Highnesses have already heard how the king of England has equipped a fleet to explore certain islands or mainland which he has been assured certain persons who set out last year from Bristol in search of the same have discovered. I have seen the map made by the discoverer, who is another Genoese like Columbus, who has been in Seville and at Lisbon seeking to obtain persons to aid him in this discovery. For the last seven years the people of Bristol have equipped two, three [and] four caravels to go in search of the island of Brazil and the Seven Cities according to the fancy of this Genoese. The king made up his mind to send thither, because last year sure proof was brought they had found land.²

The Portuguese, who knew well the Canadian coast, rich in codfish, also claimed the discovery of Newfoundland. It is quite impressive to observe the simultaneity of the facts. (Kurlansky 1999) While Pedro Álvares Cabral prepared his caravels that would lead him to the discovery of Brazil, in 1500, Portuguese seamen were navigating in a sea full of fish on the route to Hy Brasil. We have every reason to believe that the Portuguese were aware of the stories of the Island of Brazil. Could we find here any fundamental connection to the naming of Brazil? Who, in the end, gave the name Brazil to what is today the largest country in South America? Certainly, it was not Cabral, who called it *Terra de Vera Cruz*, or the *Land of the True Cross*. The Portuguese king, Dom Manuel I, changed it to *Santa Cruz*, or *Holy Cross*. The popular name *land of brazil* was adopted by those who crossed the Atlantic back and forward with their ships loaded with brazilwood, the first product to be extracted commercially from the newly discovered Portuguese colony.

Art and Literature

The legend of Hy Brasil had such a strong presence in the oral tradition and folklore of Ireland that there were many artistic manifestations to try to reproduce this environment of beauty and happiness. Poets, musicians, painters and writers used their creativity to reconstruct, in one way or another, what could not be reached in a real world. Art became the best portal to get to Hy Brasil.

The painter Patrick Collins gave his version as *Hy Brazil*, a minimalist painting from 1963 which is part of the collection of the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, in Dublin. Another painter, Jack B. Yeats, brother of the poet W. B. Yeats, preferred a more colourful image to illustrate the island in the painting *A Race in Hy Brasil*, from 1937. The island also inspired many musicians and in 1980 was exceptionally highlighted in the cantata *Hy Brasil*, composed by Jerome de Bromhead and performed by the Culwick Choral Society.

But among all forms of representation of the legend of this island, it was in literature that Hy Brasil found its true expression. There are many references to the island in poems, novels and old manuscripts, including works by famous Irish writers. W. B. Yeats, for example, reproduced Gerald Griffin's poem, *Hy Brasil, The Isle of The Blest* (probably the most famous poem on Hy Brasil), in his book *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, published in 1888. James Joyce, in his complex work *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939, makes reference to the Promised Land of St Brendan and creates the neologism *Kerribrasilian*, a combination of the adjective *brasilian*, related to Hy Brasil, and the name of the Irish county of Kerry. The association of the island and the navigator monk also appeared later in *High Brazil Brendan's Deferred*. Researching in an old second-hand bookshop on the banks of the river Liffey, in Dublin, I found Hy Brasil in the book *Christopher Columbus*, by Louis MacNeice (1944), a script for a radio play broadcast in 1942 by BBC radio.

The story of Hy Brasil was the starting point for the creation of new narratives of many other authors from different nationalities. The island appears, for example, in *The Laughter of Peterkin – A Retelling of Old Tales of the Celtic Underworld* (Sharp 1927), published in 1897 and signed by Fiona Macleod, the pen name of the Scottish writer and poet William Sharp, who mentioned it as a place of rest, happiness and eternal youth. In the following year, the American writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson describes the dream of a boy in *Kirwan's Search for Hy-Brasil*, published in the book *Tales of the Enchanted Islands of the Atlantic* (1898). In 1955, the island appeared in the book *Red Knights from Hy-Brasil*, written by Christine Savery, a story about a group of red haired children pretending to be the knights of Hy Brasil, the land of eternal youth. In 1987, it appears again in *My Lady of Hy-Brasil*, a collection of dark stories by Peter Tremayne, pseudonym of Peter Berresford Ellis. More recently, in 2002, the novel *Hy Brasil*, by Margaret Elphinstone from the University of Strathclyde, in Glasgow, narrates the story of a writer, who has to write the first travel book about Hy Brasil, as if the island existed today somewhere in the Atlantic.

Hy Brasil is also present in old newspapers published in Dublin, such as *Ireland's Own*. In its edition of 12 August 1903, the island is mentioned in the article "A Lost Atlantis or an Early Irish Navigator", about the journey of St Brendan. The edition of 13 August 1932 tells us in the article "The Shore of Connaught" that the Irish people from the Connaught region are always looking out towards the *brasilian* horizon. And in the edition of 9 November 1946, Crawford's article "A Shadowy Land off Donegal, Waterford and Antrim – the Miracle in Ireland" describes the natural phenomenon that from time to time can be seen on the coast of Ireland.

Another periodical worth mentioning is the *Irish Penny Journal*. In the book that gathers a collection of its editions, published in Dublin, in 1841, we find the fascinating tale “A Legend of Clare”, about the kingdoms of O’Brassil and Kylestafeen. This is a dramatic story involving the beautiful daughter of the king of O’Brassil, Corgeana, and the two brothers, Fahune and Niall, heirs to the throne of Kylestafeen.

But none of the stories about Hy Brasil had the impact of the wonderful book that became a bestseller in 1675 in England and can be read today in the rare book section of the British Library, in London. *O’Brazile, or the Inchanted Island: Being a Perfect Relation of the Late Discovery, and Wonderful Dis-inchantment of an Island on the North of Ireland*, is the publication of what seems to be a real letter allegedly written by William Hamilton, in Ireland, to his cousin in London, reporting the final discovery and disenchantment of the island of O’Brasile. It describes how a group of people found the island after a thick fog and how they broke its spell by lighting a fire. According to Professor Isabel M. Westcott (1958), from the University of Swansea, in *Seventeenth-Century Tales of the Supernatural*, the book of *O’Brazile* is another brilliant fiction carefully constructed by the writer Richard Head, marking a change in the literary style of the time. Another fascinating work attributed to Richard Head is the book entitled *The Western Wonder or O’Brazeel, an Inchanted Island Discovered*, published in London in 1674, which presents different accounts of the appearance and disappearance of this mysterious island.

Apart from providing entertainment, the story of the Island of Brasil, or simply Hy Brasil, was used to reinforce the Christian doctrine. I saw this in an extremely rare text, also kept in the rare book section of the British Library: *Voyage to O’Brazeel, or the Submarine Island – Giving a Brief Description of the Country and a Short Account of the Customs, Manners, Government, Law and Religion of the Inhabitants*. This precious work of sixty-four pages is a literal transcription from 1752 of the Irish manuscript of Manus O’Donnel. The original does not indicate the date, but it was probably written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, between 1558 and 1603. The manuscript, as summarised in the title, is the description of a fantastic journey to O’Brazeel, a submarine island that sank off the coast of Ireland. Below the waters, enclosed in a type of huge bubble, there was a small country – a land of virtue and Christian faith – and happy people.

Another incredible reference is a fascinating medical manuscript that became known as *The Book of the O’Lees* or *Book of the Island of O’Brasil*, probably from the fifteenth century and kept today among the rare documents of the Royal Irish Academy, in Dublin. Written in Irish and Latin, the book is apparently a translation of old medical treatises and lists the cure and treatment for several diseases. But the amusing fact about this book is that it was used by a certain Morogh O’Ley, in the seventeenth century, who claimed that he was taken mysteriously to the Island of Brasil in 1668 where he received the book and the recommendation to not open it until seven years had passed. After this period he opened the book and realised his ability to treat all sort of human illnesses, although he never had any training to do so, and everything was attributed to his “journey”

to Hy Brasil. For some Irish historians, Morogh O'Ley probably inherited the book from his family and after some professional misfortunes started to use the book as a way of living.

As well as the famous poem by Gerald Griffin quoted briefly at the opening of this article, Hy Brasil was the inspiring muse of many other poets, as we can see in the selection in the appendix.

Hy-Brasil Today

Although very old, the legend of Hy Brasil or of a fairyland that appears every seven years on the coast of Ireland still fires the imagination. Accounts of its presence can still be heard especially among the population of the west part of the country, a tradition that has been passed down through generations. A rich collection of different reports about Hy Brasil was gathered by the National Folklore Commission of Ireland, who undertook a nation-wide recording of local folklore between 1935 and 1971. This rich archive can be consulted at the Department of Irish Folklore, at University College Dublin.

Another extremely interesting aspect of this entangled story is the presence of the name Brasil in proper names, place names and family names in Ireland. In the telephone directory of the town of Tralee, in County Kerry, I found different variations of this surname that would leave any Brazilian very intrigued: Brassil, Brassill, Brazier, Brazil, Brazill, Brazzill. Even more interesting is to see those names on the front of shops, such as a small grocery called *Brassils Stores* in Tralee, or as the *Brassils Guest House*, a Bed and Breakfast in the village of Ballyheigue. According to the book *More Irish Families*, by Edward Mac Lysaght, *Brassil* or *Brazil*, or even *O Brazil*, are anglicised versions of the Irish surname *Ó Breasail*, mainly found in the counties of Waterford and Offaly. The name *O' Brasil*, according to Mac Lysaght (1982), already existed in 1308 and the name *O Bressyl* is even older, being recorded in 1285 in County Cork. This leaves no doubt of an Irish history for the name Brasil, totally independent of the South American country.

In summary, we can see Hy Brasil in at least three ways: physical, symbolical, and historical. The first one refers to an optical effect that projects an illusionary image of an island along the coast of Ireland. It is a kind of mirage generated by the reflection of solar light. This natural optical effect is interpreted as the physical representation of a ghost, with the help of popular imagination. While the phenomenon was used to provide fancy explanations, creating the legends, it was also used as concrete proof of the existence of an unreal, abstract world told in legends.

The second way to see Hy Brasil is through its mystical, mysterious and spiritual side. The island symbolised a land of eternal youth, earthly paradise, an idealised world, full of pleasure, eternal life and peace in the comfort of gods. It was a world that everyone would wish to live in now, or possibly go to after this life. In a country with a hard winter, with months of cold, rain and lack of light, dreaming about a place of sun and constant happiness was probably a survival technique for the people of the past. It is

interesting to observe that Hy Brasil represents a paradise that existed and sank, but that can come back any moment. The legend keeps the hope alive. At the same time that it refers to a tragedy, to the loss of a perfect state of things, it insists in telling us that this paradise can exist again, even if it is just in our dreams or imagination.

Finally, Hy Brasil can be associated with the history of the European maritime expansion. Was this magical land the island of Madeira, the Canary Islands, or the Azores archipelago? Speculating even further, Hy Brasil could represent evidence of an extremely old knowledge of the physical existence of lands that, through one way or another, disappeared from the surface of the sea. This island could also be evidence, or at least a very strong suspicion, of knowledge of lands on the other side of the Atlantic. Could Hy Brasil have been Newfoundland, in Canada, or a recollection of a more tropical reference, such as the sunny Caribbean or South American islands? The legend could have been born from accounts of ancient seafarers that somehow visited the West, enjoyed themselves with the wonders of these lands, and then returned to Europe to tell what they had seen. In this case, Hy Brasil would have been testimony to a pre-Colombian American enchantment. This indication of land beyond the sea was incorporated into the European maritime tradition, making the island appear in hundreds of medieval and renaissance maps. How can the presence of Hy Brasil in cartography be explained? Just an artistic interpretation or a real sign of land somewhere in the Atlantic waters? The collection of maps is of significance and the name *Island of Brazil* clearly printed insists on representing something more than a simple legend of the western Irish seaboard.

Whatever it is, Hy Brasil leaves as its heritage the eternal reminder to never stop dreaming.

Appendix 1

Love Consecrate

By Daniel Corkery

Touched by her triumphant lips,
O mouth of mine, now, now for song!
My visions, like frozen and famished ships,
Break from the ice of winters long,
And spy far on the ocean's rim
The peaks of I Bhreasail purple and dim.
[...] (Corkery 1921)

Hy Brasil

By I. F. Galwey

[...]

And now I steer by day and night
Across the changeful tide,
And ever shines the glorious Light,
To comfort and to guide;
And I know its radiance calm and pure
Beams from Hybrasil's shore,
Where those who to the end endure
Shall rest for evermore. (Galwey 9)

I-Breasil

By Ethna Carbery

[...]

But I move without in an endless fret,
While somewhere beyond earth's brink, afar,
Forgotten of men, in a rose-rim set,
I-Breasil shines like a beckoning star. (MacManus 63)

Hy Bràsil

By William Sharp

I heard the voice of the wind among the pines.
It was as the tide coming over smooth sands.
On the red pine-boles the sun flamed goldenly out of the west.
In falling cadences the cuckoos called across the tides of light.
In dreams, now, I hear the cuckoos calling across a dim sea of light, there where
a sun that never rose nor set flames goldenly upon ancient trees, in whose midst
the wind goes sighingly, with a sound as of the tide slipping swift over smooth
sands.
And I hear a solitary voice singing there, where I stand beside the gold-flamed
pine-boles and look with hungry eyes against the light of a sun that never rose
nor set. (Sharp 1897, 150)

I-Brasîl

By William Sharp

[...]

There's sorrow in the world, O wind, there's sorrow in my heart
Night and day:

So why should I not listen to the song you sing to me?
The hill cloud falls away in rain, the leaf whirls from the tree,
And peace may live in I-Brasíl where the last stars touch the sea
Far away, far away. (MacLeod 455)

The Finding of Hy Brasil

By William Larminie

[...]
So, mocked by glimpses of a glorious time,
Long have I gazed far into Eirë's past;
But now at length on the enchanted strand,
And those evasive splendours, more sublime
Than dream, the potent fire-spell has been cast;
Lo! on Hy Brasil's long-sought shores I stand. (Larminie 85)

The King's Cave

By Alfred Perceval Graves

Rash Son, return! Yon shores that dazzle
With glowing pleasaunce, glittering plain,
And crystal keep is not Hy-Brazil,
But some false phantom of the main.
And you bright band thy vision meeting,
Their warbled welcome hither fleeting –
Oh, trust not to their siren greeting,
Oh, wave not, wave not back again!
But veil thine eyes from their entreating,
And list not their enchanting strain!
[...] (Lancashire 1908)

Hy-Brasil

By Henry Kendall

[...]
But beyond the halls of sunset, but within the wondrous west,
On the rose-red seas of evening, sails the Garden of the Blest.
Still the gates of glassy beauty, still the walls of glowing light,
Shine on waves that no man knows of, out of sound and out of sight.

Yet the slopes and lawns of lustre, yet the dells of sparkling streams,
Dip to tranquil shores of jasper, where the watching angel beams.
But, behold, our eyes are human, and our way is paved with pain,
We can never find Hy-Brasil, never see its hills again;
Never look on bays of crystal, never bend the reverent knee
In the sight of Eden floating – floating on the sapphire sea!
(Kendall 1880)

Romance of Meergal and Garmon

By Robert Dwyer Joyce

[...]
It was the purple sunset when the breeze blew warm and bland,
And they saw a shore beyond them by its breath of fragrance fanned,
And within a heavenly harbour under hills serenely grand,
They have moored that boat of wonder in Hy Brasil's golden land.
[...] (Joyce 304)

Cider

By Paul Muldoon

[...]
I want you to bring me down to the estuary.
At low tide we might wade out to an island,
Hy Brasil, the Land of Youth
[...] (Muldoon 1977)

Appendix 2



Map of British Isles. Portolano produced by Grazioso Benincasa, in Venice, Italy, in 1473, showing the Island of Brazil as a big red circle near the coast of Ireland.
(BY PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY; Record Number: 21045; Shelfmark: Egerton 2855; Page Folio Number: f.8)

Notes

- 1 Ellis, P. B. [Letter] London, 17 December 1999 [to] Cantarino, G., Mickleham. 2f. The letter provides information about Hy Brasil.
- 2 *Dispatch of Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish envoy in London, to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in Spain, dated London, 25 July, 1498*. Reproduced from H.P. Biggar, editor. *The precursors of Jacques Cartier 1497-1534: A Collection of Documents relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada*. (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau) 1911, 27-29. 5 April 2005 <<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/ayala.html>>.

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Thomas Moore in Bermuda: Irish and African Liberties

Margaret Mc Peake

Abstract: “*Thomas Moore in Bermuda: Irish and African Liberties*,” takes as its subject Moore’s five month sojourn in Bermuda in 1803-04, where he traveled to take up an appointment as Registrar of the Court of Vice Admiralty. While employed by a colonial administration, Moore is unable to condemn the institution of slavery in Bermuda, while he is able to condemn slavery in the United States. When read in conjunction with Moore’s writings from the United States, Moore’s writings from Bermuda emerge as an important source for understanding his attitudes towards colonialism and slavery, as well for situating his later use of the trope of slavery in his writings on Ireland

Most accounts which speak about Thomas Moore’s time in Bermuda are concerned with the credulity of the romance he was purported to have with Nea, the subject of the love poems which he wrote in Bermuda, or the way in which his poetry and letters reflect a deeply-felt love of the Bermudan landscape. However, Thomas Moore’s relationship to Bermuda promises a much broader avenue of inquiry. Most notably, Moore’s relationship to empire and slavery in the Americas, made manifest in his acceptance of the Bermuda appointment, is key to observing the broad arc of Moore’s political development. Furthermore, a consideration of when, and under what circumstances Moore can condemn slavery, is helpful in understanding how Moore later mobilizes slavery as a trope for characterizing the relationship between Ireland and England in the *Irish Melodies*.

When Moore was attending Trinity, he became familiar with the principles of the United Irishmen’s movement, in part through his association with Robert Emmett. Moore’s willingness to take a stand on behalf of the United Irishmen is evidenced, both by a poem and a letter which he wrote for *The Press*, a paper founded by Thomas Addis Emmett, Arthur O’Connor, and several other members of the United Irishmen. Moore’s missive entitled a “Letter to the Students of Trinity College,” and signed by “A Patriotic Freshman,” ends with the the statement: “we should all have one common cause, the welfare of our country; we should all Unite, rally round her standard, and recover our Heaven-born rights, our principles from the grasp of Tyranick ministers” (Strong 51)¹.

Robert Emmett is thought to have intervened with Moore, after the publication of this letter in *The Press*, with the concern that such open discussion would do more harm than good for the cause, and potentially draw the attention of the authorities themselves.²

Furthermore, biographies are in consensus concerning the idea that it was not Moore's own disinterest or caution, but rather Emmett's judgment of Moore as not the sort of recruit they needed, which kept Moore away from more direct involvement with the United Irishmen's movement.

Shortly thereafter, Trinity did become a hunting-ground for informers about the United Irishmen's movement, and Lord Clare, Vice-Chancellor of Trinity interviewed students as a preemptive measure meant to "suppress sedition among the undergraduates" (Jones 36). Moore both witnessed students who gave evidence against Emmett and others and was himself called to give witness. He met this, first with a refusal to take the oath out of a fear of being made to answer questions which would incriminate others, and finally with an agreement to "take the oath, still reserving to myself the right of refusing to answer any such questions as I have described" (Strong 54). His answers were not incriminating, at least according to L.A.G. Strong, because, "thanks to Emmett, he knew nothing at all" (Strong 54). Moore was let off by the inquisitors, unlike many of the others who were expelled under suspicion of involvement with the United Irishmen, and he was able to go on to graduate from Trinity at the end of 1798.

In May of 1798, when the United Irishmen's rising began, Moore was himself removed from the action, as he was sick in bed. Howard Mumford Jones suggests that "the excitement proved too much for Tom, who fell ill, a fact which perhaps prevented him from participating in the bloody events of May" (37). Beyond the question of what cause lay behind Moore's physical distance from the rebellion, is the question of the impact of 1798 on his later political attitudes. Jones goes on to suggest that "the emotional shock of this whole experience is of first importance in understanding Moore, for it helps one to see why, after this brief dip into the dark whirlpools of rebellion, he retreated for the rest of his life into the safe Whig view which holds that progress comes, not from revolution, but from reform" (Jones 37).

Jones's explanation provides a possible framework for understanding how Moore, exposed to the organization of the United Irishmen's movement, became a spokesperson, welcome or not, for the ideals of the movement, and then, just as quickly, became a disengaged observer of the rebellion and its aftermath.

The element of Moore's biography which encapsulates this divergence most succinctly is the close proximity between Robert Emmett's execution and Moore's voyage for the promise of fortune across the Atlantic. After having gone to London in 1799, Moore decided to leave London for transatlantic fortunes. His ship for the United States sailed from Spithead on September 25th, 1803, five days after the execution of Robert Emmett in Dublin. Emmett led the last rising of the United Irishmen's movement, and was executed for his efforts, while Moore became a beneficiary of the British Empire abroad. As Strong notes, Moore makes no mention of Emmett's execution in his letters (55). This would be the first of a series of silences present in the writings surrounding

Moore's movement to Bermuda which has significance in understanding the later development of Moore's political sensibilities.

Involvement in the British colonial administration came to Moore in the form of a post as Registrar of the Court of Vice-Admiralty in (a Naval Prize Court) in Bermuda. This position was given to him because of the influence of the Earl of Moira, a friend and useful connection which he had made while in England. Lord Moira had, earlier in the same year, also been responsible for creating a post for Moore, in collaboration with the Chief Secretary for Ireland, in the form of an Irish Laureateship. By some accounts, Moore declined to accept the post after his family objected to it on patriotic grounds.³ However, Moore also notes that such an acceptance would not be congruent with his hopes for promotion through the government:

Feeble as my hopes are of advancement under government, I should be silly to resign them, without absolute necessity, for a gift which would authorize them to consider me provided for, and leave me without a chance of any other and further advantage. (Strong 88)

Moore's acceptance of the Bermuda post is the result of financial concerns: "it promised me a permanent subsistence and the means of providing for those I love." (White 37) The patriotic grounds that may have prevented him from accepting the laureateship were not of issue in the question of accepting an appointment abroad in the British Empire abroad.

When slavery is understood as part of the economy in which Moore's appointment involves him, his proximity to the origins of the United Irishmen's movement in Dublin become more important in situating changes in his political sensibilities. Kevin Whelan draws attention to the link which the United Irishmen made between the Republican struggle in Ireland and opposition to the transatlantic slave trade, evidenced through an excerpt of a letter written by Thomas Russell in 1796:

Are the Irish nation aware that this contest involves the question of the slave trade, the one now of the greatest consequence on the face of the earth? Are they willing to employ their treasure and their blood in support of that system, because England has 70 or 70 millions engaged in it, the only argument that can be adduced in its favour, *monstrous* as it may appear? (Whelan 233)

An opposition to slavery in the Americas was key to the United Irishmen's understanding of anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. The verse tradition of the United Irishmen, found in *Paddy's Resource* and other volumes, bore witness to this transatlantic frame of reference, through the utilization of slavery as a trope for oppression, whether slavery in the Americas, or the bondage of British imperialism in Ireland. Moore's proximity to the development of the United Irishmen at Trinity put him in close contact, not only with key leaders of the movement, but also with its tenets, tropes and rhetoric.

Despite this, Moore remained silent about the institution of slavery in the writings that emerge from the first leg of his trip to Bermuda. Moore landed originally in Virginia, where he spent time in Norfolk, in the residence of the British Consul, Colonel Hamilton. One of the poems which he writes in Norfolk, "Miss Moore," contains an abstract recognition of disappointment about the society which he encounters there:

Blame not the temple's meanest part
Till thou hast trac'd the fabric o'er: –
As yet, we have beheld no more
Than just the porch to Freedom's fane;
And, though a sable spot may stain
The vestibule, 'tis wrong, 'tis sin
To doubt the godhead reigns within! (Moore 1895, 128)

Although tantalizing in its recognition of a "sable spot [that] may stain the vestibule" of "Freedom's fane," Moore is ultimately unspecific about what aspect(s) of American society disappoint his expectations. However, his letters do contain more specific commentary. An excerpt from a letter written back to his family during this initial stay in Virginia, while not recognizing slavery's existence in the United States, or, indeed, any inequity in the society based on skin-color, does demonstrate the operation of a racialized aesthetics:

This Norfolk is a most strange place; nothing to be seen in the streets but dogs and negroes and the few ladies that *pass for white* are to be sure the most unlovely pieces of crockery I ever set my eyes upon. (Moore 1964, 50)

Seemingly, Moore is able to acknowledge race as a topic in his personal writings, but not in his poetry. In neither case, however, do we find an overt condemnation of the institution of slavery itself.

A racialized aesthetics is also present in the letters that Moore writes home from Bermuda. In one of his letters, he notes that, in Bermuda:

to my great disappointment, I find that a few miserable negroes is all "the bloomy flush of life" it has to boast of. Indeed, you must not be surprised, dear mother, if I fall in love with the first pretty face I see on my return home, for certainly the 'human face divine' has degenerated wonderfully in these countries; and if I were a painter, and wished to preserve my ideas of beauty immaculate, I would not suffer the brightest belle of Bermuda to be my house-maid." (Moore 58)

This pattern of handling issues around race, acknowledgment in personal writings and absence of acknowledgment in his poetic writings, remains constant in Moore's writings from Bermuda. The entirety of Moore's poetry credited to his Bermuda experience contains no recognition or indictment of slavery on the island.

There is a marked difference to be found in Moore's expressed attitudes towards slavery, in particular, and the shortcomings of the United States, in general, between his initial stay in the United States and his return trip. During this second visit, before he is to voyage back to England, Moore becomes openly critical of the United States.

I have passed the Potomac, the Rappahannock, the Occoquan, the Potapsio, and many other rivers, with names as barbarous as the inhabitants: every step I take not only *reconciles*, but *endears* to me not only the excellencies but even the errors of Old England. Such a road as I have come! and in such a conveyance! The mail takes twelve passengers, which generally consist of squalling children, stinking negroes, and republicans smoking cigars! How often it has occurred to me that nothing can be more emblematic of the government of this country than its *stages*, filled with a motley mixture, "all hail fellow well met," driving through mud and filth, which *bespatters* them as they *raise* it, and risking an *upset* at every step. (Moore 1853, 161)

Moore condemns a variety of American characteristics, which he finds to stem from an American brand of "Jacobinism." In an unpublished paragraph that was to be included in *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems*, Moore states the following:

In the ferment which the French Revolution excited among the democrats of America and the licentious sympathy with which they shared in the wildest excesses of Jacobinism, we may find one of the sources of that vulgarity of vice, that hostility to all the graces of life, which distinguishes the present demagogues of the United States and has become too generally the characteristic of their countrymen. (Jones 79)

This contempt for the Jeffersonian democracy which he encounters in the United States is credited, in part, to the Federalist circle in which he circulated while there. These expressed attitudes highlight his movement away from his earlier Republican leanings. Moore is able to distance himself from his previous experience of the excesses of English rule in Ireland, and the excesses of English rule in Bermuda, while expressing criticism of the Republican project of the United States.

It is important to note that, when Moore leaves Bermuda, he has done so only after having appointed a deputy to fill his position, an arrangement which is expected to continue netting him a profit, especially in times of war.⁴ Given this continuing financial benefit from the Bermuda appointment, it is, perhaps, not surprising that Moore can only condemn slavery in poetry which focuses on his disappointment with the new Republic of the United States. In *Poems Relating to America*, the poem entitled "The Lord Viscount Forbes," from the city of Washington, links a criticism of slavery specifically to the Republic's claims of liberty:

To think that man, thou just and gentle God!
Should stand before thee with a tyrant's rod
O'er creatures like himself, with souls from thee,
Yet dare to boast of perfect liberty! (Moore 1895, 142)

Despite having experienced direct and prolonged contact with a slavery economy which he benefitted from as a colonial administrator in Bermuda, Moore is only able to give voice to a distaste for the institution of slavery through the distance with which the United States provides him. It is the Republic's imperfections that excite Moore to the level of outright condemnation, not the colony's shortcomings, which he is apparently willing to oversee, given the absence of his discussion about slavery in Bermuda.

Moore's other notable silence about the Caribbean concerns the slave rebellion which triumphed in Haiti in November 1803, and the Haitian Republic which was declared independent on 1st January 1804. Moore landed in Bermuda in January, and news of a new Black Republic in the Caribbean must certainly have reached Bermuda. Yet, the topic of slavery in the colonies, or its overthrow through rebellion, is absent from Moore's writings during this time.

Moore's ability to condemn slavery in the United States, while not in Bermuda, is of import, not only in locating Moore's politics in the Americas, but also in understanding the position which he takes towards questions surrounding the relationship of Ireland and England in later work. Moore's *Irish Melodies* derive their expressive strength from, among other things, his utilization of tropes of slavery and bondage, in representing the position of Ireland under British rule. While unable to condemn slavery in the empire abroad, Moore is able to use the idea of slavery as a means of embodying Irish oppression.

The *Irish Melodies*, which start appearing in volume form in 1807, incorporate tropes of slavery/liberty in verses which comment both on Ireland's history of resistance to invasion in general, and the more specific colonial history between Ireland and England. In the second piece in *Irish Melodies*, "Remember the Glories of Brien the Brave," Moore characterizes the Irish struggle against Danish/Viking invaders during the eleventh century as a fight against enslavement:

Monomia! when Nature embellish'd the tint
Of thy fields, and they mountains so fair,
Did she ever intend that a tyrant should print
The footstep of slavery there? (Moore 1895, 170)

In "Erin, Oh Erin," Moore moves to a contemporary moment in characterizing Ireland's present state as one in which slavery is suffered by its inhabitants:

The nations have fallen, and thou still art young,
Thy sun is but rising, when others are set;

And tho/ slavery's cloud o'er thy morning hath hung
The full noon of freedom shall beam round thee yet (Moore 1895, 178)

These two examples underscore how the idea of slavery functions for Moore as a way of contextualizing Ireland's experience of colonization in the *Irish Melodies*. Moore's rhetorical use of slavery can be argued to evidence his changed relationship to the topic of Ireland's plight, something which he had turned his sympathies away from when swayed by American federalism. Or, it can be argued that Moore utilized slavery opportunistically to communicate what was, by now, a broadly recognized means of signaling Ireland's colonization, an exercise that he could safely engage in while still being invited into the drawing rooms of the English aristocracy.

Whichever conclusion one might draw about Moore's use of slavery as a trope in the *Irish Melodies*, it is important to note his unwillingness to condemn the slavery which the Bermudan economy depended upon, even as he continued to benefit from it. Moore's contradictions speak to the complexity of his personal involvement in the economy of slavery, and the manner in which that complicity influenced his responses to Bermuda, Ireland and the United States.

Notes

- 1 Howard Mumford Jones identifies the letter as having been printed in the twenty-ninth number of *The Press*, on December 2nd, 1797, whereas Strong states that it was printed in the sixtieth number of *The Press*.
- 2 "The limits to the association were set by Emmett himself. He knew Tom's mother, and he knew Tom. Only once in Tom's hearing did he allude to the United Irishmen, and he never proposed that Tom should be enrolled. Tom attributes this to Emmett's realization of the watchful anxiety with which he was regarded at home, and to his reluctance to increase it. Anastasia had no wish that her boy should be caught up in a revolutionary society, which might endanger his prospects, if not his life. She worried continually lest his impulsive nature, or his sense of loyalty to his comrades, should lead him astray. Emmett must have known all this, for Anastasia was never one to keep her anxieties to herself, and his "forbearance" was without doubt partly due to it: but he saw from the first that Tom, burning with romantic enthusiasm, was not of the stuff of which rebels are made. It was both kinder and wiser, on all accounts to leave him out. So Tom remained, throughout, ignorant or more than the vaguest outline of what was plan." (Strong 45).
- 3 "Moore's patriotic family apparently objected to hymning the House of Hanover, and after the experimental "Ode for the Birthday" already cited, he resigned the "paltry and degrading stipend," or the prospects of it, explaining that he had accepted only under the "urging apprehension that my dears at home wanted it." (Jones 61).
- 4 This arrangement will eventually cause him great difficulty as the deputy will abscond with the money proceeding from a sale of ship and cargo. "The amount in dispute was 6,000 pounds, a sum Moore could not possibly pay." (Jones 206).

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The Hindu Celticism of James Cousins (1873-1956)*

Jerry Nolan

Abstract: *The very existence of James Cousins as a significant Irish Cultural Revival voice is barely acknowledged in the field of Irish Studies. Alan Denson's pioneering and admittedly congested bio-bibliographical survey published in 1967 has made very little difference in the many commentaries on the Irish Revival in which Cousins was imaginatively formed and from which he emerged as a great teacher in India. Very recently, the young American scholar Joseph Lennon has devoted a very welcome long chapter on Cousins in his book Irish Orientalism wherein Cousins is seriously discussed in the light of issues arising out of the implications of Edward Said's seminal post-colonial work Orientalism. The essay which follows will attempt to track the passage of Cousins from Ireland to India where finally the veteran Celticist was admitted to Hindu worship on January 14 1935 in the temple of Travancore in South India. The cross-cultural significance of the spiritual formation of Cousins as Hindu Celt will be discussed in the light of certain key texts which he wrote along the way – plays, poems, theosophical writings, autobiographical musings and educational philosophising. This considerable legacy of writings, which Tagore felt deserved the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934, awaits discovery by a new generation of Irish cultural commentators.*

In 1897, at the age of 24, having been born into a Belfast working class family, James Cousins, already a published poet and active member of the Gaelic League, moved from Belfast to Dublin in search of more Irish culture. His first job in Dublin was a clerkship in a coal and shipping company. Quickly growing enthusiasm for the Gaelic League as the most culturally progressive organisation led him to meet Douglas Hyde, W.B. Yeats, AE, Edward Martyn and other prominent writers at a time when the project of the Irish Literary Theatre was about to happen with the first productions being planned for Dublin's Antient Concert Rooms of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *The Heather Field* on May 8 and 9, 1899. Many years later, Cousins would describe these beginnings of the Irish Dramatic Movement as "pathetically puny" but he was prepared to credit it with at least having a lively influence on the sluggish intellectual

life of Dublin at the time (1950, 57) Cousins himself was continuing to write poetry and plays on Irish subjects. His most successful play in Dublin and Belfast was *The Racing Lug* in 1902 which was a short tragedy, similar to but actually predating J.M.Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and somewhat removed from his deeper longings for Celticism. Cousins later described the play as "the tragedy of the life of the fisher-folk of Belfast Lough in plain prose" (1941, 14-15). Cousins and AE became close friends as they shared the same passion for promoting the Celtic way historically backwards and forwards, in the confident hope that it would be through the recovery of the symbolical power of the Celtic mythos that Ireland would best develop and embody the body of profound cosmic and psychological truths at the heart of the Irish Being. Then Cousins introduced AE to Frank and Willie Fay who decided to produce AE's only play *Deirdre* with Cousins playing a minor role in the production. In 1906, Cousins himself wrote a long poem about the marriage of Lir and Niav who came to represent for him an ideal way of unifying states of Celtic and cosmic awareness. In the four hundred line poem about Lir and Niav, Cousins drew on Standish O'Grady's historical material in *The Story of Ireland* on the mythological couple from whose union was born Manannan, the Irish god of the seas (1940, 36-54). When Cousins wrote "Etain the Beloved" (1940, 74-111) he drew on the research of H. d'Arbois de Jubainville into the Irish bardic tales, one of which was the myth of Etain, the wife of the god Mider which was essentially a story of shifting incarnations in the realms of gods and of earthlings about which Cousins wrote: "Here was matter to my taste, the circle of the cosmic life completed in a single story, and with a nearness to the details of nature and of human psychology" (1950, 210). As in the case of AE, the wisdom of Western Celticism and the wisdom of Oriental Theosophy began to be welded together in his extensive writings.

At first Yeats encouraged Cousins as a writer, but then quickly went on to dislike and disparage him. Cousins in old age, still kindly remembered Yeats as "the world's greatest singer in English" (1950, 162). Probably the Yeatsian problem with Cousins, apart from the record of their differences over Cousins's farce about Irish life *Sold*, which Arthur Griffiths had published in *United Irishman* 27 December 1902 and which Yeats subsequently dismissed as "vulgar rubbish", was the uncomfortable fact that (for Yeats), in spite of their shared interest in theosophy, Cousins and his wife Margaret saw theosophy not as forms of esoteric posturing for a self-appointed elite, but as the springboard for espousing a broad range of radical causes in Dublin between 1903 and 1913 – causes such as pacificism, the suffragette movement, the cooperative movement, vegetarianism and anti-vivisectionism which led to the couple being branded in Dublin as little more than "faddists". In standard accounts of the Irish Revival over many years, Cousins has featured almost entirely in trivialising anecdotes such as the news that the couple gave house room to James Joyce in his bungalow in Dromard Terrace, Sandymount just before Joyce moved, apparently unhappy with the vegetarian diet in the bungalow, for better or worse into Gogarty's Martello Tower; and then again there is the tale of how Cousins left the sole editorship of *Irish Citizen*, in whose columns there was much campaigning for his wife's

crusade for women's emancipation, to his close friend and co-editor Francis Sheehy-Skeffington shortly before the departure of the couple via Liverpool for India in 1913. Alan Denson's sprawling documentary work on Cousins and his wife, first privately published in 1967, has, in fact, been remarkably unsuccessful in much influencing Irish Revival scholars who mainly continue to view Cousins as a comic pigmy when set beside the likes of Yeats who contemptuously snuffed him out as a dramatist, and of Joyce whose lines from the 1912 broadside "Gas from a Burner", based on a very transitory acquaintanceship with Cousins and his early poetry, are still being quoted, with a wink and a nod: "I printed the table-book of Cousins/Though (asking your pardon) as for the verse/' Twould give you a heartburn in your arse.' Cousins Studies have fared better outside of Ireland. Rabindranth Tagore admired Cousins's writings in India to the extent of nominating him for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934. (Lennon 353).

More recently the work of Cousins has been acknowledged in the scholarly writings of D.K.Chatterjee, Gauri Viswanathan and above all, in the very recently published book about "Irish Orientalism" by Joseph Lennon who devotes a long chapter to Cousins, entitled "James, Seamus and Jayaram Cousins" (Lennon 324-370). What characterises Lennon's important and most welcome essay are his readings of Cousins in the context of the politically charged theoretical fields of anticolonial and postcolonial narratives whose agenda was set out by Edward Said. Lennon's thesis addresses the role of Cousins in the perspective of the links between Ireland and India as two cultures in need of revival on the Western and Oriental fringes of the British Empire but it does not address the relevance to *the development Ireland* of Cousins's work. That placing of the work of Cousins back at the very heart of the discussion of the Irish Revival requires, most of all, that attention must be paid to the nature of his *spiritual* passage from Ireland to India during a period when one of the sturdiest of roots of the Irish Cultural Revival was a form of Theosophy which reached out towards Hinduism as one of the most creative alternatives to the history of warring sectarian religions in Ireland over many centuries. Those Theosophical roots failed to grow in Ireland: there are many reasons for the cultural failure which began to happen when the majority of the nation after 1921 settled for the complacent compromises of Irish Celticists who saw no problem in sending Christian missionaries to convert the Orient, a practice of foreign religious proselytism which Cousins denounced as "a denationalising one" (1925, 67).

The great moment of truth occurred for Cousins during January 1937 when he was in his early sixties. He had already been established as the Principal of Theosophical Colleges in Madras for the previous twenty years or so, when he received the all important invitation and acknowledgement, late in 1935, from the 25-year old Maharajah of Travancore to become the government's art adviser in Trivandrum, the capital. The young Maharajah and his mother Her Highness Setu Parvati Bayi were so impressed by Cousins's writings about the appreciation and patronage of Indian art and culture that they decided to confer on him the title "Kulapati" (the Sanskrit word for "teacher of multitudes"). Then on the 14th January 1937 Cousins was admitted to Hindu worship at

the Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple near Trivandrum, and given the name of “Jayaran” or “victory for the light”, shortly after which he became one of the Maharajah’s party in an educational visit to Java and Bali. The gift of a Hindu temple entrance became an important symbol for the man who had been brought up as a Wesleyan Methodist in Belfast. Later in *We Two Together*, Cousins claimed that his public declaration for Hinduism implied “no denial of the spiritual truth that was to be found in all religions, or any repudiation of their ceremonial and discipline.” On one level his interpretation of the conversion might be seen as diplomatic: “conversion did not mean a turning away from one religion to another: it had for me the meaning of turning from the externals of any religion towards its internal and eternal verity.” But Cousins had expressed, some twelve years before in *Heathen Essays*, a very focused view of “religious conversion” when he asserted that it was absurd:

...to assert that the Truth of the Universe can be hammered into one set of dogmas whose particular mental formulation carries exclusive authority. Yet from such roots of falsehood is drawn the heady draught of religious exclusiveness and superiority which all along the ages has poisoned the blood-stream of humanity, and brought about the tragic paradox of the religions frustrating the true expression of the universal religious aspiration of mankind.’ (1925, v-vi).

Later in the same book, Cousins asserted that in the light of his encounters with devotees of the great faiths of the world “There is no more separateness than there is between the branches that spring from the same root” (1925, 91-2). The love of All India which his conversion splendidly crowned had grown out of his positive early view of India as a nation who rejected as a model of society the divorce between the arts and religion and philosophy that had so afflicted an European culture given over to analysis, separation and specialisation. (1918, 162) What had been of crucial importance for Cousins at the beginnings of the Irish Revival, as it had been for his friend AE, was the discovery of the ancestral self in Celtic mythology. After about eight years in India, Cousins coupled Yeats and AE, but he could have been writing about himself: “They found the spiritual truths that Asia had given to the world reflected in the old myths and legends of Ireland, and out of their illumination and enthusiastic response arose the Irish Literary and Dramatic Revival whose influence at its highest was purely spiritual.” (1922, 8) Retrospectively, Cousins understood that the Irish Revival was partly a national protest against a colonial cultural repression which formed one of the major obstacles in the way of the Irish realising the ancestral self in new cultural forms; but in his own particular case, he came to realise that the Revival had opened windows onto the powers and processes of all peoples across the world, a notion memorably expressed by AE:

I have come to believe my dreams, however fantastic, mirrored some reality in divine consciousness, brooding in the future, divising religions, philosophies,

arts, sciences and civilisations, and breathing forth the mood by which acceptance is made possible.

Cousins used these very words from AE's last prose work "The Avatars" as the key quotation on the title page of his own most sustained analysis of the nature of education for the young and the old, the admirably idealistic *A Study in Synthesis*.

In his collection of lectures *The Wisdom of the West*, published before he left Ireland, Cousins was already thinking about the need to piece together an *universal* mythology which would be characterised by its appeal on a number of levels: a story for the man-in-the-street, a parable for the teacher, a revelation of eternal mysteries for the mystic. He began research Irish mythological tales as versions of Oriental myths. He set about tracing many parallels between the gods and heroes of Roman, Greek and Celtic mythologies, and grew determined to hold all in precarious balance as manifestations of human consciousness in search of many symbols for one spiritual reality. Thus the many mythologies of the world began to be seen as the manifestations of the indestructible Ego which, being passed from generation to generation, is enriched by the experiences of particular individuals, and might one day gather all into one simple conscious expression of the Divine Word (1912, 18). The great ambition of *The Wisdom of the West* was to link indissolubly the myths of Ireland with the myths of the Orient. Already inspired by his reading the works of Madame Blavatsky and his conversations with Annie Besant, Cousins studied *Vedanta*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, consciously preparing himself to become one of most striking examples of an Irish expatriate in the Orient.

Very soon after his departure from Ireland, Cousins was analysing the reasons for the short life of the Revival:

It was mainly a renaissance of feeling, a new "romantic movement" in literature and the arts. It reached its maximum achievement with extraordinary rapidity, and as rapidly fell to its decline. Its primary impulse was spiritual; but it reduced itself ultimately to the level of a material and self-centred realism, and found its sequel in a hysterical internecine strife in which the expression of the highest idealism are made the shibboleths of physical destruction. (1925, 6-7)

Quite unlike AE, who decided to remain within Ireland until a few years before his death and who wrote tirelessly to heal Ireland's cultural disharmony in books like *The Interpreters* and *The Avatars*, Cousins as a prolific writer in distant India largely disengaged from the fast-growing party political debates about the direction of Ireland's cultural nationalism, although he never failed to acknowledge AE's heroic efforts to spell out to Ireland the ideal of "the National Being". Cousins himself felt utterly at home in India. What made India so attractive to Cousins was its great cultural fusion about which he so eloquently wrote in *The Cultural Unity of India* when he was eager to

point out that all four major world religions had originated in Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. (1922, 122-133) The genius of India, according to Cousins, was the continent's ability to make so many interconnections and interchanges that strength, not weakness, stemmed from its variety of religious symbols. Cousins's project was never aimed at compiling a comparative study of Indian religions but at locating those areas of activity which brought together people of different religious persuasions. In Ireland, Cousins must have remembered admiring the co-operative initiatives of AE and recalled the common ground shared by the people involved in the arts and crafts movement. What most impressed Cousins about India was the consensus that the nation needed to work hard to narrow the gaps at local level between life, art and religion. Cousins wrote his book *Samasdarsana* as a forceful argument for the desirability of a national revival where the impulse towards cultural synthesis should not be infected with the Western disease of eclecticism and fragmentation, but be taken as a signal for the cultivation and harmonisation of the many different human activities which arise from a sure belief in the beneficence of all the gods. Only in the English poet Shelley did Cousins find inspiring examples in the West of such a degree of unswerving idealism, and he published a book on that subject in Madras in 1933: *The Work Promethean: Interpretations and Applications of Shelley's Poetry*.

When Cousins published *A Study in Synthesis*, his ambition was to construct a convincing explanation of "samadarsana" as applied to the manifold fields of religions, philosophies, the arts, sciences, arts and crafts. The dedication was to the memory of his Theosophical patron, Annie Besant (1847-1933): "The individual synthesis of Intuition and Action, Thought and Feeling, Masculine and Feminine, Youth and Age, East and West, Past and Future." The most impassioned section in the book was Chapter 8 "The Educational Synthesis" (1934, 354-479). Cousins had greatly admired Tagore's Bengali school at Santiniketan which he had visited shortly after the school had been turned into an university in the early 1920s : Tagore became a close friend who invited his friend to teach at Santiniketan and recommended Cousins for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934 (Lennon, 353) The long years spent by Cousins as a teacher well prepared him to argue for the way of synthesis in the education of each child in a world threatened by the compartmentalisation and fragmentation of human activities. Cousins drew up a Charter for the Liberation of Youth through Education and suggested the setting forth the ideal model of an University based on the world synthesis of human experience which he imagined might inspire fellow idealists in universities throughout the world who too often felt themselves controlled by political factions whose propaganda pretended that their partial truths amounted to the whole truth to which everybody else, in the name of so called democracy, should surrender and conform. Cousins sent a copy of *A Study in Synthesis* to his old friend AE back in Ireland. By then, AE had completed his last prose work *The Avatars* in which he had imagined the ideal of a *local* community in Ireland of friends devoted to the arts and precariously surviving within a technologically powerful and hostile state. On the other side of the globe, Cousins's successful work for

the arts in India encouraged him to feel at times optimistic about the likelihood of the growth of poly-cultural world awareness emerging as a driving force in the construction of national and international identities. For the full picture of Cousins striving to harmonise the world, one should not forget to acknowledge the activities of his beloved wife Margaret who was politically active in India from her founder membership of the Women's Indian Association in 1917 to her imprisonment in 1933 for addressing a public meeting in Madras in protest against emergency ordinances being incorporated into the ordinary penal code, and beyond. The Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru recognised the importance of the writings and direct action of Margaret Cousins for Indian freedom in 1953, the year before her death after a long and very painful illness. A comprehensive guide to the many activities in India of this truly remarkable Irish woman from County Roscommon can be found in Alan Denson's comprehensive bibliography of the couple. (1967, 23-6, 89-95, 116-126)

In 1940 Cousins published his *Collected Poems*. His republication of his early Irish poetry, including the short verse play "The Sleep of a King" (which had been produced in Dublin by the Fays in 1902) deftly touched on the theme of the relationship between the cosmic and the local in his Irish storytelling. Cousins wrote in the Introduction to *Collected Poems* a review of his early poetry in connection with the inclusion of "The Sleep of the King" in a sequence of other Irish poems: "its true spiritual location...in the middle of poems expressing, in terms of Irish legend, my vision of the Emergence of the Soul in the Universe in "The Going Forth of Dana"; the call of the spiritual life to the Soul in incarnation in "The Sleep of the King"; and the culmination of the Soul's experience in the union of its outer and inner aspects in "The Marriage of Lir and Niav". He went on to introduce a restored full version of an ancient bardic tale in "Etain the Beloved" as "the descent of Etain, the Celtic Psyche, from the inmost world of the spirit, through the midway realm of the Gods, to the wider world of Eire, and her recall to her true spiritual state. I could not resist the temptation to another imaginative pilgrimage around the inevitable cycle of life, particularly as the story, being psychological rather than cosmic, took me nearer to the intimacies of the individual spirit in its fall and rise from allegiance to allegiance." (1940, vii-ix) The closing lines of "Etain the Beloved" describe the reunion of Etain and Mider, which powerfully suggests a Celtic symbol for universal love as the desirable summit of all terrestrial strivings:

.....A hope
 Shoots a faint arrow instantly – no more.
 A blinding light falls from night's glimmering slope.
 Flame-like the twain meet on the rushy floor –
 And vanish.. King and clansmen blindly grope
 Into cool air. Across the sky two swans
 Fly slowly towards the day that palely dawns. (1940, 111)

At such a high altitude of symbolic representation, the Celtic myths seemed starved of a local habitation and a name. By contrast, Cousins in India was much more successful in *locating* his poems in oriental cultures which revered religious symbols and holy rituals and places. There was “A Tibetan Banner”, in which the poet depicted the story of the Tibetan Buddhist lama who brought on foot across the Himalayas a banner from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, and stopped to worship at the Kalimpong Temple in the lower Himalayas.

The quiet lama took his stand,
And turned his prayer-wheel in his hand,
And from his wise and travelled scroll
Spelt out the secret of the soul,
And mapped the Ancient Middle Way
From darkness to the spirit's day. (1940, 309-10)

Parts 2 and 3 of “A Tibetan Banner” were condensed versions of the Buddhist teaching written down in an ancient manuscript which was venerated at Kalimpong Temple.

Cease not to turn the praying drum
And chant *Om mani padme hum*;
For they who seek the spirit's end
Have all creation for their friend. (1940, 315)

Part 4 of the poem vividly evokes the Divine presence in the form of a pilgrim at the Temple of Kalimpong.

They feel that Presence infinite
Whose hand for searching hands has writ
Upon the universal scrool
The mutual language of the soul;
Who makes this temple, Night-and-Day,
A hospice on the pilgrim's way;
Who for the foot-sore sends the showers,
And for sweet incense made the flowers;
Who stands with sanctifying grace
Midmost in life's loud market-place,
And turns our world of sea and land,
A murmuring prayer-wheel in his hand. (1940, 318-319)

Another example of a significant lyric poem about enlightened leadership was “Enthronement” which described the first day of the ten days of the Hindu festival of

Dasara in Mysore in October 1939. Cousins depicted the late Maharajah at prayer and his people being festive.

And while the multitude applaud
The elephant's fastidious foot
And flower-salaam, the horse's nod,
He lifts his right hand to salute
With reverence the God
Incarcerated in the brute. (1940, 464)

In 1948 the India Society of London published a book of essays entitled *The Arts and Crafts of Travancore*, which included five essays by Dr. J. H. Cousins, Art Adviser to the Government of Travancore, Head of Fine Arts at the University of Travancore. The five essays by Cousins were remarkable for their combination of scholarship and enthusiasm: his subjects were: "The Craft of the Metal-Worker", "The Art and Symbolism of Travancore Wood-Carving", "Travancore Ivory Carving", "Dance-Drama and Shadow – Play", and "The Art of Procession". Such a celebration by Cousins of the harmonies of beauty to be discerned in the various forms of Indian arts and crafts showed how fully committed he was to the Indian Cultural Revival around the time of Indian political independence.

Nowadays the wisdom of James Cousins Hindu Celt no longer seems so eccentric in the context of more recent investigators into the meaning and value of myth. Like Joseph Campbell, one of the most popular twentieth-century authorities on mythologies, Cousins became convinced early on that, in spite of the daunting disparity of cultures, myths can become the stepping stones to an understanding of humanity's place in the Universe, as myths echo other myths in a seemingly endless process that ceaselessly crosses and re-crosses geographical, tribal and national frontiers. In a series of conversations with the journalist Bill Moyers given in 1987, shortly before his death, and published in the book entitled *The Power of Myth*, Campbell explained his view of how myths have an universal base in all cultures and are fundamental both to human self-knowledge and human solidarity. Then in 1993, sponsored by the Joseph Campbell Foundation, *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* was published with Roy Will as the general editor: this work documented the many interconnections between world-wide mythological traditions of storytelling in the creation of a world mythography; there is included a chapter "The Celtic World (176-89) which would have certainly attracted the immediate attention of James Cousins who would probably conclude that such advocacy belonged to the lower slopes of the cultural enterprise. As in the case of Campbell, Cousins concluded that myths always needed to be interpreted symbolically for the good of humanity, because when national myths are insularly interpreted, even cherished national myths have a marked tendency to shut out the rest of the world and to develop a debilitating cross-cultural blindness. Again like Claude Levi-Strauss, the

great twentieth century cultural anthropologist who was a great investigator of myth making, Cousins concluded that the study of myth can help to synthesise binary oppositions in human experience such as youth and age, wet and dry seasons, the human and the animal, culture and nature, life and death. But what was most distinctive about Cousins approach to myth was the supreme emphasis on the educational importance of understanding the Arts in Education for the next generation as a pre-requisite in the interpretation and creation of cultures. In his Indian experience, Cousins reached a new pitch of creativity under the patronage of the Hindu Maharajas. That generous Hindu patronage transformed him into a World Advocate for the importance of the Arts in education. There was much respect expressed during his lifetime for the wisdom of his prolific writings, not from Ireland but from across the globe when he was invited to lecture in places from Tokyo to New York. In the context of his conversion to becoming a Hindu Celt, Cousins saw the Hindu Temple itself as a symbol of the harmony of the Cosmos: according to Cousins, the Hindu Temple ceremonials “carried out through the art of symbolical spectacle, anticipate the final withdrawal of the external universe into the being of Bramah” (1952, 185).

The global world still cries out to be harmonised as it did when Cousin was alive. Superficially a harmonisation has come about not through religious enlightenment but through the victory of global capitalism and mass media communication and the movements of workers across national boundaries. Increasingly the language of transcultural debate focuses on diasporas, bordercrossings, self-location, the making of home away from home. The language of diaspora is no longer an exclusive feature of the emigrant Irish across the globe but is increasingly associated with migrant people, often from poor economically poor countries, who are driven to imagine their own distinctive cultural legacy as one sure way of asserting a confident self as a very necessary bulwark against being marginalised in the global economy. Contemporary nation states have become only too aware of the risk of being traversed and subverted by the demanding presence of diasporic exiles who are most often refugees. One of the most challenging recent statements about diaspora has been made by the American Anthropologist, James Clifford: “The diaspora discourse in history currently in the air is about recovering non-Western, or not – only – Western models of cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling with and against nation states, global technologies and markets” (Clifford 244-77). Would not Cousins have seen the new diasporas as a wonderful opportunity for cultural revival, once more in opposition to all those short-sighted politicians with nothing to wave but their obviously bogus “long term plans”?

In his use of the Celtic myth of Cuchulain, “the Irish type of the perfect hero”, Cousins sketched out the sheer scope of his view of myth. At first, there was ‘A Schoolboy Plays Cuchulain, evoking boyish enthusiasm for the story of a national hero: “Soon shall he fling the charging field/Back with his puissant pasteboard shield;/ And soon shall haughty Maeve bend down,”/A vassal to his tinsel crown’ (1940, 57-9) – the poem

first appeared in *St. Enda's School Magazine*, edited by P.H. Pearse (Christmas 1909). Next there was the revelation of the Hindu dimensions: Cuchulain as Atman, a form of the Divine Spark, the Will; Laeg, Cuchulain's charioteer, as Khrisna, a form of Intuition bearing Will into action; Lugaidh, Cuchulain's fellow-warrior, as Monas of Active Mind shaping external events. (1912, 55-6). Finally there was the juxtaposition in the late play *The Hound of Ullah* of Cuchulainn, hero of the Red Branch Knights story and the remergence in the 'City of Dreams (Dublin in 1911) where Cuchulain as Dumb Dog, Laeg as Horsey and Lughaidh as Double shuffle join in with gossiping Dubliners who regard the trio as crazy. Cousins did not live to develop further his view of the Universe in life's ascending and descending grooves.

Apart from highlighting the life force of myth, Cousins also underlined the need for religious syncretism in a genuinely revived culture. In his play *The King's Wife* (1919), he prefaced the play by asserting that he was dramatising the three types of religious experience: the spiritual adventure and breadth of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the simple Hindu devotion of Queen Mira and the inquisitorial fanaticism Mira's husband, King Kumbha. In the poetic play itself, the disguised Akbar assumes an Indian identity which integrates both the Muslim and Hindu traditions, an achievement which mirrors the sixteenth century emperor's great ambition to fashion a new syncretistic religion for all India; yet Akbar's wisdom cannot prevent the Rahput King from tragically misunderstanding his beautiful wife when he discovers the jewelled necklace which Akbar had presented her in token of his appreciation of her traditional singing in the garden which had led him to "the vision of the Feet of God" (1919, 28). Under the shadow of her husband's sentence of death, Mira flees as a beggar and later, in desperation, drown herself in a flooded river, an action which is described in the play a "great sorrow that has more sweetness in vina-strings or dances, or the food that rich men scatter at a festival." (1919, 94) In Indian history Mirabai was revered as a renowned poetess and saint of the fifteenth century. Cousins's version of Mira's death pointed to the fact that she represented the spirit of an Indian nation divided by two kings who represented mutually exclusive views of life and history. The strong suggestion in the play's conclusion was that Mira's martyrdom will eventually help to undermine the unjust King. There was a strong echo of Ireland in the image of Mira as a "queen with the walk of a beggar, the opposite of Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan, an old woman with the walk of a Queen" (Dumbleton 66).

Cousins's yearning for a syncretism in the arts can be found expressed in a late Cousins poem which evokes a very special place in Travancore in South India – the poem is entitled "Windows". The place was the deserted but still magnificent Padmanabhapuram Palace, some thirty miles south from Trivandrum – even though the palace had been abandoned in 1750 as Travancore's capital, the building was still potent in the local Indian memory for its many former treasures of architecture, sculpture, wood-carving, mural paintings and ornamental windows awaiting rediscovery. Cousins was commissioned to write a guide book to the Palace; but he also wrote a memorable poem:

Grieve not for bright eyes closed
 On skill and vision grown
 So Godlike it imposed
 Godhood on wooden stone;
 And, under spirit stress,
 Through wielded brush and blade,
 To calling Loveliness
 Lovely rejoinder made...
 Grieve not for what they are,
 But what they might have been –
 Windows wherethrough a star
 Should scan the earthly scene;
 Mirrors that, though they break,
 Should, holding memory well,
 Visible beauty take
 To the invisible. (1940, 452-4)

During a period of residence in the vicinity of the foothills of the Himalayas, the Hindu Celt Cousins showed in a syncretist sonnet how as a poet he could still hold together in synthesis religious worship in Irish and Indian contexts across a gap of thirty years, as a vision of peace for an Ireland and India caught up in the history of internecine feuding:

Not now, as once through swift salt-savoured rain,
 He watches men and women slowly pass
 With “God and Mary to you” to early mass
 By fuchsia hedges in Kerry lane.
 Here, by the azure-eyed convulvulus
 He listens to loud ceremonial chants
 Surging around precipitous elephants
 When men in season grow God-amorous.
 By other paths on the same quest he goes;
 Not to the rainy peak that Patrick trod;
 But hearing in strange speech the name of God
 Along the selvage of Himalayan snows,
 Where, in the chaste colossal quietude,
 Fades from the heart and brain the human feud.

Ireland 1909, India 1939 (1940, 468)

The life work of James Cousins was concerned with the growth of the individual’s deepening understanding of the universal cycles of birth and rebirth which are then

expressed as forms of artistic and religious revival in very different communities. Often the human impulse towards such revival involves a strong political dimension as part of the individual desire to render rebirth possible when the reformers are faced with the threat of misunderstanding and injustice, as was in the case of Ireland when the Revival began to take root and flower sporadically and briefly, towards the end of the nineteenth century – at a time when many Irish idealists searched for a national being different from the ways of English culture. The central conviction at the heart of Cousins's writing was that without some transcending spiritual impulse, a concentration on state-building in the aftermath of a republican revolution may well fail to ignite deeper levels of harmony, as happened during the post-revolutionary period when the impulse for Irish Revival faded and the constraints of the Irish Free State grew. Throughout his long life, Cousins crossed many borders and transcended many border-crossings. Even the outline of this pilgrim's progress conveys a message of hope for all travellers who seek to move in diverse ways across the world from the starting point of a love of one's own country – its myths and its places – before moving onto the challenging tasks of reforming societies so that a cultural richness of diverse yet complimentary traditions can become into being. As a teacher and writer in India for about forty years, James Cousins studied and promoted his project for cultural harmony in diversity, which he called SYNTHESIS, which is the most relevant English translation word for *samasdarsana*. Today he ranks as a great Hindu teacher who came out of Ireland but who remains waiting, now almost fifty years after his death, for a deserved recognition in the country of his birth, to add to a continuing good reception in his adopted country of India for the man who 'from golden stuff and silver thread/ Through Celtic vision wrought/Vedantic thought.' (1946, 37).

Note

- * An earlier version of this essay was presented as a paper "James Cousins Hindu Celt" at the IASIL Conference in Bath Spa, England in 2000.

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The Irish in South America



O'Malley's Widow

Dramatic Comedy in Three Acts

by

Juan José Delaney

Plot Summary

The story takes place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Argentina when people from different cultures and origins immigrated to the country. The plot revolves around an Irish family living on a sheep farm. The family group is composed of the mother (the above mentioned widow) and her three children (two boys and a girl). The mother has a combative relationship with the children because of her strict Victorian principles and her 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, wanting to live on his own 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.

This boy does not speak throughout the play, with the exception of the monologue that takes place in the second act. He just listens to music and talks to the sheep, which he takes to pasture most of the day. When he communicates with the sheep he believes that his father is calling him as he used to when he was small: Be- bee- ben!

The story develops into the family's break up depicting the hypocrisy of the widow who continuously tries to justify her behaviour and enjoys flattery during the conversations and confessions with the priest. The story also describes how difficult it was for many Irish to become part of a completely different culture and learn the language.

In the end, the eldest son goes to Buenos Aires from where he plans to travel to Lois, in Ireland where his grandparents were from and which he had never visited but had often dreamt of. The daughter flees with her Jewish fiancé and the widow marries the priest who has renounced his priesthood. The story ends with the image of the youngest son listening to the music of the tango "El dientudo" being played on the phonograph and which is mysteriously played every time he appears to be threatened by reality. The play also starts with this music of the tango "El dientudo".

Characters

Mrs. Peg, widow of O'Malley, is in her forties. She is attractive and has a strong personality.

Father Lorenzo, who is in his fifties, is a Spanish Catholic priest.

Mrs. O'Malley's children: **Charlie** is twenty-one years old, **Brenda** is nineteen years old and Ben, who is retarded, is ten years old.

With the exception of the priest and the child, all the rest of the characters are dressed as farmers.

TIME

Winter and spring of 1926.

PLACE

A farm in Capitán Sarmiento, County of Carmen de Areco, flat countryside in the province of Buenos Aires.

La Viuda de O'Malley

Comedia Damática en Tres Actos

por

Juan José Delaney

Síntesis argumental

La historia transcurre en el contexto del proceso inmigratorio que tuvo lugar en la Argentina durante el siglo XIX y principios del XX, por el cual se incorporaron al país colectividades de los más diversos orígenes. La acción se desarrolla en una casa de campo de una familia de origen irlandés dedicada a la cría de ovejas. El grupo está conformado por la madre (la viuda del título), y sus tres jóvenes hijos (dos varones y una mujer), con quienes mantiene una relación conflictiva debido a su estricta moral victoriana y a su carácter dominante. Hay también un sacerdote católico, español, que, como director espiritual, los visita regularmente.

La viuda combate las aspiraciones de su hijo mayor de emanciparse y el noviazgo de su hija con un muchacho judío; por otra parte, siente como una maldición de la vida la deficiencia mental de su hijo menor. A excepción del monólogo del segundo acto, este chico –Ben– no habla, pero escucha música y se dice que dialoga con las ovejas que pastorea durante gran parte del día; en realidad él siente que, tras los balidos está la voz de su padre muerto que lo llama como cuando, siendo él muy niño, estaba con él: ¡Be- bee- ben!

La pieza da cuenta de la disolución familiar, de la hipocresía de la viuda que busca justificativos y halagos en las confesiones y conversaciones que mantiene con el sacerdote, y de la difícil integración de muchos irlandeses a un país de lengua y cultura remotas para ellos.

La crisis se resuelve con la partida del hijo rumbo a la ciudad de Buenos Aires, desde donde procurará viajar a Lois, Irlanda, país de sus abuelos, que no conoce pero que ha idealizado, la fuga de la muchacha con su novio hebreo, el casamiento de la viuda con el sacerdote que ha dejado los hábitos, y la imagen del hijo menor escuchando del fonógrafo el disco al que misteriosamente suele recurrir cuando la realidad parece amenazarlo: “El dientudo”, tango con el que empieza la obra.

PERSONAJES

Mrs Peg, viuda de O'Malley. Ha pasado los cuarenta años de edad. Es atractiva y de gran carácter.

Padre Lorenzo, sacerdote católico de origen español. Cincuentón.

Charlie, 21 años

Brenda, 19 años

Hijos de Peg O'Malley

Ben, deficiente mental, 10 años

Con excepción del cura y del niño, cuya indumentaria se indica, los demás visten ropa de campo.

ÉPOCA

Invierno y primavera de 1926.

LUGAR

Casa en medio de la llanura, en Capitán Sarmiento, partido de Carmen de Areco (campaña bonaerense).

PRIMER ACTO

Escena I

Amplia cocina-comedor de una típica casa de campo, digna pero no suntuosa. El piso es de ladrillos, la cocina a leña y las paredes casi desnudas: apenas un trébol, una cruz y a la derecha, en cuyo ángulo hay un fonógrafo con una enorme bocina, el retrato de un hombre vestido con moño y chambergo: es el difunto señor O'Malley. Junto al aparato, un perchero de pie. Al foro, a la izquierda hay una puerta y, enseguida, en el medio, una ventana, con cortinas verdes, que da al campo; ahí hay una mesa larga y cuatro sillas: una en cada extremo y las otras dos mirando a la audiencia. Sobre el lado izquierdo, la pileta, la cocina y la mesada sobre la cual hay una alta olla en la que Mrs O'Malley cocinará el estofado para el almuerzo; al foro, a la izquierda de la puerta, la alacena; en el mismo sector, en el proscenio, una silla-hamaca. Del techo cuelga un farol a gas.

Cuando se levanta el telón, el fonógrafo está tocando "El dientudo" y Ben, junto al aparato, parado sobre un banquito, observa cómo gira el disco, pero al repetirse el tema toma la escoba con la que se supone estaba limpiando el ambiente y empieza a bailar; el niño usa pantalones cortos sostenidos por tiradores; de su rostro, muy pálido y salpicado de pecas, se destaca la mirada extraviada. (Ben no hablará en todo el acto pero seguirá atentamente cada una de las acciones y parlamentos). Esta escena dura lo que la pieza. Poco antes de terminar, hace su aparición Peg quien observa severamente

a su hijo, aunque recién hablará cuando la música haya concluido. Su castellano es muy defectuoso y constantemente interpola palabras en inglés y aun en gaélico.

Escena II

*(Entra Peg, al tiempo que se escuchan los últimos compases.
Ben tira la escoba, desconecta el fonógrafo y escapa)*

PEG

¡Muy bien! ¡Bravou! ¡Todos trabajandou, señorito bailando tangous, y ovejas tirando soretos por todo el galería...! *(Pausa)*. Saben que hoy venir padre Lorenza, que es día de confesión mensual y que todo debe estar en perfectou orden. Problema, yo siempre diga, es que toman vida a lo chacota... No saben qué ser sufrimientou y dolor... Peg sí sabe. *(Pausa)*. ¡Pobre Peg O'Malley! *(Se dirige al fonógrafo, levanta la placa y trata de leer)*. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! ¡Verdaderamente es un tangou! Músico de salvajes sudamericanas y mujeres de vivir incorrectou, que cuando se baila lleva a roces y tocamientos pecaminosas. Esto exige una taza de té. Urgently! *(Se dirige al anafe, toma la pava, la llena de agua, la deja sobre la hornalla, enciende el fuego y va a la mesa, se sienta en una de las sillas que enfrentan al público y retoma la palabra)*. Ahora debe preparar para confesión, ordenar pecadous. Pero Peg O'Malley casi no tiene pecadous, Peg es como mujer fuerte de Biblia. Aunque, a ver... deje pensar... algún mala palabra... malos pensamen... tos... aunque Peg siempre lucha contra eso... peleas con los chicos... pero es para bien de esos nippers... y después... pero eso yo no puede confesar... ¡pero tiene que confesar! Mejor dejar último... Es difícil con este cura gallegou. Lástima que Father Pious enfermó... ¡Pobre Father Pious!... Tan solo, compartiendo esta historia nuestra, en país tan extraño... ¿Cómo cayó nosotros acá? Daddy a veces contaba viaje en vapour, después de Gran Hambruno, problema de la papa... Gente aglutinado en puerto irlandés de Cork, buscando un lugar en el mundou... ¡Un lugar en el mundou! Y el largou viaje compartido con hombres, mujeres y niñas dispuestas a todou: a cambiar cultura, lengua y ¡hasta religión! *(Se persigna)*. Dad sabía de compatriotas protestantos que acomodaron a religión de este país... Como en la vida, mucha gente en el vapor no saber verdaderamente dónde va. Personas equivocadas creer estar yendo a New York y terminó atrapadas en Buenos Aires. *(Advierte que la pava está hirviendo, corre la cortina y espía)* ¡Hay tiempo para taza de té! ¡Tan reconfortante! *(Se dirige a la alacena de donde toma una taza, la que llena con té y leche)*. ¡Es gran suerte que padre Lorenza no entiende bien mi castellana! *(Reflexiona)*. Aunque yo preferir sordera de Father Pious... *(ríe)*. Inmediatamente Dad lanzó al campo para criar ovejas, primerou con patrón, después como pequeño propietaria. A Mammie conoció en conventillou de capital, donde iba con paisanos en busca de paisana ya que mandato era: Have nothing to do with the natives! Es lo que yo ahora repite a chicos míos: no meter con nativos, siempre esconden cuchillo y

apenas pueden, ¡clavan puñal! Pero buena de Peg O'Malley no tener gran suerte: hija suya meter con muchachou judía y amenazar con matrimoniou. ¡Amenazar con matriomoniou! Yo tiene mucha por la vergüenza y no poder contar esto a nadie. Tampoco a Lorna O'Neill, amiga de infancia, compañera en internado llamado Santa Frígida y ahora vecina mío aquí en Capitán Sarmientou. Ni pensar en publicar compromisou en "The Southern Cross", semanaria de los Irish en este país del sur. Yo siempre diga a hica Brenda: ese muchacha Daniel Rossler valer menos que cuarto kilo de papas. Pero no hay casa, no entiende, no entiende, no entiende. Charlie ser poco menos rebelde. Pero él quiere tomar buque. Estos chicos desconocer que felicidad está acá, conmigou, que matrimonio no es oportuna y que como decir amiga mía Lorna, soltera y virgen en el mundou, sex is the durtiest porquería en el universa. Y Ben, pobrecito Ben, es cruz que Señor mandó. Sin razón mental, no comprender pitou de nada. Yo sabe que con Ben pagar pecados de ancestros. Tarea de Ben es limpiar cocina, y cuidar ovejas: ¡todo hace mal! Cocina, ya ve. Y pasa el día hablando con ovejitas. Espero Dios acuerde de él. Musha! *(Advierte que la escoba está tirada. La recoge y la sitúa detrás de la puerta.)* ¡Aquí! Para que vayan visitas indeseosos. *(Se oye el estampido de un automóvil que estaciona y que es recibido por ladridos).*

Escena III

(Golpes en la puerta. Peg lleva la taza a la pileta, se arregla y, solemnemente, abre. Entra el padre Lorenzo. Es alto y un tanto obeso. Usa anteojos circulares, bonete y viste capa y sotana negras. Fuma en pipa, es alegre y se expresa con un fuerte acento español. Trae un maletín).

PEG

¡Bienvenidou, padre Lorenza!

PADRE LORENZO

(Al tiempo que se quita la capa y el bonete, los que entrega a Peg quien presurosa los cuelga en el perchero)

¡Salud, hija! ¿Cómo andan las cosas por aquí?

PEG

Luchandou con estos animales... ¿Toma té?

PADRE LORENZO

No, no, gracias, mujer. Vamos a las cosas. *(Abre el valijín y extrae la estola, al tiempo que se dirige al sillón-hamaca, dispuesto a escuchar la confesión de Peg. Simultáneamente ella acerca una silla junto al sillón, se persigna y toma asiento, las manos entrelazadas, en actitud pía).*

PEG

Pésame, Dios mío y yo arrepiente de haber ofendidou... *(las luces se desvanecen y la iluminación se concentra en la escena de la confesión).*

PADRE LORENZO

¿Cuándo fue la última vez que te confesaste, hija?

PEG

Hace un mes con Father Pious, ahora enfermo...

PADRE LORENZO

¿Y qué faltas has cometido desde entonces?

PEG

Poquito faltas. No fue a misa un domingo, peleó con chicos, tuvo un mal pensamientou... y... *(se calla)*

PADRE LORENZO

¿Nada más?

PEG

No... sí... *(aparte)* Jesus! ...pero Peg tiene un poco de vergüenza...

PADRE LORENZO

Habla, hija. Dios es misericordioso.

PEG

Fornicar.

PADRE LORENZO

(Escandalizado)

¿Cómo? ¿Has fornicado?

PEG

Sí padre, muchas veces.

PADRE LORENZO

¿Muchas veces? Pero, ¿cuándo enviudaste?

PEG

Hace cuatro años.

PADRE LORENZO

Bueno, pues, cuéntame. ¿Tus hijos no se han percatado?

PEG

Perca... What, che?

PADRE LORENZO

Digo, si no se han dado cuenta...

PEG

Creer que no. Además, hacer solo de noche. Yo sabe que es pecado muy grave pero muchas veces no puede contener...

PADRE LORENZO

(Con picardía)

Bueno, dime, ¿quién es el otro concupiscente?

PEG

El otro... What, che?

PADRE LORENZO

Quiero decir... con quién pecas, con quién fornicas de esa manera tan consecuente y regular...

PEG

Pero... ¿qué vos dice? ¡Yo fornicar sola! Es algo que sale solo...

PADRE LORENZO

Pero Mrs O'Malley, ¿te estás burlando de mí?

PEG

Yo nunca burla de Ministros de Dios. Yo habla serio.

PADRE LORENZO

Pues entonces explícate, pues no entiendo ni jota. Confiesas que fornicas y me quieres hacer creer que lo haces sola...

PEG

¡Clarou!

PADRE LORENZO

(Furioso)

¿No querrás decir que te masturbas, hija de Satanás?

PEG

Mas... What, che?

PADRE LORENZO

Olvídalo. Pero, a ver, dime: ¿qué entiendes por fornicar?

PEG

Pues es cuando uno arroja vientos con olores putrefactos por cierto lugar del cuerpo humano...

PADRE LORENZO

¿Qué lugar?

PEG

(Tímidamente)

Parte de atrás... *(Se tapa la cara)* ¡Qué escándalo! ¡Qué vergüenza!

PADRE LORENZO

Pero mujer, ¿quién te dijo que eso es fornicar...?

PEG

Lorna, amiga íntimo que vos conoce...

PADRE LORENZO

Pues ¡fornicar es lo que ella quisiera! ¡Lo que tú haces es pedorrear! ¡Y eso no es pecado, hija de Dios! Aunque a propósito de esto, tal vez debas volver a casarte, encontrar a otro marido que te encarrile.

PEG

(Excitada)

¿Fornicar no es pecado? ¿Segura? Hurrah! Hurrah! *(Se pone de pie y se dirige al aparador)*. ¡Festear! ¡Festear!

PADRE LORENZO

(Conteniéndola)

Pero aguarda un instante que aún no te he absuelto de tus otras faltas. ¿Qué más, hija mía, qué más?

PEG

Yo creo que dijo todo...

PADRE LORENZO

Pero, ¿es verdad que nunca has sentido deseos o... digamos... alguna inclinación por el abominable pecado de la lujuria...?

PEG

¿Lujuria? ¿Qué lujos puede haber en pobre casa de campo?

PADRE LORENZO

(Ante una indicación suya, Peg se arrodilla). Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritu Sancto...

PEG

Amen. Ahora sí, a festejar con eso que yo tiene escondido y que levanta espíritu. (*Saca del aparador una botella de whiskey*).

PADRE LORENZO

Oh no, eso guárdalo para tus paisanos del Monasterio San Pablo. Yo no bebo. Pero me fumaré una pipa antes de irme. (*Extrae tabaco y empieza a preparar la fumata*). Quisiera saludar a tus chicos, especialmente al bueno de Ben, el más feliz de todos.

PEG

(*Con la botella en la mano y levemente ofendida*).

Father Pious jamás rechazar. El decir que Dios puso en irlandeses gusto por chupi para que no fueran perfectos...

PADRE LORENZO

¿Qué sabes del querido padre Pío?

PEG

Father Pious?

PADRE LORENZO

Sí, sí, ése. Sabes que no hablo Inglés.

PEG

No muchou: está enfermou, en el conventou. Mucho puchou. Espero que cuiden como él merecer.

PADRE LORENZO

¡Dios te oiga! Aunque no hay mucho que esperar. ¿Sabes lo que escribió Voltaire de los religiosos?

PEG

What?

PADRE LORENZO

Se juntan sin conocerse, viven sin amarse y mueren sin llorarse...

PEG

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! ¿Eso escribir de Father Pious?

PADRE LORENZO

¡Pero no, mujer! ¡Voltaire murió en el siglo XVIII! Lo dijo de los religiosos en general. Pero, ahora dime: ¿a qué hora llegan tus chicos? Tengo prisa.

PEG

Prontou. Yo hace marchar a ritmou y es hora de almuerzou. Calentar dumplings de anoche ya mismou... ¿No quiere comer con nosotrous? (*El padre Lorenzo no contesta pero asoma la nariz por la alta cacerola*).

PADRE LORENZO

¿Qué has cocinado, Mrs O'Malley?

PEG

(*Al tiempo que pone la olla sobre el fuego, toma la pava y vierte agua sobre el estofado*).
Dumplings.

PADRE LORENZO

¿Dumplings? Pero, por Dios, hija de Belcebú, ¿qué es eso?

PEG

Very rico, indeed. Mire: carne de corderito...

PADRE LORENZO

(*Interrumpiendo*) ¡Cordero! ¡Cordero inmaculado! ¿Sabes, Mrs O'Malley, que el cordero es el símbolo de la pureza, de la inocencia y de la mansedumbre? Agnus Dei! ¡Cordero de Dios! ¡Ah! Recuerdo mi viejo latín: "Mors, ego sum mortis. Vocor Agnus sum Leo fortis": "Yo soy la muerte de la muerte. Me llaman cordero, soy un león fuerte". ¿Qué me dices, Mrs O'Malley?

PEG

No entiende, che... Ni tampoco entender lo que dicen ustedes en misa. (*Continúa hablando, al tiempo que revuelve el contenido de la cacerola*). Junto con carne van los dumplings que son como pelotos hechos de harina...

PADRE LORENZO

Harina... El trigo espermático... ¡Oh, dulce misterio de la vida!

PEG

...un pizco de sal...

PADRE LORENZO

La sal que aviva el sabor... sabor... sabiduría... Supongo que conocerás las Escrituras y recordarás, entonces, el episodio de Lot: la mujer que miró hacia atrás y quedó convertida en estatua de sal. (*Con picardía*). ¡Ah, Mrs O'Malley! No mires hacia el pasado si no quieres que te ocurra lo de la tonta de Lot.

PEG

...un poco de leche...

PADRE LORENZO

La que nutre y da vida... ¿Sabías que en el Cantar de los Cantares la leche representa los encantos del amor entre el esposo y la esposa? ¡Oh, Mrs O'Malley! ¿Has tenido oportunidad de reflexionar sobre las cosas que metiste dentro de esa bendita cacerola?

PEG

(Sin prestar atención). Y abundante papa, que tanto significa para nosotros... Hmm, ¡qué ricou olor a ajou!

PADRE LORENZO

(Transición)

No hay caso, Mrs O'Malley: somos lo que comemos.

PEG

(Alzando la botella de whiskey)

¡Y lo que chupamos!

PADRE LORENZO

Es cierto, hija. "In vino, veritas", decían los antiguos.

PEG

Pero vos, ¿cuántos idiomas habla?

PADRE LORENZO

En realidad tendría que haber nacido mudo, pero, ¡bah!, no importa... Pero, en fin, hoy no podré quedarme a compartir tu...

PEG

Irish stew... *(Deja la botella, tapa la olla y presta atención a lo que dice el cura)*.

PADRE LORENZO

¡Eso! Pero otra vez será. Debo continuar con mi apostolado. Dios me encomendó una misión sublime y solitaria.

PEG

¿Solitariou?

PADRE LORENZO

La nuestra es una vocación de solitarios.

PEG

¿Qué significar "vacación"?

PADRE LORENZO

Vocación es una palabra que deriva del latín, “vocare”: “llamar”.

PEG

Oh, oh... ¿Y quién llamó a vos?

PADRE LORENZO

Mrs O’Malley, ¿hablas en serio o procuras burlarte de mí?

PEG

Yo ya dijo: nunca burla de Ministros de Dios...

PADRE LORENZO

Pues bien... es un llamado que proviene del más allá...

PEG

¡Ahá! Y, ¿De dónde? Daddy siempre decía que nosotros nacer solos y morir también solos...

PADRE LORENZO

Pero no hay ninguna obligación de transitar el camino también solos... (al menos eso sugiere la Biblia)...

PEG

¿Qué vos dice?

PADRE LORENZO

Nada, hija de Dios, nada... ¿Qué más pensaba tu padre?

PEG

Oh, papa decir muchas cosas. Uno muy comicou yo no puede repetir...

PADRE LORENZO

¡Anímate, hija de Dios! (*Sonriendo*) Yo sabré absolverte...

PEG

Daddy decía: “Remember we are all made of shit.”

PADRE LORENZO

Ahí sí que me cagaste. (*Se excusa, tapándose la boca*). La única palabra que reconozco es “shit” que creo que significa “mierda”. (Dicho sea de paso: tienes una especie de obsesión por lo fecal...).

PEG

Yo avisar que era frase peligroso...

PADRE LORENZO

Pues ahora ayúdame a traducirla.

PEG

(Se toca la cabeza con un dedo)

Remember...

PADRE LORENZO

(Tratando de traducir)

Re- recuerda...

PEG

(En actitud docente y gesticulando)

We are all...

PADRE LORENZO

Que, que, to- todos... estamos...

PEG

Made of...

PADRE LORENZO

Hechos de, de...

PEG

Shit! *(Se tapa la boca)*

PADRE LORENZO

¡Mierda! *(Estalla en una carcajada)*. ¿No te dije? Eres tan graciosa, Mrs O'Malley. Cuéntame algo más de tu padre...

PEG

Él era mucho cómicou. Tenía idea que vida ser comedia y nada es seriamente. Recuerdou muchou sus bromos... Siempre contar que declaraciones de amour en Irlanda no consistir en decir a prometida” ¿Quiere casar conmigou?” sino “¿Vos gustaría ser enterrada en panteón de mi familia?”. *(Ríe)*. También repetir historia de mujer a quien doctor preguntar: “Tiene su maridou habitou de beber por exceso cuando estar solo?”. Y ella contestar: “No sabo porque nunca estoy con él cuando está solo!”. *(Ríe)*.

PADRE LORENZO

(A las carcajadas)

(Aparte) ¡Hija de Belcebú! *(Dirigiéndose a ella)* ¡Qué cómica eres, Mrs O'Malley! ¡Cómo me haces reír! ¡Y cómo se nota que eres mujer! Pero no me desagrada estar contigo...

Escena IV

(Se oye el alboroto de los perros y luego voces juveniles: son los hijos de Mrs O'Malley que vuelven de sus tareas para almorzar. Aparecen muy sencillamente vestidos, acorde con sus trabajos de campo. Sin golpear, irrumpen en la cocina y no disimulan la alegría de encontrar al padre Lorenzo. Cada uno de ellos se acerca y lo besa. Ben es el último. Es evidente que el religioso tiene una predilección especial por él. Luego de saludarlo, Ben permanece a su lado, al tiempo que hurga en su bolsillo. Está por darle algo).

PADRE LORENZO

No me digas que tienes un regalito para tu amigo... *(Ben no responde pero finalmente extrae algo de su bolsillo y se lo entrega al sacerdote quien toma extrañado el objeto).* ¿Un hueso? Un hueso... ¿Dónde has encontrado esto? *(Ben no contesta).* ¡Gracias, mi querido Ben! *(Lo abraza).* También yo he traído algo para ti. *(Saca del bolsillo interno de la sotana una cadena).* Es una medalla de San Patricio... *(Señalando el retrato)* Tu padre se llamaba Patricio... *(Ben recibe la cadena, la muestra orgulloso a sus hermanos y corre a sentarse a la mesa, en una de las dos sillas que dan a la audiencia).*

PEG

(A los recién llegados)

¿Por qué tardar tantou en venir?

CHARLIE

Míster Doyle logró que en el Hospital del pueblo le entregaran la pierna que hace dos días le amputaron a su hijo Willie, después del accidente con la cuchilla del arado. Willie quiso enterrarla en su campo. Nosotros ayudamos con la excavación y ahí Ben encontró su hueso. No sé qué tiene Willie en la cabeza pero con muletas se llegó hasta el lugar del entierro con una lápida de madera bajo el brazo.

BRENDA

Él mismo escribió un epitafio: "Aquí yace la pierna de Willie Doyle. En cualquier momento, el resto".

PADRE LORENZO

Esto es mucho para mí. *(Guarda la pipa).* ¡Que Dios los bendiga a todos, especialmente a ese extraño vecino de ustedes llamado Willie Doyle! *(Se pone la capa y el bonete).*

Cuando el padre Pío se recupere o alguno de los otros pasionistas vuelva de misionar, no dejen de ir a misa. Y no olviden que es conveniente confesarse de vez en cuando... *(Mrs O'Malley se inclina ante el padre Lorenzo y éste la bendice. Al traspasar la puerta, saluda por última vez).*

PEG, BRENDA, CHARLIE y BEN

Slán agat!

PADRE LORENZO

¿Eh?

PEG

Slán agat! Good bye!

BRENDA Y CHARLIE

Queremos decir: ¡Adiós!

PADRE LORENZO

Ah, claro. ¡Adiós!

Escena V

(Todos menos el padre Lorenzo. Brenda y Charlie ponen la mesa, Mrs O'Malley revuelve el estofado y Ben juega con la cadenita, mientras espera que le sirvan. Cuando los cuatro están en la mesa y hacen un minuto de silenciosa oración, Peg empieza a hablar, al tiempo que los demás comen).

PEG

Ese muchachou Willie, el del pierna, era que iba a casar...?

CHARLIE

(De mal modo)

¡Sí, todos se van a casar! ¡Todos se van a casar! Y mientras tanto nosotros, acá... ¡Envejeciendo!

PEG

No decir así, mal muchachou. Pense en Jesus, que era perfectou y quedó junto con Mammie hasta treinta y tres años...

CHARLIE

La verdad es que Jesús tendría que haber sido irlandés: treinta y tres años, soltero y bajo la tutela de la madre... Pero el caso es que yo no soy Jesús...

BRENDA

Pero es probable que Mammie siente que se puede comparar con la Virgen María...

PEG

Vos no burla de mí. Puertas del infierno están abiertas para usted... para usted y ese concu... concuspis.... buenou, no sale palabra que recién enseñó padre Lorenza, pero vos entiende qué yo dice...

BRENDA

¡Daniel y yo nos vamos a casar antes de fin de año!

PEG

¡Qué escándalou! (*Se pone de pie y se dirige al prosenio*) Ya no puede comer. ¡Estos animales pensar que con casar soluciona toda! Pero empieza a gravar sufrimientou y dolour. Musha! (*Transición*). ¿Por qué no haber mandadou a esta hica mía al colegio de monjas, pupilo?

CHARLIE

(*Burlándose*)

Míster Coughlan, ese gran preceptor que no sólo nos enseñó a leer y a escribir sino que también dispuso las cosas para que aprendiéramos el idioma de este país, nos contó que no sé qué escritor irlandés le tenía terror a los perros y a las monjas...

BRENDA

...y que prefería a las monjas porque solamente muerden en casos extraordinarios...

PEG

¡Basta de impertinente! Cuando Mammie esté bajo tierra... se van a acordar de palabras más... no ser palabras más verdaderamente.... pero Mamma de Lorna solía repetirle que sexo es peor porquería de mundou...

CHARLIE

(*Sarcástico*)

Esa opinión no le impidió tener nueve hijos...

PEG

Basta, Charlie, porque yo no va dar carta que llegó hoy para vos...

CHARLIE

(*Entusiasmado y cambiando de actitud*)

¿Qué? ¿Una carta? ¿Llegó una carta para mí? ¿De Buenos Aires?

PEG

(Dueña de la situación)

Don't get excited, dear. Don't get excited! *(Extrae del bolsillo del delantal una carta y con ella provoca a Charlie).*

CHARLIE

(Arrebatando la carta)

Como para no excitarme... ¡Esta carta es mía! *(La examina)* ¿Qué? ¿Abierta?

PEG

Esta ser casa mía y yo manda y controla toudo.

CHARLIE

*(Se desentiende de la situación para concentrarse en el texto.
Al terminar de leer, exclama entusiasmado)*

Lo logré. ¡Sí, lo logré! ¡Me voy a trabajar a Buenos Aires! Hoy, 27 de julio de 1926, enterensé que Cyril Clancy me acepta como aprendiz en su imprenta de la Capital Federal, calle Medrano 107. Trabajaré para "The Southern Cross", juntaré dinero para irme, ¡para irme de este país de tristes!

PEG

¿Dónde ir vos?

CHARLIE

En primer lugar me voy a ir de esta casa donde mandan la hipocresía, la mentira y la locura... Y en la que no se respeta la intimidad de la gente. Después... trabajaré en Buenos Aires para ganar dinero y volverme a Irlanda...

PEG

¿Volver a Irlanda? Si vos nunca estuvo en Ireland. ¡Nunca salió de Carmen de Areca!

(Brenda y Ben se han levantado de la mesa, asombrados del diálogo y del encendido discurso de un Charlie desconocido. Brenda apoya su brazo sobre el hombro del pequeño. Peg oscila entre el asombro y la indignación).

CHARLIE

Mi cuerpo no, pero mi alma sí. Estuve muchas veces en Dublín y también en el puerto de Cork... en Lois, la tierra de los abuelos... Pero si esa Irlanda ya no existe, yo la reinventaré. *(Se ha agitado y ahora trata de tranquilizarse. Suspira).*

PEG

(Aparte)

Completamente locou. *(Corre a buscar la botella de whiskey y se sirve una medida, operación que repite sucesivamente).* Además felicidad y desdicho no tienen patria. Pero mande mudar y deje de mastur... mastur... ¡deje de joder!

CHARLIE

(Dirigiéndose a Ben)

Vamos, Ben. A trabajar. *(Salen al campo).*

Escena VI

(Mrs O'Malley y Brenda)

PEG

I'm nearly out of my mind! ¡Qué desorden! They'll set me mad! ¡Qué desorden en esta casa!

BRENDA

Osté no está loca ni nadie va a volver loca. Además aquí no hay ningún desorden, mammie...

PEG

¿Qué vos dice?

BRENDA

Que en esta casa no hay ningún desorden.

PEG

¡Bah! Vos no saber qué es lucho, sufrimiento y dolor.

BRENDA

(Dirigiéndose a su madre, aunque de un modo impersonal).

Para enseñarnos el sentido de ciertas cosas, Mr Coughlan...

PEG

¿Quién?

BRENDA

Mr Coughlan, el preceptor. El maestro.

PEG

¿Qué dice ese borracha perdida?

BRENDA

Para explicar qué hay debajo de lo que no vemos, nos dijo que nuestros muertos no están muertos...

PEG

(Indignada)

¡Completamente locou! ¿Ahora también toma kerosén?

BRENDA

Mr Coughlan está muy lejos de la locura...

PEG

¿Cómo? Si vos una vez dijo a mí que Mr Coughlan trató de enseñar hablar inglés a su caballo...

BRENDA

¡Era un truco! ¡Un truco de ventri... ventri...! Bueno: quería hacernos reír.

PEG

¡No importar! Mr Coughlan no ser el único. Muchos paisanos nuestros venir aquí para terminar enseñando inglés a caballos.

BRENDA

(Irónicamente)

Sin conocer mucho el inglés...

PEG

Pero si English is not our language! Y yo manda mudar: está cansada y todavía no rezó rosario. *Slà agat! (Se dispone a retirarse).*

BRENDA

¡Momento! Antes quiero que escuche lo que enseñó Mr Coughlan.

PEG

¡Rapidito!

BRENDA

La muerte – dice Mr Coughlan – está siempre con nosotros. Es como el carozo que está dentro del durazno. Según los viejos celtas, los muertos nunca se alejan de nosotros. El otro mundo y éste están muy cerca.

PEG

¡Completamente trastornado!

BRENDA

(Ignorando el comentario de la madre).

Por eso, antes de morir, ocurre que reaparecen abuelos, padres, hermanos y amigos. ¿Acaso no escuchamos a Daddy llamarlos la noche antes de irse? Después, cuando al parecer se van, ocurre que están muy cerca de nosotros. Lo que enterramos es algo así como un estuche, un envoltorio. Pero la verdad es que los que nos rodearon nunca están

tan cerca de nosotros que cuando están muertos: permanecen para contribuir a ordenar el aparente desorden.

PEG

Yo paga para que Mr Coughlan enseñe a leer, a escribir, a hacer cuentas y no para que diga esas...

BRENDA

(Ignorando nuevamente la interrupción de la madre).

La vida parece la única oportunidad que tenemos de hacer algo, mientras desde algún otro lugar nuestros muertos construyen puentes. Ellos son nuestros prójimos más próximos.

PEG

(Furiosa)

Y todo eso, ¿qué relación tener con los O'Malley?

TELÓN

SEGUNDO ACTO

Escena I

Habitación de Charlie y Ben. Es modesta, lo que no impide que al foro la amplia ventana que da al campo ostente cortinas, aunque de cretona, las que, abiertas, dejan ver la estrellada noche. La cama que da al exterior es la de Ben, quien duerme. A la izquierda, la puerta; a la derecha, perpendicularmente respecto de la audiencia, la cama de Charlie quien aparece sentado escuchando a Brenda cantar. Sobre la cabeza del lecho hay clavada una cruz. Brenda está sentada sobre una calavera vacuna, guitarra en mano, cantando "Cockles and Mussels". Del techo cuelga un débil farol que ilumina el ambiente. Muy cerca de Brenda, en el piso, yacen dos viejas valijas de cartón con los ángulos reforzados: una parada; la otra, abierta y a medio terminar. Sobre el pie de las camas está la ropa de cada uno de los chicos y, en el piso, las botas.

Cuando se abre el telón Brenda está cantando; Charlie interviene tímidamente en el estribillo.

In Dublin fair city
Where the girls are so pretty,
I first set my eyes on sweet
Molly Malone.
As she wheeled her wheelbarrow
through streets broad and narrow,
Crying, "Cockles and mussels
alive, alive-o!"

(Estribillo)

Alive, alive-o! Alive, alive-o!
Crying, "Cockles and mussels
alive, alive-o!"

She was a fishmonger,
But sure 't was no wonder,
For so were her father and
mother before,
And they each wheeled their
barrow
Through streets broad and narrow,
Crying, "Cockles and mussels
alive, alive-o!"

(Estribillo)

She died of a fever,
And no one could save her,
And that was the end of sweet
Molly Malone.
But her ghost wheels her barrow,
Through streets broad and narrow
Crying, "Cockles and mussels
alive, alive-o!"

(Estribillo)

BRENDA

(Tras constatar que Ben se ha dormido)

Pobre Ben. ¿Se acostumbrará a dormir solo en esta pieza?

CHARLIE

Ben siempre está solo.

BRENDA

No crea... *(Se levanta, sitúa la guitarra sobre la pared y se acerca a la cama de Ben para verificar que el chico esté realmente durmiendo. A partir de ahora, Brenda no volverá a sentarse y dialogará desplazándose por la habitación).* La música ser una de sus compañeras. Me extraña que guste tanto de ese tango que sin cansarse pone en el victrola.

CHARLIE

Ese tango se llama "El dientudo". ¿Sabe por qué?

BRENDA

No, no sabo.

CHARLIE

El "dientudo" es el piano. ¿Entende? Y el tango no tiene letra porque el piano dice más de lo que las palabras podrían decir. ¿Entende?

BRENDA

Era el tango preferido por Daddy. Él trató de conocer el país más por su música que por el idioma. Creía que era más fácil y más importante.

CHARLIE

Pero con su pobre castellano él trató de ponerle letras al estribillo. Alguna vez lo escuché. No me pida que cante porque un perro lo haría mejor. Pero creo que su letra decía algo así como:

*¡Pianito loco,
Dientudo feliz!
Batí vos
lo que no sé decir.*

Sí, aún sin letra (o por eso mismo) era el tango preferido de Daddy. Esa es razón porque Ben escucha tantas veces.

BRENDA

Ahora sí comprendo.

CHARLIE

Pero no sólo la música. A veces me despierto durante la noche por el balido de las ovejas y cuando miro por la ventana veo a Ben arrodillado o parado sobre la cama como hablando con alguien... Está muy perdido, muy desorientado, creo yo. Cuando junte algunos pesos lo va llevar para que conozca Buenos Aires.

BRENDA

¡Buenos Aires! ¿La Capital Federal?

CHARLIE

Sí, señor. Quiero que vea lo que es una gran ciudad. Y lo voy a hacer antes de juntar la plata para ir a Irlanda.

BRENDA

¿Se va, nomás?

CHARLIE

Sí. Pero me llevo, para siempre, el gusto del agua y el olor de esta bendita tierra. También la imagen de Daddy muerto sobre la cama con las dos monedas en los ojos. Las monedas con que se pagó el viaje a la otra orilla... Para mí la muerte es como un nudo que se desata y que lo que la vida contenía se dispersa, es natural que así sea... es natural que usted se case y yo me vaya...

BRENDA

Qué raro. Osté se va a Irlanda y nunca quiere hablar en inglés. Mr Coughlan nos enseñó que la lengua de uno tiene que ver con su iden... iden... La verdad que no sabo cómo termina la palabra pero osté entiende...

CHARLIE

El inglés, el latín y el gaélico están como en el sótano de mi memoria y sabrán cuándo resucitar... Pero la verdad es que no quiero irme sin que Ben sepa que el mundo no es solamente Capitán Sarmiento.

BRENDA

¡Capitán Sarmiento!

CHARLIE

¿Por qué se llamará así este lugar? (*Ambos guardan silencio y se quedan pensando. Él retoma la palabra*). Creo que un Presidente de este país se llamaba así.

BRENDA

No, no. El Capitán Sarmiento era el hijo, que murió peleando no sabo dónde. Mr Coughlan me enseñó que *old* Sarmiento era también muy bravo, aunque no murió en un campo de batalla sino en otro tipo de pelea...

CHARLIE

¡Tiene verdad! ¡Ahora acuerda! Mr Coughlan también dijo que el viejo Sarmiento escribió un libro terrible... pero no puede recordar el título...

BRENDA

El libro se llamaba... *¡Iracundo!*

CHARLIE

¡Eso es! *Iracundo*, que quiere decir alguien que está siempre enojada.

BRENDA

¿Y usted sabe por qué estaba enojado Iracundo?

CHARLIE

¿No se acuerda? Mr Coughlan explicó con claridad. Iracundo detestaba a nosotros europeos. Él no quería ser educado. Prefería continuar salvaje. Entonces estaba muy enojado con extranjeros que traían cultura y otro modo distinto de pensar y vivir. Y se volvió muy malo.

BRENDA

Yo no entendí eso... Yo creo que Mr Coughlan dijo que Iracundo quería ser libre, como el campo donde no hay problemas y donde la naturaleza es la que manda... donde siempre gana la pasión... Eso es lo que ofrece la pampa...

CHARLIE

Es que ahí está el problema de este país... Piense en Irlanda: tan pequeño y tan grande. Aunque la verdad es que en la ciudad ocurren las cosas importantes.

BRENDA

(*Enojada*)

Yo no piensa como usted... Sarmiento. ¡Sar-miento! ¿Entende? Un señor con ese apellido solamente puede decir mentiras...

CHARLIE

Cuando llegue a la Capital va a comprar ese libro, va a leer y después voy a contar.

BRENDA

No pierda su tiempo. Únicamente un preso podría leer un libro así. Sarmiento estaba mal del balero.

CHARLIE

No crea... Llegó a ser Presidente del país.

BRENDA

¡Todo es posible aquí! Hasta una mujer podría llegar a serlo.

CHARLIE

(*Alarmado*)

¡Se imagina! Sería el principio del fin. Pero por suerte yo no va a estar acá.

BRENDA

A mí no me importa lo que haya dicho ese señor Sarmiento. Acá en el campo me ocurrieron las mejores cosas...

CHARLIE

Por ejemplo...

BRENDA

Conocer a Daniel.

CHARLIE

Es muy buen muchacha. ¿Pero qué va a hacer? Mammie no quiere que nos metamos con jodíos.

BRENDA

¡Yo me voy a casar con él!

CHARLIE

Si lo hace, tenga cuidado con lo que publica en *The Southern Cross*, porque de lo contrario Mammie no va a querer saber más de usted. Le aconsejo que haga lo que la señora de Maguire al anunciar el boda de su hija con un tana de apellido Lamberti. (*Saca de debajo de la almohada el periódico*).

BRENDA

¿Qué hizo esa loca?

CHARLIE

(Busca en el periódico) A ver... Esperesé... “Wedding Bells!”. Acá. Fíjesé la picardía. Quitó una letra al apellido del futuro yerno llamado Lamberti y quedó Lambert. No será irlandés pero por lo menos parece inglés. Usted puede hacer lo mismo cuando anuncie su casamiento. ¿Cómo se llama su novio?

BRENDA

(Perpleja y un tanto abstraída)

Daniel Rossler.

CHARLIE

Perfecto: pasará a llamarse Daniel Ross. Más irlandés, imposible.

BRENDA

Yo no necesito esas tonterías para ser feliz, y le aviso que tengo un plan para serlo. El Padre Lorenzo nos va a ayudar. Mammie no va a poder hacerse cargo de todo esto sola con Ben. Con Daniel no vamos a abandonarlos. Pero primero ella debe aceptar a Daniel. A no ser que otra cosa ocurra, porque también el padre Lorenzo tiene un plan para ser feliz.

CHARLIE

¿Cómo? ¿Él no es feliz?

BRENDA

Evidente que no. ¿Osté no se dio cuenta?

CHARLIE

De lo que se dio cuenta es que ahora llama a Mammie Peg y no Mrs O'Malley.

BRENDA

Entonces no diga que no avivar.

CHARLIE

Usté siempre me deja pensando.

BRENDA

Quédese pensando hasta que le venga el sueño. Yo me voy a dormir. *Good night!*

CHARLIE

Good night.

Escena II

Brenda se dirige al centro de la habitación y apaga el quinqué, al tiempo que Charlie se dispone a dormir recostándose sobre su izquierda. Al retirarse ella, el silencio es invadido por tenues balidos provenientes del campo, los que gradualmente van ganando claridad. En el centro, en cama, se advierte la silueta de Ben que empieza a moverse. Poco a poco se va incorporando: primero se arrodilla y luego se pone de pie mirando hacia afuera. Durante su monólogo sólo se advertirá su silueta contra la noche estrellada. Los balidos se irán apagando alternándose con su discurso.

BEN

(Enlazando la sílaba con uno de los últimos balidos) ... Be... Bee... Beee... Ben... Sí, sí... acá... acá... yo...sí, yo... Ben, el que los vio... el que los vio haciendo... eso... daddy and mammy... haciendo eso... Musha! ¡Oh, no! Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis... Daddy is always with you... Sí, sí... siempre conmigo... Sí, yo siempre happy-contento... No, solo no... Musha!... aunque otro ocupe su lugar... su lugar... pero no... pero no corazón... Musha!... Ego te absolvo... Musha!... Musha!... Ego te absolvo... ¿que alguien va a ocupar su lugar?... ¿que alguien va a ocupar su lugar aquí?... pero no... no ser posible... ¿no?... sí... Daddy siempre estará con... sí, conmigo... no estarás solo... No, no... ¡Pianito loco... batí vos lo que no sé decir!... Musha... Ben... Ben... Daddy is always with you... siempre con Ben... Daddy... siempre con Ben... Ben... Bee... Bee... (siguen balidos que se confunden con el discurso) Bee... Beee... ¿No tiene nada más para decir?... Bee... Bee... ¿No tiene nada más para decir?... Sí, happy-contento...

APAGÓN

TERCER ACTO

Escena I

El ámbito es el mismo que el del primer acto, no mucho después de lo acontecido en el segundo.

Tras las ventanas, el cielo rojizo anuncia que la tarde languidece. Sobre la hornalla hay una cacerola pequeña y humeante. Pese a la hora, Peg aparece sentada a la mesa, de frente al público, con una taza de té entre manos. Se muestra nerviosa, pensativa, víctima de dudas y escrúpulos: constantemente se lleva la mano a la boca y espía por la ventana. Es evidente que espera al Padre Lorenzo, acaso para la confesión mensual.

En un momento se pone de pie y se dirige al fonógrafo, toma la placa, lee el título de la pieza y se dispone a hacer funcionar el aparato, pero en seguida desiste. Cuando termina esta operación su mirada se topa con el cuadro de su difunto marido. Peg permanece mirándolo con la boca abierta, como ausente. Unos ruidos la distraen: son los producidos por un caballo que avanza al galope. Pronto el trote se detiene frente al rancho y ella reconoce el grito del jinete que apea al pingo.

No tardan en escucharse unos golpes en la puerta. Sin preguntar nada, Peg abre.

Escena II

Entra el Padre Lorenzo vestido de paisano, con una gorra vasca y sin anteojos. Ante esta novedad, Peg se muestra escandalizada.

PEG

¡Ah!

PADRE LORENZO

Calma, hija, que no has visto a Satanás.

PEG

My God! Pero ¿dónde fue a parar su sotana? ¿Y anteojos?

PADRE LORENZO

Viví la mayor parte de mi vida disfrazado. Casi todos vivimos la mayor parte de nuestra vida disfrazados. Pero ya entenderás. Por ahora lee esto (*extrae del bolsillo de su chaqueta una carta y se la entrega*).

PEG

(*Sin entender mucho, lee, aunque con dificultad. A medida que va comprendiendo, se dirige al Padre Lorenzo*). ¡Pero entonces estos animales concus-.... concuspis.... ¡estos animales! ¿Se escaparon con ayuda de vos?

PADRE LORENZO

Brenda y Daniel no son animales ni concupiscentes. Son hijos de Dios que, además, se aman. Sí, yo les aconsejé que se fueran y fui yo quien los casó la semana pasada el mismo día que Brenda abandonó tu casa. Y si terminas de leer comprenderás que te perdonan, te perdonan *a priori*.

PEG

¿A quién?

PADRE LORENZO

A priori, hija de.... *A priori*, Peg, significa que antes de que tú se lo solicites ellos ya han perdonado tu incompreensión y, ¡vamos!, tus muchas injusticias...

PEG

¡Pero esto ser colmo de colmillos! ¡Un escandalou! ¡Y el Padre Lorenza metida en medio de la deshonra de los O'Malley!

PADRE LORENZO

El padre Lorenzo ya no existe.

PEG

¿Qué vos dice?

LORENZO

Lo que has escuchado y seguramente intuido más de una vez: el padre Lorenzo era una ficción.

PEG

¿Vos colgó sotana? ¿No voy a confesar más con vos?

LORENZO

Soy yo el que hoy ha venido a confesarse.

PEG

Pero esto es cosa de *mad people*. ¡Yo ya no entiende nada! Definitivo: ¡este mundo no es para Peg O'Malley!

LORENZO

Sí, Peg. Es para ti si logras salir de esa prisión victoriana e hipócrita.

PEG

¿Pero así que vos viene aquí a confesar? ¿Y con quién va a confesar?

LORENZO

Contigo, Peg O'Malley.

PEG

Esto es mucho para Peg O'Malley. *(Corre a la alacena y se sirve una medida de whiskey. Lorenzo le indica que prepare dos vasos. Cuando ella le alcanza el suyo, Lorenzo brinda)*

LORENZO

¡Por la vida! *(Beben)*. Peg: *In vino veritas!*

PEG

¡Che, pero hable castellana!

LORENZO

Es muy fácil confesarse con quien no domina la lengua de uno. *(Burlonamente)* ¿Entende? *(Ríe)*. Peg, te lo digo sin vueltas: equivoqué mi camino pero creo que me di cuenta a tiempo. Mi vocación no tiene mucho que ver con el amor, por así decir, divino, sino con el humano.

PEG

¡Qué picou de lorou!

LORENZO

El tiempo y no la muerte es nuestro gran enemigo. No lo voy a desperdiciar más. Peg: he venido a confesarte mi amor y a pedirte que te cases conmigo. Cargo contigo y con el bueno de Ben.

PEG

(Aparentemente estupefacta)

¿Qué vos dice?

LORENZO

¡Cásate conmigo, hija de... ! ¡Cásate conmigo, hijita de Dios!

PEG

¡Qué escandalou! Por favor baje la voz, Ben está en su pieza y puede escuchar.

LORENZO

Es muy probable que Ben sepa más de nuestros corazones que lo que nosotros podamos imaginar...

PEG

¿Qué va a decir Lorna?

LORENZO

Olvídate de esa bruja. ¿Qué dices, Peg?

PEG

(Mirando el cuadro del finado Mr O'Malley)

Hica mía Brenda decir que muertos tender puentes con nosotros y que además iluminan nuestro camino...

LORENZO

Puedes estar segura de que el bueno de Don Patricio está con nosotros... ¿Qué me contestas, Peg?

PEG

No saber. ¿Qué va a decir Lorna...? ¿Y si escapamos a Irlanda? No, no a Irlanda no: encontrar con Charlie que reirá de nosotros.

LORENZO

Eso no será nunca así. Brenda, Charlie y probablemente también Ben saben de lo nuestro... o, por lo menos de mis sentimientos... El problema es otro: ¿Qué puedo hacer yo en Irlanda que no sé una papa de inglés?

PEG

¿Y vos cree que irlandeses hablar inglés?

LORENZO

Aunque el amor sea loco, no hagamos locuras. El Padre Leonardo, mi compañero en el seminario y desde años amigo, hoy a cargo de la Parroquia local, bendecirá nuestra unión. Él, no sé por qué, me aseguró que lograría el sí. Tan seguro estaba que me dijo que nos esperaba hasta las ocho para casarnos en la sacristía. Algún otro día iremos al Registro Civil.

PEG

¿Un sacerdote bendecirá lo nuestro? ¿Hasta las ocho? ¿Qué hora ser?

LORENZO

(Tras consultar su reloj de bolsillo)

Nos quedan veinte minutos...

PEG

Oh, Padre Lorenza...

LORENZO

¡Padre, ya no!

PEG

Lorenza...

LORENZO

Lorenza, no: ¡Lorenzo!

PEG

Lorenzou.

LORENZO

¡Lorenzo!

PEG

Lorenzo. Lorenzo no gusta a mí... Prefiere Lorenz...

LORENZO
(*Impaciente*)

Pues bien: ¡Lorenz!

PEG

Aunque pensando bien, tampoco Lorenz gusta a mí...

LORENZO
(*Al borde del enojo*)

¡Pues hija de... ! ¿Cómo demonios.... deseas llamarme?

PEG

Larry es nombre adecuada.

LORENZO

Pues bien, Peg: Soy Larry para ti. Y mejor que no se enteren en mi España natal porque les agarrará un calambre en el estómago a causa de la risa. ¡Larry Morales! (*Se acerca a ella y se abrazan. Pero Peg no permite grandes avances*).

PEG

Un momento. Vos dijo que Padre Leonarda espera: voy vestir y preparar para ceremonia religioso. (*Se dirige a su cuarto*).

Escena III

LORENZO

(Permanece un breve tiempo solo. Examina el ambiente por el que se pasea feliz. Cuando se acerca a la cocina, apaga el fuego. Después se sitúa en medio del escenario y dirigiéndose a la audiencia reflexiona). ¡Oh, Dios mío! ¡Cuánta razón tiene el padre Leonardo!

¡Mueve un par de tetas
Más que dos carretas!

(Se dirige al fonógrafo. Toma la placa y lee los detalles de la etiqueta. Mientras hace esto Peg vuelve bien vestida y arreglada y con un bolso. Lorenzo que no la ha visto reaparecer, la escucha hablar desde la puerta entornada de la salida.)

Escena IV

PEG

¡Larry! ¡Marchandou!

LORENZO

¡Oh, sí, sí!

Escena V

Abandonan la casa rumbo a la parroquia. Apenas esto ocurre, Ben se precipita sobre la escena y se dirige al fonógrafo. Le da manija a la victrola y el disco de “El dientudo” se pone en acción. Ben observa el cuadro de su padre muerto y hace un gesto de triunfo que implica una secreta complicidad. Después toma la escoba y se pone a bailar con ella. A los pocos compases se reabre la puerta de salida y aparece Lorenzo.

Escena VI

LORENZO

¡Hombrecito! ¡Cargo contigo! *(Lo toma para llevárselo abruptamente pero de golpe los dos se detienen ante el cuadro de Mr O'Malley)*

LORENZO Y BEN

(Al unísono y al tiempo que saludan a la imagen)

Slán agat!

Tomados de la mano salen por la puerta que había quedado abierta. Aumenta el volumen del tango y la iluminación se concentra en el cuadro del finado O'Malley al tiempo que cae el

TELÓN

Appendix

EL DIENTUDO

Tango

Música: Juan José Delaney

♩. 120

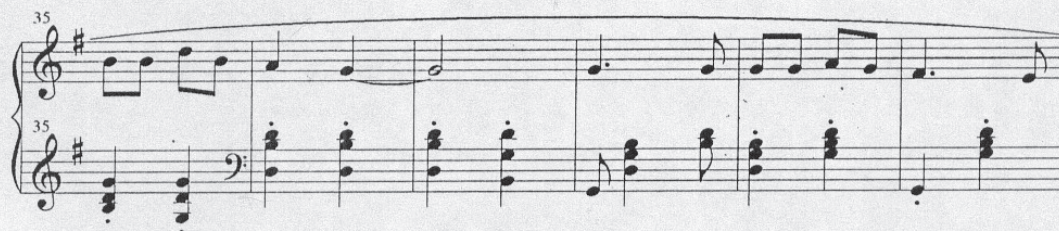
Piano

6

12

18

24



Handwritten musical score for piano, measures 58-70. The score is written on three systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and chords. Measure numbers 58, 64, and 70 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 70.

COCKLES AND MUSSELS

Canción tradicional irlandesa

In Dub·lin's fair cit-y, Where the girls are so pret-ty, I
 first set my eyes on sweet Mol-ly Ma-lone As she
 wheeled her wheel-bar-row Through streets broad and nar-row, Crying,
 "Cock-les and mus-sels, A-live, a-live-o!" A-
 live, a-live-o! A-live, a-live-o! Crying,
 "Cock-les and mus-sels, A-live, a-live-o!"

In Dublin's fair-city,
 Where the girls are so pretty,
 I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone
 As she wheeled her wheelbarrow
 Through streets broad and narrow,
 Crying, "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!"

Chorus:
 Alive, alive-o! Alive, alive-o!
 Crying, "Cockles and mussels,
 Alive, alive-o!"

She was a fishmonger,
 But sure 'twas no wonder,
 For so were her father and mother before,
 And they each wheeled their barrow
 Through streets broad and narrow,
 Crying, "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!"

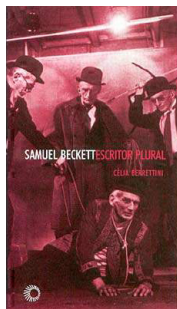
Chorus: Alive, alive-o! etc.

She died of a fever,
 And no one could save her,
 And that was the end of sweet Molly Malone,
 But her ghost wheels her barrow,
 Through streets broad and narrow
 Crying, "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o!"

Chorus: Alive, alive-o! etc.

Book Reviews





Célia Berretini. *Samuel Beckett Escritor Plural*. São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, Coleção Debates, 2005. 241pp. ISBN 85-273-0697-2

Maria Sílvia Betti

To write about Beckett is certainly a complex task: his production challenged the established standards in arts and literature in the twentieth century, and created disturbingly experimental forms of expression of the perplexity experienced in view of the horrors and desolation of twentieth-century post Second World War world.

Beckett is one of the key names in the context of artistic modernity, and his production extended the previously known frontiers between literary and theatrical expression, between prose and poetry, between fiction and philosophical investigation, between words and silence.

Samuel Beckett Escritor Plural, by Célia Berretini, is a careful inventory and at the same time a thorough analysis of Beckett's works and achievements in different literary genres, and the first critical and analytical study of Beckett's complete works in Portuguese. For all these reasons, the book is a more than welcome release.

Célia Berretini, the author, is a distinguished scholar from the University of São Paulo, Brazil, and a researcher and essayist whose well-grounded knowledge of Beckett's works relies not only on a lifetime of academic investigation, but also on the familiarity with an incredibly long and constantly updated list of bibliographical resources.

The style of the book is fluent and pleasant, and the reader, even if not previously introduced to the main features of Beckett's work, is led through a voyage of exploration of the author's creations in a highly informative and at the same time thought-provoking way, with wide use of examples and references for further reading.

In the first part of the book, Beckett's literary and artistic profile is drawn in the context of twentieth century shifts in artistic sensibility and literary expression. The biographical account is followed by the two segments examining respectively the author's use of language and forms, and the productions for different media.

In the second part, an exhaustive chronologically arranged sequence of commentaries to Beckett's works is provided, together with the sinopses of the different titles. Not a single one was left out, regardless of its length or of having been created for the printed page, the stage, or for electronic media such as the television or radio. Brazilian readers have, thus, been offered an unprecedented opportunity for a global overview and at the same time a closer contact not only with Beckett's well-known works like *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*, but also about pieces never translated into Portuguese or staged in Brazilian theatres like *Nacht and Träume*, *Words and Music*, *Footfalls* and others.

The diversity of forms and genres and the wide network of sources employed testify to the pertinence of the title chosen for Berretini's study: Beckett's nature as a writer is certainly plural, as the implicit assertion suggests.

As a matter of fact, one of the most important aspects of the book is the careful investigation of the interweaving of poetry, prose and fiction observed in Beckett's works, a remarkable feature considering that the production is characterized by multiplicity combined to an undeniable sense of unity.

Berretini keeps a constant eye on the shifts in style and mood observed throughout Beckett's career, stressing, for example, the contrast between the verbosity of the early works, where a gloomy sense of comedy was always somehow observable, and the terse and extremely self-contained expression of despair, which comes up in later works.

In the accounts of Beckett's life, the book provides an interesting insight of the cultural and literary context of the different periods of the author's career, and discusses the importance of Beckett's inclination towards particular areas of interest (such as the mastering of foreign languages and their respective literatures) and his literary affinities (among which the names of Dante, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Apollinaire and other crucially influential writers are included).

Beckett's personal sense of uprootedness and mobility is also stressed from the point of view of the effects produced on his works, and the reason why he wrote part of his works in French is discussed. The author's love for the arts and his willingness to experiment in the use of new media are also stressed.

Berretini demonstrates an astounding familiarity with historical, interpretive and analytical works, and her sources, most of which very recently published, include titles by both English, North American and French critics.

The biographical account does not lead to an over stressing of personal circumstances in detriment to in-depth analysis, and the analytical study is tuned to the dialogue with unfamiliarized readers without disregarding the necessary density and complexity to keep the interest of connoisseurs and scholars.

In order to draw a panel of the most representative aspects of Beckett's production, Berretini combines the construction of a richly detailed chronology of the author's production to an economically constructed yet extremely dense examination of specific aspects of his career and works.

The core of the book is certainly the analytical approach to characters and themes: aspects like the taste of the characters for storytelling, the use of speech as a refuge from nothingness, the frequent use of open ended stories and the recurrent presence of lonely creatures are shown and discussed.

The same happens concerning the examination of themes: widely known aspects such as the one of the "absurd of human condition" are dissected from an original point of view, showing Beckett's approach in contrast with Sartre's or Camus's. The examples provided give the reader a clear comprehension of the point: unlike the two French writers, who philosophically pondered over the question as well, Beckett exposed

the mechanism implied in it, thus making it more effective and at the same time more striking from the point of view of the effect upon the reader or viewer.

Berretini is always prolific in the use of examples, and this is particularly true in this part of the book, where the themes are submitted to thorough investigation. References to features widely or typically associated to Beckett's works (the "lack of justification for human existence", for example) are examined, as well as others, less frequently highlighted in the analysis, such as the combination of tragic and derisory tones and moods, the cynicism resulting from Beckett's derision and the use of theatrical illusiveness are the most impressive ones. Beckett's artistic attraction to the representation of physical deformity and death is another important element investigated in this part.

The analysis shifts comfortably from the examination of essays to the discussion of narrative techniques in Beckett's fiction, thus gathering elements to produce interesting insights into the author's techniques and thought. A carefully elaborated inventory of the narrative techniques is carried out in Chapter Two, where metalinguistic techniques and the narrative destruction of the possibilities of representation are closely looked into.

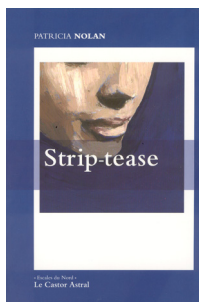
Most of the titles discussed in the book have neither been published, studied or staged in Brazil: this is the case of the series of short pieces and of medium-length ones (novels, novellas and short stories), and of most of the plays and TV and radio scripts.

In the analysis of the plays and theatrical techniques, Berretini places emphasis upon the analysis of confining spaces, where elements previously evoked or suggested in Beckett's novels are given concreteness on stage.

The main focus of the analysis of the theatrical works is set upon language and communication, through the examination of the effects and significance of dialogues, monologues, sound, music, the inarticulateness of voice, the effects produced by noise, and the function of silence. Theatrical elements like scenery, characters, the use of props, gestures and pantomime are examined in detail as well.

The sinopses provided in this part of the book include references to the circumstances of elaboration and to the main features of each work. The interpretive commentaries that follow them provide the reader with important elements for a global and critical view of the different plays and novels from a highly investigative point of view.

For all these reasons, *Samuel Beckett Escritor plural* is certainly a landmark in the area of contemporary studies of literature and theatre in Brazil.



Patricia Nolan. *Strip-Tease*. Le Castor Astral. Letres, 2005. 80pp. ISBN 9 782859 205911.

Fred Johnston

Patricia Nolan is a Dublin-born poet living for some years in Paris, where she has read widely, admittedly mainly amongst the “ex-pat” community of that city, as well as reading in Dublin and here in Galway, for the Western Writers’ Centre; asking a Paris-based “ex-pat” writer, be he or she English, Irish or American, where one might find a *French* writer is futile. Ex-pats abroad are often, Nolan excluded, parochial to a man, islands unto themselves.

French publishers Castor Astral (don’t all rush at once, now) have broken a mould by producing in French translations of work by poets from just about everywhere, including a lovely collection from Wilfrid Owen. “Travelling” was Nolan’s first, presented, as is this one, in dual-language four years back; this facing-pages collection is translated by Emmanuele Sandron, and I think that name should be on the cover of the book along with the author’s.

Nolan’s poetry takes risks and the influence of French poetry is clear. There are “proemes” here, as Francis Ponge, the master of the genre, might have called them. The concerns of the work throughout are intimate, stylish, domestic, the minutiae of the everyday. Yet their move, travelling outside Paris, are vividly sensual, as in “Ceoil na Mara”:

“We stare, dazzled by nature’s wantonness.
In labial sounds, the sea’s music drums
her Venus mound.” (26)

Which, for those who prefer it French, is:

. Nous regardons de tous nos yeux
éblouis par la nature, sa débauche.
La musique de la mer, labiale, martelee
Son mont de Venus. (27)

There are a number of poems based in Ireland here, including the wonderfully funnily gruesome “In the Bear Pit”, which is translated as “La fosse aux ours” – which means female bears: “She-bears like anxious brides can easily be tamed,/trained to perform domestic tricks, washing shirts . . .” (40), which in French is: “Les ourses comme des épouses ardentes/s’apprivoisent: apprendre des tours domestiques,/laver

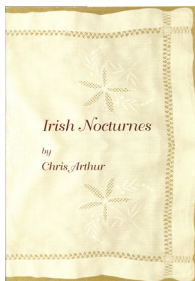
les chemises . . .” (41) One can’t help enjoying the use of the French “tour” for the English “tricks”. Some poems are simply beautiful and poignant, such as “Playground:”

I thought, perhaps if I gave you a part of the pain disfiguring my
heart. (20)

J’ai pensé: et si je te donnais un peu de ce poids
qui défigure mon coeur? (21)

Patricia Nolan has travelled extensively and the poems here reflect that. This new collection is available here in Ireland, of course, and should be required reading for anyone interested in how translation works against original text, apart from anything else. It is good to see a book like this; if the French can do it, so can we; I was fortunate enough to have an adventurous Galway-based publisher in Wynken de Worde who produced a novel of mine with facing-page French translations. Nolan’s book is well produced, the English text is in italics, and it is an example of just how far in front of the game European publishers are; and ourselves, for all our peacocking, so far behind. I am reminded of a friend of mine who reported an Irish literary agent as having remarked that the “trouble” with so many of the manuscripts crossing their desk was that they were “too literary.” I paraphrase, but you get the idea.

Vistas Within Vistas – The Meditative Essays Trilogy by Chris Arthur



Luci Collin Lavalle

Irish Nocturnes, US: The Davies Group, 1999. 246pp. ISBN 1-888570-49-0.

Irish Willow, US: The Davies Group, 2002. 236pp. ISBN 1-888570-46-6.

Irish Haiku, US: The Davies Group, 2005. 236pp. ISBN 1-888570-78-4.

A good literary essay presents not only an interesting thesis, but also an effective organization of subtexts which assure a fluent reading. In this sense, regarding the process of essay writing, the reputation of Chris Arthur (Belfast, 1955) is notably increasing, for he is an essayist whose fine perception of essential things and ability to expose these things in a vibrant way combine in the production of beautiful pieces of literature. Arthur has just completed his Irish-themed trilogy of essays composed by the volumes entitled *Irish Nocturnes* (illustrated by Gigi Bayliss), *Irish Willow* (illustrated by Jeff Hall, III) and *Irish Haiku* (illustrated by Jeff Hall III).

In *Irish Nocturnes* the essay topics range from history to death to fear to memory in an attempt to capture things lost in the passage of time. Even though Arthur acknowledges the fickle, ephemeral nature of life and time, he still makes attempts to preserve Ireland's past, with observations and thoughtful, meandering ruminations culled from his own life. As he explains it: "Writing is one of the ways to make a chink in the dark armour with which history is so impenetrably clad, allowing an occasional glimmer of light to illuminate the human story for a moment before it flickers out again" (55). In a way, he also manages to write semi-autobiographical treatises – memoirs without the pretension of self-aggrandizement.

This first book explores living memories, longing, and more-than-fond remembrances of someplace, something or someone – often pervaded by a feeling of displacement. In speaking of the Irish Diaspora, Arthur comments, "We are an adaptable species. We can uproot ourselves if need or opportunity dictates, colonize some new patch of earth [...] But can you ever really feel at home except in the country where you were born?" (239). Indeed, Arthur seems to long for Ireland and his subsequent commentary in whichever nocturne similarly touches upon threads of memory and personal histories, all of which fit in the realm of *nostalgia*.

“Ferrule”, Arthur’s nocturne about the potency and mystery of language, spotlights the highly-specific name for the metal cover on the tips of wooden canes. It is an obscure and even archaic reference, but it highlights his point well: “Language clings to us unshakably, sending its tendrils to creep through us like ivy, finding some purchase in even the most intimate interstices of silence” (21). In “Facing the Family,” Arthur writes of the modern societal trend of knowing little about one’s ancestors; according to a Japanese monk Arthur meets, this shows “a failure to properly confront our own mortality and the essential fact of life’s impermanence” (179). Such an insight increases the number of questions Arthur asks regarding family and family histories, but he never claims to have all the answers – he is content to simply ask questions and leave them unanswered being the reader’s duty to carry his thoughts further.

Even with the occasional misfire or spotty conclusion, Arthur never fails to make his reader think, and think deeply at that. He is best at addressing important issues and then making fascinating and enlightened observations. On one hand, he is honest: “As we grew older . . . we lost heart and entered that dispirited state of mind which comes to believe that there is only one mundane and bounded world to live in” (107). On the other, he is perceptive: “One of the pleasures of adult intimacy involves a swapping of significant places; introducing one’s partner to that secret mapping of the world which holds so much of your story, and being introduced in turn to theirs” (200). It is such commentary and small statements like these that keep the reader interested and impressed.

In *Irish Willow*, Arthur revisits those aspects of existence and humanity that have always fascinated him: time, memory, language and interpersonal connections. In this second round of essays, though, he focuses less on providing social commentary about the religious violence in Northern Ireland than he did in *Irish Nocturnes*. While Arthur can’t avoid speaking about that strife which has so indelibly left its mark on his life, he now seems more interested in existential issues and contents himself to remain in that heady realm of abstract musings and questionings. As he writes, “Patterns. Stories. Meanings. These are what I search for [...]. I try different ways to weave them together, follow different narrative imaginings that might extend their fragmentariness into something more closely approaching a sense-bestowing whole” (14). *Irish Willow*, the final result, is at once more unified and focused than Arthur’s previous anthology

This second book of the trilogy is at its best in those moments that reveal Arthur’s uncanny knack of producing lovely observations, which sometimes are off-topic, but nevertheless potent in their imagery or insight. Arthur ponders the wonders of photography in various essays and deftly captures the simultaneous permanence and transience of the medium: “I can picture *pictures* easily enough [...] but to summon a likeness of the living, moving face, animated by that particular vitality that was so appealing . . . seems beyond the power of recall” (35). Arthur not only captures the paradoxical nature of memory, but goes one step further arguing that a picture is more than just a snapshot, more than just an interruption of light; it’s a slice of time, preserved for our pleasure and wonderment.

Unlike his first collection, *Irish Willow* displays moments of Arthur's underlying humanity which sometimes veer off-track from the point of his essay to reveal a man beneath the writing. In one tortured thought, Arthur reminisces about an old ex-girlfriend of his, lamenting the instability and incapability of his mind to cement his memories of her: "It's sad that a face [my girlfriend's face] once explored so ravenously by my gaze, once traced so lovingly by my fingers, should have vanished ..." (35). Usually open, Arthur reveals in another moment just how ridiculous he finds the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, which he believes originates from fundamental intolerance and deep-seated prejudices: " [...] I realised how many people are trapped in a sarcophagus of rigid beliefs, a terrible caricature of living faith in which the heart and other vitals are ripped out and the semblance of life is only maintained by the embalming fluid of empty ritual motions: church-going, hymn-singing, and other public rites" (84). Here he clearly sheds any academic impartiality and shows rancour and frustration, revealing the depths of his feeling. No longer is the bloodshed of Northern Ireland a topic for essays and musings; now it is a personal matter that continues to plague him without end.

Arthur's style in *Irish Willow* can be characterized by a more ornate diction and by some intense metaphors, a special ability to manipulate language in neatly-packaged phrases such as the "dull ache of finitude" (24) or "dry stone of mortality" (25). In one case, speaking of his father's fondness for the piano, Arthur calls the tragedy of his father's arthritis, "a dissonant duet of suffering" (130). In one other example, we see some of his custom, metaphorical flourishes: "For a while we mark out our little boundaries, till our fields, life comes gently to fruition, we forget the massive seas surrounding every moment, the cold waters of oblivion, the endless duration of space and time that dwarf all our endeavours, swamping them in the end as finitude overwhelms us and our patchwork fields of friends and family, jewel-bright and previous, are engulfed" (105). His imagery, in this case, was a little bit excessive and Arthur himself seems to recognize his excesses, saying essayists try to "[tie] up loose threads more neatly than they're ever tied up in real life" (106).

The final two essays in this collection are the best of the entire lot. "Atomic Education" is clear and more descriptive than questioning. The essay, which comes across as a character study of a social outcast – Arthur's Uncle Cyril – who was nonetheless a misunderstood visionary, provides us with details that let us construct the setting in our minds: Arthur describes his uncle's house and the neighbourhood, thereby giving us a vivid idea of the grimness and uncertainty in Northern Ireland. As a whole, this essay paints a portrait of a remarkable man living among unremarkable people in a time of violence and grief. Arthur then maintains this subtle tone and embarks upon an ambitious, sprawling coda about his father. "A Tinchel Round my Father" holds up well and raises many questions about the mystery of photographs or, more specifically, life itself. Arthur weaves fragmentary stories about his father (which he assembles based upon compelling photographs of his father as a young man), along with those of himself

and even a pair of WWII refugees. The end result makes us question our knowledge of our parents and of the lives that intersect with ours, either with our recognition or without. Arthur effectively preserves time with these final two essays and arguably succeeds in his goal of “approaching a sense-bestowing whole” to the fragments of his life and our own.

At last, in regard to *Irish Haiku*, the third collection written by Chris Arthur, the reading reveals it as the best of the trilogy. In *Irish Haiku* Arthur recovers the tradition of the meditative essay, brilliantly developed by the North-American Transcendentalists before – and it is no coincidence that the book’s epigraph is from H. D. Thoreau. As for the title of the book, it is very suggestive of the extended meditation or contemplation brought by those brief perceptions, those glimpses on the uncatchable, revealed by haikus. The metaphysical quality of *Irish Haiku* is soon revealed in the book’s *Foreword*: “Instead of any words at all, I would rather start with a blackbird singing in a County Antrim garden.” (xi). After that statement, Arthur (addressing the critical reader?) modestly advances a possible interpretative consideration of his own position as a writer: “A blackbird solitary singing should not create any expectations of what comes next, what went before. Like a clear bell in a meditation hall, it just punctuates the silence, focusing the mind on what passes before it now, this moment that will never come again.” (xi).

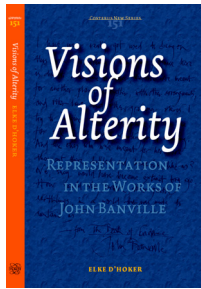
The whole book is indeed embedded in a Zen Buddhist atmosphere – or Zen aesthetics; it is impregnated by a poetic vision similar to that of haiku-master Matsuo Bashō. Like in haikus, Arthur’s essays try to catch deep and revealing moments, always with a striking directness – a process of clear seeing that triggers a temporary enlightenment.

“Obelisk”, the first essay of the book, is divided into ten interconnected observations that, “in the form of a verbal obelisk”, elaborate a dynamic speculation on Henderson Ritchie’s death; the narrative is sustained by different settings, angles, viewpoints (even movable ones in terms of chronological order). As Arthur remarks: “Beginning at the beginning – the place we’re always urged to start – is, of course, impossible, unless you are content to operate with the most simplistically constricted notion of origins.” (7).

Other remarkable essays of the collection are “Miracles” and “Water Glass”. The first evolves from the tracing back the origins of some words (“otolith” and “begin”, for instance) to show the miracle of meanings fossilized in mysterious words. As Arthur argues: “Within the literal, another voice is always singing. Why are we so deaf to it?” (66). In “Water Glass”, a detailed description of the city of Lisburn, Arthur recreates the ambience of the streets, the history and the gradual transformation of the place and the religious conflicts to which the place has served as a stage. The essay discusses the Zen practice of walking meditation and even ends by commenting on meditation: “But if meditation teaches us anything it is that first sight conceals within its picture-postcard simplicities views within views, vistas within vistas, of a richness and complexity that are utterly remarkable.” (188).

Arthur's essays excel at many levels, principally because they draw from eclectic sources. Many of his essays cite stories or beliefs from Buddhism and Hinduism, creating an interesting mixture of Europe and Asia. The only critical remark I would add regarding *Irish Haiku* is that sometimes in the book Arthur indulges in clichéd sentences: "Every life is embedded in a web of contexts" (33), "We can often learn a lot from errors" (79), "A great deal of our perception, consciousness and communication depends on selection not storage." (91). Anyhow, Arthur's focus on interweaving his own memories and knowledge of Ireland prevents any slippage into banality.

Arthur, whose prose has been compared to Seamus Heaney's poetry, beautifully transforms individual experiences into universal ones; in his texts, as this trilogy proves, the specific cultural milieu of a specific experience opens itself up to acquire extraordinary – metaphysical, critical and historical – dimensions.



D'hoker, Elke. *Visions of Alterity. Representation in the Works of John Banville*. Costerus New Series 151. Amsterdam/NY: 2004. 243pp. ISBN 90-420-1671-X. 243pp.

Hedwig Schwall

In *Visions of Alterity* D'hoker undertakes an ambitious, rigorous, and theoretically sophisticated examination of the novels of John Banville, combatively and thoroughly engaging with the current critical reception of his work. It both produces brilliant and challenging accounts of individual works and simultaneously shows how each novel is to be read as a part of its trilogy. On occasion, ideas are reversed or revised thus reinforcing the sense that this book presents a core of ideas that incrementally grows and evolves as the work progresses. D'hoker's study is no introductory work, nor is it chronological: the readings are organised around thematic clusters, which allows the reader to see how Banville does develop ideas on representation, epiphany, correspondence between inner and outer worlds.

As I want to take the reader on a quick trip through this book, we start at the table of contents which already shows the work's two main qualities: a clear logical line of development, often worded in poetic ways. Thus, Part I, which investigates the relations between "Self and World" combines Chapters one and two, respectively "Books of Revolution" and "Books of Revelation", whereby the first deals with the Scientific Quest for Truth, the second with the Epiphany in the Science Trilogy. The scientific quest, starting with the radical implications the notion of "representation" has in Kant, further leads to Heidegger who stresses the "uncanniness of a reality" which, according to the philosopher, is best represented by poets. Rorty ties in with this view, as his "edifying philosophers" are those who "want to keep a space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause ... something which is not an accurate representation of what was already there" (9). With Derrida D'hoker then draws attention to the *desire* for presence which lies at the heart of representation, thus introducing a psychological category which will later help to elucidate the narcissism of the art trilogy's protagonist. Chapter Two is outstanding in the thoroughness with which the notion of epiphany is treated and developed throughout the science trilogy(49). Again, D'hoker deems the new concept worth a brief sketch of its history, and connects theological definitions of epiphany with Abrams' discussion of this phenomenon in Emerson, to scrutinize Joyce's famous statements and compare them to Ashton Nichols' *The Poetics of Epiphany*, which lead her to reconsider observations made by the Banville specialists Imhof and McMinn. The result of all these surprising connections is a new and handy difference made between meaning and significance, which proves to be significant indeed to understand the fine developments in the epistemological adventures represented in

the science tetralogy. But though D'hoker is a champion of close reading, her exercises always end in a handy set of categories which order her impressions. So, she throws a new light on the science trilogy by distinguishing three different degrees of creativity in representational work, i.e. "*mimesis* (close adherence to reality), *poesis* (transformation of reality) and *aletheia* (revelation of the oddness of reality)" (223). This result is interesting, but the way in which she came to it as well. In her scrutiny of the science tetralogy, D'hoker cleverly pairs off one poet's epistemological system with one novel. So Wallace Stevens' poetics illuminate *Dr. Copernicus* in surprising ways; Rilke's *Duino Elegies* prove to enlighten the "poetic transformations in *Kepler*" (92); the confrontation of Hofmannsthal's "Chandos Letter" with Banville's *The Newton Letter* results in a new paradigm of "negative aesthetics" which reinterprets both texts (103 ff); finally, Goethe's two Faust books help D'hoker to define the postmodern Faust Banville creates in *Mefisto*.

Part II, on "Self and Art" brings in "Banville's Explicit Poetics", which are confronted with his implicit poetics. As Banville maintains that "I always feel you should write about what you *don't* know. Find out something" (77) this ties in nicely with Rorty's ideas about the "edifying philosophers" – though I am not sure whether this applies to his latest novel, *The Sea*.

In Part III, "Self and Other", Chapter seven clearly and concisely pictures what "the ethical turn" is all about, and again D'hoker enlivens the picture by (rather neatly) opposing one group of ethical thinkers against another one. Once more, this confrontation serves a double purpose: not only do we see how Martha Nussbaum on the one hand and the group around Derrida and Derek Attridge on the other take a very different critical stance, but this difference helps to explain Freddie Montgomery's predicament in the Art trilogy. D'hoker argues that Nussbaum uses literature as a mirror (154) to confirm and nuance her own views, whereas the Derrida-Attridge group would treat the text more "as a stranger" (148) and read it against the grain. Likewise, Freddie Montgomery treats women as mirrors, and so his tragedy consists indeed in a failure of the imagination which links the women of the trilogy, Daphne, Flora and A. : Freddie remains confined in his imaginary art world and cannot reach life as such. D'hoker's discussion of the women is very interesting: not only does she take their "cardboard quality" seriously, but, referring to Ruth Frehner's article, she deepens the views there propounded as she connects Banville's women with insights gained from Melanie Klein and Sarah Kofman, thus coming to a more general diagnosis of the constant feature of "the split mother figure" in the novelist's oeuvre (142-144), to be recognised from *Birchwood* till *Eclipse*, and beyond: D'hoker's intuitions will prove to be even more relevant for the very ambiguous mother figure in *The Sea*.

The psychological categories used in the previous chapters are further elaborated with the introduction of the phenomenon of "the Double" in Part IV, "Self and Self". In this chapter D'hoker harks back to the play of masks and mirrors she elucidated in the previous trilogies, but now refining the categories of possible "doubles" in her analysis

of the protagonist of *The Untouchable*, a master-spy whose skilled duplicity complicates the inherent ambiguity of the autobiographical genre. To sound out the pitfalls of this genre D'hoker goes back to Rousseau (202) and gradually complicates the questions at stake, focusing on Banville's clever turns of plot and style in his Jamesian spy novel.

In a characteristic inclusive movement the study's conclusion wraps up the foregoing insights yet applying them to Banville's then last novel, *Eclipse*. The liminal concepts are taken one step further again: the "visions of alterity" prove to be also "visions of mortality" (217), the paradoxes become more tightly packed. The protagonist's lazy, mimetic reading of reality is combined with a more active "making strange" of his context, i.e. a Derridean questioning aiming at the otherness of the other, i.e. its singularity, which makes that "The world seemed tilted slightly out of the true" (221). This attitude refers back to Banville's ex- and implicit poetics and question his "mode of disengagement" with the world.

That this book ends with a questioning attitude and a paradox is again typical of the creative and sporting way in which the critic tackled her subject, but it also indicates that this work is not quite finished. I have been most laudatory of this study, as I relished my reading of it, but of course the book has its flaws, though they are imposed by quantitative rather than qualitative criteria. For instance, the author promised to analyse the novels from an epistemological, aesthetic and ethical perspective, but the epistemological approach was mainly limited to the science trilogy and the aesthetic and ethical perspective to the art trilogy, whereas the inverse would have worked very well too. But what I most miss in this study is that the psychological concepts could have been elaborated in a more systematic way. The notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, briefly mentioned in the discussion about epiphanies, could have led to the delineation of the phantasm, which plays a key role in each of Banville's novels; this would in turn have allowed a more precise diagnosis of the postmodern Faust of *Mefisto*, whose psychotic structure is very relevant as a hinging figure in Banville's oeuvre. Another problem is that, because so many sources are used, they are sometimes treated rather summarily: I do not think that Nussbaum's readings are that problematical, and Hofmannsthal's *Nosce te Ipsum* is not exactly a "solipsistic" undertaking. Or, when D'hoker tries to formulate Banville's poetics, one wonders what kind of "disengagement" makes him protest so much against Coetzee's *Disgrace*, so "shockingly crowded .. with the issues of the day"?

But this lack of elaboration has its gain: the prose has a strong flow, and takes the curious reader swiftly along. One might even say that D'hoker is one of the more edifying philosophers.

Twenty-five Years of Irish Studies at the University of São Paulo



1980-2005

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- Rewriting in contemporary Irish Drama* (Advisor: Professor Munira H. Mutran)
- Irish diaspora in the Americas* (Advisor: Dr. Laura P.Z. Izarra)

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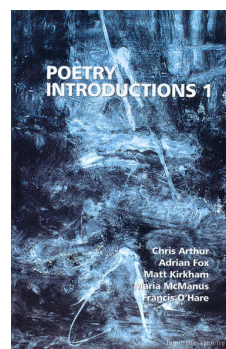
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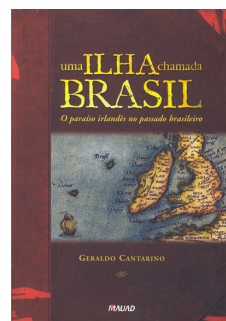
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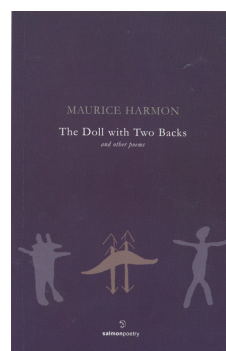
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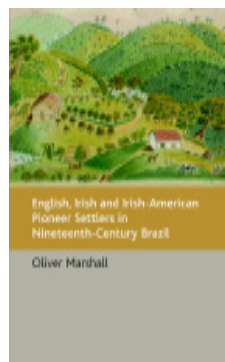
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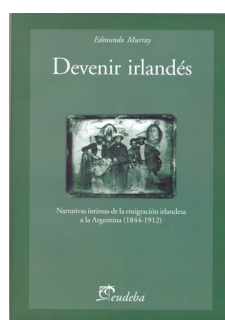
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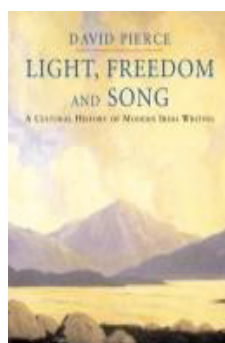
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once (2004), co-edited with Anna MacBride White and Christina Bridgwater; and countless others. He was the general editor of various series of texts, of *A Review of English Literature*, of the influential *Writers and Critics* series of monographs, and of the York Notes. He edited the journals *AREL* and *ARIEL*. In recent years he had been co-editing a four volume anthology of Irish Literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He founded IASIL, and organised its inaugural conference in 1970, and has been a major influence on the development of the Association since that time. (from obituaries written by Peter van de Kamp, O'Dwyer Riana and Christopher Rush).

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