

Modernity and Postmodernity in a Franco-Irish
Context

Studies in Franco-Irish Relations
Volume 2

Edited by:

Eamon Maher, Grace Neville and Eugene O'Brien

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Introduction: Postmodern Conditions – The Conditional Postmodern

Eamon Maher, Grace Neville and Eugene O'Brien

Like so many words that originally had their origin in the rather arcane world of French literary theory, postmodernism, similar to deconstruction, structuralism and post-structuralism, has become an almost portmanteau term signifying everything and nothing. It has been associated with different theorists, across different academic disciplines and assumes varying connotations in all of these different contexts. So, while defining one's terms is a necessary academic task, in this case it is fraught with problems. Postmodernism can hardly be defined without reference to modernism, which immediately raises the question as to whether modernism is the same as modernity and whether postmodernism is similar to postmodernity. We will seek to illustrate in this Introduction that the relationship between modernity and postmodernity is analogous to that between modernism and postmodernism.

The term 'modernity', more recent critics now suggest, should be used to signify the historical, cultural, economic and political conditions of the time and 'modernism', the literary and aesthetic representations of, or responses to, those historical conditions. Modernity defined in this way becomes the historical and cultural conditions of possibility that make modernism both necessary and possible in the first place. Similarly, 'postmodernity' can be seen as the cultural and technological context for the emergence of 'postmodernism', as a form of response to, and analysis of, these conditions. To further complicate matters, postmodernism can also be seen as an ongoing critique of, and reaction to, modernism.

In terms of postmodernism in general, its eschewal of grand narratives makes the task of defining it difficult, as to do so would risk the establishment of yet one more grand narrative. So any definition must be particularist in terms of looking at specific aspects that we can designate as postmodern. Some writers see it as sequential to modernism, whereas others, Jean-François Lyotard for example, see modernist confidence as

always counterinstanced by postmodern scepticism.¹ It especially looks at the givens of modernism and subjects these to critique. Postmodernism, therefore, splices high with low culture and, as Peter Brooker notes, it raids and parodies past art, it questions all absolutes, it swamps reality in a culture of recycled images, it has to do with 'deconstruction, with consumerism, with television and the fall of communism.'²

It is the very amorphous and paradoxical nature of postmodernism that makes it so apt to question constructions of identity. Despite the capitalistic element of the postmodern, namely the aspirations of multinational corporations that disseminate what is called 'global' culture in a hegemony Jameson refers to as 'a purer form of capitalism',³ assisting in the construction of 'a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world',⁴ as an artistic movement, postmodernism remains ideologically open, principally through its self-conscious ambiguity. The mainstream, monolithic 'high' culture of Modernism has been replaced by 'marginality' and the 'periphery,' an accentuation of polyphony, heteroglossia, difference.⁵ And it ranges across the genres and fields of knowledge from literature to science. Two of the seminal figures in postmodern theory demonstrate this.

Firstly, there is Ihab Hassan, whose *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* examines the development of what he called the 'literature of silence' through de Sade, Kafka, Hemingway and Beckett. The contradiction between literature, traditionally seen to have an enunciative function, and Hassan's ideas about silence, embody the postmodern critique of the modern. Secondly, in the field of science, Thomas Kuhn, suggested that paradigm shift was the major epistemological factor in contemporary science and knowledge. He stressed the notion of subjectivity and disagreement as part of the process of scientific progress: 'crisis is always implicit in research because every problem that normal science sees as a puzzle can be seen, from another view-

1 Jean-François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10). Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), pp.75-79.

2 Peter Brooker (ed.) *Modernism/Postmodernism* (New York: Longman, 1992), p.3.

3 Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p.3.

4 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.5.

5 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.3.

point, as a counterinstanced and thus as a source of crisis.’⁶ For Kuhn, epistemological progress always involves such counterinstances and sees paradigm shifts as a ‘transition between incommensurables’ which means there will always be contestation.⁷ Postmodernist writers and theorists suggest that a global, decentralized society such as currently prevails in the Western world inevitably creates responses/perceptions that are described as postmodern – for example, the rejection of what are seen as the false, imposed unities of meta-narrative and hegemony; the breaking of traditional frames of genre, structure and stylistic unity; the overthrowing of categories that are the result of logocentrism and other forms of artificially imposed order. While the characteristics of postmodern life are sometimes difficult to grasp, most postmodern scholars point to concrete and visible technological and economic changes that they claim have brought about these new types of thinking.

Such a philosophy allows for an increased awareness of ‘cultural complexity’⁸ to take place, that, in its turn, allows the integration of the local and the international, which, rather than succumbing to new forms of hierarchy and uniformity, creates a ‘contra-modernity’,⁹ consisting of a hybrid, syncretic, borderline culture. Peter Brooker provides a useful account of the value of such thinking:

For if the features of postmodernism [. . .] are historically specific, they are not culturally hermetic. Indeed, one of the most convincing descriptions of postmodernism is of a shift, prompted and enabled by social, economic and technological change, into the heteroglossia of inter-cultural exchange, as idioms, discourse across the arts and academy, and across these and mass forms, are montaged, blended or blurred together. ‘Postmodernism’ becomes its own best symptom of dissemination and difference.¹⁰

As further evidence of the postmodern being its own best symptom, even at the level of nomenclature, there is dissemination and difference. In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Anthony Giddens makes a case for a distinction between ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity.’ The former, for Giddens, ‘is best kept to refer to styles or movements within literature,

6 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.79.

7 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p.212.

8 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.12.

9 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.11.

10 Brooker (ed.), *Modernism/Postmodernism*, p.20.

painting, the plastic arts, and architecture. It concerns aspects of aesthetic reflection upon the nature of modernity.’¹¹ The latter, on the other hand, concerns ‘a new and distinct type of social order,’ characterized by the collapse of epistemological foundations, the exposure of history as being devoid of any meta-narratives (or in Giddens’ term ‘grand narratives’), and an increasing awareness of ecological ways of thinking.¹² Postmodernism represents a trend within the cultural sphere, and the trend might or might not be a part of a postmodern society. For Giddens, postmodernism in the arts might point to some sort of actual social change, but it need not necessarily do so.

So the very question of defining our terms is problematised by the terms themselves: ‘postmodernism’ and/or ‘postmodernity’ – the constative definition of postmodernity/postmodernism is deconstructed by its performative dimension. One of the most telling attempts to define postmodernism, by Lyotard, avoids the pitfalls of this Scylla and Charybdis by being phrased in the future perfect tense. In moving to define postmodernism this way (performatively rather than denotatively), the ‘truth’ about postmodernism is preserved (or manufactured) as being unrepresentable and hence sublime:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces, are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*misc en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. *Post modern*

11 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.45.

12 Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p.46.

would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).¹³

At a further level of paradox, the role of representation and the presentable, raised here by Lyotard, becomes central to the work of Jean Baudrillard on the postmodern. For Baudrillard, it is the image, the simulation of the real, the hyperreal, that are the most important aspects of the postmodern. Baudrillard's most explicit theorization of the term 'hyperreality' that defines the postmodern experience is provided in *Simulations*, published in 1983, where he talks about 'the four successive phases of the image.' These phases have to do with the sign or image's distancing from the object of representation, and are enumerated as follows:

- it is the reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality
- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.¹⁴

In his influential *S/Z*, where he develops a form of critical commentary that is highly 'creative' in its reading of a classical work of literature ('Sarrasine', a short story by Honoré de Balzac from 1830), Barthes introduces a distinction between what he calls 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts, a distinction which has strong points of connection with Lyotard's idea of the writer as philosopher, inaugurating his or her own rules, and Baudrillard's idea of the sign as creative of different levels of reality. For Barthes:

the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore. Further, its model being a productive (and not a representative) one, it demolishes any criticism which, once produced, would mix with it: to rewrite the writerly text would consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference. The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed: the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism)

13 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.81. Original italics.

14 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*. Translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York; Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.

which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.¹⁵

The performative nature of the postmodern, and the relative nature of truth, means that this theory offers strong possibilities for social, cultural and political change. If paradigms can be changed and if all grand narratives are now micro-narratives, then change is part of postmodern epistemology. In terms of politics and ethics, the interfusion and difference of these micro-narratives allow for structures of difference to be set up which interact and meld in an egalitarian manner. The structure of such postmodernism is what has been called rhizomatic by Deleuze and Guattari.

A rhizome is any plant, like ivy or grass, with a subterranean stem, commonly horizontal in position, that usually produces roots below and at the same time sends up shoots progressively from the upper surface. There is no single root, and the origin cannot be identified or traced. As Deleuze puts it: '[...]there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines.'¹⁶ Hence for Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome becomes the figure of what they call 'acentred systems.' Trees, then, are structured and hierarchical, whereas the rhizome is nonhierarchical, structureless, open, consisting only of 'multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight.'¹⁷ It is our contention that the contemporary culture of Ireland resembles these postmodern structures – not structureless, but very different in structure from the tree-like hierarchy that characterised the Ireland of previous decades.

Given that much of the analysis of postmodernity and much of the theoretical framework of postmodernism derives from French writers and thinkers, it appears logical to set up a series of Franco-Irish adequations whereby the current postmodern Irish socio-cultural paradigm is interrogated through the insights of French thought. Similarly, Irish contexts can help shed light on French writing as we are now going through the processes of secularisation and multi-ethnic cultural changes that have been part of the French experience since the 1950s. The interchange is

15 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 5. Original emphasis.

16 Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), p.8.

17 Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 21

fruitful to both cultures, as we hope, will be this collection of essays. The current volume, rhizomatic in structure, examines different strands and themes in the discourse of the postmodern across a Franco-Irish axis.

The first section of the book deals, appropriately enough, with two of the names regularly associated with postmodern thought, Beckett and Lacan. Helen Astbury displays how 'Beckett's theatre *and* his self-translation would eventually lead him in exactly the same (post-modern) direction his prose had taken him.' In an elegantly argued chapter, Astbury posits the view that in switching from prose to theatre with the deliberate aim of producing a less post-modern textual universe, Beckett 'underestimated his own creativity, and in fact created theatrical pieces which owed a lot to his prose writing, and a dramatic universe no less post-modern than the textual universe had been.' Fabienne Dabrigeon-Garcier concentrates on Beckett's short fiction, distinguishing between the 'short story' and the 'nouvelle.' In the stories of the collection *More Pricks than Kicks*, Dabrigeon-Garcier notes, 'c'est par l'excès, l'exubérance baroque que se produit le naufrage du sens', whereas the *Nouvelles* 's'orientent vers la littérature du « non-mot. » The *Nouvelles* still related a story, albeit it in a disjointed form, while the *Textes pour rien* show words degenerating into a morass of absurdity and incomprehension. Adrian Millar provides a Lacanian take on some of the blind-spots of the postmodernist project in Ireland. Having provided a cogent résumé of the main facets of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, Millar illustrates how third millennial Ireland is living a type of socio-ideological fantasy: 'The Other that we live or die for is no longer the great industrial machine, the Church, the State or nationalist ideology, it is the semi-solid wooden floor in the lounge, the decking in the garden, the kitchen extension, the three toilets, the foreign holidays and the best childcare that money can buy.' Postmodernism therefore fails to deliver any more meaning than modernism did. Rather, it merely offers more of the same. Peter Guy concludes this first section with an interesting application of Lacan's *Nom-du-Père* theory to two very different Irish novels: Roddy Doyle's *The Snapper* and John McGahern's *Amongst Women*. Guy's thesis is that these novels, both published in the 1990s, 'set about promoting anti-logocentric discourse that would transgress and undermine the tyranny of unitary meaning inherent in a phallogocentric system.' The issues of power, the undermining of the patriarchal system, the castration complex, the mirror, are all discussed in what becomes a lively and informative comparative study. In the end, one is left with the impression

that Lacanian theory is indeed a useful tool in critiquing contemporary Irish society.

The second part of the collection demonstrates the manner in which some of our contemporary poets grapple with issues of modernity and postmodernity. Mary Pierse dwells on how the poetic voices of Dennis O'Driscoll and Cathal Ó Searcaigh may be in tune with Jean-François Lyotard. Drawing on the latter's correspondence, Pierse underlines the philosopher's theory of how the postmodern implies 'a responsibility to investigate assumptions', something both Irish poets set about doing in diverse ways. In particular, they 'could be deemed postmodern in their overall variety', but Pierse rightly throws cold water on the notion of how useful the application of such labels to works of poetry in particular, or to literature in general, is: 'I am not convinced that Postmodernism has proved to be a label under which one can securely, satisfactorily and meaningfully locate many of the literary works that have been given the tag.' She concludes by declaring that it may well be time to 'launch a new taxonomy.' John McDonagh begins where Pierse signs off by enumerating the various reactions the term 'postmodern' can evoke when it appears in a book title or as a conference theme. However, he then states that its usefulness can be found in its heterogeneity. What follows is a snapshot discussion of how contemporary Irish poets like Michael Hartnett, Paul Durcan, Brendan Kennelly, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Rita Ann Higgins and Micahel Ó Siadhail engage with the modern state. Ireland's recent transformation in the wake of the unexpected arrival of the Celtic Tiger has had an unmistakeable impact on the approach of our poets. McDonagh concludes: 'What can be said with certainty is that contemporary Irish poetry is marked by a broad range of confident voices articulating a tentative recognition of the complex nature of major shifts in the traditional markers of Irish identity.' Joan Dargan searches for traces of French thought in Paul Muldoon's collection, *Horse Latitudes* (2006). She reveals the poet's attraction to literature and recent theory from France, illustrated in a comment he made in an interview to the effect that 'we live in a post-Baudrillardian world!' Poetry, for the French philosopher, was an 'enchanted alternative to the linearity of history.' Brian Walsh concludes this section with a discussion of the postmodern epiphany in the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Walsh argues that French theory, as revealed in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida in particular, 'provides Irish studies with interpretative resources to identify the shadow of the Other dividing the subject from its central Self.' Heaney's poetry provides glimpses of a postmodern epiphany situated somewhere

between the 'two conflicting centres of the real and the ideal, the body and the subject, form and content.'

Part III concentrates on fiction. The title of Eugene O'Brien's chapter suggests an articulation between James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Patrick McCabe's *Winterwood*. Looking at these works through the lens of Derrida's notion of the frame (*parergon*) and the work (*ergon*), he examines the way that modernist notions of the *Bildungsroman* are deconstructed by postmodern readings of the same genre, and goes on to trace an epistemology of the subject in postmodern Ireland as a changing and fluid construction. He sees postmodern theory as providing an appropriate framework through which to analyse the current paradigms of subjective identity in an Irish context. Paula Murphy deals with Dermot Bolger's Trilogy of plays dealing with the Dublin suburb of Ballymun. Murphy puts forward the argument that although the nation during the period covered by the plays 'would not have described itself in the context of postmodernism', there is something about the subject matter and the methods through which he articulates it that makes such a thesis defensible. Using Lyotard's theory that the grand narrative has lost its credibility and may be replaced by new languages being added to the old ones to form 'suburbs of the old town', Murphy maintains that Bolger holds out hope for the future 'in his charting of the vacillations and tensions between Ireland's modernity and its postmodernity.' Sylvie Mikowski supplies an insightful reading of another novel by Patrick McCabe, this time *The Butcher Boy*, where the style resembles in her view that of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's, described by Julia Kristeva as an example of 'une écriture de l'abjection.' The raw descriptions of sex and the bodily functions, the macabre, unreal atmosphere of their novels, the difficulties their characters have in communicating their emotions, the fragmented and disjointed language, generously spliced with curses and colloquialisms, offer the scope for an enlightening comparative study of the social and emotional turmoil that frames the fiction of McCabe and Céline.

The final part of this study concentrates on religion and society. Yann Bévant presents Ireland at an interesting crossroads which sees it searching for a way of reconciling increased cultural diversity with traditional national identity. By proposing a re-examination of the myths surrounding cultural specificity in a progressively more globalised world, Bévant offers an excellent overview of how France and Ireland are facing up to the problems caused by the 'évolutions idéologiques considérables de ces dernières années.' Jean-Christophe Penet, in a clever juxtaposition

of how the Irish use the greeting, *Nollaig Shona* and the French, 'Bonne Année', demonstrates the cultural differences revealed in such practices. The Gaelic language is heavily laden with religious references which would not be acceptable in a robustly secular French Republic. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical to note that at the same time as An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, was unashamedly appearing at State functions with his female partner (not his wife), the French Head of State, François Mitterrand, steadfastly kept his extramarital affair private. Analysing the contrasting reactions to 'la laïcité' as it impacts on political and social life in France and Ireland, Penet maintains that although Ireland has experienced a massive secularisation since the 1980s, it still has not completely caught up on France or the rest of Europe. France is undergoing a period of 'hypersécularisation' while Ireland has entered an 'ultramodern' zone which leads Penet to conclude with the following question: 'A défaut d'une forte tradition du discours républicain, la crise du discours laissera-t-il l'Irlande sans foi ni voix ?' Eóin Flannery deals with two cinematic productions, the French film *Hidden (Caché)* and the Irish production *Zulu 9*, in order to supply an analysis of the representational legacies of French colonialism and 'the complex transhistorical correspondences and hypocrisies of the Irish colonial experience.' The result is an illuminating chapter outlining the manner in which both films challenge the viewer by offering him/her 'a looking-glass through which they can confront conscious and submerged prejudices.' The final essay in the collection offers an examination of how the writings of the French priest-writer and philosopher, Jean Sullivan, might be useful in the context of what has been referred to as 'post-Catholic' Ireland. Sullivan maintained that the French Church of the 1970s and 80s, which had seen a massive fall-off in attendance at religious services and a drop in vocations, was more in conformity with the wishes of its founder. Writing in his spiritual journal, *Matinales*, Sullivan described how this apparent 'crisis' held out great possibilities for renewal: 'Aujourd'hui, telle la nuée de l'Exode, son visage (celui de l'Eglise) est plus lumineux que lors qu'elle semblait régner. C'est dans son humiliation qu'est sa gloire.' Maher argues that, in a similar way, the seeming demise of organised religion in Ireland could merely be a way of purging all traces of an oppressive authoritarian structure in order to replace it by a more humble, human and genuinely Christian model of Church.

Ainsi se termine le deuxième volume de la série *Studies in Franco-Irish Relations*. Nous sommes particulièrement heureux, en tant qu'éditeurs, qu'il y ait davantage d'articles écrits en langue française

cette fois-ci et que les sujets traités offrent une perspective très variée du thème choisi. Nous tenons à remercier tout particulièrement l'Institut de Technologie Tallaght (ITT Dublin) et l'Université de Cork (UCC) d'avoir assuré les frais associés à la publication de ce livre. Le Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle de l'Ambassade de France en Irlande nous a également octroyé une subvention généreuse qui a été indispensable pour l'organisation du Colloque dont cet ouvrage est issu. Finalement, les membres de notre comité de rédaction ont lu et corrigé les articles avec soin et efficacité et nous leur sommes fort reconnaissants.

Bonne lecture et vive l'amitié franco-irlandaise !

Part I

Beckett, Lacan and Postmodern Musings

Helen Astbury

Prose, Theatre, Translation: Beckett, the reluctant post-modernist

Samuel Beckett, a reluctant post-modernist? The suggestion seems incongruous, when so many thinkers of the post-modern, not least Jacques Derrida, have openly acknowledged their debt to Beckett's work in the elaboration of their theories. This chapter hopes to dispel the incongruity of the proposition by showing how every time Beckett's work tended towards an aesthetic which can be labelled as post-modern, the uniquely Franco-Irish author reacted by stepping back, and attempting to renew with a more traditional vein of writing. While it may be undeniable that Beckett's 1953 novel, and final volume of the first trilogy, *L'Innommable*, can be qualified as post-modern prose, if only because of those final words: 'je vais continuer', it must not be forgotten that in reaction to this sort of prose, Beckett turned, in a move explicitly presented by the author himself as a move to something lighter, to the theatre. Beckett saw the theatre as respite, as a haven of concreteness after the indeterminate prose he had been writing in French. Similarly, while writing *L'Innommable*, Beckett had already started translating the previous novels of the trilogy, *Molloy* and *Malone meurt*, into English, his mother tongue. Again, it was hoped that the comfortable certainty and determinacy of the mother tongue would lead him out of the aporia writing prose in a foreign language may be seen to have brought him to. However, it is my contention that both Beckett's theatre *and* his self-translation would eventually lead him in exactly the same (post-modern) direction his prose had taken him.

Firstly, taking the specific example of the French-language *L'Innommable*, I will attempt to determine how post-modern Beckett's prose writing really is, and to what extent such characteristics of his writing in French and in prose would survive the language and genre switch. The switch to drama, while it may have represented, with *En attendant Godot*, a less post-modern aesthetic, will ultimately be seen to have brought Beckett full circle, with the natural development from Beckett's first stage play to his last, *What Where*. Finally, the return to English and

the systematic practice of self-translation will be discussed in terms of the subsequent double inscription of each Beckett text.

Postmodern Beckett

In his study of Beckett's bilingualism, *Beckett ou le don des langues*, Michael Edwards qualifies Beckett's *L'Innommable* as being, in spite of having been written in French, firmly rooted in the *English* modernist tradition, because '*le modernisme, surtout anglais, se révèle souvent être la littérature de la citation inexacte; on sait maintenant que l'Innommable va résumer tout ce mouvement littéraire.*'¹ The lines Michael Edwards quotes from *L'Innommable* to support this affirmation are the following: '*J'ai à parler, n'ayant rien à dire, rien que les paroles des autres.*'² It is probably not surprising that the Irish writer Samuel Beckett should qualify *any* French words as 'the words of others.' Indeed, as a foreign speaker of a language, one can never pretend to do more than quote those words, and hope that one does not quote them too inaccurately. Julia Kristeva insists on the *secondary* nature of one's use of a foreign language in *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* ('*ce discours second et secondaire*'), and remarks also on the foreigner's use of the language as quotation: '*l'étranger [...] se contente de faire une re-production brillante de tout ce qu'il y a à apprendre, rarement une innovation.*'³ Another author who made the same linguistic choice as Beckett, the Anglophone Canadian novelist who writes principally in French, Nancy Huston, also insists on her own use of French as quotation: '*Choisir [...] de conduire le reste de son existence dans une culture et une langue jusque-là étrangères, c'est*

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- 1 Michael Edwards, *Beckett ou le don des langues* (Montpellier: Editions Espaces 34, 1998), pp.13-14. My italics: 'Modernism, in particular English modernism, often proves itself to be a literature of misquotation.' My translation.
 - 2 Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable* (Paris: Minuit, 1953), 'Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak', Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder, 1959), p.316. All subsequent references will be to these editions and will be denoted in brackets by I and T, followed by the page number.
 - 3 Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.49. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by ENM, followed by the page number. 'The foreigner is happy to brilliantly reproduce *everything* there is to be learned, but he or she rarely *innovates*.' My translation.

*accepter de s'installer à tout jamais dans l'imitation, le faire semblant, le théâtre.*⁴

Edwards' interesting transposition of what he claims to be the modernist principle of misquotation to Beckett's use of a foreign language refers to the Beckettian narrator's insistence that, in French (or indeed in English), all he will ever say will be no more than an inaccurate repetition of the words of an other. This begs the question of the inaccuracy of Beckett's French. In fact, if critics almost unanimously consider Beckett's French to be exceptional, it is in part because the inaccuracies are most often deliberate, underlined, and usually fully integrated into what we now recognise as archetypically Beckettian humour, in particular in his early French theatre. Beckett more than proves, for example, his familiarity with French expressions and proverbs such as '*battre le fer tant qu'il est chaud*' (strike while the iron is hot) or '*se tenir coi*' (to stay quiet), when he misuses them in *En attendant Godot* (when he has Estragon proclaim that '*on ferait mieux de battre le fer avant qu'il soit glacé*',⁵ translated by 'it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes'),⁶ or in the following exchange between Hamm and Clov in *Fin de partie*, after the latter's discovery of a flea in his trousers:

HAMM. – Tu l'as eue?

CLOV. – On dirait. (Il lâche le carton et arrange ses vêtements.) A moins qu'elle ne se tienne coïte.

HAMM. – Coïte! Coïte tu veux dire. A moins qu'elle ne se tienne coïte.

CLOV. – Ah! On dit coïte? On ne dit pas coïte?

HAMM. – Mais voyons! Si elle se tenait coïte nous serions baisés.⁷

4 Nancy Huston, "Le Masque et la Plume", pp.15-27, in Marina Yaguello and Cyril Veken (eds.), 'La Langue Maternelle,' *Cahiers Charles V*, no. 27, Décembre 1999, p.15. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by MP, followed by the page number. 'Choosing to spend the rest of one's life in a hitherto foreign culture and language means accepting to live forever in imitation, pretence, theatre.' My translation.

5 Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Minuit, 1952), p.23.

6 Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber, 1986), p.19. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by CDW, followed by the page number.

7 Samuel Beckett, *Fin de partie* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), p.51. The French play on words is difficult to translate, but Beckett's translation shows enormous inventiveness:

If, for this reason alone, Michael Edwards would have us consider *L'Innommable* and Beckett's other writings from the same period, including *En attendant Godot* and *Fin de partie*, as belonging to the *English* modernist tradition, it must surely not escape our attention that such deliberate (and playful) inaccuracies recognise, first and foremost, the arbitrary nature of language. While a foreign language must always appear 'more' arbitrary than one's mother tongue, Beckett first explored this idea in his final English-language novel, *Watt*, which announces, in many ways, the imminent shift to French, not least in the infamous passage about the arbitrary nature of the word 'pot': 'Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, Pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted.'⁸ Watt's dissatisfaction, caused by the arbitrariness of the word 'pot', becomes indifference towards the arbitrary nature of all language in *Molloy*, hence the narrator's remark that 'truly it little matters what I say, this or that or any other thing' (*T*, 32). Michael Edwards identifies this attitude as being related to Beckett's decision to write in French, as he remarks:

Écrire en français permet à Beckett d'éprouver, d'abord, l'arbitraire du signe, la contingence du langage. [...] L'idée de Saussure, que les mots se réfèrent d'abord à d'autres mots avant de se référer aux choses, est vraie au moins pour les langues étrangères, où l'éloignement entre les mots et les choses n'est pas à discuter. Un Anglais peut se persuader, à force d'y réfléchir, que le rapport entre un horse et le mot 'horse' est arbitraire, mais qu'on l'appelle un 'cheval' lui paraîtra tout à fait déraisonnable.⁹

HAMM: Did you get him?

CLOV: Looks like it. [*He drops the tin and adjusts his trousers.*] Unless he's laying doggo.

HAMM: Laying! Lying you mean. Unless he's *lying* doggo.

CLOV: Ah? One says lying? One doesn't say laying?

HAMM: Use your head, cannot you. If he was laying we'd be bitched. (CDW, 108)

8 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: Calder, 1976), p.78.

9 Michael Edwards, *op.cit.*, p.11. 'Writing in French allowed Beckett to experience, firstly, the arbitrariness of the sign, the contingency of language. [...] Saussure's

Such an awareness of the arbitrariness of language (as revealed through Beckett's use of the French language) as well as his deliberate misquotations of proverbs and expressions, in the denial that they imply of any reliable grand narrative, place Beckett's *L'Innommable* more clearly in a post-modern aesthetic than in the English modernist tradition for which Michael Edwards claims the novel, as do the other characteristics of Beckett's writing in this text.

Among these characteristics, and not unrelated to Michael Edwards' comment about quotation, is the repeated denial by the narrator that he is at the origin of anything that he says. He indefatigably insists that he is doing no more than repeating (or trying to repeat) the words of another (or others): 'it is not to me they are talking, it is not of me they are talking, no, that's not it, I feel nothing of all that, try something else, herd of shites, say something else, *for me to hear*, I don't know how, *for me to say*, I don't know how' (*T*, 386, my italics).

Besides denying that the words he hears spewing forth from his mouth are his, the narrator also denies the verisimilitude of the fictional world he (intermittently) believes he belongs to, qualifying everything that he can say on the subject as 'n'importe quoi' (*I*, 65). The following description of the place he has been told he occupies, for example, cancels itself, and its possible existence, out as it goes along: 'That the jar is really standing where they say, all right, I wouldn't dream of denying it, after all it is none of my business, though its presence at such a place, about the reality of which I do not propose to quibble either, does not strike me as very credible. No, I merely doubt that I am in it' (*T*, 346). As the simple description of a physical space can be subjected to such deconstruction, the more than problematic status of both plot and character, epitomised by the instability of proper names suggested by the novel's very title comes as no surprise.

These characters who cannot be identified by a single, immutable name are also characterised by an absence of corporeal integrity, and the extreme fragmentation of their bodies is paralleled by the extreme fragmentation of the narration itself. From dismemberment, 'I was lacking not only a leg, but an arm also' (*T*, 323), the characters regress to the

idea, that words refer first to other words before they refer to things, is at least true for foreign languages, in which the distance between words and things is indisputable. An Englishman can convince himself, if he thinks about it hard enough, that the link between a horse and the word "horse" is arbitrary, but it will seem most unreasonable to call it a "cheval."¹ My translation.

point of losing their sense organs, 'I don't feel a mouth on me, nor a head, do I feel an ear, frankly now, do I feel an ear, well frankly now I don't, so much the worse, I don't feel an ear either' (T, 386), and end up forced to conclude, 'I don't feel a body on me' (T, 416). Bodily fragmentation rhymes with lack of wholeness, echoed in the impossibility of completion of the novel itself with the repetition no less than eight times in the final pages of the novel of the injunction to go on, 'you must go on', most significantly in the final line.

From prose to theatre

While Beckett resisted any classification of his work as 'modern', 'post-modern', 'absurdist', etc. he was certainly aware that the ways in which he had pushed back the limits of prose writing undermined the constitutive elements of narrative which are the notions of space, time and character, as the incipit of *L'Innommable* couldn't make clearer: 'Where now? Who now? When now?' (T, 293). Shortly after Beckett completed *L'Innommable*, he turned to writing for the theatre. This decision was explicitly motivated by the need to extricate himself from the sorts of (post-modern) indeterminacy (and, possibly, impasse) writing in prose had led him into. He is quoted as giving among his motivations for switching to drama the fact that '[in] the theatre you have a definite space and people in this space. That's relaxing.' A definite space would indeed be relaxing after the 'where now?' of *L'Innommable*, as would people in this space after the 'who now?' of Beckett's pre-*Godot* prose.

Whether or not *En attendant Godot* and *Fin de partie* can be deemed to be 'relaxing', both plays take place in a definite space, one which can be satisfactorily depicted through stage directions ('A country road' (CDW, 11), a 'Bare interior' (CDW, 92), with people, and even named people, (Didi, Gogo, Pozzo, Hamm, Clov) in that space. However, Beckett's post-*Fin de partie* plays would soon disprove his certainties about the relaxing nature of theatre as a genre. Even at this early stage, some of the roles played out on the Beckettian stage, those of Lucky, Nagg or Nell, for example, may already be seen to be more reminiscent of the characters of the prose of the trilogy (and clearly premonitory of those of the late theatre), either by the fragmentation of their discourse (Lucky, with his infamous monologue) or by that of their bodies (Nagg and Nell, (again infamously) reduced to truncated torsos imprisoned in onstage dustbins)). The seeds for that late theatre were sown with the writing of *En attendant Godot*, and there is a real continuity between it and, for example, *That Time* or *A Piece of Monologue*. Indeed, theatre

changed on the 3rd January 1953, as some foresighted theatre critics, including Kenneth Tynan, remarked: ‘*Godot* [...] forced people to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama; and, having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough.’¹⁰ Perhaps the first playwright to draw the conclusions of this re-evaluation of the rules governing theatre, thus contradicting his own previous statement about theatre representing people in definite spaces, was Beckett himself.

The direction Beckett’s writing for the stage was soon to take is not unrelated to his 1956 foray into a new theatrical genre, with *All That Fall*. Radio drama can be seen, to a certain extent, to be the missing link between Beckett’s prose and his late theatre. As Jonathan Kalb puts it, ‘[d]isembodied voices [...] had been an important feature in his prose fiction for years, and in retrospect it seems only natural that he would eventually make use of a medium in which drama could be peopled entirely with invisible characters.’¹¹ *All That Fall* allowed Beckett to de-realise space, not only because of the very nature of radio drama, but also because he used deliberately artificial sound effects.¹² The de-realisation of space and the invisibility of the characters were qualities which were difficult to achieve on a theatre stage, and which Beckett had only touched upon until then with his dustbin-bound characters, Nagg and Nell. However, the stage actors Beckett worked with were soon to become almost as disembodied as those of his radio drama (and his post-modern French prose) had been.

So much for ‘at the theatre you have a definite space and people in this space.’ No spectator of Beckett’s subsequent theatre would make such a claim, and their reserves are understandable, as their theatre experiences have included a play in which the unchanging visual aspect is that of an ‘Old white face, long flaring white hair as if seen from above

10 Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p.350.

11 Jonathan Kalb, “The mediated Quixote: the radio and television plays, and *Film*”, pp.124-144, in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.126.

12 ‘The primary experience of the play in performance is of a sound-world that does not attempt to convince us of its veracity except as a product of Maddy’s (and Beckett’s) imagination. The “rural sounds” at the opening, for instance (‘Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together’), which return later, are not only flagrantly artificial in themselves – they were radio clichés even in 1956 – but are also continually used in ways that remind us of their radiophonic origin.’ Kalb, p.127.

outspread [...] about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre' (CDW, 288), and a play in which the (again) unchanging visual aspect is, even more minimalistically, that of a mouth 'about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below' (CDW, 376). Beckett's decision to turn to the theatre in a deliberate attempt to move away from the fragmentary body parts his prose incarnations had become is both founded and understandable, as, before Beckett, the theatre did not allow for floating mouths and faces. In a sense, Beckett's foray into the theatrical genre failed. But then, success and failure are almost interchangeable terms in the Beckettian universe, or, as he put it himself in a letter written to console his American director, Alan Schneider, after the flop of the American première of *Godot*: 'Success and failure on the public level never mattered much to me, in fact I feel much more at home with the latter, having breathed deep of its vivifying air all my writing life up to the last couple of years.'¹³ The same idea is at the heart of Beckett's 1983 prose text, *Worstward Ho*: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.'¹⁴

As an attempt to create more 'relaxing' work, switching to the theatre 'failed.' Theatre should have been the genre which would have allowed Beckett to complete his fragmented prose bodies, but it did not take him long to overcome the difficulty of representing body parts on stage. Similarly, when a prose character on the written page claims that it is not he who speaks, the reader can do little more than accept this statement. Before Beckett, it would have been extremely difficult for a dramatic character to make a similar claim. In Beckett's late plays, denied origin of discourse is placed, literally, centre stage. Plays like *Not I* (in which the *L'Innommable* filiation is clear), *A Piece of Monologue*, *Rockaby* or *That Time* either turn the on-stage characters into simple mouth-pieces (the sole on-stage character of *Not I* is called 'Mouth'), declaiming lives which they claim not to have lived, or into detached aural orifices (the character of *That Time* is called 'Listener'). In *Not I*, Mouth vehemently denies that the life she describes might have been hers: 'what?.. who?.. no!.. she!..' (CDW, 379). In *A Piece of Monologue*, the Speaker recounts a lived life, but the use of the third person from the opening line ('Birth was the death of him' (CDW, 425) and throughout suggests that it is not (assumed as) his own. *That Time* and *Rockaby* go further still, re-

13 Maurice Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.8.

14 Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: Calder, 1983), p.7.

ducing the bodies present on stage to silence, and forcing them to listen to a recording of their own voices, again describing what may be their own lives. The Listener of *That Time* has no control over the recording, nor does he participate, beyond opening and closing his eyes. In *Rockaby*, W can ask for 'More' (CDW, 435), but the only other words she speaks are the echo of the final lines of the recorded speech: '[*Together: echo of 'time she stopped', coming to rest of rock, faint fade of light. Long Pause*]' (CDW, 436).

If Beckett was a reluctant post-modernist, switching from prose to theatre with the deliberate and explicit aim of creating a less post-modern textual universe, he underestimated his own creativity, and in fact created theatrical pieces which owed a lot to his prose writings, and a dramatic universe no less post-modern than the textual universe had been.

From French to English

If drama was to take Beckett in the same direction as his prose, what of the suggestion that Beckett's postmodernist prose may have owed something to the fact that much of it was written in a foreign language? While French was a language he most certainly mastered, writing in any foreign language inevitably cuts one off from the certainties inherent in one's mother tongue, as Julia Kristeva puts it in *Etrangers à nous-mêmes: 'Ne pas parler sa langue maternelle. Habiter des sonorités, des logiques coupées de la mémoire nocturne du corps, du sommeil aigre-doux de l'enfance'* (ENM, 26-27).¹⁵ While Kristeva insists on the switch to a foreign language as a point of no return, Nancy Huston sees the repercussions of such a switch as being as significant in the case of a return to the mother tongue as they had been in that of the foreign language: '*L'acquisition d'une deuxième langue annule le caractère "naturel" de la langue d'origine – et à partir de là, rien n'est donné d'office, ni dans l'une ni dans l'autre; rien ne vous appartient d'origine, de droit et d'évidence*' (MP, 22).¹⁶ What effect would the systematic translation of Beckett's post-modern French texts into English, again undertaken

15 'No longer to speak one's mother tongue. To live in the sounds, the logic cut from the nocturnal memory of the body, the sweet and sour sleep of childhood.' My translation.

16 'Learning a second language cancels out the "naturalness" of the first language, and from that point on, nothing is a given, in neither language, and nothing belongs to you as origin, as right and as evidence.' My translation.

around the time of the writing of *L'Innommable*, have on the nature of his writing?

Any commentary on Beckett's translated texts must take into consideration the double status of the double that the translation always already is: both in terms of creation and in terms of reception. In terms of translation as creative activity, while Beckett often uses self-translation as an opportunity to re-write, he never uses it as an opportunity to confer more sense or verisimilitude onto his characters or their situation, or to complete their bodily fragmentariness, for example. In this sense, self-translation, even into the mother tongue, does nothing to undermine the post-modern aspects of the texts. Indeed, the self-translations may even be seen to become more post-modern, because of the way any translated text, and in particular a self-translation, is received, both critically and academically.

When discussing a translated text, the status of original and copy is perfectly clear; the original benefiting from the aura of authenticity, genuineness and uniqueness, the translation no more than pale copy, replaceable by any number of other, equally valid, versions. When discussing a *self-translation*, the status of original and copy becomes problematic. The original no longer bathes in an aura of authenticity, but immediately loses its veneer once it has been translated, as its status changes to that of mere draft or palimpsest, supplanted by a (more) final version, the changes of which will always be seen to be missing from what, until it was translated, had been seen as the original.

This problematic status of original and copy is further complicated by the reception of the texts in English and in French being relayed by their reception in Ireland and in France. Beyond the bad faith of (us) Irish academics, claiming Beckett as ours, and inherently better in English, and the equally bad faith of French academics who claim him as theirs, and inherently better in French (a difference the very existence of a book series on Franco-Irish relations should help us transcend), the way we all read Beckett has interesting consequences. When (we) academics (on both sides of the linguistic divide) discuss Beckett's self-translations we tend to treat the translations into French and English differently. Whether Beckett's writings in his mother tongue are indeed more 'authentic' or more 'natural' than his writings in French, or whether we simply apply a frame of reference onto his work, attaching more importance to his passport than to his creative choices, we almost systematically refer to his translations from English to French as, simply, 'translations', but when Beckett translates from his *original* French into English, we tend to say

that Beckett is ‘translating *back*’ into English – positing some sort of *Ur*-text in English, seen as inevitably pre-existing its writing, and of which the French version is already the translation. To a certain extent, this denial of the originality of Beckett’s voice in French parallels very neatly the denial of the originality of the narrator’s voice in *L’Innommable*.

In fact, the very existence of Beckett’s self-translations goes even further in suggesting an infinitely deferred, or even inexistent, original, whether the original language of composition be English or French. In his study of Walter Benjamin’s essay on the task of the translator, “Des tours de Babel”, Derrida insists on the way in which any translation underlines the incompleteness of the original: ‘*si l’original appelle un complément, c’est qu’à l’origine il n’était pas là sans faute, plein, complet, total, identique à soi. Dès l’origine de l’original à traduire, il y a chute et exil.*’¹⁷ If any original text requires, as Derrida suggests, completion through translation, how much more so does a self-translation of a text originally written in a foreign language? The original decision to write in French, followed by the decision to systematically translate his French texts into English (and, ultimately, vice versa), by putting forward the existence of multiple languages, underlines the incompleteness of any text, and the impossibility of its completion: ‘*La “tour de Babel” ne figure pas seulement la multiplicité irréductible des langues, elle exhibe un in-achèvement, l’impossibilité de compléter, de totaliser, de saturer, d’achever quelque chose*’ (TB, 203).¹⁸ In this way, Beckett’s translation into English of *L’Innommable* also serves to reiterate and prove the novel’s point. The impossible completion of the novel is epitomised by the words ‘je vais continuer’ (I, 213) which fail to conclude *L’Innommable*. If *The Unnamable* is a second attempt at completion, its ultimate words ‘I’ll go on’ (T, 418) simply fail better at concluding *L’Innommable/The Unnamable*.

17 Jacques Derrida, “Des tours de Babel”, in *Psyché: Invention de l’autre* (Paris : Galilée, 1987), pp.203-235, p.222. ‘If the original requires supplementation, it is because even at its origin it was not perfect, full, complete, entire, identical to itself. From the origin of the original to be translated, there is fall and exile.’ My translation. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by TB, followed by the page number.

18 ‘The ‘Tower of Babel’ does not only symbolise the irreducible multiplicity of languages. It exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of completing, totalising, saturating, finishing anything.’ My translation.

The very nature of Beckett's 'original' texts poses another problem to the translator, and even to the notion of translation itself. What Benjamin (and Derrida) point out about translation is that we believe that the role of translation (and thus the task of the translator) is to render, as well as possible, the 'meaning' of the original in a different language. How much more difficult, then, is the task of the translator, when the original text to be translated is a systematic deconstruction of any stable meaning, as is the case with Beckett's *L'Innommable*? '*C'est le concept courant de la traduction qui devient problématique : il impliquait ce procès de restitution, la tâche revient à rendre ce qui était d'abord donné, et ce qui était donné, c'était, pensait-on, le sens*' (TB, 213).¹⁹ The very idea of '*sens*' is highly problematic throughout *L'Innommable*. Beckett's prose narrators insist that every word is spoken in vain, that no meaning will be forthcoming. This conclusion is shared by V in Beckett's ultimate stage play, *What Where*, at the end of which the voice leaves all responsibility for interpretation with the spectator, in the enigmatic final words: 'Make sense who may' (CDW, 476). As self-translator, Beckett applies the same principle: he does not use the translation process as an attempt to give more sense to that which originally had very little. He does, however, on occasion, change his text, eliminate passages of varying length, add others, sometimes giving even less sense than the original had done, and further destabilising the notion of original.

Hindsight, for example, leads to one change which has not gone unnoticed: Beckett, the author, when writing *Molloy*, was already planning *Malone meurt* as a sequel, hence the narrator's remark in the opening pages of the novel, that: '*Cette fois-ci, puis encore une je pense, puis c'en sera fini je pense, de ce monde-là aussi.*'²⁰ Logically, the translation should read: 'This time [*Molloy*], then once more I think [*Malone Dies*], then I think it'll be over, with that world too.' In fact, Beckett, the translator of *Molloy* knew that *Malone meurt* would *also* have a sequel, *L'Innommable*, hence the translation: 'This time, then once more I think, *then perhaps a last time*, then I think it'll be over, with that world too. Premonition of the last but one but one' (T, 8, my italics). The linguistic

19 'The very concept of translation becomes problematic: it implied a process of restitution, the task boiling down to returning that which was first given, and that which was given, was, or so we thought, meaning.' My translation.

20 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (Paris: Minuit, 1951), p.9. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by M, followed by the page number

stammer of 'but one but one' ironically undermines the possibility of either first or last, accomplishing at the level of the text what the double inscription (in French and in English) of each text accomplishes at the level of the work as a whole.

Some of Beckett's translation choices actually even lead to the translated version making less sense than the original. In her study of *Malone meurt* and *Malone Dies*, Linda Collinge comments on one of Beckett's translation tics: '*Un autre type de répétition consiste à employer deux synonymes dans la traduction là où ne figurait dans la version originale qu'un seul mot, donnant l'impression que Beckett est à la recherche du mot juste*'²¹. These repetitious hesitations may imply that Beckett is looking for the '*mot juste*', but it is much more likely that they imply the impossibility of the very notion of '*mot juste*', questioning the stability implied by the original's confident choice of one word. These repetitions fall into two categories, the functioning and repercussions of which vary significantly. When the two terms between which the narrator hesitates are quasi-synonyms, the result is a reaction along the chain of signifiers, implying that no single, stable translation exists, and that each word of the original could have been translated by any one of a number of synonymous choices. '[Un] bâton' (*I*, 23), for example, in *L'Innommable*, instead of becoming 'a stick' becomes 'a stick *or pole*' (*T*, 302, my italics) in *The Unnamable*. Similarly, 'se recueillit' (*M*, 58) in *Molloy* becomes 'muse, *or brood*' (*T*, 37, my italics) in the English language version.

The implications of the choices implied in translation are still more significant when the two terms in the balance are antonymous. What is being suggested here is that a translation can (and does) imply the same unravelling of meaning as that accomplished between the opening and closing lines of Moran's report: 'It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows' (*T*, 92), 'Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (*T*, 176). While the end of Moran's report contradicts and cancels out its content, contradictory and self-cancelling translations from the French to the English versions of Beckett's text have a similar effect.

21 Linda Collinge, *Beckett traduit Beckett: De Malone meurt à Malone Dies, l'imaginaire en traduction* (Genève: Droz, 2000), p.133. 'Another sort of repetition involves using two synonyms in the translation where only one word figured in the original, giving one the impression that Beckett is looking for the *mot juste*.' My translation.

Instead of translating 'mais à un niveau inférieur' (*M*, 80) in *Molloy* by 'but at a lower frequency', Beckett chooses to translate it by 'but at a lower frequency, *or at a higher*' (*T*, 50, my italics). Similarly, in *L'Innommable*, 'à force de ne plus servir' (*I*, 57) does not become 'for want of exercise', but 'for want of exercise, *or from excess of it*' (*T*, 323, my italics).

In fact what Beckett is doing in these and other similar examples at the level of the text is exactly that which is also happening at the level of the work as a whole. From a relatively stable position such as 'at a lower frequency', for example, Beckett takes his text to a contradictory and far from stable position ('at a lower frequency, or [maybe] at a higher'). This change is simultaneous with that which goes from 'original' (with its positive connotations of 'better', 'more authentic', etc.) not to 'translation' or 'copy', but to 'new, or maybe not, original.' Where Beckett originally destabilised the notion of meaning, he now destabilises that of origin. Each 'il faut continuer' is relayed by an 'I'll go on', which could equally be relayed by a 'new' 'il faut continuer' which could again be relayed by a 'new' 'I'll go on' in an infinite deferral of original *and* final meaning. Make sense who may.

Fabienne Dabrigeon-Garcier

« Short story » ou « nouvelle » : les apories du genre court chez Samuel Beckett

« Une langue étrangère n'est pas creusée dans la langue même sans que tout le langage à son tour ne bascule, ne soit porté à une limite, à un dehors ou un envers consistant en Visions et Auditions qui ne sont plus d'aucune langue. »
G. Deleuze, « La littérature et la vie », *Critique et Clinique*¹

La nouvelle beckettienne n'a pas reçu toute l'attention critique qu'elle mérite, alors que Beckett n'a cessé, pendant toute sa carrière littéraire et particulièrement à des moments cruciaux de celle-ci, d'écrire des œuvres brèves en prose. Ce sont elles, qui, à trois reprises, lui permettent de sortir de l'impasse créative, en 1934 avec *More Pricks Than Kicks*, en 1946 avec les premières nouvelles françaises, et au début des années 60, lorsqu'il revient à la prose courte pour remanier les résidus d'un ouvrage plus long, sous le titre « Faux départs ». ² Plus encore, la nouvelle semble constituer pour Beckett un lieu expérimental où se déclinent successivement les deux phases antithétiques de l'aventure postmoderne de son écriture, visant l'une et l'autre à une mise en déroute du système signifiant de la langue. Dans *More Pricks Than Kicks*, son premier recueil de récits courts, c'est par l'excès, l'exubérance baroque que se produit le naufrage du sens, alors que les *Nouvelles* s'orientent vers la littérature du « non-mot » ³ et l'amenuisement ascétique qui se développent et se systématisent dans la Trilogie romanesque pour trouver leur point d'aboutissement dans les *Textes pour rien*. Après cette dernière série, Beckett atteint une deuxième phase de silence, d'impossibilité d'écrire

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1993), p.16.

2 S.E. Gontarski (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: the Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p.xxvii.

3 Lettre de 1937 à Axel Kaun. Traduction Bruno Clément, *L'Oeuvre sans qualités. Rhétorique de Samuel Beckett* (Paris : Seuil, 1994), pp.238-239.

dont il n'émergera qu'avec le retour à l'anglais en 1954. L'évolution de l'écriture dans le genre court semble donc avoir partie liée avec le choix du français. C'est ce double passage que je voudrais analyser ici : des « stories » de *More Pricks Than Kicks*⁴ aux *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, passage lui-même articulé sur un changement de langue et d'esthétique décisif.

1. La nouvelle, espace transitionnel

C'est à Paris, dans la revue *transition: An International Workshop for Orphic Creation* d'Eugène Jolas que Beckett publie ses toutes premières œuvres de fiction : deux nouvelles, « Assumption » en juin 1929 et « Sedendo and Quiesciendo » en mars 1932. La première est publiée dans le même numéro de *transition* que « Dante [. . .] Bruno . Vico .. Joyce », l'essai fameux de Beckett sur le *Work in Progress* de Joyce, écrit à la demande de Jolas sur la suggestion et avec l'accord de Joyce lui-même. La seconde, « Sedendo and Quiescendo », est un fragment du roman que Beckett est en train d'écrire en 1932, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Elle anticipe le devenir de ce roman qui, refusé par les éditeurs, sera transformé par son auteur en un recueil de dix récits publié à Londres par Chatto & Windus sous le titre *More Pricks Than Kicks* en 1934. La nouvelle, en quelque sorte, vient au secours du roman et lui assure une deuxième vie en résorbant l'hétérogénéité de *Dream* qui constituait sa faille majeure et un grave obstacle à la lecture dans la discontinuité propre au recueil de nouvelles, fragmentaire par nature. Par nature encore, le recueil fait sienne la parcellisation du personnage central de Belacqua que Beckett avait en vue dès le roman afin de mettre en pièces l'artifice de l'unité du sujet fictionnel et sa fausse cohérence dans la fiction réaliste : « Thus little by little Belacqua may be described, but not circumscribed; his terms stated, but not summed. »⁵ La récurrence de Belacqua dans chacun des récits de *More Pricks Than Kicks* n'a ni pour but ni pour effet

4 Il est à noter que *More Pricks Than Kicks* est publié sans indication de genre, alors que *Nouvelles* au contraire affiche dès son titre son appartenance générique en même temps que la proximité sémantique qu'il a en français avec la nouveauté, l'inédit.

5 Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (London, Paris : Calder Publications, 1993), p.125. Dans *Dream*, il est dit des personnages de fiction que ce sont des « clockwork cabbages » soumis à l'autorité absolue et arbitraire de l'auteur (p.120). En particulier, le monde de Balzac (« a distillation of Euclid and Perrault ») n'a rien d'une « comédie humaine », c'est un « monde chloroformé. »

de « circonscrire » le personnage, mais au contraire de l'atomiser, en lui prêtant des traits et des aventures hautement disparates et rocambolesques.

Le scénario des nouvelles venant au secours du roman se répète après-guerre, puisque c'est à la suite de l'échec de la publication de *Watt* écrit en anglais pendant les années de guerre, entre 1941 et 1945, que Beckett se tourne vers le français en 1946. Outre *Mercier et Camier* (qui ne trouve lui non plus aucun éditeur et ne sera publié qu'en 1970), il écrit quatre nouvelles, « Suite » qui deviendra « La Fin », l'« Expulsé », « Premier amour », « Le Calmant ». Deux d'entre elles seront publiées dans des revues, dont « Suite » en juillet 1946 dans *Les Temps Modernes* que Jean-Paul Sartre vient de fonder. Trois seront reprises dans *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Editions de Minuit en 1955), tandis que « Premier amour » fera l'objet d'une publication indépendante par les mêmes Editions de Minuit, beaucoup plus tard, en 1970.⁶ Ces premiers récits courts en français sont suivis d'une intense période de création, avec la trilogie romanesque, deux pièces de théâtre (*Eleutheria*, *En attendant Godot*), des essais critiques sur la peinture.⁷ Lorsque cette vague s'amenuise, c'est vers la prose courte que Beckett se tourne à nouveau, avec les treize récits de *Textes pour rien*.⁸ Les nouvelles françaises encadrent donc la plus grande période de création de Beckett qui se situe entre 1946 et 1948 : d'un côté, elles anticipent et annoncent la trilogie, alors que les *Textes pour rien* la clôturent sur une aporie : Beckett écrit lui-même que ces récits « express the failure to implement the last words of *L'Innommable*: 'il faut continuer, je vais continuer.' »⁹

Roman et nouvelles « communiquent » de manière frappante dans cette période, et communiquent aussi avec la critique picturale où Bec-

6 Après l'attribution du Prix Nobel de littérature à Beckett en 1969, les éditeurs sont à l'affût de nouveaux textes à publier.

7 « La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon », dans *Cahiers d'art 1945-1946* et « Les peintres de l'empêchement » dans *Derrière le miroir* (juin 1948), publication de la Galerie Maeght de Paris, ont tous deux été commandés à Beckett à l'occasion d'expositions des œuvres des frères Van Velde. Ces articles ont été réédités dans Ruby Cohn (ed.) *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983).

8 Titre inspiré du terme musical « mesure pour rien »: « a title adapted from the phrase conductors use for that ghost measure which sets the orchestra's tempo. The conductor calls his silent gesture 'a measure for nothing.' » Gontarski, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose*, p.xiv.

9 Lettre à Barney Rosset, 11 février 1954, Gontarski, *Complete Short Prose*, p.xiv.

kett précise ses conceptions esthétiques. Il voit dans les arts, que ce soit en peinture ou en littérature, un mouvement commun vers l'abstraction. Dès l'essai de 1931 sur Proust, il constate la « dislocation » du monde de l'objet, absorbé dans la conscience qui est la seule réalité et la seule source de signification : « The good or evil disposition of the object has neither reality nor significance [...] Such as it was, it has been assimilated to the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation. »¹⁰ Un peu plus tard, dans l'essai de 1932 sur Joyce, il estime que *Work in Progress* a accompli une rupture majeure en ne distinguant plus la forme du fond :

here, form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read –or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. He is not writing about something: he is writing something.¹¹

Le fond n'a pas d'existence en dehors de la forme, étant donné que l'écriture n'a pas à exprimer de contenu qui lui soit extérieur ou préexistant, que ce soit le monde ou les idées ; elle n'a pas vocation à représenter : elle est à elle-même sa propre justification et sa propre finalité. De même, dans « Recent Irish Poetry » initialement paru dans *The Bookman* en 1934, Beckett salue dans la poésie de Thomas McGreevy, Denis Devlin et Brian Coffey « la rupture des lignes de communication » entre le sujet et l'objet, entre deux entités qui ont elles-mêmes perdu toute validité conceptuelle.¹² Enfin, la même idée est reprise et précisée dans les écrits critiques sur la peinture, exactement contemporains du travail qui s'accomplit en 1948 dans les nouvelles et entre les séries de nouvelles :

L'histoire de la peinture est l'histoire de ses rapports avec son objet [...] L'objet de la représentation résiste toujours à la représentation [...] Que reste-t-il de représentable si l'essence de l'objet est de se dérober à la représentation ? Il reste à représenter les conditions de cette dérobade.¹³

10 Beckett, *Proust* (1931; London: John Calder, 1965), p.13.

11 « Dante...Bruno. Vico.. Joyce », *transition 16-17* (June 1929), p.248.

12 « [...] the breakdown of the object [...] the breakdown of the subject. It comes to the same thing – the rupture of the lines of communication », «Recent Irish Poetry», in *Disjecta*, p.70.

13 « Les peintres de l'empêchement », *Derrière le miroir*, galerie Maeght, Paris, juin

C'est dans cet article que l'« esthétique de l'empêchement », mise en œuvre au même moment dans les nouvelles, trouve sa formulation théorique la plus claire et la plus radicale. Pour sortir du « je ne peux pas peindre », il faut peindre ce qui empêche de peindre, dit Beckett. Pour sortir de l'impasse de la représentation, la littérature, à l'instar de la peinture, doit aller de l'avant, sortir des conventions périmées,¹⁴ des faux-semblants de la représentation et de l'« automatisme esthétisé »,¹⁵ elle doit « creuser des trous » dans la langue pour faire surgir ce qu'elle recèle :

As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.¹⁶

Et puisqu'il n'y a « rien à peindre, et rien avec quoi peindre »,¹⁷ il faut faire de ce rien quelque chose, faire de l'impossibilité d'écrire un acte expressif. C'est ce que font les treize *Textes pour rien*. Ils explorent l'impasse dans laquelle se trouve Beckett à la fin de *L'Innommable*. Le dernier roman de la trilogie se terminait sur ces mots : « il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer. » Le premier *Texte pour Rien* commence ainsi : « Brusquement, non, à force, à force, je ne pus plus, je ne pus continuer. »¹⁸ Il prend pour point de départ l'échec avéré de l'écriture. Les *Nouvelles* racontaient malgré tout des histoires, les *Textes pour rien* s'abîment dans la littérature du non-mot. Parler sans avoir rien à dire et rien avec quoi le dire sinon des « mots morts »,¹⁹ se faire le « greffe » de bruits de voix²⁰ sont autant de métaphores de l'acte d'écrire.

1948, *Disjecta*, pp.135-136.

14 « Et enfin, le chemin en avant d'une peinture qui se soucie aussi peu d'une convention périmée que des hiératismes et préciosités des enquêtes superflues. » « Les peintres de l'empêchement », *Disjecta*, p.137.

15 « Three Dialogues », in *Disjecta*, p.145.

16 Lettre à Axel Kaun du 9 juillet 1937, in *Disjecta*, p.172.

17 « Three Dialogues », in *Disjecta*, p.145.

18 *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1955), p.127.

19 « [...] il n'y a rien eu de commencé, rien eu jamais que jamais et rien, c'est un vrai bonheur, rien à tout jamais que mots morts. » Texte XII, *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, p.200.

20 « C'est à eux toutes ces voix, comme un bruit de chaînes dans ma tête, ils me grincent que j'ai une tête. C'est là-dedans ce soir les assises, au fond de cette nuit

Du flot ininterrompu d'un soliloque désincarné émergent des énoncés taraudés par la contradiction, des images de démembrement du moi, hanté par des voix impersonnelles et des clichés : « Je devrais m'en détourner, du corps, de la tête, les laisser s'arranger, les laisser cesser, je ne peux pas, il faudrait que moi je cesse. Ah oui, nous sommes plus d'un on dirait, tous sourds, même pas, unis pour la vie. »²¹ Le texte ne tient plus alors que par les images –celle du scripteur assailli par les bruits– et les scansionnements rythmiques et phoniques de la langue (répétitions, brèves unités segmentales), ou, dans les termes de Deleuze cités en exergue, les « Visions et auditions qui ne sont d'aucune langue. » Entre les *Nouvelles* et les *Textes pour rien*, pourtant réunis dans le même recueil dans l'édition française, il y a un écart de taille. Les *Nouvelles*, sous un titre générique prometteur de nouveauté, annoncent une forme de narration encore possible, tandis que les *Textes pour rien* révoquent totalement la narrativité et optent pour la nouveauté du « rien ».

Il s'agissait jusqu'ici de situer les nouvelles dans le cheminement esthétique de Beckett et de souligner les réorientations cruciales dont elles sont le lieu au sein de la période 1934-1946. Il reste maintenant à aborder la question centrale, celle de l'étrange concomitance entre d'une part une évolution de nature générique –la pyrotechnie verbale de *More Pricks Than Kicks* faisant place à l'amenuisement ascétique de l'écriture dans *Nouvelles*– et d'autre part, le passage de l'anglais dans le premier recueil au français dans le second. Autrement dit, le changement de langue a-t-il quelque chose à voir dans l'évolution générique ? Quel est le sens du renoncement à l'anglais ? Qu'est-ce qu'attend Beckett du français ? Et enfin, comment le genre de la nouvelle se ressent-il du changement de langue ?

2. De la surcharge à l'épuration

Dans *More Pricks Than Kicks*, le propos de Beckett est de débusquer l'illusion mimétique, d'exhiber les artifices de la représentation par tous les moyens, et c'est précisément la multiplicité des moyens utilisés qui génère la surcharge et l'enflure. Parmi ceux-ci, trois méritent une mention particulière :

voûtée, c'est là où je tiens le greffe, ne comprenant pas ce que j'entends, ne sachant pas ce que j'écris. » Texte V, *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, p.151.

21 « Texte I », in *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, p.116.

a. *Le montage en série*

Il est inscrit génériquement dans la structure même du recueil de nouvelles. Les dix récits de *More Pricks Than Kicks* sont construits en enfilade à la manière picaresque et ils racontent l'un après l'autre, dans un ordre aléatoire, les aventures du picaro, un Belacqua dublinois qui retient du personnage dantesque son indolence et son goût pour la prostration.²² Belacqua souffre des pieds, d'où sa prédilection pour ce qu'il appelle « the knee-and-elbow position », posture fœtale qui a l'avantage de l'isoler à la fois des pressions du monde et des assauts des femmes. Car ces dernières ont trop d'exigences amoureuses pour un indolent comme lui. Il pratique donc volontiers le *sursum corda*, un répons de la messe (« élevons nos cœurs ») qu'il blasphème en l'associant au voyeurisme sexuel. Le *sursum corda*, c'est en effet se payer le luxe de « kicks » lorsque votre mâle instrument (« prick ») se dérobe à sa fonction.²³ Le montage en série concerne aussi les épouses et conquêtes de Belacqua dont les noms se partagent à leur tour en deux séries : les noms en « a » (La Smeraldina, La Frica, L'Alba, Thelma), et les noms en « y » (Lucy, Ruby, Winnie). Toutes connaissent une mort précoce, « car, in the words of one competent to sing of the matter, l'Amour et la Mort –caesura- n'est qu'une mesme chose. »²⁴ Toutes, sauf la Smeraldina, sont ainsi expédiées *ad patres* selon une logique purement intratextuelle. Thelma bboggs, par exemple, est victime de son nom aux consonnes redoublées : elle finit dans les tourbières du Connemara au cours de son voyage de noces. Construites en séries également les images et métaphores. Celle du cheval est particulièrement récurrente, que ce soit le cheval que monte l'élégante cavalière qu'est Lucy et qui lui vaut de finir estropiée, ou le visage chevalin de La Frica : « A septic pudding hoodwinks her, a stodgy turban of pain it laps her horse face. The eyehole is clogged with the bul-

22 Belacqua est le nom du luthier florentin que, dans la *Divine Comédie*, Dante rencontre au Chant IV du « Purgatoire ». Dieu lui a refusé sa grâce parce qu'il a négligé de se repentir. Condamné à passer dans l'antichambre du Purgatoire une durée égale à celle de sa vie sur terre, il purge sa peine, prostré derrière un rocher, dans l'attente du Paradis. Au sens juridique, « forclos » signifie en effet : privé du bénéfice d'un droit non exercé dans les délais fixés (*Petit Robert*).

23 Les connotations sexuelles du titre *More Pricks Than Kicks* ont été astucieusement préservées dans le titre français choisi d'Edith Fournier, *Bande et sarabande* (Minuit, 1994).

24 « Love and Lethe », p.105.

bus, the round pale globe goggles exposed. Solitary meditation has furnished her with nostrils of generous bore! »²⁵

b. La parodie

Le deuxième procédé générateur de surcharge et de protubérances textuelles est la parodie, dont la postmodernité a fait grand usage pour afficher à la fois sa reconnaissance et son appropriation irrévérencieuse des traditions ou des grands textes du passé.²⁶ La parodie dans *More Pricks Than Kicks* est protéiforme et quasi systématique. Tous les *topoi* du réalisme sont parodiés, le paysage par exemple. Le vert canonique des prés du Wicklow est taché de rouge par les traces de sang laissées un peu partout par les brebis qui mettent bas à un rythme effréné (« these latter [lambs] were springing into the world every minute, the grass was span-gled with scarlet after-births »).²⁷ Le *topos* du portrait donne lieu à des collages grotesques d'éléments, comme dans cette description de la Smeraldina :

Bodies don't matter, but hers went something like this : big enormous breasts, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, popputa, mammore, slobbery-blubberty, bubbubbbbub, the real button-bursting Weib, ripe. Then, perched away high out of sight on top of this porpoise prism, the sweetest little pale Pisanello of a bird-face ever. She was Lucrezia del Fede, pale and belle, a pale belle Braut, with a winter skin like an old sail in the wind.²⁸

Le collage ne se contente pas de juxtaposer des fragments corporels disparates, mais il inclut aussi des échappées intertextuelles, des comparaisons esthétiques recherchées (peinture, musique), des mélanges de langues, des jeux sur les sonorités. Le personnage, paradigme-clé du réalisme, perd toute cohérence psychologique et textuelle en devenant un assemblage de détails hétéroclites. Un autre *topos* fréquemment parodié est celui de l'aventure sentimentale (*romance*), minée par des événements grotesques ou par la démission amoureuse de Belacqua, qui préfère recruter des chevaliers-servants (*cicisbei*) pour ses belles plutôt que de leur faire lui-même la cour. Plus encore, l'autorité narrative se met

25 « A Wet Night », p.56.

26 Voir par exemple Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art-forms* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2000).

27 « Walking Out », p.109.

28 « Draff », p.190.

elle-même en question en multipliant les modalités d'incertitude et en adoptant une position d'incompétence ou d'ignorance avouée : « How he had formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover. »²⁹ La sape des conventions se généralise ainsi à tout le système de représentation, en exhibe les hauts-lieux et bat en brèche la stabilité présumée des notions de sujet et d'objet.

c. La dimension transtextuelle

Troisième facteur de surcharge, *More Pricks Than Kicks* est un véritable laboratoire transtextuel, qui met en jeu les cinq types possibles de transtextualité identifiés par Gérard Genette dans *Palimpsestes* : l'architextualité (l'appartenance du texte à un genre), la paratextualité (la relation du texte à tout ce qui l'entoure et l'annonce : titre, sous-titres, préface, notes, illustrations, épigraphes), la métatextualité (qui désigne tout ce qui relève du commentaire, du retour évaluatif d'un texte sur un autre texte ou sur lui-même), l'hypertextualité (la relation unissant un texte B, l'hypertexte, à un texte antérieur A, l'hypotexte), l'intertextualité (la relation de co-présence entre deux ou plusieurs textes par la citation, le plagiat ou l'allusion).³⁰

Dans *More Pricks Than Kicks*, les relations les plus prolifiques sont l'hypertextualité et l'intertextualité. L'hypotexte convoqué est la *Divine Comédie* de Dante, presque aussi présente que l'est *l'Odyssee* d'Homère dans *Ulysses*. Beckett emprunte à Dante le personnage de Belacqua, son indolence légendaire, sa « forclusion »³¹ qui l'oblige à attendre au Purgatoire autant de temps qu'il a négligé de se repentir sur terre, la question de la grâce divine, la métaphore d'un Purgatoire dublinois. Les deux intertextes les plus sollicités sont l'intertexte biblique et l'intertexte joycien. Au sein du premier, la distorsion parodique combine inlassablement le grave et le trivial, le spirituel et l'obscène. Il a déjà été fait allusion aux connotations obscènes du titre du recueil qui viennent parasiter le sens spirituel – celui de la révélation de Paul sur le chemin de Damas, à qui Dieu dit : « It is hard for you to kick against the pricks » pour lui signifier

29 « Love and Lethe », p.95.

30 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes : la littérature au second degré* (Paris : Seuil, 1982), pp.7-12.

31 « Je dois, forclos, autant de tours attendre/des cieux sur moi, comme attendis sur terre/renvoyant à ma fin les bons soupirs. » Dante, « Purgatoire », Chant IV, v. 130-132, *Divine Comédie*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris : Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), p.1143.

l'inutilité de la résistance contre l'appel divin. *More Pricks Than Kicks* tout entier abonde, de même, en variations triviales sur le nom de Dieu, les sacrements, ou le texte des Écritures. Ces variations sont non seulement destinées à subvertir l'autorité du discours chrétien et à en exhiber l'omniprésence dans la langue, mais elles mettent en place, par implication réciproque du spirituel et du trivial, les conditions d'une parodie systématique et ravageuse.

En ce qui concerne l'intertexte joycien, les relations sont encore plus complexes et multiformes, sans que le nom de Joyce soit jamais prononcé. Il y a des emprunts directs à *Ulysses*, comme les « Purefoy triplets » qui figurent dans le cortège de mariage de Belacqua (Mrs Purefoy donne naissance à un fils dans « Oxen of the sun »), ou à *Finnegans Wake* :

« himmisacrkrüzidireknjesusmariaundjosefundblutigeskreuz »

qui est attribué à un natif de Leipzig et est accompagné du commentaire suivant : « Like that, all in one word. The things people come out with sometimes! »³² La fin de la nouvelle « The Dead » est pastichée de façon très reconnaissable dans « A Wet Night » : « and the rain fell in a uniform untroubled manner. It fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity. »³³ Les parodies des techniques d'écriture joycienne sont innombrables : Beckett, comme Joyce, manipule le signifiant pour créer des combinaisons insolites de monèmes et des mots-valises (« The Nobel Yeats », « superfoetation » ou « The Professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovoidology ») ; il procède à des collages multilingues : « he was making his piece, d'occasion perhaps in both senses. »³⁴

Si la postérité a surtout gardé le souvenir de cette déclaration faite par Beckett en 1956, soulignant ses divergences avec Joyce : « The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending towards omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance », ³⁵ il est certain qu'à l'époque de *More Pricks Than Kicks*, l'ascendant du mo-

32 « A Wet Night », p.87.

33 « A Wet Night », p.87.

34 « A Wet Night », p.64. Les deux sens de « d'occasion » combinés ici sont : 1) de circonstance ; 2) de deuxième main.

35 Israel Shenker, « Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett », in *New York Times* 6 mai 1956, pp.2-3.

dèle joycien est tout-puissant et vise le même objectif : accomplir la désarticulation de l'anglais. Beckett comme Joyce organise la subversion du langage de l'intérieur par le dysfonctionnement des structures de la langue (lexique et syntaxe) et par le parasitage du texte par toute une série d'interférences intertextuelles.

3. De l'anglais au français

C'est de cette langue, qui lui a permis pourtant les dérèglements les plus jubilatoires que Beckett va se défaire après *More Pricks Than Kicks* et après *Watt*. Il s'en défait parce qu'il ne peut pousser plus loin – en tout cas pas plus loin que Joyce ne l'a fait – l'entreprise de démolition de l'anglais, et pour d'autres raisons encore, qu'il formule lui-même ainsi en 1937 :

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask.³⁶

D'abord exilé involontaire dans sa langue maternelle, où il « creuse une autre langue » (Deleuze), Beckett s'exile à nouveau, volontairement cette fois, dans une langue d'adoption, le français, où il creuse également une autre langue, selon le destin des grands écrivains : « un grand écrivain est toujours comme un étranger dans la langue où il s'exprime, même si c'est sa langue natale. [...] Il taille *dans* sa langue une langue étrangère et qui ne préexiste pas. Faire crier, faire bégayer, balbutier, murmurer la langue en elle-même. »³⁷

Nous avons vu comment, dans *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett s'y prend pour faire bégayer – ou délirer – l'anglais en le portant à la limite de l'intelligible par la surcharge et le dérèglement ludique. En français, il utilise des moyens de déstabilisation qui affectent certes encore la grammaire, la syntaxe et le lexique, mais à l'intérieur d'un système textuel fermé sur lui-même, qui revient obstinément sur ses propres énoncés pour les corriger ou les mettre en doute, sans puiser dans les multiples

36 « German letter », in *Disjecta*, p.171.

37 Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, p.138.

ressources de la transtextualité. Dans cet exemple emprunté à « Le Calmant » :

Tout ce que je dis s'annule, je n'aurai rien dit. Avais-je seulement faim ? Le temps me tentait-il ? Il faisait nuageux et frais, je le veux, mais pas au point de m'attirer dehors. Je ne pus me lever à la première tentative, ni mettons à la seconde, et une fois debout enfin, et appuyé au mur, *je me demandai si j'allais pouvoir le rester, je veux dire debout, appuyé au mur*. Sortir et marcher, impossible. J'en parle comme si c'était d'hier. Hier en effet est récent, mais pas assez. Car ce que je raconte ce soir se passe ce soir, à cette heure qui passe. Je ne suis plus chez ces assassins, dans ce lit de terreur, mais dans mon lointain refuge, les mains nouées ensemble, la tête penchée, faible, haletant, calme, libre, et plus vieux que je ne l'aurai jamais été, si mes calculs sont justes. Je mènerai néanmoins mon histoire au passé, comme s'il s'agissait d'un mythe ou d'une fable ancienne, car il me faut ce soir un autre âge, que devienne un autre âge celui où je devins ce que je fus. Ah je vous en foutrai des temps, salauds de votre temps.³⁸

une erreur grammaticale (« je me demandai si j'allais pouvoir *le* rester ») donne lieu à une correction intéressante par le double effet de sens qu'elle introduit : d'abord un effet d'arrêt, de latence dans la chaîne signifiante face à ce « le » incongru dont le lecteur français ne sait pas à quoi il renvoie, et ensuite la scansion rythmique de cette correction elle-même, avec la reprise en écho des mots « debout » et « appuyé » et avec ses cinq pieds séparés par une césure (« je veux dire debout, appuyé au mur. ») Les deux hémistiches d'un rythme saccadé contribuent à projeter l'image d'un sujet en posture instable et incertain de son devenir.

Dans cet extrait, le temps se dérobe puisque, au sein d'un récit raconté au présent, passé et futur perdent leur ancrage existentiel et changent de place : « plus vieux que je ne l'aurai jamais été », « je devins ce que je fus ». Tout le système signifiant de la langue est de loin en loin ébranlé, à la fois coupé d'une source énonciative stable et assurée d'elle-même, et coupé de ses fondements dans le réel. Si la temporalité a perdu ses marques, l'espace, quant à lui, devient diffus. Alors que les lieux étaient explicitement et organiquement inscrits dans le comté et la ville de Dublin dans *More Pricks Than Kicks*, les lieux des nouvelles françaises sont des décors génériques et anonymes : une ville, un parc, plus rarement la campagne. Ils se dilatent ou se rétrécissent au gré de l'errance ou du repli sur lui-même du narrateur, et au gré des schémas ré-

38 « Le Calmant », *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, p.41. Les italiques sont de moi.

pétitifs des intrigues : expulsion originelle d'un lieu clos (« Premier amour », « L'Expulsé », « La Fin »), errance, rencontre, fuite ou abandon, recherche d'un nouveau lieu clos, chambre, cabane, caverne ou canot troué flottant à la dérive sur la mer.

Seul importe l'ancrage provisoire et tangentiel du sujet qui parle dans le lieu d'où il parle. C'est la voix qui assigne le corps à résidence, c'est l'énonciation qui définit son lieu, de même que l'on voit, sur le plan temporel, dans l'extrait sus-cité de « Le Calmant », le sujet tenter de rapprocher le plus possible le temps de l'histoire du point pur de l'énonciation, de réduire le battement entre les deux, aussi minime soit-il : « car ce que je raconte se passe ce soir, à cette heure qui passe ». Alain Badiou appelle très justement ce lieu « le lieu d'être de la voix », là où le Je « doublement clos dans la fixité du corps et dans la persistance sans écho ni réponse de la voix »³⁹ revient sans cesse chercher une identification. Ce lieu ultime est ce vers quoi tend toute l'œuvre de Beckett, dans son cheminement inlassable vers l'épuration progressive, le creusement du rien. Les *Nouvelles* retracent ce dilemme du sujet qui veut se défaire de tout pour saisir dans sa nudité le surgissement de l'identité au lieu même du surgissement de l'énonciation, pour saisir la vie dans son souffle à la fois originaire et terminal. C'est pourquoi les *Nouvelles* se situent toutes sur le fil du rasoir entre vie et mort, cherchant à capter le moment du basculement de l'une dans l'autre, que ce soit au début de « Le Calmant » (« Je ne sais plus quand je suis mort ») ou à la fin de « La Fin », où le narrateur se voit couler dans la mer avec son canot, dans une expérience de mort imminente :

La mer, le ciel, la montagne, les îles, vinrent m'écraser dans une systole immense, puis s'écartèrent jusqu'aux limites de l'espace. Je songeai faiblement et sans regret au récit que j'avais failli faire, récit à l'image de ma vie, je veux dire sans le courage de finir ni la force de continuer.⁴⁰

Sans même parler des *Textes pour rien*, entièrement voués à exprimer les modalités du « rien », on voit que le « rien » tient dès les *Nouvelles* une place essentielle, puisqu'il est à la fois ce à quoi les narrateurs aspirent (« ce vieux corps auquel rien n'est jamais arrivé, ou si peu, qui n'a jamais rien rencontré, rien aimé, rien voulu, dans son univers étamé,

39 Alain Badiou, « L'écriture du générique », in *Conditions* (Paris : Seuil, 1992), p.339.

40 « Le Calmant », p.112.

mal étamé, rien voulu sinon que les glaces s'écroulent, les planes, les courbes, les grossissantes, les rapetissantes, et qu'il disparaisse, dans le fracas de ses images. »)⁴¹ et ce que le texte lui-même cherche à atteindre, par une ascèse aux antipodes de l'exubérance de *More Pricks Than Kicks*.

Pour parvenir à ces fins ascétiques, Beckett creuse des écarts dans le français, retisse d'autres liens entre les mots (liens de tension antinomique ou liaisons insolites par le rythme) comme auparavant il avait creusé dans la langue maternelle les plus grands écarts possibles entre le spirituel et l'obscène, la rationalité et le délire, entre hypotexte et hypertexte. Le français de Beckett est une langue à part : c'est une langue du dénuement, de l'épuisement, comme l'anglais de *More Pricks Than Kicks* était proliférant et saturé jusqu'à l'implosion. Dans l'une comme dans l'autre langue, il crée un espace interstitiel, inédit, aporétique, par lequel il introduit sa *propre* langue, mais selon deux démarches totalement inverses : d'un côté la dépense, la vidange dans une démarche centrifuge (*More Pricks Than Kicks*) ; de l'autre, l'économie, l'épure, l'ascèse, dans une démarche centripète de retour au lieu d'être de la voix (*Nouvelles et textes pour rien*). Il est remarquable que ce soit dans le genre de la nouvelle que se soit effectuée cette mutation capitale, qui se généralisera ensuite à toute l'œuvre. Beckett trouve dans la nouvelle, comme plus tard au théâtre, un espace malléable en termes de longueur comme en termes de mode, narratif ou poétique, et en exploite toutes les potentialités, de la longue « novella » qu'est « Premier amour » jusqu'aux brefs poèmes en prose des *Textes pour rien*. Le choix de la poésie brute, minimale, aux dépens du narratif dans ces derniers, est le reflet inversé de la pyrotechnie verbale qui, aux dépens du narratif déjà, se déployait dans les nouvelles anglaises.

41 « Le Calmant », p.44.

Adrian Millar

The Blind-spots of the Postmodernist Project in Ireland: a Lacanian Take

In this chapter, I argue that the post-modern pursuit of individual freedom in Ireland has resulted in its opposite, captivity, a captivity that is marked by the absence of the moral, the spiritual, the social, the cultural and the political in everyday life. Ireland is in crisis, for who among us is not 'captivated' by our readily available pleasure fixes, by comfort and security, or by money, possessions, the lure of image or the world of celebs? Who among us is not, to a greater or lesser extent, in the grip of fear, isolation, moral relativism, political apathy and its bed-fellow, political correctness, or a hatred of the other that is masked in a passion for charity? Postmodernism has come to mirror modernism in terms of effect - division, a lack of meaning, functionalism. I demonstrate this claim by applying the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, and the more overtly socio-political reading of this theory as developed by Slavoj Žižek to the case of Irish society.

Lacan's development of the decentred, fragmented subject is at the forefront of the post-modern emphasis on greater freedom, radical democracy, the local and access to more meaning at the individual level. It rightly privileges the individual. However, his theory of the ego also explains why its dominance within postmodernism has had negative consequences for the postmodernist project, rendering it more and more like modernism in its effects. It is futile to argue that Ireland faces a future doomsday scenario; this would only allow us the paralyzing pleasure of fear. Instead, I propose that Ireland is there already. Nothing is as frightening as our inability to see it. That said, change is, of course, possible. I argue that what the postmodernist project needs is an ethics of the Real, an ethics that will show us what it is that the ego represses and that we unconsciously enjoy, an ethics that offers the possibility of social change at the level of the fundamental socio-ideological fantasy in Ireland, namely the fantasy of success. Failing this, the fantasy will continue to flourish with all its negative consequences, social change will remain

limited, and social critique, impoverished. I begin with an examination of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The Imaginary order¹

For Lacan, human subjectivity is rooted in the ‘fragmented body’ (‘corps morcelé’) fantasy according to which the individual has a sense of bodily disarray, which serves as a reminder to him/her of its lack and incompleteness, and which in turn feeds the desire for a secure, stagnant, integrated and whole frozen ‘I’, as imaged in the mirror at the pre-verbal ‘mirror stage’ (‘stade de miroir’). The ego is, therefore, condemned to perpetual torment caught as it is between a fear of disintegration and a desire for wholeness. Captivated or “captured” by its image in the mirror, the child sees its image as reality and concludes that ‘I am that’ and ‘That is me.’ In effect, the subject collapses into its object, failing to distinguish itself from the other. Thus one can say that it is in the other that the subject first lives and registers himself/herself, resulting in alienation from himself/herself. A further consequence is that because the totalising, idealised and illusory image is central to the formation of the ego, others appear to the subject to have the totality and stability that the individual desires and so they are always seen as rivals.

As a result, pulled between the desire for autonomy or identity and the identification with a rival, the ego is in a constant paranoid relation with the other, and otherness in the form of oppositions persists throughout adult life. Indeed, the ego’s desire to be the other, by dissolving its otherness in the other, gradually becomes a desire to control the other through which it sees itself because any change in the other would threaten its view of itself. This is the source of human conflict. In fact, for Lacan, aggression is born out of the narcissistic relation with the image and is linked to the structures of objectification that ‘characterize the formation of the ego.’² Aggression, therefore, for Lacan, is the basic natural state for mankind. Thus Lacan writes that in the Imaginary order we have a formula for ‘the madness that deafens the world with its sound and fury’,³ a world in which the effects of aggressive intention are ‘more

1 For a fuller exposition of the Lacanian theory of the subject, see Adrian Millar, *Socio-ideological fantasy and the Northern Ireland conflict: the Other side* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.13-28.

2 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits – A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock., 1977), p.21.

3 *Écrits*, p.7.

far-reaching than any act of brutality.’⁴ Fink characterises the Imaginary order as ‘the world of rivalry and war’⁵ because Imaginary relations always involve intimidation, opposition, paranoia, alienation, domination, oppression, aggression, superiority, jealousy, or resentment.

The Symbolic Order

When the subject enters into language, Imaginary relations involving rivalry and aggression are subordinated to Symbolic relations which are ‘dominated by concerns with ideals, authority figures, the law, performance, achievement, guilt, and so on.’⁶ The Symbolic is essentially an experience of *aliénation* because it inhabits the individual and dominates him or her, both curtailing desire and propelling its motion. ‘The subject does not speak, he ‘is spoken’ by the symbolic structure.’⁷ The subject, then, is radically divided:

By mediating himself in his discourse, the subject in effect destroys the immediate relation of self to self and constructs himself in language ... as he wishes to see himself, as he wishes to be seen, and thereby alienates himself in language.⁸

Split by language, the subject does not know what it wants, which adds to its sense of inner conflict, rivalry, aggressive intention and lack. There is also a split between the subject and other and the subject and the world.

For in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*.⁹

4 *Écrits*, p.11.

5 Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.111.

6 Fink, p.89.

7 Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), p.253.

8 Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.64.

9 *Écrits*, p.42.

The scene is set for social upheaval. The subject, then, for Lacan is not the subject of reflexive consciousness but the subject of desire from which it is alienated.¹⁰

He summarises subjectivity in two propositions which play on Cartesian philosophy and give expression to the effects of the split in the subject: 'I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think.'¹¹ Consequently, for Lacan, the key to the subject is to be found in the unconscious which comes into being to house that which is lived or experienced but not voiced as a result of the split the subject experiences because of language.¹² The unconscious is 'lacuna, cut, rupture inscribed in a certain lack.'¹³ It is 'the memory of those things he [i.e. the subject] forgets.'¹⁴ And the individual arranges everything so as to forget these things which Lacan describes as the 'stench and corruption that always yawn like an abyss.'¹⁵ At such times the satisfaction of the instinct is considered to lead to pain because it does not fit in with one's view of oneself or with one's moral principles and is thus avoided. To access the unconscious, one needs to go beyond what people mean when they speak because meaning, 'is always ambiguous, polyvalent, betraying something one wanted to remain hidden, hiding something one intended to express.'¹⁶ Lacan is not interested in what people mean, but in what they say, and why they say it one way rather than another. The tendency of the social sciences to take people at face value explains why much current qualitative socio-political analyses are so poor. Lacanian analysis offers the possibility of important insights

10 Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.89.

11 *Écrits*, p.166.

12 Holland argues that '90% of our mental life is unconscious' (*Psychoanalysis as Science*, www.clas.ufl.edu/ipasa/journal/2004_holland08.shtml#holland08, p.10), that 'Anything a person says...expresses unconscious concerns and ultimately that person's deepest themes' (*ibid.*, p.10) and that the unconscious determines everything we do.

13 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.153.

14 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. Translated by Dennis Porter. (London: Routledge, 1992), p.231.

15 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.232.

16 Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.67.

into society and social change through an unearthing of unconscious desire.

The Real

The Real is trauma, violence, a moment of excruciating pain, pure antagonism. Lying outside the world of the signifier, the Real 'governs our activities more than any other.'¹⁷ People construct 'reality' out of the Real in part to protect themselves against its pure antagonism. Slavoj Žižek notes that reality is a 'fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire.'¹⁸ In Fink's words, fantasy helps people to 'forget or misrecognise satisfaction, to explain it away or not take responsibility for it.'¹⁹ Fantasy is 'the minimum of idealization the subject needs in order to sustain the horror of the Real.'²⁰ It renders the individual prone to all the lies of group life and of culture. Ideology, therefore, is a form of socio-ideological fantasy that 'has to be read as a ciphered formation of the unconscious.'²¹ It works in a form of misrecognition at the level of social reality. People overlook the illusion which structures their relationship to reality by means of the 'ideological practice of dis-identification.'²² They believe the illusion that they are not identical to the ideological identification which they accept has a hold on them. They say to themselves:

I'm not merely a direct embodiment of....; beneath this ideological mask, there lurks a warm human person with his small sorrows and joys which have nothing to do with big ideological issues....²³

According to Žižek, it is precisely this stance of appealing to something other than the political, namely solidarity, justice, community or whatever, that makes war, violence and social conflict acceptable.

Ideology also has a Lacanian 'point de capiton' or quilting point which enables its heterogeneous parts to become a coherent narrative or fantasy. It involves a notable inversion such that what was a failure is of-

17 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.60.

18 Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), p.323.

19 *The Lacanian Subject*, p.215

20 *Mapping Ideology*, p.66.

21 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p.52.

22 Butler, Laclau and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, p.103.

23 *Mapping Ideology*, p.77.

ten turned into a triumph. This ‘point de capiton’ can equally be the outsiders who are held responsible for all the woes of the majority group. What is in fact happening is that people are externalising their lack on to others. Hatred of the other is hatred of the self. The notion of a cohesive society, a coherent narrative, is predicated upon the notion of that which threatens it so much so that, in Homer’s words, ‘the prohibition that maintains and regulates the social order, draws its very strength from that which it prohibits and excludes. If the threat is not actually, empirically, present then it will have to be constituted...’²⁴ Objects are invented to externalise the cause of non-satisfaction of desire. Thus, as Žizek remarks, ‘a social edifice is an ultimately failed attempt to displace/obfuscate its constitutive antagonism.’²⁵

Lacanian ethics

For Lacan, the very goal of psychoanalysis is change. Witness the following:

Analysis is not a matter of discovering in a particular case the differential feature of the theory, and in doing so believe that one is explaining why your daughter is silent – for the point at issue is to *get her to speak*, and this effect proceeds from a type of intervention that has nothing to do with a differential feature. Analysis consists precisely in getting her to speak.²⁶

Change is urgently needed in society because the so-called emancipated modern man, an ‘irresponsible outlaw’,²⁷ in Lacan’s words, has a neurosis of self-punishment and a history of harm towards others that result in crime and failure and condemn humankind to ‘the most formidable social hell’²⁸ wherein war is becoming the necessary midwife of all progress in human organisation. The subject needs to talk in order to be freed from the dubious satisfactions of neuroses and ‘from an illness or an ignorance whose very limits he is unaware of.’²⁹ Indeed, Lacan understands the

24 Homer, ‘The Frankfurt School, the Father and the Social Fantasy’, *New Formations*, 38, 1999, p.88.

25 Butler, Laclau and Žizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, p.125.

26 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.11.

27 *Écrits*, p.29.

28 *Écrits*, p.29.

29 *Écrits*, p.12.

self, as constructed in the West, to be ‘an ideological construction which makes our whole civilization in a meaningful sense mentally ill.’³⁰

Change is possible in spite of the fact that people recreate ‘a harmony with the real’³¹ and repeat it without recognising it because one can say something about the Real from the way the unconscious speaks where there is pain, revealing truth, which Lacan views as a function of the unconscious. Thus ‘the status of the unconscious is ethical’³² because it contains the ‘liberating truth’³³ which the analyst must go in search of in order to express ‘ethical witness.’³⁴ Lacanian truth tells us what is at the root of our lack, loss and confusion and provides us with measures for limiting these. In Žižek’s words, building on Lacan, the job of psychoanalysis is to provide an ethics of the Real which undermines the social-ideological fantasy of a cohesive society, confronting us with the lack or traumatic kernel not covered by any ideal. One achieves this by accessing the unconscious. What makes something immanently wrong is the disavowed subjective libidinal investment. Thus, responsibility for evil is said to occur when the subject derives unconscious enjoyment, i.e. *jouissance*, from the action which is enjoyed as a transgressive activity. Feelings disguise the enjoyment, which may involve suffering, and one’s angst becomes a substitute satisfaction for the repressed pleasure. Shame is normally an indication of *jouissance* or unconscious enjoyment. Žižek also notes that when people claim ignorance for their defence this does not merit forgiveness because ignorance is the state of not *wanting* to know, and this state brings unconscious enjoyment too. Change occurs when the subject takes responsibility for his/her unconscious enjoyment.

Unlike Freud, for Lacan the outcome of change in analysis is not happiness. Lacan claims that nothing is prepared for happiness.³⁵ He is not interested in the illusion of happiness. He also notes that analysis cannot guarantee cure. Talk of cure is Freudian. Lacan welcomed cures but viewed them as a mere side effect of analysis. Instead of cure, Lacanian analysis offers insight leading to a break with the fundamental fantasy that structures the subject’s *jouissance*, but one never leaves the

30 ‘Of Paranoia and Metanoia: lessons for Peacemakers from the teachings of Jacques Lacan’, in www.human-nature.com, p.90.

31 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.22.

32 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.34.

33 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.24.

34 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.40.

35 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.13.

realm of fantasy. Lacanian analysis contributes to such change by returning the subject to his or her repressed insufficiency by undoing the imaginary ideological fantasies which exist to fill out the subject's void. One 'hits' the Real, upsetting the repetition it engenders and thus helping the subject shake up its fundamental fantasy in which it tries to repeat the experience of lost satisfaction that has been foreclosed. Touching the Real involves cutting oneself loose from the object through which an other or the Other keeps one in check. The goal is not to have people rid themselves of feelings of animosity, resentment, vengefulness, murderousness etc. but to help them realise that the way things are is not the way things have to be, to learn to find less pleasure in dominance, aggression and submission. This is the Lacanian project of social transformation. Lacanian analysis does not offer resolutions or solutions to social problems. It produces results because it 'lets things happen outside itself, lets people exist',³⁶ as Schneiderman puts it. According to Lacan, in analysis, the neurosis 'becomes something else',³⁷ maybe a scar of the unconscious. In answer to the question if the neurosis is cured at the end of analysis, Lacan concludes that 'the question remains open.'³⁸ Maybe it is cured, maybe it is not.

Socio-ideological fantasy: the case of Ireland

The fundamental social-fantasy in Ireland today is the fantasy of success. While society has abandoned the modernist concerns with the grand narratives of Utopia and Reason, it is clear that the illusion of having already reached Utopia is at work in the form of this fantasy. We have arrived. The economy has never been stronger; we've never had it so good – these are society's mantras. The Other that we live or die for is no longer the great industrial machine, the Church, the State or nationalist ideology, it is the semi-solid wooden floor in the lounge, the decking in the garden, the kitchen extension, the three toilets, the foreign holidays and the best childcare that money can buy. In short, we live and die for the market. If postmodernism is meant to provide more meaning than modernism, it does not deliver. It offers more of the same. For all the increase in the choices we can make, free of modernist concerns, we are as restricted as ever. The only meaning on offer is that to be found in being

36 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.182.

37 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.22.

38 Stuart Schneiderman, *Jacques Lacan: The Death of an Intellectual Hero* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p.22.

identified with what we own. The slogan used by a leading brand of perfume, *because you are worth it*, says it all. Self-worth is tied into money. We might not be modernist cogs in the wheel, slaves of industrialisation or religious minions, but we are owned by the banks and multi-national corporations. Identifying with what we own (but which, more often than not, the banks own), image is more important than ever. Rather than being slaves to industrialisation and the constraints of Reason, we are slaves to the fantasy of liberal individualism, the myth that you can be whatever you like, the American dream that makes the Ego the new God and reduces politics and power to a matter of trivial fancy with dire consequences for humanity. We are living the dream, masters of our destiny, *Fianna Fáil*. The power of positive thinking is our armour.

The Saviour in postmodernist Ireland is not the God of the modernist period, but the Irish people who identify with oppressed minorities everywhere (except at home) and with liberal-minded people the world over. They are more likely to march for Iraq than for themselves because they imagine that at home people are riding the Tiger's back. (It is so good, we have to drink to forget). Politics is in the grip of the Imaginary. The Symbolic has taken a back seat. The power of the argument is not what matters any more. It is, rather, the power of the presentation that counts. Elections in Ireland are now won by whichever party leader wins a televised confrontation on the basis of appearing strong, on top, convincing. The image is everything. *Bertie's Team* was one of the slogans for the *Fianna Fáil* party for the 2007 general election, perhaps intending to indicate team spirit. But it also speaks of sport (probably football, Bertie Ahern's passion), camaraderie and men. In this light, this slogan is as good a catch-phrase for politics as any. It is about a single leader, in a predominately male environment, indulging in spectacle and winning. When asked about whether she could give nurses threatening strike action at the height of the campaign what they wanted, Mary Harney, the Minister for Health, tells us that she will be honest and not just say Yes because there is an election coming up, (her answer being No) – a comment which infers that she sometimes lies to the electorate. Given that image is now so central to politics, it is no surprise that lies too are commonplace.

The trans-ideological appeal of the socio-ideological fantasy of success in Ireland is to solidarity, which is crucial to its cohesion. Solidarity is maintained in part by the promise of increase – more pleasure in the form of bigger bank loans for mortgages, more foreign holidays, more material goods, but also by the imagined threat of immigrants. We be-

lieve that we have something that others want. The new European Union states want to follow our economic example. We see ourselves as the leader of the pack among European economies. Yet, if we imagine that foreigners envy us, we also feel that foreigners are after something – that they want something from us. They clog up our hospitals, have their babies here and then disappear, or fill up our schools. They are on the take. They deny us valuable access to resources. They steal our jobs. They take our welfare benefits. This swing between love and hatred, exemplified by the comment that we want to restrict immigrants coming to Ireland, but would be happy if our children married non-nationals, is symptomatic of socio-ideological fantasy:³⁹ The complaint that they don't have a word of English and the belief that they understand every word you say, but pretend not to, also typifies this swing. Thus, our unconscious hatred of immigrants is accompanied by paranoia. It is a case of Them and (the rest of) Us. They stick to themselves and don't integrate. Of course, hatred of the other is unconscious hatred of the self, entirely understandable when we are a rapidly changing society that has given birth to gangland crime on a grand scale and to many social problems. It is also interesting that the very people who build the country are the very people who we say are to blame for its downfall, threatening our economy with overload.

The immigrants are fast replacing the Catholic Church, the Christian Brothers, the English and criminal gangs as the group that is the source of all our woes, the group that won't let us ordinary folk get on with our nice little lives. Immigrants? Foreigners? Non-nationals? New nationals? The new Irish? When you no longer know what to call a particular social group, you know the country is into the business of stitching them up. The PR machine is moving in. We try to find a word for others that we find unproblematic in order to satisfy ourselves that we are kindly liberals, and thereby hide our prejudice from ourselves. It is not for nothing that in the Land of a Thousand Welcomes, you see 'Slán Abhaile' written outside many Irish towns, but rarely a 'Fáilte go dtí.' The unconscious speaks in externality.

Solidarity is a modern-day fiction. In this age of postmodernism we speak of the *global village*, suggesting that we are close-knit, only seven steps away from every other human being in the universe. It appears all so very cosy. However, the contradiction in the impossibility of a global village suggests that this phrase is apt, not because it suggests intimacy, but because it suggests tyranny, for we all know the tyranny of the vil-

39 *The Irish Times* Behaviour and Attitudes Poll (Sept. 29th, 07)

lage – secrecy, sexual repression, suicide, alcoholism, the repression of women, poverty and fear. To which we could add, in the case of Irish bed-towns, social isolation. If the world is seen as a *global village* it is no accident because repression, oppression, poverty, addiction, angst, fear are as rampant as ever. The global local is an illusion. In the age of communication and internet access, intimacy is hard to find. In the age of modernity, the great mystery was the Afterlife, that which lay outside Reason. In the age of postmodernity, the great mystery is our neighbour.

As the liberal self-interpretation has spread so too has idealisation of the private sphere or the non-political. The contradiction between the subject who admits that he/she wants less immigrants in the country but who at the same time would be happy if their offspring marries a non-national suggests that self-idealisation is going on at the personal level. We are nice people whose political opinions do not detract from our liberal values. The successful Irish person did not get there by trampling all over others. He/she got there by being tolerant and respectful of difference. We imagine we are all into equality and justice and we have, particularly in Ireland, fabulous social consciences. Sure, just look at those who lead the way, two Irish men, Bono and Bob Geldof. Our consciences are clear. Every celebrity must have their charity. However, as Zizek points out,⁴⁰ the great leaders of ‘liberal communism’ (Bill Gates etc.) fail to see that they are agents of the structural violence that has created the fundamentalism which they oppose. They have helped create mass poverty and hopelessness. They have also done away with grand categories like the working-class, exploitation, religion, social analysis and structural violence. There is no problem. There is only our goodness and our concern for the less fortunate. Ethics are reduced to charity, social responsibility and gratitude, of which they have made Gods.

Not only do we have the appearances of the liberal, we also have the appearances of a politically strong, open, self-critical, unshackled society. We imagine ourselves as being post-colonial and post-Church, but in fact the new *us* is as shackled as ever. In Celtic Tiger Ireland, failure is inverted and returns as triumph; the Famine was our finest hour because it taught us to be the empathetic, generous nation that we are, always there to relieve – is ‘help’ too ambiguous a term here? – Africa’s poverty. Poverty – time-poor, relationship-poor, community-poor; a debt-ridden population, the highest under-age drinking problem in Europe, the highest suicide rate in the young adult group, growing inequality in the gap

40 Slavoj Zizek, *Nobody has to be vile*, www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n07/zize01_.html

between rich and poor – returns in the guise of the Celtic Tiger. Sure, we are all having one big party, is not that it? Is that because we self-censor with addictions – gambling, alcohol, drugs? How else can one explain our addictions, our depression, our debts, our re-mortgaging, our obesity other than by acknowledging that we unconsciously enjoy our woes? Why else would we put ourselves through this mill? *Ah, sure* is our refrain, and the submissive post-colonial mind-set plays into this.

As with all socio-ideological fantasies, in the socio-ideological fantasy of success, small things become big things. Individuals are suddenly a matter of national importance, whether these are the housemates in *Big Brother*, Bono's personal assistant and what she took from his wardrobe, or Madeleine McCann. We are obsessed with the private lives of others. The disappearance of a child in Spain dominates our consciousness month after month while the fate of children all over the world in conflict zones, in debt-ridden countries and in developing economies practically never enters our heads. Similarly, we obsess about the price of the goods in our shopping baskets and ignore spiralling house prices.

Unconscious aggressive intention also looms large. This is present in the way we obsess over others' private lives, the way we push ourselves to the hilt, in the way we want what our neighbours have, be this their new porch or their new Porsche, in the way we blame others for their poverty, their addictions, their social problems, telling ourselves that they have simply made the wrong choices; in the way we take pleasure in other people's downfall and wish for nothing more than to see heads roll; in the way separation, divorce, hurt, hatred occur and the way we resent even our children for interfering with our lives by their very existence; in the way our society has become more and more litigious; in the way competition dominates business and education; in the way we are obsessed by violent games, in the way bullying has become more prevalent.

Critics of the fantasy are presented as people whose perspective is skewed. They are 'begrudgers.' They are spoiling the fun for the rest of us. The message to them is 'Don't rain on our parade!' The German ambassador to Ireland was recently forced to apologise for remarks he made about Irish society. He, like those who criticise the fantasy, is presented as the problem. They are to blame for our feelings of guilt or shame, our woes. We even blame those who commit suicide for their action. Those who kill themselves are selfish people, we say (though perhaps not from the pulpit). In a sense, we believe that they have betrayed us. Thus, people who kill themselves are said to have had everything to live for – two

cars, a house, a job, a young family or a girlfriend, a future. We idealise their situation in order to let ourselves off the hook. We can imagine no reason as to why people should hang themselves from the rafters or put a gun to their heads, apart from their selfish desire to simply spoil the party for everyone else. And if we don't offer that as the reason as to why they take their lives, then we throw up our hands and say it is a mystery. In the post-modern age we no longer invoke God. We invoke the Great Unknown – Mystery – to explain our social contradictions. The fantasy itself remains unproblematic. The appeal to people to close ranks also isolates the political, which people ridicule. People tell themselves that the political is for corrupt politicians, or if you are a woman, for men. They say that all politicians are the same - they are only in it for the money. People refuse to vote. 'Sure, what's the point?', they say. Nothing ever changes. Thus, as in the modernist period, people unconsciously choose powerlessness yet all the while idealise themselves as being powerful, achievers, successful, philanthropic.

Another consequence of the socio-ideological fantasy of success is the fact that morality is suspended at the political level. Institutions are off the hook because there is nothing to answer for, which is why we have endless tribunals, the equivalent of toothless coroners' inquiries. We tell ourselves that corruption is the fault of the individual and we look for the bad apple in the barrel. Or we simply make claims of ignorance, saying, for example, that we never knew there was such a thing as corruption or paedophilia. Which brings me to the subject of social analysis. There is little or no social analysis today. Postmodernism has pushed everything into the private, individual realm. Social analysis has by and large been reduced to chance. Reality TV channels the Real to us. When it breaks through on our television screens, like the Jade Goody affair on *Big Brother*, *Newsnight Review* tells viewers this is a marvellous opportunity for them to reflect on issues of racism and class that they would otherwise shun. When a chef on a reality TV show is bullied, then we are meant to be grateful for the opportunity to debate another important social issue. The disappearance of Madeleine McCann gets us feeling guilty about our parenting skills and the fate of our little darlings that we leave in the crèche at 7am and pick up at 7pm. When a gaping hole opens up in the fantasy of success, such as rising crime – those foreigners again! – we believe the official line that everything is under control, that there is nothing wrong, that *normal programming will be restored as soon as possible*, as it were, normally when the professional spin-doctors have stepped in.

As Žižek notes, the socio-ideological fantasy downplays the political. Thus, the Northern Ireland conflict was a mismatch between two groups stuck in the past, Iraq is a sectarian conflict, Darfur, at best, is two groups fighting over resources when they should know better to share, at worst a religious conflict. Ideology is dead. Politics have been reduced to the personal. The personal is the diversion that allows us to overlook the political. Nothing has political significance any more in Ireland. The new prevailing ideology is the ideology of more: the government promises you more choice, more opportunities, more money, more tax relief. Politics have been reduced to economics because, of course, we are told, that is what the people want – more money in their pockets. Responsibility and civic duty which were once at the heart of politics are something foreign. It is, of course, understandable that in the era of the strong ego, such as at present, when we can all imagine ourselves as Gods, that agency is lacking in the political sphere. People want to consume, not assume responsibility. As a result, policies are driven by consumerist considerations, voter apathy is widespread, political life is blighted with corruption, elections are won on grounds of image and we stumble from crisis to crisis. One could argue from a Lacanian perspective that this lack of agency brings unconscious pleasure, that people unconsciously enjoy having no apparent say in politics, which leaves them in the position of victim. They like to see themselves as powerless in the political domain. They can blame others – principally ‘begrudgers’, corrupt politicians and immigrants – for their woes while continuing to enjoy these unconsciously.

The socio-ideological fantasy of success also poses huge problems for women who are drawn into the market-place in search of success in the form of financial independence,⁴¹ but who have all the guilt associated with placing this goal before more traditional relationships with children or partners. So, they rationalise their motives for wanting what men have. They tell themselves that they are not after power, but the ends it provides. They want financial independence because it is not good to depend on men, which they view as a type of oppressive dependency, or they desire personal care because by investing in looking better they are looking after themselves and are thus in better shape to look after others as a result. Should they desire political office, they do so because only women can really represent women’s issues or put child-care on the map. These are rationalisations of guilt which hide the unconscious

41 *The Irish Times* Behaviour and Attitudes Poll (Sept. 29th, 07).

pleasure they find in power. They indulge in self-idealisation to make up for their desire for this one thing that has been forbidden them more than any other. Desire remains unanalyzed. Contradictions are overlooked. Shades of grey are downplayed. Child-care is not the abiding social issue in Ireland today, but the socio-ideological fantasy of success that both sexes play along with.

Conclusion

Would it be too much to argue that postmodernism in Ireland has come to mirror modernism: the pursuit of freedom has resulted in its opposite, captivity; the pursuit of meaning has resulted in private navel-gazing? The ego is God. We are more than ever caught up in the mirror. The ego's decentred, split, paranoid, aggressive nature whose neuroses condemn us to a social hell, is ignored. Division, inequality and fear are widespread. Desire reigns supreme, while the unconscious is ignored.

Taking responsibility for the fantasy means that the subject must acknowledge his/her unconscious attraction to whatever has been denied. In the case of contemporary Ireland, I posit the view that this is poverty, emigration, famine, guilt over the Northern conflict, Partition, colonialism – everything that has sent us headlong into the socio-ideological fantasy of success. Today, one must be European, outward-looking, successful and, above all, one must not blink. The subject needs to acknowledge the unconscious pleasure found in this lost object. The fact that it involves pain does not make it any less enjoyable because unconscious pleasure may involve suffering. We enjoy our woes. Subjects must also acknowledge the way in which they have enjoyed the denial of their desire and operated so as to obstruct its satisfaction. Subjects must identify the way they fantasise their *jouissance*, in other words, the way, imagining others have it, they are unconsciously drawn to retrieve it through domination; the way they unconsciously replace it with fantasies of wholeness and independence; the way they unconsciously avoid it by identifying with ideals that belie its presence and the way they unconsciously find repressed pleasure in self-destruction. Subjects need to confront themselves with the way the ideological figure of the other has been invested with their unconscious desire. They also need to see how this involves hatred of the self, pleasure in pain, pleasure in dissatisfaction, and a desire for self-destruction. In other words, they need to identify how they gain satisfaction from their symptoms. Lacan writes that the

whole point of analysis is not to deny people satisfaction but to provide them with 'other ways, shorter ones for example'⁴² to attain this – ways that are less trouble to the subject. This does not mean people should come to altogether jettison the symbolic constraints on *jouissance*, but rather it means that they should come to accept in a new, radical way the type of satisfaction that they seek. What is important is that people come to accept that they desire whatever they have repressed. Once they become aware of it they can take responsibility for their enjoyment. When they recognise where *jouissance* comes from, that is to say, from their anxieties and fears, they can then stop inhibiting this at the unconscious level, as opposed to necessarily obtaining the object of their *jouissance*. By removing the prohibition, one can move towards a more effective management of socio-ideological fantasy. However, it is not the knowledge one gains about the structure of one's symptoms that guarantees change. One has to want to want something, not simply know it. And to want something on the basis of knowledge requires judgment. It is judgment that enables the subject act on the basis of having recognised one's desire in the Other. This judgement is what gets a person from thinking – which is a postponement – to action.

Responsibility is key for Lacanian psychoanalysis. No matter what shapes one's motivation, social, cultural, environmental or unconscious, people are called to answer for their behaviour when they have traversed their fundamental fantasy. It will be interesting to see how the challenge of assuming responsibility for our unconscious desires pans out in the coming years in Ireland.

42 *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p.166.

Peter D. T. Guy

In the Name Of The Father: Lacan's Nom-du-Père and the Modern Irish Novel

This essay offers something of an overview into research I am carrying out on Lacanian tropes and their impact on the evolution of the later Irish novel. A key area which I aim to look at in this chapter is that of the patriarchal structure and how a number of Irish authors – my focus will be upon John McGahern's *Amongst Women* and Roddy Doyle's *The Snapper* – set about promoting an anti-logocentric discourse that would transgress and undermine the tyranny of unitary meaning inherent in a phallogocentric system.

In Ireland, as in any decolonizing nation, the idea of family remains a crucial concept. During the nineteenth century, both Ireland and Britain were figuratively viewed in binary opposition to one another - essentially as masculine and feminine entities. This allowed British colonial discourse a framework in which to enact a master text that set into opposition a natural division of the sexes. What was inherent in Irish expression soon became mirrored in the Irish psyche - the carnivalesque, playful society (what Ernest Renan called the 'essential feminine' nature of the Celtic race) was set against the staid, pragmatic British discourses of science and culture.¹

Yet, as Frantz Fanon illustrated in *The Wretched of the Earth*, anti-colonial nationalism was locked into Western imperialist modes of thought. The intellectuals and social elite that were responsible in leading the nationalist drive were the ones who, once they came to power, quickly reinstated the systems of hierarchy and privilege that had characterised the colonial policy.² It came as no surprise then that those respon-

1 Ernest Renan, from *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1859), quoted in M. Storey (ed.) *Poetry and Ireland Since 1800: A Source Book* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.58.

2 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by C. Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967) and *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by C.L. Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986), p.147.

sible for Irish decolonization quickly began to reconfigure Irish society along demonstrably unequal lines. In post-independence Ireland, the Irish male suddenly became a fighter, the bread-winner, the patriarch whose word was final.³ A woman's place was in the home; a concept enshrined in the Constitution of 1937. There, she might exert a certain amount of power but, as we shall see in *Amongst Women*, that power was conditional on placating, and at times undermining, the central patriarchal figure in the house.

A second area of interest in this domain is the way in which children sought to repudiate the patriarchal system, as we shall see in *The Snapper*. One telling example is when Sharon's pregnancy threatens to undermine the working class values which, on the surface, appear so important for her mother, Veronica, whose most pressing concern is 'the neighbours' and 'what will they say?',⁴ or as Abbey Hyde notes, there are 'clear threats to patriarchal structures when a breakdown of traditional relations between women and men occurs, and when the daughter's "dangerous fertility" bypasses the male-controlled route of marriage.'⁵ Yet, by the close of the novel, Sharon's 'rebellion' is countermanded by her desire for the sort of working class stability that shows how each generation inevitably seeks to re-install the principle of patriarchal authority in some other guise, 'She wanted to stay here so the baby would have a proper family and the garden and the twins and her mammy to look after it so she could go out sometimes' (*TS*, 157).

Fintan O' Toole has noted that Roddy Doyle's writing is 'firmly located within an Irish tradition', of 'fatherhood and failure.'⁶ In *The Snapper*, Jimmy's determined speech about how 'a father figure would be vital for Sharon's snapper' (*TS*, 193) is counterbalanced somewhat by his snap decision to finally cut the grass, 'cutting the grass was important. The new short grass would be a sort of announcement: There is a new man who living in this house, so fuck off and mind your own business'

3 See Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1997).

4 Roddy Doyle, *The Snapper* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.7. Abbreviated in the text as *TS*.

5 Abbey Hyde, "Gender Differences in the Responses of Parents' to Their Daughters' Non-Marital Pregnancy" in A. Byrne & M. Leonard (eds.), *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997), p.292.

6 Fintan O' Toole, "Working-Class Dublin on Screen: The Roddy Doyle Films", in *Cinéaste*, 25, 2-3 1999, p.39.

(*TS*, 194). Here we see the private effacing the public sphere, the re-imposition of patriarchal norms, even in such a futile gesture as keeping the grass cut. This lends credence to O' Toole's depiction of *The Barrytown Trilogy* as 'a working-class father's attempts to come to terms with the loss of the traditional role.'⁷ His role in the house is tentative enough, as illustrated by his contretemps with his deeply disaffected son, Les: 'Jimmy Sr couldn't leave it like that. He'd lost, in front of Darren, the twins, Sharon – them all. He was the head of the fuckin' house!' (*TS*, 46).

For Lacan, the father is seen to embody the socio-symbolic law and the function of the paternal metaphor is to substitute the desire for the mother with the law of the father. This is also the founding moment for Lacan and the point at which the phallus is installed as the central organizing signifier of the unconscious. For Lacan, the question of phallogocentrism is inseparable from the structure of the sign. The signifier, the phallus, holds out the promise of full presence and power which, because it is unobtainable, threatens both sexes with the castration complex. Social and cultural factors, such as gender stereotypes, will accentuate or diminish the impact of the unconscious lack but the phallus, being a signifier of full presence and not a physical organ, remains a universal source of this castration complex. Lacan sometimes calls this insistent signifier 'Name-of-the-Father', thus emphasizing its non-real, non-biological mode of existence.

It is essential to recognise the metaphorical nature of the father's role: he is installed in the position of lawgiver not because he has a superior procreative function but merely as an effect of the linguistic system. The mother recognises the speech of the father because she has access to the signifier of the paternal function which regulates desire in a repressive manner. Thus, only by accepting the necessity of sexual difference and regulated desire can a child become socialized. The advantage of this approach is that it supersedes biological determinism and puts Freudian psychoanalysis in touch with the social system. To suggest that women's unequal position within society can be explained simply through sexual difference or gender is to impute a fixed and unchanging essence to the notion of the feminine which psychoanalysis reveals as untenable. The category 'woman' cannot be said to exist, as there is no inherent feminine nature or fixed identity to which the term applies. Sexual difference, therefore, is determined not as a difference between two discrete sexes but as a result of one's position in relation to *jouissance*.

7 *Ibid.*

A number of Irish writers have gone about investigating and critiquing the role that patriarchal cultural discourses have played in defining Irish gendered identities. In the case of John McGahern, we have someone who has tended to concentrate on what Judith Butler has called the 'promising ambivalence' of violent and patriarchal speech.⁸ This ambiguity accounts for the likelihood that speech can sometimes fail to act, or act in ways that counter the meaning of the speaker. Butler argues that all cultural discourses share a volatile correlation with the intentions that accompany their deployment, and that it is this unpredictability which can provide the impetus for the undermining of the patriarchal order.

McGahern's father figures are often cast as figures of authority, either as veterans of the War of Independence: Sgt. Reagan in *The Barracks*, the fathers in 'Korea' and 'Oldfashioned', and Moran in *Amongst Women*; or members of the Gardaí: Reagan again, the fathers in 'Bomb Box' and 'Oldfashioned' and Sergeant Moran in *The Leavetaking*. They represent the dominant figures in a patriarchal hierarchy, in the community and in their home. Many of those fathers retreat into the family to establish their own independent republic, a microcosm of the country at large as McGahern sees it, where there is no cohesive society beyond the family, only 'thousands of little republics called families.' Another type of father figure is the religious father, who represents the authority of the church – as McGahern states in a 1991 interview with Joe Jackson: 'The whole notion of society was patriarchal, from the concept of God the Father right down to the father who actually dominated the household and dictated even when the rosary should be said.'⁹

McGahern's fathers also tend to have the egotism of children. Both Moran and Reagan demand to be served their meals alone and have the habit of watching their reflection in the sideboard mirror as they eat.¹⁰ It is as if, like children in the Lacanian mirror stage, they need constant reassurance of the completeness of their identity. The mirror stage describes the formation of the Ego via the process of identification, the Ego being the result of identifying with one's own specular image. At six

8 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.91.

9 Joe Jackson "Tales from the Dark Side", in *Hot Press*, 14 November 1991, 18-20 , p.19.

10 See also James Whyte, *History, Myth, and Ritual in the Fiction of John McGahern: Strategies of Transcendence* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 2002). Chapter 4 provides a more detailed investigation into the family and the symbolic.

months the baby still lacks coordination; however, he can recognise himself in the mirror before attaining control over his bodily movements. He sees his image as a whole, and the synthesis of this image produces a sense of contrast with the un-coordination of the body which is perceived as fragmented. This contrast is first felt by the infant as a rivalry with his own image, because its wholeness threatens him with fragmentation. Thus the mirror stage gives rise to an aggressive tension between the subject and the image. To resolve this aggressive tension, the subject identifies with the image: this primary identification with the counterpart is what forms the Ego.¹¹ The moment of identification is to Lacan a moment of jubilation since it leads to an imaginary sense of mastery. Yet, the jubilation may also be accompanied by a depressive reaction, when the infant compares his own precarious sense of mastery with the omnipotence of the mother (*La relation d'objet*). This identification also involves the ideal ego which functions as a promise of future wholeness sustaining the Ego in anticipation.

Therefore, the unnamed narrator in *The Dark* realises that no person can be just a 'walking mirror' for another.¹² But that is exactly what McGahern's fathers require; they insist that their children 'mirror' their feelings or echo their utterances. In 'Bomb Box', for example, the hypochondriac sergeant, who tells his children that he is dying, wants 'to see his life in the mirror of the pain of need.'¹³ Significantly, the children's most effective means of subverting the authority of the father is mimicry, which distorts rather than reaffirms the self-image he wishes to project. In his Prologue to a reading at the Rockefeller University, McGahern refers to 'this Medusa's mirror, allowing us to see and to celebrate even the totally intolerable.'¹⁴ It is this effort to mediate between the self and the other, who appears as the Medusa with her petrifying stare encapsulates what McGahern appears to see as the unbridgeable gulf between people. As Henri Paratte phrases it, McGahern's starting point is that people are separate.¹⁵

11 A more detailed analysis can be found in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996) and Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005).

12 John McGahern, *The Dark* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), p.94.

13 John McGahern, *Nightlines* (London: Panther, 1973), p.62.

14 John McGahern, "The Image", in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* July 1991, Number 1, Volume XVII, p.12.

15 Henri-D. Paratte, "Conflicts in a Changing World: John McGahern", in P.Rafroidi

In *The Snapper*, Sharon sees her image distorted by looking in the wardrobe mirror and the dressing room table mirror. Her earlier resoluteness when she envisages the reaction of the Barrytown residents is illustrated in the following passage:

Sharon Rabbitte's pregnant, did yeh hear...
That's shockin'
Mm
Dirty Bitch
Poor Sharon
The slut
I don't believe her
The stupid bitch
She had tha' comin.' (TS, 67-8)

Her reaction is, 'Fuck them. Fuck all of them. She did not care' (TS, 68). This repudiation of the community as a collective morality is offset however when she finds herself looking into the mirror in her parents' bedroom. Here, as in the Lacanian example, the mirror acts as the medium which brings together these fragmentary voices and it is only through the mirror that she is capable of seeing herself as she imagines the community sees her: 'Jesus she looked terrible. She was white in one mirror and greeny-pink in the other one. Her tits were hanging like a cow's... she looked like a pig. In both the mirrors' (TS, 152).

In Lacanian theory, acceptance of the law of the father and hence subjection to the law of society are crucial steps in the formation of personality. McGahern's fathers do not carry any of these positive attributes. In *Amongst Women*, Moran's bullying of his teenage daughters is implicitly contrasted with his inability to maintain his ascendancy over his former lieutenant, McQuaid. He terrorizes his daughters, so that in his presence they 'sink into a beseeching drabness, cower as close to being invisible.'¹⁶ One scene of importance is set during the Monaghan Day and describes the daughters as frantically cleaning the house:

No sooner had the door closed than Mona, released from the tension of his presence, let slip the plate from her hands...quickly they swept up the pieces

and M. Harmon (eds.), *The Irish Novel in Our Time* (Lille: Publications de l'Université de Lille, 1976), pp.311-327.

16 John McGahern, *Amongst Women* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p.8. Abbreviated in the text as AW.

and hid them away, wondering how they would replace the plate without being found out...anything broken had to be hidden until it could be replaced or forgotten. (AW, 10)

The plate acts as a metaphor, on one level, for the fractured but outwardly coalesced Moran family and, on a deeper level, for Moran himself, broken but defiant, hidden behind the barriers of the family. Thereafter, Moran turns his family into a closed community and the absence of any intrusion from without further augments his own paternal supremacy. The primacy of the family is an idea also sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Links between Catholicism and patriarchy are forged in the novel by its most repetitive narrative ritual and the family prayer from which it derives its title. Moran's devotion to the rosary is explicable on familial and patriarchal grounds: 'the family that prays together stays together', he adroitly observes. The rosary in the Moran household is a public prayer that reinforces a hierarchical social structure: it is presided over by the head of the family and the five decades are allocated from eldest to youngest in descending order of importance. The internal structure of this prayer, the Creed with which it opens, the 'Our Father' and 'Glory be to the Father' that enclose each decade, emphasises Divine fatherhood. Though the rosary repeatedly pronounces Mary as 'blessed ...amongst women', because she was chosen to be the mother of Christ our redeemer, in the Moran household, the character blessed 'amongst women' is Moran himself.¹⁷

In *The Snapper*, the maxim 'the family that prays together...' is inverted according to its working class settings. According to Jimmy Sr, 'The family tha' eats together – how does it go?', is a humorous take on the importance of spiritual ritual in decline, but the message remains the same (*TS*, 100). Where Moran supplants the maternal in prayer, Jimmy Sr does so by his intrusion into Sharon's pregnancy – again, an example of the patriarchal attempting to reclaim typically female space as its own. Jimmy Sr's decision to become something of a 'new man', taking a new-found interest in his daughter's pregnancy, is by no means a welcome

17 Here I am indebted to the work of Siobhán Holland, "Tact and Tactics: A Case for Matrifocality in John McGahern's *Amongst Women*", in A. Marshall & N. Sammells (eds.), *Irish Encounters: Poetry, Politics and Prose since 1880* (Bath: Sulis, 1998), pp.115-126 and Antoinette Quinn, "A Prayer for My Daughter: Patriarchy in *Amongst Women*", in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, July 1991, Number 1, Volume XVII, pp.79 – 90.

development for the females in the house. Sharon reacts by affirming to herself: 'It was her pregnancy and he could fuck off and stay out of it' (*TS*, 174), while his wife, Veronica, mocks his newly acquired medi-speak: 'We don't want you bursting your waters all over the furniture, isn't that right, Jimmy dear?' (*TS*, 200). Both women resist Jimmy Sr's infringement on their domain, in terms of both physical space and their embarrassment in his new-found interest in the family. Of his children, he states: 'His kids were grand, but Jimmy Sr'd said that was just good luck and Veronica because he'd nothing to do with it' (*TS*, 193). Here we witness another example of a generation seeking to reaffirm their parents' familial norms which, though they may have initially repudiated them, now wish to re-enact in their own lives. If Jimmy Sr took no interest in his wife's pregnancies before, then Sharon wishes he would take the same attitude with her own.

In *Amongst Women*, a large part of the fascination which Moran holds for Rose and his daughters is sexual. Rose loves him, his 'sense of separateness and pride that she found unlike any of the other local men she had known' (*AW*, 23). Before his marriage to Rose, Moran shares his bed with his youngest son, Michael. Tellingly, McGahern writes: 'Tomorrow night Rose would lie in the boy's place' (*AW*, 39). His daughters have an oedipal attraction for him also. He is their 'first man' and their love of him is indistinguishable from their fear. He remains the dominant figure in their life, even after two of the daughters, Maggie and Shelia, marry. Neither of these men poses a threat to Moran, for both have their inherent weaknesses – Maggie's husband, Mark, is a heavy drinker and it is his wife who ends up assuming the dominant role in the marriage. Shelia's husband, Sean, is a somewhat effeminate figure, and Moran '...did not respect Sean... he despised him for running to a woman with his story' (*AW*, 158). The latently incestuous relationship which Moran inspires in his daughters is violated only when Shelia leaves him and the family in the hayfield to go indoors and make love to Sean. As a result, the family is united in its disapprobation:

'You'd think they could have waited,' Michael said quietly, in agreement with the resentment he felt all around him. It was as if the couple were together disregarding the inviolability of the house, its true virginity, with a selfish absorption. (*AW*, 166)

The Snapper also encourages oedipal readings. George Burgess and Jimmy Snr are demographically almost identical, as well as in age: 'Jesus, Veronica, I think the cunt is older than I am', Jimmy states with his

usual candour (*TS*, 120). Both, in some way, force themselves upon Sharon's body, and invade or violate her private space. Sharon contemplates naming her child after her father: 'Her daddy would love that. But then he might take over the baby, the way he was these days' (*TS*, 199), while Jimmy also begins to act as a surrogate father to Sharon's child. He offers to be in the delivery room with her, while his friends remind him of his familial duties, almost as if he were indeed the father: 'I couldn't give a fuck who it is, said Paddy – It's Jimmy. I'm not going to be buying food for it, an' nappies an' little fuckin' track suits. Jimmy is' (*TS*, 65). As Ruth Barton states, 'in effect, the pregnancy becomes his and the threat of the single mother bringing up her child in a nonpaternalistic family unit is dispelled.'¹⁸

The Oedipal complex remains fairly straightforward for boys, but for girls it has to account for the process whereby girls first give up their initial love object – the mother. The Oedipal complex for girls, thus, involves an extra, earlier, step. The girl transfers her love from mother to father, because she realises that neither she nor her mother has a phallus, in a process that Freud famously termed penis-envy. The problem for Freud was that he simply could not then explain why a girl should give up the father as love object and re-identify with the mother. Lacan partially solved this question by linking the process through which women must give up an essential part of themselves in order to be the phallus with a concept he called masquerade. He stated:

Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved.¹⁹

Thus, it is through the masquerade that a woman's 'not-having' the phallus is transformed into 'being' the phallus. This is an idea which he derived from Joan Riviere's essay, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', which saw the notion of masquerade as an important contribution to the theory of female sexual development. She argued that both the mother and the

18 Ruth Barton, "Feisty Colleens and Faithful Sons: Gender in Irish Cinema", in *Cinéaste*, 24, 2-3, 1999, p.42.

19 Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus", in *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by A. Sheridan (London: Routledge/Tavistock, 1977), pp.289-290.

father are the little girl's rivals and objects of her sadistic fury. If the mother can be placated by the girl using the masculinity she obtains from the father and putting it to the service of the mother, the father can be placated only by the girl masquerading in a feminine guise for him, that is showing him her 'love' and guiltlessness towards him. In terms of women's identity and sexual development then, she must firstly identify with the father and only then with the mother. The problem for women, therefore, is not whether they put on a mask of femininity or not but how well it fits. In short, femininity is masquerade.²⁰

In *Amongst Women*, Moran's power is patriarchal rather than paternal. His daughters are drawn 'as if to a magnet, to what Daddy would like or dislike, approve of or disapprove of' (AW, 131):

He did not need to be very charming. They had learned to accept him in all his humours: They were grateful for anything short of his worst moods, inordinately grateful for the slightest goodwill, what they would barely have accepted from an equal. (AW, 129)

Even in adulthood, as here, his daughters consider themselves as Moran's inferiors and grant him a sort of paternal *carte blanche*. Around Moran a 'silence and deadness would fall upon them...if they had to stay they moved around the place like shadows' (AW, 53). Yet Moran also instils in his daughters the importance of family and the house:

Beneath all differences was the belief that the whole house was essentially one...deprived of this sense they were nothing, scattered, individual things. They would put up with anything in order to have this sense of belonging. (AW, 145)

They need to return again and again to Great Meadow in order to be affirmed and reaffirmed by Moran but in doing so they forfeit their autonomy. The bond that exists between father and daughters is an indissoluble one and the mechanics of patriarchy continues until Moran falls into ill health. But like the hen pheasant in the hayfield whose legs are amputated by Moran's tractor, his daughters are so emotionally crippled by him that they can never fly away from Great Meadow.

20 Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", in V. Burgin, J. Donald & C. Kaplan (eds.) *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp.35-44.

The pull back to their first home is a means of overcoming feelings of aloneness and exposure. The numinous sense of completion and oneness gives them their commitment to their father and to being the agents of his will. Of his three daughters, Shelia alone seems capable of standing up to him but even she 'knew instinctively that she could not live without (the family)' (AW, 167). There are, however, a number of subtle ways in which the patriarchal structure is undermined in the novel – for one, being forced to rely upon his family is in itself a concession of power. When his daughters attempt to nurse Moran back to health, he reacts furiously to their meddling: 'It ran counter to the way he had managed his own life. He had never in all his life bowed in anything to a mere other' (AW, 178). Rose's wilfulness is an affront to his authority and he twice attempts to disparage her position in the household. Rose's only recourse is the threat of withdrawal: 'she spoke with the quietness and desperate authority of someone who had discovered they could give up no more ground and live' (AW, 71). Moran backs down, frightened by his 'deepening blindness', and the possibility that she may emulate Luke's actions and actually leave the family home.

A similar device is used in *The Snapper*, when Sharon forces a confrontation with her father. In her words, 'she'd have to do something' (TS, 151). Like Rose, her threat is only a device to bring matters to a head but it shows how the threat of withdrawal can help destabilize the patriarchal structure. Jimmy Sr feels that he was won this particular battle of wills: 'He'd won. He'd got what he wanted' (TS, 158), but Sharon follows through with her threat and Jimmy is forced to employ another female device, false tears, to convince her to stay. Thus patriarchy is shown not as an omnipotent force, but merely a façade, a token recognition of a hierarchical structure that is all about saving face. This superficiality is again illustrated when Jimmy finds himself unable to express his emotions in front of any male characters: 'He wondered if he should kiss Veronica on the cheek or something... But no, he decided, not with the boys there. They'd slag him' (TS, 39).

Sharon also illustrates how traditional linguistic patterns, in a Lacanian terms, can be used against the originators of those terms. When she confronts George Burgess, she states, bluntly: 'You said I was a ride. Didn'tt yeh?' As the narrator states 'George Burgess hated that. He hated hearing women using the language he used. He just did not think it was right. It sounded dirty' (TS, 86). Sharon relishes the power of bluntness, which she goes on to use when standing up to other male characters. Equally, while she is taken advantage of in every other way, Veronica

controls the linguistic high ground in the family, as she explains to Jimmy Sr: “‘It’s no wonder they talk the way they do’”, Veronica gave out to Jimmy Sr’ (*TS*, 5). Even Doyle’s ‘gave out’ is less formal than the register Veronica uses, and the narrator has this linguistic advantage over Jimmy Jr who is forced to take elocution lessons in order to acquire a proper radio accent.

In *Amongst Women*, while Moran accepts that the domestic authority of the Irish mother figure is an ‘old story’ which has powerful citational force, he is also obliged to use it to his own benefit – notably when he remarries and is forced to acknowledge the importance of a central female figure in the family:

He saw each individual member gradually slipping away out of his reach. Yes, they would eventually all go. He would be alone. That he could not stand. He saw with bitter lucidity that he would marry Rose Brady now. (*AW*, 22)

Even when he uses the rosary to enforce his dominance on the family, the reality is that it is merely a device to impose his will rather than one that automatically confirms it. This can be seen in Maggie’s return from London, when she becomes the centre of attention: ‘She was the centre of the table’, displacing Moran from his self-assumed role. He attempts to displace her by starting the rosary earlier than usual, but the formulaic manner in which it is recited breaks down and rather than confirming his familial role as head of the family, it positively discourages it.

This night Moran enunciated each repetitious word with slow clarity and force as if the very dwelling on suffering, death and human supplication would scatter all flimsy vanities of a great world; and the muted responses giving back their acceptance of human servitude did not improve his humour. (*AW*, 79)

Once he loses the physical strength which has helped him regulate the patriarchal power structure in the family, the words of the rosary no longer contribute to or endorse his claims. The family home, the new fragility of which helped to challenge the stability of Moran’s power, now comes to signify the authority of benevolent mothers rather than that of powerful patriarchs. Moran, akin to King Lear, forfeits his kingdom to his daughters and ‘For the first time in his life Moran began to fear them’ (*AW*, 178). He has always been in the driving seat, and ironically, though he rallies his ‘troops’ to ‘seize the day’, as Denis Sampson attests:

'Moran's lifelong inability to seize the day is finally revealed to be at the heart of his egocentric inability to accept the reality of change.'²¹ Due to fear of penury, a loathing of the professional class and aversion to outsiders, he has retreated into Great Meadow and will give no further ground. But he is powerless in dictating to his grown children and it is they who finally open up the Great Meadow to the world. Towards the end of the novel, Moran, helpless in the face of change, reluctantly resigns himself to the back seat: 'He still went to the post office to post letters but Rose drove him there and waited outside in the car' (*AW*, 172).

In conclusion, I feel that Lacanian theory is useful in that it has encouraged modern criticism to abandon faith in language's power to refer to things and to express ideas or feelings. Modern literature often resembles dreams in its avoidance of a governing narrative position and its free play of meaning. The novel, in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, is the 'only developing genre and therefore reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process.'²² And it is only within this open space that we can fully deconstruct and pursue the idea that no speaker has access to the conventional ideal of absolute agency.

21 Denis Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p.240.

22 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Translated by C. Emerson & M. Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.53.

Part II

Poetry Grappling with issues of Modernity and Postmodernity

Mary Pierse

The Poetic Voices of Dennis O’Driscoll and Cathal Ó Searcaigh: in tune with Lyotard?

*Gúru i gClúidíní*¹ - or a baby guru in nappies - is the title of Irish poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh’s 2006 collection of poetry and, on the scale of what might be considered postmodern, the notion of such a guru must be nearly at the peak. It is so far from the authority of a grand narrative, so cheeky in its defiance of any supremacy that is justified by age, education and existing power structures, so celebratory of an unexpected guru and, by implication, celebratory of what is temporary, provisional, local and relative. The volume title and the poem of the same name suggest a postmodernism that resonates with many of the dicta of Jean-François Lyotard, yet other poems within the collection might not so immediately be seen as thus identifiable. This would also be the case for the range of similar shades and variations that are perceptible in the poetry of Dennis O’Driscoll. Such diversity raises questions concerning where one might locate the two poets on a postmodern map; moreover, it gives rise to further and inevitable queries in relation to the notion of postmodernism, however it might be interpreted.

The idea of the postmodern in the thought of Jean-François Lyotard is, as is well-known, a complex one. Lyotard’s engagement with the presence or absence of the postmodern addresses the concept within the realms of science and technology, politics, philosophy – and literature. This examination of postmodern qualities in recent poetry by O’Driscoll and Ó Searcaigh will take place solely within the confines of that last domain, literature. The exploration of their writings will assess the relevance and suitability, if any, of the labels modern and postmodern for their poems; in addition, it will consider how either or both poets might be seen as exemplifying the qualities of Lyotard’s own particular definition of the postmodern. In the case of Cathal Ó Searcaigh, I propose to look at poems from the already-mentioned 2006 collection; in that of

1 Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Gurú i gClúidíní* (Indreabhán, Conamara : Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2006).

Dennis O' Driscoll, the focus will be on recent poems from the collection *Foreseeable Futures* (2004), and also on an earlier poem "Middle-Class Blues" from *Hidden Extras* (1987).²

"Gúrú i gclúidíní" by Cathal Ó Searcaigh would seem to have strong claims to be reckoned a postmodern document. It lacks the modernist nostalgic wish or its lament for departed order; rather, it establishes a personal freedom. The poem has two verse paragraphs, of nine and eight lines respectively, and is thus displayed in a newer shape rather than in one with any of the 'consistance reconnaissable' that Lyotard ascribes to modernist form.³ Its content certainly argues with generally pre-conceived notions of reality as the little guru introduces and alludes to what is conceivable but 'qui ne peut être présenté', to echo Lyotard once more.⁴

"Gúrú i gclúidíní"⁵

Ó lá do thuismidh tá do theangaidh féin agat, a mhic ó,
faoi mar a bheadh sí leat i gcónaí, i dtaiscigh san méid díot a bheathaíonn,
beo síoraí, trí shaol na saol. Tá sí agat anois ar do bhinn féin agus tú
ag ainmniú laethanta na seachtaine as an nua. 'Dé Sú Úll, Dé Kathmandu,
Dé Búda Buí, Dé Daidí na Gealaí, Dé Mamaí na Gréine, Dé Fonn Donn,
Dé Spéir go Léir.' Níl lá dá n-éiríonn nach bhfuil tú, a ghúrú na
gclúidíní, ag múnú d'úrlabhra uaibhreach féin, ag briatharú na beatha
de spalpacha reatha, a Rimbaud. 'Inniú Dé Síob sa Spéir' adeir tú
liom, 'gheobhaidh muid scamall i dThamel, a Dhaideo.'

A dhraoi an tseanchinn, a dheisbhéalaí na naoi mí dhéag,
baineann tú as ár gcleachtadh sinn le héirim cinn
do chuid cáinte agus tú ag cur d'fhírinne úraoibhinn
féin ar chiall na coitiantachta. 'Tá an spéir lán d'inné,
an tsráid lán d'amárach, tá mise lán d'anois,' adeir tú linn
i do ghuth glé binnbhéalach agus muid amuigh ag síneadh na ngéag
i dtráthnóna sámh na mbasár. Déanann tú do lámha a rothlú agus tig dé
bheag gaoithe ár bhfuair. 'Tá Dia te' adeir tú. 'Tóg go bog é . . .'

2 Poems from both collections are included in Dennis O'Driscoll, *New and Selected Poems* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2004).

3 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants: Correspondance 1982-1985* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), p.32

4 *Ibid.*, p.33

5 Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Gúrú i gClúidíní* (Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar- Chonnachta, 2006), p.16.

“Baby Guru in Nappies”⁶

From birth, you have had your own language, little son,
 as though it was always there, stored until you breathe life into it,
 eternally alive, for ever and ever. It’s all yours now as you
 bestow new names on the weekdays. ‘Apple juice day’, ‘Kathmandu day’,
 ‘Yellow Buddha day’, ‘Moon Daddy day’, ‘Sun Mommy day’, ‘Idle reverie
 day’,
 ‘Whole sky day.’ There isn’t a day, little napped guru, that you aren’t
 honing your own spirited speech, verbalising life
 as fast as you can, O Rimbaud. ‘Today is Drift in the sky day’ you tell me,
 ‘we’ll get on a cloud in Thamel, Grandad.’
 O druid of the old wise head, O nineteen-month articulate one,
 your intelligent talk is disconcerting for us
 as you spread your fresh sweet truth
 over common connotations. ‘The sky is full of today,
 the street is full of tomorrow, I am full of the now’ you tell us
 in your clear, sweet-tongued voice while we are out stretching our legs
 in the peace of the bazaar evening. You whirl your hands and a little
 breath of wind comes to cool us. ‘God is hot’ you say, ‘take it easy....’

This foregrounding of the exotic imagination, the calmly accepted contestation of established weekday names, the normality of cloud transport, all of these transfer agency and authority to the individual and do so with the complete assurance of one who is light-years away from institutions and their power structures. The spreading of ‘d’fhírinne úraoibhinn/féin ar chiall na coitianta’ ‘fresh sweet truth/over common connotations’ is both an affirmation of the new dispensation and an acknowledgment of the existence of an earlier state. Moreover, the sense that the little guru has the ball, so-to-speak, is accompanied by the telling phrase ‘beo síoraí, trí shaol na saol’/ ‘eternally alive, for ever and ever’ – thus conveying that the language and freedom opportunities will be there to be availed of in the future, without any restrictive prescription. There is additional significance in ‘trí shaol na saol’/‘forever and ever’, since it is the phrase that comes at the end of so many prayers in the Christian tradition and is usually followed by ‘Amen.’ In this case, the aspiration of the prayerful is there but the infinite choice is proffered, rather than a fixed ‘so be it.’ “Tearmann”/“Refuge” provides a contrast to that first poem. As is apparent, it presents a more formal structure and arrangement on the page:

6 My translation.

“Tearmann”

Cnoc na Naomh
 ina shanctóir corcra
 fraoigh

Fuiseoga
 ag canadh a dtrátha
 os a chionn

Um meán lae
 gach poll portaigh
 ina chailís ghlé
 solais

“Refuge”⁷

Cnoc na Naomh*
 a purple heathered
 sanctuary

Larks
 singing the hours
 above it

At midday
 every bog hole
 a shining chalice
 of light

**trans.* Saints’ Hill

It could be considered an imagist poem in its brief twenty five words but the images are not totally neutral, the lines exude a palpable, contented appreciation of the purple heather and the singing larks, while refraining from putting forward such images as definitive and prescriptive. Without any punctuation, the sensations move gently from the visual to the auditory, from the sky to the earthly reflections of those heavens. My choice of that word ‘heavens’ is deliberate because the religious connotations of this poem are clear: the place of worship and refuge is a cathedral in Nature; the home of the saints is swathed in the royal purple of heather; the divine office is sung by larks; the darkest places like ‘gach poll portaigh’/‘each bog hole’ become ‘a bright chalice of light’, ‘ina chailís ghlé/solais.’ Here are the non-proselytising qualities of Hinduism, the abiblical attributes of deism, the unity of Toland’s pantheism. The combination evinces a definite characteristic of the postmodern as Ó Searcaigh purposely travels away from the grand narratives of the Christian religions – possibly towards the multitude of Celtic or oriental gods, maybe also towards those of the Romans (whose selection of environmental gods extended beyond *lares* and *penates*). In this poem, there is a

7 My translation.

unity and a circularity in Nature that exclude the possibility of any pyramidal structure of domination.

One of Jean-François Lyotard's elucidations of the postmodern refers to the responsibility to investigate assumptions, and the recommended or prescribed route is to undertake 'un procès en 'ana', un procès d'analyse, d'anamnèse, d'anagogie, et d'anamorphose',⁸ a sequence of analysis, anamnesis (or reminiscence), anagogy (or a spiritual, mystical, or allegorical interpretation) and anamorphosis (or distorted projection, or a drawing that appears normal from one certain point). In Ó Searcaigh's poetry, the process of analysis is concealed from the eye while its existence is borne out by the evidence of anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis. The anagogical, that is the spiritual or mystical, is particularly remarkable in much of his writing. In Lyotard's view, the anagogical is remote from what is practical; it is utterly resistant to the reduction of everything to a utility. The importance of that resistance is that it combats a system of reason that is at the heart of the grand narrative, a search that necessarily involves the wish to govern, to predict, to interpret, to reduce to formulae, to establish a central authority, to build an edifice of control. The literary work withstands this drive, and "Gúrú i gClúidíní" and "Tearmann" are excellent examples of such counter-direction. Similar qualities may be seen in Cathal Ó Searcaigh's poem "Gealach"/"Moon":

"Gealach"

Is mó den ghealach
na den ghrian
atá ionamsa

gealach fhiáin
na seilge
ag deargadh na hoíche
lena teanga fola

Siúd í
ag siúl na spéire
cuil nimhe
ina súile geimhridh

"Moon"⁹

There is more moon
than sun
in me

a wild
Hunter's moon
reddening the night
with its bloody tongue

There she is
walking the sky
venom bristling
in wintry eyes

8 "à Jessamyn Blau, Milwaukee, le 1er mai 1985", in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris : Galilée, 1986), p.126.

9 My translation.

ag mearadh na meara
is ag tabhairt
brionglóidí buile
do Shuibhne Geilt

deranging the sea
and bringing
frenzied dreams
to Mad Sweeney

Sin an ghealach
atá ag éirí
i mo dhán

That's the moon
that is rising
in my poem

Although it departs from the serenity of the scenes in the two poems already referred to, “Gealach”/Moon is nonetheless as grounded in nature as they are, and once more it links the human into the natural world. While the magnetic force of the moon determines the tides – and here that pull is depicted as a maddening and upsetting strength, ‘ag mearadh na mara’/‘deranging the sea’ - yet the phrase ‘ag tabhairt brionglóidí buile do Shuibhne Geilt’/‘bringing angry or frenzied dreams to Mad Sweeney’ puts the moon into the past, into myth and folklore, into the narratives that are those of community rather than of autocracy or dictatorship. Despite the overwhelming magnetism of the moon and its widespread influence, it would appear that the poet has chosen to harness lunar power, rather than be subjected to it. In preferring that route, Ó Searcaigh’s poetry manifests yet again an arrogation of power and decision making to the individual, and away from central authority. While threatening ‘gealach fhiáin na seilge’/‘a wild hunter’s moon’, the concluding statement is that this is the moon that is rising in his poem. The readers are not given a view of that full moon. Are the clouds in the way? Have readers slept through the night? Perhaps, since it is the final poem in the latest collection, it is a promise of angry lines in future. In postmodern fashion, a definite path is not laid out. However, without such a path, one might well view this poem as a fragment and that immediately recalls Lyotard’s opinion that the fragment is modern while the essay is postmodern, although the fragmentation of societal structures is seen as postmodern: ‘Il me semble que l’essai (Montaigne) est postmoderne, et le fragment (l’Athaeneum) moderne.’¹⁰ That confusion does not seem to facilitate a definitive diagnosis according to a simple label.

“Life” is the title of the first poem in Dennis O’Driscoll’s collection *Foreseeable Futures* (2004).¹¹ In it, O’Driscoll dwells in today, flicking

10 “Le Postmoderne”, in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p.33.

11 “Life”, from *Foreseeable Futures* is included in O’Driscoll’s *New and Selected*

unemotionally through a range of truths and attitudes, laying the easily accepted open for scrutiny and undermining the superficial certainty of clichés:

“Life”

Life gives
 us something
 to live for:
 we will do
 whatever it takes
 to make it last.
 Kill in just wars
 for its survival.
 Wolf fast-food
 during half-time breaks.
 Wash down
 chemical cocktails,
 as prescribed.
 Soak up
 hospital radiation.
 Prey on kidneys
 at roadside pile-ups.
 Take heart
 from anything
 that might
 conceivably grant it
 a new lease.
 We would give
 a right hand
 to prolong it.
 Cannot imagine
 living without it.

This must rank as a prime example of Lyotardian postmodernism in that it is literary work that exposes the power of language to unsettle the self-assurance of the mind, and it troubles and disrupts the conventional ways in which language is used, it disturbs the habitual.¹² It is a postmodernism that amuses too as we recognise the apparent contradictions and the black humour of killing ‘in just wars’, wolfing fast food, downing

Poems (London: Anvil, 2004), p.231.

12 Mallarmé, Joyce, Kafka and Beckett, not to speak of Rabelais and Sterne, are all authors considered by Lyotard to upturn the habitual.

'chemical cocktails', preying on one to preserve the life of another. Having read the lines 'Prey on kidneys/at roadside pile-ups', the next line 'Take heart' momentarily conveys a whole new meaning until its import is again returned from possible body-snatching to the worn and familiar safety of 'Take heart/from anything' and the granting of 'a new lease.' More body parts in the form of 'We would give/a right hand' show the poet playing with readers' expectations and sensitising them in preparation for the obvious and the ambiguous in the final two lines, 'Cannot imagine/living without it.' The postmodern criterion of investigation of assumptions is fully met by the way language is used in this poem. Its postmodernism is further confirmed in the disquieting interlocking of altruistic and ruthless sentiments in accordance with Lyotardian procedures of anamnesis and anamorphosis.

Different in form but comparable in tone, O'Driscoll's poem "Seven Ages"¹³ takes a somewhat similar linguistic approach, one that is equally challenging of popular and literary expectation. The following extracts are illustrative:

from "Seven Ages"

Teens are wrapped around one another
like cars locked in the embrace of lampposts
after closing time in clubs and bars.

Twenties, having shacked up in a bedsit,
save for a house deposit and the outlay
for the full works on the Big Day.

Thirties – circumnavigating the neighbourhood –
are on the two-car shuttle between school gates,
face painting, violin lessons, junior sports displays.

[. . .]

Seventies blab on about deteriorating standards,
wish their children hadn't relocated at such distance,
live for Christmas reunions, bide their time.

13 From the collection *Foreseeable Futures* and included in *New and Selected Poems*, p.245.

In contrast to Shakespeare's division of ages, here the seven ages of man (and woman) miss out the 'mewling and puking' and the 'creeping like snail unwillingly to school'; the stages start with 'Teens are wrapped round one another', an honest admission of a reality that flies in the face of societal hope and parental admonition, and is aeons from the Shakespearean depiction of 'the lover/Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad/Made to his mistress' eyebrow.' The violence of the contrast between then and now is reinforced by the O'Driscoll simile: 'wrapped round one another/like cars locked in the embrace of lampposts/after closing time in clubs and bars.' If there is no explicit condemnation of fleshly or metallic close encounters, the juxtaposition cannot but connect the fatal or crippling results of the latter smashes with indulgence in the former couplings. The slight shock from the page seems to be assuaged by the twenties who 'save for a house deposit and the outlay/for the full works on the Big Day', although a certain incongruity might be detected between their initial shacking up and the grandeur and elegance of the planned wedding splash. It is probably that use of 'shack up' which most sharply underlines the chasm between the patterns and behaviours of earlier and later times. Having started with the teens, O'Driscoll can divide the later ages into more stages than those enumerated by Shakespeare's judge who moved to the shrinking and wrinkling stage, and then to senile dementia. O'Driscoll records quite a sober, demanding and responsible succession of involvement in caring - first for children and then for grandchildren - after which there are 'signs of decline.' However, the final group, the Seventies, are not 'sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything'; they are far from silent as they 'blab on about deteriorating standards,/wish their children hadn't relocated at such distance,/live for Christmas reunions, bide their time.' The picture is up-to-date, totally plausible, eminently recognisable in whole or in part, and quite unsettling in the uncertainty and unpredictability of 'bide their time', a phrase that more usually indicates choice but here reveals the lack of option and the inevitable and unplanned end. The division of the poem into seven tercets may give the initial impression of an ordered and controlled progression but the language rocks the boat, unsettling and disconcerting the reader and thus demonstrating its postmodern quality, not in any simple chronological sense of its composition date coming after modernism, but postmodern in its stimulus to thought and in its purposeful divergence from the Shakespearean canon.

O'Driscoll's "Middle-class Blues"¹⁴ opens with a brief and ostensibly traditional narrative that draws the portrait of a successful man, 'He has everything.' The assets are stacked up from 'young wife' to 'fair-haired daughter' and the consumer flauntables are typical, *de rigueur* emblems of material success in the 1980s. It is, ironically, the legacy of traditional narrative that breaks into Mr Successful's carefully constructed social and economic edifice, shattering its security with doubt. The twist is in the well-worn phrase of 'Then one day.' With no account of the sequel, a niggling fear is effectively sown. The predictability of story phraseology is employed to underscore the unpredictability of tomorrow; the tools of grand narrative are brought in to highlight a post-modern state of the temporary, provisional, contingent and relative.

"Middle-Class Blues"

He has everything.
 A beautiful young wife.
 A comfortable home.
 A secure job.
 A velvet three-piece suite.
 A metallic-silver car.
 A mahogany cocktail cabinet.
 A rugby trophy.
 A remote-controlled music centre.
 A set of golf clubs under the hallstand.
 A fair-haired daughter learning to walk.

What he is afraid of most
 and what keeps him tossing
 some nights
 on the electric underblanket,
 listening to the antique clock
 clicking with disapproval from
 the landing,
 are the stories that begin:
He had everything.
A beautiful young wife.
A comfortable home.
A secure job.
Then one day.

14 From *Hidden Extras* (1987) and included in *New and Selected Poems*, p.23.

Examining Dennis O’Driscoll’s poems, one has to be struck by how many of them are visually modernist in appearance¹⁵ – the short lines, the pared-down observations, the minimalist approach – but then one becomes equally aware of the postmodern quality that is the rejection of any distinction between high and low art. The vocabulary of “Middle Class Blues” is an example wherein the ostensibly sober matter of the contemporary portrait of a successful man is decorated by electric blanket and cocktail cabinet rather than by a serious business philosophy or a professional ethic, or even a registering of the absence of both. “Seven Ages” squares up to the Shakespearean canon in several ways, one of which is to wipe out a beginning and an end and so remove the modernist chronology. In the poem “Exemplary Damages”,¹⁶ there is no lamentation for what has gone – even the line ‘Our one true God has died’ that could easily be read as a cry *de profundis*, is discreetly counterbalanced by the immediate reassurance that ‘our lives remain/eternally precious in the eyes of man.’ The further poetic elucidation of this statement is an analytical presentation of what actually pertains, and it is couched in language that subverts conventional attitude and expectation:

from “Exemplary Damages”

Our one true God has died, vanished under
a rainbow’s arch, banished like a devil
scalded by holy water; but our lives remain
eternally precious in the eyes of man.

We love one another so much the slightest
hurt cries out for compensation: sprain your
ankle in a pothole and City Hall will pay
exemplary damages for your pains

This is an analytical presentation that avoids overt judgment. It embraces anamnesis and anagogy, and its viewing angle is ironic and hence anamorphic. Thus, according to a Lyotardian formula, the poet has very comprehensively discharged the postmodern requirement to investigate assumptions; the responsibility and the options for any subsequent reac-

15 Prime examples would be “Way of Life” and “Operation”, in *Long Story Short* (1993), “Contracts” in *Hidden Extras* (1984), and “All” in *Quality Time* (1997), reproduced in *New and Selected Poems*, pp.55, 81, 41, 132.

16 From the collection *Exemplary Damages* (London: Anvil, 2002), p.23.

tion to that dissection are handed to the reader. That too has to be seen as postmodern.

Cathal Ó Searcaigh is known as Gúrú na gCnoc, the guru of the hills. Translation of the elements of the Sanskrit word, 'gu' meaning darkness and 'ru' meaning light, signifies the role of a spiritual eye-opener and that particular function is one with the potential to be either postmodern or supportive of a grand narrative in modernist style. However, what is found in Ó Searcaigh's poetry, both in theme and in treatment, affirms the freedom of the individual; his poems take on the task of unsettling conventional patterns, often by gentle persuasion, by the allure of a physical environment, by the openness and emotion of his homoerotic love lines. His poem "Trasnú"¹⁷ provides an analysis of Ireland's current state and, as will be apparent in the following extracts, the locations of darkness and light are not pinpointed:

'Tá muid ar strae áit inteacht idir Chath Chionn tSáile agus an <i>Chinese takeaway</i> .'	'We are wandering somewhere between the Battle of Kinsale and the Chinese takeaway.'
'Tá muid leath réamh-stairiúil agus leath- <i>postmodern intertextúil</i> .'	'We are half prehistoric and half postmodernly intertextual'
'Tá muid teach ceanntuách agus bungaló <i>mod conach</i> ;'	'We are thatched-cottagey and mod-con bungalowed;'
'Tá muid rinne seiteach agus hócaí pócaí cairíocaíach.'	'We are set-dance-ish and hokey-pokey karaoke-ish' ¹⁸

The title of Ó Searcaigh's play *Mairimid leis na Mistéirí* (2006) might offer further assistance in determining postmodern status or intent. As is almost always the case with this poet, the surface language and the underlying ramifications are challenging: the play's title could mean 'we live with', 'we continue', even 'we prosper with', or 'we enjoy', the mysteries. Similar flexibility or instability attaches to the title "Trasnú": amongst several meanings, it may be translated as crossing, contradict-

17 From *Ag Tnúth leis an tSolais: 1975-2000* (Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2000), pp.277-279.

18 My translation

ing, intersecting, or heckling, and it offers the possibility of a combination of those connotations. It is indicative of a position that casts a clear eye on past and present, is not belligerent in condemnation of the grand narrative but is full sure that any replacements of that narrative deserve equally stringent assessment.

If the poetry of Ó Searcaigh and O'Driscoll meets the criteria connected with some ideas on the postmodern as elucidated by Jean-François Lyotard, in what way might they also be perceived as being outside a postmodern framework? In the case of Ó Searcaigh, it could be argued that his 1993 "Anseo ag Stáisiún Chaiseal na gCorr" [Here at Caiseal na gCorr Station], a poem in which he seeks and finds his roots and meaning in his native place, is diametrically opposed to the postmodern route.¹⁹ It could be said that Dennis O'Driscoll's poems "Here and Now" and "Siblings Revisited" combine a more traditional poetic voice with the assortment of the postmodern and the uncertainty of its future.²⁰ On which cusp do they lie? Can it be productive or important to quantify the manner and degree to which their creative writing accords with the traits of postmodernism? Ironically, the impossibility (apart from the undesirability) of locking either poet into a file bearing the label 'postmodern' might well be a case of Irish examples coinciding with French theory because the Lyotardian concept of the postmodern does not emerge as a watertight category.

Lyotard has included the eighteenth-century Irish writer Laurence Sterne together with Rabelais and Diderot in his assembly of the postmoderns, explaining that the 'post' of postmodern does not refer to chronological time, and so does not indicate being 'after' what is known as modernism. Based on that decision alone, one would have to enter a *caveat* on the suitability and therefore on the usefulness of the nomenclature. Complicating the picture further, Lyotard declares: 'Une œuvre ne peut devenir moderne que si elle est d'abord postmoderne. Le postmodernisme ainsi entendu n'est pas le modernisme à sa fin, mais à l'état naissant, et cet état est constant.'²¹ Were it not for Lyotard's politically-inspired determination to reject the term 'avant-garde', that latter expression could be a more meaningful description for what he has so painstakingly

19 *Homecoming/An Bealach 'na Bhaile* (Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2004), pp.94-97.

20 From *Hidden Extras* and included in *New and Selected Poems*, pp.24, 27.

21 *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p.30.

ingly explored – and he goes some way towards admitting so much.²² However, 'avant-garde' is potentially an even broader category than postmodern, one that could take under its umbrella the early stages of many movements, or be counted as an essential component in them; hence Lyotard's discarding of it is ultimately constructive while still not providing a substitute title nor refining the concept to practical and manageable size and content.

There is a degree of support for the Lyotardian concepts in the definition of postmodernism from another cultural commentator: Malcolm Bradbury has decided firmly that postmodernism is 'well, plurality, or in other words, almost everything.' His bold definition of 'almost everything' includes 'culture without hierarchy, expression without substance, history without process'; he claims that it 'names a chaotic, futuristic, fantastic time of artistic, cultural and stylistic eclecticism' and, tellingly, that 'the fictive mind grasps in its own ways at the new borders and frontiers of the imagination.'²³ That is an echoing, in a different register, of Lyotard's postmodernism as being modernism 'à l'état naissant, et cet état est constant.' Can what is in permanent and rapid flux be grasped to the extent that its identity is established without doubt, without confusion, without mistake?

If there is a widespread accord – as there would appear to be – that postmodernism is a very broad church, it would seem that the diverse poetic subjects, treatments and styles of Dennis O'Driscoll and Cathal Ó Searcaigh could be deemed postmodern in their overall variety, and remarkably postmodern in individual eclectic instances. They can be said to be 'in tune' with Lyotard. However, can it be truly meaningful or in any way helpful to seek to attach such a label to their writing? In the light of the qualification entered by Bradbury, a certain lack of commitment to the category might be detected on his part: he sees postmodernism as an 'ever-growing body of concepts and definitions which, in ever larger order, attempt to measure the contemporary scene'; he opines that 'We may, of course, fairly take it that a postmodern condition exists' because if it did not exist, he and his fellow commentators would be out of a job.²⁴ The tone of that cynical reasoning is less than committed; might

22 "à Jessamyn Blau, Milwaukee, le 1 er mai 1985", in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p.125.

23 Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Trans-Atlantic Mythologies and the Novel*, 1995 (London: Penguin, 1996), pp.469, 487.

24 *Ibid.* p.469

one even discern a suggestion of the Emperor's new clothes? Lack of conviction on Bradbury's part can be matched with Lyotard's own admission that postmodernism is 'une intuition brumeuse.'²⁵

Given the conflicts and difficulties that have been encountered to date in trying to provide a concise definition of postmodernism, I venture to suggest that the notion cannot be sufficiently elucidated – or possibly, restricted – to the point where it becomes truly significant. Wandering around with 'une intuition brumeuse', while claiming to see clearly in the fog, inevitably results in journeys on diverging roads and failure to reach an ultimate convergence at journey's end, even if scrutiny of texts for the diverse putative characteristics of postmodernism will certainly uncover their treasures and their trivia and throw up evidence of trends in genre, subject, mood and treatment. While I remain open to being persuaded otherwise, I am not convinced that Postmodernism has proved to be a label under which one can securely, satisfactorily and meaningfully locate many of the literary works that have been given that tag. I suggest that it would be more productive and exciting, and probably more appropriate to the twenty-first century, to explore a variety of innovative descriptions and to launch a new taxonomy.

25 Quoted in "Avertissement", in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants: Correspondance 1982-1985* (Paris : Éditions Galilée, 1986), p.10.

John McDonagh

*Entre Deux Mers: Strands and Collages in
Contemporary Irish Poetry*

The moment a conference organiser decides to use the term ‘postmodern’ in the conference title, a number of reactions can be predicted. The call for papers will elicit a huge variety of abstracts, ranging from traditional academic literary criticism to more daring swipes at the sacred cows of intellectual debate. The term postmodern, loosely defined and even more loosely interpreted, jumps headlong into the sea of eternally elusive signifiers in which meaning becomes an ever-receding target of the drive to escape what Fredric Jameson referred to as the prison house of language.¹ The poor conference organiser will look at the motley crew of abstracts and attempt to cobble together panel sessions marked by a distinct lack of cohesion and unity. Key words in abstracts will be scoured in order to shoehorn Seamus Heaney, Quentin Tarantino and Jacques Derrida into the same panel. However, postmodernity’s very useful get-out clause is that this very heterogeneity is its defining characteristic. The fundamental difficulty with an attempted definition of postmodernity is that the very concept itself resists the imposition of any form of cultural or intellectual hegemony. The critic of the postmodern, therefore, is left in a similar position to the crowd who observed Hans Christian Anderson’s naked Emperor as he paraded his sumptuous new clothes through the streets of his town, applauding and praising something that clearly defies definition, and vaguely clapping the deluded monarch simply because everyone else is doing so. Caught up in the tumult of the present moment, the crowd validate the illusion through their collective participation, only recognising their complicity when the apparently innocent yet narratively essential voice of the child remarks on the absurdity of their reaction – “But he has nothing on!” The child punctures the collective delusion of the crowd, arguably a perfect post-modern moment in

1 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

which the pretensions of the present are shown up to be nothing more than a rattle-bag of half-baked ideologies wrapped up in self-serving pretensions.

If the concept of postmodernity is accepted, then it clearly is setting itself as a reaction to and a re-evaluation of classical modernism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is important to at least recognise the characteristics of the modern before we can begin to appreciate the subversiveness of the postmodern. Virginia Woolf dates the emergence of Modernism quite specifically to an art exhibition she visited in London in December, 1910, which featured the works of, amongst others, Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso and while this chronological specificity is somewhat arbitrary, at least it provides a starting point. However, when it applies to literature, the term modernism raises far more questions than it answers, because many of the traits of literary modernism, exemplified in the work of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Wolfe, James Joyce and Ezra Pound, could equally be ascribed to concepts of literary postmodernism. For example, the disruption of the linear flow of a narrative and a pervading sense of historical discontinuity, leading to a heightened perception of alienation from society and community, are generally accepted as classic modernist literary tropes. Add to this the other characteristics such as the frustration of conventional expectations concerning unity and coherence of plot as well as the deployment of ironic and ambiguous juxtapositions within a narrative and the distinction between the modern and post-modern becomes increasingly opaque. It can therefore be argued that postmodernism is more of a development from basic modernist principles than a direct rejection of a previous ideology. Equally, both the modern and postmodern are utterly reliant upon their literary and theoretical antecedents for their intellectual credibility.

This hermeneutical dilemma is brought into sharp relief when one considers the potential influence of postmodernity on the contemporary narrative. The very concept that a national narrative can exist in the first place would be anathema to any card carrying postmodernist. One of the most common features of what could be termed a postmodernist perspectives is its resistance to what are referred to as grand national narratives or meta-narratives, as if such narratives can be easily identified and codified. In a brilliant essay entitled 'The Double Vision of Michael Harnett', Declan Kiberd questions the validity of these supposed narratives when he recalls Brendan Behan's reworking of his original Irish-language play *An Giall* as *The Hostage* for a London theatre in 1957, complete with jokes and references specifically tailored for his English

audience. For Kiberd, the contrasting versions of the play, each tailored to a specific audience, questions the appropriation of texts as icons of national identity. Kiberd writes:

By creating two texts where there might only have been one, he was also offering a subtle critique of authorship, authority and indeed of singular identity itself. He was, after all, the artist who in a poem saluting Oscar Wilde praised him for having things 'both ways.'²

What I think Kiberd is getting at is that texts are appropriated by various interest groups, political lobbies, ideological formations, religious groupings, linguistic nationalists, to suit the politico/cultural aims of that group, whatever they happen to be. Behan's textual duality points to this very danger, namely the incorporation of texts into a broader intellectual and ideological movement, that is a metanarrative. By customising *The Hostage* for the London stage Behan was telling his English audience that this was also their story, and showing that a text can move easily between often competing metanarratives, and the closer the text is analysed, the shakier the foundations of that metanarrative appear to be. If every work contains within itself the seeds of its own critique, then texts themselves can be used to deconstruct the very structures that seek to categorise them in the first place.

So what do contemporary Irish poets have to say about our modern state? What strands can be detected connecting 21st century Ireland with perceptions of its past, and indeed what tentative images of the present can be seen to emerge? Looking at the Irish poetic scene today, resistant as it is to definitive categorisation, an unlikely antecedent springs to mind. William Butler Yeats, in many senses the principal modern Irish poet whom many critics accuse of consciously attempting to provide an Irish grand narrative, was also keenly aware of the tenuous nature of his poetic project. In the second stanza of 'Sailing to Byzantium', published in *The Tower* in 1928, he acknowledges that ultimately identity is a fractured, invented concept, a tattered coat which inevitably and inexorably unravels under the weight of time. Yeats cleverly uses the word 'paltry' to describe 'an aged man', the word derivating from a 'palt' or 'pelt', a rag or worthless piece of cloth. However, this unravelling is to be cele-

2 Declan Kiberd, 'The Double Vision of Michael Hartnett', in John Mc Donagh and Stephen Newman (eds), *Remembering Michael Hartnett* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p.25.

brated and embraced and not feared. Yeats exhorts poets to look to at every manifestation of identity, 'every tatter in its mortal dress',³ as a cause of celebration. Far from advocating a monolithic grand national narrative, the *bête noire* of postmodernism, he appears to be acknowledging the very postmodern concept of a decentred identity, marked by its lack of cohesion and its focusing on the margins for alternative models of self. Yeats urges a vigorous bout of hand clapping and singing for this alternative universe and it can be clearly seen that the origins of the polyvocal poetic present are a good deal more complicated than are traditionally presented. Jean-François Lyotard, the doyen of postmodernism, argues that we have ceased to believe that grand national narratives (such as Irish nationalism) are adequate to represent and contain us all. We have become alert to difference, diversity, the incompatibility of our aspirations, beliefs and desires, and for that reason postmodernity is characterised by an abundance of micronarratives. Lyotard noted: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarrative.'⁴

What is critically important about poetry, then, is its continuous ability to shift these metanarrative goalposts. Equally, what has continually maintained poetry's vitality and cultural importance is its resistance to contemporary culture, and its articulation of alternative voices that speak of new and exciting aspects of modernity. In the poem 'Service', in Brendan Kennelly's brilliant 1991 epic *The Book of Judas*, the eponymous Iscariot laconically notes that 'The best way to serve the age is to betray it'⁵ and it is precisely this form of subversion that gives so much contemporary Irish poetry its social, cultural, political and literary relevance. This reworking of the word betrayal is based largely on a desire to resist a casual labelling in which the complexities of both individuals and ideologies are glossed over. In the preface to *The Book of Judas* Kennelly warns of the dangers of reductionism inherent in all forms of social and cultural classification. Contemporary Irish poetry is marked by this note of resistance. Michael Hartnett brilliantly described poetry's ability to surprise at the end of his poem *For My God-daughter, B.A.H.*:

3 A. Norman Jeffares (ed.), *Yeats's Poems* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), p.301.

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp.xxiv-xxv.

5 Brendan Kennelly, *The Book of Judas* (Newcastle:, Bloodaxe Books, 1991), p.17.

for there is an Ireland, where
 trees suddenly fly away
 and leave their pigeons, baffled,
 standing in the air.⁶

One of the constant ‘flying trees’ of the past forty years has been Paul Durcan, a serial demythologiser, a self-demythologiser and a relentless commentator on the rolling maul that is Irish identity. If one of the defining characteristics of postmodernity is the use of irony, then Durcan’s long poetic career, marked by an often unnerving emotional honesty and a recurring desire to undermine the pomposity of an Ireland struggling under the weight of inherited inconsistencies, can be regarded as the epitome of the genre. Since his earliest solo collection, *O Westport in the Light of Asia Minor* in 1975, Durcan has satirised and caricatured Irish life like no other contemporary poet. His often incongruous narratives, borrowing heavily from surrealism, juxtapose the absurd and the normal. His stinging attacks on the new Irish bourgeoisie is only matched by his contempt for the pretensions of literary and cultural society, making him the natural contemporary successor of Patrick Kavanagh. Where Kavanagh railed against what he perceived to be the literary mediocrity of 1950s Dublin in ‘The Paddiad’ - ‘The boys go wild and toast the Joker/The master of the mediocre’⁷ – Durcan has been an early critical observer of the emergence of what is commonly known as the Celtic Tiger. The very preposterousness of many of his poem titles, including ‘Margaret Thatcher Joins the IRA’, ‘Irish Hierarchy Bans Colour Photography’ and ‘Archbishop of Kerry to have Abortion’, points to his delight in upsetting traditional perspectives and inverting the perceived ideologies at work in Irish society.

Durcan’s work also illustrates the importance of the European dimension in the development of contemporary Irish poetry. His poems are indicative of a generation of poets, particularly south of the border, no longer obsessed with Anglo-Irish issues but determined to look further afield for resonances of common identity. For example, in his 1987 collection *Going Home to Russia*, Durcan explores the connections between individuals that spread far beyond borders, nationalism and even lan-

6 Michael Hartnett, *Poems to Younger Women* (Dublin: The Gallery Press, 1989), p.33.

7 Peter Kavanagh (ed.), *Patrick Kavanagh – Complete Poems* ((Newbridge: The Goldsmith Press, 1972), p.213

guage. In the hilariously titled ‘An Attack of Diarrhoea at Party Headquarters in Leningrad’, Durcan muses over the randomness of fate as he recovers from a bout of bowel trouble on a trip to Leningrad:

My ignominy- not anybody else’s ignominy-and that night
Over cups of tea we discussed the war in Afghanistan,
Agreeing that realistically it appeared an insoluble problem,
Yet hoping against hope that somehow it would be solved
And that – as you put it, Slava – “Russian boys come home.”
There is nothing necessarily ignominious about anything.⁸

The brilliant last line of this poem is an exemplar of the acute ability of the seemingly comic and banal to speak a universal truth. Durcan’s bout of diarrhoea occurs in the Communist Party Headquarters in Leningrad, the emotional heartland of one of the great Western counter meta-narratives of the second half of the twentieth century, namely Red Russia. Now here was a meta-narrative with a life outside third level seminar rooms and PhD theses! This particular meta-narrative led directly to a re-drawing of the map of Europe, the escalation of the nuclear arms race to potentially catastrophic levels, and to the apogee of human technological development when Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on the July 21st 1969. Vladimir Lenin, in all his portrayed glory, looks down on the stricken poet, empathizing with his discomfort and somehow reaching out over the Grand Hall of the People to the buckled poet staggering towards his waiting car. Duran’s diarrhoea initiates a conversation between him and his interpreter, Slava, in which the reality of the loss of human life in the name of bankrupt ideologies becomes their emotional bond, cemented by healing cups of communal tea. The real ignominy of life is death and it often takes a moment of apparent absurdity, brilliantly recounted by Durcan, to remind us that we take so much for granted. Here, arguably, is the most effective methodology of the postmodern, juxtaposing the absurd and the ridiculous with the profound and the philosophical in such a way that whatever truth the artist is attempting to articulate emerges in the most surprising ways. Brendan Kennelly is right when he states that real identity lurks in the nooks and crannies of self and it is in the absurd that the postmodern finds its most effective social and cultural critique. There are no sacred cows in the poems of Paul Durcan. Indeed,

8 Paul Durcan, *A Snail in My Prime – New and Selected Poems* London: Harvill, 1993), p.146.

his work is a veritable Halal abattoir in which pretensions, hypocrisies, posers and chancers have a razor-sharp blade traced across their throats, bleeding forth their duplicity, pretence and double-standards. Durcan does this with a black humour and lightness of touch that mark him out as one of the most effective and insightful social critics this country has produced.

Another poet who would also appear to subscribe to the postmodern is Cathal O'Searchaigh. A gay Buddhist Irish-language poet and playwright living at the foot of Mount Errigal in Co. Donegal, O'Searchaigh occupies many of the spaces that stand in opposition to the traditionally dominant markers of Irish identity. However, he is a complex poet, whose output combines lyrics railing against the discrimination meted out to those in Ireland who do not conform to the perceived orthodoxies, with poems expressive of a Kavanagh-esque delight, celebrating the simple and rugged beauty of the Donegal countryside. O'Searchaigh writes of his Iraqi lover Yousuf and the difficulties faced by him since the beginning of the latest war to hit his country. His homoerotic poems are explicit, relishing in a sensuality that for many years rarely found expression in Irish literature. In a poem entitled '*Laoi Chumainn*', for example, (translated by Frank Sewell and entitled 'Serenade'), O'Searchaigh parodies the Red Branch heroes of Lady Gregory when he portrays his lover in terms of a rampant Celtic warrior:

So, tonight, if There is a war to wage, my love,
let it be here among these pillows.
Raise your shield and hurl your lance,
 aim your sword
exactly. Get that war-cry off your chest.
And I will be here, all eyes
 at the manhood
moving in you, my passionate one, until you come
to meet me through sheets and pillows.⁹

While not quite at the level of Myles na gCopaleen's legendary Celtic parodies, O'Searchaigh's evocation of a warrior complete with shield, lance and sword allows an army of *double-entendres* a freeplay of delicious irony, underscoring the homo-erotic undertones of a good deal of traditional Irish Celtic literature and mythology. For Cuchulainn and Fer-

9 Cathal O'Searchaigh, *An Bealach 'na Bhaile* (Connemara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta Teo, 1991), p.5.

dia read Cathal and Yousuf! However, O'Searchaigh is well aware of the slow pace of change in the public's perception of gay love when he notes that 'tomorrow, we'll pay for being flesh and blood', an acknowledgement that old prejudices are often much slower to alter, despite economic and social advances. His homoerotic poems celebrating the sexual union between another man and himself are unambiguously explicit, allowing 'the love that dare not speak its name' a clear expression in the context of a society far more at ease with alternative models of sexual orientation, as recognised by the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the Republic in the early 1990s. This legal recognition of homosexual union only came about after a tortured legal wrangle in the European Court of Human Rights and Ó Searchaigh's erotic celebration is a marker of the degree to which contemporary Ireland can no longer point to the axis of heterosexual/Catholic/married as a secure anchor of an imagined national identity. The fact that these poems originally appeared in Irish further enhances the perception of a shifting linguistic paradigm where the national language becomes the carrier of cultural change rather than a perceived repository of traditional values

However, his poetry is a strong indication that the Catholic/heterosexual axis of Irish identity, enshrined in the constitution, is no longer the only model of identity. Equally, O'Searchaigh's promotion of the Irish language is an important marker of the re-emergence of the national language as a serious player in the development of contemporary Irish poetry. While translation studies shed revealing and challenging light on the nature of the development of contemporary Irish poetry, an overview of this progression cannot ignore the vitality and range of poetry written in the Irish language. Throughout the 1990s, many Irish language poets, including Michael Hartnett (1941-99), Michael Davitt (1950-2005), Nuala Ní Dhomnaill (b.1952), Cathal Ó Searchaigh (b.1956) and Gearóid Mac Lochlainn have written poetry in Irish that is every bit as socially and culturally challenging as its English-language counterparts. The principal difficulty facing Irish language poetry is obviously the thorny issue of translation into English, and many prominent contemporary poets have used the kind offices of fellow poets to bring their Irish language poetry to an English-speaking audience. Indeed, that audience is principally an Irish one in that the readership for Irish language poetry is very local. A classic example of this linguistic exchange can be found in the work of Michael Hartnett who famously turned his back on English in 1974 only to return triumphantly a decade later with

his *Inchicore Haiku*, one of which beautifully summed up his linguistic dilemma:

My English dam bursts
And out strolls all my bastards
Irish shakes its head.¹⁰

Rita Ann Higgins has long been one of the most astute and sharp observers of the changes that have come about in Irish society over the last twenty years. She has charted the gradual emergence of what she perceives to be an uncaring society turning its back on the marginalised, prepared to accept collateral casualties in its drive for more and more economic success. With Ireland's rapid economic growth in the past fifteen years has come an inevitable widening of the chasm between those who have benefited from years of sustained economic growth and those whose poverty and exclusion are merely exacerbated by the rising tide of prosperity. There are no subjects off-limits for Higgins, who ranges from her own personal struggles with addiction to subjects that are tragic in the extreme but which flicker in and out of public consciousness. In an unpublished poem, entitled 'The Immortals', she touchingly and sardonically portrays the brief lives of what have euphemistically become known in contemporary Irish parlance as 'boy racers', young men driving usually old but modified cars up and down the highways and byways of Ireland. The statistics for these young men, often boys, are grim. Male drivers aged between 18 and 24 are 10 times more likely to die in a road accident than a female while over a third of all fatal incidents on Irish roads are classified as YDAs, or Young Driver Accidents. Thirty-eight percent of all people killed in road accidents in Ireland are aged under 25 and thirty percent are in the 18 to 25 age group. Higgins portrays the minutiae of a sub-culture, from the base-ball caps to Recaro bucket seats, from gaudy colours to functionless accessories. She captures a milieu in which social and economic powerlessness is converted into God-like supremacy behind the wheel of a modified car. The conversion of the roads of rural Ireland from John Hinde images of cattle-herding to sites of apparently relentless fatalities is epitomised in the reference to Spiddal, the gateway to Connemara and the spiritual home of the Irish *Gaeltacht*:

10 Michael Hartnett, *Inchicore Haiku* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1985), p.9.

The boy racers
 quicken on the Spiddal road
 in Barbie Pink souped-ups
 or roulette red Honda Civics.
 With few fault lines or face lifts to rev up about
 only an unwritten come hither of thrills
 with screeching propositions and no full stops -
 if you are willing to ride the ride.

This is a subject that has also resonated in contemporary Irish theatre. Christina Reid's 1986 play *Joyriders* explores the phenomenon in contemporary Belfast, a city with a long tradition of boy racers. Higgins's poem, however, is set in the more rural area of Connemara, close to her home city of Galway. The juxtaposition of the iconic fields of Connemara with the burning rubber of the red Honda Civic provides the poem with one of its central dynamics and Higgins is unafraid of dealing with the inevitable tragedies that such activities entail:

On headstones made from Italian marble
 they become 'our loving son Keith'
 'our beloved son Jonathan,' etcetera etcetera.
 On the Spiddal road
 itching to pass out the light
 they become Zeus, Eros, Vulcan, Somnus.¹¹

The last line of this poem is beautifully weighted. The fatalistic journey in the car transforms the boy racer and lures him into believing in his infallibility. At a mythic level, he is metamorphosed from the God of Gods (Zeus) to the eternal sleep of the grave (Somnus). No penalty points or speed cameras are going to have the slightest effect on this journey because this transformation is intoxicating. The freedom offered by the car and the road to a boy marginalized from many avenues of social and cultural advancement cannot be replaced. The split second journey from Zeus to Somnus is destined to be eternally played out on boreens from Malin Head to Mizen Head. Again, as in the poems of Paul Durcan, Higgins deals with real social problems, merging the aesthetic with the real in poems of often shocking clarity. This feature of contemporary Irish poetry, namely the regular intrusion of subjects normally associated with other genres, certainly adds a great deal of bite to the current crop of

11 Rita Ann Higgins, unpublished poem, 2007.

poets unafraid to deal not only with their most personal experiences, from addiction to depression, but also contemporary social issues. These concerns may date these poems somewhat as the latest cultural concerns are forgotten and replaced by new ones but they also give contemporary Irish poetry a far greater handle on the zeitgeist than in previous eras. Adrian Mitchell's often quoted maxim that most people ignore poetry because poetry ignores most people is one that cannot be applied either to the work of Rita Ann Higgins nor a good proportion of poets writing in Ireland today. Higgins's Ireland is a place of social and cultural disillusionment, populated by a tranche of individuals who have, unwittingly or otherwise, missed the bus of the economic boom. Her satirical and lacerating critiques of the pretensions of what would commonly be known as 'the chattering classes' are laced with a biting humour and her harassed characters act as a wonderful counterbalance to a culture that prides itself on an unwavering confidence. She unflinchingly deals with the darker side of life in the Republic, treating topics such as the epidemic of suicide to the unrelenting death tolls in road accidents and her poetry is a barometer of the many casualties of Ireland's social and cultural development. Indeed, the witty and surreal cover of her 2001 collection, *An Awful Racket*, features the late Pope John Paul II preaching to a flock of penguins on an iceberg in the arctic, and is indicative of the drift away from authority that is so characteristic of 1990s Ireland.

No music best approximates to the postmodern condition than jazz. Utilising the traditional instruments of guitar, piano, bass, saxophone, trumpet and drums, jazz relishes in taking chords that the ear can easily comprehend and follow and lets them loose in a polyphonic freeplay which at times appears to be without constraint and focus but which always manages, even in the most extreme performances, to retain enough recognisable structure for the listener to be both a part of and complicit with the attempted subversion. Indeed, subversion and parody, recognised as the twin pillars of the postmodern, are only truly successful when based on a solid knowledge of that which is being subverted, and jazz is a case in point. Its loose form allows traditional structures of two, four and eight-bar beats to be both plastic and distended while retaining an integrity, and it is this very combination of the traditional and the subversive that makes it such a postmodern exemplar. At times all the musicians will play together in perfect harmony, fused to a strict metrical pattern and form, only to break into solo riffs that appear as if they are emerging from the instrument of their own accord. This dissonance is clearly controlled to a degree but it does not stop the listener from won-

dering whether the music is simply being made up as it goes along. The better the musicians, the less structure will be apparent. John Cage's '4'33"' is perhaps the most postmodern of all musical composition/performances, where a man sits at a piano for four minutes and 33 seconds, and plays nothing. Silence. On January 16th, 2004, at the Barbican in London, the BBC Symphony Orchestra gave the UK's first orchestral performance of this work. It was broadcast live on BBC3 Radio and one of the main challenges was the radio's emergency backup systems which are designed to switch on whenever apparent silence is detected. They had to be switched off for the sole purpose of this performance!

In 2000 Micheal O'Siadhail published a collection of poems entitled *Hail Madam Jazz* and this musical motif is one to which the poet constantly returns throughout his work. In many senses, poetry is the jazz of literature, usually operating with recognisable and popular forms but occasionally, thrillingly, shattering the expectations of the reader and consigning form and expectation to the bin. O'Siadhail is not quite as radical a figure as John Cage, but he is an adept experimenter with form, blending traditional cadences and structures with looser freer verse. In his 2007 collection, *Globe*, in a poem entitled 'Tremolo', he wonderfully captures the parallel between the furtive musical explorations of jazz and a perception that the contemporary world is in a constant state of flux:

But one space of chosen nodes,
Median world of both/and plays
In flexitime, in different modes?

Given riffs and breaks of our own,
Given a globe of boundless jazz,
Yet still a remembered undertone,

A quivering earthy line of soul
Crying in all diminished chords.
Our globe still trembles on its pole.¹²

As with Durcan's diarrhoea and Higgins's boy racers, O'Siadhail presents a fascinating image of the world as he sees it, quivering in its uncertainty about what it thinks it is, yet celebrating that very uncertainty as a mark of its willingness to accept every tatter in its mortal dress. To

12 Michael O'Siadhail, *Globe* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2007), p.109.

tremble is to feel both fear and exhilaration, a concurrent certainty of pleasure combined with the potential of its sudden loss, and therein lies the great strength of the tremelo. O'Siadhail's poetry exemplifies many of the trends noticeable in contemporary Irish poetry, blending traditional forms with experimental cadences and structures. His respect for the traditional roots of poetry is apparent in much of his work. What he refers to as a 'remembered undertone' informs his version of modern Ireland. In many ways, this image captures the nature of contemporary life in Ireland, far more outward looking than before but mindful of traditions that are rapidly disappearing under the weight of a transformation in the social, cultural and economic fabric of the country. O'Siadhail's work acts as an exemplar of the nature of contemporary Irish poetry, particularly south of the border. Collections such as *Hail Madam Jazz* (1992), *A Fragile City* (1995) and *Love Life* (2005) showcase a poet at home in his own fragile sense of humanity, sensitively aware of the everyday concerns that consume so much time and refreshingly free from any sense of an over-arching theme or agenda. His poetry is that of almost instant recognition, often unadorned, eschewing complex imagery yet crafted with a sharp eye on the unity of form and subject. Contemporary life in Ireland is shown to be what it is: something that cannot be grasped in its totality but which offers a greater degree of intellectual and emotional honesty in a cultural climate that is in a frenzied state of flux.

In their introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, first published in 1990, the editors Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon note that Irish poetry 'speaks for itself in one or another of the many voices which have evolved over the years'¹³ and this crucial acknowledgement in an important and popular anthology points clearly to the disparate, polyvocal and chimerical nature of a good deal of contemporary Irish poetry up to 1990 and beyond. Ranging from Cathal O'Searcaigh's homoerotic odes to his gay lover to Paul Durcan's laments over the crass materialism of contemporary Ireland, Irish poetry since 1990 has been clearly marked by the notable absence of a dominant voice and an eclectic, surprising and challenging *mélange* of subject matter. Light has been shone on almost every manifestation of contemporary Irish life by poets displaying, in Louis De Paor's wonderful phrase, an 'agitated intelligence'¹⁴ in the wake of widespread social and economic

13 Peter Fallon and Derek Mahon (eds), *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London Penguin 1990), p.xxii.

14 Louis de Paor, 'Contemporary Poetry in Irish: 1940-2000', in Margaret Kelleher

changes. What can be said with any certainty is that contemporary Irish poetry is marked by a broad range of confident voices articulating a tentative recognition of the complex nature of major shifts in the traditional markers of Irish identity. In the North, the changing social and political landscape is equally reflected in the discontinuous narrative of the major poetic voices, including Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon and Medbh Mc Guckian. This uncertainty is captured by Carson in *Belfast Confetti* when his self-image reflects a national questioning: 'My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A/fusillade of question marks.'¹⁵

In the Republic, the economic boom of the 1990s continues unabated in the 2000s, heralding unparalleled prosperity, increased urbanisation and large scale immigration, a triad destined to place pressure on accepted models of a collective national perspective. Ironically, the very lack of a predominant school or voice places greater pressure on critical reflections on the nature of contemporary Irish poetry in that the diffracted nature of poetic expression often defies categorisation. What can be said is that there are few areas of contemporary experience that are not subject to poetic scrutiny and it augurs well for the future that there are so many strong and disparate voices ready to challenge whatever hegemonies might be looming on the horizon.

and Philip O'Leary (eds), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.349.

15 Ciaran Carson, *The Irish For No* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1987), p.31.

Joan Dargan

Sand and Speed: Traces of French Thought in Paul Muldoon's "Horse Latitudes"

The sonnet sequence "Horse Latitudes,"¹ which opens the collection of the same name, confronts the reader with a surface both brilliant and repellent, with its cartoon-like characters, a profusion of violent imagery related to warfare and illness, and the steely insouciance of the speaker. Introducing the work, Muldoon has said: 'I started [...] "Horse Latitudes" as the U.S. embarked on its foray into Iraq. The poems have to do with a series of battles (all beginning with the letter 'B' as if to suggest a 'missing' Baghdad) in which horses or mules played a major role.'² The poems also spring from an inner necessity within Muldoon's work, inasmuch as they revive themes prominent in the collection *Mules* (1977) and elsewhere. Perhaps most remarkably, they provide the missing link unavailable to the poet upon the completion of his first remembered poem, written at about the age of twelve, in which he drew 'not a connection, a lack of connection between [the Elizabethan Charlemont Fort near Armagh] and the modern world and the smell of gasoline.'³ Years of residence in the United States have entitled him to consider that apparent gap and that American term in a new and bitter light.

But these are not the only forces at work in this bristling and sometimes anguished poetry. References to battles at Blaye and Bazentin, to French knights and Normans, and the appearance of Gauloises and chevaux-de-frise entitle us to contemplate Muldoon's attraction in "Horse Latitudes" to literature and recent theory from France, its poetic tradition resonating with the temple-splitting sound of the horn of Charlemagne's nephew, ambushed while retreating through the Pyrenees.

1 Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp.3-21. All references in the text are to this edition.

2 Muldoon, *Medley for Morin Khu* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2005), p.6.

3 *The John Tusa Interviews*. Transcript of the John Tusa Interview with Paul Muldoon. BBC Radio 3. 17 October 2007. http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio_3/johntusainterview/muldoon_transcript.shtml.

Muldoon's speaker, in the opening poem "Beijing," awakens while he 'could still hear the musicians/cajoling those thousands of clay/horses and horsemen through the squeeze' [HL, 3]. These shadowy Orpheuses, war-mongering pied pipers, lend animation to an earthen army: a standing army, by definition of no interest to the potentate or to the poet of the *chanson de geste*, both in search of drama. As if sprung from dragons' teeth or like golems, the dream cavalry moves in a world parallel to the lives of the speaker, his American lover ill with cancer, and her grandfather imbued with values represented by traditional European craftsmanship. If Beijing stands in for Baghdad, the tools of the carpenter's trade evoke the poet's. Are we to hope that the tools of poetry will help us understand the persistence of warfare?

BEIJING

I could still hear the musicians
 cajoling those thousands of clay
 horses and horsemen through the squeeze
 when I awoke beside Carlotta.
 Life-size, also. Also terra-cotta.
 The sky was still a terra-cotta frieze
 over which her grandfather still held sway
 with the set square, fretsaw, stencil,
 plumb line, and carpenter's pencil
his grandfather brought from Roma.
 Proud-fleshed Carlotta. Hypersarcoma.
 For now our highest ambition
 was simply to bear the light of the day
 we had once been planning to seize. [HL, 3]

Muldoon tells us in *The End of the Poem* that we live in 'a post-Baudrillardian world,'⁴ where transposition from poetic practice to the realm of historical phenomena, urged by the French critic in *The Illusion of the End*, hardly seems a tenable method for approaching the past. Indeed, Muldoon is quick to drop, rather like a hot potato, the notion of poetry as, in Baudrillard's words, an 'enchanted alternative to the linearity of history.'⁵ All the same, the onslaught of death and destruction affecting man, woman, and beast in "Horse Latitudes" (there are no child-

4 Muldoon, *The End of the Poem* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p.360.

5 *Ibid.*, p.359.

ren; such a world is not fit for children), occurring in ages from the medieval to the present, without benefit of chronological exposition, and on several continents—all this resembles a demonic possession, to say nothing of a non-linear view of history. The studied detachment of the speaker in the poems—or is it his shock and sense of helplessness—suggests a kinship to the Baudrillard of *Amérique*, bedazzled and overwhelmed by the deserts of California and Nevada, where the monuments and history of Europe are simply irrelevant, and the automobile, endlessly supplied with fuel, is the indispensable ferry between the oases of steel and glass called cities. Baudrillard's America is a caricature, a necessary pretext for his theorizing on the nature of modernity; Muldoon's America, its political desertification annihilating in its own way, spurs creation of the defenses represented by the stylized, glittering, harsh surfaces of the sonnets. Although Muldoon would surely view with a jaundiced eye the affirmation of a long-standing secular 'truth principle,' his critique of American culture bears some resemblance to Baudrillard's:

L'Amérique est la version originale de la modernité, nous sommes la version doublée ou sous-titrée. L'Amérique exorcise la question de l'origine, elle ne cultive pas d'origine ou d'authenticité mythique, elle n'a pas de passé ni de vérité fondatrice. Pour n'avoir connu d'accumulation primitive du temps, elle vit dans une actualité perpétuelle. Pour n'avoir pas connu d'accumulation lente et séculaire du principe de vérité, elle vit dans la simulation perpétuelle, dans l'actualité perpétuelle des signes. Elle n'a pas de territoire ancestral, celui des Indiens est circonscrit aujourd'hui dans des réserves qui sont l'équivalent des musées où elle stocke les Rembrandt et les Renoir. Mais c'est sans importance—l'Amérique n'a pas de problème d'identité. Or la puissance future est dédiée aux peuples sans origine, sans authenticité, et qui sauront exploiter cette situation jusqu'au bout... Qu'on le veuille ou non, le futur s'est déplacé vers les satellites artificiels.⁶

It is that 'sans importance,' that blunt exercise of power, that has stunned the poet into writing these sonnets: they are full of images of people and animals being drawn up short: the harsh awakening to a lover's incurable illness, soldiers being trampled to death by cattle, decapitations by poleax, horses and riders impaled upon chevaux-de-frise. Like Richard's blood at "Bosworth Field," the poems sometimes 'sputter and spurt' [*HL*, 8], as when the dreaming speaker of "Beijing" wakes up next to Carlotta: 'Life-size, also. Also terra cotta' [*HL*, 3]. Another sonnet, "Bronk-

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1986), p.76.

horstspruit," contains this admonition: 'Attention. Shun. Attention. Shun. Shun. Shun.' [HL, 17] —a pertinent reference to Elizabeth Bishop's description of gas cans at a filling station arranged 'so that they softly say:/ESSO—SO—SO—SO/to high-strung automobiles.'⁷ It is not the moment, in Muldoon's America, to turn away from the evidence. Living in the present is something other than the 'perpetual currency of signs,' as when the speaker in "Beijing" concludes: 'For now our highest ambition/was simply to bear the light of the day/we had once been planning to seize' [HL, 3]. (Lines such as these show how far Muldoon's approach to the necessary artifice of poetry has changed since *Madoc*, his earlier poetic journey to America.)

How can one brush aside the decimation of an entire people—'sans importance'—and be unaware of the signs of one's own sickness? In the sonnet "Blackwater Fort," closer to the poet's childhood home, Muldoon explicitly rejects the kind of fascination with the American landscape and culture that inspires Baudrillard's speculation:

BLACKWATER FORT

As I had held Carlotta close
that night we watched some Xenophon
embedded with the 5th Marines
in the old Sunni Triangle
make a half-assed attempt to untangle
the ghastly from the price of gasoline.
There was a distant fanfaron
in the Nashville sky, where the wind
had now drawn itself up and pinned
on her breast a Texaco star.
"Why," Carlotta wondered, "the House of Tar?
Might it have to do with the gross
imports of crude oil Bush will come clean on
only when the Tigris comes clean?" [HL, 9]

The American Carlotta, suffering from hypersarcoma, a cancer affecting connective tissue, now wears the Texaco star, a reminder of one of Nashville's major industries besides music (duly noted in the 'Nashville skyline' of "Baginbun" [HL, 4]), of military decorations associated

7 Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), p.128.

with the defense of that industry, and, distressingly, of the Shoah. The star is the sign we must learn to shun, so as not to contemplate its real meaning. The person wearing it is almost negligible (in “Brandywine,” ‘Carlotta surfaced like flot/to be skimmed off some great cast-iron pot’ [HL, 14]). The allusion to ‘the gross/imports of crude oil Bush will come clean on/only when the Tigris comes clean’ calls to mind the poem “Moy Sand and Gravel,”⁸ where nothing, it seems, will wash clean a Jansenistic view of sexuality. Even Carlotta’s grammar will be fastidiously ‘smoothed over’ by her grandfather: ‘*On which . . . On which* Bush will come clean’ (“Badli-Ke-Serai” [HL, 15]). Another sputtering, or stuttering, where Muldoon’s language suggests the difficulty of getting from one word to the next in a sick environment whose connecting tissue is visibly breaking down, sacrificed to the source of a wind-blown star.

While puns and anagrams and ribaldry and slipperiness abound in “Horse Latitudes,” the strangeness of the surface corresponds to the extreme discomfort of the moment: the speaker crouches in his Little Ease, that is, a cell designed to prevent both lying down and standing up (“Brandywine” [HL, 14]); Carlotta lies down in a scanner (“Brandywine”); the grandfather tries to remember ‘the maiden name of that Iron Maiden/on which he was drawing a blank’ (“Blenheim” [HL, 12]). The two lovers watch news of war on television in a hotel room: no escaping the out-of-jointedness of the time, as relentlessly present as the references to all those earlier wars in places beginning with a ‘B.’ The multiplication of allusions sickens: ‘The blood slick from the horse slaughter/I could no longer disregard’ (“Boyne” [HL, 11]). We are far from any revelry in the proliferation of signs. If anything, we are imprisoned by them; they wage war against us.

Why would Muldoon risk writing, and why should we bother reading, poems so bleak and coarse, so clotted with images and references, so strident in political protest, so prickly in self-consciousness—so inhospitable? ‘Literature is the house of nuance and contrariness against the voices of simplification. The job of the writer is to make it harder to believe the mental despoilers,’ writes Susan Sontag in her powerful speech “The Conscience of Words.”⁹ She goes on to say: ‘It is the job of the writer to depict the realities: the foul realities, the realities of rapture. It is the essence of the wisdom furnished by literature (the plurality of literary

8 Muldoon, *Moy Sand and Gravel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p.8.

9 Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007), p.151.

achievement) to help us to understand that, whatever is happening, something else is always going on.' In the case of Muldoon, whose poems in "Horse Latitudes" practically function as chevaux-de-frise to the efforts of inquiry, we charge against artifice and arcana, become enmeshed in foreign-seeming obstacles to comprehension no lilting music can (or will) cajole us out of. We will have to articulate for ourselves the connection between the Texaco star and the blood slick; we will not find it announced on the evening news, and the speaker is otherwise preoccupied with Carlotta and her grandfather's memories. We are left to our own devices; the poet has already done his job. While the horse latitudes may symbolize the doldrums of middle age, as Helen Vendler¹⁰ and others have observed, the sonnet sequence itself builds to a stunning climax that eclipses the scope of any frustration depicted within the poems or inferred as the poet's own.

Approaching that climax, we may profitably turn to the thought of Paul Virilio, who, like Baudrillard, treats America as a 'terre d'élection' for his reflection on the conditions of contemporary life. Whereas Baudrillard revels in his discovery there of a vast geography and a capacity for self-invention (as manifested in fiction and film and in the erasure of unpalatable facts from the collective memory), Virilio offers instead a trenchant critique of military technology and its influence on the culture at large. Mobility and the speed of travel, along with the ubiquity of instantaneous communications, leave in their wake distortions of perception in individuals and loss of a common sense of reality. Thus the listlessness overtaking the speaker in "Horse Latitudes" might also be understood as a function of the historical moment:

"Que servirait à un homme de gagner le monde entier s'il vient à perdre son âme?" Rappelons-nous que gagner, cela veut aussi bien dire arriver, parvenir que conquérir ou posséder... perdre son âme, anima, c'est-à-dire, l'être même du mouvement.

Historiquement, nous nous trouvons donc devant une sorte de clivage de la connaissance de l'être au monde: d'un côté, le nomade des origines pour qui le trajet, le trajectoire de l'être, dominant. De l'autre, le sédentaire pour qui l'emportent le sujet et l'objet, mouvement vers l'immeuble, l'inerte [...] Mouvement qui s'amplifie aujourd'hui, du fait des technologies de la télécommande et de la téléprésence à distance pour aboutir bientôt à un état

10 Helen Vendler, « Fanciness and Fatality », in *The New Republic*, 235 (November 6, 2006), pp.26-33.

d'ultime sédentarité où le contrôle de l'environnement en temps réel l'emportera sur l'aménagement de l'espace réel du territoire. [...]¹¹

As the speaker stays with Carlotta in their room or by the pool at the Vanderbilt Hotel, he renounces heroics ('our highest ambition/was simply to bear the light of day' [HL, 3]); he disperses his memories of her and of her grandfather throughout the poems, heedless of chronology; the titles of the sonnets do not necessarily correspond to the content of the poems, or vice versa. One has the sense that the poems might endlessly multiply, like so many cancer cells, like so many battles. It is as though Muldoon is rushing forward with the evidence of documented history to resist the obliteration of memory that is now assailing us all, and most pointedly a stunned and unreflective American culture. So many fresh reminders of so many battles beginning with a 'B' (and this only at the beginning of the alphabet), Bull Run, Bunker Hill and Brandywine among them: these permit no excuse for innocence of the nature of war, of one's own bellicosity. The hard defiance of the poetry counteracts the shifting electronic transmissions that serve (and do not alone serve) to destroy the faculty of attention. If we are to avoid the fate of mass-produced inanimate figures, we must contemplate the unalterable past without flinching and cease remaining sedentary, leading ourselves out of the squeeze we are in.

Muldoon's poems also respond to the pressures discerned by Virilio in systems governed by the military-industrial complex to eliminate the human element from art, to silence the artist—what he calls an 'esthétique de la disparition.'¹² Speaking of art and music, Virilio writes:

La fin du caractère relative et analogique des prises de vue et de son, au profit du caractère absolu et numérogique de l'ordinateur (après le synthétiseur), c'est donc également la perte de cette poétique de l'éphémère dont l'impressionnisme (pictural, musical...) avait su retrouver la saveur, avant que le nihilisme de la technologie contemporaine ne l'élimine définitivement. [...] Après la *contre-culture*, ne sommes-nous pas à l'aube d'une culture *contre nature*?¹³

The final poem of the sequence, "Burma," in which Carlotta's grandfather, as a young G.I. in World War II, must slit the vocal cords of mules,

11 Paul Virilio, *La vitesse de libération* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), pp. 38-39.

12 Virilio, *La Procédure silence* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), p.29.

13 *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.

stuns by its matter-of-fact recounting of systematic brutality. (Muldoon's refusal to glorify actions taken in the name of war is especially courageous in view of the self-congratulatory, sentimental evocation of "the Good War" popularized in America in recent years.) In this moment of catharsis, one feels the shock not only of an example of unredeemable cruelty to fellow creatures (war causes the unspeakable, no matter what the cause), but also of the recognition that it is the capacity of speech that is singled out for destruction. The poet cannot mistake the nature of such forces. The extinction of free expression by violence threatens him, and it threatens us all:

BURMA

Her grandfather's job was to cut
 the vocal cords of each pack mule
 with a single, swift excision,
 a helper standing by to wrench
 the mule's head fiercely to one side and drench
 it with hooch he'd kept since Prohibition.
 "Why," Carlotta wondered, "that fearsome tool?
 Was it for fear the mules might bray
 and give their position away?"
 At which I see him thumb the shade
 as if he were once more testing a blade
 and hear the two-fold snapping shut
 of his four-fold, brass-edged carpenter's rule:
 "And give away their position." [HL, 21]

On the next page, which would be the twentieth in the sequence, should logically appear the implied poem, the ghost poem, on Baghdad; but the poet, having so dramatically represented the danger to which he himself is vulnerable as an artist and a citizen, closes with silence. It is only in silence where one can hear the voices of the oppressed. In their way brutal as the razor, official document and electronic noise too easily cut them out.

"Horse Latitudes" appears to register Muldoon's profound disappointment in his adopted countrymen as they wage a war 'into which they galloped full tilt/and impaled themselves' ("Benburb" [HL, 10]); to his protest, he brings a European (and specifically Irish) sense of time and place and familiarity with defeat, and a European (and specifically Irish) sense (tempered by considerable irony and circumspection) of the poet's responsibility to address matters of national or international concern. No American poet would likely imagine such a historically-driven,

rhetorically uninviting, deliberately factitious response to events, let alone expect it to be seriously received. For such a critique we must turn to others able to look beyond the Nashville skyline, however beloved it may be. It is important to acknowledge the insight, for example, that Virilio's notion of the 'état suicidaire' finds its expression in the continual, senseless rush to death portrayed again and again in the poems of "Horse Latitudes," ending on the brink of irreversible silence.

The grounds for Muldoon's authority to expose the desert within a people's psyche are at once personal and unimpeachable, for there is another missing page in his sequence, the one for a poem on Belfast. Its absence, too, haunts the poetry, giving resonance to the conceit on a more personal level. To turn from nearby Charlemont Fort to Charles d'Orléans, wise successor to Roland: 'Paix est trésor qu'on ne peut trop loer./Je hé Guerre, point ne la doy prisier.'¹⁴ If only we awoke to such music.

14 Jean-Pierre Chauveau, Gérard Gros, and Daniel Ménager (eds.), *Anthologie de la poésie française : Moyen Âge, XVIe siècle, XVIIe siècle* (Paris : Gallimard, 2000), p.377.

Brian Walsh

The Postmodern Epiphany in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney

How do ideological centres hold in postmodernity? In post-war continental philosophy Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) provided a description of the ontological circumstance persisting against them at the level of embodied consciousness. The perceiving body as subject relates pre-symbolically to the Other in a relationship of primordial difference. Seamus Heaney can be interpreted to have conceived of poetry as an allegory of the irreducible terms of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body-subject symbolised in the exchange of interpretive value between form and content. As such its implications reach further than the thematic representations of the experiential 'marvels' that he sought to 'credit'¹ in *Seeing Things*.

Both Jacques Derrida and Merleau-Ponty have observed critiques of Edmund Husserl's transcendental idealism which claimed to establish consciousness anthropocentrically. In that thesis we find the ultimate claim that deconstruction will adopt as a first principle in terms of what it disputes in any implicit or explicit claim to full presence of meaning (*logos*). It is with post-metaphysical irony then that I will "centre" my thoughts on this critique by looking at Derrida's deconstruction of the figure of the centre itself articulating 'the original or transcendental signified, [which] is never absolutely present outside a system of differences.'² In terms of a postmodern epiphany (section I) I will observe something of the anxieties of identity as the centre deconstructs from within a circle that is constituted from the outside in. In Western culture two ideological circles have held centre through the images and narratives of Christianity and the theories of consciousness that found psycho-analytical theory. The outside of these circles is given definition in con-

1 Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.78; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.354.

ceptions of the afterlife and the unconscious to contain the threat of the Other that paradoxically allows discursive centres to hold. The postmodern experience is characterised by a newly acquired awareness of this ontological dilemma. I will suggest the terms of a postmodern ethic accordingly. In response to it also we will see (section II) Heaney reassign Death symbolically to a meaningful dialectic exchange with Life.

French theory provides Irish studies with interpretive resources to identify the shadow of the Other dividing the subject from its central Self. Heaney's poetic phenomenologies corroborate a postmodern thesis of consciousness and experience as ultimately ambiguous that these resources are best equipped to qualify and append to the ethical issue. The poetry classifies as something of an anomaly³ that focuses the critical dilemma of meaning in a post-metaphysical environment. I will consider this as a position Heaney insists upon. He presents an ambiguity of the modern and pre-modern in ultimate terms to qualify the de-centred nature of consciousness and experience in 'the phenomenal instant' (*Seeing Things*, p.66). In *Seeing Things* we find this ontology in a conception of the symbolic crossing of the life/death boundary as a structure of experience. A postmodern epiphany is given where a centre holds paradoxically in an ambiguity of form and content, where the gap between subject and object, signifier and signified can never be complete.

I: The Disenchanted Centre

That I may be a product of my culture clarifies my unconscious reactions to unfamiliar ritual practices. As an adult there is no longer that shudder of discomfort in a handshake that might have bothered my childhood. If however, I am being greeted by a French man with three kisses I may feel a little out of sorts. But I can choose to tolerate a momentary threat that takes me outside the parameters within which I have come to know myself in and through the world. I may even assimilate that experience of the other to the general disposition of my being-in-the-world⁴ and under-

3 Richard Kearney calls the poetry a 'mediational modernism' that partakes of a postmodern narrative complexity which is 'one moment endorsing a deconstruction of tradition, another reinventing and rewriting the stories of the past transmitted by cultural memory.' Richard Kearney, *Transitions. Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*. (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), p.14.

4 Martin Heidegger would begin his ontological enquiries with *being-in-the-world* (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and insist that an experience empty of content, as Husserl's transcendental reduction appeared to be, is no experience at all. Merleau-Ponty and

stand myself to be something more than a product. I may observe it ironically as a central principle of a postmodern ideology of the disenchanting centre. I have thereby adapted myself in terms of the symbolically infinite and perpetual incarnation of the Self that is sustained between me and the other anonymously in the outside we provide for each other. In this familiarisation I engage the postmodern by identifying myself as *out* as much as *in*, as much bodily finite as symbolically infinite. Such self-awareness would bear witness to a postmodern subject which in Merleau-Ponty's terms is supplementary to this anonymous Self or the 'true subject',⁵ the one as yet to come and poised on the double horizon of past and future experience. This deconstructs the immanence of the moment of experience into a 'perpetual incarnation' of that Self: 'Each sensation, being strictly speaking, the first, last and only one of its kind, is a birth and a death. The subject who experiences it begins and ends with it.'⁶

Cultural practice provides shelter from the anxieties of a radical freedom supplemented to this anonymity. A diversified ideological circle like Ireland's in recent years allows a little too much symbolic space for such a contingent existence to define itself within. Foreign presence registers as such in the native sensibility demanding response. This radical freedom is identified in poststructuralism at the heart of the sign and the cultural text. The hollowing out of the signifier begins in the war-years of existential phenomenology before the linguistic turn. We find in its writings the identification of anxiety as an ontological category and authentic experience of the supplementary status of the subject. French theory at this time emerges out of a critique of the phenomenology of the German Edmund Husserl. His transcendental idealism reverses the order of supplementarity. The ordinary moments of the natural attitude are conceived to be outside the location of a pure immanence of transcendental subjec-

Sartre would concur. The starting point of consciousness could not be the Cartesian clarity of subject/object dichotomy since in experience we find ourselves already at that position and already taken up into a pre-reflective and therefore irreducible ontological relation with the world described as *being-in-the-world*. 'The compound expression 'Being-in-the-world', Heidegger writes, 'indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole.' Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.78.

5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2005), p.250.

6 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.250.

tivity and supplementary to its plenitude. This timeless location of the transcendental ego is presented as a resolution of the paradox of immanence and transcendence saving man from contingency. But man having rolled his rock like Sisyphus up to the turn of the twentieth century sees it roll back down again in its awful first half.

Some conception of ambiguity between culture and nature as ultimate seemed urgent. The theist tradition of the Catholic Church had offered the epiphany of divine will to the world transcending and affirming at once the Life/Death boundary in a similar manner to psychoanalytic discourse. It claims to resolve the immanence/transcendence paradox in the incarnation of the Messiah, the Self who emerged out of anonymous flesh into the Word from the double horizon of the past and future. The resurrection returned him there to maintain the structure of belief meaningfully in relation to the outside of the circle of the Christian ideology. Phenomenology posited a centre for consciousness that would also alleviate the burden of too much freedom, an issue taken up by Sartre in terms of the anxieties of moral choice without ideological reference. In *Writing and Difference* Derrida determines the implications of the idea of a centre such as Husserl formulated for the subject understood as that which is thought to have 'constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.' Rather the centre 'closes off the play it opens up and makes possible.'⁷ Once I claim to know myself in ultimate terms the circle closes and I identify the other shining brightly in the darkness from the outside. Husserl's transcendental ego eliminates the 'sort of exchange'⁸ between the body (which reduces to the other side as an object in death) and the subject (which reduces the world to nothing in the transcendental ego) that will be returned in Merleau-Ponty's conception of perpetual incarnation. The circle opens in an embrace again. There is no outside to the situatedness of human being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty) or language (Derrida). Man is originally the anonymous being of pre-reflection renewed in silence in each new moment through the individual encounter with alterity.

7 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.279.

8 'The relationship between the subject and object is no longer that *relationship of knowing* postulated by classical idealism, wherein the object always seems the construction of the subject, but a *relationship of being* in which, paradoxically, the subject is his body, his world, and his situation, by a sort of exchange.' Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, p.72.

The Messiah narrative fails an existential consciousness whose essence is freedom and an inexhaustible binding to the objective world by a fundamentally intentional consciousness. The subject is reduced to a nausea of contingency, absurdity and anxiety. Poststructuralism observes the desire for objective forms of discourse where style is the register of a stable centre that secures identity against these categories. Deconstruction blurs the critical line traditionally assumed to hold between forms of discourse and their attendant styles of language. There is no fixed conceptual order amongst signifiers. The anxiety of freedom enters language as Derrida defies the completion of the gap between the signifier and the signified (as Merleau-Ponty had done with perceiver and perceived). The means of expression in all language use is bound to the signified. We are now turned away from bodiless ideas to their context of signification within an infinite series of other contexts of the same, to circles overlapping circles.

Each centre maintains proximity to the territory of another (including the immanence of the signifier and the transcendence of the signified), its (dis)placement imminent through marginalised other styles and vocabularies which lend it integrity while it endures the threat of these outside registers. A common form of this is audible in the acquired accents of spoken language. Each discourse actualises meaning in this agonistic encounter embodied in other individuals and must continue to make real the freedom through which it forms meanings. It does so by defying the threat of the radical freedom lurking within the sign to disseminate all meaning and break open all the circles that preserve identity through each other. This indeed is the nature of the threat of the outside which requires in postmodernism a willingness to enter 'riskily' (*ST*, 16) into the (re)vision of the ideological centre in an embrace of the other. 'Classical thought' Derrida observes 'could say that the centre is, paradoxically *within* the structure and *outside* it.' The centre is how the structure coheres. But since it is the origin and/or end of the meanings that emerge out of a structure (such as the system of language) it is at a point that no structure can locate. By definition it escapes structurality:

The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre. The concept of centred structure – al-

though it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science – is contradictorily coherent.⁹

If the centre holds it is by this common bond of the true subject. The centre is anonymous where this subject of the phenomenal instant of sensation is born and dies in each moment at that point of ‘reversibility’ between interiority and exteriority; immanent self-consciousness and the body as object belonging to a transcendent world. If the centre holds then, it is not because it can be appropriated to an ideological centre whether orientated toward the ideal or the real. It holds intersubjectively within the time of experience where the intimacy of the touch of an objective world returns to register a ‘dumb being’ (*ST*, 60) that is our common bond of silence. Religions, however, preserve a coherent centre through practices that involve sacred symbol, rituals and the sense of community. These alleviate existential anxiety of the Other by providing images to objectify it. In Christianity there is a common bond in the Word made flesh rather than an anonymous dumb being. The modern Christian perspective runs through linear time toward the crucial ‘hour of our death. Amen.’ Life is a trial of moral fortitude where the soul can blemish with every indiscretion making the Other a real rather than symbolic threat. But without religion there is still a price to be paid. For the subject exiled from a meaningful pre-modern cosmos to the status of Sisyphus the universe becomes absurd and the individual mind takes on all the existential burdens of creating meaning out of it.

What we contrive out of this burden of radical freedom is a comfort zone in identity centred around cultural practices and the self-conceptions their images immediately suggest. A name must be given to the anonymous Self to which I am supplementary. So let it be one I can subscribe to. I will find shelter from that burden until that French man advances toward my masculinity and reveals in a postmodern epiphany of anxiety the contingency of the circle that defines me. More general ideological themes apply. Sanity can be considered to be among them now that discourse blurs into discourse, circle into circle. If the news-reader becomes emotionally involved in the six o’clock broadcast I will be able to classify him and place him outside the circle of rational behaviour that will re-affirm my own circle of identity. This mechanism of (dis)placement is my primary means of cohering amongst those who are inside and outside my circle. Culture nurtures the filial instinct to belong

9 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.279.

in a home sheltered from such exile as I learn to perceive as aberrant behaviour. Its practice is self-fulfilling since the comforts of that home emerge from the threat that lies outside their locality. In postmodernism that other becomes no less authentic in any absolute sense than any identity through which I cohere in my own cultural context. These dilemmas are presented symbolically in *Seeing Things* in terms of perceptual being.

Another discourse that partakes necessarily of the same protective circumference is ironically psychoanalysis. Freud's scrutinies of the de-centred territory helped to 'de-divinize the self'¹⁰ Richard Rorty observes. By blurring the line between the discourses of the conscious and the unconscious that which separates sanity from insanity is brought within one circle in psychoanalysis that in the process names the outside in terms of the unconscious. It redraws the circle to protect its own centre as religion also does with good and evil. The rational categorisation of consciousness plays no lesser part in procuring new "truths" for new epochs. These are never lived but always on the outside of the circle of one's discourse. If I am insane I still cohere through (dis)placement within my own circle. It is when I am unsure of my sanity that I live the truth of the contingency of the circle that surrounds me. While setting ourselves free, we imprison both ourselves and the other. One on the inside; one on the outside; both supplementary to one another. What is required is a postmodern generosity where one submits one's ontological vulnerabilities to the generosity of the other by accepting those kisses as a reach into one's otherness from an other side.

We cannot have God, Being or the Self as more than transcendental signifieds. Derrida's "central" claim was that 'The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.'¹¹ The very structure of consciousness itself is 'messianic' he insists. Such a structure identifies the promise constitutive of symbolic life that is broken by being fulfilled. It is the 'structure of experience.'¹² Heaney refers us to things beyond a compulsive identity thinking,¹³ to

10 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.30.

11 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.354.

12 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.266.

13 The modern belief system believed its own dream of rational self-sufficiency, that one's identity is not contingent upon the marginalisation of irrationality.

'things beyond measure' (*ST*, 106) in places of experience 'Beyond our usual hold upon ourselves' (*ST*, 86) and he conceives of the crossing between Life and Death, Inside and Outside, Subject and anonymous Self as a structure of experience. Accordingly he reinterprets the Christian promise of paradise as an articulation of such a structure. The ambiguity here between the immanent and the transcendental Merleau-Ponty contends 'can be understood as ultimate.'¹⁴

An enchanted¹⁵ world on the contrary is a pre-modern one founded in terms of one's place within a cosmic order. It coheres around principles that make existence immediately meaningful in contrast to a modern alienated subjectivity. One of the major contributions to the fall in attendance at the Catholic mass in Ireland is urbanisation. The loss of community dissipates the cohesive force of belonging that encourages participation in ritual practice. The dispersion of community life is directly linked therefore to secularisation. Ritual is also essential to modern Catholicism but it has learned to cater for a new world that Peadar Kirby sees as partly responsible for its decline.¹⁶ However, the need to superimpose structures of symbolic significance that are in some sense conducive to the power of the sacred emerging out of the otherwise profane remains within the collective psyche as a mechanism guarding against the Other.

Postmodern Ireland is a secularised pastiche of throwaway "spiritual" practices. Its urban "centres" cater for weekend rituals in sports sta-

Accordingly Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* prescribed to a change in the direction of conceptuality 'to give it a turn toward nonidentity.' Thought in itself is problematic because of its 'compulsive identification' which leads to the fallacy of the concept as a 'seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning' which 'exempts it from reality.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), pp.11-12.

14 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.458-459.

15 *Disenchantment of society* is a description used by Max Weber (1864-1920), the German economist and sociologist and described in Tovey and Share's *A Sociology of Ireland* as 'a process whereby the spiritual and the supernatural come to play a lesser role in people's lives and may be replaced by more rational as scientific modes of thinking and expression.' Hilary Tovey and Perry Share, *A Sociology of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003), p.403.

16 Kirby observes that 'where the old [church] was intimate with God and saw his hand in the things of the world, the new was stylised and sentimental encouraging a discourse between things spiritual and material.' Peadar Kirby, *Is Irish Catholicism dying?* (Cork: Mercier, 1984), p.66.

diums, nightclubs and live music venues. What pop culture provides are symbols to organise associations amongst people seeking some sort of postmodern spiritual experience which the Church is powerless to censure in terms of where it is to be found. Bob Geldof produced the image of a guitar incorporating the continent of Africa as the Live Aid banner in 1985. The dead are sometimes buried now with the colours of their favourite football teams. But the symbol we require at the centre of a globalised cultural space is that of the human figure that prompted the Live Aid appeal. If the centre is disenchanted one cannot find the moral ground that would make a judgement on the postmodern pursuit of 'civil religion'¹⁷ except in terms of the preservation of the anonymous Self as sacred through a postmodern transcultural generosity. In this we are drawn back toward enchanting the centre again with pre-modern values based now, however, on the self-awareness that as suggested earlier bears witness to this postmodern subject of ultimate ambiguity. We cohere once more about a centre occupied by our own frail and contingent human image that the media presents to us on a daily basis in real images of war and poverty. These become sacred in a newly enchanted postmodern civil religious environment.

We can combine a pre-modern sense of a world, enchanted by ourselves in an absurd universe, with a faith that does not wait for salvation but believes in the possibility of self-realisation in an epiphany of the 'the phenomenal instant' (*ST*, 66) where an anonymous Self registers in anxiety and in conflict with subjectivity as cultural product. In this process of individuation the centre does not have to hold because a crucial step in that process is the comprehension of the constitution of subjectivity out of an anonymous being that the other presents to me symbolically. The other manifests my freedom against the finite terms of identity. We achieve a symbolic incorporation of an ultimate Death into consciousness as absence through that opening to the threat it presents in its presence to us in the other. Our generosity thereby opens a dialectic of presence and absence. This response to postmodernity is one we find Heaney incorporating into a secularised transvaluation of Christian symbolism. The meaning of neither Life nor Death coheres in any pure sense that would affirm a fully adequate moment of interior self-presence that is not contaminated by that interior darkness of the empirical independence of objects and the transient circumstances of their perception.

17 Tovey and Share, *A Sociology of Ireland*, p.412.

II: Seamus Heaney's Postmodern Epiphany

What guaranteed us -
 That quick response and buoyancy and swim -
 Kept me in agony. All the time
 As we went sailing evenly across
 The deep, still, seeable-down-into water,
 It was as if I looked from another boat
 Sailing through air, far up, and could see
 How riskily we fared into the morning,
 And loved in vain our bare, bowed, numbered heads.
 (ST, 16)

'Seeing Things' articulates religious symbolism in terms of a centre sustained by cultural structures through the participation of each individual who is 'numbered' or finite within it. The risk in the poem is symbolically that inherent to poetic language which opens in metaphorical depth into an abyss of possibilities that allow a transparent vision or descent during the motion across the water. It is during the intersection of these parameters of the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, this intensification into the primary Life/Death 'agony' of human endeavours to achieve equilibrium that an ascension to a God-like perspective is given. Each 'numbered' individual, however, is embraced in fraternal rather than paternal compassion since this perceiver is accounted for amongst the perceived. The privileged perspective is reduced to the relativity of 'another boat.' It emerges out of an exchange of perspectives symbolically equivalent to the meaning-event of the poetic text. The defamiliarisation of the boy's *terra firma* is equivalent to the same in the disorientating territories of poetic language. From the perspective given of the other, 'air' is the medium of passage. The compassionate view is given by de-centring both the perspective of the seeing and the seen into one humble image of human being such that he seems to bear the ambiguity of the body-subject, a mortal partaking of a God-like self-awareness. *Life* and *death* become interchangeable signifiers given their symbolic exchange between air and water since from the elevated perspective the real boat floats at the bottom of a medium that supports the imaginary boat. This dialectic making one medium out of the immanently real and the transcendental de-centres meaning. The priority of the poetic meaning-event as interpretive exchange or the passage itself is asserted.

Perceiver and perceived have become one by an imaginative extension of the 'actual' into the 'longed-for.'¹⁸ By occupying 'another boat' the poet as a boy could inhabit a dialogic position drawn between subject and other. This then qualifies that which 'guaranteed us', the collective identity, in the metaphoric 'quick response and buoyancy and swim' (*ST*, 16) with ontological status in terms of this relationship. It is not within the authority of any articulate episteme to claim the centre as an absolute origin. Ambiguity becomes ultimate and begins in the 'sort of exchange'¹⁹ that is the body-subject which as an ambiguous 'third genus'²⁰ will reduce neither to the immanently real nor the transcendently ideal. A dialectic emerges not through an epiphany of the transcendental ego but of the body-subject.

Existential ironies lend the book a strong sense of language in general as operating across a divide that is pre-symbolic in origin, a pre-reflective orientation in the perceiving body of the immanence/transcendence dialogic. Heaney locates this unsayable centre in the sensuous appeal of the language, the vivid materiality of his signature which ultimately returns us to the silence of anonymous being. Here Death is inseparable from the Life of the true subject that precedes symbolic consciousness in each new moment of experience, each new moment of the formal register where it is born and dies in the phenomenal instant. It is this origin in anonymous being that is 'listened for'²¹ in the exchange between the interpretive value of immanent form and transcendental content. Poetry has within it the generosity that responds to the postmodern condition as conceived previously. Its attendant expression of the nearness of the transcendental signifier (*Life* or *Death*) in that motion is an epiphany that Heaney has developed in a reassignment of the interpretive values of religious symbolism. Man's epiphany comes

18 Given the paradoxical terms of experience Heaney observes how we continue to 'desire conditions where the longed-for and the actual might be allowed to coincide.' Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keepers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p.56.

19 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*. Translated by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1971), p.72.

20 Merleau-Ponty writes of a 'third genus of being' formed 'between the pure subject and the object' (PP, 408). He favours a conception of consciousness as 'perceptual...as the subject of a pattern of behavior' rather than 'constituting' (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.408-409).

21 Seamus Heaney, *The Haw Lantern* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p.32.

through an imaginative participation in the perspective of the Other, the imaginary perspective given from a theocentric source that refracts his image between Life (absolute presence) and Death (absolute absence). This is given from 'far up' (*ST*, 16) above the scene exchanging the God-like perspective with that of embodied consciousness and bridging the gap symbolically between transcendental subjectivity and the immanently real life of the perceiving body. Both draw into the irreducible "passage" of experience and correlatively the movement of the signifier. Heaney's conception lends the floating subject of postmodernism (the poet as a boy is literally floating in the poem) its sympathetic right to claim a home in the world. The existential and textual circumstance allows the ratification of no ultimate claim within any ideological circle to the immanence of embodied consciousness (form) or the transcendental appeal of symbolic existence (content).

Accordingly we are presented with the conflict between a modern Cartesian conception of the world and a pre-modern cyclically unifying one. These contrary conceptions are implicit in the fishing motif of casting and gathering used in 'Squarings *xliv*' and other poems in *Seeing Things* :

All gone into the world of light? Perhaps
As we read the line sheer forms do crowd
The starry vestibule. Otherwise

They do not. What lucency survives
Is blanched as worms on nightlines I would lift,
Ungratified if always well prepared

For the nothing there - which was only what had been there.
Although in fact it is more like a caught line snapping,
That moment of admission of All gone,

When the rod butt loses touch and the tip drools
And eddies swirl a dead leaf past in silence
Swifter (it seems) than the water's passage.
(*ST*, 104)

The image of a dead leaf at the centre of a circling motion of water impresses a sense of absence immanently present at the centre of experience paradigmatically. There is simultaneously the intersecting linear progress of 'the water's passage.' It is the pre-reflective immediacy of this instinctive sense of a bottomless centre as it is given in the use of the bogland

imagery in the earlier poetry or the 'ore of longing' (*ST*, 101) in words and experience referred to in 'Squarings *xli*' that is returned to language in metaphor.

The centre opens in the gathering that pre-reflective consciousness in the body as subject perpetuates in the sensual register where the true subject is born and dies in one 'phenomenal instant.' Heaney's language binds this depth of silence into a linear progression or *casting* from which symbolic consciousness can know itself as having been but never enter finally into the pre-reflective immediacy of the true subject. It must '*enter, enter, enter, enter*' that possibility in perpetual incarnation in each new moment. Hence the hybrid and paradoxical identity of the 'good thief in us harking to the promise!' of 'Lightenings *xii*' who becomes a symbolic figure for the 'lightening' moment which can suggest both a physical 'alleviation' as in 'A Basket of Chestnuts' but also 'A phenomenal instant...before death':

And lightening? One meaning of that
Beyond the usual sense of alleviation,
Illumination, and so on, is this:

A phenomenal instant when the spirit flares
With pure exhilaration before death
The good thief in us harking to the promise!

So paint him on Christ's right hand, on a promontory
Scanning empty space, so body-racked he seems
Untranslatable into the bliss

Ached for at the moon-rim of his forehead,
By nail-craters on the dark side of his brain:
This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.
(*ST*, 66)

In 'A Basket of Chestnuts' it is a dialectic exchange of presence and absence that is seen to be 'ratifying you.' The stability of the subject yields to an external 'giddy strange assistance' that lends reassurance in a 'comeback' established as much in how things possibly might be as how they are in actuality: 'The lightness of the thing seems to diminish/The actual weight of what's being hoisted in it' (*ST*, 24). The sudden flare of the instant of experience is pure and 'Untranslatable into the bliss' promised by Christ. This moment is valid in its own right. Consciousness is pressed between an external transcendental world of 'empty space' and

an internal and immanent one of 'nail-craters on the dark side of his brain.' What survives in that moment is brought to where the fulfilment of the promise is 'Ached for at the moon-rim of his forehead.' At these limits it is not in the bliss of an afterlife that the spirit is exhilarated but in the intensification of that dialectic of light and dark that play out their demands in the human 'brain', the anthropocentric location of modern man. The 'moon-rim' image suggests the light surrounding or cresting a dark space observed in solar eclipses that intensify the moon's shadow inside a circle of a light of the sun made brilliant by dramatic contrast. A cosmic sun is symbolically eclipsed by the darkness of rational modern man. The physical organ of the 'brain' is appropriate then rather than the 'spirit' which 'flares' in the moment of experience between inside and outside and lives that postmodern ontology in an ambivalence of pain and pleasure. Neither is the sun of pre-modern cosmology the centre of the universe. What is in essence neither of an external deity nor a moment of internal or rational self-sufficiency is the epiphany that opens between them within experience 'before death.' The identity of the 'good thief' (*ST*, 66) articulates our 'agony' (*ST*, 16) of ambiguity.

'Squarings *xliv*' presents images that explore the agonistic struggle between a culturally centred subject and the true subject of immediate sensual awareness to which it is supplementary in the meaning-event. In the linear time of the former each moment is assumed to be discretely self-sufficient. In the 'swifter' (*ST*, 104) time of the latter each is gathered into the influence of another as in 'Postscript' where the former is caught 'off guard.'²² Between them an 'ore of longing' (*ST*, 101) is revealed and a 'mellowed silence' is 'implicated'²³ as the source of and end into which articulate being emerges and vanishes as is given in the circular image in 'Glanmore Sonnets (IV)':

...small ripples shook
 Silently across our drinking water
 (As they are shaking now across my heart)
 And vanished into where they seemed to start.²⁴

We find the same origin/end paradox at the centre of 'concentric' (*ST*, 14) circles as in 'Man and Boy.' Occasionally sudden 'buffetings',²⁵

22 Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.70.

23 Heaney, *Field Work*, p.58.

24 Heaney, *Field Work*, p.36.

strike at the vulnerabilities of the supplementary subject that organises its world anthropocentrically. It is seen to be transcended by the insistent pre-symbolic immediacy of the event. We enter a space between one “now” and another and into the flow of things out of which there ‘just as unexpectedly comes rebound -/Downthrust and comeback ratifying you’ (ST, 24). All empirical truth becomes doubted in the interim moment. There is a ‘lightening’ (ST, 66), a risky entry into a place of disquieting nearness to the true subject of pre-reflective being where one is ‘neither here nor there’,²⁶ neither one supplement nor the other but surprised by the outside agency of external transcendental reality; ‘a shadow-boost, a giddy strange assistance/That happens when you swing a loaded basket’ (ST, 24). Such an agency is given ultimate status in a cosmos and eclipsed by the identity thinking of Cartesian man. It is between these that we might locate the postmodern epiphany in Heaney’s poetry. In that place of the meaning-event there is neither the absolute absence of Death nor the promise of Life fulfilled. Rather there is a nearness experienced as the opening of the one into the other in a passage in which the perceiving body as subject is primordially engaged like ‘the melt of the real thing/smartering into its absence.’²⁷ In the context of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception Heaney’s fidelity is to the lived ambiguity that binds body and subject around a centre of anonymous being.

Heaney textualises the struggle to find equilibrium between that Antaeus impulse toward the instinctively immediate and the Herculean impulse where ‘intelligence/is a spur of light’ toward order ‘graiping’ Antaeus out of his ‘element’ in ‘the cradling dark’ as we find the mythological figures in *North*. When Hercules defeats Antaeus it is the end of the struggle from the darkness into articulate light that dispossesses, the priority of its interpretation as a ‘triumph’²⁸ at the end of a linear time over the sustenance of a renewable one. This end is present in the Catholic paradigm of obedience and reward. In the termination of the mythological agon consciousness degenerates into the modern Cartesian myth of a naturalism where there is no longer a ‘music’ which in ‘Squarings x/vi’ ‘admits things beyond measure’ because they open in transgressions of the circumference of one ideological circle into that of the other. Here Heaney appeals with irony to a modern ‘proof’ of God’s existence but by

25 Heaney, *The Spirit Level*, p.70.

26 Heaney, *The Spirit Level*, p.70.

27 Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, p.14.

28 Heaney, *North*, pp.46/47.

way of the immediate and pre-reflective appeal to the transient art of music, a decidedly pre-modern Antaen appeal: 'Was music once a proof of God's existence?/As long as it admits things beyond measure,/That supposition stands' (*ST*, 106).

Accordingly 'Squarings *xliv*' quotes from the first line of 'They are all gone into the world of light!' from Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) but replaces Vaughan's exclamation with a question mark. Vaughan's poetry is replete with images of natural and mystical light. Heaney reduces this 'shining' of a personified 'Death' to a dwindling 'lucency' and the lowly image of something 'blanched as worms' (*Seeing Things*, p.104). Vaughan's concern is with another world, his 'custom of seeing the memory of the dead as lights to guide the living'²⁹ who are condemned to life in a 'world of thrall' where the 'spirit' is divided from 'true liberty.' Heaney's poetry concentrates this struggle into the paradox of the phenomenal instant where paradigmatic depth is intercepted by a syntagmatic linear perspective to alleviate the burden of such "liberation" from the Other. In Vaughan's poem 'Death' is 'beauteous' and the 'jewel of the just/Shining nowhere, but in the dark.' The stark division that there is an afterlife that leaves the living 'lingering here' is presented by the either/or logic in Heaney's poem: 'perhaps' yes, 'Otherwise' no. This allows no middle ground as Heaney, Virgil and Dante³⁰ do which the living and the dead share in order to impress the symbolic significance of the Other active within the tenor of experience. This deconstructs Vaughan's transcendental Life/Death binary and with it the self-sufficiency implicit in the subject/object dichotomy that measures the world from within the anthropocentric privilege it presupposes.

Heaney presents the ambiguity of perceptual encounter (what 'seems') against the clarity of such logic and whereas Vaughan's terms are of the extremes of light 'Shining nowhere, but in the dark', Heaney's emerge into the achievement of a self-moving reality in the motion of sensible being as 'The shadowy, unshadowed stream itself' (*ST*, 17). In

29 Alan Rudrum, 'Henry Vaughan's Poems of Mourning', in Donald R. Dickson and Holly Faith Nelson, *Of Paradise and Light: Essays on Henry Vaughan and John Milton in Honor of Alan Rudrum* (USA: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p.309.

30 Both poets feature in translations that frame the book. 'The Golden Bow' (*Seeing Things*, pp.1-3) is a translation of a section from Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* and 'The Crossing' (*Seeing Things*, pp.111-113) translates a section of Cantos III of Dante's *Inferno*.

this image it is not through the clarity of Death or Life as ultimate realities that consciousness comes into its own but where perceptual being becomes a 'bright nowhere'³¹ shining into the world not from beyond but through the reach of desire beyond finite limits which the book is preoccupied to incorporate into an expression of the ontology of our seeing things. In 'Clearances (8)' we find this source of light and the repetition of the words given in 'Station Island (III)' suggesting a ritualistic circling through linear time of an illuminating absence and 'A soul ramifying and forever/Silent beyond silence listened for.'³² The circling 'round/and round a space utterly empty,/utterly a source'³³ are the lines repeated from where the poet takes counsel with the spirit of Joyce and searches for 'the collect of a new epiphany.' Despite Joyce's advice to give up his 'peasant pilgrimage'³⁴ Heaney finds a means toward what is described in the earlier poem as the mystical 'absence stationed in the swamp-fed air.'³⁵ These lines are repeated like words of a prayer or a collect to the epiphany in 'Clearances (8)' identifying the source of the Other in two different circumstances of ritualised remembrance where the living and the dead inhabit one being-in-the-world. In the meaning-event of the poetry the lamp of romantic originary imagination and the mirror of the mimetic copy/original paradigm which is Vaughan's are composed into a 'music of what happens'³⁶ and an epiphanic nearness of the one to the other, of two conflicting centres of the real and the ideal, the body and the subject, form and content. All of these become supplementary to each other in the compromise struck between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic that is embodied consciousness. Heaney's is a postmodern epiphany of a primarily temporal access to Being forever promised and listened for in one phenomenal encounter with the Other.

31 Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, p.32.

32 Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, p.32.

33 Seamus Heaney, *Station Island* (London : Faber,1984), p.68.

34 Heaney, *Station Island*, p.93.

35 Heaney, *Station Island*, p.68.

36 Heaney, *Field Work*, p.56.

Part III

Fiction and the Postmodern or Postmodern Fiction

Eugene O'Brien

Winterwood: A Portrait of the Artist as a Postmodern Pariah

Writing about Kant in *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida made some telling points about the relationship between the frame (*parergon*) and the work itself (*ergon*). Derrida notes that:

The *parergon* stands out both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu; it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. There is always a form on a ground, but the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out, but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy. The frame is in no case a background in the way that the milieu or the work can be, but neither is its thickness as margin a figure.¹

Derrida's point is that the structuration of a work of art is predicated on a framing device which is both part of the work, and at the same time, part of the ground from which that work originates. In this context, he is examining the inter-relation between the frame which gives structure and specificity to a work of art, and that work itself. To extrapolate a little, the frame of any work of literary art involves the philosophical and epistemological context out of which that work derives, and towards which that work is addressed.

The title of this chapter suggests an articulation between James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*² and Patrick McCabe's

1 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.61.

2 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Edited by R.B. Kershner (Boston: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1993). First published 1916. Abbreviated in the text as *P*.

Winterwood,³ and I will examine these books as synecdoches of the difference between a modernist and postmodernist paradigm of Irish cultural and aesthetic life. It is my contention that the *parergonal* context of both works sheds mutual light on their narrative structures, and on the broader cultural contexts. So, just as the *parergon* is necessary for a fuller understanding of the *ergon*, so the *ergon* can likewise develop our understanding of the *parergon*. Indeed, there is a strong connection here between the two. Later in the same book, playing upon a simple observation of a pair of shoes, Derrida introduces the term ‘interlacing.’ The movement of a lace goes from inside to outside, from outside to inside, from under to over and from over to under. By a law of stricture (which is hard and flexible at one and the same time), lacing gathers a shoe together: it ties it to one’s ankle securely yet still allows enough flexibility for comfortable movement. The figure of trajectory of the lace ‘a stricture by alternate and reversible passage from inside to outside, from under to over’, articulates the structure of the frame and the work itself:⁴

By an invisible lace, which pierces the canvas (as the pointure ‘pierces the paper’), passes into it and then out of it in order to sew it back onto its *milieu*, onto its internal and external worlds.⁵

It is the very interplay of ‘opposites’: inside and outside, intrinsic and extrinsic, subject and other, intelligible and sensible, thought and unthought, that connects the text and the context. Indeed, Derrida’s work has made this very point in the seemingly contradictory declarations ‘*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*’ (there is nothing outside the text)⁶ and ‘*Il n’y a pas de hors contexte*’ (there is nothing outside of context).⁷ It is the very imbrication of the two that allows for growth and cultural progress as texts, interlaced with their contexts, are both shaped by, and creative of change in, those very contexts. This interlacing applies both to context and text and to the imbrication of different contexts. Postmodernism is often seen as following sequentially from modernism but I would agree

3 Patrick McCabe, *Winterwood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). Abbreviated in the text as *W*.

4 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.321.

5 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.304.

6 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), p.158.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.136.

with Lyotard's contention that postmodernism is actually 'a part of the modern.'⁸ Lyotard goes on to state that a work 'can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but the nascent state, and this state is constant.'⁹ So with these interlacings in mind, I would like to look at the two novels and begin with the issue of the speaking subject in each book – Stephen Dedalus and Redmond Hatch.

As Colin McCabe has noted, 'central to the discourse of literary criticism is the philosophical category of the subject',¹⁰ and in terms of Irish writing, the self-narrative of the subject of writing is a popular genre. The *Bildungsroman* (a narrative someone's growth from childhood to maturity), has long been a staple in Irish writing, across the genres of short story and poetry but especially in the case of the novel. A kind of subset of the *Bildungsroman* is the *Künstlerroman*, the story of an artist's growth to maturity, with Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*,¹¹ being famous examples. The expectation of the *Bildungsroman* is the revelation of some form of truth or of veracity. In a modernist context this was a tenable objective, and Colin McCabe's category of the subject provides a conceptual *parergon* underlying this genre. Thus, this genre both constructs a particular type of subjectivity, and addresses a particular type of subjectivity.

Jacques Lacan stresses this point in his *Écrits*, where he speaks about the intersubjective nature of language, noting that he will 'show that there is no speech without a reply, even if it is met only with silence, provided that it has an auditor: this is at the heart of its function in psychoanalysis.'¹² He goes further and suggests that the subject is actually constituted by this linguistic process: 'the allocution of the subject entails an allocutor – in other words that the locutor is constituted in it as intersubjectivity.'¹³ Lacan's use of the term the Other is specifically tailored

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10). Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), p.79.

9 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.79.

10 Colin McCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. Language, Discourse, Society Series (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.4.

11 Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (London: Harper, 2005).

12 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits - A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), p.40.

13 Lacan, *Écrits*, p.49.

to this intersubjective context of language, as he sees the Other as the place 'where is constituted the one which speaks with the one who listens.'¹⁴ And just as the *parergon* affects the *ergon*, so the epistemological *parergons* of modernism and postmodernism affect and shape how we see the subject. The speaking subject of modernism and the speaking subject of postmodernism are radically different, though there is a chiasmatic relationship between the two.

The term 'postmodernism' is especially associated with Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard understood modernity as a cultural condition characterized by constant change in the pursuit of progress, and postmodernity as representing the culmination of this process, where constant change has become a *status quo* and the notion of progress, obsolete. Following Wittgenstein's critique of the possibility of absolute and total knowledge, Lyotard also further argued that the various metanarratives of progress – such as positivist science, Marxism, and structuralism – were defunct as methods of achieving progress.

Most famously, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), he argued that our age (with its postmodern condition) is marked by an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives.'¹⁵ These meta-narratives – sometimes 'grand narratives' – are grand, large-scale theories and philosophies of the world, such as the progress of history, the knowability of everything by science, and the possibility of absolute freedom. Lyotard argues that we have ceased to believe that narratives of this kind are adequate to represent and contain us all. We have become alert to difference, diversity, the incompatibility of our aspirations, beliefs and desires, and for that reason postmodernity is characterised by an abundance of micronarratives.

In Lyotard's works, the term 'language games', sometimes also called 'phrase regimens',¹⁶ denotes the multiplicity of communities of meaning, the innumerable and incommensurable separate systems in which meanings are produced and rules for their circulation are created. Lyotard, like Nietzsche, argues that all the grand narratives of Western civilization – such as Christianity, the Enlightenment or Marxism – have been demolished in the wake of postmodern scepticism towards great

14 Lacan, *Écrits*, p.57.

15 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiv.

16 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.96, pp.178-180.

'stories' or total explanations of human nature, freedom, 'progress', and history.¹⁷ Like Derrida and Nietzsche, though, Lyotard insists that the 'essentialist foundations of all these 'grand narratives' can no longer be accepted.'¹⁸ For Lyotard, the 'cycles consist of modernist total 'grand narratives' being continually repudiated by different forms of post-modern scepticism.'¹⁹ In this context Lyotard sees the modernist and postmodern paradigms as co-existing together. This is unlike many perspectives which see modernism as sequentially followed by postmodernism.

Lyotard discusses postmodernity in the context of a discussion of science, and yet the ramifications of his investigation reach far beyond empirical study. Lyotard uses the term 'modern' to:

designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.²⁰

Hence, Lyotard views the 'Enlightenment narrative' as assuming a 'consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value . . . if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds.'²¹ One project of modernity is said to have been the fostering of progress, which was thought to be achievable by incorporating principles of rationality and hierarchy into aspects of public and artistic life. In terms of modernist art, Frederic Jameson sees the art object as expressing something mysterious within which there was a secret to be disclosed, a truth to be revealed, or a history to uncover. It was as if something existed prior to the text and the text was a series of ciphers which needed to be probed until the extra-textual secret meaning is revealed.

For example, Jameson examines Vincent Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes* as an instance of modernist art.²² Representing the 'age of anxiety,' *Peasant Shoes* claims to represent an actual social situation with certain social truths that the shoes held in relation to the peasant's life

17 Dave Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism* (New York: Totem, 1999), pp.41-2.

18 Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism*, p.42.

19 Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism*, p.44.

20 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiii.

21 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiii.

22 Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992), pp.6-10.

and social condition. Van Gogh's painting signifies a specific meaning of peasant life and this is possible only if, as a painting, it grasps the referent (that is the 'real' object of the peasant shoes) symbolically recreating the situation with all its attached meaning. The act of painting must epitomize within its very creation a conception of the viewer or audience on which the referent (the 'real' object) and signified (its meaning) rely. There is a singular extra-textual referent which has been transformed into art. Modern art, then, is seen as ideologically encumbered by a *parergon* which sees narrative as achieving some kind of truth-value. It takes the stuff of life and mimetically transforms it into a higher form of truth: as Joyce would have it, the artist 'as a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever-living life' (*P*, 248-249).

Hence the *Bildungsroman*, the story of someone's life, is seen as a developmental journey up towards some kind of singular fullness and teleology, and the expressive function of the aesthetic is a subset of this modernist paradigm. The narrative will reveal the unfolding of a single destiny. The now programmatic assertion at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a *locus classicus* of this type of modernist *parergon*, where the aesthetic is viewed very much in terms of transmuting the 'daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life' (*P*, 192). Here the *eregon* is very much conditioned by its *parergon*, in that all of the structural conditions of the frame are to be found in the work. In the climactic final pages of this aesthetic *Bildungsroman*, Stephen again stresses the transformative imperative that drives his quest towards the artistic vocation:

Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (*P*, 218)

Declan Kiberd has analysed this piece in modernist terms, seeing the *Bildungsroman* an instrument to 'investigate the Irish experience', and makes the self-understanding 'a discovery of the real Ireland of the present.'²³ However, from a postmodern perspective, the singular certainties

23 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p.336.

of this passage – ‘*the heart ... life ... the reality of experience ... the smithy of my soul ... the uncreated conscience of my race*’ – are in need of unpacking, and postmodern notions of subjectivity are the most effective ways of achieving this.

Indeed, using a term like ‘postmodern’ is problematic for the very reason that postmodernism distrusts grand narratives, overarching labels, and any inherent connection between language and the world. According to Jameson, just as Van Gogh’s *Peasant Shoes* exemplifies modernist art, so Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* exemplifies postmodern art. He argues that contemporary cultural production can be seen as mass production; postmodernism integrates any and all art completely as a part of commodity production. Art no longer holds any utility or instrumentality within the *intrinsic* value of painting. Rather, art is rearranged purely along the lines of a consumer logic so that the cultural object ‘by its transformation into a commodity, a thing of whatever type has been reduced to a means for its own consumption.’²⁴ On this view, postmodernism destroys the possibility of depth as it relies on an image divorced from a referent of any particular signification. In other words, postmodernism, what Jameson calls ‘the ultimate form of commodity reification,’ is a pure celebration of the signifier.²⁵ Postmodernity can be described as the society of the image. Jameson argues that *Diamond Dust Shoes* does not speak to us with a hidden reality that we must interpret. Rather this painting can be characterized by its depthlessness and flatness in that it does not translate any particular message or meaning other than perhaps the feeling that it has no hidden narrative. The meaning is plural and created – there is no core to be unveiled.

So I would conclude that while *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be seen as analogous to the *Peasant Shoes* in its attempt at a univocal unveiling of meaning, so *Winterwood* can be seen as analogous to *Diamond Dust Shoes* in its expression of a plurality of meaning. The *parergons* are very different. The *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman* of Joyce’s book follows a chronological and rational structure. The chapters take us from Stephen’s childhood, through his schooldays, his sexual awakening, his religious awakening and ultimately to his aesthetic awakening, summarised so tellingly in the passage already quoted. Linguistically and cognitively, the narrative voice moves from the simple and the basic to the complex and the expressive – as symbolised by the baby-talk

24 Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p.11.

25 Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, pp.11-12.

at the beginning and the internal diary monologue at the book's close. Temporally, spatially, sequentially, and cognitively, what we are offered here is the slow unveiling of a very singular subject position which is self-aware and self-expressing. There is an unveiling of truth in this novel, and the details about Clongowes and the streets of Dublin and UCD all add to the specificity of this vision. In other words, though Stephen changes and develops, it is always *Stephen* that develops – there is a cohesion and a teleology at work in the gradual progression from the baby talk of 'Baby Tuckoo' (*P*, 19) to the mature voice of the proleptic exile. The interlacing is very much controlled by the *parergon* here as the formal traits of the *Bildungsroman* are controlling the text: the *perergon* controls the *ergon*.

At a surface level, McCabe's *Bildungsroman* follows a similar pattern. The book is divided into a strict chronology, with broad sweeps like 'the eighties' and then 'mid nineties' and 'late nineties' and then with more particular focus like '1991' and '2006.' The dates are reminiscent of Joyce's late chronology in the diary sequences, but the focus narrows to encompass particular instances, and this uneven temporal framework is indicative of the postmodern *parergon*. The gradual unfolding of the postmodern twist in this novel comes through a series of hints and suggestions as the narrator tells us the story as if it is unfolding and then peppers the narrative with atemporal hints: 'I fell head over heels in love with Catherine Courtney. Telling her things I would never have told anyone. Which was regrettable, obviously, in the light of what happened' (*W*, 21).

In postmodern Ireland, where, as Lyotard would have it, the grand narratives have broken down, and where, as Baudrillard puts it, simulacra have replaced reality and truth is now a construct, such certainty is no longer attainable. So postmodern novels must take account of the new symbolic order, to use Lacan's term, and respond accordingly. Baudrillard in *Simulations* asserts that:

when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity...there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production.²⁶

26 Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Douglas Kellner

Winterwood is just such a novel. It transcends generic description. It is a love story, a mystery story, a crime novel, a social critique, and it deconstructs the pretensions of the realist novel towards truth. Formally it is not experimental, indeed it seems to adhere to the *parergon* of the confessional novel, but in effect is transforming it as it progresses. It is also a novel that deconstructs the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* in that the narrator, Redmond Hatch lies all the time, and the reader is left unsure of many of the key points of the narrative. The growth from childhood is there but one finds the details of that childhood scattered spatially across the novel, and temporally scattered across his life, through unreliable and changeable narratives of memory. Childhood details are given analeptically, and in a fractured manner, so it is left to the reader to piece them together and even then, the pieces do not make a complete whole.

The construction of the narrator is part of this split subjectivity Redmond Hatch tells the story – it is his story though told in parallel with his fascination with an old country fiddler called Ned Strange. Hatch begins as a very normal voice – he is in love with, and married to, Catherine Courtney: ‘a flawless union. The sort of partnership people dream about’ (W, 20), and has a daughter Imogen on whom he dotes. He returns to his childhood home of Slievenageeha, an isolated mountain valley, to write about folklore in changing, early-1980s Ireland. He meets the wild, cabin-dwelling fiddler Ned Strange. Strange is popular: his music, stories and the children’s ceilidhs he runs keep the past alive – and it is a seemingly benign and stable past.

But on poteen-soaked visits to the decrepit cabin, Redmond comes to know a different Strange, who perhaps murdered his wife for adultery; who says that Redmond’s father perhaps beat his mother into a brain haemorrhage and who hints that Redmond’s Uncle Florian was not the angel he appeared. Redmond’s planned memoir of Strange is not the only reason for his visits. Strange is repulsive but Redmond also finds him beguiling, enigmatic, charismatic. Then Redmond loses his job. He moves to London with his adored wife Catherine, and they have a baby, Imogen. But when Catherine commits adultery his world collapses. They separate (violence against Catherine is hinted at), Catherine and Imogen returning to Dublin. Redmond fakes his suicide and follows with a new identity.

The novel becomes darker. Redmond learns with disgust of Strange’s sexual assault and murder of a Slievenageeha boy, and of his

subsequent suicide. Strange's taunting, all too-solid ghost appears to the destitute Redmond. He leaves a photograph of Redmond as a child, taken in a pinewood by Florian. Traumatized, and rudderless without his family, Redmond begins drinking. He reaches breaking point – and the book its turning point – outside a Dublin church. A voice warns Redmond that if he chooses evil, he must accept the consequences. But he no longer cares and another voice comes. ‘‘Redmond,’ I heard, softly whispered in the wind, ‘You know you can trust me. I’ll look after you. Till the very last pea is out of the pot, till the angels quit the hallowed halls of heaven’’ (W, 59).

McCabe, too good a writer to identify the voice's owner immediately, or to have Redmond suddenly turn bad, keeps us puzzling. At times Redmond rejects Strange's visitations as hallucinations, or reiterates his disgust of him, or reaches false dawns of hope. But when he sees Catherine with her new husband, he feels sympathy for the (perhaps) cuckolded Strange, and Redmond's descent has begun.

The narrative moves on subtly, building through clues and fragments, never tipping over into melodrama, skipping between the present and memories: Redmond's kidnap of Imogen, his taking her to the pinewood by Rohan's factory; his abuse by Florian as a child; his Faustian resurrection as a successful documentary maker with a glamorous wife and the final appearance of the now literally demonic Strange. The initial description of Strange harks back to Baudrillard's views on myths of origin:

On a platform in the square a slap-bass combo was banging away goodo with a whiskery old-timer sawing away at his fiddle, stomping out hornpipes to beat the band. He must have been close on seventy years of age, with a curly copper thatch and this great unruly rusty beard touched throughout with streaks of silver. (W, 3)

The myths of origins are clear in the preoccupation of the story with Hatch's meeting later with ‘Auld Pappie’ and the description of him by the barman:

Just be careful of them auld stories of his. You wouldn't know whether to believe them or not. He's an awful man once he gets going. Tells everyone he spent years in America. And sure the poor auld fucker – he's never once left the valley. Never set foot outside Slievenageeha. (W, 5)

Of course Ned adds to this uncertainty by telling him that:

—Of course the whole fucking lot could be a pack of lies, Redmond. Maybe I don't give a fuck about these stupid country songs. Maybe it is like my stories about America. Maybe I *did not* ever set foot beyond the mountain. That's a real possibility, is not it, Redmond? That I might never, in fact, have travelled an inch further than them fucking pines there standing outside. I might only have been as far as the town, never further. How do you know but there never was a sweetheart either? That Annamarie Gordon never even existed? Why, us rascally mountain mongrels, you couldn't trust our oath! (W, 99)

The idea of Ned as a liar is one that bears out the postmodern *parergon* as outlined by Baudrillard earlier – the notion that truth is plural and relative. The portrayal of the postmodern artist is very different from that of his Joycean precursor, but in a very real way McCabe also forges (in both senses of that word) the uncreated conscience of his race. This image of an old, isolated rural man is paralleled in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

April 14. John Alphonsus Mulrennan has just returned from the west of Ireland. European and Asiatic papers please copy. He told us he met an old man there in a mountain cabin. Old man had red eyes and short pipe. Old man spoke Irish. Mulrennan spoke Irish. Then old man and Mulrennan spoke English. Mulrennan spoke to him about universe and stars. Old man sat, listened, smoked, spat. Then said: -- Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter and of the world. I fear him. I fear his red-rimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till. Till what? Till he yield to me? No. I mean no harm. (P, 289)

In Joyce's book, the old man is a nameless foil to the urban and bourgeois figure of the developing artist; in the modernist *Künstlerroman* he must be transcended by the modernist *parergon* of progress and urbanisation. In *Winterwood*, however, the *parergon* is deconstructed as the self is interlaced with other aspects of selfhood – unconscious desires and repressed memories. Here the ideology of a teleological progress is imaginary – instead, subjective uncertainty is what is offered as the *parergon* of the *Bildungsroman* is deconstructed by the *ergon* of the text. Ned Strange will gradually take over Redmond Hatch's persona, and the latter will almost become the former, to such an extent that later in the book, Redmond will be referred to as 'Auld daddy Hatch' (W, 4), paralleling the 'Auld Pappie' image of Ned. Later in the book, as he is about to kill his wife Catherine, 'no one likes lifting their hand to their wife. Regard-

less of whether they are separated or not' (W, 180), he sees an image of himself in the rear-view mirror of the car he notes: 'it dawned on me how easily, how ridiculously easily, in the baseball cap, I could have passed for Ned Strange. You could see the copper-red curls showing from underneath the baseball cap. Why I literally could have been the man's twin I thought' (W, 180). Here we see the subjective dehiscence that is part of postmodern theory. As Lyotard puts it: 'let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences.'²⁷ In other words, in a postmodern *Bildungsroman*, one should not expect subjective coherence – instead one should accept the difference that is at the core of identity.

However, the gradual invasion of Redmond's unconscious by Ned Strange – who, having been convicted of the rape and murder of a child, has been sent to prison and committed suicide – makes Redmond become strange (pardon the pun) as he loses control of his life, and the winning image becomes more and more malevolent:

Redmond Hatch, the poor man's Ned Strange. All I could say was, if he and I were twins, then I was the weak Ineffectual one. 'Combine with oneself in bold con-By.'" The idea was laughable. I would never be Ned Strange, simply wasn't up to the task. (W, 135)

Here there is an inter-subjective fusion of the old country man and the younger artistic narrator. Redmond Hatch is a writer, and a television reporter and producer – the postmodern equivalent of the artist. And whereas in the modernist *parergon*, the urban and bourgeois artist will eclipse and bypass the older rural embodiment of a past age, in this postmodernist *parergon*, there is no clear progression towards some kind of truth or artistic revelation. Indeed, the whole concept of the *Bildungsroman* of McCabe's book, the apparently chronological and sequential narrative of Redmond Hatch and his journey from a seemingly happy life with his wife and daughter Imogen, gradually unravels. Because when he comes back to Ireland, Hatch takes a new name, wife, and job. He abducts his daughter, keeping her 'safe' among the secluded pines of 'Winterwood' (the imaginary kingdom of *My Little Pony*). Later, Catherine suffers the same fate so that their 'happy home' remains 'unspoiled.' So, not only does Hatch not develop to self-subjective maturity as the *Bil-*

27 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.82.

dungsroman would expect – instead he actually becomes another person, as at the end of the story, the narrative persona changes:

Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to allow Redmond Hatch to conclude his own story. Regrettably, however, that is impossible. There are times, it has to be acknowledged, when he will make the most valiant efforts. But somehow he never seems to transcend a certain point. When he finds himself in a certain hotel bathroom, standing mutely beside a torn shower curtain.

After that, I'm afraid, he appears to lose the power of speech, just sits there staring, uttering sounds which are quite indecipherable. Certainly making no sense. Poor fellow. It really is dreadful. It must have been quite an ordeal.

Which is why it must inevitably come to me to finish his story, me, his oldest friend and neighbour on the mountain. A task for which I hope I am adequately equipped. Which I ought to be, of course. Although, given my reputation, one runs the risk of certain liberties being taken with what, after all, is a straightforward narrative. Of my inserting certain 'flourishes' of a certain 'fanciful' nature perhaps. As us old mountain fiddlers have been known to do.

But not this time. For, after all, there is hardly any need. There being quite enough drama, one might suggest, in his private little 'melodrama' already. (W, 239)

So has the narrative persona of the *Bildungsroman* changed radically, or have the two characters merged in some way, or has Hatch been taken over by Strange, has he become strange? In Lacanian terms, the subject who is speaking is directly related to the subject who is listening. In this case, we can transpose speaking with writing, and it is well to remember the fact that Redmond Hatch is dead should not be a problem as Ned Strange is long since dead in the chronology of the novel. So here we see a further deconstruction of the *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*, as the dead are now speaking through plural voices, and the *ergon* has interlaced with the *parergon* to completely transform it. Indeed, one could see this novel as a synecdoche of the modernist/post-modernist dialectic as set out by Lyotard. The modernist certainty of personal and artistic subjective development, the subject as grand narrative, is undercut by post-modern scepticism about that very possibility, as so many different 'selves' of Redmond Hatch are given voice in this novel. The grand narrative of self-subjective certainty is deconstructed by the postmodern interlacing little narratives or *petit-recits* of split subjectivity of the novel. The *ergon* has now interlaced with the *perergon* to create many sub-*parergons*.

To add a further layer of narrative dehiscence, there is a blurring between Ned Strange and Redmond Hatch's Uncle Florian – a paedophile who repeatedly rapes and molests the young Redmond, using the term 'fiddles with him' to describe the molestation. This again connects Florian with the fiddler, Ned Strange. Indeed, in parts of the novel, the reader is completely unsure as to whether Redmond Hatch is a figment of Ned Strange's imagination, or whether Ned is a figment of Redmond's imagination. The real location of this novel is in the unconscious of the narrators – and I use the plural deliberately here – and the amount of false information given in the novel is stunning. Indeed the style deconstructs the genre as attempting to give a plot summary is almost impossible given the twists and turns of the novel, and the dearth of basic factual information: 'Just be careful of them auld stories of his. You wouldn't know whether to believe them or not. Slievenageeha' (W, 5). Ned Strange drip-feeds Redmond stories of past abuse – we find out later that Redmond's mother has been killed by his father and much later that in an orphanage, Redmond has been repeatedly abused by his uncle Florian, another character who bears an uncanny resemblance to Ned Strange.

Indeed, in parts of the book, there is a blurring of all three characters as the subject suffers a dehiscence into multiple personality. In a manner redolent of postmodern theory, this is less a grand narrative than a series of intersecting and interlacing little narratives or *petit-recits*, where the information is given in an oblique way and the truth of the novel is less revealed than created. We do not know if Ned Strange and Uncle Florian are a composite figure. We do not know if Redmond hallucinates the images and voice of the long-dead Ned, or if he sees his ghost. We do not find out until later in the book, and it is all the more frightening for that, that Redmond has killed his daughter and that his visits to Winterwood, the place of her imagination, are to her corpse, and that it is to her corpse that he reads his stories of *Where the Wild Things Are*. With its major theme of childhood abuse, the novel faces up to one of the core issues facing contemporary Ireland but does so in an idiosyncratic manner which captures the 'imaginative truth' of such abuse in a more authentic way than documentary evidence could achieve.

Baudrillard describes the postmodern text as being devoid of meaning, because 'meaning requires depth, and unseen yet stable and fixed substratum or foundation; in the postmodern world however, everything is visible, explicit and transparent, but highly unstable.'²⁸ For Baudril-

28 Baudrillard, *A Critical Reader*, p.11.

lard, the horizontal and vertical lines of symbolic signification discarded by the postmodern text give meaning some sense of a historical and natural ontological progression and authenticity. What we see in this book is that exchange and fluidity of signifiers of which Baudrillard speaks in terms of the core symbol of the postmodern. In *Hystericizing the Millennium*, he makes the telling point that:

To oppose this movement in both directions at once, there is the utterly improbable, and certainly unverifiable, hypotheses of a poetic reversibility of events and the only proof we have of it is the possibility of this in language. Poetic form is not far removed from chaotic form. Both of them disregard the law of cause and effect. If, in the theory of Chaos, we substitute sensitive reliance upon initial conditions for susceptible dependency upon final conditions, we enter upon the form of predestination, i.e., that of destiny. Poetic language itself abides in predestination, in the imminence of its own end, and thrives on the reversibility of the end in the beginning. In this sense, it is predestined – an unconditional event without any signification or consequence, one that flourishes singularly in the vertigo of its final resolution.²⁹

It is this reversibility of narrator and style and event and repetition that makes *Winterwood* so quintessentially postmodern. As Baudrillard has noted 'my position is based on reversibility, which seems to me to be the true symbolic form',³⁰ and this is also the structural and thematic core of *Winterwood*. Lies and deceit are the key to reversibility: 'think you're like me — a liar and a deceiver? Are you a bit crafty, do you think? Leave out the bits that'll implicate and incriminate you?' (*W*, 125). The simulation that is not connected to the real means that reversibility is possible. The simulation of *Winterwood* itself is a simulacrum, and the ultimate deconstruction of the *parergon* by the *ergon*. The sense of a *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, of the story of a subjectivity which is teleologically expressing itself through art, is now deconstructed through the story of a fractured subjectivity, of a split subjectivity between conscious and unconscious, life and death, truth and lies and of a sense of the unknowability of the self in a postmodern context. The interlacing has

29 Jean Baudrillard, *Hystericizing the Millennium*. Translated by Charles Dudas. *L'Illusion de la fin: ou La grève des événements* (Paris: Galilee, 1992) <http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/hystericizing.html>.

30 Jean Baudrillard, 'Interview with *Le Journal des Psychologues*' in *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. Edited by Mike Gane (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.177.

now allowed the text to change the context and the *ergon* to change the *parergon*, and this is especially clear in the attitudes to names in each text.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the individuality and singularity of Stephen's name serves as a synecdoche of his individual and developing subjectivity: 'you have a queer name, Dedalus' (*P*, 22) says Athy and as the novel develops, and as his sense of selfhood develops, the singularity of his name will signify for Stephen the singularity of his artistic vocation. Names are a signifier of his developing consciousness:

-- I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names. (*P*, 105)

The individuality of names here is part of the modernist *parergon* which sees individuality and subjective coherence as givens. And as he moves in a teleological arc towards his artistic vocation, his name is again connected with that individual, coherent subjectivity. The archetype of Daedalus, the classical artist who soared above the waves and transcended his culture, is very much conflated with Stephen:

-- Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!
Their banter was not new to him and now it flattered his mild proud sovereignty. Now, as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy. So timeless seemed the grey warm air, so fluid and impersonal his own mood, that all ages were as one to him [...] Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawk-like man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (*P*, 185-186)

He answers his own question in a ringing affirmation which is typical of the *parergonal* genre of which this book is so much a part:

His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his

soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable. (*P*, 187)

Here, the name serves as a synecdoche for the teleological outcome of the *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*: the name is fused to the subject – it serves as a signature to who Stephen has become. It is a metonym of his uniqueness and individuality, and a signifier of the teleological modernist certainty of subjective identity.

In *Winterwood*, however, the idea of a singular name is deconstructed at almost the structural centre of the book. In an intense and revelatory conversation, Ned Strange insists on a relationship with Hatch: 'We're *all* related! Every sonofabitch as was ever spawned on the slopes of this mountain! Don't you see that? Well, don't you, Red?' (*W*, 128). And this blurring of identity proceeds apace as Hatch himself makes a Freudian slip: 'Stay where you are', I said, 'Red! I mean Ned!' (*W*, 128). Here, the name becomes blurred, and that static singularity of the modernist paradigm that was foregrounded at the conclusion of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is deconstructed as Redmond becomes Ned. This is further developed in the process of linguistic interlacing that Ned sets up. He asks Red: 'how is your name Hatch?', and Redmond's reply elicits one of the most significant moments of postmodern plurality in the novel:

—It is just my name. It just happens to be Hatch.

—It just happens to be! It just happens to be! Did you ever happen, as you say, did you ever happen to look up what it actually means? What 'hatch' happens to mean in the Irish language? You're not familiar with the Irish word *air*? You do know how to pronounce that word, don't you, Redmond?

I did as a matter of fact. And was triumphant, at last, to be in a position to trump him.

—Yes, I replied cockily, it is pronounced 'atch.' It actually means 'place.'

He stood there and waited, stroking his chin as he pondered, biding his time with enviable control. Then slowly his grin began to widen, stretching right across his face.

—Sure it does, he said. It means that all right. But it also means something else, you see.

I could bear it no longer.

—What does it mean! I snapped. What does it fucking mean?

—Easy, he cooed.

He flashed his incisors. I went cold all over. —It means 'strange', Little Redmond. That's what it means. It means 'strange' [...] Maybe you'll put that in your next article. I'm sure your readers would find it most interesting!

Red Strange from the mountain — sounds kind of familiar, you have to admit. (W, 129)

Thus the *parergon* of the *Bildungsroman*'s usual outcome, the enunciation of a coherent, self-aware subject, and that of the *Künstlerroman*, the enunciation of a coherent and self-aware artistic and creative subject, is deconstructed by this *ergon* – the postmodern blurring and uncertainty is epitomised by the questions raised about selfhood in this book. In response to the signature of Stephen, there are the countersignatures of Ned and Red and Florian. In *Winterwood*, therefore, the signature is subject to the same iterability that affects all language – as Derrida notes that for a signature to function, it must be both singular and iterable at the same time: 'in order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production.'³¹

And a postmodernist reading of Joyce can reveal the same interlaced process. In his essay 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', Derrida highlights the iterability of Molly's final multiple 'yesses' at the conclusion of *Ulysses* and reads this as an interlacing between Joyce's signature – 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914-1921'³² – and Molly's countersignature, claiming, 'they call to each other across a *yes*, which always inaugurates a scene of call and request: it confirms and countersigns.'³³ This interlacing of the signature is elaborated on by Geoff Bennington, who notes that because a signature is repeatable, it can be repeated by someone else: 'the fact that my signature, if it is to be a signature, must be repeatable or imitable by myself entails just as necessarily the possibility that it can be imitated by another, for example a counterfeiter.'³⁴ If signatures are always iterable then they are conditioned by the possibility of a countersignature to come and this possibility disrupts the purity of the signature. And it is this disruption that partakes of Baudrillard's view of *poetic reversibility* and which makes *Winterwood* in many

31 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Edited by Gerald Graff. Translated by Alan Bass (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.20.

32 James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). p.732.

33 Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.253-309, p.288.

34 Geoff Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*. Translated by Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.162.

ways a postmodernist countersignature to the modernist certainties of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In its transformation of the conditions of its own production, in its transforming of the generic certainties of the *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, this book enunciates a postmodernist portrait of an uncertain and divided self, whose unconscious is very much where the wild things are.

Paula Murphy

Dermot Bolger's Ballymun Trilogy and Doing 'The French Thing'

As a publisher, playwright, poet and novelist, Dermot Bolger has consistently challenged mainstream perceptions of Ireland and Irish society. When he first set up Raven Arts Press at twenty years of age in 1979, postmodernism was not a commonplace idea in Ireland, and the nation of that period almost certainly would not have described itself in the context of postmodernism. Bolger's subject matter, however, and the methods through which he articulates his subject matter, suggests that the term may be applicable. From a Lyotardian point of view, for example, he shuns the Irish literary grand narrative of pastoral rurality for a focus on urbanity. In an interview, he comments on his early attempts to establish a corpus of writing about Irish urbanity as a publisher:

When I began Raven Arts Press in 1980, I went over to England to try and interest publishers in a number of Irish writers and they just laughed at me; they said that if they wanted to read about urban blight they would read a poet from Hull, and if they want[ed] to read about the countryside they would read a poet from Ireland.¹

Moreover, the characters that he writes about are usually, though not always, urban working class; a strand of Irish society underrepresented in Irish literature until the late 20th century.² This can be seen as usurping the middle and upper class dominance of Irish narratives. Although Bolger does not overtly declare a postmodern stance, as Eamon Maher notes, 'We may not be conscious of having a theoretical framework, but that

1 Dermot Bolger, "An Interview with Dermot Bolger", conducted by Damien Shortt, in *Irish Studies Review*, 14:4 (2006) pp.465-474, p.469.

2 There are a few notable exceptions such as Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and James Plunkett's *Strumpet City* (1969).

does not prevent us from having recourse to one.'³ This being the case, it is possible to retrospectively see Bolger's career as having, from its beginnings, a postmodern tendency.

Bolger's postmodernism is complicated by the fact that Irish studies has been largely wary of theoretical terminology until the last decade or so, with the exception of postcolonialism, which has enjoyed a privileged position as a mode of analysis within academic circles. This scepticism is not confined to Ireland, however. Many scholars have scant regard for theoretical perspectives. Speaking of his book *How to Read and Why*, Harold Bloom epitomises this standpoint, saying:

I am deluged with mail from people who say how desperately pleased they are to find that someone is indeed writing about literature for the common reader, that someone does not try, as it were, to do the French thing, in regard to literary study or the many ideological modes which I will not mention, which are now practiced in the Anglo-American Universities and college world.⁴

The difference between Bolger and Bloom is that while the latter pertains to write *for* the 'common' readers, Bolger writes about them. His writing elucidates how perceptions of places, spaces and the social strata that live in them, can become re-imagined through an artistic interpretation, creating a counter-narrative (in the case of modernism) or micro-narrative (in the case of postmodernism) of the city, its inhabitants and the nation to which they belong. This is why, in this chapter, I hope to 'do the French thing' in relation to Bolger's drama, because it is appropriate to the breaking down of ideologies, preconceptions and received ideas that takes place in his work.

Literary theory in all its guises can justifiably be thought of as a particularly 'French thing', particularly in the area of postmodernism on which this essay focuses. Its most important theorists are of French origin: Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Latterly, the voice of Fredric Jameson has become associated with postmodernity, especially in the wake of his important and exten-

3 Eamon Maher, "Foreword", in *New Voices in Irish Literary Criticism: Ireland in Theory*, edited by Paula Murphy and Cathy McGlynn (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p.i.

4 Harold Bloom, "Author Interview", in *BookBrowse*, [http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=631], accessed June 20th, 2006.

sive tome *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. As its name suggests, the book avows a form of postmodernism specifically relating to social organisation and cultural production (such as art, architecture and literature) as emerging from or reaction to, economic forces, in keeping with Jameson's Marxist sympathies. Although Jameson is an American theorist, writing about postmodernism makes him indubitably a part of the French tradition of postmodern analysis, and it is through his work and that of other French postmodernists that I hope to assess Bolger's Irish trilogy.

I favour Lyotard's view that modernism and postmodernism exist together, and that one overtakes the other in a cyclical fashion. For him, postmodernism is 'a part of the modern.'⁵ He states that: 'A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but the nascent state, and this state is constant.'⁶ The postmodern writer or artist is working in the future anterior – what will have been done.⁷ The metaphor of this tense evokes the inevitability that modernism will succeed postmodernism and vice versa. For example, when Joyce wrote *Ulysses*, his project was a modern one, marking an innovative break with the history of the novel form by creating a book that was encyclopaedic in its detail, and in its inclusion of styles, genres and forms. And yet, this could easily be seen as nascent postmodernity; as 'the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks of voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture' that Jameson associates with postmodern writing.⁸ The shifting relationship between the two literary styles is compounded by the attempt to define postmodernism itself. In the disputes about which characteristics of postmodernity descend from modernism and which are new, each becomes re-defined.⁹ As well as the French tradition of writing about

5 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10). Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), p.79.

6 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.79.

7 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.81.

8 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991), p.18.

9 Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane make a similar point in "The Name and Nature of Modernism", but state that modernism is re-defined without specifying that postmodernism must also be re-defined in relation to it: 'the argument around Post-Modernism now adds to the abundance of versions of Modernism' Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism" in

postmodernism, France also played an imperative role in the development of Anglo-American modernism, whose writers show the influence of Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert, and so any discussion of modernism or postmodernism in an Irish context is unavoidably infused with French writing.

According to Lyotard, the difference between modernism and postmodernism is blurred - they succeed each other and turn into each other. Bolger's two plays illustrate this idea, exhibiting aspects of modernity and postmodernity that I will draw attention to, making reference to three core ideas: Lyotard's modern/postmodern cycle, Jameson's discussion of modern and postmodern architecture, and Lyotard's meta and micro-narratives. *From These Green Heights* was commissioned by the Axis Arts Centre, Ballymun, and staged by them in November 2004 with Ray Yeates as director. It is the first play in a trilogy, two of which have been completed at the time of writing. The Axis Arts Centre promotes community-based theatre, ideally aiming to combine innovative art with community development and the location and mission of this theatre are ideally suited to Bolger's play. The centre was set up in 2001, amidst the beginnings of redevelopment in Ballymun, and sees itself as contributing to the area's cultural as well as social rebirth, as does the play itself in its chronicling of Ballymun's history.¹⁰ It was performed in 2004, a few months after the demolition of the infamous Ballymun tower-blocks, which were replaced with an ambitious new housing scheme. It records the history of the flats, from their inception in the sixties, when the area was still outside the city's perimeters, to their demolition in 2004, weaving together many of the stories of those who lived there, articulating the social and economic factors at play, but also, importantly, contributing to an artistic re-imagining of both the history and the future of Ballymun. Arguably, the choice of venue for this play displays a postmodern stance: establishing diversity and difference in the location of the performance as well as in the play itself, and moving out from the symbolically central and culturally historical Abbey Theatre to establish an alternative nexus of theatrical art.

Modernism 1890-1930, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.19-56, p.35.

10 The mission statement of the Axis Art Centre is 'to promote participation in the arts, to fuse professional and community practice and involvement, and to create a space where art really does contribute and make a difference to people's lives' in *Axis Ballymun* [<http://www.axis-ballymun.ie>], accessed September 11th, 2007.

The title of the play appears incongruous with the depressing grey appearance of the original tower blocks, but it is grounded in the history of the flats. The Minister for Local Government who spearheaded the creation of the tower-blocks, Neil Blaney, originally wanted to call the development ‘Ard Glas – Green Heights.’¹¹ ‘Green’ referred the view of orchards that would be visible from the flats, a promise that, like many others made about the ‘Promised Land’ (G, 4) of Ballymun, never materialised. Carmel, Christy and their son Dessie are the fulcrum of the play, and their characters are among the original inhabitants. Dessie remembers what he thought was in store in their new home at five years old: ‘moving skyward. The word struck me, because I thought it was two words, sky and wood. I don’t know what I imagined, maybe a green orchard suspended at that height amid the clouds’ (G, 3).

The ‘green heights’ of the title represents the history of Ballymun in a circuitous way that resembles the cycle of modernism and postmodernism that Lyotard describes. Its polysemy includes the green spaces that existed before the flats appeared, in which the towers looked like ‘alien spacecraft’ (G, 3); the hope the first residents had for their new home in a ‘New World’ (G, 15); the irony of the original name in the light of the dearth of amenities and the social problems that became situated there; and finally, the optimism for the renewal of Ballymun, realised at the end of *The Townlands of Brazil*, the second play in the trilogy. The title is a synecdoche of Bolger’s handling of temporality in this and other plays: it encapsulates the lifetime of the Ballymun towers and signifies time as experienced in the mind, rather than on the clock. This method of organising literature has been recognised as modernist; and is evident in texts from the shifting cadences of Leopold Bloom’s mind in *Ulysses* to the seemingly random thoughts and fragments that make up Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, in which ‘a model of the mind is implied in the structure [which]...is mood driven.’¹²

Bolger’s poem ‘Ballymun Incantation’ is printed at the end of *From These Green Heights* and some verses from it are also used at the beginning of the play. It was originally composed to be central moment of a public wake, the day before the first tower was demolished in 2004. This recital, and his incorporation of the poem into the play, breaks down the

11 Dermot Bolger, *From These Green Heights* (Dublin: New Island, 2004), p.4. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by G, followed by the page number.

12 Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.101.

divide between art and reality in a modernist fashion. The genre of art known as 'the ready made' illustrates how the divide between art and reality is broken down in modernism. Marcel Duchamps' 1913 'Bicycle Wheel' is a case in point. As its name suggests, it was a bicycle wheel that was exhibited almost unchanged from its original form, suggesting that objects from reality need not be mediated by the artist to be regarded as art. Similarly, Edgar Varèse's 'Ionisation' was made up of mechanical and factory noises put together to form a classical piece of music. Like these examples, *From These Green Heights* is not solely an artistic representation of the history of Ballymun; it has a living existence with the inhabitants as an elegy to their homes on the occasion of the real towers being knocked down.

For Carmel and Christy, the central characters, moving to Ballymun seems like moving to paradise because of the appalling conditions they left behind in Dublin tenements. Rooms warm from the heat of radiators and hot water on tap are luxuries for the young couple. Despite the fact that living conditions have improved, they find disadvantages to their new home too. The physical space of the buildings means that they cannot interact with their neighbours in the same way as they could in the city. In this way, the buildings themselves, and their physical location that brought about the relative isolation of Ballymun from the rest of Dublin in the late sixties, are the major contributing factor to the breakdown of normal social relations, and the modernist trope of the isolated individual in the urban landscape is apparent. As Peter Childs states, 'The Modernists felt they had to write about crowds, apartment blocks, mass entertainment, cars and...city-scapes. For the twentieth century writer, this is the reality that is expressed, along with the new experiences of anonymity, of being surrounded and isolated.'¹³

This reality first becomes evident when one of the tenants dies, and the flats witness their first funeral. Mr McGrath's death is directly related to the isolation of the flats. Old friends from the city find the journey to Ballymun lengthy, and in the flats themselves, few neighbours call to visit each other. After moving in, Mr McGrath 'lived on Sweet Afton and bull's eyes and died after eight months from a lack of conversation' (*G*, 12). The normal rituals of death cannot be observed. The hearse has to be transported to the ground floor in the lift and Dessie relates how 'the lift broke with his coffin stuck inside it' (*G*, 12). The incident exhibits the first signs of decay that are appearing in the buildings, but also the first

13 Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p.182.

signs of neglect that the characters gradually feel more keenly. The tenants try to perform their social functions as neighbours in the same way as before, but it proves impossible – the context has changed: ‘What could you do except stand around the hearse in the churned-up mud outside the tower where workmen were still laying pipes, then walk a mile to catch a bus into town?’ (*G*, 12).

Carmel and Christy soon feel the effects of living in Ballymun even more harshly. Christy loses his job in the joinery and waits a month before telling his wife. He had thought his contacts would direct him towards alternative employment, unaware that ‘the grapevine doesn’t stretch to Ballymun’ (*G*, 27). His situation is compounded because the stigma of the area is already being felt: ‘It is amazing the difference between the gaffers who knew me in Bolton Street and those who did not. The others just hear this address and their minds are already made up’ (*G*, 27). Christy’s unemployment, and his consequent loss of esteem, causes emotional as well as financial problems for his family. Carmel finds him increasingly distant from her and negative about the future, as regards both their social circumstances and their marriage: ‘We’ve reached the terminus’, he tells her, ‘Our lives have stopped’ (*G*, 44). Christy’s unemployment, combined with the sense of failure that he associates with living in Ballymun, sends him into a deep despair. Without his job, he feels he has no function in society. His marriage is disintegrating because he feels he has nothing to offer his wife, as he equates the role of husband with financial provider. His son is also drawing away from him because, unlike Christy, he identifies with Ballymun: ‘I belong here even if you don’t’ (*G*, 39).

For Christy, Ballymun is associated with the beginning of all his problems: personal, domestic and financial. In the Bolton Street tenements, he had a job and the respect of others. ‘Here’, he says, ‘I’m nobody’ (*G*, 39). Removed from his place in the social and economic system, Christy wants to die. After an argument with his wife, in which she tells him that he must choose what he wants, he stands teetering on the balcony. The fact that it is the high-rise flats themselves that provide the means for his destruction is highly symbolic of their culpability in his mental state. But when he leans out, the sense that finally he has control over a situation is what gives him hope: ‘I felt a sudden sense of power because for once I had a choice. I could step back and live or lean forward and die’ (*G*, 45). Exerting control after so many months of being controlled by the stigma of Ballymun and the collective unconscious of the society in which he lives, charges him with renewed optimism. Later

in the play, Jane, a woman who has lost her own daughter to heroin, reaches out to take the hand of a drug-addict about to jump off the balcony, loses her balance and falls over the edge herself. For Jane too, it is the flats themselves, their physical height, that cause her demise, a metaphor for the emotional and social effects that their space has on individuals. The modernist theme of the alienated individual isolated in the urban environment is very much in evidence. Later though, when these stories become paralleled with those of the immigrants, they can retroactively be described as also part of postmodernity.

Another modernist echo in Bolger's work is his thematic echoes of Sean O'Casey. O'Casey's work has not been thought of as high modernist, but while his early Dublin trilogy may not be modernist in form, it certainly is in content, depicting the isolation of urban life with as much conviction as high modernist counterparts. Like Bolger, O'Casey has critiqued the squalor of urban working class dwellings. The set descriptions of sparse, run-down living conditions foreground the poverty of his tenement inhabitants, and character description show the effect of such conditions on their physical well-being. In *The Shadow of a Gunman*, Mrs Grigson is described as 'one of the cave-dwellers of Dublin',¹⁴ because she lives in a tenement kitchen that emits only an occasional beam of sunlight. She appears dirty because of the smoky atmosphere, peers out through half-closed eyes because of her dimly-lit environment, and all in all, looks much older than her forty years. Forty years after O'Casey's plays were written the living conditions of Dublin's working class still leave much to be desired. Carmel bemoans:

The tiredness of climbing stairs when the lifts were broken. The tiredness of waiting for shops to be built, then being unable to afford anything in them with Christy so long out of work. The tiredness of waiting for buses that rarely came. The tiredness of dealing with a corporation who forbid Christy to hammer a nail into their precious walls, yet never sent anyone to fix anything broken. (*G*, 31)

Bolger's fictionalised account of high-rise living is substantiated by fact. Frank McDonald notes that 'in one twelve-month period in the late 1970s, the corporation had to deal with 2,425 complaints due to equip-

14 Sean O'Casey, *Three Plays: Juno and the Paycock, The Shadow of a Gunman, The Plough and the Stars* (London: Papermac, 1994), p.113.

ment failure, misuse, or vandalism.’¹⁵ Though its size was comparable to several mid-sized towns, Ballymun had one supermarket, two pubs and only a part-time bank.¹⁶

The experience of women in these plays can be seen as effects of the grand narratives of Church and State. In its views on sexual expression and contraception and its implicit condoning of inequality between the sexes through the patriarchal power structures of the Church, women were subordinated. The State’s marriage bar compounded this inequality. In 1933, national school teachers were legally obliged to resign on marriage and in 1935 this ban was extended to all civil service jobs.¹⁷ Carmel is an exemplar of this inequality. During the play, it becomes apparent that she is illiterate. Her memories of her school-days, and classes held through Irish, a foreign language to her, correspond to the experience of immigrants in Ireland today. Many similar links between Irish and immigrants are made by Bolger in the second play of the trilogy, *The Townlands of Brazil*, discussed below. Carmel explains that she never needed to write, and spent her days in school ‘dying to turn fourteen so I could earn money...the real lesson you learnt was never to draw attention to yourself. That way you’d less chance of getting belted’ (G, 56). She relies on her husband to sign forms and chooses books with tapes to ‘read’ with her son, memorising the words beforehand.

In her study of women in contemporary Irish society, Pat O’Connor notes that ‘although the contribution of women to family life may confer on them emotional power and although many live fulfilling and emotionally satisfying lives, their power is not underpinned by wider institutional structures.’¹⁸ This statement describes Carmel’s position well. She is vitally important to the physical and mental welfare of her husband and children, as evidenced by her support of Christy during his unemployment, but her personal development is limited because it simply is not regarded as necessary, even to her, that she should have the same educational opportunities as her husband, thus disempowering her in any environment outside the home. Some of the problems experienced by Carmel

15 Frank McDonald, “The Writing Was on The Wall for Ballymun’s Towers for 25 Years”, in *The Irish Times*, 9 June 2004.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003), p.100.

18 Pat O’Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), p.141

as a result of her gender remain into the next generation, as evidenced by Marie. She differs from Carmel because she deliberately does not become attached to a man, fearing that it will keep her in Ballymun. When Dessie tells her that he loves her, she responds, 'I cannot afford to hear you...you're going nowhere' (*G*, 54). She decides to emigrate after her Leaving Certificate, blaming the lack of opportunities in Dublin. Despite her ambition however, she ends up in a similar situation to her mother, Jane, alone with a broken marriage behind her. She admits that only three weeks after the wedding, on discovering her husband with another woman, 'I realised I would married my father' (*G*, 86). Depressingly, the character that seems most determined to change, changes the least. Dessie, who eventually becomes her partner, remains in Ballymun and embarks on a successful career, taking an important role in the redevelopment of Ballymun. In contrast to Jane and Marie, the improvement between his social circumstances and that of his father is specified: 'Neighbours would get him to write letters for him, imagining his penmanship would impress officials. It did not. Now I sit at meetings as a full-time union official arguing people's cases and the bosses have to listen' (*G*, 87). The difference between Dessie's rise to social power and Marie's stagnancy can perhaps be regarded as a synecdoche of the greater limitations experienced by women through the ideological control exerted on their sexuality and social position from society as a whole. Bolger's representation of these struggles undermines, as others have done, the grand narratives of Irish society and opens the way for the acceptance of difference associated with postmodernism.

The prevalence of Catholic morality makes Carmel's life more difficult. She is told that another baby could put her life in danger and so sex becomes strained, awkward and infrequent, with Christy having to ask men going to England to smuggle home condoms, listening to 'their crude jokes about me having a mot on the side' (*G*, 22): it is presumed that there is no need for contraception with his wife. Religious morality and its public support mean that Carmel is imprisoned by her female body as well as her social class. Myrtle Hill comments on the impact of religion on sexuality in the sixties:

The so-called sexual revolution...was slow to impact on the South, where family life was highly valued and where...the Catholic Church retained a tight control over moral and sexual behaviour. Contraception remained out-

lawed in the Republic for much of this period, and it is difficult to assess just how couples managed their sexual and reproductive lives.¹⁹

In depicting women's lives as subsumed by the governing ideologies about female behaviour and sexuality, Bolger is illustrating what was a grand narrative of Irish society. In the past, such narratives were legitimised because they were supported by powerful groups - the Catholic Church and the Irish state. But now, according to Lyotard, in 'postindustrial society, post-modern culture - the question of the legitimation of society is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility.'²⁰ Exactly how it has lost its credibility and what social changes this loss of credibility has caused, is shown in *The Townlands of Brazil*.

The design of the Ballymun flats was ironically intended to express the positive economic climate of the 1960s and its modernist characteristics. As Andrew Kincaid notes, the flats' 'Modernist architecture—flat, concrete, and rational—had been harnessed to a new national narrative of economic modernization';²¹ a grand narrative perhaps, that is delegitimised by Bolger. Dessie, the son of Christy and Carmel, becomes central to the redevelopment of Ballymun and it seems he is determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Rather than prioritising physical structures, his new plan for Ballymun prioritises the social relationships of its inhabitants: 'Start from scratch. Don't break up the community but firstly build new homes and shops and then knock the old towers down' (G, 93). The transition from building of these modernist tower blocks, to their demolition in *The Townlands of Brazil*, in order to build a new housing scheme in Ballymun, one in which communities will be maintained, and access to amenities and to the city will be crucial, is a transition from modernist to postmodernist architecture that Jameson has analysed as indicative of social organisation in the two spheres. According to Jameson, postmodern buildings 'no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city.'²² It is evident in the case of Bally-

19 Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland*, p.145.

20 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.37.

21 Andrew Kincaid, 'Memory and the City: Urban Renewal and Literary Memoirs in Contemporary Dublin', in *College Literature* 32.2 (2005) pp.16-42, p.22.

22 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

mun that although the tower blocks were initially conceived of, by the architects and tenants, as utopian, the modernist gesture of removal and distinction from the surrounding city, was the very thing that made them a sociological disaster. In contrast, the new development adheres to Jameson's definition of postmodern architecture, that which 'seek[s] to speak that very language [of the city], using its lexicon and syntax.'²³

The Townlands of Brazil is also set in and around the Ballymun flats, although its time-frame is slightly different. Act one takes place in 1963, just before the flats were built, and act two in 2006, as they are about to be demolished. Whereas *From These Green Heights* focuses on social inequality amongst Dubliners from the 1960s to 1990s, with issues such as gender roles, sexual repression and the impact of physical and social environments coming to the fore, *The Townlands of Brazil* analyses similar themes in relation to 1960s Dublin and the first act, and the Dublin of 2006 in the second. In act one, the characters are ethnically Irish for the most part, although ambiguities in this categorisation of identity are foregrounded, and in the second, the characters are mostly migrant workers.

Taken together, the two plays show the exchanges that take place between modernist to postmodernist Ireland. The first play emphasises the injustice and suffering endured by Ballymun's inhabitants because of poor planning, lack of amenities and badly constructed buildings, portraying all of these problems as an indirect result of the grand narrative of modernisation and Catholic-nationalist identity, espoused by state and Church. The second play shines a light on the nationalistic ideologies that underlay the governmental policies evident in the first, through a consideration of how they impact on Ireland's new population of immigrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, suggesting that the 'national' character of the ideologies functioned to disguise the 'othering' of groups

(London, New York: Verso, 1991), p.39.

23 Jameson's analysis of postmodern architecture appears contradictory – on the one hand, the buildings seek to become part of the fabric of the city, but on the other, they seek to be the city's 'equivalent and replacement or substitute' (Jameson, p.40), just as Disneyland for Baudrillard operates as a substitute for the US. In keeping with Jameson's generally underlying negativity about postmodernity, the interior of these buildings transcend 'the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself...in a mappable external world' (Jameson 1993, 44), mirroring the drifting rootlessness that characterises the postmodern subject in his theory.

within Irish society. It allowed the most powerful groups within society to make their dominance seem normal and natural; it allowed them to control how events were narrated and perceived. This dual perspective is evident in the casting of *The Townlands of Brazil*, as several actors play Irish characters in the first act and immigrants in the second.

The relationships between the two sets of characters connect and overlap in complex ways, all of which adds to the interconnectedness of the two halves of the play, and the mutual dependence of the stories in each act to create the meaning of the whole. Act one revolves around a romance between Eileen Redmond, a young girl from Ballymun, then a countryside townland, and Michael Brady, a young man from Brazil. Brazil may be read as a synecdoche for the central thrust of this play, which seeks to uncover the familiar in that which appears strange and different. Throughout the play, Bolger consciously creates links between the experience of the Irish and that of the immigrants, showing that the difference between them is largely a social construct. Brazil is a case in point. As Eileen's mother states, 'you'll find Brazil beyond Brackentown wood, with not a black man in sight nor any brazen carnival hussies shaking parts of their bodies that God never intended for shaking.'²⁴ The local place-name is distinguished from its South American namesake, the inhabitants of which are described in a stereotyped manner, as Bolger sets up the oppositions which he will later deconstruct, while the play moves between a unified overarching narrative of modernity and a plural narrative of postmodernity.

Michael Brady has been working as a labourer in England and has come home for a brief holiday. Here again, the experience of the Irish is directly related to that of immigrants, who, as is seen later in the play, work at similar menial jobs in a foreign environment. Michael embraces the freedom he finds in England, where he is not judged on the local perception of his family: 'There I'm judged on my hands alone and not on who my people were. I've no history in Liverpool. I'm free to become whoever I want to be' (*T*, 18). Outside of the context of Ireland, Michael is free from the narratives that construct his identity. The relationship between Michael and Eileen is threatened by their families who have been

24 Dermot Bolger, *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006), p.16. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be denoted in brackets by T, followed by the page number. The page numbers for *The Townlands of Brazil* refer to a transcript of the play kindly given to me by the author. The published text is expected to appear in 2008, published by New Island, Dublin.

involved in a dispute surrounding Michael's uncle, who was murdered in the wake of rumours that he planned to join the Free State Police. Eileen's uncle, a member of the IRA who has now emigrated to the US, is suspected of dealing the lethal blow that smashed his skull. From the outset, it is apparent that without emigration, there is little hope of escaping the strictures of the dominant nationalist narrative.

Soon after they become acquainted, Michael asks Eileen to come live with him in Liverpool. She displays the same fear of acting on her sexual desire that Bolger illustrates in *From These Green Heights*, fearing that Michael wants to lure her to England as his 'slut' (T, 22). After assuring her that he wishes them to get married, they consummate their relationship and she agrees to follow him. When he has returned to his job, Eileen realises that she is pregnant, and in the climate of sexual repression that surrounds her, is filled with terror. When Michael does not reply to her letters, she visits his mother to discover that he has been killed working in a flooded trench, in poor working conditions similar to those endured by immigrants to Ireland in the second act. Eileen's pregnancy is finally discovered in a most humiliating way, when her suspicious mother spies on her in the bath, demanding that she leave the house and calling her a slut. Eileen narrowly escapes being confined in a Magdalen laundry, and the fate of working in a wealthy household as an unpaid maid only to have her baby taken for adoption. While these 'arrangements' are being made, her father remarks that an unwed mother would be unacceptable now, but that perhaps this mentality would change when 'these townlands are teeming with strangers' (T, 31), that is to say the inhabitants of Dublin tenements who will move to the area. As the first act closes, Eileen has decided to slip away on the night boat to Liverpool and raise the child on her own, amidst the voices of the chorus-like cast, the voice of society, the voice of the Catholic/nationalist grand narrative of modernity, crying out to stop her stealing God's child.

In act two, one of the first characters introduced to the audience is Monika, a Polish woman living in Ballymun. Her life history parallels Eileen's in several ways. She has had a child by a Polish man, Thomas, who left for Ireland soon after she became pregnant, just as Michael fled to Liverpool. Like Michael, he was a labourer on building sites and was killed while abroad, leaving his lover and unborn child behind. Monika follows to his adopted country after his death, as Eileen did, although she does not bring her baby with her, leaving it instead in the care of Michael's parents. Similarly, their relationship was opposed by both sets of parents because of an old political row, in which Thomas's father was

suspected of informing on Monika's father in Communist Poland, in another example of the tension that ensues when the grand narrative of a nation is challenged. She has left her daughter after four years of taking care of her, the same length of time that Eileen succeeded in keeping her son before he was adopted, as the audience later discovers. The point of all these crossovers is to emphasise the similarity between these immigrant workers and their Irish counterparts, and also to conduct a social critique on an Irish society that is more inclined to see the differences. These characters are heterogeneous voices that become voices without a norm from the perspective of postmodernism. According to Jameson, postmodernity is characterised by 'a linguistic fragmentation of social life to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed.'²⁵ An everyday example of this can be seen in the way that BBC English, a particular type of accent made familiar by British broadcasters on national radio and television stations, has given way to presenters with a variety of accents. These are variations without a norm, just as the characters in the second act of Bolger's *Townlands* are. There is no longer a unified idea of what it means to be Irish from which individual variations can be contrasted, simply heterogeneity.

Just as Bolger showed the prejudice experienced by the inhabitants of the Ballymun towers in the first play, so too does he portray the fear and intolerance that greet migrant workers in this play. A Turkish labourer, Oscar, remarks that 'Irish women look through me' (*T*, 47). He relates how, after he went abroad, he found it impossible to fit in at home again, belonging to neither one place nor the other (*T*, 53), recalling the Eileen's observations in the first act: 'Every year you sensed that this place felt a little less like home for them. People looked forward to them coming home but felt an unspoken relief when they left again' (*T*, 17). Anna tells Monika, 'Sometimes I feel that a gust of wind will blow me away without anybody noticing' (*T*, 51). These characters, floating, rootless and exiled can be regarded as symbols of postmodernity, certainly in Jameson's view. For him, the 'alarming disjunction between the body and its built environment...can itself stand as symbol and *analogon* of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds...to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational networks in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.'²⁶

25 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991), p.17.

26 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.44.

Retroactively, the Irish characters from the first act of *The Townlands of Brazil* embody this postmodern subjectivity too in the Lyotardian future anterior of what will have been done – once plurality and diversity have become commonplace and emigrants like Eileen and Michael can be re-written into Irish history as seen as individual micro-narratives from the perspective of the postmodern present. Although these emigrants from the Ireland of the 1960s, and to the Ireland of 2006, long for a sense of home, home is also what they wish to escape. In Dublin, Monika's lover Thomas did not have to be his father's son, 'he was simply himself, no better or worse than any other man' (*T*, 55). His words resonate with those of Michael in the first act who emigrated 'to stop living in the shadow of a murdered uncle'; to 'become somebody new' (*T*, 23). In this sense, postmodern Dublin has the potential to be a positive place to live and work because of its variety, diversity, and transitory nature and not in spite of it. Bolger's perspective provides a balance to Jameson's more gloomy account of the ephemeral nature of place in the postmodern world because he sees in terms of its untapped possibilities. This is made clear when Monika remarks that the unsettled landscape reminds her of herself: 'Ballymun is a mess, like myself. It doesn't know if it is coming or going' (*T*, 71). But she adds, 'Maybe that's the sort of place where someone might start a new life. Maybe we're all foreigners here' (*T*, 71).

The building and blasting that is going on in Ballymun is razing the previous landscape to the ground; architectural, and, Bolger suggests, social. An opportunity for rebirth is being created; an opportunity to build a 'New Jerusalem', paralleling the biblical metaphors initially associated with the towers in *From These Green Heights*. Appropriately, it is Eileen's son Matthew, a demolition expert, who will push the button that will demolish the towers forever, and with it, Bolger suggests, the inward-looking society that forced her to run to England with her unborn child because she posed a threat to the prevailing narrative of womanhood in the grand narrative of early 20th century Ireland. The difference between that society and the new one is symbolised in Monika, who resolves to bring her child to Ireland, repeating Eileen's words almost exactly when she says that 'every morning that I manage to wake up beside you will be a precious new dawn' (*T*, 73).

Christy saw the Ballymun towers as being 'half way to paradise' (*G*, 10). For Anna, it is the affluent West that promised her a 'Garden of Eden'; (*T*, 66), a promise that, like Christy's, has been disappointed. Ultimately for these characters, such an ideal sense of home exists in the

imagination, but Bolger portrays imagining as the first step to realising. In England with her son, Eileen created this imaginary place in her games with Matthew, which featured the familiar placenames of her home in Ballymun: 'the imaginary world which we fled to when the shouting started overhead' (*T*, 70). The central place in this play is not the Brazil of South America, which represents the fearful exoticism of the immigrants, or even the Brazil near Ballymun, it is 'Hy-Brazil' (*T*, 62), in folk-lore an imaginary island off the West coast, here, a place of the imagination. It can be looked upon as a postmodern perspective on Eliot's un-real city: it is un-real, but in Bolger's drama that can be a positive. It is this re-imagining that enables Bolger to partake in the re-defining of Ireland and Irishness; what Eugene O'Brien describes as 'that most central of activities, the questioning of the givens of the past in order to carve out a space that is both aware of that past but at the same focused on the modern and beyond.'²⁷

The first step towards creating this imaginary place in reality is realised by Bolger's narratives in these two plays, and within the plays by the characters' insertion of themselves into the narratives of Ballymun. They do this symbolically by adding their own names to the graffiti on the derelict walls of the tower block: 'amid all the other scrawled names that people seemed desperate to leave behind: "Tara Farrell was born here". "Jane Bourke fell to her death here"... "Christy's pigeons rule OK"', Matthew writes, "Eileen Redmond once lived here"' (*T*, 72). Monika tells him to 'Write down her [Eileen's] name here and write down Oscar's name and your name and mine and Anna's so that when the tower tumbles we'll all be part of its story along with the Antos and Tomos and Jacintas' (*T*, 73). Although Bolger intersects the lives of the two communities throughout *The Townlands of Brazil*, it is in this gesture that they merge most fully - by becoming part of the same history, a history takes that shape through narratives like his own. As Lyotard suggests, the grand narrative may indeed have lost its credibility, but what will replace it may be a more egalitarian system of plurality; a system in which 'New languages are added to the old ones, forming suburbs of the old town.'²⁸ Herein, lies Bolger's positive hope for the future, in his charting of the

27 Eugene O'Brien, "Derrida, Heaney, Yeats and the Hauntological Re-Definition of Irishness", in *Engaging Modernity: Readings of Irish Politics, Culture and Literature at the Turn of the Century*, edited by Michael Böss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), pp.220-234, p.232.

28 Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*, pp.40-41.

vacillations and tensions between Ireland's modernity and its postmodernity.

Sylvie Mikowski

Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, Céline and Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*

*The Butcher Boy*¹ is one of the most frequently discussed pieces of fiction published in Ireland in the late 1980s, and has often been considered as a social critique or even a satire of small-town Ireland, depicted at a time when de Valera's pastoral vision of the country was grievously contradicted by the harsh realities of economic underdevelopment, cultural sterility and moral censorship. Thus, according to Tom Herron, Francie Brady is 'the site upon which the tensions and contradictions of late 1950s and early 1960s Ireland are played out.'² Following a similar line, Gerry Smyth looks upon Francie as a 'scapegoat for a moribund community.'³ Clare Wallace argues that 'McCabe attempts to give voice to madness itself' through the character of Francie, a madness which also questions 'the apparent sanity of 1960s Ireland.'⁴ For Linden Peach as well, *The Butcher Boy* is 'a literary representation of mental illness.'⁵

Most commentators have also been alert to the possible psychoanalytical interpretations of the text, thus trying to build a bridge between the depiction of a diseased individual and that of a diseased society. But perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the book, and one which lingers in the reader's memory, is the syncopated, fragmented nature of the language it uses, which produces the same impression as oral speech, as well as the extreme violence expressed by the book, which is represented

1 Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy* (London: Picador, 1994). All further references are to that edition, abbreviated as *BB*.

2 Tom Herron, "ContamiNation: Patrick McCabe's and Colm Toibin's Pathographies of the Republic", in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, edited by Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.172.

3 Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p.82

4 Clare Wallace, "Manic Logic in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*", in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol.6, N°2 (August 1998), pp.157-163.

5 Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.169-173.

in the diegesis, but also in what is done to the reader. Butchery is indeed not just a metaphor in a novel revelling in scatology, blasphemy, blood and murder, to an extent which is bound to remind us of what Julia Kristeva calls 'abjection.' Another reason for being reminded of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* is the fact she concludes that book by a long analysis of Céline as an example of 'écriture de l'abjection.'⁶

It seems to me that a comparative approach of *The Butcher Boy* and Céline, especially in *Mort à Crédit*, as mediated by Kristeva's definition of the abject, could open up the perspective of a non-contextual reading of McCabe's work, and help clear the mystery of the appeal of such a disturbing book. Kristeva defines Céline as 'l'apogée de cette révolte morale, politique et stylistique qui marque notre époque' (*P*, 31). In other words, she suggests that the writing of abjection is inseparable from modernity. By showing to what extent *The Butcher Boy* can be categorized as 'littérature de l'abjection', we are therefore led to consider how the book articulates modernity and postmodernity.

But let us first find out what various elements connect McCabe's work to the literature of abjection. Kristeva writes that 'celui par lequel l'abject existe est un jeté qui (se) place, (se) sépare, (se) situe et donc erre, au lieu de se reconnaître, de désirer, d'appartenir ou de refuser' (*P*, 15). Disconnectedness, uprootedness and disorientation are all features which characterize Francie Brady both as character and narrator; abandoned by defective parents whose existence is wiped away by despair and helplessness, Francie is also left to fend for himself by the various members of the community he is supposed to belong to – neighbours, priests, doctors or police. But he proves unable to recognise himself as a member of that community, as is illustrated by his tendency to look upon the people he comes across not as who they really are but as what his imagination makes of them: the Sergeant is a clown nicknamed Sergeant Sausage, the head of the industrial school where he is sent becomes Father Bubble, Father Sullivan is Father Tiddly, the other boys in the school are nothing but 'bogmen', Mr Nugent is a character from an ad for 'Mal-tan Ready Rubber Flake.' No one except his friend Joe Purcell, and his own father and mother, are regarded as real persons with whom to develop a relationship.

Francie is also confused as far as his own identity is concerned: he calls himself various names and speaks alternatively with the voices of

6 Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur, Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Le Seuil, collection essais, 1980). All further references are to that edition abbreviated as *P*.

John Wayne, Kirk Douglas, cartoon characters, or simply imitates the accents of the people he comes across, whether it be Philip Nugent's English accent or the small town people's dialect. Disowned by the community after he has broken into and sullied the Nugents' house, Francie starts out by disowning that community and cutting himself off from their world, as when he finds refuge in his hiding place, the 'hole by the river under a tangle of briars' (*BB*, 1). He prefers to live in a sort of no-man's land, to live as 'Francie the Fugitive' as he calls himself. As a narrator, Francie is just as difficult to locate: his voice arises out of an unidentified place, perhaps from the 'hole' just mentioned, Beckett-style. Narrating and narrated times overlap in an indistinct manner, an effect produced by a style which imitates a voice actually speaking to us and as is underlined by the vagueness of the opening line: 'When I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago' (*BB*, 1). We are gradually made to understand that the place from which Francie speaks may very well be his madness, even though the Hamlet-like method in his madness makes his position ambiguous.

This ambiguity is only fit for such a 'borderline' case as his, a condition which Kristeva associates with abjection, because, as she writes, 'the abject is above all the ambiguous, the in-between, what defines boundaries',⁷ particularly the boundary between the inside and the outside. The way Francie, as the single narrator, is constantly made to speak in other characters' voices, without any grammatical marker to distinguish his words from theirs, effectively blurs the distinction between his own and the others' identities, and leads the reader to question the limits of his consciousness, in which we are supposed to be immersed. To put it bluntly, we never know whether we are inside or outside Francie's subjectivity, and we can never be certain whether Francie is the subject or the object of the text. This should be related to the fact that, as Anne-Marie Smith summarises, 'the experience of abjection can be linked to the child's first efforts at separation from the maternal body, to the attempt to distinguish and separate subject and object, and the depression which accompanies this process.'⁸

All the horror of Francie's experience stems precisely from his history of a terribly painful separation from his mother. The opening lines of

7 John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.157-165.

8 Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p.33.

the novel, to which I referred, could very well be read as the image of a birth: 'I was hiding out by the river in a hole under a tangle of briars...You could see plenty from the inside but no one could see you...Then I stuck my nose out to see what was going on.' Francie's mother herself harks back to their primal union and the moment of their separation: 'You know you were only five pounds weight when you were born Francie' (*BB*, 8) she says, after begging him never to let her down. Moreover, birth is explicitly connected to death through the song called 'The Butcher Boy' that Francie's mother sings to him, the story of a pregnant girl who hangs herself, and which starts with the line 'I wish my baby it was born' (*BB*, 19).

According to psychoanalysts, the natural process of subject-formation requires that the child leave the archaic mother for fear of seeing his existence threatened: it is the role of the father to intervene between the mother and the child, allowing him to enter the symbolic order through the imposition of what Lacan calls the Law of the Father. But Francie's father is the stereotype of the defective father, a social failure and a drunk, who himself has never recovered from having been abandoned to an orphanage as a child, and who let his wife down from the first day of their marriage. Unable to acquire a stable identity thanks to a successful entrance in the symbolic order, and confronted with the incestuous drive of a demanding mother, Francie is further destabilized by that mother's sinking into depression and suicide. The ensuing absence of this dead mother will forever remind the boy of his loss, and of the lost primary union with her body; it also makes forever impossible the movement of rejection of the mother's body – or of abjection as Kristeva puts it – which if we are to believe that she secures the entrance into the Symbolic order. That is why Francie fantasises: in order to replace his real mother with Mrs Nugent, a substitute mother whom he will be able to abject, and who becomes for him the focus of both fascination and horror. The fascination is obvious when we see Francie becoming obsessed with the whole Nugent family, first spying upon them, and finally breaking into their home, where he tries on Philip's clothes and looks at himself in a mirror in that attire, before indulging in a fantasy in which Mrs Nugent breastfeeds him.

The abjection which follows this initial fascination is insidious at first but just before he learns of his real mother's death, Francie is repulsed by the face of Mrs Nugent seen up close: 'She was so close I could see the wiry hairs on her chin and the pink make-up and powder on her cheeks. The smell of it turned my stomach' (*BB*, 43). Mrs Nugent is

all the easier to abject as a threatening mother as she is described as a domineering woman, whose presence completely overrides that of her husband, and who never seems to leave her son Philip alone. The breast-feeding fantasy also arouses revulsion, in the most Kristevan sense of the word: 'I thought I was going to choke on the fat, lukewarm flesh' (*BB*, 60), a phrase which reminds us of the example provided in the opening pages of *Powers of Horror* of the revulsion experienced at the confusion of contact/separation, outside/inside when one's lips come into contact with the skin of milk. The imaginary contact with the fantasized mother's body is enough to throw Francie into a fit of violence, and drives him to respond to that heightened feeling of abjection by adopting an abject behaviour. That is when he smears the walls of Mrs Nugent's bedroom with lipstick and leaves his excrement on the floor.

Kristeva uses the works of anthropologists to stress that all societies rely on a number of purifying rituals, and that among the objects considered unclean two stand out which are closely related to the mother, menstrual blood and excrement. Indeed the mother is traditionally in charge of toilet-training her child, thus dividing the body into clean areas and unclean ones. Crossing the line between cleanliness and uncleanness is one way of signifying abjection and of enacting the rejection of the mother's authority. Studying abjection in the history of religions, Kristeva asserts for example that:

Le dispositif pur/impur témoigne de la lutte sévère que, pour se constituer, le judaïsme doit mener contre le paganisme et ses cultes maternels. Ce dispositif reconduit, dans la vie privée de chacun, le tranchant de la lutte que chaque sujet doit mener tout au long de son histoire personnelle pour se séparer, c'est-à-dire devenir sujet parlant et/ou sujet à la Loi. (*P*, 113)

Anything which prevents the strict separation between clean and unclean, or which leads to the erasure of that difference becomes abject. The worst aspect of this confusion between clean and unclean as exemplified in *The Butcher Boy* is the one established between human and animal, embodied by Francie's obsession with pigs, from the moment when Mrs Nugent calls on his mother to complain of Francie and to call his father a pig.

The fact that Francie should from then on identify himself and his family with such an animal is particularly significant when one thinks of the role played by the pig in the Jewish and the Muslim religions. Leviticus (11:1-4) draws a list of clean and unclean food among which stands 'the pig, [which], though it has a split hoof completely divided,

does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.' According to Kristeva's analysis of the whole series of prohibitions related to food and contained in that part of the Old Testament, 'l'abomination alimentaire trouve un parallèle dans l'abomination que suscite le corps féminin fécondable ou fertile' (P, 119). Having turned himself into an object of aversion by pretending to be a pig, Francie reaches a climax of mad violence and of abject behaviour when he finally comes to kill Mrs Nugent with a butcher's knife commonly used to slaughter pigs, rips her stomach open and guts her innards the way you do with a slaughtered animal. Just as Othello the Moor, who was originally treated as an object of abjection by the Venetians because of his blackness, stabs himself at the end of the play after describing himself as 'a circumcised dog', Francie becomes the abject killer he was made to appear to the eyes of the others. He experiences the abject as this 'état fragile où l'homme erre dans les territoires de l'animal' (P, 20). He also testifies to the fact that 'l'abject s'éprouve dans sa force maximale...lorsque le sujet trouve l'impossible en lui-même: lorsqu'il trouve que l'impossible, c'est son être même, découvrant qu'il n'est autre qu'abject' (P, 12). Francie in this regard embodies a perfect case of the 'abjection of the self.'

Another illustration of abjection in the novel is the way McCabe forces the reader to focus his or her imagination on corpses: indeed for Kristeva the corpse is one of the most obvious examples of the confusion between life and death which signifies abjection. Confusion prevails when Francie comes home and discovers his father sitting cold and inert in his armchair but nevertheless continues to act as he were still alive for an indefinite period of time. The reader has to use his sagacity to understand what is going on; it is only when the police arrive and express their horror at the sight of the corpse being devoured by maggots that things become really clear. Francie's treatment of Mrs Nugent's corpse is just as revolting. There is even a hint at cannibalism when Francie jokingly thinks of offering people 'two pounds of chump steak or a half pound of Mrs Nugent' (BB, 197) - another possible allusion to Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*, and to another of his 'abject' characters, Shylock. According to the Old Testament, the corpse is unclean and should not be touched: 'Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days' Numbers (19:12). Francie definitely crosses a line when he plays with Mrs Nugent's dead body: 'le cadavre, le plus écœurant des déchets, est une limite qui a tout envahi'. He enters a realm which lies beyond law, religion, and morals, and through the creation of such a character, McCabe, like other contemporary writers, signifies what Kristeva

calls 'l'impossibilité de la religion, de la Morale, du Droit' (P, 23), the collapse of meaning, value and authority. McCabe joins other writers in the constitution of a literature of abjection: 'avec cette littérature-là s'accomplit une traversée des catégories dichotomiques du Pur et de l'Impur, de l'Interdit et du Péché, de la Morale et de l'Immoral' (P, 23).

In the eyes of the Franco-Bulgarian philosopher, it is Céline who best exemplifies 'la littérature abjecte du XXe siècle (celle qui prend la relève de l'apocalypse et du carnaval)' (P, 165). It is obvious that McCabe is the heir to a line of 'apocalyptic writers' that goes from Céline to Artaud to William Burroughs. There are striking similarities for example between *The Butcher Boy* and Céline's *Mort à Crédit*. Both are first-person narratives told retrospectively by a narrator who relates a violent, painful childhood. Both texts use a disarticulated language and a style which seeks to make written language pass as spoken language, 'c'est-à-dire contemporain, rapide, obscène' according to Kristeva (P, 161). Céline's invention of a form of writing which imitates popular oral speech, first inaugurated in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, and continued in *Mort à Crédit*, was a direct attack against the supremacy of written academic language; an attempt to undermine aesthetic codes only meant to safeguard the social barriers between the ruling classes and the others. In the aftermath of the disaster of World War I and the social crisis it brought about, it simultaneously appeared to writers in various parts of the world that the traditional language of the novel was no longer a suitable medium to represent a deeply divided society. Thus Jean-Paul Sartre complained in 1952:

Notre société, en crise depuis la fin de l'autre guerre, use d'un langage trop vieux pour elle. Beaucoup de mots, décrochés aux objets, flottent à la dérive ; beaucoup d'hommes dépayés au sein de la classe bourgeoise, isolés par leur histoire et par leurs complexes, ont le sentiment que le langage n'est pas tout à fait à eux.⁹

Sartre praised Dos Passos as the greatest writer of our time for inventing the fragmented technique used in his *USA* trilogy. The use of oral speech as a literary form, such as it was, developed by Céline, Raymond Queneau, Jean Genet, John Dos Passos and many others, stems as much from an ideological standpoint as from an aesthetic choice. McCabe's lack of respect for traditional literary codes in *The Butcher Boy* should be read as

9 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p.311.

a similar form of protest against a society equally in crisis and plagued by profound divisions, such as is exemplified by the conflict between the Nugents and the Bradys. The Nugents embody the bourgeois aspirations of an independent Ireland that remains in awe of its former coloniser's alleged cultural superiority and continues to mimic it, as is suggested by this allusion to the way Mr Nugent speaks: 'I don't know if he was English but he spoke like it. He said good afternoon when everybody else said *hardy weather* or *she looks like rain*' (*BB*, 51). The Nugents do everything in their power to take a distance from the Bradys, who contrary to them, are plagued with all the deficiencies of an oppressed, subaltern class, such as lack of education, economic poverty, cultural deprivation, leading to a sense of desperation and alcoholism. Francie's identification with that class is made apparent in some of the colloquial or Hiberno-Irish forms of speech that he uses, as in: 'I says', or 'I seen', or 'It wasn't too long after that ma was took off to the garage' (*BB*, 8), or his frequent use of 'fuck', which find their equivalent in the faulty French grammar that Céline assigns to Ferdinand, as in his systematic use of a personal pronoun repeating a nominal subject: 'Quand on rentrait à la maison, mon père il demandait des nouvelles..', 'Ma mère elle répondait rien'¹⁰ or of 'y'a' for 'il y a': 'Y avait foule immense devant notre cortège et ça cavalait fort derrière' (*MàC*, 93), notwithstanding the numerous recurrences of 'saligaud', 'merde', 'con', 'bordel', which punctuate the narrative.

Céline's style is not only characterised by the reproduction of oral popular speech and slang, but also by its extensive recourse to polyphony or, in Bakhtin's words, heteroglossia. In *Mort à Crédit*, Céline seeks to transcribe the infinite nuances which distinguish one voice from another and to interweave them all into a single, seemingly unified flow, as in the following example, in which the owner of a shop next to that of Ferdinand's parents has come to complain about Ferdinand's dog: 'Elle a traversé exprès, la Méhon, pour venir provoquer ma mère, lui faire une esclandre. Elle a gueulé que c'était infâme, l'ignoble façon qu'il cochonnait toute sa vitrine, notre petit galeux' (*MàC*, 75). In this passage, the words 'infâme', 'ignoble' or 'petit galeux' can clearly be assigned to the character of la Méhon, whereas the use of the article 'la' before the name Méhon is typical of Ferdinand's parents' lower-class speech. A similar use of heteroglossia can be found in *The Butcher Boy*, in a scene in which

10 Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Mort à crédit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p.115. All further references are to that edition, abbreviated as *MàC*.

Mrs Nugent, also an antagonist to the narrator's parents, has come to complain of Francie's behaviour:

She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England and she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of me what else would you expect from a house where the father's never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he's no better than a pig. (*BB*, 4)

This time it is the hackneyed expressions such as 'what else would you expect' which betray Mrs Nugent's voice as that of a conventional, narrow-minded, middle-class character.

Another feature of Céline's style is the way he disarticulates the traditional rhythm of the written sentence through a specific use of punctuation, such as the famous dots which conclude about every other sentence, as in: 'Mon oncle était pas d'avis qu'on s'entête dans les rigueurs...il était plutôt conciliant, il croyait pas à la force...il croyait pas que ça donnerait...il leur a dit mot pour mot...' (*MàC*, 200). Therein lies one of the most effective means by which the writer manages to recreate the rhythm of spoken language, and also to disrupt the modes of production of meaning, forcing the reader to reconstruct broken logical links, to infer missing details, or to re-establish a subverted order. Yet from the reader's implication, as Henri Godard suggests, springs this 'incomparable sentiment de vie dans l'instant que donne la prose de Céline.'¹¹ The same sense of vividness is produced by McCabe's similar use of punctuation, also meant to imitate the patterns of oral speech. Most of the novel is written using a combination of indirect speech, characterised by the use of introductory verbs such as 'he says', 'she says', and direct speech, frequently punctuated by exclamation or interrogation marks:

The streets of Picadilly, Alo!
Now you said it. Spent the night in the YMCA. Don't talk to me!
All the corners of the earth, he says!
Now you said it!
Well would you credit that!
Boys oh boys;
Twenty years to the day, he says!
Well you're here now so here's to your health and all in this room! (*BB*, 27)

11 Henri Godard, *Mort à Crédit de Louis-Ferdinand Céline* (Paris: Gallimard, Foliothèque, 1996).

Alternatively, McCabe omits the punctuation marks, thus tending to obscure the meaning of sentences:

What did I do? It was hard for him to say it, I could hardly hear him I loved you like no father ever loved a son Francie that was what he said it would have been better if he drew out to hit me I just let go of his lapel and stood there with my back to him fuck off I said fuck off and I knew I would been alone for a long time when I heard Bubble's soft lisp well Francie wasn't that a nice surprise? (*BB*, 86)

Another stylistic device reminiscent of Céline is the insertion of onomatopoeia, another means of bringing written language closer to oral speech in the sense that oral communication does not rely on words only but also on ungrammatical sounds and body language. We can thus compare the following sentence from *Mort à Crédit*: 'Ma mère clopinait à la traîne...Ta!ga!dac!Ta!ga!dac!...' (*MàC*, 161), and also: 'Mais entre nous, Ferdinand, je crois que notre pauvre boutique...Tst!Tst!Tst!...elle pourra pas s'en relever...Hum!Hum! je crains le pire tu sais!' (*MàC*, 309) with 'Who's this only Father Dominic swish swish and the creak of his polished shoes well well Francie he says and how are you today, drrrumm drrrummm.' (*BB*, 16)

Through this raw, seemingly spontaneous use of language, McCabe in the manner of Céline seeks a means of expressing the absurdity, the ludicrousness, but also the violence of his narrator-cum-protagonist's experience of life, a violence which begins in childhood. Both Ferdinand and Francie for instance undergo a painful severance from their mothers in their early years, Ferdinand being taken to a foster-mother because his own mother has to work hard. Like Francie's parents, Ferdinand's are lower-class people, defeated by life, who have proved unable to adapt to the transformations of society, in the way the Nugents have in the most blatant, and to Francie's eyes, intolerable manner. Strikingly, Ferdinand's father, like Francie's, is a failed artist who indulges in the nostalgia of his wasted talent: that family tyrant paints watercolours in his free time, while Francie's mother can still fondly recall how her husband played the trumpet in the early days of their marriage. Both fathers, pathetic and to a certain extent ridiculous, are unable to stand as figures of authority or to embody the Law. Nevertheless their sons have to acknowledge what they have in common with these unworthy genitors: after all, Francie does finally let his mother down in the same way his father always did and proceeds to become 'the butcher boy' from the song, that the mother uses as a metaphor of her own story. The only difference is that in the song the

butcher boy is the pregnant woman's lover, not her son, a hint perhaps at the boy's neurotic oedipal attachment to his mother, another similarity with Céline's novel, more or less the story of a boy who eventually tries to kill his father. Like Ferdinand's mother, whose physical disability (she has a limp) makes her an object of attraction and horror in her son's eyes, Francie is both attracted to, and ashamed, of his mother who spends time in a mental institution.

Violence in the two novels does not only stem from the tensions within the protagonists' families but is also due to their lowly social status. Like Francie whose first job is in a slaughterhouse, Ferdinand becomes an apprentice at an early age after dropping out from school. Céline suggests the sufferings of a deprived childhood and the unbearable inequalities between those whose parents can afford to protect their offspring from the hardships of life and those who leave it to fend for itself. Thus, Francie's sinking into psychosis accelerates when he sees his friend Joe Purcell going away to a private boarding school and taking music lessons whereas he is sent to industrial school. In that industrial school, Francie becomes the prey of Father Tiddly's sexual delinquency, in the same way as Céline's Ferdinand is molested as a child by one of his mother's male customers, and later by a woman called la Gorloge, who calls him 'chéri petit cochon' (*MàC*, 188). Like McCabe in *The Butcher Boy*, Céline in *Mort à Crédit* shows that those who are the victims of violence resort to violence in their turn.

Mort à Crédit contains as much, if not more, violence than *The Butcher Boy*, including a violence addressed to the reader confronted to what Kristeva calls 'des scènes d'abjection ou de nausée les plus abominables de la littérature' (*P*, 171). Ferdinand, like Francie, provides copious details about his excrement, as on the day when, after attacking his father with the utmost violence, he ends up sullyng his pants: 'J'en peux plus !... J'ai le trou du cul qui convulse... Je chie dans mon froc... [...] C'est pas supportable la frayeur ! ... C'est le trou du cul qui me fait le plus mal... Il arrête plus de tordre et de renfrogner... C'est une crampe atroce.' (*MàC*, 335). Kristeva speaks of Céline's 'dégoût de la pourriture ou de la déjection' (*P*, 174) which in *Mort à Crédit* is forcefully exemplified by the appalling descriptions of corpses: thus a mad priest recently escaped from a mental asylum touches the body of the just deceased Courtial: 'Il plonge les doigts dans la blessure... Il rentre les deux mains dans la viande... il s'enfonce dans tous les trous... Il arrache les bords ! .. les mous ! Il trifouille... Il s'empêtre !... Il a le poing pris dans les os ! ça craque... il secoue.. ; il se débat comme dans un piège... Y a une espèce

de poche qui crève !...le jus fuse ! gicle partout ! Plein de la cervelle et du sang !' (*MàC*, 594), a scene which should be set in parallel to the assassination of Mrs Nugent by Francie in *The Butcher Boy*.

Interestingly enough, one critic remarks that 'le cloaque infectieux décrit par Céline [dans certains passages] se laisse comparer à la boucherie sanglante et boueuse de la guerre.'¹² Not only does the critic use the same metaphor of butchery as McCabe does, but he also draws our attention to the importance of war in Céline's work, a point also made by Kristeva: 'Sans la guerre, il est difficile d'imaginer une écriture célienne' (*P*, 178). Here is at last a point on which McCabe seems to diverge both from Céline and la littérature de l'abjection. But such is not the case if we continue reading what Kristeva says about Céline's writings:

Fresque sociale et politique, débordante de rejets et de sarcasmes envers une politique [...] de trahisons, d'escapades, de massacres, de bombardements et de destructions : l'agressivité y montre soudainement son abominable versant débile, dans une infernale jouissance- mobile abject de l'Histoire. (*P*, 179)

Likewise, *The Butcher Boy* can be read as a violent satire of Ireland in the 1960s and as a critique of the betrayal of the small people that the nationalists were supposed to make free, independent, and even happy. None of the beliefs that sustained the struggles of the Irish in the past – in the Catholic Church, or in such allegedly liberating heroes as Daniel O'Connell or Michael Collins who are both alluded to in the course of the novel – become realities. In the meantime, people like the Nugents, who took their cue from the English, and brought back to Ireland their materialistic bourgeois values, are the only ones who seem to benefit from the new postcolonial order. As the ending of the novel suggests, McCabe deploys an apocalyptic vision of a process of modernization he considers utterly failed, deceptive and even revolting. Francie can thus be said to embody the 'abominable versant débile' of contemporary Irish history, as well as the 'jouissance abjecte' of violence. That 'jouissance' was made particularly obvious and visible during the Troubles that took place for more than thirty years on the other side of the border, a border which is very close to McCabe's hometown of Clones.

12 Serge André, *L'imposture perverse* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1993), pp.386-387.

Part IV

Religion and Society in the Wake of Postmodernity

Yann Bévant

L'Irlande entre diversité culturelle et affirmation de l'identité nationale : nouvelle problématique, nouveaux enjeux ?

Peu nombreux sont les pays dont la fête nationale est connue dans le monde entier, *a fortiori* lorsqu'il s'agit d'îles dont la population totale est inférieure à 10 millions d'habitants. L'engouement international actuel pour l'Irlande se fonde sur la spécificité de son héritage culturel et historique, mais aussi sur l'internationalisation extraordinaire de marqueurs de son identité ces dernières années, avec des phénomènes tels que celui de *Riverdance*, la popularité de pièces, livres et romans comme *Dancing at Lughnasa* de Brian Friel, *Angela's Ashes* de Frank McCourt notamment, accompagnée de l'éclosion d'une génération de cinéastes irlandais talentueux. La reconnaissance dont bénéficient la littérature, la poésie et le théâtre irlandais contemporains, avec des noms comme ceux de Yeats, Joyce, et plus près de nous Heaney, Mc Gahern, Friel, prend également toute sa place dans ce processus. Comme se le demandait Kim Bielenberg dans *The Irish Times* : 'Joyce est-il un grand artiste ou un vecteur de marketing global ?' La question mérite d'être posée quand on voit la place commerciale et touristique prise par le phénomène *Bloomsday* aujourd'hui à Dublin. Michael Malouf apporte un éclairage intéressant sur l'interaction entre industrie touristique et marqueurs culturels dans la construction de l'identité nationale :

Dans un pays comme l'Irlande où les poètes et les écrivains occupent une place centrale dans le panthéon national, leur présence sous forme symbolique [...] fait que les conflits sur les questions d'inclusion et d'exclusion construisent un espace possible d'identité nationale [...] utilisée pour transformer un passé tumultueux en un présent continu et consommable, la langue allégorique de Joyce et Yeats est partie intégrante de l'expérience touristique.¹

1 Citée par Michael Malouf, "Forging the Nation: James Joyce and the Celtic Tiger",

Par-delà la place du tourisme dans l'économie irlandaise contemporaine, une question intéressante que pose implicitement le postulat de Malouf est la transformation extraordinaire des interactions entre l'Irlande et son environnement extérieur sous l'influence de la mondialisation, au point de rendre invisibles ou caduques certaines frontières autrefois clairement identifiées. Le processus d'internationalisation auquel ont été soumis les repères traditionnels de l'identité nationale tend à rendre cette dernière plus floue, moins évidente, ce qui pose la question de sa transformation, voire de sa pérennité. Cependant, avant d'aller plus loin, il convient de s'arrêter d'abord sur le périmètre et le sens que l'on met sous un concept -à la mode- comme celui d'identité, concept dont on sait qu'il a été au cœur du débat politique lors de l'élection présidentielle en France. Cette réflexion nous amènera à observer le sens particulier que prend la notion d'identité dans le contexte spécifiquement irlandais de ce début de 21^{ème} siècle, et à questionner la pertinence de modèles hérités de l'émergence des Etats-nations dans la période moderne.

En 1845, Thomas Davis commentait l'évolution remarquable de la situation politique irlandaise dans les dernières décennies du 18^{ème} siècle en affirmant que l'avenir réaliserait la promesse du passé. Davis pensait que le combat pour l'émancipation avait permis de rapprocher les différentes communautés irlandaises et qu'il avait jeté les bases d'une nation, appelée à devenir bientôt réalité politique. Son analyse, en dépit des conflits sectaires qui ont continué à ensanglanter le pays, a trouvé un écho chez bon nombre d'historiens depuis au moins la deuxième moitié du 18^{ème} siècle. En effet, l'extraordinaire effervescence intellectuelle que connaît l'Europe dans cette période contribue à l'émergence de consciences culturelles spécifiques, pré-requis indispensable à l'affirmation d'identités nationales. L'Irlande et ses intellectuels étaient parties prenantes de cette dynamique de découverte, d'affirmation identitaire et d'émancipation culturelle en tant que minorité, et le projet de définition de la spécificité culturelle irlandaise nous intéresse directement en ce qu'il pose les bases sur lesquelles se sont forgées les perceptions de l'identité nationales, et les marqueurs spécifiques à celle-ci.

De fait, l'histoire, ou plutôt l'interprétation de l'histoire puisque la définition d'Hérodote est toujours d'actualité, apparaît aux 18^{ème} et 19^{ème} siècles comme un vecteur culturel dominant en Irlande, qui nourrit un sentiment grandissant d'appartenance incluant progressivement

in *Jouvert, A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Special Issue, Ireland 2000, Vol.4, Issue 1, 1999, p.4.

l'ensemble de la population. Cette interprétation fait ressurgir un passé celtique glorieux, et elle est liée à une revendication d'émancipation politique illustrée dès le 18^{ème} par le pamphlet de Molyneux, et par le parlement de Grattan. Dès la fin du 18^{ème}, les intellectuels irlandais entreprennent donc de donner une image nouvelle de l'Irlande, en rupture avec celle diffusée jusque là par les Anglais, et en s'appuyant sur son passé pré-colonial, voire pré-chrétien, d'affirmer la différence culturelle profonde entre les deux peuples. Très clairement, l'objectif est de montrer que l'Irlande est une nation à part, qui ne peut s'identifier à et encore moins être assimilée par la culture britannique.

Ce projet est rendu possible par le fait qu'il existe dans cette période un intérêt dans toute l'Europe pour l'histoire et pour le passé, période que Michel Foucault situe entre 1750 et 1825. C'est aussi à l'intérieur de ces repères chronologiques que Foucault situe le recul de la pensée classique au profit de la pensée moderne. L'émergence de cette dernière suscite de nombreuses interrogations, l'histoire n'étant plus perçue selon un modèle aristotélicien d'analogies et de succession de représentations qui oscillent entre description et prescription.² Selon Foucault, les événements ne sont que des manifestations du pouvoir qui avance toujours sous de nouveaux et multiples masques, et il a donc cherché à mettre en place une épistémologie du savoir à partir des pratiques du pouvoir qui met le sujet au centre : l'homme moderne cherche sa vérité, la connaissance et la maîtrise de lui-même, à travers la maîtrise du savoir. Si des penseurs comme Habermas ont montré que la théorie développée par Foucault présentait des apories au même titre que les sciences humaines qu'il questionne, il n'en reste pas moins que son apport reste significatif puisque depuis Foucault il est clair que la notion de vérité dépend d'un point de vue propre à chaque période historique. En soulignant l'absence de sens global de l'histoire, Foucault rejoint et complète la pensée d'Henri Bergson, selon laquelle le passé et ses œuvres trouvent un enrichissement en fonction des interprétations qu'en donne l'avenir. Ricoeur et De Certeau, pour leur part, apportent une dimension spatiale à la question, en définissant l'archive comme étant à la fois « un lieu social » et « un lieu physique ».

En Irlande, si les bornes chronologiques de Foucault demandent à être nuancées car l'intérêt pour le passé commence vers le milieu du

2 Ainsi que le note A. Fowler, 'the other great error of neoclassical genre theory was generalization from a narrow and inappropriate canon of genres. Especially, rules drawn from the genres of classical antiquity were assumed to apply to vernacular genres', in *Kinds of Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.27.

18^{ème}, la première moitié du 19^{ème} apparaît comme très prolifique : c'est la période durant laquelle, à travers travail de terrain et publications, les intellectuels irlandais se penchent sur un passé de plus en plus lointain et spatialement bordé puisqu'il recouvre le territoire irlandais. Les observations de ces intellectuels vont trouver des vecteurs de dissémination à travers des journaux comme *The Dublin Penny Journal* ou *The Nation*, et progressivement, en se démocratisant, elles vont faire reculer l'image encore communément véhiculée par des magazines comme *Punch* ou *The Harper's Weekly* d'une Irlande peuplée de sous-hommes réfractaires à la civilisation.

Ce processus de réhabilitation entraîne plusieurs conséquences : en premier lieu, l'histoire et le passé sont les instruments par lesquels l'Irlande se trouve définie, ce qui aura des répercussions importantes en termes de définition de l'identité. Ensuite, au 19^{ème} siècle les intellectuels irlandais se trouvent confrontés à une histoire lacunaire, malgré les progrès que constituent les méthodes modernes d'investigation des sources primaires et l'apport de l'archéologie, et à une opposition entre deux traditions politiques opposées qui conçoivent l'histoire comme un champ de bataille idéologique. La justification par le passé n'échappera en conséquence pas à des interprétations que l'on pourrait qualifier pour le moins d'audacieuses et de scientifiquement fragiles, et qui ont pour objet de servir une approche idéologique qui a largement débordé le 19^{ème} siècle, comme le montre par exemple la publication d'Adamson, *The Cruthin*. En outre, aspect lacunaire et pressions idéologiques contribuent à un embellissement progressif du passé et à la construction d'un âge d'or, donnant naturellement du présent une vision contrastée, voire négative. C'est sur ce mythe, créé en grande partie par les intellectuels, relayé par les artistes, diffusé par la presse, que vont s'appuyer les hommes politiques pour élaborer la nation rêvée. L'histoire permet de justifier l'existence de la nation par ses origines, ses racines, mais son interprétation introduit la tentation de bâtir celle-ci à partir d'une image reconstruite du passé, image qui correspond à la perception idéale du passé qu'il s'agit de retranscrire dans le présent, l'avenir n'étant alors perçu que comme projection de ce dernier. L'interprétation du passé et les mythes qu'elle génère ont donc été, paradoxalement, intimement mêlés à la construction de l'identité nationale d'une Irlande moderne.

Les mouvements politiques des 18^{ème}, 19^{ème} et 20^{ème} siècles, même si leurs objectifs divergent parfois radicalement, considèrent tous la nation irlandaise comme l'émanation d'une communauté culturelle et d'un territoire historique, et non comme l'expression d'une race ou d'une reli-

gion, même si ces facteurs peuvent intervenir. Le discours qu'ils développent sur le concept de nation met en avant l'idéal de l'unité, et considère que cet objectif est indissociable de celui de souveraineté nationale. Aux 18^{ème} et 19^{ème} siècle, ce discours fonctionne comme une utopie protectrice et salvatrice. Selon Paul Ricoeur, l'utopie est la réplique la plus radicale à la fonction intégrative de l'idéologie. L'unité recherchée est ainsi perçue comme la quête du retour à un mythique âge d'or, talisman protégeant l'identité irlandaise d'une absorption totale par l'idéologie britannique dominante, que traduit en termes politiques la création du Royaume Uni en 1800.

Toutefois, cette utopie se trouve confrontée dès le 19^{ème} siècle à l'association de plus en plus répandue de l'identité irlandaise et du catholicisme, sous l'impulsion notamment de Daniel O'Connell, John MacHale et de Paul Cullen, ainsi qu'à la catastrophe de la Grande Famine. Le rêve national doit faire face aux réalités, et notamment aux divisions religieuses et sociales qu'il cherchait à transcender, voire à effacer. Dans son fameux discours « Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation ? », prononcé à la Sorbonne en 1882, Ernest Renan affirmait : « l'oubli et [...] même l'erreur historique sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation. » Ce faisant, il précédait déjà d'une certaine manière les idées de Bergson et Foucault, et proposait un postulat justifiant la création des mythes, toutefois la question de l'oubli est à double tranchant, puisque si le refus d'oublier des origines plus ou moins reconstruites est à l'origine de la fondation de la nation irlandaise, c'est aussi le refus d'une partie de la population protestante de renoncer à d'autres mythes qui lui sont propres qui crée les conditions de la division et de l'échec du projet unitaire nationaliste.

Le postulat de Renan nous renvoie par ailleurs à un autre point important : il rappelle que c'est en grande partie à travers l'influence des constructions conceptuelles françaises que se forment les Etats-nations du 19^{ème} siècle. Mais si le modèle français prétend à l'universalisme des principes philosophiques et moraux qu'il défend (égalité entre les citoyens, droits des individus, [. . .]), il cherche pourtant lui aussi sa légitimité dans un passé reconstruit dont un des principaux hérauts sera bien sûr Jules Michelet. Ainsi nous trouvons inscrit dans le modèle républicain français de l'Etat-nation un paradoxe fondamental : la revendication de la rupture avec le passé s'accompagne d'une légitimation par la reconstruction, voire l'absorption pure et simple de ce même passé. Ainsi la république française, dans sa compétition avec un empire allemand que la France de la révolution et de l'Empire ont contribué à faire émer-

ger, en vient-elle à glorifier le mythe de Vercingétorix et d'un hypothétique peuple gaulois ancêtre du peuple français, alors que l'étymologie même du mot France trahit une autre origine, germanique celle-là, et que la recherche contemporaine (Lambert 1994, Kruta 1982, Cunliffe 1987 [. . .]) a établi qu'il n'y avait pas un peuple gaulois, mais plusieurs nations d'origine celtique liées par une culture commune. De même la république se cherche-t-elle des figures allégoriques héroïques dans un passé berceau de la nation, tels Charlemagne, Jeanne d'Arc ou Richelieu, symboles de la grandeur éternelle de la France, de l'unité de l'Etat et de la défense d'un territoire perçu comme nécessairement concomitant à cet Etat. Ici encore l'opposition à l'Allemagne et le désir de reprendre l'Alsace et la Lorraine perdus en 1870 ont eu une forte influence, mais ces figures emblématiques, en ce qu'elles justifient l'intégrité territoriale -Jeanne d'Arc face aux prétentions anglaises, Charlemagne face à la pression musulmane, Richelieu en symbole de l'autorité de l'Etat central face à des provinces rebelles- montrent la confusion entre revendication d'un message universaliste et ambitions expansionnistes. Les manuels d'histoire de France utilisés dans les écoles sous la quatrième et la cinquième républiques n'hésitaient d'ailleurs pas à présenter la République comme l'héritière d'une tradition de centralisation et d'unification commencée par les rois et continuée par l'Empire, et l'Etat n'a pas hésité à imprimer sur les billets émis par la Banque de France les portraits de Louis XIV, bourreau des protestants, et Napoléon, qui rétablit l'esclavage. Il devient à partir d'un tel constat aisé de comprendre pourquoi la décolonisation a été si douloureuse pour la France, au point d'empêcher encore aujourd'hui le pays d'accepter un examen critique de son passé comme l'a montré la volonté récente du Parlement de légiférer sur 'le rôle positif de la colonisation' ou le discours du candidat Sarkozy sur la République, présentée comme synthèse des idéaux de la Révolution et des ambitions de l'ancien régime lors de la campagne présidentielle en 2007 (propos confirmé ensuite par le même Nicolas Sarkozy, devenu président, lors de son premier voyage officiel au Sénégal au titre de sa fonction en juillet 2007, à l'occasion duquel il a affirmé au nom de l'Etat son refus de toute repentance).

Des références nationalistes dont certaines renvoient à la période historique qualifiée d'Ancien Régime sont déjà dérangeantes en ce qu'elles créent une continuité qui cadre mal avec le discours de la rupture, mais une figure emblématique comme celle de Vercingétorix pose également un sérieux problème puisqu'elle évoque une continuité ethnique qui justifie l'unité nationale. Alors que l'entrée dans la modernité

conduisait à développer un modèle de nation qui se construit à partir de l'adhésion à un système de valeurs communes n'interdisant pas l'existence d'un libre arbitre individuel et au contraire s'en nourrissant, le modèle français réintroduit un déterminisme collectif que justifie un passé nécessairement incontestable.

On peut à ce stade envisager un parallèle entre la France et l'Irlande. La stratégie française, largement développée par la 3^{ème} république, cherche au nom de l'unité rêvée à uniformiser les différentes composantes de la nation en imposant un discours d'homogénéité culturelle et linguistique qui ne laisse quasiment pas de place aux spécificités. Il s'agit de construire l'homme nouveau, et cet homme nouveau parle français où qu'il soit dans l'hexagone -voire dans les colonies-, il doit savoir que ses ancêtres sont les Gaulois, que Clovis est à l'origine de la France -même si à l'époque cette notion n'a pas de sens, même si les Francs sont d'origine germanique, et même si nombre de peuples et de territoires (Bretagne, Savoie, Corse pour ne citer que ceux-là) ne seront rattachés que tardivement au Royaume de France. La situation de l'Irlande au sortir de siècles de colonisation et de conflits avec la couronne d'Angleterre est bien entendu différente, mais il n'en reste pas moins que l'homme nouveau en Irlande, c'est-à-dire le citoyen irlandais et non plus le sujet britannique, doit se conformer à un certain nombre de critères impératifs qui fondent son appartenance nationale. Parmi ceux-ci on trouve l'adhésion à des mythes qui renvoient eux aussi à une perception ethnique de la nation, malgré un discours qui se veut largement inspiré par des idéaux universalistes et dont on retrouve la trame depuis Theobald Wolfe Tone jusqu'à de nombreux passages de *Bunreacht na Eireann*. Si l'Autre en France est celui dont les ancêtres ne sont pas "gaulois", ce qu'on traduit aujourd'hui hypocritement par français pas "de souche", et la xénophobie s'est depuis le 19^{ème} siècle largement nourrie de ce fantasme, en Irlande le repère ethnique a contribué largement à brouiller les cartes et à conduire une partie de la population à ne pas se reconnaître dans ce modèle et à devenir elle-même l'Autre, voire à adopter à son tour un discours ethniciste (un des meilleurs exemples contemporains étant encore une fois les pseudo-recherches d'Adamson sur les *Cruthin* et la notion d'Ulster Scot).

Si on peut envisager le réexamen des mythes fondateurs comme une piste intéressante pour aborder les difficultés traversées actuellement par la France, le propos de cette communication reste l'Irlande, et force est de constater que cette dernière a connu des évolutions idéologiques considérables ces dernières années. En premier lieu, les courants révision-

nistes de la seconde moitié du 20^{ème} siècle ont questionné les mythes et l'interprétation de l'histoire nationale, et ont largement remis en cause la pertinence des conceptions ethniques de la nation. Le Forum pour une Nouvelle Irlande en 1984 a concrétisé l'ouverture du nationalisme irlandais, ouverture qui a fini par s'imposer aux mouvements républicain et unioniste. Ces évolutions idéologiques s'expliquent notamment par la fin de la guerre froide et l'intégration de l'Irlande – et du Royaume-Uni – dans de nouveaux ensembles politico-économiques dont l'Union Européenne et les mouvements transatlantiques d'entreprises et de capitaux sont les expressions les plus évidentes. Cette nouvelle donne a rendu d'autant plus obsolètes les anciens conflits que l'Irlande, autrefois dépendante de l'ancienne métropole coloniale, est aujourd'hui plus riche que celle-ci (O'Toole, 2003), et la conscience de ce renversement a eu l'occasion de s'exprimer sur la scène culturelle irlandaise à travers un vecteur traditionnel comme le théâtre : on peut penser notamment à la pièce *That was then* de Gerry Stembridge. L'Autre, qui était littéralement incarné par l'existence de l'entité séparée du Nord, a changé de statut au moins politiquement, puisque la revendication territoriale a disparu de la constitution de la République : cet Autre, en fait, se situe maintenant ailleurs que dans les relations Nord-Sud, voire ailleurs que dans les relations anglo-irlandaises.

De telles transformations ouvrent un certain nombre de pistes de réflexion. La première consiste à se demander si l'on assiste réellement à un processus de redéfinition de l'identité nationale. Le huis clos et la rivalité entre les deux traditions de l'île, qui avaient conduit au schisme territorial, sont aujourd'hui révolus même s'il reste encore des frontières visibles entre les communautés qui ont été les plus exposées au conflit. Sans doute l'exemple le plus éclatant de la nouvelle donne se trouve-t-il aujourd'hui dans cet exécutif nord-irlandais qui réunit Ian Paisley et Martin McGuinness, chose impensable il y a à peine quelques années. Dans le même temps, les flux migratoires se sont inversés, et si le phénomène d'immigration qu'a déclenché l'émergence du Tigre Celtique est fort récent, il n'en reste pas moins significatif de transformations importantes du tissu social irlandais : il y a aujourd'hui plus de locuteurs polonais que de locuteurs gaéliques en Irlande, alors que le Gaélique demeure officiellement la première langue de la République.

A partir d'un tel constat, la question qui se pose est de savoir si la réponse à cette nouvelle problématique sera un repli sur un discours néo-ethno-national, comme la tentation s'est manifestée en France, ce que dénonçait Jean François Bayard, l'ancien directeur du CERI et de la re-

vue *Critique Internationale* dans *Le Temps* du 30/04/07,³ ou au contraire l'acceptation d'une redéfinition de l'identité nationale fondée sur la diversité culturelle et l'adhésion à un socle minimal de valeurs communes. Des travaux récents, comme la thèse de Rachel Scoazec à Lille 3 par exemple, soutiennent l'idée que ce repli a déjà commencé, à partir de l'observation des inflexions apportées à l'ouverture sur l'extérieur, notamment en matière de politique d'immigration, et aussi de modifications apparentes dans les comportements des citoyens, le rejet initial du traité de Nice pouvant être perçu comme une manifestation de cette méfiance nouvelle.

Ce propos n'a pas pour objet d'étudier dans le détail des points précis comme une étude fine des agressions ou comportements xénophobes qui apporterait un éclairage particulièrement intéressant sur la validité de ce postulat, mais il souhaite mettre en évidence quelques pistes qui suggèrent qu'au contraire un travail de recomposition de l'idée d'identité nationale est à l'œuvre.

En premier lieu, la principale inflexion récente apportée à l'ouverture de la nation sur l'extérieur est probablement l'abrogation du droit constitutionnel à l'octroi automatique de la nationalité à tout enfant né sur le territoire. L'amendement approuvé par référendum en juin 2004 insère la section suivante dans l'article 9 de la constitution : 'une personne née dans l'île d'Irlande, incluant ses îles et ses mers, et qui n'a pas au moment de sa naissance au moins un parent qui est citoyen irlandais ou qui a droit à la nationalité irlandaise, n'a pas droit à la citoyenneté irlandaise à moins que la loi ne le lui permette.' Cette modification est indéniablement d'importance puisqu'elle substitue le droit du sang au droit du sol, toutefois il convient de ne pas se tromper de cible : si cette modi-

3 'Le national libéralisme est au libéralisme ce que le national socialisme est au socialisme : une alouette de libéralisme et un cheval de nationalisme [...] son programme économique et fiscal est libéral. Il le déguise sous le couvert de l'appel à la nation. Il conçoit celle-ci de manière obsidionale et sécuritaire. Il pense que l'immigration met en danger sa pureté. [...] Il choisit donc d'ethniciser la question sociale des banlieues pour se poser en défenseur de "l'identité nationale" et pour protéger ses options économiques libérales de la contestation populaire. La combinaison de l'immigration" et de l'identité nationale" confie une fois de plus à l'Etat la délimitation de la nation, en la confisquant aux citoyens. [...] La démocratie est la séparation de la mémoire et de l'Etat, autant que de l'Eglise et de l'Etat, nous dit le philosophe Olivier Abel. Un ministère de l'immigration et de l'identité nationale, à grand renfort de police, assignerait aux individus leur identité et leur capacité civique en fonction de leur origine', in *Le Temps* du 30/04/07.

fication implique débat, elle ne signifie pas ipso facto rejet de la diversité culturelle. Pour faire simple, on peut dire qu'en 2004 l'Irlande suit l'exemple du *Nationality Act* britannique de 1981, pour autant il n'est pas possible de dire que dans la période qui suit 1981 le Royaume Uni a tourné le dos au multiculturalisme, puisque dans les faits ce concept est même devenu politique officielle. La volonté de contrôler, voire de limiter l'immigration en Irlande relève davantage d'une réponse largement répandue en Europe et dans le monde développé face à un phénomène de transfert massif de populations que d'une volonté délibérée de créer un isolat ethnico-culturel. Que ce phénomène soit lié aux disparités sociales considérables entre pays développés et pays émergents dans un monde globalisé et qu'il provoque des fantasmes de submersion ou d'invasion est une autre histoire, qu'il remette en cause l'ouverture culturelle reste également à prouver. On trouve de nombreuses illustrations du contraire dans des signes extérieurs de changement des habitudes et comportements : la popularité des cuisines étrangères en général et continentales en particulier, le développement du *latte* comme en Australie, autre pays multiculturel, l'explosion de la consommation de vin, semblent un début d'emprunt et d'incorporation de comportements "européens", même si ces transformations touchent essentiellement les classes favorisées et renvoient aussi à ce que Bourdieu qualifiait de signes de reconnaissance sociale entre membres d'une partie de la population, et que Gerry Stembridge a brocardé dans la pièce *That was Then* précédemment citée. Les manifestations de ces transformations sont ainsi commentées et appropriées par les vecteurs culturels que sont le cinéma, le théâtre, la littérature, qui se font écho et soulignent que si les anciens repères tendent à s'effacer au profit de comportements, de normes, d'objets à portée universelle, ce sont dans les interstices que se trouvent les traces de l'irlandité, à côté des traces d'autres identités. Ainsi les nouvelles de Roddy Doyle ont-elles été portées à l'écran par Alan Parker et Stephen Frears. La difficulté à cerner la nationalité de ces productions est elle même éclairante : nouvelles et scénarii écrits par un Irlandais, cinéastes britanniques, acteurs irlandais, productions internationales...et bien des séquences pourraient se dérouler n'importe où en Europe ou plus généralement dans le monde occidental, mais ce sont dans des détails que les films marquent leur appartenance irlandaise : accent des personnages, scène de confession auprès d'un prêtre lui-même contaminé par les influences extérieures, en l'occurrence le jazz, et mise en abyme d'un match de hurling qui passe à la télévision du salon dans *The Snapper*. Debbie Ging et surtout Martin McLoone ont largement montré en quoi le

cinéma irlandais est représentatif à la fois de cette internationalisation des valeurs, de cette volonté de rappeler qu'il existe un ancrage, et des questionnements qu'induit l'oscillation entre les deux pôles.⁴

Sur le plan politique, la *garden party* multiculturelle de la présidente Mary Mac Aleese à sa résidence officielle en 2005 a été un moyen symbolique de montrer l'attachement de la République à la pluralité des cultures, mais il est aussi tout à fait intéressant de constater qu'un parti comme Sinn Fein, qui était le fer de lance de l'opposition à la ratification du traité de Nice, prône la solidarité avec les populations d'origine immigrée dans un manifeste ouvertement multiculturel intitulé *Many Voices – One Country*. Par-delà une rhétorique pseudo-marxiste, on retrouve dans le discours de Sinn Fein cette contradiction fondamentale entre la tentation essentialiste et les influences des Lumières, qui font que ce parti qui se perçoit comme le gardien de la pureté républicaine oscille constamment entre un discours populiste hostile à l'ouverture sous couvert d'anticapitalisme, et une fidélité aux valeurs universelles héritées des Irlandais Unis du 18^{ème} siècle. J.F. Bayard, dans son ouvrage *L'illusion identitaire* publié en 2000, apporte peut-être la clé du problème :

L'analyse des situations politiques qui semblent dominées par des conflits identitaires et qui devraient logiquement corroborer la validité du concept d'identité primordiale, infirme justement la pertinence de ce dernier car [...] elle surestime l'ancienneté et l'unité de chacun des protagonistes en même temps qu'elle occulte les échanges entre ceux-ci[...] [par] l'absorption, l'échange, l'emprunt, la dérivation créative, le transfert de sens, la cristallisation, le syncrétisme, de nouvelles associations de valeur.⁵

En 1827, Goethe déclarait : 'La littérature *nationale*, cela n'a plus aujourd'hui grand sens ; le temps de la littérature *universelle* est venu, et chacun doit aujourd'hui travailler à hâter ce temps.'⁶ La fin du 20^{ème} et le début du 21^{ème} siècles ont probablement contribué à nuancer ce postulat : la littérature et au-delà de celle-ci les nouvelles formes d'expression artistique ont interprété à leur manière l'opposition goe-

4 Voir notamment l'article de Debbie Ging 'Screening the Green: Cinema under the Celtic Tiger', in *Reinventing Ireland*, edited by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, Michael Cronin (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp.177-195, et Martin McLoone, *Irish Film, The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2000).

5 Jean-François Bayard, *L'illusion identitaire* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), p.92.

6 *Conversations de Goethe recueillies par Eckermann*. Traduction d'Emile Délerot (Paris: Charpentier, 1863) 2 t. Conversation du 31 janvier 1827., 1883.

théenne et laissent entrevoir un nouvel espace pour le politique. Alors qu'on aurait pu penser que les pôles de l'identité (nationale) et de l'hybridité (mondiale) constitueraient les composantes d'une nouvelle dialectique postmoderne, il existe peut-être aujourd'hui une alternative dans la synthèse ces deux pôles, synthèse dans laquelle se joue actuellement la recomposition, la recréation de l'identité nationale.

Des écrivains bilingues ou multilingues exilés (Wilde, Beckett, Joyce, qui font pendant à d'autres noms célèbres de la littérature européenne comme Nabokov, Ionesco, Kundera...) ont illustré parfois en une langue autre que leur langue maternelle, ou en deux langues à la fois, l'«extraterritorialité» de la littérature moderne, comme dit Steiner. 'Délógés, expropriés, locataires de la langue adoptée et nomades en elle' (Maurras les appelait 'les phoques', Gide parlait des 'amphibies'), ils ont été les explorateurs, mais aussi les transfuges passant d'un vernaculaire à l'autre, créant ainsi des passages vivifiants. Cette expérience littéraire d'hybridité trouve aujourd'hui un prolongement dans l'expérience vécue par l'ensemble de la population irlandaise. Puisse cette expérience conforter l'analyse de Fintan O'Toole :

La mondialisation n'est pas un processus à sens unique. Elle touche différentes cultures de différentes manières, et chaque culture apporte sa propre contribution à la construction de forces globales. Ceci est particulièrement vrai pour l'Irlande, parce qu'elle a été une société mondialisée bien avant que le terme de mondialisation ne soit inventé. Elle a enfoui des souvenirs, oublié des histoires, ce qui lui offre aujourd'hui un précédent utile pour affronter les réalités nouvelles plutôt que d'être submergée par celles-ci. En se rappelant ces souvenirs et ces histoires, en les réinventant, elle peut peut-être apprendre à surfer sur la vague globale plutôt que de se noyer dans une marée de conformisme et d'amnésie.⁷

7 Fintan O'Toole, *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1998), p.15. Ma traduction.

Jean-Christophe Penet

Nollaig Shona ou Bonne Année? Pratique catholique et pratique politique en Irlande et en France post-/ultra-moderne

Les cieux leur sont-ils tombés sur la tête ? Suprême ironie de l'histoire... En ce monde postmoderne, alors que, débarrassé de sa croyance en l'enfer, le premier ministre, *An Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern, quitte le giron de Dame Catholique pour s'embarquer dans une danse adultère aux bras de sa maîtresse, emmenant l'Irlande dans sa suite, François Mitterrand, grand homme de cette Ve République fièrement laïque, cache la sienne, de peur de provoquer les remontrances de cette même Dame Catholique ! D'ailleurs, son successeur à la présidence de la République, Jacques Chirac, n'a-t-il pas déclaré lors de sa visite au Vatican en janvier 1996 qu'il souhaitait resserrer les « liens millénaires » entre la France et le Vatican, témoigner de la « fidélité » de la France à son « héritage chrétien », et manifester son « respectueux » attachement au pape ? Si de tels propos semblent répondre à la volonté du pape que les hommes au pouvoir ne dirigent pas leur pays simplement comme des hommes *politiques*, mais avant tout comme des hommes *catholiques*,¹ ils n'en demeurent moins pas surprenants de la part du président d'un pays qui, justement, selon une très récente enquête du *Monde des Religions*, n'est plus très catholique...² Quant à l'Irlande, bien que Bertie Ahern réaf-

1 « Les chrétiens, de même que tous les hommes de bonne volonté, sont appelés, en vertu d'un grave devoir de conscience, à ne pas apporter leur collaboration formelle aux pratiques qui, bien qu'admises par la législation civile, sont en opposition avec la Loi de Dieu. (...). Cette coopération ne peut jamais être justifiée en invoquant le respect de la liberté d'autrui, ni en prenant appui sur le fait que la loi civile la prévoit et la requiert: pour les actes que chacun accomplit personnellement, il existe, en effet, une responsabilité morale à laquelle personne ne peut jamais se soustraire et sur laquelle chacun sera jugé par Dieu lui-même » (cf. *Rm* 2, 6; 14, 12) (*Evangelium Vitae*, 1995, §75).

2 « Les catholiques français : qui sont-ils ? », *Le Monde des Religions*, janvier-février 2007, n°21.

firme au détour d'une interview la conception assez « traditionnelle » selon laquelle « *religious belief and practice is not purely a private matter, with no place in public discourse...* », ³ il semble que son histoire récente souligne avant tout une volonté politique constante de séculariser sa constitution et ses institutions. C'est ce dont témoigne, dans le domaine éducatif, l'annonce en ce début d'année de l'ouverture pour septembre 2008 d'une école primaire pilote, une « *Community National School* », dans le Comté de Dublin, qui ne sera aucunement soumise – et c'est une première – au contrôle de l'Eglise catholique. De la sorte, l'Etat irlandais prive l'Eglise de l'un de ses bastions traditionnels de l'enseignement de la pratique catholique : l'école. Ainsi, si la pratique politique veut toujours que, en République d'Irlande, la Présidente de la République, la très catholique Mary McAleese, souhaite « *Nollaig Shona* » à ses compatriotes, et que, en République française, le président Jacques Chirac souhaite la bonne année aux siens, cet usage, d'un côté catholique et de l'autre laïque, n'en cache pas moins une réalité bien plus nuancée en ce qui concerne les relations entre pratique catholique et pratique politique en France et en Irlande. Ce sont les interactions entre ces deux types de pratiques, fondamentalement liées depuis Constantin et qui nous apparaissent pourtant toutes deux fragmentées en ces temps postmodernes, que je vais m'efforcer d'analyser au sein de ce chapitre.

Pour mieux comprendre les interactions possibles entre pratique catholique et pratique politique en France et en Irlande, il semble nécessaire de se pencher plus avant sur ce que Marcel Gauchet nous dit du lien primordial entre la politique et le christianisme qu'il considère – et c'est là toute sa thèse – être à l'origine de « la sortie de la religion ». En effet, dans *Le désenchantement du monde*, le spécialiste du fait religieux montre en quelle mesure la spécificité chrétienne est fondamentale de notre organisation politique, le christianisme ayant permis, de manière assez inattendue, l'essor de la technique et la marche de la démocratie. Alors que les sociétés primitives se caractérisaient par le règne de l'immanence (séparation temporelle et « règne du pur passé », immobilisme), l'émergence de l'Etat fut contemporaine du développement des monothéismes fondés sur la notion de transcendance lors de la période axiale. C'est dans un tel contexte que le christianisme vit le jour, religion de la transcendance et de l'incarnation dans laquelle Dieu est à la fois loin, absent (car appartenant à une autre dimension)

3 *The Irish Times*, 23 février 2006. Citation tirée de Gerry O'Hanlon, "Religion and Society", *Studies*, 95, n°378, pp.141-152, p.141.

mais aussi présent au cœur même de l'histoire humaine, s'étant fait homme. Avec Jésus, il faut donc désormais « (...) se consacrer entièrement, exclusivement aux tâches de salut, mais pas en se détournant de ce monde, pas en s'installant hors de lui, en l'investissant, au contraire ; et en œuvrant à la plénitude de son accomplissement propre ». ⁴ L'interprétation du catholicisme, de cette religion de la médiation qui présuppose la séparation de l'ici-bas et son autonomie par rapport à l'au-delà, pose donc le politique comme fondamentalement nécessaire au salut. Nous comprenons bien en quoi, dès lors, toute pratique catholique se veut intrinsèquement liée à une pratique politique.

L'histoire scella d'ailleurs ce lien primordial entre pratique politique et pratique catholique à travers la personne de l'empereur converti, Constantin, et de son Edit de Milan (314) qui permet à l'Eglise de devenir la religion officielle de l'empire romain et, par conséquent, de s'immiscer profondément et durablement dans ses structures politiques. Avec la réforme grégorienne (fin du XI^e siècle), qui consomme la rupture entre l'Orient et l'Occident, la coïncidence entre pratique politique et pratique catholique est à son apogée, puisque le pape devient rien de moins que le chef suprême d'une Europe dont la foi chrétienne assure l'unité (du moins, jusqu'au Concile de Trente, issu de la Réforme), un chef spirituel auquel princes et monarques doivent, d'ailleurs, obéissance. Il faut attendre les Lumières du XVIII^e siècle, d'inspiration humaniste, et donc chrétienne, et la Révolution française pour que la France, « fille aînée de l'Eglise », entre dans la modernité, c'est-à-dire pour que, de société hétéronome, structurée par la religion, elle se transforme peu à peu, au gré des aléas de l'histoire, en une société autonome, qui se donne sa propre loi et se propose l'autogouvernement idéal. La modernité, que l'on trouve déjà en germes dans les différents mouvements de réforme qui secouèrent l'Europe du XVI^e siècle, se caractérise donc par l'émergence d'une pratique politique tournée vers l'avenir, avec les notions de progrès et de souveraineté nationale, et qui s'oppose à une pratique religieuse tournée vers le passé, vers la tradition. A partir de 1789, en France, l'idéologie républicaine de la « Grande Nation » se construit donc dans l'opposition constante et à la monarchie, et à l'Eglise catholique. Cette lutte s'acheva d'ailleurs par la victoire de la République et le vote d'une loi sur la laïcité, séparant officiellement Eglise et Etat en 1905.

4 Marcel Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du monde, une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p.97.

Cependant, il est important de souligner que, bien qu'il se soit construit en opposition à la l'Eglise catholique, l'idéal républicain français n'est jamais parvenu à dissocier totalement pratique politique et pratique catholique et, encore moins, pratique politique et pratique religieuse. En effet, le fait même que le discours républicain ait usé du mode de l'identification négative comme stratégie d'identification peut être vu comme la preuve même de l'influence (assez paradoxale, il est vrai) de l'idéal catholique sur le développement d'un idéal proprement républicain.⁵ Qui plus est, et comme le montre Jean-Louis Ormières dans *Politique et religions en France*, avec la République, l'Etat a entrepris « (...) d'être le concurrent de l'Eglise en matière d'autorité morale mais d'offrir un modèle d'enchantement substitutif ». ⁶ Au sein de ce véritable « culte de la République » selon l'expression consacrée du sociologue Jean-Paul Willaime, 1789 serait le mythe fondateur, la Déclaration des droits de l'homme le « livre révélé » et l'Etat l'objet du culte remplaçant Dieu, le tout rendu possible par une « christianitude » diffuse dans la culture et les mentalités qui lui impulserait ses caractéristiques.⁷ L'époque moderne, en France, semble donc se caractériser par cette volonté d'affirmer la suprématie de la pratique politique (celle de la République) sur la pratique catholique, ainsi que son indépendance. Pourtant, de par son processus d'identification et les valeurs qu'elle adopte (toutes humanistes, et donc d'origine chrétienne), la pratique politique qu'est l'idéal républicain continue d'être fortement influencée par la pratique religieuse en général, et la pratique catholique en particulier.

En ce qui concerne l'Irlande, sa situation à l'heure de la modernité se veut quelque peu complexe. En effet, durant tout le XIXe siècle l'Irlande semble écouter les sirènes d'un nationalisme tantôt constitutionnel, tantôt révolutionnaire, et qui, bien que protestant à ses origines, se fait de plus en plus synonyme de catholicisme. En effet, le nationalisme irlandais n'avait cesse de revendiquer le droit à l'indépendance de

5 Bernard Lamizet, *Politique et identité* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002), p.113.

6 Jean-Louis Ormières, *Politique et religions en France* (Paris: Edition Complexe, 2002), p.8. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *PRF* suivi du numéro de page.

7 Shmuel Trigano, *Qu'est-ce que la religion ? La transcendance des sociologues* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), p.226. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *QQR?* suivi du numéro de page.

l'Irlande au nom de son présumé glorieux passé gaélique et de sa tradition catholique ancestrale qu'il opposait à l'idée de progrès incarnée par un Royaume-Uni alors en pleine révolution industrielle. Il serait dès lors tentant de considérer que, par ce repli de la société irlandaise du XIXe siècle sur un nationalisme peu à peu étroitement associé au catholicisme, l'Irlande resta en marge de la modernité. Ce serait pourtant là ignorer que, comme nous le rappelle Eric Hobsbawm, l'une des caractéristiques essentielles de la modernité fut, justement, la création de la tradition. En voulant « restaurer » la nation irlandaise au nom de Dieu, le nationalisme, en Irlande, se voulait une pratique plutôt politique que catholique puisque « En volant la Nation au parti du mouvement pour y loger son rêve de restauration, [il] abandonne sans s'en rendre compte l'ordre voulu de Dieu pour le règne de la volonté des hommes ».⁸

Ainsi, si en France la pratique politique actuelle fut créée sur le mode de l'opposition (de l'identification négative) à la pratique catholique, celle de l'Irlande le fut sur le mode de l'identification positive, l'Eglise catholique s'étant vite alliée avec le jeune Etat indépendant. Comme l'a montré Maire Nic Ghiolla Phadraig, « *The church offered the state continuity and stability and in return sought its support for continuity and stability in its own work* ».⁹ A l'opposé de la loi sur la laïcité française, cette congruence entre pratique catholique et pratique politique en Irlande atteignit son zénith en 1937 avec la constitution de de Valera, dans laquelle l'Eglise catholique se vit attribuer une position spéciale. En outre, la pratique catholique se voulait également au service de la pratique irlandaise de la politique extérieure, puisqu'elle devait permettre à l'Etat indépendant de se constituer un « empire spirituel » à même de concurrencer l'empire britannique. Cette symbiose entre pratique politique et pratique catholique aux prémisses de la République d'Irlande permit donc la mise en place de ce que Tom Inglis appelle, en reprenant les termes de Bourdieu, un « habitus catholique » en Irlande, c'est-à-dire d'une société dont les valeurs et les références

8 Marcel Gauchet, « Croyance religieuse et croyance politique », *Le débat*, n°115, mai-août 2001, p.8. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *CRCP* suivi du numéro de page.

9 Maire Nic Ghiolla Phadraig, "The Power of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland", in *Irish Society, Sociological Perspectives*, edited by P.Clancy, S. Drudy and K. Lynch (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1995), pp.593-619, p.609.

étaient largement inspirées de l'éthique catholique.¹⁰ L'Église catholique s'étant arrogé, de la sorte, un monopole moral qui dura pendant presque tout le XXe siècle ou, comme le remarque Tom Inglis : « *In other words, being a good Catholic helped get contracts and jobs, be elected, be educated, be well-known and liked* » (MM, 11). Nous voyons bien en quoi, parce qu'elle légitimait et, de la sorte, permettait de sacraliser les instances dirigeantes, la pratique catholique fut intimement liée à la pratique politique à l'époque moderne, que la dernière se soit créée contre la première (cas de la France où les élites catholiques représentaient un contre-pouvoir pour les élites républicaines) ou en alliance avec elle (cas de l'Irlande). Si elles eurent, donc, une attitude différente vis-à-vis de la pratique catholique lors de la création de leur idéal républicain à l'époque moderne, l'Irlande commença cependant à rejoindre la France sur le chemin de la laïcisation à l'heure de la postmodernité.

Depuis les années soixante, d'après Marcel Gauchet :

... les croyants sont à ce point entrés dans l'espace du pluralisme et de l'autonomie démocratique, la croyance est devenue à ce point une foi individuelle que son sens s'en trouve changé. Le lien entre croyance religieuse et ordre social se défait. La foi ne dit rien, en tant que telle, de l'organisation sociale et politique. Son objet est d'un autre ordre. Le fidèle le plus fervent n'a plus l'idée de se réclamer d'un ordre chrétien ou a fortiori d'une politique de Dieu, tant il est persuadé que c'est aux hommes qu'il appartient d'édifier la cité qui les unit par leurs seuls moyens. (CRCP, 9)

Il s'agit là, ni plus ni moins, du processus de laïcisation des sociétés postmodernes, c'est à dire ce processus en fonction duquel l'Etat non seulement se sépare des Eglises, mais les prive également de toutes sortes de fonctions qu'elles assumaient autrefois et de leur pouvoir de coercition normative. A vrai dire, la laïcisation semble également avoir été en-

10 « By habitus, Bourdieu means a lasting, general and adaptable way of thinking and acting in conformity with a systematic view of the world which, in our case, is that produced by the Catholic Church. In other words, the role of the Church has been to get Irish people to read automatically, understand and react to situations in which they find themselves in a way which conforms to Church teaching. ». Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly. The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. (Dublin : UCD Press, [1987] 1998), p.11. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par MM suivi du numéro de page.

couragée, dans une certaine mesure, par Rome puisque, dans son effort de s'adapter au monde moderne lors du Concile de Vatican II (1962), l'Eglise catholique accepta la notion de liberté religieuse posée conformément aux droits de l'homme avec la constitution *Gaudium et spes* sur la légitime autonomie des réalités terrestres. Une position qui se retrouva renforcée dès 1971 avec la publication de la lettre apostolique *Octogesima Adveniens*, dans laquelle – et c'est là toute la nouveauté de cette lettre – le pape soulignait la légitimité du pluralisme, y compris dans le domaine politique, puisqu'elle se voulait l'expression de la liberté de choix pour le chrétien.¹¹

En fait, il semble que cette volonté, émanant de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique, d'une plus grande indépendance de la pratique politique vis-à-vis de la pratique catholique ne faisait qu'entériner dans la théorie un phénomène déjà bien ancré dans la pratique, le légitimant de la sorte. Ainsi, alors que l'épiscopat français avait déjà cessé, dans les années 1960, toute intervention dans les campagnes électorales, ne désignant plus de « bons » candidats, il fallut attendre 1972 pour que, encouragé par *Octogesima Adveniens*, il officialise ce changement au cours de son assemblée plénière à Lourdes dans un rapport intitulé *Politique et foi. Pour une pratique catholique de la politique*. De la même manière, il semblait temps, à l'époque, que la hiérarchie catholique reconnaisse officiellement l'indépendance de la pratique politique vis-à-vis de la pratique catholique dans ce pays qui, non seulement, s'était « dépayonné » (et où l'Eglise avait donc perdu l'un de ses appuis les plus anciens), mais qui, de surcroît, était en proie à une véritable désaffection de ses cadres comme de ses fidèles (*PRF*, 198).

C'est dans un tel contexte d'une Eglise de France perdant peu à peu prise sur la société, affaiblie, et gagnée à la nouvelle théologie de Vatican II, que la Loi Veil (1975) légalisant l'IVG put être votée sans trop de protestations de la part du clergé français. Ainsi, le désinvestissement politique de l'Eglise et l'effondrement de la pratique religieuse ont abouti au cours des années suivantes à un épuisement tangible du lien entre religion et politique. D'après Ormières : « L'attitude neutraliste de l'Eglise n'a certes pas été sans conséquences sur l'évolution politique d'une partie des catholiques qui a peu à peu rejoint le Parti socialiste et permis la victoire de François Mitterrand lors de l'élection présidentielle de

11 Jan Grootaers, *De Vatican II à Jean-Paul II: le grand tournant de l'Eglise catholique* (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1981), p.106.

1981 ». ¹² Fort de cette victoire, les politiques font alors passer toute une série de mesures allant toutes dans le sens d'un éloignement de la pratique catholique. C'est ainsi que, en 1999, fut voté le Pacte Civil de Solidarité (PaCS) qui donne un statut juridique aux couples non mariés mais vivant maritalement, dont les homosexuels. Une loi qui semble assez peu probable en Irlande dans un futur proche ! En effet, si l'Irlande a bien suivi la France sur le chemin de la laïcisation, elle a entamé son parcours avec un peu de retard... Bien que la possibilité d'un changement soit présente dès les années 1960, il faut attendre les années 1970 pour que les premiers signes se fassent faiblement sentir, et les années 1980 pour qu'ils deviennent franchement perceptibles à travers les premières grandes réformes institutionnelles. Ainsi, dès les années 1960, la nouvelle façon de penser la pratique catholique voulue par Vatican II se retrouve appliquée à la lettre – bien qu'à contrecœur – par un clergé et une population qui partagent une vision franchement légaliste de la religion.

Comme le montre Louise Fuller dans *Irish Catholicism Since 1950*, un tel changement en matière de pratique catholique ne pouvait qu'entraîner un changement de la pratique politique, et c'est en ce sens que, dès 1972, le gouvernement Lynch mit fin par voie de référendum au statut spécial de l'Eglise catholique en Irlande ancré dans la constitution. Si une telle mesure fut justifiée par la nécessité de composer avec les Protestants du Nord, elle peut tout de même être également vue comme une réponse à la volonté de plus d'œcuménisme de la part de l'Eglise avec Vatican II. Ce ne serait donc qu'en 1973, lors de la polémique concernant le projet de loi de Mary Robinson sur l'avortement, que l'on assista pour la première fois, en Irlande, à un éloignement d'une attitude dogmatique de la part de la hiérarchie qui déclara que « *the state was not obliged to defend by legislation the moral teaching of the Catholic Church* ». ¹³ Si le projet de loi ne dépassa pas le stade de projet, les choses se précipitèrent à partir de 1981 avec l'arrivée au pouvoir de la coalition Fine Gael/Labour conduite par un FitzGerald qui ne cache pas son projet de réformer les institutions de l'Irlande dans le sens d'une plus

12 Jean-Louis Ormières, *L'Europe désenchantée. La fin de l'Europe chrétienne ? France, Belgique, Italie, Espagne, Portugal* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p.83. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par ED suivi du numéro de page.

13 James H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1970* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p.7.

grande autonomie vis-à-vis de l'Église. Les années 1980 et 1990 furent donc marquées par toute une série de mesures en Irlande visant à rendre légaux des interdits catholiques : vote d'une loi dite de « Planning Familial » légalisant la vente de produits contraceptifs, référendums sur l'avortement (1983, 1992 : cas X ; 2002) et sur le divorce (1986, 1995 : le oui l'emporte). Selon Louise Fuller, le dernier référendum sur l'avortement (2002), où le non l'emporta de très peu, atteste d'une baisse de soutien de la population pour l'Église catholique et marque, de la sorte, « (...) *the Final stage in the dismantling of legislative and constitutional support for the Catholic ethos in Ireland* ». ¹⁴ Une Irlande, d'ailleurs, où, comme cela avait été le cas en France dès les années 1970, la pratique avait commencé à baisser sérieusement à partir des années 1990.

Ainsi, toutes ces mesures (qu'elles aient été prises ou que les législateurs continuent d'essayer de les faire passer) sont la preuve tangible de l'avènement, en France d'abord puis, plus récemment, en Irlande, d'un univers laïque au sein duquel la pratique du catholicisme ne structure plus l'espace politique et cesse d'influencer, de manière générale, le choix des lois que ces pays s'imposent à eux-mêmes par le biais de la politique, c'est-à-dire la définition de leur idéal républicain. Il nous faut malgré tout, à ce stade, nuancer nos propos. En effet, si laïcisation il y a, bien qu'à des stades différents, en France et en Irlande, celle-ci n'est en rien absolue et, si la religion se privatise, perdant, comme l'a montré Tom Inglis pour l'Irlande, de sa « domination symbolique », elle ne disparaît pas totalement de la scène publique (*MM*, 208). Aussi, dans une interview accordée au *Irish Times* en février 2006, le Taoiseach Bertie Ahern affirme-t-il que « (...) *religious belief and practice is not purely a private matter, with no place in public discourse* », et il ajoute même que sa foi influence sa vision des affaires publiques. Une déclaration qui trouve d'ailleurs des échos chez certains candidats aux présidentielles de 2007, en France, comme Nicolas Sarkozy (désormais président) qui, dans un entretien assez récent pour l'hebdomadaire *La Vie* (avril 2007), déclare que : « Les religions ont leur mot à dire dans les grands débats de société. Parfois je regrette qu'elles ne le fassent pas assez ».

14 Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: the Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002), pp.87. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *IC* suivi du numéro de page.

Il est donc possible de constater, en dépit du phénomène de laïcisation, la persistance d'un lien entre pratique politique et pratique catholique. En effet, si l'Eglise veut bien renoncer à faire de la politique, elle n'est pas pour autant décidée à disparaître de la scène publique, ni à renoncer, d'ailleurs, à rappeler l'obligation morale des praticiens de la politique qu'elle compte dans ses rangs. Aussi, dans le cadre de son programme de nouvelle évangélisation lancé en 1983, et destiné à réaffirmer les valeurs et l'identité catholique, Jean-Paul II entend-il lutter contre les « mentalités permissives » en demandant, entre autres, à ses prélats de retrouver sur la scène publique une partie de l'autorité perdue auprès de leurs fidèles (*ED*, 257). L'Eglise ne se contenterait donc pas de faire valoir sa norme, son autorité morale ; elle voudrait également l'imposer à l'ensemble de la société. Ou, comme le constate Jean-Louis Ormières :

Ni les tentatives du Saint-Siège et des Eglises pour imposer que la Constitution européenne fasse référence de manière explicite aux origines et au patrimoine des chrétiens, ni le recueillement de Jean-Paul II devant la tombe du professeur Lejeune ou sa participation au 1 500^e anniversaire de Clovis ne permettent de penser que l'Eglise est prête à se conformer au nouveau rôle que les sociétés pluralistes contemporaines lui confèrent. (*ED*, 258).

Quel est d'ailleurs ce nouveau rôle dont parle Ormières ? Il s'agit de celui de conseiller moral, auquel elle peut prétendre de par l'importance de la tradition catholique dans ces sociétés, qu'il faut écouter, entre autres conseillers, mais qu'il ne faut pas nécessairement suivre. Un rôle qui lui vient donc, en France du moins, de la nécessité de la référence au christianisme comme « lieu commun » de la société française. Il semblerait en ce sens que la laïcité de l'Etat républicain ait été, en France, peu à peu infléchie dans un sens qui a fait sa part à une sorte d'identité chrétienne supposée commune à tous les Français, identité dont l'évocation semble curieusement liée à la fonction présidentielle : on rappelle, au moins pendant la campagne électorale, qu'on a reçu une sérieuse éducation chrétienne, ensuite on assiste à une messe dominicale et, pour finir, on est enterré solennellement à Notre-Dame de Paris. C'est en ce sens que l'enterrement à la fois officiel et religieux de François Mitterrand put être vu par d'aucuns comme une remise en question de la

laïcité.¹⁵ Il est en tout cas la manifestation que ce que Marcel Gauchet nomme « l'idéologie », ou croyance politique, ressent essentiellement et durablement l'empreinte de la religion qui l'a imprégnée de ses usages et de son esprit pendant longtemps.

Ainsi, au niveau des dépositaires du pouvoir démocratique, les votants, il est possible de constater que la pratique catholique continue de guider, dans une certaine mesure, la pratique politique. C'est en tout cas ce que nous enseigne l'analyse des votes des présidentielles de 1981 où « François Mitterrand obtient un score de 30% chez les catholiques pratiquants réguliers, de 42% chez les pratiquants irréguliers, de 55% chez les non-pratiquants et de 64% chez les sans religion ».¹⁶ De manière plus récente, l'exemple le plus flagrant du lien persistant entre pratique catholique et pratique politique est sans aucun doute celui de l'Union Démocratique Française du catholique pratiquant avéré François Bayrou : d'après Julien Fretel, dans ce parti centriste, dont l'éthique semble assez proche de l'éthique catholique, 95% des personnes interrogées se déclarent catholiques, mais, plus encore, 60% d'entre elles reconnaissent qu'elles sont catholiques pratiquants – « réguliers » –, voire « actifs » dans leurs paroisses.¹⁷ Si, en accord avec le sociologue Pierre Bréchon dans son article sur « Valeurs de gauche, valeurs de droite et identité religieuse en Europe » qui étudie l'enquête sur les valeurs européennes de 1999, on considère, en ce qui concerne la politique, que ces valeurs « dépassent les frontières nationales » et ont « un contenu semblable dans tous les pays », la droite étant plus « traditionnelle en matière morale, familiale et sexuelle » que la gauche et que, en ce qui concerne la religion, « (...) l'identité religieuse doit être prise comme un continuum qui va des attitudes antireligieuses jusqu'à l'adoption d'un système construit de croyances et de pratiques », on comprend alors aisément que pour l'Europe des 15 à cette même date « (...) les personnes qui ont une faible identité religieuse sont plus souvent à gauche, alors qu'à l'inverse une identité religieuse forte s'accompagne souvent d'une orientation politique de droite », bien que

15 Danièle Hervieu-Léger et Isabelle. Saint-Martin (dir.), *La modernité rituelle: rites politiques et religieux des sociétés modernes*. (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2004), p.57.

16 Patrick Michel, *Religion et démocratie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), p.299.

17 Julien Fretel, « Quand les catholiques vont au parti. De la constitution d'une illusion paradoxale et du passage à l'acte chez les « militants » de l'UDF. » (*Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 2004/2005, 155, pp.76-81), p.78.

de nombreuses nuances existent.¹⁸ Ceci permettrait donc en partie de comprendre pourquoi il n'existe pas de grande tradition de gauche en Irlande, où ce sont les deux grands partis de centre droit Fine Gael et Fianna Fáil qui se partagent le pouvoir, avec une prédominance dernièrement de Fianna Fáil (d'ailleurs à nouveau confirmée par les élections législatives de mai 2007), parti fondé par de Valera et qui, malgré une libéralisation de ses valeurs dans les vingt dernières années, demeure un peu plus à droite et traditionaliste sur l'échiquier politique. Ceci semblerait donc indiquer que la pratique catholique des Irlandais, qui continuent de se rendre à l'eucharistie plus fréquemment que leurs voisins européens, soit toujours assez significativement influencée par leur pratique catholique. Ou, comme le remarque Timothy Whyte :

(...) the Republic of Ireland remains an overwhelmingly Catholic State in terms of religious identification and the power of the Church remains remarkably strong in terms of its influence on many political matters. This would seem to contradict the conventional wisdom that industrial high culture severs the historical link between faith and dominant national Church.¹⁹

Ainsi, que ce soit en France ou en Irlande, si la pratique catholique n'est plus revendiquée et ne participe plus, comme par le passé, à l'acquisition d'un capital moral pour les « bons catholiques », elle demeure tout de même l'un des fondements de l'identité des individus qu'elle concerne, quelle que soit leur place sur le continuum, et qui influe sur le vote des électeurs et sur la législation prise par les hommes politiques. C'est d'ailleurs le poids de la pratique catholique qui permet d'expliquer que, en France, l'euthanasie et le mariage homosexuel soient toujours interdits (alors que ce n'est plus le cas dans certains pays qui ne sont pas de pure tradition catholique, comme la Hollande par exemple) et que, en Irlande, la reconnaissance civile de l'union homosexuelle et l'avortement le soient également (ce qui témoigne d'une tradition catholique qui, pour les raisons historiques que nous avons vues, se veut encore plus forte qu'en France). Ceci amène dès lors à se demander si la

18 Paul Bréchon, « Valeurs de gauche, valeurs de droite et identités religieuses en Europe », in *Revue française de sociologie*, 47.4 (oct.-déc. 2006), pp.724-754, p.726.

19 Timothy J. White, 'Decoupling Catholic and National Identity: Secularisation Theories in the Irish Context' in Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), pp.238-257, p.250.

France et l'Irlande ont réellement été, comme on l'entend souvent, sécularisées.

Si l'on s'en tient à la définition classique de la sécularisation telle qu'elle fut proposée par Peter Berger, à savoir « (...) le processus par lequel des secteurs de la société et de la culture sont soustraits à l'autorité des institutions et de symboles religieux », ²⁰ il semble que ce ne soit pas entièrement le cas. Mais si, à l'aide de la sociologie des religions, nous réfutons cette acception de la sécularisation quelque peu restrictive, comme le fit Berger lui-même en 1996 en parlant de « désécularisation », ²¹ et nous la redéfinissons, à l'instar de Danièle Hervieu-Léger, non plus comme « la disparition de la religion confrontée à la rationalité », mais comme « le processus de recomposition permanente des forces de la religion dans la société », ²² ce qui implique que le religieux subsiste et se diffuse partout, il est alors possible de considérer que sécularisation il y a eu. Ceci est d'ailleurs caractéristique de ce que Hervieu-Léger nomme l'« ultramodernité ». En effet, le terme postmodernité, selon elle, postule que le temps de la modernité, c'est-à-dire de « la mise en place des grandes séparations qui assurent aux différentes activités humaines leur autonomie propre, par rapport notamment à des normes religieuses s'imposant à l'ensemble de la société », ²³ est dépassé. Or, il n'en est rien. La sociologue considère, en effet, que :

En la plaçant dans la souveraineté du peuple, la modernité a arraché à Dieu la source légitime de l'autorité politique. En conférant à l'individu un pouvoir de plus en plus étendu de légitimation autonome des autorités qu'il reconnaît comme telles, les sociétés de l'ultramodernité parachèvent l'arrachement du principe d'autorité à cette transcendance, fût-elle celle de « l'ordre de la nature ». Cette mutation des régimes de l'autorité « tenue d'en haut », dans la

20 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements in a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p.174.

21 « L'idée selon laquelle nous vivons dans un monde sécularisé est fautive. Le monde d'aujourd'hui, avec quelques exceptions sur lesquelles je reviendrai, est aussi furieusement religieux qu'il a toujours été ; il l'est même davantage dans certains endroits » Peter Berger, *Le réenchantement du monde* (Paris : Bayard, 2001), p.15.

22 Danièle Hervieu-Léger et Françoise Champion, *Vers un nouveau christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), p.140.

23 Danièle Hervieu-Léger. *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde ?* (Paris: Bayard, 2003), p.85. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *CFM?* suivi du numéro de page.

famille, dans les écoles ou dans l'entreprise, ne s'arrête évidemment pas aux frontières de l'Eglise (*CFM?*, 88).

Le maintien de l'influence de leur pratique (ou non-pratique) catholique sur leur pratique (ou non-pratique) politique, malgré l'effondrement de l'Eglise en tant qu'institution, serait donc, dans une certaine mesure, le signe de la sécularisation, comprise comme un redéploiement de la religion, dans une France et une Irlande ultramoderne, où toute forme d'autorité est en crise face à des individus avides d'autodéfinition, quitte à multiplier les identités fragmentées.²⁴

Un dernier constat s'impose : en ce monde ultramoderne, l'effondrement de la pratique catholique s'accompagne dans les deux pays d'un effondrement de la pratique politique.²⁵ Phénomène religieux à l'origine, le désenchantement du monde s'étend également, comme le souligne Marcel Gauchet, au domaine politique.²⁶ En fait, si ces deux types de pratique sont en crise, c'est sûrement parce qu'elle sont toutes les deux des « figures du croire », pour reprendre l'expression de Hervieu-Léger, c'est-à-dire « un dispositif idéologique, pratique et symbolique par lequel est constituée, entretenue, développée et contrôlée la conscience (individuelle et collective) de l'appartenance à une lignée croyante particulière », soit « l'expression d'un croire, la mémoire d'une continuité, la référence légitimatrice à une version autorisée de cette mémoire, c'est-à-dire à une tradition ».²⁷ Et c'est justement ce croire et cette tradition qui sont en crise dans l'ère de « l'après-devoir » qui est la nôtre selon Gilles Lipovetsky, ou encore dans cette époque, d'après Michel Patrick, d'un processus global de désenchantement, « (...) affectant maintenant le politique, après que le politique a été requis de

24 « La récession économique et la continuation des principales mutations de la société française – familles « recomposées », affaiblissement des grandes institutions (Eglise, armée, école) et du sentiment d'appartenance à une classe sociale ; recul des agriculteurs et des ouvriers – ont accentué le processus d'atomisation individuelle. Il s'ensuit un refus de plus en plus affirmé de l'individu de se laisser encadrer ou embrigader. Cette mutation peut expliquer le malaise que traverse la politique. » (*PRF*, 218).

25 En ce qui concerne la France : « Au cours des trois dernières législatives (1988, 1993 et 1997), le taux d'abstention est resté supérieur à 30%. Cette démobilisation de l'électorat gagne aussi les scrutins municipaux (...) : de 27,2% en 1989 (...), ce taux s'est encore élevé à 30,6% en 1995 et à 32,7% en 2001. » (*PRF*, 219).

26 Marcel Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p.108.

27 Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1993), p.58.

participer au désenchantement religieux du monde ». ²⁸ En France et en Irlande, où le désenchantement religieux a pour l'essentiel eu lieu, nous sommes donc dans le « post-traditionnel » de l'ultramodernité (et non dans le postmoderne), or ce post-traditionnel « (...) se joue sur le mode du télescopage entre des formes dépassées mais toujours naissantes et pas encore stabilisées » (*P&R*, 111).

Ainsi, la crise du croire serait celle de l'articulation entre croire individuel et croire commun, et serait de la sorte une crise du croire ensemble, qui nous amène à poser la question de l'institution au centre de notre réflexion. Dans l'ère du relatif qui est la nôtre, l'Eglise (que ce soit celle de France ou d'Irlande) est incapable de développer une parole autonome : le problème de l'Eglise est donc un problème de discours qui, à défaut de convaincre, entraîne un effondrement de la pratique. De la même manière, à défaut d'un discours convaincant, la pratique politique s'amenuise dans ces démocraties que sont la France et l'Irlande. Contrairement à l'homme moderne croyant aux discours, l'homme ultramodern, au croire individualisé, recherche une pratique directe, immédiate (et donc débarrassée de la médiation du discours) de sa foi et de la politique. Pratiques catholiques et pratiques politiques (désormais plurielles) deviennent donc plus fragmentées (on ne compte pas moins de 12 candidats aux élections présidentielles de 2007 en France) et plus immédiates (avec, en ce qui concerne la pratique religieuse, la multiplication des célébrations sans prêtres)...

Mais il nous faut à nouveau rappeler – et c'est là l'intérêt de cette étude comparative – certaines différences entre les deux pays. Si l'Irlande a vécu une sécularisation accélérée depuis les années 1980, rattrapant de la sorte le reste des pays européens, elle ne semble pas pour autant – pour des raisons historiques évidentes – les avoir rattrapés totalement. Ainsi, si la France, selon Jean Paul Willaime, est en période d'« hypersécularisation », sécularisant, en questionnant le « magistère éducatif », ses écoles jadis laïcisées, ²⁹ l'Irlande, quant à elle, n'a pas

28 Patrick Michel, *Politique et religion, la grande mutation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), p.18). Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage au sein de cette édition sera signalée entre parenthèses par *P&R* suivi du numéro de page.

29 « L'école, après avoir été marquée par un changement de tutelle du religieux au séculier (sécularisation-transfert de l'éducation qui passe de l'Eglise à l'Etat) subit aujourd'hui une seconde phase de sécularisation où le magistère éducatif se trouve lui-même questionné. C'est en ce sens que nous disons qu'après avoir été laïcisée en passant sous la responsabilité de l'Etat-nation, l'école est aujourd'hui

encore dépassé le stade de laïcisation de ses écoles. En France, le fait même que l'idéal républicain se soit formé contre la pratique catholique a permis non seulement une laïcisation en règle du pays, mais aussi de remplacer peu à peu le discours catholique par un discours républicain qui fait que le président ne souhaite plus un joyeux Noël à ses concitoyens mais bonne année et qui, bien que désormais en crise dans notre ère « ultramoderne », se maintient grâce à une forte tradition philosophique et sociologique. En Irlande, en revanche, on peut parler d'un télescopage entre une laïcisation récemment entamée et toujours d'actualité, due à l'histoire personnelle de l'île, et une hypersécularisation lancinante, qui la rattache à son époque et qui, peut-être, lui vient en partie de son nouveau destin commun avec les autres pays du continent européen en proie à la sécularisation. A défaut d'une forte tradition du discours républicain, la crise du discours catholique laissera-t-elle l'Irlande sans foi ni voix ?

sécularisée. » Jean-Paul Willaime, *Europe et religion : les enjeux du XXe siècle* (Paris : Fayard, 2004), p.75.

Eóin Flannery

The Other Within: Migration, Postcolonialism and Cinema in France and Ireland

Its [diasporic art] *raison d'être* lies in refracting the multiplicities of consciousness and multiple and often contradictory relationships within which diasporic subjectivity arises. By its nature it is always partial and fragmentary since, at another level of discourse, epistemological, it is seeking the impossible; to give form to a 'not', a neither here nor there, a neither one 'thing' nor another.¹

I

In a recent special supplement *The Irish Times* provided a popular historical rendition of the events and personalities surrounding the 'Flight of the Earls' from Rathmullan on Lough Swilly in September 1607.² On the front page, below a sizeable reproduction of Thomas Ryan's painting, *The Flight of the Earls*, Fintan O'Toole reflected on the historiographical and memorial implications and legacies of the flight. This most romanticised of Irish emigrations has long since been evacuated of its material import and remains firmly freighted with the unquestionable gravity of myth. Within the national, and nationalist, imagination the flight represents a further, perhaps even foundational, instance of social and cultural displacement. And it is most important for the symbolism of that displacement, rather than the actuality of the expelled parties. As O'Toole suggests:

The narrative that was forged by Irish priests and writers from their continental exile in the decades after the flight may have been [...] a sanitised tale of saintly Catholics fighting a noble but doomed struggle against Protestant heresy. But it was a great story and the Flight gave it an almost artistic con-

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- 1 Liam Greenslade, "A Complex Kind of Joy: Art Diaspora Identity", in *Contexts: Arts and Practice in Ireland*, 4.4, (2005), p.45.
 - 2 This eight page supplement appeared on 1 May 2007 and was produced in association with the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, and the Department of the Taoiseach.

clusion that enhanced its power. In a culture that would be characterised by emigration, the moment of the departure and the deaths in exile resonated with ordinary experience and made complex, haughty men like O'Neill into mythic figures who could embody a defeated nation.³

One of the virtues of recalling the flight is that it reminds us that the Irish have always been an international people; travel, movement, whether coerced or voluntary, are consistent features of the country's historical narratives. But it also alerts us to the politics of narrative representation; the flight is securely ensconced in the chapbook of Irish nationalist narratives and in this sense it is a narrative of dispossession, of historical wrong and nefarious usurpation. Furthermore, the actual displacement of the earls, and of many millions more through later emigration, is matched by the nationalist feeling of displacement at home. The absence of self-governance, indeed the prolonged inability to gain access to political, economic and social participation did engender a sense of internal exile in Ireland. Consolation, then, is tangible in the legion narratives of the nationalist canon, as writing, or more accurately narrative, becomes a homeland within which the displaced culture can find some form of communal anchorage.

And in many ways the flight is one of these national narratives that both recounts physical exile, but also facilitates the construction of a consoling nationalist narrative at home. In contemporary terms, flight is now a phenomenon that Ireland experiences in reverse; the country is the now recipient of migrants (both temporary and long term); asylum seekers and political refugees. The myths of historical exile and displacement and the emotional strains of more recent Irish emigrant experiences are now replaced by the challenges of accommodating large incoming communities from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. It is now a question of how we narrate the present and the future as much as it is about contesting embedded historical narratives. Likewise, resident emigrant populations within former imperial powers such as France have become increasingly disillusioned by what is perceived as decades of social and political disenfranchisement, and this has led to intermittent outbreaks of extreme violence. What both of these differing contexts present are opportunities to interrogate the narrative, representational codes of western, European culture. There is no dispute that both political and verbal representations

3 Fintan O'Toole, "Why it matters 400 years later", in *The Irish Times: Special Supplement*, 1 May 2007, p.1.

have been, and continue to be deployed as agents of social, political and economic marginalisation and surveillance. Alternative forms of narrative consolation for tremulous governing authorities in times of perceived threat. What this chapter proposes is to address the ways in which recent visual narratives in European cinema have dealt with the issues cited thus far: migrancy, control, nationality, artistic form and narrative subversion.

II

Edward Said invokes just such transitory populations in his efforts to imagine radical, material alternatives to the sedentary, and malignant, political agendas of global neo-imperialism. Said's own biographical experience as an exiled Palestinian intellectual both modulates, and legitimates, his reflections on the disruptive capacities of the migrant mind. Drawing on the work of the French urban sociologist Paul Virilio, Said suggests that 'the modernist project of liberating language/speech [...] has a parallel in the liberation of critical spaces – hospitals, universities, theatres, factories, churches, empty buildings; in both, the fundamental transgressive act is to inhabit the normally uninhabited.' He continues, further extracting from Virilio, 'As examples, Virilio cites the cases of people whose current status is the consequence either of decolonization (migrant workers, refugees, *Gastarbeiter*), or of major demographic and political shifts (Blacks, immigrants, urban squatters, students, popular insurrections, et cetera).' Ultimately, for Said, such population flows, which quicken political and economic consciousness, 'constitute a real alternative to the authority of the state.'⁴ Said divines a dynamic counter-hegemonic animus in the movement of migrant peoples; they are possessive of what he terms 'exilic energies', profoundly disruptive and creative voltages that contradict the centralising reification of the modern, capitalist nation-state. The migrant figure, who persists between languages and between homelands, throws into relief the contingency of all historical and political narratives of possession, origins and authorship. Clearly, such politically charged actions are not always conscious affronts to incumbent political authorities. But rather the very existences of incommensurable mobile populations, who refuse to, cannot, or partially participate in the micro-theatrics of capitalist modernity, furnish affective rebukes to the complacent digestion of modernity's self-validating narratives.

4 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p.395.

Cultural hybridity, liminality, diasporic consciousness, nomadism, migrancy, exile, each of these terms and conditions has become differentially privileged in recent theoretical challenges to the stasis of realist representation and its ossified cultural politics. Dispersal, migrant consciousness and motile communities of knowledge now additionally assail the very architecture of reason, thought and language, challenged in earlier decades by poststructuralism, postmodernism and feminism. Under such reconfigured imaginative and geopolitical boundaries '[t]hought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. Here reason runs the risk of opening out on to the world, of finding itself in a passage without a reassuring foundation or finality: a passage open to the changing skies of existence and terrestrial illumination.'⁵ The liberating political possibilities of such physical and imaginative travel are further canvassed by James Clifford, who argues that: '[i]f we rethink culture [...] in terms of travel, then the organic, naturalizing bias of culture – seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, dies [...] is questioned. Constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view.'⁶ In light of such theoretical debate, the very forms through which identities are narrated, produced and confined have come under intense scrutiny. This chapter, then, will provide close textual/formal readings of two recent films, *Hidden*,⁷ which concerns itself with the representational legacies of French colonialism, and *Zulu 9*,⁸ which highlights the complex transhistorical correspondences and hypocrisies of the Irish colonial experience.

III

In an interview in 1991, Said elaborates further on his conception of the creative discontinuity of the exilic condition. Referring to the discordant musical form of counterpoint, he suggests that the mobile situation of the exile is an adjacent phenomenon: 'If you're in exile [...] you always bear within yourself a recollection of what you've left behind and what you can remember, and you play it against the current experience.'

5 Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.4.

6 James Clifford, "Travelling Cultures", in *Cultural Studies* edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.101.

7 *Hidden (Caché)* (2005). Directed by Michael Haneke, 117 mins, Les Films du Losange.

8 *Zulu 9*, (2001). Directed by Alan Gilsonan, 11 mins, Yellow Asylum Films.

So There is necessarily that sense of counterpoint.’ Herein Said captures the residual, and resistant, cultural freight of the exilic consciousness; moving within and between cultures the exile embodies a sense of critical recalcitrance, and also a measure of egalitarian invention, to the easy certainties of political and cultural ‘homophony.’ Crucially, Said is alluding to the question of form, the manner, and extent, to which dominant cultural narrative forms are vulnerable to critical interrogation and expansion by previously excised authorial voices. And, indeed, his subsequent and most famous elaboration on the presence of contrapuntal energies, in *Culture and Imperialism*, divines such formal complexity within the canonical artistic texts of European culture. While narrative is on the one hand a stay against death, it is also a simplification, and in that way is also an agent of death for marginal or unrepresentable cultural constituencies. It is this sense in which form can be appropriated and can resound with the voices of exilic, peripheral or submerged populations that is crucial to the ensuing discussion. In reading the relative cinematic engagements with the issues of migration, asylum and postcolonial politics, I want to explore the idea recently floated by Luke Gibbons that artistic forms are possessive of memories; art forms house within them memories of oppression, violence and resistance.⁹ But, as we well know, history is not confined to the public sphere – it insinuates itself into the intimate topographies of the private. Perhaps this is especially true of postcolonial societies, in which recent historical wounds and traumas remain unstaunched. In *Hidden*, history is personal; it is never confined to the abstract, or the textual – it is lived, carceral, violent and infective.

In particular, I will approach the film *Hidden* with this notion in mind; a film in which the politics of representational forms are crucial to the narrative momentum and dramatic tension. In this film we see the dramatic contest within visual art itself – the visual fetish of realism is ambushed repeatedly by the disjunctive intrusions of the fragmentary, and obscure, narrative codes of surveillance. Within the complacent, consoling narrative codes of the naturalistic there is the irritant of anti-realist representation; the scenes of surveillance, together with the scenes from childhood function as incendiary violations from the past, from the unconscious and from silences excluded from the semiotic economy of narrative realism. Chafing against the confirmatory frame of realism’s accepted mimetic contours, Michael Haneke plants the contradictory ener-

9 Gibbons explored this idea in a panel discussion at the *Association of Art Historians* Conference in Belfast in April 2007.

gies of a postmodern visual medium. *Hidden* is an exceedingly rich film from a critical perspective, from a thematic standpoint it touches on urgent social issues such as race, class, gender, imperialism, capital and the family. Likewise it is provocative in the ways that it confronts the textual, both verbal and visual, forms through which modern lives are mediated, and the narrative prisms through which personal and national historical narratives are refracted. Haneke articulated such sentiments in a recent interview:

My films are intended as polemical statements against the American ‘barrel down’ cinema and its dis-empowerment of the spectator. They are an appeal for a cinema of insistent questions instead of false (because too quick) answers, for clarifying distance in place of violating closeness, for provocation and dialogue instead of consumption and consensus.¹⁰

Hidden is reflective of a broader postmodern turn in contemporary cinema, and perhaps in modern art forms, which are entirely self-aware. In such art works there is a knowingness to the creative artefact, a concentration on the surface, on form and on the techniques of representation. Such anatomised forms typically centre on thematic material such as social atomisation, violence, trauma, cynicism, or a loss of faith in society’s norms. The formal narrative structures, then, bear the freight of a disillusioned, withdrawn or subversive authorial intent. In this film we see an intertextual confection of artistic genres; *Hidden* is part detective story, part psychological drama, part autobiography and part historical narrative. And again this formal mixing is symptomatic of the promiscuous dissolution of generic borders in contemporary art, a trend that, I suppose, is mirrored in the increasing obsolescence of national and continental geographical borders. In a typically playful postmodern strategy, Haneke’s film draws attention to itself as a constructed visual text through the use of surveillance footage within the central plot-line. Such matters as visual surveillance and the increasingly intrusive nature of visual culture in today’s world are consistent concerns of Haneke’s art.

In *Hidden*, the central dramatic tension revolves around the life of a minor television celebrity, Georges, played by Daniel Auteuil, whose life is disrupted by the delivery of disturbing, and increasing intimate and

10 Cited by Will Norman, “The Images of Conscience”, in *The Oxonian Review of Books*, 5.2, Spring (2006), <http://www.oxonianreview.org/issues/5-2/5-2norman.html>

threatening, footage from his past and from his contemporary life. As the film unfolds the primary suspect is revealed as a former childhood friend of Georges, an Algerian, Majid. Majid represents a guilty, and long-forgotten, secret from Georges' childhood; the orphaned Majid was supposed to be adopted by Georges' parents, but motivated by childish jealousy, Georges' manipulated his parents into reversing their decision and Majid spent his remaining minor years in state care. At this level, then, the film is an allegorisation of France's and the West's protracted history of exploitation and manipulation of the populations of the Third World. And in some way Haneke's film constitutes a visual conjugation of Rushdie's famous aphorism that the empire writes back. Indeed, in consistently adverting to the fabricated nature of visual narration, the film is preoccupied with the idea of authorship; it probes the links between authority, narrative, representation and authorship. Moreover, as Will Norman suggests in an insightful review of the film:

Hidden presents a bigger story than its plot suggests. Implicit in its tragic narrative is France's brutal colonial history – a ghost that refuses to be exorcised as the rioting in its deprived and forgotten *banlieues* only last year demonstrated. More than this, though, the filmgoers of any nation which has colonised and oppressed, which has exploited and looked down upon its immigrants, will feel the quiet power of this movie. I say quiet, because the real stories in *Hidden* are the ones happening off camera, in the minds of its viewers.¹¹

Anchoring a slick, and in many ways self-regarding and oleaginous, arts/book review television programme, Georges embodies the publicly articulated face of the liberal bourgeois conscience, one that cheerleads history's progress towards the future and salves itself with a commitment to tolerance and pluralism. In his hands the mechanics of the visual, the form offered by visual technology, retail intellectual debate, ideational complexity and liberal values. The skilfully edited and smartly produced programme is an agent of social confirmation, as well as an index of Georges' personal success. His profession offers him a level of comfortable familiarity with the visual; it allows him a manipulable visual version of himself, as he presents and edits the final drafts of his broadcasts. The unwelcome intrusion of clandestine, and uncontrollable, visual versions of himself, his family, and crucially, his past usurps his authorial

11 Norman, "The Images of Conscience."

autonomy. The visual texts of Georges' life – his TV programme, the visual record of the family unit (memorably theorised by Pierre Bourdieu as the family portrait) – and the visual archives of his past are now infested by a contrary, and anonymous, authorship. In these ways memory, history are being re-written, likewise the present, the marital status quo, Georges' version of himself are also being assaulted.

The marginalised, postcolonial disenfranchised bear the repressions of capitalist imperial modernity in their bodies, their representational codes and their movement. In this sense the mobile bodies of the impoverished, of the disfigured, of the policed, of the indentured are globalised, perhaps postmodern, resurrections of the gothic. They are victims of history's legion violences – epistemic, ethnic, economic, political and representational. With their revenant emergence, with the seizure of representational space, or through their re-coding of that space and of received narratives and its forms, they attempt to rewrite the memories of those forms. Such populations mark the limits of modernity's spate. They embody its guilty conscience, yet they are burdened with its menial tasks and its frustrations. They are the exposure of its self-validating myths; they are the discordant voices, the disturbing images of neglected histories, and in Georges' case repressed memories.

While the delivery of the intimate and increasingly violent surveillance footage is perhaps the most arresting of the visual devices in the film, other visual registers are also co-opted by Haneke in his critique of the naturalising tendencies of visual complacency. The stalker from Georges' past also includes child-like drawings with his video packages – these drawings are bloody images featuring a beheaded chicken and a child coughing up blood. In fact, blood is a recurring motif in the film, suggestive of the hematological contagion of paranoia, guilt, violence which are infective of the French body politic, and civil bourgeois society at large. The childish images, then, are firstly the insertion of non-elite artistic visual medium within the traditionally artistic borders of the cinematic. But they also remind the viewer that memories, both pleasant and unpleasant, active and repressed, are visually recalled. We do not remember in words as easily, effectively or as frequently as we do in images; such remembered images bear much more traumatic freight and are more permanently etched on the mind than those of the verbal text.

At one point in the film the action cuts to the living room of Georges' home, but the action on-screen is a *Euronews* report on the Iraqi occupation. The news story is recounting the details of a gubernatorial appointment of the Italian diplomat Barbara Contini to the Iraqi province of

Nasiriyah. The sequence is a heavily layered allusion to the politics of colonial occupation, the complicity of the news media in the representation of such topographies and the normalisation of violence affected by such visual narratives. Clearly, Haneke is once more weaving a politicised intertextual gesture into the broader narrative framework of the film. But during the report the entire aural canvass of the film becomes deliberately cluttered. At this point we can make out Contini responding to the media in Italian, at the same time the *Euronews* report is translating these comments into French, and we, the viewers, are facilitated through English subtitles. Herein Haneke achieves a discordant Babelian effect, through which the evasive language of diplomacy, which conceals within itself the barbarism of its military accomplices, is exposed as a saturating, almost universal, language of political narration. But again, it is at the level of form, that the author, Haneke, challenges the authorial privilege of such linguistic manoeuvres.

Haneke's text is a political and aesthetic affront to the complacent digestion of confirmatory images that pervades Western culture. In this respect Susan Sontag's work is crucial; she concludes: 'A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetise the injuries of class, race and sex.'¹² *Hidden* reacts to such passivity by drawing its viewers into the speculative dynamics of its narrative; the film activates the implicit class-based and racial preconceptions of the audience and attempts to discommodate the viewer through its extended sequences of ominous, and ambiguous, silence. The film, then, is a self-interrogating text, in the sense that it sees the irony of exposing the limits of visual culture through those very mechanisms. And its achievement is to never offer resolution or consolation; Haneke's film ends but the issues and the questions it raises do not.

IV

Alan Gilsean reflected on the eerie similarity between the drama of his short 11 minute film *Zulu 9* and the discovery of nine dead refugees, together with five survivors, in the back of a container in Wexford the previous week, as reported in an article in *The Irish Times* in mid-December 2001. Gilsean's comments chime with Haneke's concern with the increasing trend in contemporary culture in which the representational boundaries between the so-called real and the fictional become

12 Cited in John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1980), p.59.

blurred. But they also, without any sense of hubris, suggest the capacity of art to retain a proleptic, or at least cautionary, role in society. To be flippant for a moment, it recalls the Wildean notion of life imitating art. Gilsenan's work has consistently engaged with what might be called the material reality of Irish society and its histories – a sociology graduate, Gilsenan's cinematic and documentary work, including the recent RTE broadcast *The Asylum*, interrogate presiding political and moral complacency.

The title of the film is taken from police slang; 'Zulu 9' is a code word for explosive material, the connotations of which clearly extend beyond the confines of Gilsenan's short feature – reaching out to contemporary attitudes to migration and the polyglot fabric of modern Irish society. It also invokes the tribal designation of the South African Zulu people, a people that became mythologized as fearsome and savage in the popular colonial imagination. The nine in the title refers to the number of victims in the film: eight die and one survives. The plot is familiar to us at this stage, a truck driver, Kevin Montford, transporting an illegal cargo of toxic chemicals along the N11 hears noises from the container, including what sounds like a gun-shot, and instead of stopping there and then, he contacts the police via radio and they eventually arrive to investigate the disturbance. And while the viewer readily anticipates the likely outcome of the police search, the combined visual and aural effects, together with the unrelenting pace of the action, including hand-held footage and a layered soundtrack, the denouement retains its harrowing import.

Referring to the style of *Zulu 9* Gilsenan admits that:

We tried to make *Zulu 9* as authentic as possible. We shot it as Sky News would shoot it. The crew wore flak jackets or fireman's outfits, so from the helicopter, filming above, it would look real. We tried to embrace reality without understanding its significance. We filmed on a then-unfinished section of the M50 motorway. Above the set was a bridge carrying commuters home from work. Many pulled over to peer from the bridge at the action below. Idly curious.¹³

The film, then, represents a highly self-conscious text – one that actively interacts with, imitates and, thereby, implicates the dynamics of voyeuristic media coverage. For the 'idly curious' commuter the fictive action

13 Alan Gilsenan, "Gruesome Imitation of Life", in *The Irish Times*, 14 December 2001.

of *Zulu 9* assumes the form of the real, it simulates the ‘reality’ of police pursuit and media surveillance that are elements of our narrative comprehension of the material world. These individuals, then, are implicated in their own deception, but not only that: there is a sense in which they are also implicated in the fictive/real action of human trafficking and the tragedies that unfold in these practices too. And still further, the pitiful sight of a desperate people arriving in an alien country as economic migrants resounds in the Irish context, as it calls to mind the emaciated mobile bodies of Irish famine emigrants. Thus these inquisitive commuters, engaged in their own circuitous drama of daily movement, are witness to the recrudescence in modern form of their nation’s traumatic histories.

Gilsenan’s film, then, is akin to *Hidden* at the level of form, as it harnesses the visually arresting medium of surveillance footage as a narrative alternative to naturalistic representation. In *Hidden* the contraband footage delivered to Georges’ home violates the integrity of the domestic and quarries the discarded recesses of his past – in other words this deconstruction of surveillance footage enforces a discomfiting intimacy. In *Zulu 9* the employment of a helicopter and hand-held cameras captures the panicked, visceral and emotive footage from police chases, now a common feature of popular television. In a sense the urgency fomented by the choice of visual forms mirrors the desperation of the trucker’s illicit human cargo. The disjointed visual narrative is married to a verbal/aural text; we hear the truck driver listening to a cassette reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once – somewhere – far away – in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one’s past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence.

Not only is this an obvious instance of the playful intertextuality of postmodern culture, but it is clearly a signal of the political message of the film: a deliberate reference to the excesses of colonialism. But equally, it suggests that these migrants have been deceived. The success of Western cultural forms in advertising the prosperity, the freedoms, the opportunities and the superiority of the west to developing populations has tempted these people and others like them to risk their lives in order

to sample this lifestyle. But in a sense, such alluring Eurocentric narratives are also illusions. Likewise the value systems that buttress such narratives, equality, pluralism, tolerance, etc... are equally hollow.

For these traumatised, and/or deceased migrants the journey represents a post-industrial descent into a 'heart of darkness.' Again the Irish context recalls a further detail of Irish emigrant history; these deathly containers are postmodern versions of nineteenth century coffin ships bearing a morbid cargo – a cargo that has invested its security and prospects in politico-cultural conjuncture that has occasioned the very journey they are undertaking. Indeed it is telling that such containers are so frequently deployed as vehicles for such clandestine travel; in effect what we witness is the further reification of the human body as a transportable commodity. But, of course, their journey as commodity anticipates the future that, potentially, awaits them as functions of a market-oriented social system.

The viscid darkness of the container constitutes a liminal zone of transition for the migrant; escaping an undesirable past life and now propelled towards an uncertain and unknowable future. As Cheryl Herr recently suggested in a paper on *Zulu 9* in Vancouver: 'The person in the dark enclosure, the imprisoning container, is caught up in an apparatus of transport; the person becomes an epiphenomenon of the smuggling mechanism.'¹⁴ The migrant is evacuated from history; they exist in interstitial narrative territory through which their burdensome bodies are smuggled within the heavily policed borders of the future. According to Herr: 'stripped of engagement with a fully social environment [...] human cargo occupies a certain kind of limit situation in our understanding of what it is to be in-the-world.' In other words, the migrant undergoes a form of identitarian breakdown during the transportation; the journey, the destination, the languages, the geography and the prospects for migrants are unpredictable and potentially volatile, if not life-threatening. They are physically and culturally adrift, beyond the limits of their familiar cultural and social coordinates.

At 11 minutes in length *Zulu 9* is a brief penetrating meditation on the doubled nature of Irish historical experience. The film embodies Gibbons' point cited above that artistic forms are possessive of memories; in

14 Cheryl Herr, "Thinking Inside the Box", Irish Genres Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver 14 March 2005. Version published as "Images of Migration in Irish Film: Thinking Inside the Box", in *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism*, edited by Brian McIllroy (London: Routledge, 2007).

its formal structuring Gilsenan's film harbours the after-effects of Ireland's protracted colonial and postcolonial histories. It gestures towards our complicity with these migrants both as historical fellow migrants and as contemporary western consumers. Gilsenan's film does, however, extend beyond the limits of contemporary human trafficking; the narrative effectively explodes the historical continuum with its allusions to past historical suffering in an Irish and international colonial context; its indictment of those currently involved in the exploitation of the vulnerable and the impoverished; and its implicit request for ethical vigilance, a matter all the more pertinent to a postcolonial society such as Ireland.

V

Mobility is both a condition of possibility, as well as being a disruptive, potentially traumatic experience; and declensions of such movements: exile, migrancy, hybridity and liminality are, as has been well documented, part of the poststructuralist, postmodernist and, later, adjacent postcolonialist interrogation of tendentious identitarian absolutes. Critics such as Bhabha, Said, Chambers, Hall and Appiah have differentially urged the enabling potential of defiantly fluid individual and communal identities, what Bhabha terms 'unhomeliness',¹⁵ or 'differential communality.'¹⁶ Writing in 1982 in an essay entitled 'Imaginary Homelands', Salman Rushdie reflected on the nature of exile or expatriation for the contemporary writer. While mobility granted newly calibrated angles of creative perception for the artist, perhaps even distant clarity of vision, it, nevertheless, is leavened by a feeling of loss. Yet the weight of that loss is itself countered by the imaginative impulse, the creative yields that unfold and that seek to compensate for the uncertainty of alienation and exile:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in

15 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.9.

16 Bhabha, cited in Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, p.14.

short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.¹⁷

This sense of absence is, perhaps, a symptom of all travel – once one has departed from ‘home’, it can never be experienced as entirely the same place again. Both the traveller and the sanctuary place alter with mobility, distance and absence, or as Stuart Hall suggests with reference to the migrant’s condition: ‘Migration is a one way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to.’¹⁸ But Hall’s point also alludes to the fact that mobility is not merely a traversing of space/time between fixed locations. Such anchored positions are founded on historically naturalised versions of individual and communal identity – brands of identity that are no longer theoretically sustainable or beyond political challenge.

Aggregating Rushdie’s concern with the mechanics of fictive remembrance and Hall’s notion of identitarian fluidity, even contingency, we are not only alerted to the enabling trajectories of liminality, provisionality and transition, but we must accept these cultural and political conditions as the most urgent in the contemporary global world. These combined insights are relevant to the manner in, and rapidity with, which both political and artistic languages do and must change to accommodate new social conjunctures. Experiences of loss, displacement, exile, trauma, alienation and marginality, as the two texts under scrutiny in this chapter suggest, have the capacity to interrogate and to expand the formal limits of dominant representational mechanisms – developments which do not necessarily sit easily with those at the ‘centre.’ So while artistic migrancy and critical travel have a discordant creative yield, it also has the effect of displacing the narrative certainties of dominant constituencies and of provoking urgent ethical responses from the viewer. It is this critical issue that is central to the disturbing narrative structures of both *Hidden* and *Zulu 9*; the viewer is challenged, they are offered a looking-glass through which they can confront conscious and submerged prejudices. Representation is power and in producing such dissonant texts, Haneke and Gilsean expose the inequitable power structures of dominant representational modes. Both filmmakers seem to coincide with

17 Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands”, in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism: 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p.10.

18 Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves”, in *Identity: The Real Me. Post-modernism and the Question of Identity* edited by Lisa Appiganesi (London, ICA Documents 6, ICA, 1987), p.44.

Robert Stam's conclusion in his essay, "Eurocentrism, Polycentrism, and Multicultural Pedagogy: Film and the Quincentennial", wherein he argues:

The powerful are not accustomed to being relativized; most of the world's representations are tailored to the measure of their narcissism. Thus a sudden relativization by a less flattering perspective is experienced as shock, an outrage...Subaltern groups, in contrast, are not only historically accustomed to being relativized, they also display a highly relativizing, even irreverent attitude towards the dominant culture.¹⁹

19 Robert Stam, "Eurocentrism, Polycentrism, and Multicultural Pedagogy: Film and the Quincentennial", in *Late Imperial Culture*, edited by Roman De La Campa, E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p.119.

Eamon Maher

A Message from France: Jean Sullivan and post-Catholic Ireland

The French priest-writer, Jean Sullivan (1913-1980), suffers from an unforgivable neglect in his country of birth for reasons that are difficult to decipher. He published his first book, *Le Voyage intérieur*, in 1958 and some commentators reasonably expected that he would continue the genre of the 'Roman Catholique', which experienced a flowering in France at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Such an ambition was very far from Sullivan's thoughts, however. He wrote at a time of great spiritual upheaval, particularly acute in France in the wake of the Second World War, a period when existentialism, structuralism, postmodernism, the Nouveau Roman, were all calling into question traditional interpretations of long-held beliefs in relation to society, the Church, philosophy and literature. It is strange to think that a priest-writer like Sullivan should be so in tune with this ambience, which he did not hold to be at variance with his priestly vocation.

In their Introduction to *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli note the difficulties one encounters in defining exactly what postmodernism means. They put forward the following tentative definition: 'Postmodernism denotes a set of philosophical propositions that are centred around the rejection of Realist epistemology and of the Enlightenment project that builds upon that epistemology.'¹ Their postmodernism would include: denial of the transparency of language, impossibility of the accessing the real, and rejection of the so-called grand narratives that underpinned and legitimised modernity. Writing some 40 years earlier than the date this study was published, Sullivan was quite comfortable working within such a framework, even though some of its tenets would be seen as undermining the religious project. The more one reads Sullivan, in fact, the more one has the impression that his writings reflect a deep distrust of all thought systems and institutions, all

1 Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (eds), *Postmodernism: the Key Figures* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p.xii.

grand narratives, and in this regard he would appear to be reasonably at one with the postmodernist project. Nevertheless, he manages to retain hope in a revitalised religion, stripped of the trappings of power and closer to the thinking of the founder of the Christian enterprise. He explained his particular vocation in *Petite littérature individuelle*:

L'explication dans l'ordre spirituel est toujours une forme d'annexion et de domination qui fait barrage et par là rassure. Le langage synthétique, parole parlante non déjà parlée, c'est-à-dire le langage 'poétique' au sens original du mot, pauvre en communication immédiate parce qu'il plonge ses racines dans l'expérience intime, peut seul ouvrir à une rencontre dans les profondeurs de l'existence.²

From these lines, it can be seen that Sullivan had no intention of being an apologist for the dogmatic Catholic Church. Rather, he saw his literary task as an attempt to continue the Word, with all its calls for uprooting and rebirth. Also, through the poetic quality of his style, he sought to imbue his work with the 'breath' of the Gospel – the word 'souffle' recurs in an almost obsessive manner in his books. Such an evolution took a while to come into being. At the beginning of his literary career, he admitted to being primarily concerned with producing polished prose.³ With time, however, he found that his style was becoming fragmented and the syntax disjointed, as he attempted to describe characters who were undergoing intense mystical transformation. In his spiritual Journal, *Matinales*, he acknowledged his fascination with social misfits and outcasts who, although living at a remove from organised religion, still appeared to enjoy a rich inner life:

Du coup je me sens proche des marginaux, clochards, drogués, tous les tor-dus, comme des hommes de l'establishment' vidés de substance spirituelle et qui commencent à le savoir. Ils vivent parmi les tours d'acier, de verre, acci-

2 *Petite Littérature Individuelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p.128.

3 In an interview shortly before his death, for example, he said: 'Quand j'ai commencé à écrire, chez Gallimard, j'étais un paysan qui a découvert tard la culture [...] Et quand j'ai commencé à écrire [...] forcément je n'avais qu'un modèle, le modèle que j'avais devant moi, c'était l'écrivain, le grand écrivain, plus ou moins notable, qui est porté par les siens, par les catholiques s'il est catholique, par les protestants ou par d'autres, par les athées, par d'importants militants.. Donc j'ai choisi d'exceller, je me suis appliqué à faire beau.' "Interview avec Alain Saury", in *Rencontres avec Jean Sullivan 1*, 1985, pp.13-21, p.13.

dents, cimetières de la folie des routes, sex-shops, tous les détritux de la défaite humaine. Mais en même temps je m'aperçois avec stupeur que le chant d'une liberté circule à travers tout, une joie paradoxale plus forte que les blessures de ma médiocrité, l'Espérance que ceux qui la portent disent reconnaître.⁴

Tramps, drug addicts, prostitutes, rebel priests, people with psychological problems, Sullivan's novels are populated with this type of marginal individual. In his view, it is when one moves away from the centre of society, dominated by appearances and the pursuit of social and economic advancement, that one has the best opportunity to truly 'see' the world and reassess one's role in it.

In this chapter, I shall confine the focus to one of Sullivan's novels, *Mais il y a la mer* (1964), and some of his prose essays in an attempt to illustrate their relevance to the spiritual climate of postmodern Ireland. In *Mais il y a la mer* we come across a fairly typical Sulivanian depiction, the Cardinal Ramon Rimaz whose career mirrors closely that of many Irish clerical figures. *Mais il y a la mer* won the Grand Prix Catholique de Littérature and the Prix de l'Académie de Bretagne on its publication in 1964, which proves that it was acknowledged as having literary merit as well as being acceptable to the Church establishment. It relates the conversion of a cardinal living in an unspecified Spanish-speaking country, who in his retirement villa beside the sea begins a re-evaluation of his life as a priest, bishop and cardinal. With time to reflect on his career, he realises that all his so-called triumphs amounted to very little indeed. As he comments to himself towards the beginning of the novel: 'Incroyable. Tout s'est passé hors de moi. J'étais en représentation.'⁵ Through a series of imagined flashbacks, conversations with people who knew him, like his niece Merché and his personal assistant, Campos, the narrator begins to flesh out the events that resulted in Ramon's fateful decision at the end of the novel to take the place of a political detainee, Monolo Vargas, who escapes dressed in the cardinal's clothes. What brought about this dramatic decision? Why would a prince of the Church put himself in jeopardy for the sake of a misfit whom he barely knew?

Certain hints of a conversion are given in the course of the novel. For example, the cardinal is disgusted one day as he flicks through press cuttings and photographs capturing various stages of his career. How

4 *Matinales* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p.207, hereafter cited as *Ml*.

5 *Mais il y a la mer* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.35, hereafter cited as *M*.

could he have not known how far he had strayed from his initial vocation of serving the poor, in order to become a functionary? He is ashamed of his vanity, his worldliness, when he sees himself through others' eyes. The narrator interprets his feelings thus: 'Tu mentais, Ramon, tu mentais et tu n'en savais rien' (*M*, 58). In a fury, he turns to his housekeeper and tells her to burn the photos, symbols of a futile past. Change becomes possible as soon as Ramon realises that he was suffering from what he describes as 'la pétrification', a numbing of the soul. After the incident with the photos, and to everyone's amazement, he begins to dress in a fisherman's clothes and to avoid all social gatherings. During the rare sermons he gives in the church of the local village of Noria, his words are halting and enigmatic: 'Ainsi butait-il sur les mots. De longs silences ponctuèrent sa méditation. Les silences parlaient, car on avait le sentiment qu'il luttait avec et contre quelqu'un' (*M*, 234).

By facilitating Monolo's escape from the local prison and taking his place in a prison cell, Ramon Rimaz felt he was following a genuine Christian path for the first time in years. He was distancing himself from the political and ecclesiastical authorities in order to experience the fate of the poor and the marginalized with whom he wished once more to be associated. When asked what could have inspired such a gesture, his niece Merché replies: 'Je crois, pour rien. Il était au-delà de toute démonstration. Quelqu'un avait besoin de lui. Il y est allé naïvement... A moins que ...' (*M*, 275). As can be seen from the conjunction 'à moins que', followed by the 'trois points' or ellipses that are associated with this strange and mysterious decision, doubt surrounds the motivation of a gesture that goes beyond the scope of human understanding. On the threshold of death, Ramon Rimaz came to the conclusion that his life as a priest had been at variance with the Gospel message of love. After all: 'La puissance et ses prestiges, Jésus les avait crucifiés.' (*M*, 258) That being the case, how could his representatives on earth cover themselves in the same vestiges of power and prestige?

Mais il y a la mer is a book that asks many questions of the Catholic Church and in that sense it is somewhat surprising that it won a prestigious prize from a jury representing its establishment. It is true that Sullivan's friend, Daniel-Rops, a member of the Académie Française, had a major role in the decision. Nevertheless, one wonders how carefully the jury read the book, which is designed to make many Catholics feel decidedly uncomfortable. It condemns those who opt to make a career out of Christianity, those who prefer comfort to poverty, power to humility. It proclaims that, in order to survive, the Catholic Church will need to re-

discover the humility of its origins. In his memoir, *Devance tout adieu* (1966), Sullivan would castigate himself for having accepted the Grand Prix catholique, which brought with it a certain amount of celebrity and financial security, when the hero of his book pointedly turned his back on this type of self-glorification. The memoir provides a stinging attack on the so-called literary experts who make appreciative sounds about talented writers without ever going beyond the surface of what they put down on paper:

Where are the prophets, I ask myself? In truth, literature has become a career for many writers. There is an obvious contradiction between pursuing a career and living out the paradoxes of the Gospel. I keep on waiting to hear a breath, a voice of rebellion. Instead, all we're treated to is writers playing around with political or moral ideas and telling us about their pious aspirations. All I hear are well-rounded, balanced truths that will not upset the apple cart.⁶

He is no way considered himself exempt from this stinging critique. He acknowledged that his main reason for accepting the Grand Prix catholique was a desire to enhance his literary status in France:

When I began writing, I did not know that the literary world was composed of little cliques and idols; I was perfectly content to be ignorant of this fact in the beginning. I very quickly came to realise, however, the difficulty my marginal position posed if I wanted to enlarge my readership. The Catholic press totally ignored me, the non-Catholic press paid scarcely any attention to books that dealt with themes that were obviously Christian. (*A*, 85-6)

But, of course, recognition by the Establishment comes at a price and, as he was being photographed after the awards ceremony, Sullivan felt like an 'impostor', someone who had prostituted himself for the sake of literary recognition. I have always maintained that he was too hard on himself in this regard. After all, the novel is not in any way a pious or edifying account. The cardinal is someone who at the end of the book is shunned by both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Nevertheless, the discomfort would always remain with Sullivan who, following the ceremony, walked around Paris for a long time and made the resolution 'that I would keep my distance from the literary establishment by adopting the

⁶ *Anticipate Every Goodbye* (Dublin: Veritas, 2000), p.82. Translation by Eamon Maher of *Devance tout adieu*, hereafter cited as *A*.

means that would allow me to talk freely' (A, 89). This resolution was realised with his subsequent novels, which are characterised by a breakdown of traditional punctuation and syntax, and by characters who are more radically marginal than Cardinal Ramon Rimaz.

All of which brings us finally to the link with Ireland. Sullivan formulated a radical type of Christianity that attempted to come to grips with a much-changed religious climate in post-World War II France. It can be argued that the spiritual climate of France at the end of the 1970s closely resembles that which characterises third-millennium Ireland: a massive fall-off in vocations to the priesthood and religious life; an all-pervasive and aggressive secularism that is being fuelled by certain interest groups for many different reasons; and a despair that is being engendered by the void created by the demise of a once extremely powerful Catholic Church. We are entering a 'postmodern' phase when it comes to religious practice in particular. The Church of Ireland bishop, Dr. Richard Clarke, in a book of essays on post-Catholic Ireland, maintains that 'the Irish Church is now discredited and moribund in the eyes of many detached onlookers.' The reasons for this, in Clarke's view, are manifold, but two of the main ingredients are pride and complacency, qualities that Ramon Rimaz detected in himself. Clarke writes: 'The primary offence of the whole church, and certainly not the Roman Catholic tradition alone, was to believe that it was somehow above and beyond accountability, perhaps even an accountability to God himself.'⁷ The sociologist, Tom Inglis, in his ground breaking study *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (1987), argued that in the past adherence to the Catholic Church helped people 'attain and maintain power, particularly economic possessions, occupational positions and social prestige.'⁸ This access to power, more than the Church's teachings and practices, or its role in signalling a path to salvation, was what primarily motivated Irish people to appear outwardly religious. As soon as the 'social capital' that was associated with being pious or spiritual began to dissipate, so too did the levels of religious practice, according to Inglis. In a chapter dedicated to this issue in a book of essays entitled *Engaging Modernity* (2003), Inglis remarked how far Ireland had travelled down the path of secularism. Religion had become 'a private affair', he noted:

7 Richard Clarke, *A Whisper of God: Essays on Post-Catholic Ireland and the Christian Future* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), p.27.

8 Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p.6.

'It is becoming more of an end in itself rather than a means towards other ends, that is material or worldly success. This is what is at the heart of Ireland becoming a secular society.'⁹

In the following chapter from the same book, Catherine Maignant remarked the succeeding development: 'Following the recent collapse of the Irish Church as a credible institution, Ireland appears to have warmed to the ideals of the post-modern world, which were latent since the 1960s, but only reached their full expression in the past ten years.'¹⁰ Maignant quotes the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli who maintained that what characterises post-modern times is 'the irrepressible growth of multiplicity in all its forms.' Organised religion depends on unity and stability to flourish, and the narcissism that permeates post-modern societies, the tendency to seek one's salvation through the channel of self-examination, is particularly injurious to Church as a communal institution. The message of Christianity is undoubtedly better received by people who enjoy fewer material possessions and who are reassured by the knowledge that one of the obligations of a Christian is to accept one's suffering with equanimity. A lack of education will also lend itself more readily to a blind acceptance of decrees handed down by priests and religious. With free education, the advent of radio and television, increased prosperity (all of which were evident in the 1960s), Irish people began to assert their independence in a more forthright manner. The church rituals became less of an essential social outlet. Instead of kneeling down to say the rosary, families now sat down around the television. On the little screen, they saw lives depicted which were rarely marked by religious constraints, where sex was not a taboo subject, where people unashamedly pursued wealth as well as sexual pleasure and fulfilment. The winds of change were blowing strongly. Compare the role of the Church in the Ireland described by the writer John McGahern and the situation that pertains today:

The breaking of pelvic bones took place during difficult births in hospitals because it was thought to be more in conformity with Catholic teaching than

9 Tom Inglis, "Catholic Church, Religious Capital and Symbolic Domination", in *Engaging Modernity: Readings of Irish Politics, Culture and Literature at the Turn of the Century*. Edited by Michael Böss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), pp.43-70, p.43.

10 Catherine Maignant, "Re-imagining Transcendence in the Global Village.", in *Engaging Modernity*, pp.71-84, p.76.

Caesarean section, presumably because it was considered more 'natural.' Minorities were deprived of the right to divorce.¹¹

McGahern, while resentful of the oppressive nature of Church influence on the lives of ordinary men and women, still admitted that he always got pleasure from the symbols and imagery associated with the religious ceremonies of his youth which introduced him to 'an indoor beauty, of luxury and ornament, ceremony and sacrament and mystery.' (*Mr*, 201) He ended up being estranged by the contradiction he detected between the Gospel message of unconditional love and the harshness of certain stances adopted by the Church, especially in the sexual realm. He recognised his mother's acceptance of all the Church's pronouncements, right up to the last pregnancy that would lead to her untimely death from cancer. Louise Fuller argues that: 'Catholicism in the pre-Vatican II era placed a very heavy emphasis on duty, self-sacrifice and mortification, and fearfulness in relation to threats to sexual morality was ever-present.'¹² The fact that such a moral climate could put women's lives in danger did not prevent people from generally following its dictates. The move from such an overtly religious society to the post-Christian Ireland of today took time to develop and there were many significant turning points along the way. Some would say that the Irish never totally eradicated their pagan roots. In McGahern's view, the Irish had the unique ability to outwardly conform to the dictates of the Church while following their individual beliefs:

Most people went about their sensible pagan lives as they had done for centuries, seeing this conformity as just another veneer they had to pretend to wear like all the others they had worn since the time of the Druids. (*Mr*, 211)

But it was more complex than this. There was the rash of clerical sex abuse revelations, the stories of what happened in the religious-run orphanages, industrial schools and in places like the Magdalen Laundries. Writing about the new stance adopted by the Irish public to the Church in the wake of these revelations, Eugene O'Brien argues that the political and clerical abuses were revealed at around the same time, thus

11 John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), p.210, hereafter cited as *Mr*.

12 Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), p.227.

compounding the scepticism of people. The moral fibre of the former pillars of Church and State were seen to crumble, as commentators, some of whom were products of a university system in which French theory was taught, began to question and deconstruct former givens. O'Brien writes: 'a new openness has begun to dawn, an openness where the old centres have not been demolished, merely decentred, deconstructed in the sense that they are no longer beyond the power of critique.'¹³ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, shortly after his appointment to the Dublin archdioceses a few years ago, said that he wanted to see a humbler Church emerging in Ireland, a listening Church. Such a position may well be forced on the institution, as it deals with the reality of being a minority concern in a rapidly secularising Ireland. There is a clear echo of Sullivan who wrote of the French Church of his time: 'Aujourd'hui, telle la nuée de l'Exode, son visage est plus lumineux que lors qu'elle semblait régner. C'est dans son humiliation qu'est sa gloire' (*MI*, 303).

Sullivan captured the postmodern malaise that accompanies the breakdown of grand narratives and the consequent doubts that emerge in relation to institutions like the Catholic Church. The latter became, almost without realising it, another power bloc whose feet were seen to be made of clay. But instead of bemoaning the collapse of a glorious edifice, Sullivan sought a renewal of the Church from the margins. I sense that a similar move may be afoot in Ireland at present. To illustrate this point, I would like to refer briefly to a talk given by the Archbishop of Armagh (recently appointed cardinal) at Knock, where the most significant shrine of Marian devotion is located, on Friday the 17th of August 2007. Gesturing towards the new 'Ireland of stocks and shares', he noted: 'The truth is that many of those who claim to have set Ireland free from the shackles of religious faith in recent years are now silent in the face of the real captivities of the 'new' Ireland.'¹⁴ In the wake of the revelations of clerical sex abuse in the 1990s, there has been a strange silence from the Irish Bishops, who seemed to feel that whatever they said in relation to any topic would be misconstrued by the Irish public because it would be mis-

13 Eugene O'Brien, "Ireland in Theory: the Influence of French Theory on Irish Cultural and Societal Development", in *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship*, edited by Eamon Maher and Grace Neville (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), pp.25-40, pp.38-9.

14 I am indebted to the report by Patsy McGarry, "Back with a Belt of the Crozier" (*The Irish Times* Weekend Review, August 25, 2007), for quotations from Archbishop Brady's speech.

represented by the media. It is refreshing to see some unequivocal comments such as those that characterise the Cardinal's address: 'I believe there are increasing signs that the secular project in Ireland has failed. It has failed to bring the happiness it promised or the answers to the really important questions of people's lives.' People may agree or disagree with this assessment, but I think that his comment that nothing has yet emerged to replace the cohesion and stability of institutions such as the Church in Ireland is beyond doubt. This resulted in a spiritual void in the lives of many people for whom religious observance and ritual were essential ingredients of a happy life. The Archbishop echoes Sullivan's earlier assertion when quoting the words of Cardinal Daneels of Brussels: 'Now that we are weak and humble of heart we have greater freedom to do the real work, unshackled.'

Speaking from a lay person's point of view, Declan Kiberd recalled a liberal priest's comment to him in 1980: 'Religion will go in Ireland. And when it goes it'll go so fast that nobody will know what is happening.' Coming the year after the highly successful visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland, this observation initially struck Kiberd as ill-conceived. But looking back on it with the benefit of hindsight, he realised that the priest's words were prophetic. Rather than providing concrete evidence of the enduring Church triumphant in Ireland, the papal visit was a sign of crisis and uncertainty. Vocations had been in sharp decline for more than a decade and people were adopting a more independent line when it came to sexuality and general morality. Kiberd maintains that the changed Irish attitude to religion is similar to its decision to jettison the Irish language when it no longer seemed useful. On closer analysis, he notes: 'it may be safe to say that it is not religion which has declined in large sections of Tiger Ireland. What is dying, rather, is a Victorian ecclesiology in its institutional forms. The 'underground' church of local saints and popular devotionism, a church which celebrates ritual and life, may already be re-emerging to displace an autocratic institution based on external rule-keeping and social fear.'¹⁵

Kiberd's analysis is astute, but its author did not have time in a short newspaper article to demonstrate the many ways in which it has now become somehow taboo or anachronistic for an Irish person to talk about his or her religious beliefs. One more article from *The Irish Times*, reputedly Ireland's most 'liberal' or anti-clerical newspaper, shows how there

15 Declan Kiberd, "National Genius for Adaptation", in *The Irish Times*, October 3, 2006, p.16.

is an uneasy tension in Irish society concerning faith. It surprises commentators when a famous composer, writer, singer or sports star acknowledges unambiguously his or her attachment to religion. The unnamed author (only the initials FmacE are provided, as is normal in this column) writes:

Personal faith is still an important part of many of our lives. We are often expected to keep it private but we often choose to make it public. Weddings, funerals and Sunday practice are still popular and although there is a tendency to talk it down, there are significantly more people practising their faith than there are people attending sports events on any given weekend. Yet sport and issues associated with it play a disproportionate role in our conversion.¹⁶

In France, where a strong tradition of 'laïcité' has attempted to avoid any infringement by the religious domain on the business of state, this type of inability to speak openly about matters pertaining to faith is not nearly so prevalent. Ireland's particular form of aggressive secularism has meant that a once extremely powerful Church has now been pushed to the margins along with anyone who adheres to what are generally perceived to be its anachronistic values. While it did flex its muscles at times and interfere excessively in the matters of State, while it undoubtedly did also make some awful mistakes in how it dealt with clerical sex abuse, the good done by the Church in the areas of education and health are too often conveniently forgotten. Also the work of people like the Jesuit priest Peter McVerry and Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy in defending the poor and the marginalized provides a Christian witness that is recognised and appreciated by people of all religious persuasions, and none. Jean Sullivan's writings are of particular relevance to a society like Ireland where an anger at the wrongdoings of a formerly powerful Church has given way to a desire to live a closer relationship with God outside of the bounds of organised religion. The French writer doesn't see the point in apportioning blame for the decline of religion to the representatives of secularism:

Ce n'est pas le laïcisme qui a bloqué le message. Il faut renoncer à cette idée. C'est le rationalisme qu'on y a introduit, une pensée abstraite et impériuse,

16 Anon., "Why are we Surprised by Faith?", in *The Irish Times*, August 25, 2007, p.15.

voilà ce qui l'a miné, le souci de rendre acceptable ce qui est inacceptable.
(*MI*, 223)

Furthermore, Sullivan states his belief that issues of faith are not rational: 'Mais enfin le sens ultime du christianisme n'est pas dans un monde d'idées : il est dans la précarité, quelque chose de faible et d'humilié qui appelle' (*MI*, 69). Ultimately, what is important in Sullivan's view is to follow as closely as possible the example of Christ:

Les hommes habités que j'ai rencontrés se taisaient généralement sur l'essentiel, parlaient d'autre chose. On ne peut qu'aimer ce qu'il (Jésus) aima: guérir les malades, ressusciter les morts, les mots faute de mieux, avoir faim et soif de justice, changer de regard, inverser spirituellement l'ordre de ce monde. (*MI*, 90)

Because he possesses such a prophetic voice, one that resonates across continents and cultures, Sullivan has a clear message for the Irish Catholic Church: it is, seize the moment, cherish your lowly position because it is the one that may best suit the flowering of an authentic spirituality. Richard Clarke certainly sees this to be the case. Rather than proclaiming itself as victim of the secular media that took, in its view, a distasteful glee in exposing abuses within the Church (especially in relation to the sexual abuse of children), the Catholic hierarchy in his estimation might be better advised to ask themselves why was the reaction to these scandals so vitriolic. They might then see that it stemmed, to a certain extent, from the control the Church exercised both over its members and within the government of the state: 'The exposure of scandals gave free rein to a rage that had been waiting for the opportunity to explode.'¹⁷ Sullivan was always prepared to engage with those whose opinions differed from his own. He often found more Christian values in atheists than in those who professed undying loyalty to the Church.

To conclude, I would like to quote the French philosopher, Gilles Lipovetsky, who, in his book, *L'ère du vide*, captures the type of ambience evident in Sullivan's work and whose comments have great relevance for the Ireland of today. Lipovetsky talks about how, in post-modern societies, everyone demands 'le droit et le plaisir narcissique à s'exprimer pour rien, pour soi, mais relayé, amplifié par un médium. Communiquer pour communiquer, s'exprimer sans autre but que de

17 Clarke, *A Whisper of God*, p.127.

s'exprimer et d'être enregistré par un micropublic, le narcissisme révèle ici comme ailleurs sa connivence avec la désubstantialisation post-moderne, avec la logique du vide.¹⁸ Postmodernity and religion are not very compatible bedfellows according to Lipovetsky, but Sullivan would argue that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive either. The trick is to adopt a new approach to the Christian experience, one that is less concerned with outward appearances and more attuned to what makes a deeper spiritual experience possible. There is more than a little food for thought in this philosophy for the Irish Catholic Church.

18 Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'ère du vide* (Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1983), p.23.

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