

Reinventing Ireland Through A French Prism

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Volume 1

Edited by:

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Michel Déon (de l'Académie Française)

Préface

Pris de scrupules devant le mot 'colloque', j'ouvre le dictionnaire (de l'Académie, bien sûr) pour ne pas trahir l'esprit de la rencontre au Département de français de l'Université de Cork. Je lis :

1° sens : conférence entre chefs d'états... non, ce n'était, Dieu merci, pas ça !

2° sens : entretien plus ou moins confidentiel entre une ou plusieurs personnes. Ce n'était pas ça non plus !

3° sens : réunion d'un petit nombre de spécialistes qui échangent des vues sur un sujet déterminé.

Là, nous approchons, bien que le mot 'spécialiste' ne semble guère convenir aux participants.

De ce colloque, j'ai gardé le souvenir d'un ensemble d'actes tous fort différents et dignes d'intérêt mais sans aucune concertation préalable entre leurs auteurs : des idées se croisaient et se saluaient sans se heurter. Ces rencontres déjà si fructueuses le seraient encore bien plus si nous les préparions comme on prépare une pièce de théâtre mais peut-être leur improvisation est ce qui retient le mieux l'attention du public. J'aimerais baptiser ce genre de colloque : « Conversations à bâtons rompus ». Chacun y vient parler égoïstement de ce qu'il a en tête, mûri ou pas. La diversité est le meilleur ferment de ces journées de travail. En public, nous nous révélons aux uns et aux autres autant qu'à nous-mêmes et découvrons avec surprise le cheval de bataille de notre prédécesseur ou de notre successeur à la tribune. Où, au monde, aurions-nous pu entendre une jeune étudiante vanter les qualités d'une Simone Tery, journaliste de la plus pure obédience stalinienne dans les années trente, oubliée avec quelque gêne par son propre parti, et, dans la foulée, écouter une pénétrante analyse de l'œuvre de Michel Houellebecq ?

L'université que j'ai épisodiquement fréquentée en 1938-39, m'est souvent apparue comme un monde à part dont, devenu écrivain, j'ai eu le

sentiment qu'elle tendait à m'exclure au nom de sa supériorité dialectique, l'université m'ouvre soudain les bras en France comme à l'étranger. A Cork, deux journées de la meilleure honnêteté intellectuelle me réconcilient avec les maîtres et leurs studieux disciples. Si grandes étaient les curiosités que le temps a semblé nous manquer. Une leçon est à retenir de ces débats : nous ne nous parlons plus assez, Irlandais et Français. La « vieille liaison » amoureuse entre nos deux imaginaires remonte à bien plus loin que Louis XIV et son malheureux soutien au Roi Jacques détrôné, elle remonte aux moines irlandais qui, lors des grands pèlerinages à Rome, s'attardaient en France, édifiaient des églises, fondaient des monastères et des écoles, recopiaient des manuscrits et sauvaient de l'oubli tout un savoir qui, sans eux, aurait été perdu à jamais. Avec le temps, cette « vieille liaison » s'est fragilisée, surtout quand la Grande-Bretagne n'a plus été l'écrasante puissance coloniale si insupportable aux intellectuels irlandais. Depuis la fin de la II^e guerre mondiale, une partie de l'attention des intellectuels irlandais s'est tournée vers Londres ou les États-unis dont la formidable puissance exerce une attraction assez irrésistible. Si l'Irlande semble s'être quelque peu détournée de la France qui fut longtemps la terre d'asile de ses écrivains, en revanche je crois sincèrement que nous avons continué d'accueillir avec la même générosité ses artistes, ses romanciers et ses dramaturges.

Je sais l'obstacle : il faut pour que nous nous entendions passer d'une langue à l'autre. Ce ne fut un problème ni pour Synge, George Moore, Wilde, Joyce, Beckett et quantité d'autres, mais il semble que ce soit un problème aujourd'hui. De la vie littéraire française, l'Irlande ne connaît guère que ce que la Grande-Bretagne laisse filtrer dans ses rares traductions du français, et ce n'est pas le meilleur. On croirait même qu'un choix pervers diffuse en anglais ce que nous avons de plus douteux pour que la critique du *Times Literary Supplement*, du *Guardian* et des magazines spécialisés fassent des gorges chaudes de nos auteurs les plus cryptés, les plus illisibles. Faute de moyens, les éditeurs irlandais ne peuvent guère redresser la barre et on ne saurait le leur reprocher.

Au cours de notre colloque, j'ai eu plaisir à évoquer deux hommes qui, avec une rare générosité, ont symbolisé l'amitié littéraire de la France et de l'Irlande: le professeur Rudmore Brown, de Trinity College, auteur de *French Literary Studies* (de Maurice Scève à Mallarmé) et Valery Larbaud, romancier, essayiste, traducteur de l'*Ulysse* de James Joyce, et préfacier de *Gens de Dublin*. Avec une ferveur rare et une émouvante abnégation – surtout pour Larbaud au détriment de son œuvre

– ils ont, l'un et l'autre, tissé des liens entre les trésors de l'Irlande et les trésors de la France.

Certes, nous ne sommes pas des puissances mondiales. La France l'a peut-être été un long moment dans l'histoire de l'Europe et ce n'est pas forcément la décrier que de douter de son rôle dans les temps modernes. De son côté, l'Irlande jouit d'un privilège particulier : sa neutralité la protège mieux qu'une puissante armée. En revanche les deux pays, l'Irlande avec sa diaspora si puissante, la France avec l'étendue des territoires restés francophones, représentent dans le monde actuel deux havres de paix qui ne souffrent d'aucun malentendu historique et ne peuvent que s'enrichir en se parlant, en s'écrivant en s'écoutant. C'est ce que nous avons fait à Cork.

Eamon Maher, Grace Neville and Eugene O'Brien

Introduction

The task of 'reinventing' Ireland is not completely new territory. In fact, it has already been tackled in the book of essays edited by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin.¹ In their Introduction, the editors refer to a statement from the 1999 strategy document of the National Economic and Social Council which stated unambiguously that: 'Ireland reinvented itself during the 1990s'. In economic and social terms, there can be no doubt that this was the case. The late nineteen nineties saw the development of the Celtic Tiger, with full employment, massive road- and house-building, increased GNP and GDP, lower taxation and the emergence of a new society built around the principles of liberal capitalism and consumerism. What bothered some commentators was the uncritical manner in which people accepted a positive view of every aspect of the Celtic Tiger. The new culture was seen as 'marking a break with the past and the coming-of-age of an enlightened, tolerant and liberal Ireland'.² Colin Coulter, in his Introduction to *The End of Irish History?*, makes a similar point:

It has been entirely predictable, therefore, that the advent of the Celtic Tiger should have moved a range of commentators to declare and delineate the demise of traditional Ireland. In recent times, it has become commonplace to portray the Irish Republic as a thoroughly modern society that has changed utterly and for the better.³

¹ *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

² "Introduction", *Reinventing Ireland*, p.2.

³ Steven Coleman and Colin Coulter (eds), *The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (New York and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.16.

Such uniform acceptance of the massive social, economic and cultural transformation experienced by Ireland in the last decade of the twentieth century, and the first years of the twenty first, runs the risk of forgetting the less savoury sides of economic progress.⁴

This book, the first in a new series entitled *Studies in Franco-Irish Relations*, seeks to reinvent Ireland through a French prism. At the second conference of the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies that was held in University College Cork in March 2006, a number of papers were delivered which brought a French perspective to bear on various aspects of Irish literature, history and culture. When it came to choosing a generic theme, therefore, we felt that the concept of 'reinvention' was one that opened up a very interesting debate, one in which the French 'take' on the Irish situation was particularly apposite. At the time of the Literary Revival in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ireland looked to France for much of its inspiration. Even though tied for centuries to our near neighbour and colonizer, England, we had also long established links with Continental Europe and beyond through our monks, priests and nuns. Similarly the Famine led to a massive exodus of our population to England, North America and elsewhere. Because of this, we were a global nation *avant la lettre*! As we contemplated the disappearance of the Gaelic language and culture at the end of the nineteenth century, the Literary Renaissance was responsible for bringing it back centre stage. Declan Kiberd notes:

That enterprise achieved nothing less than a renovation of Irish consciousness and a new understanding of politics, economics, philosophy, sport, language and culture in its widest sense. It was the grand destiny of Yeats's generation to make Ireland once again interesting to the Irish, after centuries of enforced provincialism following the collapse of the Gaelic order in 1601.⁵

⁴ There is an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor in Ireland. Between 1997 and 2000 alone, 2000 new prison places were created. 'Indeed, the fact that many tigers in the developed world end up in cages is an ironic reminder of the penal realities of contemporary Irish society. Those who end up behind bars are almost invariably the poor and the disadvantaged', *Reinventing Ireland*, p.9.

⁵ Declan Kiberd, *Reinventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.3.

It is possibly too early to predict what the impact of the past few decades of increased economic prosperity will have on Irish society. What is certain, however, is that placing Ireland in a European context, seeing how developments here mirror or diverge from what has occurred in a larger country like France, can yield interesting insights. Two republics, Catholic in tradition but subject to the pressures of modernity in the shape of secularisation and globalisation, France and Ireland are perfectly poised to shed mutual light on each other's development. France has much to teach Ireland, but the opposite is also probably true. The insights derived from Francophone literary and cultural theory have become commonplace in contemporary Irish academic discourse and these too can enlighten Irish cultural developments, as well as offering the tools to critique different aspects of Ireland today. The essays that follow trace aspects of a rich crossfertilisation of ideas between two countries through a number of centuries and illustrate how various experiences can be better dealt with by appreciating the lessons that have been learnt by others.

The opening section sets the scene for what is to come by dealing with the historical context. Michael Cronin begins with a quote from Patrick Pearse who predicted in 1906 that if Irish literature was to grow, it would need to come to grips with its past on the one hand and with the mind of contemporary Europe on the other. Cronin examines the manner in which this double engagement was undertaken, paying particular attention to the special relationship that Ireland has always had with France. The following chapter, by Serge Rivière and Jenny O'Connor, shows how two famous nineteenth century French travellers, Montalembert and Tocqueville, described their impressions of the Irish cultural landscape in their travel *Journals*. Their conflicting accounts of the Anglo-Irish 'Big Houses' and the oppressed Catholics' rural cabins and cottages make for most interesting reading. Yann Bévant analyses the 'myth' that grew up in France around the 36th Ulster regiment, particularly in light of their heroic efforts and heavy casualties at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Bévant analyses the composition of the regiment and their political allegiances, which were not nearly as uniformly 'unionist' as some would have us believe. Catherine Burke is currently researching Virgilian cities and her chapter provides us with a fascinating comparative study of Joachim du Bellay's Rome (as seen in the sixteenth century poetry collection *Les Regrets*) and Elizabeth Bowen's London (as portrayed in the wartime novel *The Heat of the Day*). She ultimately shows how both authors found inspiration in Virgil's depiction of the city in the *Aeneid*.

Louise Fuller concludes this opening section with a comprehensive analysis of Roman Catholicism in France and Ireland during the twentieth century. Using Jean Blanchard's *The Church in Contemporary Ireland*,⁶ the first sociological survey of Irish Catholicism, as her starting point, Fuller goes on to explore the widely differing attitudes to Catholic practice in a largely secular France, compared to traditional Ireland where attendance at religious services was extremely high by European standards. She concludes that the Irish Church may have had a great deal more to learn from France that might have appeared to someone like Blanchard, lessons it would have been well advised to learn before secularism began to take root here.

Part II examines nineteenth century links between France and Ireland. Jean Brihault opens by tracing how the writer Lady Morgan built bridges between the two countries through the colourful descriptions in her autobiographical writings of trips made to France. Brihault notes that because of her French education Lady Morgan was in a position to 'observe and denounce the catastrophic situation of her country in terms that did not strictly oppose Irish interest to British interest', a tendency that was all too pervasive in much of the discourse of that time and right throughout the twentieth century. Anne Markey presents a part of Oscar Wilde's literary output that tends to escape much critical attention, his fairytales. This chapter unveils an unexpected link between Wilde and 'the guiding spirit of seventeenth century French literary fairy tales but they [his fairy tales] also allude to more recent French literary models.' Mary Pierse focuses her attention on 'le moment célibataire' in the writings of George Moore, the renowned Irish Francophile. This notion of the 'bachelor era' or 'the age of the single man' is one that found its origins in France (Balzac, Zola and Huysmans are quoted as French writers who depicted it) and became a strong part of Moore's fiction. Pierse's exposé reveals that 'le moment célibataire' managed to incorporate a 'large human troupe of single and married persons who evince a wide variety of characteristics and tastes, and defy pigeonholing.'

Part III concerns itself with the convergence of nineteenth and twentieth-century thought. Brigitte Le Juez states the fascination among Irish writers such as George Moore, W.B. Yeats, Elizabeth Bowen and James Joyce with Gustave Flaubert, before forging a link with Samuel Beckett,

⁶ This survey was conducted during the 1950s.

whose lectures in French literature at Trinity College demonstrated a great appreciation of Flaubert, particularly his insistence on style as being at the heart of all literary activity. Repetition, or refrain, is strongly imbedded in the works of both writers and this intertextual reading sheds intriguing light on these two major literary figures, and highlights their unique sense of humour. John McDonagh offers a lively discussion of the French influence on Brendan Kennelly, due in no small part to his reading of French as an undergraduate. McDonagh rightly maintains that Kennelly's poetry needs to be explored 'outside of the traditionally accepted schools of contemporary Irish poetry' and so he embarks on a very fruitful study of how Baudelaire and Rimbaud, both of whom, like Kennelly, struggled with alcoholism and traumatic adult personal relationships, can reveal a lot about the poetic quest of the Irish poet. Sarah Nolan once more links Baudelaire to a contemporary Irish poet, this time Peter Surr, and shows significant similarities in how both present woman and the city. Sylvie Mikowski does a remarkable job at outlining the extent to which John McGahern's first novel, *The Barracks*, owes much to Flaubert. The window motif is pronounced in both writers, as is the image of the woman who feels trapped in a provincial wilderness. Mikowski notes that McGahern is but one in a long list of writers, from Proust through Joyce to Beckett, who acknowledge a debt to the French master of the modern novel.

Part IV deals solely with twentieth century literature. Raymond Mullen, following a similar course to that of Sylvie Mikowski, links McGahern to another French writer, Albert Camus, and traces the existentialist mood of two novels, McGahern's experimental *The Pornographer* and Camus's *L'Étranger*. Mullen concentrates on 'the womb and the grave', the experience of living and dying in a universe that can at times seem bereft of meaning. He concludes with a quotation from the nameless narrator of *The Pornographer* who assumes a very Camusian tone when stating: 'To find we had to lose. The road away becomes the road back.' Eamon Maher's chapter seeks to discover the reasons why the genre of 'Catholic Novel', so important in early twentieth century France, never developed in Ireland. Taking the novelist John Broderick as an example of someone who admitted to an admiration for both François Mauriac and Julien Green, Maher concludes that the conditions in Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century weren't quite ripe for the emergence of a Catholic Novel. In a paradoxical way, the more secular Ireland of today could be a more hospitable environment for this type of litera-

ture to develop. Joan Dargan plunges us into the work of Seamus Heaney in an attempt to capture the presence of France in it. Normandy is especially to the fore in the poem “Testimonies”, which evokes the feelings of an American Airborne Division stationed at Castledawson, as they prepare for D-Day, where the Norman landscape would bear some remarkable similarities to that of the Northern Ireland they had just left.

Part V brings the book to a close, with its mixture of theory, travel literature and sport. Eugene O’Brien subjects French and Irish Republicanism to a deconstructive analysis in a chapter that covers a vast array of subject matter; from a Hans Holbein painting to the antics of former *Playboy* Playmate, Anna Nicole Smith (now deceased), from the pronouncements of George Bush to those of Wolfe Tone and Gerry Adams. O’Brien concludes by quoting Richard Kearney’s view that cultural inheritance is a prerequisite for any form of negotiation to take place. We can inherit from the past and make it, in Heaney’s words: ‘willable forward/Again and again and again.’ Paula Murphy applies herself to a critique of Sebastian Barry’s controversial play, *Hinterland*, in which some uncomfortably close parallels between one of the main characters and the former Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, can be drawn. Murphy maintains that French theory, with its questioning of all ‘givens’, provides the tools for a successful analysis of ‘Ireland’s changing postmodern society.’ According to Emilie Bordenave, the Swiss traveller Nicolas Bouvier cast a ‘French’ look on the Aran Islands, situated off the west coast of Ireland and immortalised by the work of Synge among others. The ‘French’ aspect is contained in the language and style in which his impressions were conveyed. Comparing Bouvier’s ‘travel literature’ account from his *Journal des Iles d’Aran et autres lieux* to that of Synge’s *The Aran Islands*, Bordenave concludes that travel writing allows one to be transformed by the sights one beholds. In Bouvier’s words: ‘On ne voyage pas pour se garnir d’exotisme et d’anecdotes comme un sapin de Noël, mais pour que la route vous plume, vous rince, vous essore.’

Philip Dine brings the book to a close with a sporting flourish in a brilliant study of how French writers Jean Lacouture, Antoine Blondin, Jean Cormier, Roger Bastide and Jean-Pierre Bodis perceive Irish rugby. Dine concludes by stating that for all that unites the rugby traditions in Ireland and France, the latter persists in seeing herself as ‘the real outsider in European competitions and, indeed, in the Anglophone rugby-playing world as a whole.’ In Dine’s estimation ‘it is more a question of

1789 than 1798' on the international field: that is to say, France stands alone, but in a visionary and splendid isolation.

And so we come to the end of this first book in the new series. Before signing off, we need to express our thanks to a number of people and institutions:

- Nous tenons à remercier tout particulièrement Monsieur Michel Déon de l'Académie Française, d'abord de sa présence fort heureuse au colloque et puis d'avoir écrit une Préface brillante au livre qui nous est allée droit au cœur.
- Le Service Culturel de l'Ambassade de France en Irlande a fourni une subvention généreuse dont nous sommes reconnaissants. L'Attaché Culturel, Monsieur Serge François, nous a aidés énormément comme toujours avec son enthousiasme et sa culture.
- ITT Dublin (Tallaght) has been hugely supportive of the activities of the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies and more recently of AFIS (Association for Franco-Irish Studies) and has supplied much appreciated financial support for our various initiatives.
- Mary Immaculate College for the MIC Research Fellowship which allowed Eugene O'Brien to devote time to this enterprise.
- The Faculty of Arts in University College Cork provided us with a generous grant towards the publication of this tome.
- Ute Winkelkötter, commissioning editor with Peter Lang, has been a wonderful support to us throughout the compilation of this book and saw the value of the series from the outset.
- Finally, a big 'Thank you' goes to our energetic editorial team who have worked really hard on proofing articles and ensuring that the book was as free from errors as possible.

Part I

The Historical Context

Michael Cronin

Chapter One: The Shining Tumultuous River? Irish Perspectives on Europe

Writing in 1906 Patrick Pearse remarked that, 'Irish literature, if it is to live and grow, must get into contact on the one hand with its own past and on the other with the mind of contemporary Europe.'¹ When Samuel Beckett came to survey the Irish literary scene in the 1930s for *The Bookman*, time and geography were still the yardsticks of differentiation. However, where Pearse saw complementarity, Beckett sensed division. The Irish poetic 'antiquarians', notably Yeats and his followers, continued to offer 'with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods' whereas the works of poets like Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey formed the 'nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland.'² Ironically, the generators of the living poetic in Ireland, now found themselves, like Beckett himself, living outside of Ireland. In Beckett's view, the obsession with the Irish past had led to a terminal retreat from the European present. The polarities of Beckett's arguments have proved immensely attractive to critics and Irish engagement with Europe is popularly presented as a parable of early modernist exile (Joyce, Beckett) and belated post-modernist embrace (the European Union, Zoo TV, 'Ireland and its Diaspora' as the theme for the 1996 Frankfurt Book Fair). John Goodby, in his discussion of Irish experimental poetry, charts the map of expressiveness in familiar terms:

Irish poetic modernism, established at the close of the nineteenth century, continues to the present but in a line of descent so broken and mutilated that we might want to question the aptness of the use of the word like tradition to describe it. Rather, there are a series of silences and sporadic reinventions of

¹ Patrick Pearse, "About Literature", in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 26 May 1906, p.6.

² Samuel Beckett, "Recent Irish Poetry", in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), pp. 70-76.

an experimental poetry deeply marked by its silencing within Ireland and, before the late 1960s, overwhelmingly diasporic production.³

To see Europe largely as a backdrop for the more spectacular renunciations of Faith and Fatherland or as a sanctuary for the poetic outcasts of modernism has indeed the emotive charge of victimhood but this view fatally simplifies Irish literary relations with Europe in the twentieth century and obscures areas of complex, fruitful exchange. In this chapter, we wish to suggest that there are Irish perspectives on Europe which are not confined to the high drama of exile, a drama fetishised by decades of Beckettian and Joycean scholarship.

The perceived enmity between retrospection and a geographically distant line of aesthetic progress has more than any other view shaped responses to the European dimension to Irish cultural experience. In other words, direction of time is related to position in space. Going backwards in Irish Time is to retreat from European Space, going forwards in Irish Time is to approach European Space on an asymptotic curve of modernist achievement. Thus, the creative space of the antiquarians, in their obsessive unearthing of the past, shrinks to the stifling pieties of local place and identity. Conversely, the bold commitment to the present or projection into the future involves taking flight to the more stimulating and congenial expansiveness of the European mainland. This space-time correlation is a literary critical variant on what Johannes Fabian has described in his work as ‘denial of coevalness.’ In Fabian’s analysis, colonial travellers are on a trajectory of modernity so that the cultures they visit always appear to be situated in an earlier historical period or stage of cultural development.⁴ The temporal distance excites the travellers’ contempt or curiosity depending on their political outlook but the condescension of distance remains a constant. The primary difficulty with the critical time-space continuum in the Irish instance is that it bears little relationship to Irish appropriation of the past in the early twentieth century.

³ John Goodby, “ ‘Current, historical, mythical or spook?’: Irish modernist and experimental poetry”, in Scully M. and Goodby J. (eds), ‘Colonies of Belief - Ireland’s Modernists’, Special Issue of *Súitээр na n-Aingeal*, no.17, Spring 1999, p. 51.

⁴ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.35.

In 1927 a book appeared entitled *Ireland and the Foundations of Europe*.⁵ The author, Benedict Fitzpatrick, had previously produced a less geographically ambitious work called, *Ireland and the Making of Britain*.⁶ In his 1927 work, Fitzpatrick offers the reader a summary history of 'civilization' beginning in Egypt, continuing through its Greek and Roman phases and then he describes the impact of the barbarian invasions on the great 'flood' of Greco-Roman culture:

Then like the huge, sedimentary mud-flat, precipitated through geologic ages, that obstructs the flood and turns it into a delta, the dull mountain of northern barbarism descended and made two courses of it - the winding, multi-colored stream of Byzantium, and the shining tumultuous river of medieval Ireland.⁷

The shining river will flow for ten centuries, from the tenth to the fourteenth, the period Fitzpatrick grandly declares to be one of 'Irish intellectual hegemony in Europe'.⁸ He sees distance as no barrier to the expansionism of the medieval Irish:

Thus in the early medieval period we find Irish tourists, explorers and schoolmen at every ultimate boundary of the then known world, while there was hardly an interior land from Iceland to Egypt that had not its garland of Irish foundations, whether abbeys or houses of hospitality or schools.⁹

In a post-nationalist, post-religious age, Fitzpatrick's prose is easily parodied. His is the counter-imperial rhetoric of an insurgent nationalism that becomes imperial in its anxious affirmation of cultural distinctness. His Catholicism is unrepentantly Roman and triumphalist. However, to view Fitzpatrick's work as simply another manifestation of the Glorious Tale of How the Irish Saved Civilisation is to miss an important point about Irish-European relationships. The substantial footnotes to Fitzpatrick's chapters contain the names of the leading Celtic scholars of his day and earlier, names like Georges Dottin, Mario Esposito, Louis Gougaud, Ei-

⁵ Benedict Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Foundations of Europe* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1927).

⁶ Benedict Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Making of Britain* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1927).

⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Foundations of Europe*, p. 4.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, p.9.

⁹ Fitzpatrick., p.27.

leen Hull, H. d'Arbois de Joubainville, Eoin MacNeill, Kuno Meyer, Eugene O'Curry, John O'Donovan, Whitley Stokes and H. Zimmer. These scholars might not always concur with Fitzpatrick's often colourful extrapolations from the historical record and his literalist reading of medieval texts (particularly hagiographies) but they did devote considerable time and effort to tracing Irish influences on the development of medieval European culture.¹⁰ That is, the more they examined the Irish past, the more Europe came into view. The 'antiquarians' that will play such a decisive role in the formation of cultural nationalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early part of the period under review in this book, contributed not to the evacuation of a larger European dimension from Irish cultural life but, on the contrary, to a clear positioning of Ireland in a network of European intellectual exchange.¹¹ This is the network eulogised by Fitzpatrick, 'a continual *va et vient* of Irish instructors linked the most distant of them [Irish monastic foundations abroad] with the great seas of learning in Ireland.'¹² Hence, Beckett's polarities do not have the usual geographic consequences attributed to them. Europe was not the sole concern of an exiled intelligentsia or of post-1973 Ireland but was a prominent element of cultural debate and exploration in many different areas of Irish society throughout the twentieth century, an element that was enhanced rather than diminished by examination of Ireland's past. Thus, cultural nationalists like Fitzpatrick were as interested in Europe as schismatic modernists like Beckett and Joyce. They were separated not by insularity on the part of the former and pro-Europeanism on the part of the latter but by their preferred versions of the European heritage and the uses to which they put it.

The European heritage that has most actively excited the Irish literary imagination from 1900 to the 1960s has unquestionably been the French component of that heritage. French succour for Irish political aspirations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (more aspirational than real in many instances) and for the majority population, a common religious heritage in Catholicism, set the historical context for the develop-

¹⁰ For a more recent, nuanced and scholarly treatment of these influences see James P. Mackey (ed.), *The Cultures of Europe: The Irish Contribution* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), in particular the essays by Máire Herbert and Gwenaël Le Duc.

¹¹ For the role of antiquarianism in the emergence of cultural nationalism see Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Literary and Historical Response* (Cork University Press, 1996).

¹² Fitzpatrick, *Ireland and the Foundations of Europe*, p.77.

ment of intellectual and cultural sympathies.¹³ However, other more contemporary factors motivated the strong Francophilia, Francolatry even, of the Irish intelligentsia for much of the twentieth century. Brian Fallon in his recent study, *The Age of Innocence 1930-1960* mentions a number of these:

It was not only admiration for French culture, French political structures and French thought which inclined the Irish intelligentsia towards Francophilia. France offered, in effect, an alternative to English domination or at least a corrective to it. France was republican while Great Britain was monarchist, and the fact that both had colonial empires was often conveniently overlooked in this Irish exaltation of France as the home of liberty, equality and fraternity. France was also seen as the land of artistic modernism and innovation, while English culture - as exemplified by a writer such as Galsworthy - was often considered stodgy, inward-looking and insular (this outlook was not confined to Irish writers and artists, it was strangely common among British intellectuals and artists as well, notably those of Bloomsbury who were almost all snobbishly Francophile).¹⁴

France, then, in a sense, was not-England. As Irish writers sought to re-define identity, one way of avoiding the proverbial cracked looking glass of Joyce's servant with its disabling mimetism was to look into another mirror where the same power asymmetry did not prevail. This mirror was French for many decades as it had been German for the generation of *The Nation* newspaper in the mid-nineteenth century and would become North American at the end of the twentieth. George Moore, Oscar Wilde, Edith Somerville, James Joyce, J.M. Synge, Thomas McGreevy, Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey and of course, Samuel Beckett were all deeply affected by their encounter with the city of Paris, in particular and French culture, in general. Yeats's poetic development owes a significant debt to French symbolism and the most widely-practised prose genre of post-independence Ireland, the short story, draws heavily on the models of

¹³ Richard Francis Hayes, *Old Irish Links with France: some echoes of exiled Ireland* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1940); *Ireland and France, a Bountiful Friendship: Literature, History and Ideas* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992).

¹⁴ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998), p. 124.

Guy de Maupassant and Alphonse Daudet.¹⁵ Though much has been written on specific genealogies of French influence on individual Irish writers, there is a specific aspect of the French intellectual tradition that is frequently neglected in discussions of Franco-Irish connections and that is the tradition of intellectualism itself. When Émile Zola challenges the French politico-military establishment in the Dreyfus affair and earns for himself and the other *Dreyfusards* the epithet of opprobrium, *intellectuel*, he establishes a paradigm for French writers that will endure until the death of Sartre. Here, the writer has a moral obligation to speak in the public sphere in the name of the ideals of secular transcendence - truth, justice, freedom. The Enlightenment heritage modulated by messianic Marxism ghosts this position but the signal characteristic of the modern birth of the French intellectual is the active embrace of the public print media from *L'Aurore* to *Libération* in the dissemination of moral and political ideas.¹⁶ The prominence of writer-intellectuals in the genesis of cultural nationalism in Ireland points to a role for the writer in Irish political life but it is arguably after independence that the Irish writer assumes an adversarial position that is closer to a model of *endogenous* rather than *exogenous* critique. In the pre-independence period much (though by no means all) intellectual energy is devoted to challenging Ireland's subjugation by Empire, to the systematic righting of Ireland's rhetorical wrongs in the political, social and cultural spheres.¹⁷ The establishment of the Irish Free State meant that intellectual interventions could no longer be framed in exclusively nationalist terms, even if partition did ensure the continuity of a strong anti-imperial current in Irish intellectual life. In other words, writers in Ireland found themselves increasingly in a position where they were mounting a critique from within their own society, appealing less to the sovereign rights of national self-determination and more to the transcendent principles of the Enlightenment. They had shifted in Sartre's terms from specialists of the particular to spokesper-

¹⁵ It is of course another prominent Francophile, Seán Ó Faoláin, who both codifies and propagates the influence of the nineteenth-century French realist short story in his *The Short Story* (London: Collins, 1948).

¹⁶ For the most succinct analysis of this phenomenon see Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: the Intellectuals of Modern France* (London: NLB, 1981).

¹⁷ Maurice Goldring, *Faith of our Fathers: the Formation of Irish Nationalist Ideology* (Dublin: Repsol, 1982); Maurice Goldring, *Pleasant the Scholar's Life: Irish Intellectuals and the Construction of the State* (London: Serif, 1993).

sons for the universal.¹⁸ The pronounced Francophilia of the two main periodicals in the period from post-independence to the 1950s, *The Dublin Magazine* and *The Bell*, is hardly surprising in that the French conception of the intellectual provided a congenial role model for writers who felt that they ultimately were the most spectacular victims of the Poets' Revolution. This conception must explain, in part, the predominance of prose realism in Irish writing in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. If writers were to see themselves at some level as public figures, as playing a part in the public sphere in the French manner, then they would have to use a language and practise a discourse that the public could understand. Thus, satire (O'Brien) or prose polemic (Ó Faoláin) were favoured over more linguistically demanding forms of subversion. Ethical urgency did not admit of obfuscation. In a sense, though, Irish Francolatry was not simply an internal response to a specific set of political and historical circumstances. The English-speaking world would be drawn repeatedly to France between the 1890s and the early 1960s for stimulus, renewal and recreation.¹⁹ Joyce, Beckett, Coffey, Devlin and MacGreevy in their journeying to the Parisian centre were thus behaving in a conventionally Modernist way, even if they sought to distance themselves from prosaic conventionality in their own writings. France, then, is appropriated in two markedly different ways in the post-independence period. For the writers who leave Ireland, the country is the homeland of the Revolution of the Word, for those who stay, she is the sacred source of the Revolution of the World.

Paul Fussell in *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars* speaks of the diasporic conditions of inter-war literary modernism, the many English-speaking writers who decided I Hate It Here:

This diaspora seems one of the signals of literary modernism, as we can infer from virtually no modern writers remaining where he's 'supposed' to be except perhaps Proust - we think of Pound in London, Paris and Italy; Eliot in London; Joyce in Trieste and Paris; Mann ultimately in the United States.²⁰

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels* (Paris : Gallimard, 1972).

¹⁹ For a nuanced account of the early period see Eric Cahm, "Revolt, Conservatism and Reaction in Paris", in Malcolm Barbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 162-171.

²⁰ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 11.

For the American critic, literary modernism and twentieth-century travel writing owe their common origin to this unhousedness, this compulsive desire to be elsewhere. It is of course the permanency of being elsewhere that underscores the drama of exile, the condition of a Joyce or Beckett on the European continent. Travel, however, defines itself in the moment of return, in the sighting of Ithaca after the trials of difference. This dimension to Irish nomadic experience in the twentieth century has, however, been curiously disregarded. Travel writing on Ireland has been the focus of critical attention, whether this writing has been work of Irish or foreign travel writers, but precious little commentary exists on travel writing by Irish writers from 1900 onwards.²¹ The oversight is significant and points to a danger in Irish diasporic studies where only certain forms of movement are privileged in analysis. The permanent move to Canada but not the sojourn in Sicily, the emigrants' letters home from Australia but not the visit to Berlin, become objects of critical inquiry. Irrevocability risks becoming a talisman of authenticity (real travel (exile) v. superficial travel (tourism)) and concentration on the Irish in New Communities may narrow the world to encounters with varieties of Anglophone Irishness and neglect individual Irish experiences of a multilingual and multicultural Europe. And yet one of the striking features of Irish writing in the modern period has been the continual presence of the travel genre from Jane Francesca Wilde's *Driftwood from Scandinavia* (1884) to Kate O'Brien's *Farewell Spain* (1937), Monk Gibbon's *Swiss Enchantment* (1950), Sean O'Faolain's *A Route to Sicily* (1953) and Colm Tóibín's *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe*.²² This is writing in the English and Irish language in Ireland that is singularly absent as a distinct category from books, dictionaries, guides and anthologies of twentieth-century Irish literature.²³ The focus of the writing itself has been predominantly European and travel has acted as an important vehicle for the

²¹ Martin Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland: Literary Travellers, Rural Landscapes, Cultural Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publications, 1998); John McVeagh, *Irish Travel Writing: A Bibliography* (Dublin, Wolfhound Press, 1996).

²² Lady Wilde, *Driftwood from Scandinavia* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1884); Monk Gibbon, *Swiss Enchantment* (London: Evans Brothers, 1950); Monk Gibbon, *Western Germany* (London: Batsford, 1955); Sean O'Faolain, *South to Sicily* (London: Collins, 1953); Colm Tóibín, *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe* (London: Cape, 1994).

²³ The sole exception is Bernard Share's anthology of Irish travel writing, *Far Green Fields: Fifteen Hundred Years of Irish Travel Writing* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992).

articulation of Irish aesthetic and cultural responses to the countries of Europe. It is not the place of this essay to give a detailed account of the large number of travel books on Europe by Irish writers in both languages but we would like to briefly consider one such account, Liam Ó Rinn's 1931 *Turus go Páras* (Trip to Paris).²⁴

The effects of Empire exercise the mind of the writer and translator Liam Ó Rinn on his Parisian excursion in 1924. He sees the city of Paris as material testimony to the historical and architectural desolation of Ireland. Two emblematic moments are his visits to Notre Dame Cathedral and the castle and gardens in Versailles. Thinking of Irish history Ó Rinn is moved to anger in the king's chapel:

Ag cuimhneamh dom ar thiubaisteacht an scéil, do ghabh racht feirge mé. Mara mbeadh na seacht gcéad bliain úd an mhí-áidh agus an mhí-fhortuin do bheadh saibhreas mór séad-chomharthaí againn-ne, leis, agus slóite ag teacht o gach áird den domhan bhraonach chun bheith á n-iniúcha agus ag déanamh iongna dhíobh. Ní hi dteampuil bhriste agus i gcaisleáin bhatarálta, i mbotháin shuaracha agus i gcoillte tanaí lomtha, do bheadh stair na Banban le léigheamh ag an stróinséir, ach in árd-eaglaisí agus i rí-broga agus in uasal-tithe do bheadh lán de sheodaibh ealadhan ár sinsear.²⁵

The glories of French construction are doleful proof of the miseries of Irish destruction. The city becomes an utopian space for imagining an Irish past that might have been otherwise had history evolved differently. Paris reveals the invisible cities of Ó Rinn's historical imagining, a kind of anti-history of longing. There are certain ironies at work here. The public France that Ó Rinn admires is monarchist, clericalist, triumphalist. It is a France which celebrates unity, force, singleness of faith and singleness of purpose. It is precisely the country that from Henry IV to Louis XIV would provide England with a powerful role model and a rival. The qualities Ó Rinn is so attracted to in their material manifestation in the splendid churches and palaces would be mobilised to great effect in the military arena in the overseas expansion of the two early modern monarchical nation states. Though Ó Rinn is keenly interested in the Irish nationalist cause and eager to explain it to other foreigners he meets in Paris, he shares with many Irish intellectuals of the period and later, a

²⁴ The author of the present essay is currently engaged on a full-length study of twentieth-century Irish travel writing in both languages.

²⁵ Liam Ó Rinn, *Turus go Páras* (Dublin: Oifig Díolta Foilseacháin Rialtais, 1931), p. 73.

failure to disentangle Francophilia from a residual Anglophobia. In other words, it is unlikely that small nations like Ireland would have fared any better under French imperial ambitions than they did under British. Though France might have appeared worthy to emulate as a successful independent nation state in the 1920s, it can hardly have appeared in a similar light to its colonies in North Africa and elsewhere.

Ó Rinn writes his account in Irish, one of his native languages and a minority language. For speakers of minority languages in France such as Basque, Breton and Occitan, Ó Rinn's Parisian enthusiasms would seem misplaced. From 1793 onwards and the campaigns of *l'abbé Grégoire*, the French state has waged an implacable war against the regional languages of France in the name of strong, linguistically homogenous centralism. The fate of Irish then in the French imperial orbit would hardly been more favourable than it was under successive British administrations. However, it is worth dwelling here on a dimension to Irish travel in Europe, highlighted by Ó Rinn, which recurs in Irish travel accounts throughout the century, namely that of (native) language and (foreign) identity. At one point in the narrative, Ó Rinn asks for directions from a White Russian out walking with his family. He informs the Russian in French when they fall into conversation that he is Irish and that Irish is his native language. The Russian ignores the linguistic nicety and proceeds to address Ó Rinn in broken English for the rest of the conversation. The ticket office at the *Folies Bergères* is another unlikely setting for linguistic confusion. Ó Rinn meets a Dutchman who speaks some French and English. Due to the fact that Ó Rinn spoke English, the Dutchman assumed him to be an Englishman and berated Ó Rinn for what he saw as the woeful lack of interest on the part of the English in modern languages. When Ó Rinn protests that he is a speaker of the 'Irish language' the Dutchman dismisses it as a dialect of English and persists with his vocal critique of English linguistic shortcomings. Only references to Gaelic and a thumbnail sketch of the Indo-European family of languages finally make the Dutch critic dimly aware of difference.²⁶ The ready equation between language and identity by European cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century has generated a rich terrain of confusion in the twentieth. For the Irish traveller to Europe for much of the century, an ability to speak the English language with fluency becomes the defining marker of identity. Cultural, historical and religious differences that come to the fore in travelling within the Anglophone area i.e.

²⁶ Ó Rinn, *Turus go Páras*, p. 89.

when the Irish travel to other English-speaking countries, fade to be overshadowed by the implacable fact of language when the travelling is in non-Anglophone Europe. The native language of the Irish traveller, in this respect (though not in others), is irrelevant. As Irish is not an international language, few foreigners speak it, so the Irish-language traveller will also travel in English if they do not possess the requisite foreign languages. The convenience of a global language is offset by the endless potential for cultural misapprehension (the same phenomenon that leads to Canadian backpackers adorning their rucksacks with the maple leaf flag). Leaving aside nationalist susceptibilities, the difficulty of misattribution is to create a false set of expectations or to conceal histories not normally on view. Thus, the Dutchman at the ticket office expects Ó Rinn to offer an explanation as to why the English are less motivated than other nations by the prospect of learning foreign languages. Were the Irishman to oblige, the manoeuvre would be somewhat fraudulent, a view from the outside be taken as a perspective from the inside. The assumption of language dictating nationality further complicates the hermeneutic task of the Irish travellers in that their own history, less widely known, can only be invoked among specialists in discussion or interpretation. When the White Russian lambastes the Bolshevik regime as consisting of tyrants and thieves Ó Rinn reflects on the upheavals of the Irish Civil war, which ended the year before his trip to Paris, but he does not give voice to comparisons between the Irish and Russian situation as his Russian interlocutor is convinced Ó Rinn is English so these historical observations would make little sense. There is a distinct sense in a number of Irish travel accounts of the occlusion of Irish history, the erasure of cultural difference occasioned by the perception of language which gives birth to a certain uneasiness in European travel. Irish travellers find themselves repeatedly caught between a reluctance to glorify in specificity and flag-waving and a genuine desire to be taken as they are and not as someone else, not, in other words, as fraudulent messengers of a culture they know increasingly by hearsay.

Words not only travel in the accounts of travellers, they are also borne from language to language and culture to culture by the labours of translators. The journey out as initiation into the foreign language becomes the homecoming in translation. Translations make permanent the traces of contact. The history of Ireland has been continuously marked by the traffic of translation between Ireland and Europe, a traffic that has un-

til recently did not feature prominently in maps of Irish literary activity.²⁷ Yet, translation was intimately bound up with the Irish literary revival. When a patent was granted to the Abbey Theatre in the name of lady Gregory, one of the clauses in the patent restricted the Abbey to performances of contemporary Irish dramas and continental European masterpieces. The clause was inserted to reassure the proprietors of other Dublin theatres that the Abbey would not encroach on their territory. The constraint proved liberating as it prompted Lady Gregory to consider translation as a source of dramatic material for the Abbey company. Her first translation, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, a rendition of Molière's *Le Médecin malgré lui* was staged in April 1906. *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* was popular with both the public and the critics and Gregory went on to do a translation of *Les Fourberies de Scapin* that was premiered as *The Rogueries of Scapin* on the 4 April 1908 and a translation of *l'Avare* whose premiere as *The Miser* was on the 21 January 1909. Lady Gregory's own description of her translations has often led to a certain amount of critical confusion. The translations were, in fact, careful, painstaking translations of the French texts. Similarities between Gregory's own short comedies and the work of the French dramatist may also have facilitated the task. Furthermore, both Yeats and Gregory saw affinities between the Irish folk drama that the Abbey sought to encourage and the theatre of Molière. Lady Gregory's translations were in Kiltartan, her version of the English of rural Ireland ('Kiltartan' itself, of course, largely a product of translation), and they were primarily an act of cultural self-confidence. The translation of Greek and Roman classics had been an essential component of nation-building in Tudor England, Classical France and Romantic Germany.²⁸ To translate a major figure of world literature like Molière into Hiberno-English was to celebrate the national distinctness and poetic possibilities of a language that would no longer be the mouthpiece for the parodic utterances of the Stage Irishman but a fitting vehicle for the classics of world literature.²⁹ Though many Irish drama

²⁷ For a survey of Irish translation activity over the centuries see my *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork University Press, 1996).

²⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1992).

²⁹ Lady Gregory, *The Rogueries of Scapin, The Miser, The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, published in *The Kiltartan Molière* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1910); Gregory, Lady Augusta, *Our Irish Theatre* (London: John Murray, 1913); revised and enlarged edition, Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1972; Mary Fitzgerald, 'Four French Comedies:

translators were reluctant to follow Lady Gregory in her explicit use of Hiberno-English in translation, the volume of drama translation remained high throughout most of the century. The first performance in the newly opened Gate Theatre in 1930 was of a translation of Goethe's *Faust*. Anouilh, Montherlant, Giraudoux, Cocteau, Sartre, Claudel, Mauriac, Pirandello, Copek, Lorca, Chekov, Ibsen, Strindberg have been among the writers whose works have featured in translation on the Irish stage. There is as yet no exhaustive work detailing the achievements of Irish drama translators and charting the influence of translation on Irish theatrical development in the twentieth century but the translation dimension is worth noting if only to correct overly negative assessments of the Irish theatrical milieu in the post-independence period. As Brian Fallon has observed with respect to the 1930s and the 1940s and activity here includes translations, 'In the face of such formidable [theatrical] activity, can it really be maintained that the Thirties and Forties were decades dominated by kitchen comedy and insularity.'³⁰

A stated aim of the new government of the Irish Free State was to restore Irish as the primary vernacular of the Irish people. A modern vernacular demanded a modern literature and policy makers were inspired by Welsh and Flemish examples to provide contemporary literature for Irish speakers through a system of government-aided translation projects. In 1928, the *Coiste na Leabhar* (Books' Committee) was established and one of its explicit objectives was to promote the translation of books by foreign authors into Irish. As a direct result of the scheme, by 1937 over 99 books had been translated into Irish. These included works by René Bazin, Louis Hémon, Henri Bordeaux, Alphonse Daudet, Émile Erckmann, Wilhelm Hauff, Felix von Luckner and Thomas Mann. However, the bulk of translations were from the English language. This source-language bias reflected the relatively limited foreign language abilities of the Irish-language translators outside of English and the dominance of Victorian and Edwardian middle-class reading habits in the choice of texts to be translated. Not only were the translators but so also were most of the readers familiar with English, so there were few incentives to read *Great Expectations* or *Ivanhoe* in Irish, when there was easy access to the originals in English. The translation scheme was also unpopular with creative writers in Irish like Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Seosamh Mac

Lady Gregory's Translations of Molière' in Saddlemyer, Ann and Smythe, Colin, *Lady Gregory, fifty years after* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1987), pp.277-90.

³⁰ Brian Fallon, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 146.

Grianna who felt that original writing was being neglected in favour of what they perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be derivative hackwork. The scheme was quietly abandoned at the outbreak of the second world war but it had helped to re-establish an indigenous Irish-language publishing tradition and extend the generic possibilities of writing in Irish. It also provided a lineage for a later generation of literary translators like Breandán Ó Doibhlin, Gabriel Rosenstock and Máire Nic Mhaoláin who have worked into Irish from French, German and Italian.³¹

If translation from European languages into English was a constant of Irish literature in the twentieth century, two periods in particular saw an intensification of the activity, the 1930s and the 1970s. Samuel Beckett, Denis Devlin, Thomas MacGreevy and Brian Coffey were the leading translators of the earlier period and the source languages for their translations were mainly French, German, Italian and Spanish.³² What is striking about these writers, of course, is that they are also seen as the standard bearers of Irish literary modernism in the century. The connection is not fortuitous. When Beckett translates Guillaume Apollinaire or Denis Devlin translates René Char or Giuseppe Ungaretti, the act of translation becomes an active link to traditions of writing that are seen to be markedly different from what Beckett perceived as the triumphant antiquarianism of the Irish literary revival. Thus, the translations contributed to the general tradition of translation in the English language but they were considered to have a specific resonance in the Irish context because of the formal conservatism of much of the writing in the immediate post-independence period. Translation then is both source and statement. To translate the poems of Gaston Bonheur (Brian Coffey) or Rainer Marie Rilke (Denis Devlin) is to bring new poetic ideas and sensibilities into the language and into the specific oeuvre of the poet-translator. Modernism is tapped at its French, German or Italian sources. Translation, and in particular the choice of poet to be translated, also advertise an

³¹ Paolo Marletta, *Dormitio Virginis*. Translated by Máire Nic Mhaoláin, (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1993); Georg Trakl, *Craorag*. Translated by Gabriel Rosenstock (Dublin: Carbad, 1991); *On Fhraincis: Aistriúcháin*. Translated by Breandán Ó Doibhlin (Belfast: Lagan Press/Fortnight Educational Trust, 1994).

³² Brian Coffey, *Poems and Versions 1929-1990* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1991); Denis Devlin, *Translations into English* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1992); Octavio Paz, *An Anthology of Mexican Poetry*. Translated by Samuel Beckett (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970); Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto University Press, 1988).

unwillingness to adopt forms, themes, conventions, deemed to be stilingly canonic in the Irish tradition. The French critic Jacques Aubert has called the multilingual *Finnegans Wake* a 'translation in progress' and Joyce in his 1939 work evokes the activity of 'transluding from the Otherman.'³³ Joyce's formulation captures the element of subversion, the dissent of the ludic, at work in the 1930s writer-translators, the Othermen of Irish literary practice.

The establishment of the New Writers Press in 1967 and the subsequent coming into existence of the Raven Arts Press and the Dedalus Press were important moments in the revival of Irish literary contacts with European literature through translation. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a dramatic increase in the amount of material translated from European languages. A significant difference from the earlier period was the widening of the range of source languages and, in particular, a greater interest in the languages and literatures of Central and Eastern Europe.³⁴ In 'Memoirs of a Turcoman Diplomat' by Denis Devlin, the narrator talks of his father's European ambitions for his son, 'My father thought my feeling could take fire by the vibrant Seine/And a tough intellect be constructed in Göttingen.'³⁵ The West becomes the East, the Irish diplomat in conflict with a restrictive Catholicism is transformed into a Turcoman diplomat at odds with a repressive Islam. Terence Brown has noted a similar metamorphosis in the imaginary geography of Irish poetry in the 1980s where Michael O'Loughlin's first collection is entitled, *Stalingrad: The Street Dictionary* (1980), Paul Durcan publishes a collection with the title, *Going Home to Russia* (1987) and Seamus Heaney's *The Haw Lantern* (1987) draws suggestive analogies between Ireland and an imaginary Eastern bloc state. Brown argues that Away is tellingly like Home:

For poets such places [in Eastern Europe] come with the imprint of a savage and terrible history on their very structures, bearing the marks of pain in the flesh of their language, courage in the syntactical scruple with which they comfort themselves in the face of terror. They afford the Irish poet a way of

³³ James Joyce, *Introduction à l'esthétique de James Joyce* (Paris : Didier, 1973), p.219; James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), p.419.

³⁴ Examples of this translation activity were Marin Sorescu, *The Youth of Don Quixote*. Translated by John F. Deane (Dublin, Dedalus, 1987); Agnes Nemes Nagy, *Between*. Translated by Hugh Maxton (Dublin: Dedalus/Budapest: Corvina, 1988).

³⁵ Denis Devlin, "Memoirs of a Turcoman Diplomat", in Scully and Goodby (eds), p.77.

deepening the local sense of a frighteningly flawed national life while they offer the means of escape from a futility and an inanity which must result from the fact that our flawed Irish world only occasionally presses with a defining immediacy on the individual.³⁶

The continuing violence in Northern Ireland and the militarisation of civil society along with a severe economic depression in the Republic and two bitterly divisive referenda on abortion (1983) and divorce (1986), meant that Irish poets felt a particular affinity with poets writing out of the post-war Eastern European experience. A difficult history, political violence, repression, economic hardship, the intolerable ideologies of Church/Party and State, these subjects were to become the common currency of Irish/Eastern European poetic exchange. In the translations and poems, West met East as Irish literature found writing whose imaginary contours matched the harsh realities of Irish fact. If the writers of the 1930s saw translation as an oblique expression of canonical dissent, writers in the 1980s are similarly drawn to the subversive possibility of translation but the subversion is more explicitly political in the identification of Irish the writer with the conscience of Eastern dissidence. The translation moment is the reading of dissident writers in translation or of the actual translation of works or of translation in a geometrical sense where the poets displace themselves, *translate* themselves into Eastern Europe settings in an act of political homecoming.

The departures from Ireland in the 1980s were not all imaginary. Many were painfully real. The pain and the anger found their expression in writing but the writing of the latest generation of literary migrants to Europe could no longer be adequately described in terms of the shop-worn martyrologies of exile. When Dermot Bolger first thought of compiling an anthology of work written by young Irish writers living abroad, the initial title was *Lines of Departure*. However, the title was soon abandoned in favour of *Ireland in Exile* but Bolger claims that both titles are unsatisfactory at some level because '[e]xile and *departure* suggest an out-dated degree of permanency. Irish writers no longer go into exile, they simply commute'³⁷ (his emphasis). The exile may have lost its permanency but the voyage out is not historically innocent. Joseph

³⁶ Terence Brown, "Translating Ireland", in *Krino*, no.7, 1989, p.2.

³⁷ Dermot Bolger, "Foreword", in Dermot Bolger (ed), *Ireland in Exile* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1993), p.7.

O'Connor in his introduction to the anthology sees the leavetaking as a repeated answer to the Joycean summons:

We are now as we always have been, a land of exiles and wanderers. 'The history of transport', muses a Paul Durcan poem, 'is there any other history?' Well, it's a very Irish question. Ever since Joyce discovered the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead...hundreds of thousands of us have followed the unwashed and bright-eyed Stephen Dedalus, on that heartbreaking, exhilarating and, frequently, stomach-churning journey across the snotgreen sea.³⁸

The prose writers like the poets perform an act of translation but often in a physical as well as an imaginary sense. One of the effects of this out-migration is the appearance of different European cultures in the works of contemporary Irish short story writers and novelists. Spain features in Colm Tóibín's novel *The South* (1990), Germany in Hugo Hamilton's *Surrogate City* (1990) and *The Love Test* (1995), Holland, Spain and Germany in Michael O'Loughlin's *The Inside Story* (1989) and Italy is the country that both delights and frustrates the characters in Deirdre Madden's *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992).³⁹ The narrator in Madden's novel associates the north with violence and death and like D.H. Lawrence's heliophiles goes south to escape the fickle shadows of history. The light reveals but in surprising ways:

I had learnt a lot about Italy in the time I had been there, but what I had learned most of all was how little I had understood it, how deceptive a country it was. And more than learning anything about Italy, I had found out more about my own country, simply by not being in it.⁴⁰

Cultures are resistant to guide book formulae and Madden's narrator like the protagonist of Michael O'Loughlin's 'Traditional Music' find an intractable complexity lies beneath the easy familiarity of cross-cultural *bonhomie*. In addition, the obstacles to the understanding of otherness sharpen the sense of self, the foreign setting providing the stimulus for a

³⁸ Joseph O'Connor, 'Introduction', in *Ireland in Exile*, p.15.

³⁹ Colm Tóibín, *The South* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990); Hugo Hamilton, *Surrogate City* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990); Hugo Hamilton, *The Love Test* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995); Michael O'Loughlin, *The Inside Story* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1989); Deirdre Madden, *Remembering Light and Stone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

⁴⁰ Madden, *Remembering Light and Stone*, p.40.

pilgrimage of origin. Aspects of Irish culture and history, private and public, are underscored by the shock therapy of the unfamiliar. For the characters in O'Loughlin's story Ireland's nationalist past and present is a source of irritation and ridicule and they become involved in a brawl after insults are traded at a German traditional music festival. One of their number, Ciaran, is taken to hospital to have a stab wound seen to and it while they are waiting in the hospital that the narrator becomes aware of the distinct foreignness of Renata, Ciaran's German girlfriend. The cypher of foreignness is language. Renata suddenly seems immeasurably distant as she speaks in her own language to the doctor in Casualty. The narrator is reminded of other moments lost in translation and his mind wanders back to Latin classes and Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars. He describes his fascination with a text that resisted him, 'The Latin was like a brick wall, that forced me to fling myself at it again and again. and even when I had mastered the grammar, knew every word, the wall was still there, and I had to get at whatever it was that was behind it.'⁴¹ The revelation of Renata's irreducible otherness and the narrator's sudden, intense feeling of foreignness cause him to reflect on divided Irish responses to the European civilizing process:

As Caesar had marched north, we had marched with him, with his laws, his grammar, his plumbing, his Greeks. And while we were marching with him, we were crouched down in our forests, in our earthen forts, with our idols, our severed heads, our bubbling language, waiting for him. We were both Caesar and Vercingetorix. Which is to say we were nothing, nowhere.⁴²

What matters here is less the historical inaccuracy of his depictions of the native Irish than the acute sense of divided allegiances in the narrator's notion of Ireland's European identity. Historically, there is a very real sense in which the Irish marched with north, south, east and west with Latin grammars and translations from the 'Greeks'. It is the exploration of this tradition that, as we argued at the beginning of this chapter, led from the Irish past to the European present. However, Ireland never became a Roman colony and the country this century was not directly affected by the two world wars so that Ireland's experiences in the distant and more recent past have been markedly different from those of other European countries. Economics has brought the Irish within the European

⁴¹ O'Loughlin, "Traditional Music", in *The Inside Story*, p.51.

⁴² O'Loughlin, p.52.

pale but history has often left them outside looking in so that this in-between state can result in the sensation of being 'nowhere', of being stranded in transit. Recorded in story after story of European encounters is the added danger of exoticism, where historical atypicality is reified to produce the dream-child of imperial nostalgia. Joseph O'Connor bemoans the plight of the objects of political romanticism, 'It's extraordinary. The whole world longs to be oppressed and post-colonial and tragically hip and petulantly Paddy, and we Irish just want to be *anything* else' (his emphasis).⁴³

Irish-European literary relationships throughout the twentieth century have been sustained by imagination and curiosity. Further European integration would seem to promise an intensification of these relationships, particularly given the general Europhilia of the Irish electorate. However, Irish cultural attention since the 1960s in literature, the fine arts and popular music has been directed largely towards the English-speaking world, notably Britain and the United States. Literary translation from other European languages remains a distinctly minority taste and the literature component has been dropped from foreign language programmes at second level, so that exposure to the languages and literatures of Europe for many Irish readers and writers is an increasingly rare experience.⁴⁴ Cordoned off by the monoglossic presumptuousness of English, the Irish risk seeing Europe as a source of bureaucratic largess and lifestyle options (food, clothes, wines) rather than as an immensely exciting gathering of cultural experiences and differences. Perhaps, Pearse's aim needs not to so much to be restated as rephrased. Irish literature, if it is to live and grow, must get into contact on the one hand with its own *European* past and on the other with the mind of contemporary Europe. Beckett would hardly disagree.

⁴³ O'Connor, "Introduction", p.18.

⁴⁴ See Michael Cronin, "Into the West: Irish intellectuals, public space and European rhetoric", in *Graph*, second series, no.2, 1996, pp.4-11.

Serge Rivière and Jenny O'Connor

Chapter Two: The Representation of the Irish cultural landscape in the Journals of Montalembert (1830) and Tocqueville (1835)

'Landscape' is the product of a synthesis between cultural and natural elements. In what follows, cultural landscape refers to the human impact on the natural landscape;¹ as such, it is not static, but dynamic and reflects social and political change. This was especially true of the Irish cultural landscape in the nineteenth century, defined as towns, village settlements, buildings, division of land, monuments and churches. Such developments were influenced by urban and rural traditions, local and regional trends. As a metaphor for the complexity of Irish society in a constant state of flux, both before, and after the Famine, cultural landscape reflected a dialogue between insularity and continental influences, between the indigenous and exogenous. In the 1830s, French travellers came to Ireland with preconceived notions that Irish society and cultural landscape were polarised between the Ascendancy and Catholics, between the Anglo-Irish 'Big House', perceived as an adjunct of power on the one hand, and oppressed Catholic rural workers' cabins, 'hovels' and cottages, on the other.

This chapter aims to make a contribution to the discourse on 'space' in Ireland, by analysing briefly some representations of rural habitations in the narratives of Montalembert (1830) and Tocqueville (1835). Cultural landscape will be seen as refracted through the visitors' perspectives of Irish social, cultural and political activities, and both travellers perceived it as a major indicator of the disjunction between classes. In his erudite article on Burke and Tocqueville, Seamus Deane hits the nail on the head in stating that such writing, in the form of journals, memoirs and

¹ See F.A.H. Aalen, "The Irish Rural Landscape: Synthesis of Habitat and History", in *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, F.A.H. Aalen (ed.) (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), p. 5.

correspondences, ‘looks for ways by which the subjective element might be taken by its readers as the basis for a profound wisdom rather than for an impressionistic observation. Madame de Staël claimed that for such commentary there must be an effective combination of closeness and distance [...]’.² Were Montalembert and Tocqueville remotely aware of local and regional nuances, of hybrid identities? Did they acquire greater knowledge during their perambulations in the Irish countryside, or were they content to look for evidence in support of their predetermined theses? Because of constraints of space, we shall omit their representation of Dublin, Cork,³ Galway and Limerick; the chief focus of this paper will be the Irish rural landscape.

Are our travellers’ descriptions of Anglo-Irish ‘Big Houses’ and Catholic cabins emotionally and ideologically charged? Do they seem to be looking in, or looking out, from afar or from close by, and do they bring to their *tableaux* their personal protocols and absolute notions of French taste? The Comte de Montalembert, by his background, seems to concur with Lady Gregory in viewing the ‘Big House’ as ‘the home of culture in more senses than one’.⁴ Tocqueville saw in Ireland ‘a mix of modern and archaic elements’, according to Deane,⁵ and he preferred to describe the ‘Big House’ as obtrusive, secure but isolated within a more normative view of the Irish social landscape. This chapter will pay special attention to the language in which this representation is couched, within the framework of Theodor Adorno’s notions of the conformity or non-identity between the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’.

According to Kant, ‘objects’ are ‘shaped by conceptual determination’, that is to say ‘we [can] only see things as they appear to our consciousness’. Hence, objects are ‘phenomena’ rather than things known in themselves. Adorno’s notion of the ‘priority of the object in art’ is, according to Simon Jarvis’ analysis, ‘an attempt to ask on what conditions it would be possible to have *substantive* knowledge, knowledge of the ob-

² S. Deane, “Burke and Tocqueville: New Worlds, New Beings”, in *Boundary 2*, edited by S. Deane and K. Whelan (vol. 31, no. 1, Spring 2004), p. 9.

³ See J. Fischer and G. Neville (eds), *As Others Saw us. Cork through European Eyes* (Cork: Collins Press, 2005).

⁴ O. Rauchbauer, “Big Houses and Irish History”, in O. Rauchbauer (ed.), *The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992), p. 8.

⁵ Deane, p. 16.

ject as it is in itself, not merely knowledge of appearances.’⁶ On the one hand, Adorno agreed with post-Kantian idealists, like Hegel, that ‘it is more consistent not to separate the thing in itself from the thing as it appears to consciousness.’⁷ On the other hand, in a materialist rejoinder to these same idealists, he asserted in *Negative Dialectik* that the Truth-content or cognitive content of art ‘cannot be reduced either to the work’s reception by an audience nor to the intentions of the work’s producer’, and can be revealed further by close analysis.⁸ Hence, paradoxically, for Adorno both the art object and the aesthetic experience of the audience contain elements of a Truth-content.⁹ In travel writing, this problematical and dynamic relationship of the ‘subject-object’ can also be expressed as a power relationship; the ‘object’ or observed is the ‘Other’, whether this be the indigenous population, their environment or *mores*; the perceiver or observer appropriates power by virtue of the fact that he/she assumes the role of omniscient narrator. But does the representation of the cultural landscape of Ireland by Montalembert and Tocqueville privilege the ‘subject’ over the ‘object’? Does an analysis of their writings bear out Adorno’s statement: ‘Only for the subjective reflection, and only for subjective reflection on the subject is the priority of the object attainable’?¹⁰ In any event, is the Truth-content, or cognitive element, as important as the impact it made on the consciousness of the two travellers?

‘Big Houses’¹¹

Montalembert on ‘Big Houses’

Charles-Forbes-René de Montalembert (1810 – 1870) belonged, on his mother’s side, to an old Scottish aristocratic family, with a branch in Ireland, headed by the Earls of Granard.¹² Charles’ background was, there-

⁶ S. Jarvis, *Adorno. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 182.

⁷ Jarvis, p. 182.

⁸ Jarvis, p. 97.

⁹ See J. Callaghan, “Theodore Adorno”,
<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Adorno.html>

¹⁰ Quoted by Jarvis, p. 183.

¹¹ In a recent, well-researched and superbly illustrated anthology, *The Big House in Ireland* (London: Cassell, 2005), Valerie Pakenham has revived interest in the ‘world of the Big Houses’.

¹² Charles’ émigré father, Marc-René de Montalembert, had married Elise Roy Forbes in London, from a Protestant Scottish family, but she converted to Catholicism in

fore, partly Anglo-Irish, although his mother had converted to Catholicism in 1822. The 1830 tour of Ireland, described by the editors of Montalembert's *Journal intime* as 'un périple irlandais passionnant',¹³ transformed the budding thinker into the leader of the Liberal Catholic movement in France in the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁴ As demonstrated in a previous paper,¹⁵ the visit to Ireland, envisaged by Montalembert as a research trip to check data for his proposed History of Ireland, had been carefully planned.¹⁶ Moreover, Montalembert drafted a very detailed itinerary of the tour, marking on it the dates, people to contact at each stop-over and interesting places to visit. Letters of introduction gave him access to the most prestigious houses of the Ascendancy and to the Catholic higher clergy.¹⁷

Having boarded the *Sir George* in Liverpool on Friday 3 September 1830, Montalembert arrived in Dublin Bay the next day. His feelings of elation lasted the entire tour¹⁸ and were sustained by his visits to Anglo-Irish families in their 'Big Houses'. To his friend, Léon Cornudet, Charles confided from Killarney, on 6 October 1830, that since setting foot in Ireland, he had led 'la vie de voyageur le matin, et de mondain le soir.'¹⁹ By his background, temperament and taste, Montalembert had close affinities with the Ascendancy and the educated Catholic higher clergy. His portrayal of the rural cultural landscape of Ireland reveals both his elitist approach and romantic penchant.

1822. See *Letters to a Schoolfellow*. Translated by C.F. Audley (London: Burns and Oates, 1874), p. 211.

¹³ C. de Montalembert, *Journal intime inédit*, in L. Le Guillou and N. Roger-Taillade (eds) (Paris: CNRS, 1990), vol. 2, p. X. Further references to this source will be entered into the text and preceded by (*Journal*).

¹⁴ M. Oliphant, *Memoir of Count de Montalembert* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1882), vol. 1, p. 105.

¹⁵ M.S. Rivière, "In Defence of Irish Catholicism: Charles de Montalembert's aborted History of Ireland and *Journal intime*", in E. Maher and G. Neville (eds), *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 147-161.

¹⁶ Many manuscript items are to be found at the Archives de la Roche-en-Brenil; e.g. *pièce* 685: "Lettres et papiers d'Irlande et d'Angleterre, 1830-1832".

¹⁷ Archives de la Roche-en-Brenil 685 *bis*; see Rivière, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁸ *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 59.

¹⁹ C. de Montalembert, *Lettres à un ami de collège, 1827-1830*, M. Cornudet (ed.) (Paris: Lecoffre, 1884), p. 431.

When viewing 'Big Houses', Montalembert applauded the harmony between these buildings and their location, between Art and Nature. Much more balanced would be the descriptions of Friedrich Engels who, in 1856, described the 'enormous wonderfully beautiful parks', but he added: 'All around is wasteland'.²⁰ For his part, Montalembert failed to reflect on the 'Big Houses' as a hybrid form of taste, arising from a mixture of continental and English architectural models, and as not necessarily suited to Ireland. Throughout his *Journal*, Montalembert's political stance remained strangely paradoxical; Mrs Oliphant, his first English biographer, was puzzled by his pandering to the Ascendancy and by his apparent betrayal of the Irish labouring class: the future champion of Irish Catholicism, she felt, should have had little in common with Lords who 'were cruel tyrants of the martyr-people'. But then, Montalembert was swayed by his aristocratic taste and by such factors as Lord Durroughmore's three pretty nieces.²¹ Much more astute, during his visit from 1776 to 1779, Arthur Young had decried the lack of taste displayed by the 'Big Houses' in Ireland.²²

From 1800, notes Pakenham, 'the battle of the 'styles' was raging in earnest. Was Gothic or classical more suitable for the Irish landscape?'²³ Montalembert was not as fussy as Young, for he was bowled over by the generous hospitality of Anglo-Irish families. On several occasions, he simply makes a passing observation on the 'châteaux magnifiques', as when he observes, from a distance, Skelton Abbey, the 'vaste et superbe résidence du C[om]te de Wicklow', restored by the celebrated architect, Richard Morrison, into 'ce qu'il y a de plus complet' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 73). Likewise, the 'château du Marquis d'Ormonde' (nowadays, Kilkenny Castle) is a 'vaste et imposant monument de la féodalité, curieux et inappréciable original des copies modernes' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 75). The language used by Montalembert in depicting 'Big Houses' and demesnes abounds in superlatives and emotive terms; he deemed Curraghmore, the residence of the Marquis of Waterford, to be surrounded by 'le plus beau parc que j'aie encore vu, on le dit le plus beau des 3 royaumes'. Montalembert goes on: 'Les plantations y sont admirables, les arbres d'une

²⁰ Pakenham, p. 23.

²¹ Oliphant, p. 101.

²² A. Young, *A Tour in Ireland, 1776-1779*, J.B. Ruane (ed.) (Shannon: Irish University Press, London, 1770), vol. 2, p. 151.

²³ Pakenham, pp. 12-13.

beauté merveilleuse, les points de vue nombreux, bien choisis et embellis par le voisinage du Suir' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 78). On rare occasions, the young aristocrat reluctantly concedes that the 'Big House' does not come up to his high ideals of French taste, but he always inserts a compensatory note to restore the balance. Thus, although the interior of Lismore Castle 'ne répond pas à la magnificence ni à l'originalité inappréciable de l'extérieur', the 'Big House' remains a 'vénérable et pittoresque château' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 80).

The fact is that, far too often, Montalembert is content to admire the 'Big Houses' from a distance; this 'panoramic' view reveals both a 'romantic' taste for antiquity and a superficial tendency to applaud any gothic-like building, whether genuine or pseudo. Bantry House is significantly described from afar; here, too, Montalembert extols, less the building itself, than the situation of this 'château féodal [...] entouré des plantations les plus pittoresques, des pelouses les plus vastes, ayant les points de vue les plus séduisants [...] enfin unique autant par sa beauté réelle que par l'originalité et la retraite de sa situation' (p. 84). Three superlatives, the epithet 'unique', the nouns 'beauté', 'originalité' and 'retraite', add up to a Chateaubriand-like discourse. By their very nature, Irish Palladian and neo-classical 'Big Houses' were meant to flag the status of their occupants in a hierarchical society. By the 1830s, the sites for 'Big Houses', such as river valleys, had become equally important, and Montalembert saw this as an example of Nature and Art merging felicitously. It is to be noted that in 1841, the Montalembert family were to acquire La Roche-en-Brenil, in the Côte d'Or, not far from Dijon, a 'Big House' that conformed to the ideals of Charles.

If Bantry House is seen from the outside, we are taken on a tour of Kilruddery House, County Wicklow, built in 1820 by Richard and William Morrison for the tenth Earl of Meath. Once again, Montalembert waxes lyrical; this 'magnifique château [...] est certainement ce qui approche le plus de mon beau idéal en architecture, qui réalise tous mes rêves gothiques en ce genre.' We are in the realm of 'rêves romantiques' but, paradoxically, comfort and size seem to matter as much as 'style' to the young aristocrat who applauds the imitation 'boiseries gothiques' and 'les vitraux modernes excellents' – the epithet 'excellents' is clearly added to counteract the less positive epithet 'modernes'. Continental taste dictates his choice of details, and his attention is arrested, not by the intrinsically Irish elements, but by 'quelques fort belles statues italiennes'. (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 65) Dazzled by the harmony, opulence, splendour and

pseudo-gothic elements, the French traveller fails to mention Lord Meath's exploitation of his tenants. There is a sense in which, in Montalembert's scheme of things, the 'Big House' ceases to be the focus of human political activities and becomes a purely aesthetic icon.

Indeed, Montalembert does not appear to have been as shocked as Tocqueville would be, five years later, by the stark contrast between the opulence and extravagance of the 'Big Houses' and the poverty surrounding them. This is essentially because Montalembert responded aesthetically rather than philosophically to the Irish cultural landscape. He proves to be a volatile judge of Irish architecture, as shown by his reaction to Kingston Castle in Mitchelstown. Kilruddery, praised highly earlier, is soon forgotten, as the traveller is invited to see inside Kingston Castle: 'Visite du château qui surpasse tout ce que j'ai encore vu dans le genre féodal: tout y est complet et d'une régularité admirable; les tourelles, créneaux, meurtrières, armoiries, y sont prodigués' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 94). In Montalembert's emotive prose, the key features are flattering epithets: 'complet', 'admirable', 'excellente', 'vénérable', 'immense', and 'magnifique'. The focus is once more on taste and wealth, not on the disparity between the rich and the poor; indeed, the spotlight is turned on the monetary value of the estate, an 'exemple frappant des avantages d'une grande propriété pour les intérêts agricoles' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 95). So it is that when Montalembert wrote to his friend Léon, on 9 September 1830, '[l'Irlande] satisfait toutes mes croyances, tous mes goûts et jusqu'à mes moindres préjugés', he showed a remarkable degree of self-knowledge.²⁴ Indeed, the *Journal intime* offers many examples of how, during the romantic period, travel writing 'becomes resonant with the interactions between the traveller and the world', thereby illustrating a 'complex interplay between self and the world, between the empirical and the sentimental', with the latter having the upper hand.²⁵

Tocqueville on the 'Big House'

Alexis de Tocqueville was born on 29 July 1805, in a family that belonged to the lower nobility, the Clérel de Tocqueville, from Verneuil, in Normandy. Tocqueville had seen some of his relatives, including his

²⁴ *Lettres à un ami de collège*, p. 416.

²⁵ C. Blanton, *Travel Writing. The Self and the World* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 19.

great-grandfather, Malesherbes, executed during the 'Reign of Terror'. Although his own parents, as strong supporters of the Bourbon Kings, were imprisoned, they escaped the guillotine.²⁶ Tocqueville's attitude towards the old French aristocracy was as paradoxical as his opinions on many other subjects; on the one hand, he tried to free himself from the royalist penchant of his father who acceded to the peerage under Charles X;²⁷ on the other hand, Alexis recognised that the old aristocratic privileges constituted a form of freedom in their own way. Yet, he followed in the footsteps of his liberal mentors in Paris, where he studied Law (1823-1827), notably François Guizot, Benjamin Constant, and Pierre-Paul Roger-Collard, and considered it futile to turn back the clock, for he saw the decline of the aristocracy in Europe as inevitable.²⁸ Such views, however, did not prevent him from inheriting the family Château in Normandy on his mother's death in 1836. In this respect, as in many others, Tocqueville emerges as a complex character; Kramnick comments: 'Postmodernists applaud him for his Pascal-like rejection of certainty and his glorying in contradictions, the bipolarity of aristocracy and democracy, for example. Simultaneously embracing opposites, he is given credit for not seeing reality as uniform and orderly, but as complex and contradictory.'²⁹

Equally paradoxical were Tocqueville's views on Ireland in his private notes compiled during his six-week visit (July-August 1835). When he first set foot on Irish soil, on 6 July 1835, Tocqueville was an experienced traveller, as was his companion, Gustave de Beaumont. They had sailed from Le Havre for America on 2 April 1831, and had spent 271 days in the New World and 15 in Canada, or altogether nine and a half months abroad. This tour of 17 of the 24 American states was to yield a rich harvest; not only did it transform Tocqueville into the national expert on American affairs, it also enabled him to solve some 'intellectual and political puzzles that [had] roiled through Tocqueville's reading and studies in the 1820s', notably surrounding the issues of centralization, democracy, federalism, localism and the conflict between equality and free-

²⁶ A. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I. Kramnick (ed.) (London: Penguin, 2003), p. XII.

²⁷ *Democracy in America*, pp. XIII-XIV.

²⁸ *Democracy in America*, p. XV.

²⁹ *Democracy in America*, p. XLVI.

dom.³⁰ The publication of Part I of *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (Part I: 1835; part II: 1840), and of *Du Système pénitentiaire aux Etats-Unis* (1833), established Tocqueville's reputation in Europe as a political analyst and social scientist. Thus, his chief preoccupations and political theories had already taken shape before his visit to Ireland.

For a detailed discussion of Tocqueville's political and social ideas, readers are referred to Jack Lively's excellent study.³¹ Some key notions need to be recalled here briefly, as particularly relevant to Tocqueville's pronouncements on Ireland. Running through his writings is the principle that 'Freedom is, in truth, a sacred thing', exemplified by the model of America.³² During his fact-finding mission with Gustave de Beaumont, Tocqueville had been impressed by the degree of social equality in America, presented as the 'paradigm of the democratic age'.³³ He had adjudged democracy to be dependent on three intrinsic pre-conditions: (1) the equality of social conditions; (2) the sovereignty of the people; (3) favourable public opinion. In Tocqueville's view, 'democracy represented the negation of the aristocracy'.³⁴

Within a democratic society, religion had a vital role to play as a system of moral regulation. Like Montalembert and his liberal colleagues, Tocqueville argued strongly for an alliance between liberalism and religion; he later welcomed Montalembert's *Des Intérêts catholiques au dix-neuvième siècle* (1852-1856). However, as Lively indicates, Montalembert was chiefly concerned 'with the position of the Church and the Catholic faith, Tocqueville with the political effects of religion.'³⁵ In Tocqueville's view, the value of religion resided in its social and political impact on the 'maintenance of democracy'. He repeatedly stressed the conformity between Christianity and democratic ideals, notably in America where 'liberty required the support of religious beliefs.'³⁶ One important proviso was the separation of Church and State, since Tocqueville

³⁰ Kramnick, pp. XVII-XVIII.

³¹ J. Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

³² *Democracy in America*, pp. 80-81.

³³ C. Frederiksen, "Alexis de Tocqueville"
<http://criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/tocqueville.htm>

³⁴ Frederiksen, pp. 5- 6. See also Deane, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁵ Lively, p. 185.

³⁶ Lively, p. 189.

firmly believed that any clergy should dissociate itself entirely from politics.

What, then, would such a political thinker have made of the oppression of the Irish Catholics by the English government? In his English edition of Tocqueville's *Journal*, J.P. Mayer provides a clear answer to this question: 'He does not hide his contempt for the British aristocracy and its instruments which treated the Irish as conquered people.'³⁷ Although, as a moralist, Tocqueville expressed sympathy for the Catholic labouring class in Ireland, as a social scientist and a 'sharp observer and analyst', he set about gathering data in support of his, or Beaumont's, preconceived thesis.³⁸ Prior to his visit, he had formed the view that in Ireland, the Catholic clergy shared with the masses 'the most extreme democratic views', while the Church of Ireland was closely connected with the political hierarchy.³⁹ Hence, the crucial separation of State and Church did not exist. Since a transition from an aristocratic society to a democratic one was inevitable, the key question was whether this transition could be effected peacefully and without a revolution. Would 'archaic elements' stand in the way of the inexorable march towards democratization in Ireland?⁴⁰

During their travels, Beaumont and Tocqueville had decided on a division of labour: the latter would focus on America, and the former on the British Isles and Ireland. Beaumont became so fascinated by Ireland that he returned in 1837, before publishing his extensive study of Irish politics and society.⁴¹ In his introduction to Tocqueville's *Journey in Ireland*, Larkin remarks: 'Tocqueville, apparently out of consideration for his friend's decision, never did anything more with his Irish notes.' Yet, precisely because they were not intended for publication, these notes reveal both the moralist and the social scientist.⁴² Early in the tour, Tocqueville became conscious of the complexity of the Irish question; to his

³⁷ J.P. Mayer (ed.), *Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), introduction, p. 18.

³⁸ J.P. Mayer (ed.), *Alexis de Tocqueville*, p. 18..

³⁹ Lively, p. 188.

⁴⁰ On this issue, see Deane, p. 16.

⁴¹ G. de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious*, W.C. Taylor (ed.) (London: The Belknap Press, 2006).

⁴² E. Larkin, *Alexis de Tocqueville's Journey in Ireland* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), Introduction, p. 2.

father, in 1835, he described Irish society as a 'ghastly labyrinth' that would require 'not three weeks but three months.'⁴³ A visit to the Poor House in Dublin, on 9 July, confirmed in Tocqueville's mind the three key areas to explore, as summed up by Larkin: 'The first was the extraordinary poverty of the Irish people. The second was their enduring and implacable hatred for the Irish aristocracy, and the third was their deep and touching attachment to the church of their fathers.'⁴⁴

Like Montalembert, Tocqueville was already a liberal in 1835, but his overriding concern was not Catholicism. The main themes of Catholic poverty and repression underpinned the numerous interviews he had with politicians and clerics of both denominations; he discussed the links between State and Church, the Penal Laws, the Poor Law and the Irish economic and agricultural systems. That is to say, in his Irish notes, Tocqueville's ideology is never far from the surface and colours his depiction of the Irish cultural landscape. Yet, he remained conscious of the dangers of subjectivity; later, in his *Souvenirs* (1848), Tocqueville argued for 'the inadequacy of the Cartesian and scientific separation of the universe into object and subject, the observer from the matter observed.'⁴⁵

From the very start, a binary opposition was firmly established in his mind between the Anglo-Irish landlords and the Catholic poor. Ireland was, in Tocqueville's view, divided into two groups, both political and religious, and the chasm between them would not be easily bridged. It is in this context that one must analyse Tocqueville's brief glimpses of the 'Big House', brief because he was more interested in the dwellings of the labouring poor and had little affection for the Irish aristocracy, presented as 'politically defunct' and 'as a condition that was historically unavailable'.⁴⁶ 'Big Houses' and cabins thus became mirror images of this binary opposition. In considering Ireland as a two-nation state, Tocqueville pondered several questions: If democracy was inevitable and if the aristocracy was doomed, who would inherit power after its demise? What could be done to alleviate the shocking poverty of the masses? How could the

⁴³ Larkin, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Larkin, p. 7. See also Deane, p. 17.

⁴⁵ The *Souvenirs* were published in Tocqueville's *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome XII, ed. L. Monnier (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). See J. Lukacs, "Alexis de Tocqueville: A Historical Appreciation", in *Literature of Liberty*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982), p. 21. www.libertyfund.org/Home3/Essay.php?record/D=0799

⁴⁶ Deane, p. 7.

land be re-distributed? Would State salaries to the clergy be acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy? Would there eventually be a Revolution in Ireland?⁴⁷ How would one curb the political ambition of the Catholic clergy? Such were the notions underpinning Tocqueville's descriptions of the cultural landscape of Ireland.

In his *Journal*, there is as much identity between the observer and the observed, as there in Montalembert's descriptions, but the fact that Tocqueville chooses to observe the 'Big House' from afar, and in a panoramic manner, underlines his ideological stance. While Montalembert sought an invitation to Kingston Castle, Tocqueville merely comments, albeit positively, on the size of the property, 'un château magnifique, appartenant à Lord Kingston. Il possède autour de ce château 75, 000 acres de terre'.⁴⁸ But unlike, Montalembert, Tocqueville was prepared to give a truer picture of the grave financial situation facing Irish landlords in 1835, by stating that their apparent opulence did not match the reality; for example, Lord Kingston was in debt to the tune of 400,000 pounds. Tocqueville depicted an aristocracy in decay, with a degree of glee: 'Il en est ainsi dans presque toute l'Irlande. Voyez le doigt de Dieu ! [...] Elle [l'aristocratie] meurt par où elle a péché' (p. 276). Of far greater concern to Tocqueville was the subjugation of the Catholic people by the colonizers and the social incongruity that ensued; hence, as discussed below, the miserable cabins at Mitchelstown detained him longer than Lord Kingston's mansion.

In his article, Deane concludes that both Burke and Tocqueville insisted on the fact that 'Ireland suffered from the most bigoted and destructive of all aristocracies'.⁴⁹ This is borne out by Tocqueville's notes: 'Si vous voulez savoir ce que peuvent produire l'esprit de conquête, les haines religieuses, combinés avec tous les abus de l'aristocratie, sans aucun de ses avantages, venez en Irlande' (p. 217) — a rare occasion when Tocqueville addresses the reader. In order to discover Tocqueville's private opinions, one needs to look closely at the wording of questions put to interviewees, such as: 'Est-il vrai que les propriétaires irlandais pressurent la population agricole et en tirent presque jusqu'aux moyens de

⁴⁷ Deane, p. 18.

⁴⁸ A. de Tocqueville, *Voyages en Angleterre et en Irlande*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard / Idées, 1967), p. 276. Hereafter, the references to this edition will be inserted into the text.

⁴⁹ Deane, p. 16.

vivre?’ (p. 219) He finds out that there is no moral bond between the poor and the rich.⁵⁰

Thus does Tocqueville present an image of dislocation, reflected by the physical distance between the landlord’s mansion, a ‘magnifique château’, and the ‘misérables demeures’ at Mitchelstown (pp. 275-76). At Tuam, this binary opposition is signalled once more geographically. The priest and Tocqueville come to a fork on the road, at which a beautiful short-cut leads to the mansion on the right, while a small path on the left opens out on a valley that hides a wretched village, built near a ravine. This location highlights the precarious lives of the inhabitants. Moreover, the cabins are ‘confined on each side [of the dry stream] by two rather high hills covered with pasture’; here, Tocqueville evokes a people caught in the poverty trap. Moreover, not a tree grows in the valley that offers a ‘spectacle of nudity’.⁵¹ By contrast, the Lord is oblivious to this wretchedness in his large park: ‘What does the Lord do during all this time? He strolls in his vast estate surrounded by walls. In the enclosure of his park, everything breathes splendour, outside poverty groans, but he does not notice it.’⁵²

Despite such evidence of Tocqueville’s emotional involvement as a moralist, the social scientist remains detached. Long before Edward Said in his article, ‘Representing the Colonized’,⁵³ Tocqueville had raised the issue of representation as problematical, for he remained honest enough to realise that truth was not absolute. Near Tuam, Tocqueville mused: ‘Sur le haut de la colline, d’un côté les masures du village et la petite maison du curé; de l’autre, le château, les grounds [...] Réflexions : Là, la richesse, la science, le pouvoir. Ici, la force : diversité de langage suivant la position. Où trouver la vérité absolue ?’ (p. 302). Unlike the more dogmatic Montalembert, Tocqueville was fully aware of the difference between first impressions made by an ‘object’, and the ‘Truth-content’ or reality of the ‘object’. Tocqueville’s brilliance as an observer of the contemporary scene rested, in no small measure, on his awareness of the complexities of societies, notably Irish society: ‘What a complexity of

⁵⁰ Larkin, p. 29.

⁵¹ Larkin, p. 111.

⁵² Larkin, p. 117.

⁵³ See Blanton, p. 107.

miseries five centuries of oppression, civil disorders, and religious hostilities have piled up on this poor people'.⁵⁴

Montalembert on cabins and cottages

According to Pauly, during his Irish tour, Montalembert was in close contact with all classes of Irish society.⁵⁵ While this is intrinsically true, the fact is that in the *Journal intime*, the young man took a disappointingly global view of the Catholic labouring poor; he viewed them as a 'cause célèbre' rather than as individuals. Nor did he immerse himself fully into their world, unlike Arthur Young who devoted a section of his work to 'the labouring poor'⁵⁶ and their 'habitations'.⁵⁷ In his dealings with the Catholic poor, Montalembert broached a single subject: religion, for example during his conversation with a young Catholic Kerryman, John Brennan (*Journal*, vol. 2, pp. 84-85). Moreover, Montalembert is given to broad generalisations both in his *Journal*, and later in his *Lettre sur le Catholicisme en Irlande* (1831).⁵⁸ Throughout his discussion of Catholic dwellings in the *Journal*, he makes no attempt to underline individual, regional or economic differences, and he ignores the fact that some Catholic landlords were as wealthy as their Protestant counterparts. In his *Lettre sur le Catholicisme*, all Catholic vernacular dwellings are described indiscriminately as 'hutttes immondes'.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in the *Journal*, Montalembert does not mention a single visit to cabins; instead, he is content with passing observations on vernacular buildings. As a result, the *Journal* lacks the kind of concrete details provided by Arthur Young. In brief, Montalembert sympathizes with the Catholic masses, but from his pedestal. He adopts a 'Monarch of all I survey' attitude; he adjudges Waterford to be 'une grande et sale ville' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 77); he describes Fermoy, on the other hand, as 'une ville régulière et florissante de 6,000 âmes' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 80), but no details of buildings are given. Blarney is quickly sketched as a 'petit village situé sur le bord d'un torrent dont la course forme un vallon assez gentil et assez bien planté'

⁵⁴ Letter to his father, quoted by Larkin, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Pauly, p. 115.

⁵⁶ Young, vol. 2, pp. 35-58.

⁵⁷ Young, pp. 47-49.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the *Lettre sur le Catholicisme*, in *Œuvres polémiques*, vol. 2, p. 130. See also Rivière, p. 159.

⁵⁹ *L'Avenir*, 1831, p. 1.

(*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 81). Tralee is the 'vilaine et sale capitale de Kerry', while Tarbert struck him, from afar, as '[un] joli village habité principalement par les Palatins ou protestants réfugiés du Palatinat' (*Journal*, vol. 2, p. 91).

Such sweeping statements are the sum of his observations on the town dwellings of artisans in rural Ireland, and he failed to look closely at their living conditions, which he later decried so vehemently in *L'Avenir* (1831). Montalembert chose to eulogise the natural landscape, the 'pays fertile et champêtre' (p. 97), notably between Clonmel and Kilkenny, as he made haste to enjoy the hospitality of the Marquis of Ormond in his 'beau château' (p. 98). Indeed, Montalembert's stated objectives for his trip were to observe Catholicism as a national movement, to interview Daniel O'Connell, and to collect the views of the Catholic *intelligentsia*. Moreover, being by inclination, a town-dweller, he was at home neither in villages nor in the countryside, even if he adopted a romantic pose in the manner of Lamartine and Chateaubriand. For him, religion remained an abstract, intellectual and philosophical subject to debate, not a way of life to be observed at close hand in wretched cabins. In brief, the 'Truth-content' of his representation of the Irish cultural landscape mattered less to him than his own mediation and emotions.

Tocqueville on cabins and cottages

By contrast, one is struck by Tocqueville's sober pragmatism, genuine concern for the Truth and growing commitment to the democratic principles of liberty, equality and social justice. To John Stuart Mill, he had avowed in June 1835, before the tour of Ireland: 'I love liberty by taste and equality by instinct and reason. These two passions which so many people pretend to have, I believe I truly feel in myself, and I am ready to make great sacrifices for them.'⁶⁰ Tocqueville found, in the habitations of the poor, mirror images of the dehumanising elements of the Dublin Poor House.⁶¹

Like Adorno, in a section entitled 'Refuge for the homeless' in *Minima Moralia* (1951), Tocqueville showed growing awareness of the problematical nature of human dwellings. Wishing to debate the apparent truth surrounding human habitations, and their intrinsic reality, Adorno

⁶⁰ Quoted by Lively, p. 18.

⁶¹ Larkin, p. 25.

argued in 1951: ‘The hardest hit, as everywhere, are those who have no choice. They live, if not in slums, in bungalows that by tomorrow may be leaf-huts, trailers, cars, camps, or the open air’, since houses and beds are little more than a transient ‘threshold between waking and dreaming’.⁶² But Tocqueville jumped a little too quickly to conclusions and failed to heed Arthur Young’s sensible advice:

[...] I found upon various occasions that some gentlemen in Ireland are infected with the rage of adopting *systems* as well as those of England: with one party the poor are all starving, with the other they are deemed in a very tolerable situation, and a third, who look with an evil eye on the administration of the British Government, are fond of exclaiming at the poverty and rags as proofs of the cruel treatment of Ireland. When truth is likely to be thus warped, a traveller must be very circumspect to *believe*, and very assiduous to *see*.⁶³

Neither Montalembert nor Tocqueville appear to have been ‘assiduous to *see*’. Swayed by his deep-seated democratic fervour and a warm heart,⁶⁴ Tocqueville gives too sombre a representation of cabins; thus, on the road from Dublin to Carlow (19 July 1835), a uniformly grey colour pervades his tableau: ‘La plupart des habitations du pays très pauvres d’apparence ; un fort grand nombre misérables au dernier point. Murs de boue, toit de chaume, une seule pièce. Point de cheminée, la fumée sort par la porte. Le cochon couché au milieu de la maison’ (p. 229). This thumb-sketch coincides with Arthur Young’s first-hand observations in 1776.⁶⁵ However, in his notes, Tocqueville admits that some of his ‘panoramic’ observations are not entirely empirical and amount to generalisations made. This is borne out by his choice of language: ‘très pauvres d’apparence’; ‘la plupart’ ‘un grand nombre’. Between Carlow and Waterford (21 July 1835), the language betrays the same degree of uncertainty: ‘L’aspect nous semble devenir un peu moins misérable. Presque toutes les maisons ont de bonnes cheminées. Quelques-unes paraissent neuves et bâties sur un plan un peu meilleur’ (p. 240).⁶⁶ Because he is inclined to take a

⁶² T. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, tr. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), pp. 38-39.

⁶³ Young, vol. 2, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Lukacs, p. 33.

⁶⁵ Young, vol. 2, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁶ My italics.

global view, conveyed *en passant*, Tocqueville erroneously creates an impression of dislocation in rural communities, as on the road to Thomastown: 'Peu de villages, mais beaucoup de cabanes éparses. Point d'églises [...] Point de manufactures. Point d'habitations médiocres [...] Point d'industrie visible que la terre' (p. 241).

Arthur Young had been more cautious about the Irish labouring class than either Montalembert or Tocqueville, declaring that the 'apparent poverty of it is greater than the real; for the house of a man that is master of four or five cows, will have scarce any thing but deficiencies.' To an Irish labourer or small tenant, Young had added, 'a hog is a much more valuable piece of goods than a set of tea things.'⁶⁷ For his part, the usually astute Tocqueville showed little awareness of the dynamic nature of the Irish cultural landscape and of differences in vernacular buildings, in their environment and in regional materials.⁶⁸ Thus, when describing labourers' cottages near Tuam, Tocqueville once more takes an oversimplified view:

Toutes les maisons qui faisaient file à ma droite et à ma gauche étaient faites de boue durcie au soleil, et élevée en murs de hauteur d'homme. Le toit de ces demeures était formé de chaume si ancien que l'herbe qui le couvrait se confondait avec les prairies qui garnissaient les collines voisines [...] Le cochon dans la maison. Le fumier. La tête et les pieds nus. Expliquer et peindre cela⁶⁹

This 'unhappy village',⁷⁰ is characterised by dehumanising poverty and a total loss of individualism: 'Les bois légers qui soutenaient cette faible toiture avaient cédé aux efforts du temps, et donnaient à l'ensemble l'apparence d'un *taupier* sur lequel se serait appuyé le pied du voyageur' (p. 280). While claiming superior knowledge of vernacular habitations, Tocqueville fails to reflect on local *mores* and values, a vital element underlined by Henry Glassie in his book *Material Culture*: 'Buildings, like pots and poems, realize culture', insofar as they 'can be interpreted as

⁶⁷ Young, vol. 2, p. 49.

⁶⁸ See Aalen, pp. 147-152: 'House styles had evolved as adaptations to the local environment and economy, with distinctive forms transmitted as part of a communal tradition.'

⁶⁹ Tocqueville, p. 280. The *points de suspension* are in the manuscript journal.

⁷⁰ Larkin, p. 111.

displays of the values we value [...] The meanings that lie in the selection of materials are social and economic as well as environmental.’⁷¹

If Tocqueville took little notice of the impact of the environment on the location and construction of vernacular buildings, it is because he saw workers’ cabins, less as representations of material culture and rural traditions, than as symbols of a downtrodden people. He had come to Ireland with this preconceived notion, and in the course of his travels, cabins and ‘Big Houses’ represented ‘archaic elements’ that stood in the way of political progress and modernization. Cultural congruity or incongruity mattered less to him than ideology; his vision was blurred, just like Montalembert’s, but for different reasons. Instead, Tocqueville measured regional variations by the degree of poverty manifested by habitations.⁷²

In the west, the picture darkens considerably, and near Tuam, Tocqueville is drawn into this world of suffering during a sad visit to a dying man, a martyr to poverty: ‘Rien de plus désolé que l’aspect de son intérieur : un banc de bois fixé contre l’un des murs, un coffre vermoulu [...] L’âtre était formé de quatre pierres plates au milieu desquelles brûlait lentement et obscurément un pâle petit feu de tourbe [...]’ (p. 297) At this point of the tour, Tocqueville appears to have experienced some sort of epiphany; through the emotive language, a mystical mood is created:

Toute la famille restée avec moi en dehors s’était agenouillée sur le seuil. Le soleil se couchait alors. Ses derniers rayons, pénétrant par la porte ouverte dans l’intérieur de la cabane, y jetaient une clarté inaccoutumée et pour la première fois teignaient de brillantes couleurs le nuage de fumée qui la remplissait. A mesure qu’il [prêtre] parlait, la douleur physique et l’espérance se peignaient à la fois sur la figure du vieillard, l’intérêt et l’inquiétude sur les traits du prêtre. (pp. 297-98)

Such observations serve at least to disprove Heine’s unfair assessment of Tocqueville as ‘a man of head with little heart’.⁷³

Tocqueville’s ‘negative concept of liberty’ was, in the words of Jack Lively, ‘based on the absence of restraint and coercion by other men or

⁷¹ H. Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 227, 230, 237.

⁷² Larkin, p. 39. See also p. 51.

⁷³ Kramnick, p. XX.

conversely of un-coerced choices in action'.⁷⁴ As much as interference from central government, poverty and the unfair division of land were highlighted by Tocqueville as responsible, in Ireland, for the loss of individual liberty and as posing a threat to social order. Far from merely bemoaning these ills, in the manner of Montalembert, the social scientist sought practical solutions to pauperism. Tocqueville had described the value of his American trip to his mother as furnishing him, 'on the majority of questions which concern us in France, with ideas which I can some day put to practical use.'⁷⁵ The Irish notes must also be seen in the same light.⁷⁶

In our analysis of Montalembert's and Tocqueville's observations on the cultural landscape of Ireland, one significant difference has emerged: the former responded as a moralist first and foremost; the latter reacted primarily as a social scientist. Larkin comments: '[He was] deeply interested in and concerned about these problems presented in Ireland by the law, poverty, aristocracy, and religion, but to the social scientist, as distinguished from the moralist, they posed difficulties to be solved rather than wrongs to be righted.'⁷⁷ Back in France, Montalembert sought inspiration for his liberal campaign in Irish Catholicism; Tocqueville saw Catholicism as an adjunct, among many others, to the advent of democracy. In the end, the two travellers' representation of the 'object' tells us more about the 'subject', and the 'observed' reveals the 'observer'. While the *voyageurs* saw themselves as observing objectively, everything was mediated by their 'private protocols'. And while representing singular cases, they both relied on gross generalisations. Hence, in their Irish Journals, they struggled to evolve notions of group, class and national identities.

Writing of art and music, Adorno stressed the importance of seeking out the Truth-content, the 'concentrated social substance' and the 'social meanings in artistic form'.⁷⁸ Paradoxically, he also recognized the importance of the mediator or 'subject' in any attempt to arrive at a substantive knowledge of the 'object'. Montalembert's, and, to a lesser degree, Tocqueville's so-called empirical observations are undermined by an ines-

⁷⁴ Lively, p. 10.

⁷⁵ Letter of 27 September 1831, quoted by Lively, p. 29.

⁷⁶ See Larkin, p. 143.

⁷⁷ Larkin, p. 141.

capable impression of ‘subjectivity’ or ‘perspective’, defined as ‘the fact that everyone sees the world from his or her (or its) individual vantage point, defined in part by nature, by culture, and by individual experience.’⁷⁹ In respect of this ‘subjective mediation’, factors such as the travellers’ experience and background manifestly came into play. As readers of both men’s Journals on Ireland, we are restricted to what each *voyageur* personally deemed to be either of interest, or relevant to French Liberalism. Accordingly, in perusing their notes, one finds it difficult to arrive at ‘knowledge of the object as it is in itself, [and] not merely [at] knowledge of appearances.’⁸⁰

⁷⁸ P. Mattick, “Theodor Adorno”, in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by D.E. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 5.

⁷⁹ R.C. Sol, “Subjectivity”, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. T. Honderich (Oxford: O.U.P., 1995), p. 857.

⁸⁰ Jarvis, p. 182.

Yann Bévant

Chapter Three: La 36^{ème} division d'Ulster, un mythe irlandais né en France

L'étude des mythes au 20^{ème} siècle s'est radicalement distinguée de celle du 19^{ème}. Les "mythologues" ont abandonné l'approche du mythe comme légende ou fiction au profit d'un mythe vivant ou "histoire vraie". Lévi-Strauss et Mircea Eliade, entre autres, considèrent dans le mythe le fait étonnant que l'angoisse humaine ne reste pas muette, ni comme interdite, mais au contraire qu'elle est capable de s'élaborer psychologiquement et sociologiquement en créant des symboles. Cette symbolisation, c'est-à-dire le fait d'être capable d'engendrer et d'organiser un corps de signes, renvoie à la possibilité d'être capable de se projeter dans des représentations et par voie de conséquence, que ce soit par conviction ou par illusion, d'être soulagé de l'angoisse existentielle. Grâce au mythe, l'angoisse devient supportable. Le mythe apparaît ainsi comme un genre de récit particulier, différent des contes et légendes en ce que ses héros sont reconnus comme vrais par les sociétés qui les racontent. Construit comme un récit qui explique des origines et institue un temps historique, il s'articule avec les rites pour répéter l'acte créateur d'identité, et constitue au final un élément essentiel du discours identitaire et idéologique des sociétés. Comme l'exprime Martine Joly :

Tout en disant quelque chose sur quelque chose, le langage du mythe instaure aussi un sujet de discours capable de se désigner lui-même comme je à l'intérieur de ses énoncés.¹

Dans le contexte particulier de l'Irlande du Nord, on conçoit très bien comment le conflit entre les communautés nationalistes et unionistes s'est inscrit dans des perceptions identitaires antagonistes nourries par des

¹ Martine Joly, *L'image et son interprétation* (Paris, Nathan, 2002), p.22

mythes différents ou par des approches opposées de mêmes mythes. Les rebelles héroïques des uns sont les terroristes des autres (1798, 1803, 1858, 1868, 1916...), les actes fondateurs des uns sont les actes de sujétion des autres (siège de Derry, bataille de la Boyne, création du Stormont...), les héros légendaires comme Cuchulainn sont soit la manifestation d'une identité celtique irlandaise, différente de l'identité britannique, soit la représentation emblématique et la justification par le passé de la différence entre l'Ulster et le reste de l'Irlande. La première guerre mondiale, ou plutôt le rôle de l'Irlande dans la première guerre mondiale, apparaît comme un 'no man's land' historique. Comme le dit Keith Jeffery :

This dangerous zone sits between two opposing perceptions of Ireland's role in the war; on the one side is a unionist image of Irish Protestants loyally rallying to the flag in 1914, along with Ulster's own losses at the front sealing the Union with blood in an equivalent national sacrifice to that of the men of Easter 1916 in Ireland. On the other, Catholic and Nationalist side, the men of the rising represent the real and true Ireland, in sharp contrast to the misguided Irish youths, duped into taking the King's shilling by worn-out politicians, who are slaughtered in France at the altar of British imperialism²

Entre ces deux représentations manifestement difficilement réconciliables, se trouve en fait une réalité humaine beaucoup plus complexe. La participation de l'Irlande à la première guerre mondiale a ainsi pris une profonde connotation idéologique. Les faits d'armes de la 36^{ème} division d'Ulster sont très connus en Irlande du Nord. Tous les ans lors des parades de l'ordre d'Orange, dans toute l'Irlande du Nord des fleurs sont déposées sur les monuments commémoratifs par les politiciens unio-

² « Cette zone dangereuse se situe entre deux perceptions opposées du rôle de l'Irlande dans la guerre. D'un côté il y a l'image unioniste de protestants irlandais ralliant loyalement le drapeau en 1914, et des pertes de l'Ulster au front scellant l'Union dans le sang, dans un élan de sacrifice national équivalent à celui des hommes de pâques 1916 en Irlande. De l'autre, catholique et nationaliste, les hommes du soulèvement représentent la seule et véritable Irlande, qui contraste brutalement avec ces jeunes irlandais perdus et dupés par des politiciens au bout du rouleau au point de s'engager à la solde de Sa Majesté, et qui se font massacrer en France sur l'autel de l'impérialisme britannique », *Lees Knowles Lectures*, Chaire d'histoire militaire de Trinity College, Université de Cambridge. (Conférences données par Keith Jeffery dans le cadre du thème "For the Freedom of Small Nations : Ireland and the Great War", novembre 1998).

nistes, en mémoire de ceux tombés au champ d'honneur. Dans Donegal Pass à Belfast, il existe une fresque murale dédiée à la 36^{ème} division qui établit un parallèle entre les actions des combattants irlandais lors de la bataille atroce de la Somme, et les actions de l'UVF actuelle, organisation paramilitaire clandestine créée en réalité en 1966.³ L'utilisation politique de l'engagement de la 36^{ème} division sur la Somme n'est pas un phénomène nouveau : peu de temps après la bataille du 1^{er} juillet 1916, le major Wilfrid Spender, un officier du haut commandement de la division, écrivait :

The Ulster Division has lost more than half the men who attacked and, in doing so, has sacrificed itself for the Empire which has treated them none too well. The much derided UVF has won a name which equals any in history. Their devotion [...] deserves the gratitude of the British Empire. It is due to the memory of these brave heroes that their beloved Province shall be fairly treated.⁴

Cette citation résume à elle seule le mythe de la Somme et de la 36^{ème} division. Elle dépeint une division totalement acquise à la cause unioniste, composée d'hommes qui servaient dans la milice paramilitaire loyaliste, l'UVF, bravant héroïquement le feu ennemi malgré des pertes effroyables, au service d'un gouvernement britannique impérial qui était prêt à brader l'Ulster dans les années précédant le conflit. Comme pour tous les bons mythes, il faut un fond de vérité pour que la chose fonctionne. D'abord, il est clair que le Home Rule - projet de loi créant un parlement et un gouvernement autonome pour l'Irlande et déjà rejeté par deux fois à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle par le parlement impérial de Londres - était en passe de devenir loi en 1914, et nul ne sait ce qui serait advenu sans l'irruption de la première guerre mondiale, tant la tension avait atteint un paroxysme non seulement en Irlande entre les deux communautés, mais aussi en Grande Bretagne entre la droite impériale qui dominait

³ Le sigle UVF est à l'origine celui d'une milice créée en 1913, comme on le voit ultérieurement sur cette page. La confusion -volontaire- entre les deux organisations, celle de 1913 -organisation de masse- et celle de 1966 -groupuscule illégal- est une manifestation de la volonté de montrer la continuité du combat mené par les loyalistes.

⁴ Tim Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War, Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 68 -69.

le parti conservateur alors dans l'opposition, et le gouvernement libéral favorable à cette réforme exigée par les nationalistes constitutionnels de l'Irish Parliamentary Party. Ensuite, il est également vrai que la 36^{ème} division avait été formée largement à partir de la structure de l'UVF, milice loyaliste formée en 1913 afin de résister à la mise en place du Home Rule. Du point de vue militaire, enfin, pour ce qui concerne la bravoure au combat, il est exact que la 36^{ème} division fut la seule unité britannique à atteindre la deuxième ligne allemande lors de la bataille le 1^{er} juillet, au prix de 6000 tués et blessés, soit un peu plus de la moitié des soldats engagés dans l'offensive ce jour-là.

Cependant, si le mythe est basé sur un fond de vérité historique, il est loin de recouvrer celle-ci : en premier lieu, il est faux d'affirmer que la 36^{ème} division était protestante et unioniste dans son intégralité, et que ses combattants étaient tous originaires d'Ulster. Prenons l'exemple du 14^{ème} bataillon, le Royal Irish Rifles, qui avait été formé à partir des Young Citizen Volunteers de Belfast, un groupe attaché à l'UVF. Tim Bowman qui a étudié les archives du Royal Rifles a découvert que 174 hommes, soit près de 18% de l'effectif du bataillon, étaient de confession catholique, et qu'un des officiers, un lieutenant, était un juif américain.⁵

La création de la division ne fut pas aussi facile que beaucoup de politiciens unionistes aiment à le croire, et souvent des volontaires extérieurs à l'UVF, et même à l'Ulster, étaient recrutés. Un des officiers de la 36^{ème}, Frank Crozier, décrit dans ses mémoires comment il trouva une centaine de recrues à Londres et environ 800 à Glasgow⁶. Ce témoignage est confirmé par des rapports transmis au général Mackinnon du com-

⁵ Tim Bowman, "Composing Divisions, The Recuitment of Ulster and National Volunteers into the British Army in 1914", in *Causeway*, Spring 1995, pp.24-29, p.25

⁶ Frank Percy Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) pp.78-93. F. Crozier est connu en Irlande car après une carrière militaire qui l'a conduit de la guerre des Boers aux tranchées de la Somme, il a fait partie des officiers commandant les tristement célèbres Black and Tans durant la guerre anglo-irlandaise. Désapprouvant totalement les méthodes d'intimidation et de terrorisme du gouvernement britannique d'alors, il eut le courage de démissionner de son poste et de sacrifier sa retraite. Il ne s'est par la suite jamais départi de ses options pacifistes, écrivant même un livre intitulé *The Men I Killed*, dans lequel il dénonce par le biais de l'autobiographie la brutalité des politiques impériales de l'époque.

mandement occidental en février 1915, selon lesquels un officier de la division d'Ulster essayait de recruter des volontaires à Liverpool. Mackinnon dût émettre l'ordre formel que le recrutement devait être opéré exclusivement dans la zone géographique couverte par la division, sauf autorisation spéciale du commandement. Simkins, enfin, affirme que les soldats du régiment d'artillerie de la division furent tous recrutés dans la région de Londres.⁷

Ces éléments montrent que le mythe de la 36^{ème} division d'Ulster doit être traité avec une grande prudence, ce qui n'est pas véritablement une surprise. Une première remarque est que l'image monolithique de la 36^{ème} division, corps de protestants loyalistes d'Ulster, est ainsi battue en brèche. Même si l'UVF constitue une bonne partie de l'ossature de la division, celle-ci compte de nombreux éléments exogènes à l'unionisme ou à ses valeurs.

Un autre effet du mythe est sans doute qu'il a largement contribué à passer sous silence l'existence d'autres unités irlandaises engagées sur le front français, ainsi que les actions de celles-ci. Une rapide comparaison avec ce qui se passe en termes de recrutement dans le reste de l'Irlande est instructive. En dehors de la 36^{ème}, l'Irlande fournit deux autres divisions : la 10^{ème} et la 16^{ème}. Le recrutement pour la 10^{ème} avait commencé dès le 21 août 1914, et la situation politique qui prévaut à cette période en Irlande n'est pas sans effet : alors qu'à la date du 29 août la plupart des autres divisions qui recrutent en Grande Bretagne ont fait le plein de volontaires pour atteindre l'effectif normal d'environ 20 000 hommes par unité, en Irlande la 10^{ème} division n'a enregistré que 1933 recrues. Au 14 septembre, la division compte 124 officiers et 10 910 hommes, mais ces chiffres ont été atteints grâce au renfort de volontaires venus d'Angleterre : le Royal Munster Fusiliers, par exemple, se voit affecter 600 volontaires venus de Bristol. Il est clair à cette période qu'en l'absence d'un compromis satisfaisant sur le Home Rule, les nationalistes en général et les dirigeants de l'Irish Parliamentary Party en particulier - encore représentatifs à l'époque- ne sont guère enclins à soutenir l'effort de recrutement. La situation évolue après le compromis de septembre qui donne au Home Rule le statut de loi tout en la gelant jusqu'à la fin des hostilités et en envisageant un statut spécial pour l'Ulster. Le 11 septembre, le recrutement

⁷ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army, The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988), pp192-208.

commença pour la 16^{ème}, et c'est essentiellement avec cette division que les nationalistes constitutionnels s'identifièrent, notamment du fait que des membres importants du parti nationaliste comme Thomas Kettle ou William Redmond s'y engagèrent. Il serait cependant faux de considérer, à l'instar de la 36^{ème} division, que les volontaires nationalistes affluèrent. Comme la 36^{ème} et la 10^{ème}, la 16^{ème} comptait beaucoup de volontaires non irlandais. Un exemple frappant est celui du Royal Irish Regiment : son 6^{ème} bataillon comptait 250 engagés de la milice de Guernesey, dont près de la moitié ne parlait pas anglais mais le dialecte des îles anglo-normandes. La campagne de recrutement pour la 36^{ème} ne fut ouverte qu'en octobre 1914, et ceci est également un détail souvent oublié, mais significatif, car il remet en cause par la chronologie le postulat de l'Ulster unioniste volant immédiatement au secours de l'Empire à la déclaration de guerre (celle-ci intervient le 4 août), par opposition au sud de l'Irlande et aux nationalistes dont l'attitude aurait été attentiste et ambiguë.

La chronologie fait plutôt apparaître que les deux factions continuent à entretenir le rapport de forces entre elles afin d'obtenir le maximum d'avantages et de garanties dans la perspective de la fin du conflit. Initialement John Redmond assura que les National Volunteers pouvaient être utilisés pour défendre l'Irlande⁸, en coordination avec l'UVF, ce qui permettait de libérer des troupes britanniques et de les envoyer sur le continent (stratégie qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle employée par Grattan en 1782). Carson surenchérit en faisant valoir que l'UVF pouvait tout à la fois défendre le territoire contre une menace d'invasion, mais aussi fournir des troupes pour le corps expéditionnaire. Redmond et l'Irish Parliamentary Party proposaient leur soutien en échange des garanties en faveur du Home Rule, Carson mettant l'UVF dans la balance en échange du contraire. Le compromis de septembre s'explique largement par la position de l'Irish Parliamentary Party et de Redmond. Le contenu du troisième projet de Home Rule, présenté à la Chambre des Communes en

⁸ Citation : "I say to the government that they may tomorrow everyone of their troops from Ireland [...] the armed Catholics of the south will be only too glad to join arms with the armed protestant Ulstermen". Déclaration du 3/08/14 à la Chambre des Communes. De fait Jonathan Bardon fait également état de scènes surprenantes dans les jours qui suivent, notamment à Omagh et Strabane où ont lieu des manifestations de fraternisation entre unités des National Volunteers et de l'UVF. Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005), pp. 448-449.

1912, était très en retrait du traité qui fut signé en 1921 suite à la guerre anglo-irlandaise : s'il prévoyait la création d'un parlement d'Irlande à Dublin, il précisait également que Westminster conservait le contrôle des forces armées, de la police, du commerce et de la politique étrangère. Mais ce projet proposé par un gouvernement libéral qui devait depuis 1910 compter sur le soutien des travaillistes et des nationalistes irlandais à la chambre correspondait très largement à l'attente des dirigeants de l'Irish Parliamentary Party. John Redmond, le leader du parti, pensait accéder au statut d'homme d'état de l'Empire à l'image des premiers ministres d'Australie, du Canada, de Nouvelle Zélande ou d'Afrique du Sud. Le compromis correspondait donc aux intérêts défendus par l'Irish Parliamentary Party et par ses dirigeants. Une autre limite à l'homogénéité idéologique des divisions irlandaises fut la position du ministre de la guerre, Lord Kitchener. Kitchener, qui était soldat de métier - et né en 1850 près de Listowel dans le Kerry- était opposé à la création de corps d'armée qui auraient une connotation politique.⁹

Malgré ses réticences Kitchener avait besoin des volontaires ulstériens,¹⁰ et plusieurs concessions furent faites pour répondre aux exigences de Carson. Ainsi, le terme Ulster, qui n'était pas prévu dans les listes des divisions avant 1914, fut accordé dans le nom officiel de la 36^{ème} division. En outre la structure de l'UVF fut largement préservée et lorsque cela était possible, les officiers de l'UVF intégrés en conservant leur grade ou leur commandement. Ainsi, le Général Nugent, qui fut nommé à la tête de la division, était-il un propriétaire terrien protestant de County Cavan membre du commandement de l'UVF. Ces aspects symboliques et organisationnels ont conduit nombre d'observateurs, et bien sûr les nationalistes, à considérer que le commandement général de l'armée, et par voie de conséquence le gouvernement britannique, avait accordé un traitement préférentiel aux unionistes, et que celui-ci ne pouvait s'expliquer que par des raisons politiques. De ce point de vue, le mythe de la 36^{ème} a fonctionné également à rebours, puisqu'il a contribué à nourrir le discours nationaliste radical. La volonté de Carson et des unionistes de faire apparaître la division comme l'expression militaire de l'unionisme, nourrie

⁹ George Cassar, *Kitchener's War, British Strategy from 1914 to 1916* (Washington D.C: Brassey's, 2004), pp74-76 et Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies 1914-1916* (Manchester: MUP, 1988).

¹⁰ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p.449.

des valeurs protestantes et impériales, contribua aussi à imposer cette représentation au sein de la population catholique et nationaliste et à donner à la division une coloration clairement orange. En conséquence, l'attitude de l'armée, déjà suspecte de partialité depuis la mutinerie de Curragh, semblait n'être en fait que l'écho de la volonté du gouvernement, via le ministère de la guerre. L'attitude du cabinet britannique dont Kitchener était membre apparaissait comme la démonstration de l'absence totale d'équité dans le traitement des Irlandais prêts à se battre pour la Couronne, les nationalistes ne bénéficiant pas des faveurs accordées aux unionistes. A partir d'une telle démonstration, il ne fallait donc pas s'attendre à ce que la Couronne fasse preuve de justice dans le traitement de la question irlandaise.

Pourtant, d'autres aspects, pragmatiques ceux-là, méritent également d'être pris en considération. D'abord, l'UVF disposait d'armes et d'équipement militaires, elle était entraînée et encadrée par des officiers expérimentés. Autant d'atouts dont ne disposaient pas les National Volunteers. L'UVF disposait également de ressources financières propres : lorsque la création de la division d'Ulster devint officielle, Carson commanda immédiatement sur ses deniers 10 000 uniformes auprès des établissements Moss Brothers, et un tel effort était évidemment le bienvenu pour le ministère de la guerre, qui devait faire face à des besoins considérables en matière d'équipement, tout comme l'était l'apport d'officiers expérimentés à la tête de troupes entraînées et disciplinées immédiatement incorporables.¹¹

A contrario, nombre de cadres des National Volunteers furent affectés à la déclaration de guerre dans des unités combattantes sans qu'il soit tenu compte de leur passé dans les Irish Volunteers, et de leur capacité à diriger des hommes qu'ils avaient déjà eu sous leurs ordres. Le peu d'empressement du commandement britannique à reconstituer à l'intérieur de l'armée une milice nationaliste considérée comme peu loyale à la couronne n'est pas surprenant, mais il convient de souligner que plusieurs cadres de l'UVF qui faisaient partie de la réserve se virent aussi appelés dans des unités extérieures à la 36^{ème}. Ainsi, Frank Crozier dont il a déjà été question fut mobilisé à Dublin pour prendre la tête d'une compagnie des Royal Irish Fusiliers. L'exemple de Crozier, toutefois, est

¹¹ Paradoxalement, ce n'est pourtant pas avant octobre 1915 que la division sera engagée sur le front français.

également révélateur de la porosité et des liens entre le commandement militaire de Dublin et les politiciens unionistes : suite à une intervention de James Craig, Crozier ignore délibérément son affectation sans être inquiété et fut ensuite nommé major dans le régiment des Irish Rifles, au sein de la 36^{ème}. En d'autres termes, il ne fait guère de doutes que les politiciens unionistes cherchaient délibérément à donner une signification politique et une connotation idéologique à la division d'Ulster, et qu'ils bénéficiaient de certaines sympathies au sein de l'état-major. Néanmoins, l'attitude du haut commandement, à travers Kitchener, est plutôt une attitude de méfiance, voire d'hostilité vis-à-vis des tentatives de politisation de l'armée, et le haut commandement a plutôt tendance à renvoyer dos à dos les politiciens irlandais des deux bords ; l'entrevue orageuse entre Carson et Kitchener est à ce titre éloquente, comme le rappelle Anthony Stewart dans sa biographie de Carson.¹² Les nécessités du moment, la méfiance vis-à-vis des nationalistes et le besoin de se montrer pragmatique contribuent néanmoins à faire pencher la balance du côté d'une UVF qui, au-delà du loyalisme à la couronne qu'elle professe, dispose de moyens financiers et militaires et d'une organisation que les National Volunteers n'ont pas.

L'examen des niveaux de recrutement par Province fournit également des indications intéressantes. Selon TJ Campbell, qui fut l'éditeur de l'*Irish News*, à la fin de 1915 28000 membres de l'UVF et 27000 National Volunteers s'étaient engagés. Si on croise ces chiffres avancés par une source nationaliste avec celle du War Office (Ministère de la Guerre) à la même période, celle de l'année 1915, on obtient une comparaison instructive.¹³ Dans le tableau A, les chiffres montrent sans ambiguïté que la contribution de l'Ulster place la Province largement en tête, ce qui justifie le discours unioniste sur la loyauté de la Province, et relativise l'estimation de Campbell concernant l'engagement unioniste. La contribution du Leinster est toutefois loin d'être négligeable, et montre que son estimation pour les nationalistes est peut être également minorée. Cela indique en tout état de cause qu'au début du conflit la réponse positive des nationalistes à l'engagement est assez forte, et si elle diminue par la suite, les nouvelles du front, mais aussi l'image sectaire de l'armée qui a

¹² Anthony Terence Stewart, *Edward Carson*, (Dublin : Gill & Macmillan, 1981), pp. 94 -99. Ouvrage réédité en 1997 par Blackstaff Classics.

¹³ Voir le tableau A, à la fin de cet article.

été évoquée et à laquelle participe pleinement le discours unioniste sur la 36^{ème} ont sans doute un impact très négatif. Les chiffres du Ministère de la Guerre appellent un autre commentaire : manifestement, l'Est de l'Irlande, donc les zones les plus fortement urbanisées, fournit les plus gros contingents de volontaires, proportionnellement au niveau de population des différentes régions. En ce sens l'Irlande ne se distingue pas vraiment de la Grande Bretagne où les zones industrielles sont aussi les principaux bassins de recrutement.¹⁴ On peut donc raisonnablement émettre l'hypothèse qu'un vecteur sociologique autre que l'unionisme contribue à expliquer la corrélation entre zone géographiques et dynamisme du recrutement, et rejoindre Roy Foster lorsqu'il avance que la présence d'un prolétariat urbain est un facteur important dans le recrutement, indépendamment des facteurs politiques.¹⁵ Il n'est pas dans les objectifs de cette communication de s'étendre sur les détails qui permettent d'étayer cette hypothèse, mais il n'est néanmoins pas inutile de remarquer qu'en ce qui concerne l'Irlande les bouleversements sociaux considérables à laquelle la société irlandaise a été soumise entre la grande famine et le début du 20^{ème} siècle jouent un rôle non négligeable. La quasi disparition du prolétariat rural au profit d'une classe de petits propriétaires terriens travaillant souvent seuls dans leur exploitation et tenus de rembourser les crédits qui leur ont permis de s'approprier leur lopin à la suite des différents Land Acts¹⁶ et notamment le Wyndham Act de 1903, crée une situation défavorable à la mobilisation dans les campagnes : il est quasiment impossible économiquement à cette classe sociale de rejoindre les drapeaux, c'est en tout cas totalement en contradiction avec ses intérêts. Cette tendance se confirme d'ailleurs avec la levée de boucliers que provoque dans les campagnes la perspective de la conscription obligatoire à la fin de la guerre, et qui aura de profondes conséquences politiques. Cette donnée, si elle ne remet pas en cause l'influence de l'idéologie unioniste, amène néanmoins à compléter le tableau, et à nuancer celui-ci en ce qui concerne la situation au nord : le clivage nord/sud existe, mais il faut aussi tenir compte des différences sociales et du clivage est/ouest.

¹⁴ Voir tableau B à la fin de cet article.

¹⁵ Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600—1972* (London: Penguin History, 1989), pp. 471-474.

¹⁶ Lois qui introduisent des réformes agraires.

Il n'en reste pas moins que la volonté de colorer politiquement la 36^{ème} division d'Ulster a été suivie d'effet, et au nord elle apparaît bel et bien comme apparentée à la communauté unioniste et à son histoire propre. En Ulster, le 12 juillet 1916, toute activité - y compris les cérémonies orangistes habituelles - fut suspendue à midi en signe de deuil et de recueillement. Le sacrifice du sang, auquel le major Spender fait référence, prend une dimension particulière en ce 1^{er} juillet compte tenu de l'ampleur des pertes, et constitue un élément fondateur de l'identité unioniste dans la période contemporaine, qui n'est pas sans rappeler le poids de sacrifices équivalents de la part des Australiens et des Néo-zélandais, pour lesquelles l'ANZAC, et ANZAC Day aujourd'hui sont des éléments constitutifs de l'identité nationale. En conséquence pendant longtemps les cérémonies commémoratives, en dehors des autorités de l'Etat, ont été l'apanage des politiciens et organisations unionistes, et considérées comme politiquement connotées. La question de la commémoration du souvenir des volontaires irlandais tombés durant la grande guerre a aussi été épineuse au Sud, mais le débat a dans une large mesure été évacué dès les années 30, sous l'influence notamment d'une stratégie d'apaisement ambiguë de la part de Fianna Fáil¹⁷. De fait, des monuments commémoratifs sont érigés à Cork en 1925, Sligo en 1928, Limerick en 1929, mais pour autant les autorités du sud montrent leur peu d'empressement à mettre en place des manifestations commémoratives, voire à se joindre à celles qui sont organisées : si en 1938 le National War Memorial voit bien le jour à Dublin suite à un projet datant de 1919, De Valera, alors Taoiseach¹⁸, refusera d'assister à son inauguration, et il faut attendre 1994 pour que Bertie Ahern, alors ministre des finances, ouvre officiellement le mémorial après sa restauration.

Il apparaît ainsi clairement que longtemps après la fin des hostilités, la première guerre mondiale continue à être perçue à Dublin comme à Belfast selon des critères propres à l'Irlande, qui renvoient à un corpus de symboles constitutifs de perceptions identitaires différentes. Si un compromis est trouvé au sud malgré de manifestes arrière pensées, c'est aussi

¹⁷ Fianna Fáil, "les guerriers de la destinée" en français, est un parti créé en 1926 par Eamon De Valera, à la suite de la guerre civile perdue par les Républicains. A l'origine mouvement de scission à l'intérieur de ce camp, il s'impose dans les années 30 comme le principal parti d'Irlande du Sud et accède au pouvoir en 1932.

¹⁸ Terme gaélique qui désigne le Premier Ministre dans la Constitution de 1937, élaborée par De Valera, qui abroge celle de 1922.

parce qu'une partie non négligeable de la population nationaliste ne voit pas la commémoration du souvenir des 10^{ème} et 16^{ème} divisions comme une manifestation de soutien aux valeurs britanniques. Il se trouve aussi que nombre d'anciens combattants de la première guerre mondiale sont venus renforcer les rangs de l'IRA lors de la guerre anglo-irlandaise. Un exemple particulièrement pertinent est celui de Tom Barry, le leader bien connu du bataillon républicain de Cork, connu sous le nom de la fameuse colonne volante. Barry rappelle dans ses mémoires qu'il est au front à Gallipoli lorsqu'il entend pour la première fois parler du soulèvement de 1916. Cela ne l'empêchera pas par la suite de faire partie des irréductibles qui refuseront le traité de 1921.¹⁹

La situation est bien différente au Nord, du fait du succès de la stratégie d'appropriation de la 36^{ème} division par les leaders unionistes. Les sentiments partagés qui existent au sud n'ont pas cours auprès de la minorité nationaliste du nord, et si les unionistes voient la 36^{ème} comme un symbole de leur identité britannique, mais aussi spécifiquement nord-irlandaise, celle-ci reste pour les nationalistes comme une référence qui au mieux leur est étrangère, au pire est une des manifestations symboliques de la domination impériale et donc de leur sujétion. L'attentat meurtrier attribué à l'IRA à Enniskillen le 8 novembre 1987, à l'occasion d'une commémoration en mémoire des soldats de la 36^{ème} Division tombés au champ d'honneur, est incompréhensible si on ne dispose pas de cette grille de lecture qui rend l'attaque plausible. Les réactions qui ont suivi cet attentat méritent qu'on s'y attarde un peu.

L'attaque a fait 11 morts et 60 blessés; elle a été condamnée des deux côtés et d'importantes manifestations contre la violence ont lieu non seulement au nord mais aussi au sud. Adams a écrit par la suite dans ses mémoires que l'attentat d'Enniskillen a été un événement qui a pesé dans les choix ultérieurs privilégiés par le mouvement républicain. Les réactions d'indignation des opinions publiques des deux côtés de la frontière à cette époque montrent qu'au-delà de l'émotion causée par la mort de victimes perçues comme "innocentes" (terme utilisé par le *Cork Examiner* à l'époque, journal important du Sud de la République), cette innocence présumée souligne que si la commémoration du sacrifice de la 36^{ème} est

¹⁹ Tom Barry, *Guérilla en Irlande*, (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Bretagne, 1971), p.12. Titre original *Guerilla days in Ireland* (Anvil books, nouvelle édition 1993).

effectivement perçue comme un rite appartenant à la communauté unioniste, ce rite doit être respecté puisqu'il s'agit d'un hommage aux morts d'une guerre qui ne relève pas de la problématique irlandaise et du conflit entre les deux traditions. Ce d'autant que le sang versé l'a été dans une guerre à laquelle beaucoup dans la communauté nationaliste avaient initialement souscrit au nom du droit des petites nations à l'autodétermination. Dans une période qui précède le début du processus de paix, émerge ainsi un mythe fondateur de la communauté unioniste qui n'est pas tourné contre l'autre tradition de l'île, et que cette dernière peut même dans une certaine mesure partager.

Il n'est donc pas surprenant que ce soit dans la même période que le gouvernement irlandais décide, en 1986, de la création d'une journée nationale de commémoration des morts de la grande guerre, célébrée le dimanche le plus proche du 11 juillet, et en 1993 Mary Robinson est la première présidente de la République à honorer la messe du souvenir lors de cette journée à la cathédrale St Patrick de Dublin. Le mémorial de 1994 s'inscrit également dans cette dynamique, et Mary Mc Aleese a suivi l'exemple de Mary Robinson. Il est évidemment significatif qu'en 1998, l'année de la signature de l'accord du vendredi saint, la présidente d'Irlande et la reine d'Angleterre inaugurent conjointement la Ireland Peace Tower à Messines, en Belgique. La tour est érigée sur le lieu d'une bataille où les 36^{ème} et 16^{ème} divisions ont combattu côte à côte en 1917. Le Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, souligna à la BBC ce 11 novembre 1998 que cette inauguration conjointe était un moment de réconciliation symbolique.

Si le mythe de la 36^{ème} division repose sur un fond de vérité, ce dernier ne doit pas occulter les faits qui montrent combien la vérité historique est différente de l'interprétation des faits, surtout lorsque ceux-ci sont par avance voués à une interprétation idéologique. Ce mythe et les rites qui l'accompagnent ont été intégrés à un ensemble de symboles permettant à la tradition unioniste de se rassurer sur son identité, et il a été perçu comme tel par la communauté nationaliste. Il offre cependant aujourd'hui une approche qui le différencie considérablement des autres objets symboliques qui signent l'identité unioniste, ainsi qu'une place différente dans l'histoire de cette communauté. Pour la première fois, celle-ci dispose d'une référence forte, voire glorieuse, acquise dans un moment critique, qui lui est propre et que tout le monde lui reconnaît symboliquement, mais qui ne s'inscrit pas dans le long cortège des événements, perceptions de l'histoire et objets symboliques définissant la tradition

unioniste par opposition à la tradition nationaliste. A travers le mythe de la 36^{ème} division, la tradition unioniste se voit donc reconnue et légitimée sans qu'il lui soit besoin de se référer à l'héritage d'hostilité réciproque avec la tradition nationaliste. Aujourd'hui entre Bangor et Newtownards en Irlande du Nord, région considérée comme territoire unioniste pur et dur, un musée appelé The Somme Heritage Centre a ouvert ses portes. Ce musée, construit sur un des sites historiques d'entraînement de la 36^{ème} Division, définit ainsi sa raison d'être :

The Centre commemorates the involvement of the 36th and 16th Divisions in the battle of the Somme, the 10th Division in Gallipoli, Salonika and Palestine and [...] promotes cross community contact, mutual understanding, and appreciation of cultural diversity.²⁰

Après l'exemple de réconciliation donné par Helmut Kohl et François Mitterrand à Verdun, ce ne sera peut-être pas le moindre des paradoxes de la première guerre mondiale d'avoir ainsi contribué à l'édification de la paix entre les Irlandais.

TABLEAU A

²⁰ « Le Centre commémore l'engagement des 36^{ème} et 16^{ème} divisions dans la bataille de la Somme et celui de la 10^{ème} division à Gallipoli, Salonique et en Palestine et [...] encourage les relations inter-communautaires, la compréhension mutuelle et le respect de la diversité culturelle ». Source: [www://http.irishsoldier.org/heritage.html](http://http.irishsoldier.org/heritage.html), consultation le 06/01/05 .

Recrutement par Province en Irlande en 1915

Province	hommes de 19 à 41 ans décembre 1915	hommes recrutés au 15 décembre 1915
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Leinster	174597	27458
Ulster	169489	49760
Munster	136637	14190
Connacht	81392	3389

TABLEAU B

Recrutement au 4 novembre au Royaume Uni par segment de 10,000 habitants

Midlands	196
Lancashire	178
London/Home Counties	170
Yorshire, Northumberland, Durham	150
Ireland	127
Western England	88

Sources : Tim Bowman, Tom Johnstone, Peter Simkins

Catherine Burke

Chapter Four: Bowen's London as a du Bellian Rome

This chapter marks the first stage in my research of Virgilian cities. In the pages that follow, I shall examine the treatment of Rome in du Bellay's *Les Antiquitez de Rome*¹ and London in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*.² But before I proceed, it is first necessary to explain what I understand by Virgilian city. Virgilian cities are cities that interact with the myth of Rome established through Virgil's *Aeneid*,³ and which display quintessential Virgilian themes of loss, exile, and transition.⁴ One key feature of the Virgilian city is that it possesses an underworld, comparable to that depicted in Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The underworld is a place of impenetrable darkness, full of fire and wandering shades, where death and the evils of mankind reside:

Shapes horrible to look at, Death and Agony;
Sleep, too, which is the cousin of Death; and Guilty Joys,
And there, against the threshold, War, the bringer of Death. (vi.277)

The placement of war by the threshold is significant, for the underworld is symbolic of a transition between two worlds and it is war, more than any other factor, that generates this sense of hovering on a threshold. Steiner acknowledges the importance and relevance of Virgil during the atrocities of World War II:

¹ Joachim du Bellay, *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, in *Les Regrets et autres Œuvres Poétiques* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1974). All subsequent references will be to this edition, in which sixteenth-century French spelling is used.

² Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London: Vintage Classics, 1998). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

³ Virgil, the *Aeneid*. Translated by C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All subsequent references will be to this edition.

⁴ The Virgilian theme of the failure of communication, for which there is much to be said with regard to each text, will not be dealt with here due to limitations of space.

With the Second World War recognitions seemed to alter. The shattered burnt cities are still perennial Troy. But the desolate light on them is that of Virgilian pathos rather than Argive-Homeric triumph. It is not so much Odysseus homeward-bound but Aeneas the refugee, the man hunted towards the unknown with the scarred remnants of his people who addresses our fortunes.⁵

The Virgilian city, therefore, is conceived amidst an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty, where war, or the prospect of war, creates the sensation of being suspended between two worlds: a state of limbo.

This resonates with du Bellay's depiction of Rome in *Les Antiquitez*, which were written at a time of political unrest in his native France. It also evokes Bowen's wartime London, when the horrors of World War II penetrated to the very depths of Western Civilisation. This description of a Virgilian city applies to Virgil himself, whom Klingner describes as having lived through 'a boundary situation between the ages, surrounded by the horror of the end, of nothingness. The idea of Rome's decline was in the air. All around unspeakable suffering without escape, thousandfold decline'.⁶ Klingner's remarks are especially significant to Bowen since they emerge from the Second World War. They reflect a renewed interest in Virgil that characterised much of the 1940s, and in particular, 1944, which Ziolkowski identifies as *annus mirabilis Virgilianus*.⁷ It is easy to see why. The year 1944 saw the establishment of the Virgil Society, the publication of Jackson Knight's influential *Roman Vergil*, and Eliot's famous lecture 'What is a Classic?'. These events reflect the 'modern view of Virgil as a poet whose vision is dark enough to accommodate the chaos of World War II'.⁸

This chapter shall compare the treatment of Rome in du Bellay's *Les Antiquitez de Rome* with that of London in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. Du Bellay was a French poet of the sixteenth century who resided in

⁵ George Steiner, "Homer and Virgil and Broch", *London Review Books* (12 July 1990), pp.10-11 (p.10).

⁶ Friedrich Klingner, *Römische Geisteswelt* (1943; 5th ed. München: Heinrich Ellermann, 1965), pp.297-98. Cited in Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.25.

⁷ For a fuller discussion see "Virgil in Britain" in Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*, pp.99-145, and in particular pp.129-134, from which this quote is taken.

⁸ Ziolkowski, p.132.

Rome from 1553 to 1557. During this time he wrote *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, composed of 32 sonnets. The sonnets treat of Rome's ruins and his response to them. The entire work is built against the backdrop of Rome: its past, its present, and its future. London occupies a similar privileged position in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. Elizabeth Bowen was an Anglo-Irish writer born in 1899, at the turn of the twentieth century. She sets her novel, *The Heat of the Day*, against the backdrop of London during the Blitz, from 1942 to 1944 to be precise. This novel revolves around the city of London in the same way that du Bellay's work revolves around Rome.

Les Antiquitez signify du Bellay's response to the multifaceted and conflicting nature of Rome. Sonnet iii captures the sense of double exile that Du Bellay experiences within Rome:

Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome
Et rien de Rome en Rome n'aperçois,
Ces vieux palais, ces vieux arcz que tu vois,
Et ces vieux murs, c'est ce que Rome on nomme.

Not only is he exiled in the traditional sense, from his native land, but he is also exiled from the real Rome. Greene comments on the inner conflict this produces: 'There are [...] accents of puzzlement and wonder which betray cultural shock, shock which embraces both the ruins of antiquity and the modern city, a ruined Renaissance, in its *dépaysement*.'⁹ Du Bellay's imagined version of Rome is superimposed onto the reality of the Rome he beholds in front of him. But it is an imperfect superimposition. The landscape of ruins shatters his illusion of Rome, so that he sees not a complete picture, but fragments from different timeframes fused together. In this respect, du Bellay is echoing Book viii of the *Aeneid* where Aeneas is captivated by a shield welded for him by the Fire god Vulcan and upon which is depicted the future history of Rome:

Such were the scenes that Aeneas admired on the shield of Vulcan
His mother gave him. Elated by this portrayal of things
Beyond his ken, he shouldered his people's glorious future. (viii. 729)

⁹ Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p.221.

W. H. Auden captures the incongruity of such a representation of Rome in his poem, *Secondary Epic*:

No, Virgil, no:
Not even the first of the Romans can learn
His Roman history in the future tense,
Not even to serve your political turn;
Hindsight as foresight makes no sense.¹⁰

Even in its founding epic, Rome is conveyed as a work of the imagination. Mythic Rome overshadows the Rome of reality.

The ruins of Rome have a profound impact on du Bellay. In Sonnet v these ruins evoke the ghost of Rome. Raised from its ashes, the shade of Rome wanders through its ruins. Again, du Bellay alludes here to the *Aeneid*, in which the dominant image is of Aeneas wandering over land and sea to found Rome. Now it is the shade of Rome itself, unhinged from its foundations, which wanders through the world, having been reduced to a myth: its Virgilian role as an imagined and elusive city: 'Mais ses escripts [...] font son idole errer parmy le monde'.

These ruins also recall Rome's former glory. Greene states: 'The ruinous architecture calls up the memory of its splendor the way a spirit is conjured from the tomb'.¹¹ Du Bellay equates Rome with the world, thereby capturing its influential role as the centre of civilisation: 'Rome fut tout le monde, et tout le monde est Rome' (Sonnet xxvi). Ironically, however, Rome's renowned glory is paralleled only by its own equally spectacular collapse. In Sonnet xxviii, du Bellay alludes to Lucan's *Pharsalia*,¹² but he adapts the simile, comparing not Pompey, but Rome, to an ageing oak tree that has incurred its own demise through over-ambition and excessive pride:

Qui a veu quelquefois un grand chesne asseiché,
Qui pour son ornement quelque trophée porte,
Lever encor' au ciel sa vieille teste morte,

¹⁰ W. H. Auden, "Secondary Epic", in *Collected Poems*, edited by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1976), p.455.

¹¹ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p.231.

¹² Lucan, *Civil War*. Translated by Susan H. Braund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Dont le pied fermement n'est en terre fiché.

The overwhelming presence of ruins in Rome serves as a stark reminder of Rome's fate. The ruins impress upon du Bellay the complete reversal of Rome's fortunes; from the powerhouse of one of the most successful empires to a city dominated by ruins. In Sonnet xxix, du Bellay captures the polarity of Rome's destiny. At the height of its power, Rome became the repository of the most eclectic collection of art in the world, with artefacts plundered from the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Asia. Rome was the centre of civilisation. Consequently, the end of Rome signals the end of civilisation and, by association, the end of the world: 'Rome vivant fut l'ornement du monde / Et morte elle est du monde le tombeau'.

For du Bellay, the collapse of Rome is simultaneously a moment of public and personal crisis. In this respect du Bellay resembles Aeneas in the aftermath of the fall of Troy. The public crisis experienced by the Trojans as a race at the loss of their homeland is mirrored by Aeneas's own loss, with the death of his wife, Creusa, in the burning city. Rome's fall had far-reaching implications for all of the peoples within its dominion.¹³ The loss of the centre of civilisation created a universal sense of disorientation. But it also constitutes a more personal crisis for du Bellay himself. Not only does he experience the loss of the centre of civilisation during his stay in Rome, but also he is further destabilised by the realisation that the myth of Rome has failed. Rome is no longer the Eternal City of his imagination. In Sonnet xxxi, du Bellay anticipates the themes of Bernini's Four Rivers Fountain, which unites the four corners of the earth: Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas; thereby confirming Rome's central position in the world: 'ô quiconques tu sois / Que le Tygre et le Nil, Gange et Euphrate baigne'. This allusion highlights du Bellay's desperate attempts to re-establish Rome as the centre of civilisation and, consequently, to reconstruct the mythic Rome of his imagination. Du Bellay hopes to recreate a 'Pax Romana, a world empire organised around a capital city'.¹⁴

The ruins of Rome provoke opposing responses from du Bellay. On the one hand, he is desperate to reconstruct and renew the past. In this re-

¹³ For a fuller discussion, see Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: and the End of Civilisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Cited in Dean McWilliams, *The Narratives of Michel Butor: The Writer as Janus* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p.33.

spect he complies with the Renaissance tradition of 'shifting from fragments to the composition of whole buildings'.¹⁵ Du Bellay attempts to resurrect Ancient Rome from its ruins by evoking classical writers and inserting them into his sonnets. In particular Sonnet xv exemplifies this, where it alludes to Book vi of the *Aeneid* in its evocation of the shades of Hades encircled by the river Styx:

Dictes, Esprits (ainsi les tenebreuses
Rives de Styx non passable au retour
Vous enlassant d'un trois fois triple tour
N'enferment point voz images umbreuses).

The ruins invite du Bellay to 'probe and dig down to the divine presence which lies below the soil.'¹⁶ This is the first step in reconstructing the past. Greene outlines the process as two-fold: 'one first stoops, dips, gropes downward into the disorder of the past and then one rises and constructs upwards by imitation.'¹⁷

Du Bellay's alternative response to Rome involves a reversal of this reconstruction. Rather than rebuild Rome from its ruins, du Bellay seeks to appropriate, for France, Rome's status as the epitome of power and majesty. The realisation that the myth of Rome has failed provides du Bellay with the opportunity to superimpose Rome onto Paris. In his dedicatory sonnet to King Henry II, he clearly establishes this as his aim, saying:

Que vous puissent les Dieux un jour donner tant d'heure
De rebastir en France une telle grandeur
Que je la voudrois bien peindre en vostre langage.

His poetry constitutes a 'preliminary act' towards the rebuilding of greatness in France.¹⁸ His transplantation of Rome onto Paris signifies his desire to establish Paris as the new centre of civilisation; that is as the six-

¹⁵ Margaret M. McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.167.

¹⁶ McGowan, p.214.

¹⁷ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p.233.

¹⁸ Greene, p.222.

teenth-century equivalent of Ancient Rome, thereby ensuring the continuation of its legacy.

However, du Bellay's vision of Rome haunts the new vision of France he is trying to establish. In several sonnets, such as Sonnet xvi and xxi, but particularly in Sonnet x, du Bellay blames Rome itself for its destruction. He alludes to 'la fraternelle rage' that signalled her downfall:

D'une horrible fureur l'un contre l'autre armez,
Se moissonnarent tous par un soudain orage,
Renouvelant entre eulx la fraternelle rage
Qui aveugla jadis les fiers soldatz semez.

In superimposing Rome onto France, he must encompass all aspects of Rome, and that includes her civil war and ultimate collapse. This is an extremely unsettling image for du Bellay, and one that proves almost prophetic in light of later events in France (the Wars of Religion 1562-1598). He also finds his attempts hindered by the magnetic power of Rome. He is mesmerised by its romantic beauty and by its landscape resonant with gifted writers - Ovid, Lucan, and Virgil. Sonnet xxv pays homage to such classical writers, and to Virgil in particular:

Peusse-je au moins d'un pinceau plus agile
Sur le patron de quelque grand Virgile /
De ces palais les protraits faconner.

Here he establishes himself in the Virgilian tradition of poets. This act of imitation is also the second phase in his construction of the past, as outlined by Greene earlier. Hence his two opposing responses to the ruins merge at this point.

But this act of imitation itself proves problematic. Margaret Ferguson makes the argument that ruins often provoke fears over the death of poetic inspiration.¹⁹ Hence, the act of recalling the past becomes not only a response to ruins, but an act whereby the poet, in this case du Bellay, seeks to consolidate his own poetic powers. However, as Ferguson re-

¹⁹ Margaret Ferguson, "The 'Afflatus of Ruin': Meditations on Rome by Du Bellay, Spenser and Stevens", in *Roman Images: Selected Papers from the English Institute 1982*, edited by Annabel Patterson (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.23.

marks: 'the achievement of an individual accent involves a struggle against the seductive and threatening power of others' voices'.²⁰ In other words, the act of imitation contains within it a version of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*.²¹ In evoking such literary figures as Ovid and Virgil, du Bellay feels his own literary voice will not be heard. Again, Ferguson states: 'the Roman authors look, as they often do to du Bellay, like fathers who are refusing to die gracefully and pass on their wealth'.²² Thus a civil war ensues between the poetic father and ambitious son.

Du Bellay attempts to unite his ambivalent attitude towards Rome in his final sonnet, where he styles himself as the French Virgil. He refutes the claims made by Ovid and Virgil that poetry can outlive monuments. He undermines the authority of the Roman writers, and in doing so, he opens up his own creative space. 'Le premier des François' is a direct reference to Virgil's assertion in the *Georgics* that he is the first to celebrate Italian history:

If life enough is left me,
I'll be the first to bring the Muse of song to my birthplace
From Greece, and wear the poet's palm for Mantua.²³

'Du peuple à longue robe' refers to Book i of the *Aeneid*, where Jupiter speaks of Roman domination (i.278-282). Screech states: 'Ce vers, très connu à l'époque, aurait rappelé au lecteur cultivé tout son contexte.'²⁴ With this allusion, du Bellay highlights that he is the 'first to sing in French the ancient honour of the Romans',²⁵ which was quite radical at a time when Latin was still the dominant language of literature. In this way, he could also showcase the merits of the French language to the French people.

T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* acts as an intermediary between du Bellay and Bowen. Like Janus, this poem looks simultaneously back at du

²⁰ Ferguson, p.43.

²¹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²² Ferguson, "The 'Afflatus of Ruin' ", p.25.

²³ Virgil, *The Georgics* in *Virgil: The Eclogues; The Georgics*. Translated by C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), III. 10.

²⁴ Greene, *The Light in Troy*, p.228.

²⁵ McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France*, p.217.

Bellay and forward to Bowen, an act that underlines the du Bellian nature of Bowen's London. Martindale remarks: '*The Waste Land* is a London poem, but London had long been seen as the heir of Rome'.²⁶ One famous passage from Henry James illustrates this:

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the Modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber....If it was a question of an *Imperium*, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge.²⁷

In 'The Burial of the Dead', Eliot writes:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.²⁸

This recalls du Bellay's sonnets, where he feels the presence of ghosts all around him in Rome: the ghost of Rome itself, the spirits of the classical authors, and the shades that he evokes from Hades. In her novel, *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen reproduces this image in a passage similar to that of Eliot, where she describes the ghostly shades wandering through London: 'Most of all the dead, from mortuaries, from under cataraacts of rubble, made their anonymous presence [...] felt through London. Uncounted, they continued to move in shoals through the city day' (91). Her description of the traffic flowing through wartime London also seems to resonate with Eliot, where the traffic becomes a mechanised version of

²⁶ Charles Martindale, "Ruins of Rome: T.S. Eliot and the presence of the past", in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, edited by Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.244.

²⁷ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.29.

²⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1963), p. 65.

the dead souls pouring over London Bridge: 'The diversion of traffic out of blocked main thoroughfares into byways, the unstopping phantasmagoric streaming of lorries, buses, vans, drays, taxis past modest windows and quiet doorways' (91). These passages look back to Eliot, and beyond Eliot to Dante, who is an acknowledged intertext in *The Waste Land*, and whose *Commedia* establishes Virgil as its most influential figure.²⁹ Bowen's lines also resonate beyond Dante to Virgil, and a passage depicting the Underworld from Book vi of the *Aeneid*; an episode that is also used in the *Georgics*.³⁰ Bowen makes the allusion explicit when she describes passengers alighting from trains in London: 'Arrival of shades in Hades, the new dead scanned dubiously by the older' (181). Therefore, Eliot not only links du Bellay and Bowen, but through his evocation of the Virgilian image of the shades in Hades, waiting to cross the river Styx, he simultaneously establishes himself as the mediator of Virgil from du Bellay to Bowen.

This role is compounded throughout *The Waste Land*, particularly in 'A Game of Chess' with the lines:

And other withered stumps of time
were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.

These lines allude to Book i of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas sees the fall of Troy depicted on the walls of a temple in Carthage (i. 456-493). This allusion echoes du Bellay's lamentation on the fall of Rome, and the sense of exile that accompanies it. It also resonates with an episode from Bowen's novel, where Stella, the female protagonist, discovers a gallery of photographs on the wall of Robert's childhood bedroom. In what is a

²⁹ 'Behind it came a huge torrent of people; / so many that I never should have thought / Death had been able to undo so many'. Dante, *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Inferno, Canto III, 55.

³⁰ 'This way came fast and streaming up to the bank the whole throng: matrons and men were there, and there were great-heart heroes / Finished with earthly life, boys and unmarried maidens, / Young men laid on the pyre before their parents eyes', *Aeneid*, vi. 305; *Georgics*, iv. 475.

modified Virgilian ecphrasis,³¹ Stella gazes in wonder at the exhibition, mesmerised by the story of images before her eyes:

sixty or seventy photographs, upward from snapshots to crowded groups, had been done in passe-partout or framed, according to size and weight, and hung in close formations on the two walls. All the photographs featured Robert. By himself or with friends, acquaintances or relations he was depicted at every age. (116)

For Stella, as for Aeneas, Eliot, and du Bellay, the past has intruded on the present. She attempts to ‘fashion a composite from the disconnected fragments of Robert’s past’;³² to link the past and the present, in the hopes of gaining a greater understanding of both. But, while Aeneas understands the story that has re-emerged from the past, and acknowledges its significance in his present wanderings, no such comfort is afforded to Stella, for whom the past remains as elusive as the shade of Anchises.

Bowen is the twentieth century heir of the Virgilian myth of Rome, handed down from du Bellay and transmitted through T.S Eliot.³³ Her novel, *The Heat of the Day*, conveys the sense of exile so characteristic of Rome, the ruined city. The characters feel exiled in London. The female protagonist, Stella, lives in a flat decorated and furnished by the previous tenants. It contains no trace of her past and no sense of home. The only locale associated with the sinister Harrison is an equally sinister underground restaurant. The characters are deracinated in London, each looking for a home and a sense of belonging. Like du Bellay, this emphasis on exile results from the clash between illusion and reality. Bowen states: ‘the violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied’.³⁴ The collapse of the illusion that

³¹ For a fuller discussion of the Temple of Carthage as an example of ecphrasis in Virgil, see Alessandro Barchiesi, “Virgilian narrative: ecphrasis”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³² Heather Bryant Jordan, *How will the Heart Endure?: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p.160.

³³ Bowen’s extensive knowledge of ancient Rome is revealed in her novel, *A Time in Rome* (London: Vintage Classics, 2003).

³⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, Preface, *The Demon Lover*, in *Collected Impressions* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1950), p.48.

'things' could confer stability and security is provoked by the discrepancy between pre-1939 London and the wartime London now in its place.

Bowen identifies London as a Virgilian underworld throughout her novel.³⁵ Wartime London, like Virgil's Underworld, is a city of impenetrable darkness. Here, the air is comprised of smoke and dirt, which attacks the senses.³⁶ In her essay 'London 1940', Bowen describes London in terms evocative of Virgil: 'standing, as might the risen dead in the doors of tombs, in the mouth of shelters [...] rubbing the smoke-smart deeper into our eyes with our dirty fists'.³⁷ The heightened sense of transition between the living and the dead is conveyed by the presence of ghosts in the city, as described above. The prevalence of shades and darkness in Du Bellay, Eliot, and Bowen resonates with Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose final word is the ambiguous *umbras*.³⁸ In a scene reminiscent of Dido and Aeneas in the Underworld, when:

the Trojan leader
Found himself near her and knew that the form he glimpsed through the
shadows

³⁵ 'The transposition of the Virgilian underworld to London is, of course, not new', according to Fiona Cox, "Sibylline Sisters – Margaret Drabble's *The Seven Sisters*", unpublished work, p.4. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has seen many writers characterise the city of London as analogous to Virgil's Underworld, as depicted in Book VI of the *Aeneid*. See Margaret Drabble, *The Seven Sisters* (London: Penguin, 2003); A. S. Byatt, "The Pink Ribbon", in *The Little Black Book of Stories* (London: Vintage Classics, 2005); Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Calder, 1977).

³⁶ Bowen's awareness of the parallels between London and Rome as paradigms of the Underworld is evidenced in *A Time in Rome* and her description of ancient Rome as a dark and burning city, pp.96-97.

³⁷ Bowen, "London 1940", in *Collected Impressions*, p.217.

³⁸ 'vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras' (With a deep sigh the unconsenting spirit fled to the shades below), *Aeneid*, XII. 951. For a fuller discussion of the significance of *umbra* in Virgil's oeuvre see W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Virgil's Aeneid* (California: University of California, 1976); Stephen Medcalf, "Virgil at the Turn of Time", in *Virgil and his Influence*, edited by Charles Martindale (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1984), Elena Theodorakopoulos, "Closure: The Book of Virgil", in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Was hers – as early in the month one sees, or imagines he sees,
Through a wrack of cloud the new moon rising and glimmering. (vi. 451)

Stella, returning to her flat one night, thinks she sees Harrison waiting at her door. But she cannot distinguish him from the surrounding shadows: 'That she should seem to perceive a figure posted, waiting, that she should instantaneously know herself to be on the return to a watched house, *could* be only another deception of the nerves' (127).

The Virgilian nature of Bowen's London is further displayed in chapter 12, when Harrison brings Stella to an underground restaurant (224-241). The restaurant, or 'grill', is evocative of Virgil's Underworld. The 'row of backviews of eaters' at the counter, replaced by a new row as the night progresses, recalls the souls waiting by the shore for Charon to ferry them across the Styx. The sensation of 'overpowering heat' evokes the fires of Hades, while the ash and smoke of Harrison's cigarette, a remnant of which catches his eye, recalls the fiery-eyed Charon.³⁹ Even the lone dog becomes a parody of Cerberus, not guarding the entrance to Hell, but pathetically attaching itself to various customers and 'pleading to be allowed to be under obligation to *someone*' (234). This restaurant is a version of the Underworld, but it is a subverted version. There are no shadows, only blinding light. All the shadows have been 'ferreted out and killed' (225). Here, nothing can be hidden, it is a 'lie-detecting place' (226). This resonates with Sartre's *Huis Clos*,⁴⁰ where hell is presented as a claustrophobic place in which there is no escape from other people and their penetrating stares. In Bowen, such 'apocalyptic moments of blinding light'⁴¹ symbolise the war itself, of which Bowen remarks: 'I say, this war's an awful illumination; it's destroyed our dark: we have to see where we are'.⁴²

The glaring light is in stark contrast with the habitual dark of war-time London. As a result of the enforced black-outs, London is predominantly a nighttime city, where 'the night behind and the night to come

³⁹ Butor uses a similar image in *La Modification* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957). Here, the teacher's glasses reflect a burning cigarette, (p.49) casting him as a version of Charon in Delmont's subsequent descent into the Underworld (p.220).

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos* (Paris : Gallimard, 1947).

⁴¹ Harold Bloom, ed. and introduction. *Elizabeth Bowen* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), p.81.

⁴² Elizabeth Bowen, *Elizabeth Bowen's Irish Stories* (Dublin : Poolbeg, 1978), p.70.

met across every noon in an arch of strain' (91). Almost every scene takes place at night, especially all of Stella's encounters with Harrison. This is evocative of Baudelaire's 'Le Crépuscule du Matin' and 'Le Crépuscule du Soir',⁴³ where he describes Paris at the transient hours of dawn and dusk. For Baudelaire, dusk is 'ami du criminel'. This recalls Harrison, who is associated with the night and constantly emerges from the shadows. Furthermore, his poem 'Les Sept Vieillards', and in particular the opening stanza, resonates with Bowen's London:

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.⁴⁴

This echoes Bowen's depiction of wartime London as a city full of potent dreams and wandering shades, where the darkness alters the appearance of the city, and transforms 'a capital city into a network of inscrutable canyons'.⁴⁵ This same poem by Baudelaire is acknowledged as an intertext in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where Eliot attributes the line 'Unreal City' to the opening two lines of 'Les Sept Vieillards'. Consequently, Baudelaire links Eliot and Bowen, a link that is intensified by Bowen's evocation of her city as phantasmagoric: 'that particular psychic London was to be gone for ever' (92).

Early in her novel, Bowen establishes parallel imagery of a city in ruins. She describes Regency terraces in their semi-ruin: 'They were shells: the indifference of their black vacant windows fell on the scene, the movement, the park, the evening they overlooked but did not seem to behold' (21). This passage is informed by personal experience. Bowen herself lived in Regency terrace, and vacated her home only briefly when it was bombed in 1944. In addition, the opening scene of her novel fulfils the role played by the *Aeneid* in du Bellay's Sonnet v, as outlined earlier, whereby the city of Rome is transformed into a wandering shade. Bowen's scene depicts an outdoor concert which is attended by 'shabby Londoners and exiled foreigners'. They are desperate to regain some

⁴³ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, edited by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1972; 1996), pp.139-140; pp.129-130.

⁴⁴ *Les Fleurs du Mal*, pp.121-122.

⁴⁵ Bowen, preface, "The Demon Lover", in *Collected Impressions*, p.52.

semblance of pre-war London life, a feeling that is reflected by the shadowy light of dusk, that signifier of transience and temporality. In the words of Lee: 'war-time London is a spectral city'.⁴⁶

The landscape of ruins leads Bowen to contemplate the fate of London. Like du Bellay, Bowen becomes acutely aware of London's transformation from the central city of the British Empire to a war-torn city. London has metamorphosed into a city of dislocation and instability; a city under siege. The opening line of the novel captures the radically altered face of London: 'That Sunday, from six o' clock in the evening, it was a Viennese orchestra that played' (7). The Viennese orchestra evokes the notion of Empire and a time when London, and Europe as a whole, was a confident civilisation. But its presence amidst the ruins of London serves only to highlight London's fragile and destructible nature. It seems almost to mock the British Empire and its perceived sense of permanence. Wartime London is no longer a centre of civilisation. Bowen herself perceived this change: 'At nights, at my end of the terrace, I feel as though I were sleeping in one corner of a deserted palace. I had always placed this Park among the most civilised scenes on earth'.⁴⁷

For Bowen, as for du Bellay, the fall of her city has both public and private repercussions. The world of empire and stability had collapsed, and with it the concept of all-encompassing ideologies and a world order. The people of London realised that life had been irreversibly changed. The end of the war could not restore the old world: 'even before the bells had come to a climax, people began turning away from the illusion, either because it had already begun to fade or because they knew it must' (291). Bowen illustrates the more personal impact of London's fall through the life of Stella, 'juxtaposing each emotional turning point with a public one'.⁴⁸ It is against the backdrop of the initial London air raids that Stella's relationship with Robert first develops. Wartime London provides a vacuum; a suspended reality where their relationship can flourish: 'It was a characteristic of that life in the moment and for the moment's sake that one knew people well without knowing much about them [...] Life-stories were shed as so much superfluous weight - this for different reasons suited both her and him' (95). Consequently, when the war be-

⁴⁶ Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation* (London: Vision Press Limited, 1981), p.164.

⁴⁷ Bowen, "London 1940", in *Collected Impressions*, p.220.

⁴⁸ Bryant Jordan, *How will the Heart Endure?*, p.153.

gins to wane, the illusion is shattered and their relationship can no longer be sustained.

However, despite these similarities, Bowen's overall response to the ruins contrasts sharply with that of du Bellay. She experiences no desire to revitalise the past. For her, the ruins are symbolic of a self-destructive generation that has ruptured all links with the past. Lee encapsulates Bowen's feelings, stating: 'The idea of a civilisation which has earned, and deserves, its own destruction, is central to *The Heat of The Day*'.⁴⁹ For Bowen, the ruins are the physical manifestation of the discontinuity between her century and the past. Stella captures that feeling when she realises 'the fatalistic course of her fatalistic century seemed more and more her own' (134).

Instead Bowen responds to the ruins by attempting to superimpose London, the embodiment of English life, onto Ireland by juxtaposing a quintessential English property with an Irish one. Holme Dene, Robert's home, symbolises middle-class English life. Yet it is characterised as a house of concealment, full of 'repressions, deaths, fears, subterfuges' (256). Foster remarks: 'this scenario, completely English and completely unreal has bred a traitor'.⁵⁰ This dwelling is starkly contrasted with Mount Morris, the Big House left to Stella's son Roderick after the death of an Irish relative, and which is based on Bowen's ancestral home in County Cork, Bowen's Court. Lee states: 'as antidotes to London, Elizabeth Bowen [...] returns to an Irish house - Mount Morris'.⁵¹ Mount Morris symbolises innocence, loyalty and continuity. But most importantly, it offers a future. Roderick perceives this from the outset:

Possessorship of Mount Morris affected Roderick strongly. It established for him [...] what might be called a historic future. The house came out to meet his growing capacity for attachment; all the more, perhaps, in that by geographically standing outside the war it appeared also to be standing outside the present. (50)

⁴⁹ Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, p.157.

⁵⁰ Roy Foster, "The Irishness of Elizabeth Bowen", in *Paddy Power and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, edited by Roy Foster (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1993), p.119.

⁵¹ Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, p.164.

Stella, too, experiences this hope of a future when she visits Mount Morris. In the drawing room, the past, present and future of Mount Morris intertwine. She senses its past of madness and disillusionment, represented by Cousin Nettie who has withdrawn from Mount Morris into the unreal world of Wistaria Lodge. She feels its discontinuous present, represented by her own generation. But she also envisages a future, embodied in the daughter-in-law that she conjures up. Stella realises it is not the Mount Morris of the present, but that which will emerge through the next generation, that will bring this hope to fruition: 'It was not her story [...] The place was his [Roderick's] future' (194). This future is compounded by a string of hopeful images at Mount Morris: the three swans on the river below Stella's room, the romantic portrayal of the servant-girl Hannah, and the announcement of Montgomery's victory. Bowen is eager to transpose what is good about London onto Ireland, and thus ensure its survival in an Irish future.

Bowen also experiences that du Bellian sense of being mesmerised by the ruined city. Although she endeavours to relocate London to Ireland, part of her is captivated by the spirit of London during the war: 'an overpowering sense of London's organic power-somewhere here was a source from which heavy motion boiled, surged and, not to be damned up, forced for itself new channels' (91). Wartime London is full of fight and resilience: 'the very soil [...] at this time seemed to generate more strength' (91). To reconcile this ambivalence, Bowen twists her Irish/English duality to fulfil a creative role, in the manner of du Bellay. She casts her novel as a mediator between Ireland and England. Bowen herself was involved in secret reporting for the Ministry of Information on Ireland and Ireland's neutrality during the war. She felt she could explain Ireland to England at a time when many in England resented Irish neutrality. In the hope of improving relations between the two countries, Bowen highlights many of the misconceptions regarding Ireland during the war. Stella naively assumes that Ireland and Mount Morris have been unaffected by war rationings; a view bitterly expressed by Robert's sister several pages later: 'And how was the Emerald Isle? Beef steak? Plenty of eggs and bacon?' (182).

To conclude, Bowen's treatment of wartime London is comparable to du Bellay's treatment of Rome through the mythical image of Rome established in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Recourse to Virgil and his *Aeneid* as a means of articulating the phenomenon of London during the war is sup-

ported by Helen Waddell, who, speaking of Book ii of the *Aeneid*, in her introduction to *More Latin Lyrics from Virgil to Milton*, states:

I speak of it with passion, for something sent me to it on that September afternoon when the Luftwaffe first broke through the defences of London, and that night it seemed as though London and her city burned. You remember the cry of Aeneas waking in the night, the rush, arming as he went, the hurried question – ‘Where’s the fighting now?’ – and the answer:

Come is the ending day
The ineluctable hour.
Once we were Trojan men,
And Troy was once, and once a mighty glory
Of the Trojan race.⁵²

As a Northern Irish writer, Waddell shares Bowen’s sense of an Irish/English duality, and therefore this passage highlights the importance of Virgil in articulating feelings of exile. Eliot also illuminates his depiction of an earlier wartime London with multiple allusions to the *Aeneid*. Kenner suggests that Eliot may have intended *The Waste Land* as a modern *Aeneid*, culminating ‘in a city both founded and yet to be found, unreal and oppressively real’.⁵³ This casts Eliot as an intermediary between du Bellay and Bowen, for whom the cities of Rome and London respectively are both ‘unreal and yet oppressively real’.

The Virgilian city resides in the realm of unreality. *The Waste Land* builds upon the comparisons drawn between du Bellay and Bowen in the treatment of their respective cities, and it highlights the broad range of research still to be done in this area. As a crucial intermediary in the transmission of Virgil from du Bellay to Bowen, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* reveals the way in which Virgil permeates the two texts. In doing so, it illuminates the vital role that Virgil plays in literature concerning fallen or

⁵² Helen Waddell, Introduction to *More Latin Lyrics from Virgil to Milton*. Cited in Charles Martindale (ed.), *Virgil and his Influence* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1984), p.15.

⁵³ Hugh Kenner, “The Urban Apocalypse”, in *Eliot in This Time: Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Waste Land*, edited by A. Walton Litz. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp.23-49. Cited in Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the moderns*, p.122.

ruined cities: the literature of exiles. As Colin Burrow has aptly remarked, Virgil is truly 'the poet of exiles'.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Colin Burrow, "Virgil in English Translation", in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.35.

Louise Fuller

Chapter Five: The French Catholic Experience: Irish Connections and Disconnections

The first sociological survey of Irish Catholicism was undertaken by a Frenchman, Jean Blanchard, in the 1950s, at a time when the Irish Catholic experience was very different from today. The preface was written by Gabriel Le Bras, the father of modern religious sociology. He explained that he had renewed acquaintance with Blanchard in 1953, when the latter was working as a diplomat at the French Embassy in Dublin, and that he had urged him to round off his studies by preparing a thesis on the state of the Church in Ireland, for which he was subsequently awarded a doctorate.¹ Justifying the importance of this, Le Bras went on to point out that ‘nothing on the present state of the Irish Church had as yet appeared in print’. Referring to the Irish Church, he was able to point out that ‘we are more familiar with the annals of the early middle ages than with present day life around us ... we have little information concerning the organization of the clergy, of Church property, or of the relations between Church and State under the present government’.² Apart from the vastly secular nature of French society at that time in comparison to Ireland, Le Bras highlighted how different the Irish Church was from the French Church when he asked: ‘How many of the French suspect that in this almost entirely Catholic country the Church is separated from the State, that some of the ancient cathedrals belong to the Protestants and that the clergy are totally dependent on the generosity of the faithful’.³ Blanchard’s study was published under the title of *The Church in Contemporary Ireland* in translation in 1962.

¹ Jean Blanchard, *The Church in Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds Ltd., 1963), p. ix.

² Blanchard, p.ix.

³ Blanchard, p.ix.

Notwithstanding Blanchard's apology in his foreword for the uneven nature of his study, his research is ground-breaking for the period and it provided invaluable documentary evidence for which we are indebted to him. Much of his book is concerned with the structural organisation of the church, the hierarchy, administration of dioceses, parishes, clergy, revenue, but he also includes material on religious practice and piety. Commenting on a Dublin parish at a distance of eight miles from the city centre, he points out that 'practically the whole of the Catholic population frequent the church. The entire congregation – with few exceptions – attend Mass every Sunday'.⁴ He noted that the Irish religious phenomenon was radically different from that observed in France, pointing out that certain questions would be superfluous – as for instance regarding children receiving Baptism, attendance at Mass and Extreme Unction. In Ireland all of these can simply be taken for granted as universal, he observed.⁵

Recalling Pope Pius XI's observation to Cardinal Cardijn that 'the greatest scandal of the nineteenth century was that the Church lost the masses of the working class',⁶ Blanchard's impression of Ireland in the 1950s was that this was certainly not the case. As a Frenchman, he was particularly interested in this aspect of Irish Catholicism. His own country at that time was referred to as 'pays de mission' because of the alienation from the church of large numbers of the working classes and the agricultural community. In an article entitled "France today" in *The Furrow* in 1950, Fr P.J. Brophy of St. Patrick's Diocesan College, Carlow pointed out that 'today France has a population of some forty millions, but less than a tenth of that number go to Mass regularly or perform their Easter Duties'.⁷ An aspect of French culture and indeed Western European culture in general in the post-war era was the growth of communism, socialism and the social democratic movement and various strains thereof. There was no parallel development in Ireland, partly because of its isolated geographical position and neutrality during the Second World War. Blanchard observed:

⁴ Blanchard, p. 27.

⁵ Blanchard, p. 29.

⁶ Quoted in C.B. Daly, "The New French Revolution", in *The Furrow*, 3:5 (May, 1952), p. 177. See also Maisie Ward, *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1949), p. 168.

⁷ P.J. Brophy, "France Today", in *The Furrow*, 1:9 (Oct. 1950), p. 459.

The family life of Irish Catholic workers and employees, with few exceptions, is steeped in Catholicism The majority of them support the national parties, rather than the Labour Party International Marxism has very little influence on the workers.⁸

He commented on the Workers' Union of Ireland organisation of a public procession during the Marian Year in 1954 to attend High Mass in the Pro-Cathedral and how subsequently the participants accompanied by a priest went to their Union headquarters which was then consecrated to the Blessed Virgin.⁹

Blanchard is glowing in his praise of the Irish Church regarding its greatest characteristic as 'the close solidarity, which has ever existed between her and the faithful – for Ireland is deeply Christian and mostly Catholic in spirit and practice' and he goes on to point out that 'the Church will continue to live in this nation which is by tradition and sentiment so devoted to it'. This, he concludes, explains 'the prestige which the clergy enjoy, and likewise the harmonious relationship between Church and State'.¹⁰ There is no doubting that Blanchard's representation of Irish Catholicism at that time was authentic. Irish bishops and the generality of the clergy were more than happy about the state of Irish Catholicism and indeed they were the envy of their continental European counterparts. Their main concern was to defend the Irish Church against the materialistic, communistic and secularistic influences emanating from continental countries, such as France.

The fact of Ireland's insular position, that it remained neutral in the Second World War and the fact that it remained an agrarian rather than developing as an industrial society meant that social changes which were felt in Europe since the turn of the 19th century, which gained a new momentum after the world wars were not part of the Irish experience. In the late forties and fifties Western Europe was in a state of flux. The old order and fixed certainties were being questioned after the experiences of the Second World War. Totalitarian regimes had been revealed at their worst. Authority figures would never be looked up to in quite the same way again. A new era was on the horizon when people would be more individualistic, more open to all manner of influences and less conformist

⁸ Blanchard, *The Church in Contemporary Ireland*, p. 30.

⁹ Blanchard, p. 30.

¹⁰ Blanchard, p. 90.

in their thinking. It was an era when people would become more materialistic and more concerned to find happiness in this life rather than being content to make sacrifices, put up with their lot and find happiness in Heaven. In this new era people would come to see a lot of ideas inspired by Church teaching as questionable, old-fashioned and not in keeping with the more 'progressive' spirit of the times. This kind of questioning of authority and the Church's world-view had begun in France two centuries before at the time of the Enlightenment.

Cardinal Suhard the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris in a landmark pastoral letter in 1949 entitled "Rise or Decline of the Church" pointed out that Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular was undergoing a grave crisis all over the continent.¹¹ He saw the post-war era as one of transition towards a completely new civilisation, characterised by its complete universality and by the ascendancy of the world scientific over the world of ideas. This was indeed prophetic for the 1950s. The question that he posed was whether Christianity could provide the inspiration for a totally new worldwide civilisation, which would be so technical in character – a civilisation which would be universal and common to all.¹² This was the thinking of a Church figure who was confronted head on in the 1950s with the kind of secular materialistic culture that the Irish bishops only read about or heard about in their rare enough encounters with their foreign counterparts. Cut off as they were the Irish bishops could hardly have foreseen the complexity of the age that was on the horizon, but what they certainly did have was a kind of vague generalised fear of change. They sensed that foreign newspapers, books, radio, cinema and in due course television would be the harbingers of change and a new culture over which they would have little or no control and in relation to which they felt helpless – their response was to warn people endlessly in their pastoral letters of dangers to their faith.¹³

At the beginning of 1945 the Church in France was in disarray and regarded with no small amount of suspicion by the papacy. The French clergy and hierarchy had been savagely divided by the civil war between the Gaullists and the Petainists. On 6 December 1944 Angelo Roncalli

¹¹ Cited in Michael I. Mooney in "The Church in the World", in *The Furrow*, 1:2 (March, 1950), pp. 50-53.

¹² Mooney, "Church in the World", pp.50-53.

¹³ See Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002, 2004), pp. 37-43, 52-4.

(the future Pope John XXIII) was appointed nuncio to France by the Vatican and arrived on time to ring in the New Year.¹⁴ The challenges of his appointment were enormous – they would be political, theological and pastoral. A sense of the state of the French Church in the forties is conveyed in Roncalli's journal entry during a retreat in Villa Manresa, the Jesuit retreat centre in Paris in the week of 8-13 December 1947, when he noted: 'The longer I stay in France the more I admire this great country, and the more sincerely fond I grow of "this most noble Gallic people"'. But he went on to register 'a certain disquiet concerning the real state of this "elder daughter of the Church" and certain obvious failings of hers'. He went on: 'I am concerned about the practice of religion, the unsolved question of the schools, the insufficient numbers of clergy and the spread of secularism and Communism'.¹⁵

The Church in France was in possession of statistical evidence illustrating the drop in religious observance thanks to the pioneering studies of Gabriel Le Bras.¹⁶ The situation was deemed so acute that in July 1941 at their assembly the cardinals and archbishops decided to establish a seminary for home missions to train priests who would specialise in the apostolate of conversion.¹⁷ France, seen to be in an advanced stage of dechristianisation was to be rechristianised. The seminary was established in Lisieux and by 1943 the first missionaries were being sent out. Thus began the Mission de France.¹⁸ In the same year Cardinal Suhard commissioned a report on the condition of the proletariat in relation to the Church to be undertaken by two priests who worked at the coal-face in different districts of Paris.¹⁹ Abbé Daniel furnished the statistics and Abbé Godin the sociological reflections and analysis. The report essentially pointed out that in France the bulk of the working class was now so alienated from the Church that it was more realistic to see France as mission territory rather than the 'eldest daughter'. The report was published with the authorisation of the Cardinal under the title *France: Pays de*

¹⁴ See Paul Johnson, *Pope John XXIII* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), pp. 59-60.

¹⁵ See Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), p. 268.

¹⁶ See Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism since 1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 233.

¹⁷ See Maisie Ward, *France Pagan?*, p. 47.

¹⁸ *France Pagan?*, p.47.

¹⁹ *France Pagan?*, p. 48

Mission? It confirmed that French society was so secularised by the forties that it required new methods of evangelisation as would befit a mission country. In 1944 the first worker-priest missions were set up in Paris and then in Lyons and Marseille. Priests began working anonymously in factories sharing in the labour and suffering of the workers, thus giving witness to Gospel values and hoping in this way to draw people back to the Church.²⁰ The theory was that only by working beside the industrial proletariat, by being one of them could the missionaries win the confidence of the workers in the same manner as Communist evangelists. They saw the absence of the poor from the Church as not just simply a gap to be filled by bringing them back but requiring a radical re-thinking of the whole mission of the Church. They also pointed to the Church's complicity in injustice. In their philosophical approach they prefigured liberation theology of the post-Conciliar era and the 'option for the poor'.

In due course they began to join in agitation for improvements in wages and conditions for workers and became prominent in the industrial unrest that simmered in 1952 and 1953 heading the strike committee at the Isère Arc dam site near Radens. Vested interests – Catholic industrialists and factory owners traditionally reliant on the Church for support – complained to the French Bishops and then to Rome accusing the priests of being 'political' and Marxist because they belonged to pro-Communist unions.²¹ For the worker-priests, belonging to unions was unavoidable as they were the only avenue to reform. From the outset the movement was viewed with suspicion by Rome and in August 1953, on orders from Rome, the Mission de France was closed down – some of the priests refused to obey and had to be excommunicated and there was much bitterness.²² After the demise of the worker-priest movement the French bishops devised other initiatives in urban industrial districts in their efforts to win back the working classes and in 1957 the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops established a National Secretariat for the Mission to the Working Class.²³ The mission of the worker-priest movement was publi-

²⁰ See Peter Collins SJ, "The Demise of the Worker Priests", in *Uniya*, Jesuit Social Justice Centre Newsletter, Autumn, 1995, p. 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Johnson, *Pope John XXIII*, pp. 72-3.

²³ See Joseph N. Moody, "The Dechristianization of the French Working Class", in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan. 1958), pp. 46-69 for an excellent

cised in the book *France, Pays de Mission?* by Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel, translated and adapted by Maisie Ward as *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin* and published by the Catholic Book Club London in 1949. The book pointed out ‘the new things – the radio, the cinema, the newspapers – coming from the great cities and bringing a pagan spirit that is slowly eating away the soul of France’.²⁴ While secularisation would be much delayed in Ireland, in 1950 Archbishop D’Alton was echoing and lamenting similar developments in Irish society, when he wrote:

We have to face the fact that with the rise of the new inventions such as the cinema and the radio, we no longer enjoy [sic] our former isolation. Our people are constantly being brought into contact with a civilisation for the most part alien and materialistic in outlook.²⁵

But he took heart from the fact that the Irish were ‘deeply attached to their faith and loyal in their practice of it, despite the dangers of modern life.’²⁶ And the bishops’ approach at this time was essentially to batten down the hatches and to attempt to ward off all such corrupt influences that might threaten the Catholic way of life.

Rapid urbanisation and its concomitant problems – dislocation of communities, alienation and exploitation of workers, secularisation, and the resulting decline in religious practice – had stimulated debate among liturgists, theologians and churchmen on mainland Europe since the turn of the century. Because Irish Churchmen had not experienced the sharp decline in religious practice that their continental counterparts had, they had little need to question the quality of people’s religious experience. From the 1940s France was the crucible of new directions in theology mapped out by theologians like Congar, Chénu, De Lubac and Daniélou. They were of the opinion that in order to bridge the widening gap between theology and the more secularised mind, Catholic theology must be prepared to integrate more modern thought systems and philosophical

overview of the religious situation in France and a comprehensive bibliography of contemporary studies/surveys undertaken.

²⁴ Ward, *France Pagan?*, p. 67.

²⁵ Archbishop D’Alton, “*The Furrow and its Programme*”, in *The Furrow* 1:1 (Feb. 1950), p. 6.

²⁶ D’Alton, “*The Furrow and its Programme*”, p.6.

ideas, which reflected the needs of, and were more meaningful to, the contemporary individual.²⁷ In 1950 however Pope Pius XII cracked down on the new lines of enquiry in his encyclical *Humani Generis*.²⁸ The encyclical, while it did not name any particular figures, was considered to be aimed strongly at France's progressive theologians and it cost several of them their positions and again, as in the case of the worker-priests, it fell to Roncalli to pass on the orders. But the ideas of the French theologians were not to be suppressed forever. Pope Pius XII died and was succeeded by Roncalli as Pope John XXIII in 1958 and shortly after, in January 1959, he announced his intention of calling a Vatican Council and the new directions in theology became the basis for the so-called 'new' theology validated in the decrees of Vatican II.

But the important question to pose at this stage, is to what extent would Irish Church personnel have been aware of the challenges, intellectual currents, theological developments, liturgical and pastoral initiatives in the French Church and how would they have viewed them? The short answer is that the generality of the bishops and clergy had little awareness of developments on the continent, and would have seen the Irish Church as somewhat superior to that of continental countries. An indication of this can be seen when a clergyman speaking of the question of liturgical renewal in 1954, pointed to an attitude of complacency towards the liturgy in Ireland whereby clergy were of the opinion that 'we should leave well enough alone'. And he pointed out that it was hard to blame them given 'the packed congregations for all the Masses on Sunday' and the fact that Ireland has been 'held up to the whole world, even by the Holy Father, as a great Catholic country': so it was easy to see how many clergy at the time would have felt that, as he put it, 'our full churches excuse us from the suggestions made by continental writers to revive religion and fill their empty ones'.²⁹

For the most part the Irish Church was cut off from that of continental Europe – and the attitude of the bishops and the clergy in general tended to be one of battenning down the hatches against the kind of secu-

²⁷ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, pp. 99-100.

²⁸ *Humani Generis*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XII Concerning certain False Opinions, 12 August 1950, in Anne Fremantle, *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context* (New York: 1956, 1963), pp. 294-8.

²⁹ Liam Breen, "The Liturgy in a Rural Parish", in *The Furrow* 5:1 (Nov. 1954), p. 692

larisation taking place in mainland Europe. But a clerical intelligentsia was beginning to emerge in the late forties and with the founding of journals like the *The Furrow* and *Doctrine and Life* some clergy were beginning to look at what was happening in places outside of Ireland and several articles appeared relating to French Catholic life in the fifties. In March of 1950 Rev. Michael Mooney wrote about Cardinal Suhard's pastoral letter of 1949. Referring to the cardinal's concern about the Church's loss of the masses, he pointed to the conflict of opinion in the church as to how this should be tackled, noting that there were those whose line of thinking was 'Let us stay as we are ... The Church has lived through other crises ... Let the storm blow over', but there was another group who complained that the Church in the West had not evolved with civil society - that she had 'lost contact with the masses, and [had] failed to take the initiative in the field of doctrine, culture and action'.³⁰ He went on to point out that the Church must adapt herself to the modern world if she wished to re-conquer it. Here he was tapping into an issue that has been problematic for Catholicism for centuries and it remains to be resolved. Broadly speaking it has to do with the extent, nature and exercise of the Church's authority and questions revolving around freedom of conscience and intellectual freedom. But I think it is fair to say that these kinds of questions would have found little echo in Ireland beyond the readership of such journals at that time.

On the other hand it was no surprise that questions were being raised by the French primate and French theologians, because a century before the French Church was the battleground where liberal Catholics like de Lammenais, Montalembert, and Lacordaire sought to convince the Pope of the necessity for the Church to come to an accommodation with the ideas of the Enlightenment. But they got little hearing from Pope Gregory XVI who responded with the Encyclical *Mirari Vos* in 1832. When liberal Catholics in France and Germany persisted in their efforts to renew theology in keeping with ideas influenced by scientific and philosophical developments, the response of Pope Pius IX was to issue the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864 enunciating eighty errors of the modern world and in due course to declare Papal Infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. In the same way that the Papacy failed to respond adequately to the lib-

³⁰ See Michael I. Mooney, "The Church in the World", in *The Furrow* 1:2 (March, 1950), p. 51.

eral Catholic intellectuals, likewise its response to the exploitation of workers arising from the Industrial Revolution was also late in coming. Karl Marx beat the Church to it when in 1848 the *Communist Manifesto* appeared, later followed by *Das Kapital*. It was not until 1891 that Pope Leo XIII issued his landmark encyclical *Rerum Novarum*³¹ which formed the basis for social Catholicism, the Catholic Action movement and the Christian Democratic parties in Europe.

Essentially the Mission de France copied the techniques of Communism in its battle to win back the workers, which made it suspect in the eyes of the authorities and led to its suppression in due course. This kind of suspicion of some of the rhetoric of the movement is echoed by Cahal Daly (future Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland), in an article entitled “The New French Revolution” in *The Furrow* in 1952. He points out: ‘Nor will we win back the workers by swapping slogans with the Marxists or trying to steal the thunder of the class war’.³² He is disconcerted by the categorisation of priests as ‘bourgeois’ and the concentration on bettering the present circumstances of the workers, thereby perhaps giving less weighting to the supernatural.³³ These were, of course, core principles in Catholic thinking – the question of the temporal and the spiritual. Traditionally the Church’s attitude was to stress the spiritual dimension of human existence, while ignoring or at best sidelining, as being of lesser importance in the grand scheme of life everlasting, the practical day-to-day exigencies of the workers’ lives on earth. In the forties and fifties they were being brought together in France, and the philosophical thinking that underpinned them was existentialism, which stressed the importance of responding to individuals in their unique day-to-day situation. In time this kind of thinking was set to undermine traditional Catholic theology based on medieval Scholastic philosophy, challenging the idea that church doctrines and teachings could be handed down dogmatically without giving due consideration to changing times and people’s life circumstances.

This caused a revolution in consciousness, a paradigm shift you might say, which profoundly influenced Catholicism. While it was tem-

³¹ *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on the Condition of the Working Classes, 15 May 1891, in Anne Freemantle (ed.) *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context* (New York: Mentor, 1956), pp. 166-95.

³² Daly, “The New French Revolution”, in *The Furrow*, 3:5 May 1952, p. 187.

³³ D’Alton, “*The Furrow* and its Programme”, pp. 187-8.

porarily suppressed, it was nevertheless destined to form the basis for the so-called 'new theology', which was very much a French phenomenon. So France was in the vanguard of radical new ideas in Catholicism – both social and theological - in the forties and fifties, which would be validated in time. In the 1950s the clergy writing in *The Furrow* would have found little in Ireland to compare with the situation in France. In 1952 Cahal Daly remarked:

Irish pastoral methods, both at home and wherever Irish priests and people have gone, have produced a Catholicism which, for all its faults, has unusual and indeed unique virtues. It is marked by a faith which never loses its firm grasp on the essentials in dogma and in devotion; which transcends classes and has never alienated or lost the workers or the masses; which issues in a unique solidarity between priest and people.³⁴

However, a year before this article was published cracks were beginning to appear in Irish Catholic culture, as illustrated by the controversy surrounding the proposed Mother and Child scheme. On the one hand it demonstrated the enormous power of the Catholic Church. On the face of it the Church won the battle of strength, but the price was high. While Irish Catholics could be very independent of their Church when it suited them, for instance in political matters in the 19th century, unlike France, there was no tradition of anti-clericalism. However this controversy, how it was managed and the publicity surrounding it, signalled the beginning of a sub-culture of dissent. The Catholic Church's right to prescribe dogmatically would be questioned slowly but steadily from that time.³⁵ And it must also be recorded that that not all clergy were complacent about the state of the Irish Catholic Church in the fifties. There were those who felt that the Irish Catholic ethos, ideal and all as it might have appeared to most observers at the time, could not last. Canon J.G. McGarry and the co-founders and contributors to *The Furrow* were aware of the changes in society, and the decline in religious practice all of which were precipitating a re-examination of theological thinking on mainland Europe. They knew that these changes would not ultimately stop at the shores of Ireland, much as the church authorities might like it.³⁶

³⁴ D'Alton, "The Furrow and its Programme", p. 185.

³⁵ See Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, pp. 76-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3.

And even in the fifties change was beginning to happen slowly in Ireland. Several factors were impacting on society – emigration, the flight from the land, cinema, access to British TV on the east coast. That said, Mass attendance remained universally high. In an article in *Social Compass* in 1964, C.K. Ward pointed out that there was:

... no published empirically-based estimate of proportions of Sunday churchgoers and paschal communicants. These categories are generally said to contain about ninety-five percent of urban Catholics and an even higher percentage of rural Catholics.³⁷

But in the same article he sounded a warning when he emphasised the importance of research in a country ‘where uniform practice must surely cloak difference in attitude and opinion’, and went on to say that ‘current stereotypes of the Irish Catholic would not survive empirical investigation’.³⁸ By the sixties many developments would lead to profound changes in Irish culture. Economic growth, travel opportunities, the establishment of an Irish television station, educational reforms, the impact of the Second Vatican Council, relaxation in censorship legislation, the nascent women’s movement all in their various ways influenced fundamental cultural change and it was against this background that *Humanae Vitae* was promulgated in 1968.³⁹ But in passing on the Pope’s teaching, the Irish bishops took little cognisance of changes in Irish society. The occasion which crystallises this was the press conference which was called with Dr McQuaid and Prof F Cremin in attendance, at which the latter, referring to the Pope’s reaffirmation of the Church’s traditional stance on artificial birth control, registered that he personally had ‘never received a better piece of news’.⁴⁰ But the occasion called for a more sensitive kind of response in all of the circumstances. The clergyman who probably most read the signs and mood of the times and whose response was to be prophetic was Fr. James Good, who saw the encyclical as a major tragedy and gave his opinion that it would be ignored by the vast ma-

³⁷ Conor K. Ward, “Socio-Religious Research in Ireland”, in *Social Compass*, XI/3, 4 (March-April 1960), p. 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹ Encyclical letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae: On the Regulation of Births*, 21 July 1968, in *The Furrow*, 19:9 (Sept. 1968), pp. 542-56.

⁴⁰ See *The Irish Times*, 30 July 1968, p. 1.

jority of Irish Catholics.⁴¹ Fr. Good was to be dismissed from his post in UCC as a result of his voicing his opinions. But time proved him right - the encyclical was indeed a turning point, not only in Ireland, but throughout the Catholic world.

The Church's official position was one thing – how the local hierarchy handled this and interpreted it for their followers was quite another, and it would prove more and more important as time went by. The era was long over when French Catholics would have accepted the Irish approach. Rather than simply passing on the Pope's teaching, the French bishops went a stage further, recognising that people might experience a conflict of conscience, in which case they pointed out that 'partners will come to a decision after reflecting together with all the concern which the nobility of their married vocation imposes on them'.⁴² Unlike the Irish bishops, they did not see themselves as a mere vehicle for the passing on of rules. French society was far more secularised and more liable to question and reject the teaching than was Irish society. This may be understood also in light of the independent philosophical tradition of France over many centuries. And of course the experience of the French Church since the revolution had been a humbling one, culminating in 1905 with the separation of Church and State and along the way being forced to adapt to declining religious practice. Ironically while the Irish Catholic experience over centuries had been a less than happy one, in the course of the 19th century the Church had consolidated its position and was, as a result, placed in a position of extraordinary power and influence over government and people at the beginning of the 20th century. That said, Catholicism is universal and essential aspects of how it is experienced are similar across geographical boundaries. The fact that the Irish Catholic ethos was not altogether dissimilar from what was experienced in France is borne out in the writing of Jean Sullivan in 1960. Born in 1913 and reflecting back on his youth he observed:

The priests of my youth tended to preach about laws and obligations In their eyes the rural order in which the Church still played a dominant role

⁴¹ *The Irish Times*, 30 July 1968, p. 1.

⁴² Cited by Fr. Denis O'Callaghan in "Theology Forum: *Humanae Vitae* in Context", in *The Furrow*, 28:4 (April 1977), pp. 232-3.

was an expression of the divine will. They had forgotten about freedom, without which there is no faith.⁴³

Whereas he was speaking of times past in France, this situation only began to change slowly in Ireland from the sixties and indeed *Humanae Vitae* was a significant turning point. Catholic culture changed because lay Catholics, became more questioning, educated and secularised and increasingly rejected the dogmatic approach of their Church and its interference in areas which they considered to be their private moral lives. So the irony is that the Irish Church, as opposed to teaching the French church, could indeed have learned a lot from developments in France over the years.

By the early seventies while religious practice in Ireland was still remarkably high relative to France and most other European Catholic countries, surveys were showing that particular groups were at risk, in particular the young and skilled and semi-skilled workers. With practice as high as 91% in 1974,⁴⁴ it is doubtful if the Church authorities were too perturbed about this, but they constituted early warning signs of a phenomenon that has increasingly grown since that time. But whereas the French Church had to devise its own creative responses to the alienation of the working classes in the 1940s and 1950s, by the time this happened in Ireland official Catholic theology in relation to social issues had changed fundamentally. The worker priest movement in the fifties in France was suppressed by the Church authorities because the identification and involvement of clergy with the working classes was seen as communistic and threatening to the status-quo. But a great deal had changed by the early seventies. Pope John XXIII's encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, and the deliberations of the Vatican Council paved the way for a radical new departure by the Latin American Bishops at their conference in Medellin in 1968, at which they announced their 'option for the poor'. This was a seminal event and in due course this new direction would filter through to general Catholic thinking via liberation theology, which led to a radical change in the theory and prac-

⁴³ Quoted in Eamon Maher, *Crosscurrents and Confluences: Echoes of Religion in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Dublin: Veritas, 2000), p. 4.

⁴⁴ *A Survey of Religious Practice, Attitudes and Beliefs in the Republic of Ireland 1973-4*, report no. 1 on *Religious Practice*, Research and Development Unit, Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland (Dublin, 1975), p. 71.

tice of the Irish Catholic church. To a great extent the pre-Vatican II Church had been primarily concerned with the salvation of man's soul in preparation for the next life. Liberation theology, on the other hand, sought to enable people to interpret the present circumstances of their lives, taught them to become aware of institutionalised injustices, which were not God-made, but man-made, and encouraged them, where necessary, to challenge the status quo. This was, of course, revolutionary. Those who espoused liberation theology went beyond theory and analysis – they actively involved themselves in the plight of the alienated and oppressed. This very often meant political involvement and confrontation.

From the seventies the Irish Church in policy statements and in its practice on the ground has increasingly identified with the poor and the marginalised.⁴⁵ Priests like Sean Healy of CORI and Peter McVerry SJ have become actively involved in issues of injustice, poverty, deprivation and unemployment. Indeed in the case of CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland), a commentator recently saw it as having a left-wing politico-economic agenda.⁴⁶ And there is no doubt that the Irish Church in terms of its pronouncements in the social justice area has moved radically left of centre. Ironically, however, while the Irish Church has increasingly identified with the marginalised since the 1970s, this section of Irish society has become more alienated from the Church. So it would appear that the Irish Church's response to the interests and needs of the marginalised came too late. Given the universal religious practice and closeness of Irish Catholic workers to their Church recorded by Jean Blanchard in the 1950s and the substantial decline in rates of practice noted in surveys some fifty years later,⁴⁷ it would also seem that the Irish Church may have had a great deal more to learn from France than might have appeared either to Blanchard or other commentators in the fifties.

⁴⁵ See Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, pp. 216-9, 260-1.

⁴⁶ See David Quinn, "Is the Conference of Religious in Ireland going too far with its teachings on Social Justice?", in *Magill* (September 2001), pp. 36-41.

⁴⁷ Statistical results for religious practice vary and analysts need to study questions and how they are posed in the polls carried out to get a clearer picture. With this caveat in mind a number of recent surveys/polls may be consulted. A recent Republic of Ireland survey recorded a figure of 63% attendance at religious services once a week or more often (apart from special occasions).

At the very least, it is clear that there was, and is, much scope for soul-searching.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Eoin O'Mahony, *The European Social Survey Round 2: A Review of 2005 Religious Practice data*, The Bishops' Council for Research and Development, April 2006, p. 6. See *The Irish Times*, 20 September 2002 for a report by Patsy McGarry on the Millward Brown IMS survey, conducted for the 'Power to Change' campaign August 2002, which recorded weekly Mass attendance in the Republic at 48%. A further Millward Brown IMS opinion poll for/in the *Sunday Tribune*, 24 April 2005 gave a figure of 44% for weekly Mass attendance. There is anecdotal evidence that in some urban working class communities the weekly Mass attendance figure is 5% and lower in some places. Unlike France there has been no tradition of compiling empirical data at local parish level. In Ireland, regional and class differences and their impact on religious practice need closer investigation. The question also arises as to whether weekly Mass attendance, the traditional measure of religiosity is still reliable, and whether new indicators may have to be devised.

Part II

19th Century Links

Jean Brihault

Chapter Six: Lady Morgan: Building Bridges

Lady Morgan (1775-1859) is a neglected writer in Ireland and among specialists of Irish literature. This is mostly due to the fact that she tended to pay little attention to literary composition, to art, which means that quite understandably academics today find very little of interest in her prose. The other side of her literary production, the information supplied on life in the Ireland of her time and before, also tends to be considered negligible as students of history and culture turn to other more rational sources to document their knowledge of Irish life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is, however, the combination of these two weaknesses that constitutes the main interest of Lady Morgan's literary production. The fact that, as a female, she was debarred from any form of involvement in the politics of her times, that, nevertheless, she found a way of expressing her views on the history, political situation and economy of her country, as well as the responsibilities of Great Britain towards Ireland, is of major interest. She, in fact, produced a 'fiction of a fiction' pretending to write novels when, in reality, she was tackling the problems of the day. She also played an essential part in the emergence of the Irish novel in English. She was not the only one, but she was one of the first, together with Maria Edgeworth to deal with the matter of Ireland in a respectful manner. Just to illustrate the point it can be mentioned that she was the very first to attempt to transpose the various accents characterising the English spoken in Ireland with accuracy, making sure to render as precisely as possible the differences between a Cork accent, a Dublin one and one heard on the coast of Antrim. Given her attitude to life, her interest in politics and economics, her frustration at being confined, because of her gender, to a very strict and confining code of conduct, it is little wonder that she rapidly developed an interest in post-revolutionary France where she thought (probably quite wrongly) that she could detect a sort of counter-model to what was imposed on her at home.

Lady Morgan and her husband, Sir Charles, arrived on their first visit to Paris in April 1816. Their purpose was to write a 'book on

France' which was not a very original idea at the time.¹ Attitudes in Paris concerning the 'English' were contrasted. After Waterloo, 'la populace' is deeply hostile to the nation that has defeated Napoleon. By contrast, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie again show the Anglomania that used to prevail prior to the Napoleonic wars. If to a majority of French people all these visitors were 'English' and as such to be hated or welcome, there was in reality a huge difference between an English visitor and an Irish one. Gustave de Beaumont, in *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse*, reminds us of the exceptional interest caused by the French Revolution in Ireland.²

What characterized this first stay in France was Lady Morgan's absence of prejudices, her willingness to tackle any new situation with enthusiasm. This attitude enabled her to meet the strangest people and to es-

¹ One can mention, among others M. Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey through France, from Dieppe through Paris and Lyons, to the Pyrenees and back, through Toulouse, in July, August and September 1814, describing the Habits and the People, and the Agriculture of the Country* (London: William Phillips, 1814); Rev. J. C. Eustace, *Letters from Paris to George Petre Esq.* (London: J. Mawman, 1814); W. D. Fellowes, *Paris during the interesting Month of July, 1815* (London: 1815); J. Hobhouse, *The Substance of Some Letters written from Paris, London 1817* (London: 1817); W. Scott, *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk* (London: 1815); J. Scott, *A Visit to Paris in 1814, being a Review of the moral, political and intellectual Conditions of the French Capital* (London: 1815); Rev. W. Shepherd, *Paris in Eighteen Hundred and Two, and Eighteen Hundred and Fourteen* (London: 1814); H. Wansey, *A Visit to Paris in June 1814* (London: 1814). For more details, see M. E. Elkington, *Les relations de société entre l'Angleterre et la France sous la Restauration (1814-1830)* (Paris : 1929) et M. Moraud, *La France de la Restauration d'après les visiteurs anglais* (Paris : 1933).

² Gustave de Beaumont, *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse* (Paris : C. Gosselin, 1840), vol.1, p. 165 : « La révolution française a remué tous les peuples ; mais il ne se trouve peut-être pas dans le monde un pays auquel elle se soit aussi vite et aussi fidèlement communiquée qu'à l'Irlande. L'Irlande a désormais les yeux fixés sur la France ; tout ce qui se passe dans ce dernier pays la touche profondément. La cause de la France est à ses yeux celle de tous les peuples asservis qui aspirent à la liberté. Non seulement l'Irlande sympathise avec la France et prend toutes les passions de celle-ci, mais encore elle lui emprunte ses mœurs, son langage, le style de ses lois, et toutes les nouvelles allures révolutionnaires. »

establish strong and enduring friendships in France. It is interesting to observe that in her *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 45, she should mention that:

On removing to hotel d'Orleans (sic) in the faubourg St Germain, we found our apartment hanging over the gardens, and commanding the hotel de la Rochefoucault, where the Encyclopedists so constantly assembled; where the Voltaires, D'Alemberts and Diderots were united in wit and philosophy, and where the first meeting of those five friends took place, who formed the subsidiary society of 'Les amis des nègres' – Grégoire, Mirabeau, de la Rochefoucault, Condorcet and La Fayette.

This quotation constitutes a clear indication of Lady Morgan's interest in 'ideas'. So does the list of those she met during this first stay in France and which her propensity for name-dropping makes it easy to establish. Among the most famous, we may mention Humboldt, Abbé Grégoire, Denon, Prince and Princesse de Beauveau, Princesse de Craon, Princesse de Hénin, Count and Countess de la Rochefoucault, Marquise de la Villette, Madame Patterson (Jérôme Bonaparte's former wife), Madame de Genlis, Talma, Suard, Cuvier, Ségur, Lally Tollendal and Lafayette who became the Morgans' close friend.

The outcome of this first visit was a book called *France*, which, Lady Morgan was informed by her London publisher, Colburn, came out of the press on June 17 1817. It was said by the author to have been written between November 1816 and March 1817. Lady Morgan explains that, as she had promised her publisher to give him the manuscript before April 1, she had been compelled to write 'à trait de plume' and to send it chapter by chapter without being able to check it before it was sent to the printers. These statements however were made later, after the formal weaknesses of the book had been exploited by critics hostile to its political content. *France* clearly bears the mark of its author's political leanings. This is precisely what makes it interesting today. In it, Lady Morgan endeavours to give an idea of all the positive consequences of the 1789 Revolution and of all the evils restored at the same time as the monarchy. In the opening pages of the first volume, for example, she mentions 'that great *bouleversement*, out of whose principles of destruction and regeneration the present improved condition of the peasant population of France arose.'³ This 'political' quality of the book is confirmed by the re-

³ Lady Morgan, *France* (London: Colburn, 1817), vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

actions that it evoked both at home and abroad. As early as August 1817 Madame Patterson could inform Lady Morgan:

Your work on France has appeared through a French translation, in which they have suppressed what they thought best, and have arranged what they chose to give the public in the way best suited to their own purposes.⁴

As a consequence of this 'translation', Lady Morgan's friends in Paris organized themselves to make sure that this misrepresentation was corrected. Doctor Montègre was informing Lady Morgan in a letter dated October 22 1817 that Madame Du Bignon 'avait pris soin de faire un relevé exact de toutes les suppressions, additions, ou mutations qu'on avait fait (sic) à l'ouvrage dans les deux éditions de la traduction française . »⁵ Finally, we may quote Dénon who sent her a letter telling her 'People are beginning to forgive your work here, and to render it justice. You are abused, but purchased, in English. You see, therefore, that your affairs are not going badly.'⁶

The press, both in Great Britain and in France showed considerable interest in the book. On the French side, one may mention articles published in *Les archives philosophiques, politiques et littéraires*, *La Chronique parisienne*, *Le Constitutionnel*, *Le Correspondant*, *La Gazette de France*, *Le Journal de Paris*, *Le Journal des débats*, *Le Journal général*, *Le Mercure de France*, *La Quinzaine littéraire* and *La quotidienne*. Pamphlets were also published including one by A. J. B. Defauconpret, the author of the 'translation' already mentioned and another by Charles Dupin & William Playfair. Last, but not least, the French government decided to make Lady Morgan *persona non grata* on French soil. In Great Britain, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Monthly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* were the most prominent in the debate over the book. The commercial success of *France* was considerable.

The Morgans returned to France at the end of August 1818. This second stay was going to last eight months despite Lady Morgan's publisher's demand that she should travel to Italy as rapidly as possible after

⁴ Lady Morgan, *Memoirs*, edited by W. Hepworth Dixon & Geraldine Jewsbury, (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1862), vol. 2, p. 65.

⁵ Lady Morgan, *Passages from my Autobiography, an Odd Volume* (London: Bentley), pp. 134-135.

⁶ *Passages from my Autobiography*, pp. 22-23.

he had paid her an advance of £2000 for the book she was to write on this country. This stay is partly reported in *Passages from my Autobiography; and Odd Volume* (1859). They spent the first month of this second French visit at General Lafayette's at La Grange, which confirms the quality and the sincerity of the relationship established on the occasion of their first visit. When she came back to Paris, at the beginning of October 1818, Lady Morgan opened her 'salon' and Wednesday became 'her' day as she very proudly states in a letter to her sister. This stay was to last until April 1819 when the Morgans at long last left for Italy.

The third trip taken by Lady Morgan to France took place from April 1829. The stay lasted three months. The literary outcome of this stay was *France in 1829-30* (1830). The two volumes of this book reveal the extent of her knowledge concerning France and also her interest in and mastery of the culture of this foreign country. Comparisons between the situation in 1817 and 1829 are of real interest and Lady Morgan passes a rather favourable judgment on the evolutions that have taken place in France since her first visit. The book was a commercial failure for reasons that have nothing to do with its intrinsic quality. The truth is that Lady Morgan and Colburn, her former publisher, were confronting each other in court and that this had an adverse impact on the commercialisation of the book.

These three visits, however, had been anticipated by earlier contacts with French culture and the French language. At the age of thirteen, Sydney Owenson's education was entrusted to one Mrs Terson, a French lady of Huguenot origin who was running a school for young ladies in Portalington. There, a good number of classes took place in French. In the course of her third year at Portalington, the school closed and Sydney Owenson and her sister, Olivia, moved to another school where the French influence was also strong. In particular one Mrs Dacier was employed there as governess. She was to later open her own school which Lady Morgan's sister would attend. In this second school there was also one Monsieur Fontaine who was employed as music and dancing master who was to become Sydney's mentor and friend.

She had also met several other French expatriate Huguenots, then the monarchists who had emigrated at the time of the French Revolution and, finally, former elements of the French Irish Brigade who, though their names were Irish, were totally French in language, culture and manners. So even before she set foot on French soil for the first time, Sydney Morgan had been subjected to French influence and culture. It is impor-

tant in this regard to note that when she decided to become a governess, a decision for which her father displayed a total lack of enthusiasm, the arguments which she used to convince him of the respectable character of the position she was about to take were all based on French names:

What objections can you have to my occupying a position as teacher to the young? It is a calling which enrols the names of Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Genlis, and I believe, at this moment, even the young Duke of Orleans.⁷

The first two novels which she published in 1803 and 1805⁸, more than ten years prior to her first visit to France, also reveal a sort of fascination with the country and its culture including as they do numerous quotations from French authors, (over)abundant use of the French language and, for the second, a French plot and French historical characters. It is thus very clear that Lady Morgan had a deep interest in and a considerable knowledge of France. Now it may be useful to try and identify the impact this privileged position had on her literary production.

One very clear influence was that exercised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Lady Morgan was not the first among the Irish to be influenced by the French philosopher and *littérateur*. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, the novelist's father, for example, had 'determined to educate his eldest son, Richard who was born in 1764, in accordance with the system of Rousseau.'⁹ Philippe Séjourné in *Aspects généraux du roman féminin en Angleterre de 1740 à 1800* also reminds us (pp. 187-188) that Rousseau's influence in England had been considerable as early as 1763. Whereas Maria Edgeworth in *Belinda* (1801) had tried to counteract Rousseau's influence, showing in chapter twenty-six Belinda's superiority over Virginia,¹⁰ Lady Morgan, like Rousseau, thought that nature was the source of all good. All of her heroines, like Emile, spend their childhood and youth far from the city and as close to nature as possible and it is always made

⁷ Lady Morgan, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 177-178.

⁸ Lady Morgan, *St Clair; or, the Heiress of Desmond* (Dublin: Wogan, 1803) (an earlier version may have been published in 1802 by Brown of Dublin under the title *St Clair; or First Love*) & *The Novice of Saint Dominick* (London: Phillips, 1805).

⁹ Patrick Murray, *Maria Edgeworth. A Study of the Novelist* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1971), p. 16.

¹⁰ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London: Dent, 1893), p. 176.

clear that their exceptional qualities and moral perfection is the consequence of this education. Like Rousseau, Lady Morgan associates the concepts of 'nature', 'virtue' and 'happiness'. 'Plus l'homme est resté près de sa condition naturelle, [...] moins [...] il est éloigné d'être heureux' ¹¹ seems to be Rousseau's motto. According to John B. Halsted, 'for both the enlightenment and for Romanticism, nature was pointed to as a standard, the 'natural' constituted a standard for beauty and natural behavior a standard in morality.'¹² When Rousseau writes 'les premiers mouvements de la nature sont toujours droits'¹³ or 'tout ce que je sens être bien est bien, tout ce que je sens être mal est mal'¹⁴, he finds an echo in Lady Morgan's evocation of Luxima, the heroine of *The Missionary; an Indian Tale*:

More sensitive than reflecting, she was guided rather by instinctive delicacy, than a prudent reserve; in *her*, sentiment supplied the place of reason, and she was the most virtuous because she was the most affectionate of women.¹⁵

Similarly both writers agree that not only is virtue natural, but that it is also enjoyable. Where Lady Morgan proclaims 'Pleasure and virtue are so nearly allied that it is wonderful they should be separated'¹⁶ and 'virtue is my object – felicity my aim; or, rather, I am lured towards the former through the medium of the latter'¹⁷ she is merely echoing Rousseau and his 'cette tentation [de bien faire] est si naturelle et si douce qu'il est impossible de lui résister toujours.'¹⁸ This belief in the moral value of nature entails on the part of both Rousseau and Lady Morgan a negative view of society as it is and of its influence upon man. This is summed up in *France* as follows:

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation* (Paris : Garnier, 1964), p. 85.

¹² John B. Halsted, *Romanticism* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 10.

¹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 81.

¹⁴ *Emile*, p. 348.

¹⁵ Lady Morgan, *The Missionary; an Indian Tale* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1831), p. 140.

¹⁶ Lady Morgan, *Woman; or Ida of Athens* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1809), vol. 2, p. 202.

¹⁷ Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl; a National Tale* (London: D. Bryce, 1856), pp. 273-274.

¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 355-356.

The savage, whose joys and sorrows, whose life and death, are governed by the laws and passions of nature only, here, for a moment, stands opposed in proud superiority to that erring, cruel, and vainglorious creature, to whom civilization has lent but half its light; who, in his dangerous progress through semi-barbarism, has learnt to *pervert* not to *improve* his faculties, to tread on the rights of others, not to respect and preserve his own; and who, substituting power for happiness, and ambition for justice, seeks to become *great*, without endeavouring to become *wise*.¹⁹

Their view of society led both writers to consider that crime was to be accounted for by social conditions and not by individual flaws. They saw a close connection between the structure of society and the psychological condition of the individual. They believed that discord and moral confusion are the ineluctable consequences of excessive inequalities of wealth. According to Lady Morgan: 'In the more striking cases of human misconduct, there are, for the most part, two parties – the criminals who offend, and the society which first prepares the act, and then passively acquiesces in it.'²⁰ To them, men could not be truly free unless they were emotionally secure. Freedom in their view was the prerequisite of any social happiness and moral worth. Rousseau writes: 'Libre et content, tu es resté juste et bon; car la peine et le vice sont inséparables, et jamais l'homme ne devient méchant que lorsqu'il est malheureux.'²¹ Only to be echoed by Lady Morgan's « the Greeks [...] are only *debased* because they are no longer *free*.'²² Their notion of liberty concerns masters as well as slaves. They consider that moral degradation affects the despot as much as the victim. For Rousseau, 'la domination même est servile'²³ et « le maître et l'esclave se dépravent mutuellement »²⁴, a position entirely shared by Lady Morgan. This approach quite naturally leads them to envisage the possibility of revolutions. According to Rousseau, « Tout ce qu'on fait les hommes, les hommes peuvent le détruire : il n'y a de caractères ineffaçables que ceux qu'imprime la nature, et la nature ne fait ni

¹⁹ Lady Morgan, *France*, vol. 1, p. 238.

²⁰ Lady Morgan, *Woman and her Master* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1840), vol.1, pp. 176-177.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 565.

²² Lady Morgan, *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, vol.1, pp. 2-3

²³ *Emile*, p. 68.

²⁴ *Emile*, p. 70.

princes, ni grands seigneurs »²⁵. Lady Morgan also refers to ‘natural law’ when she evokes the French Revolution:

Political revolution, the inevitable result of undue preponderance in some order of the state in which it occurs, presents in the moral subversion it occasions, an image of those fearful symptoms, by which nature in her great volcanic struggles rights herself, and vindicates her violated laws.²⁶

Lady Morgan’s negative approach concerning ‘society’ and ‘institutions’ once again corresponds to Rousseau’s when religion is at stake. This correspondence is clearly demonstrated in *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland, Written in Connaught*, where the Irish novelist gives a translation of one of Rousseau’s fundamental principles concerning religion:

While I surveyed this diversity of sects prevailing on the face of the earth, and accusing one another of error and falsehood, I inquired, ‘Which is the right?’ Each replied: ‘It is ours: we alone possess the truth, and all others are mistaken.’ – ‘And how do you know this?’ – ‘Because God himself has declared it’ – ‘Who told you so?’ – ‘Our minister, who is well acquainted with the divine will: he has ordered us to believe this, and accordingly we do believe it. He assures us that all who contradict him speak false, and therefore we do not listen to them’?²⁷

Rousseau is the advocate of ‘natural religion’²⁸ which he also calls ‘theism’²⁹ and he insists on the fact that this is the exact opposite of irreligion³⁰. This religion is based on feelings and sensations:

Voyez le spectacle de la nature, écoutez la voix intérieure. Dieu n’a-t-il pas tout dit à nos yeux, à notre conscience, à notre jugement ? [...] Si l’on n’eût

²⁵ *Emile*, pp. 224-225.

²⁶ Lady Morgan, *France*, vol. 1, p. 3.

²⁷ Lady Morgan, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland, Written in Connaught* (London: Phillips, 1807), vol. 1, p. 67.

²⁸ *Emile*, p. 361.

²⁹ *Emile*, p. 360.

³⁰ *Emile*, p. 360.

écouté que ce que Dieu dit au cœur de l'homme, il n'y aurait jamais eu qu'une religion sur la terre.³¹

Though he contests the authority of churches (« L'Eglise décide que l'Eglise a le droit de décider. Ne voilà-t-il pas une autorité bien prouvée ? »³²) and because rituals do not matter in his view, he advises people to accept the religion of their fathers : « dans l'incertitude où nous sommes, c'est une inexcusable présomption de professer une autre religion que celle où l'on est né. »³³ These are the exact principles voiced by Lady Morgan in *The Missionary, an Indian Tale* : « God has appointed to each tribe its own faith, and to each sect its own religion : let each obey the appointment of God, and live in peace with his neighbour. »³⁴ The principle expressed and the vocabulary used take on special significance in an Irish context. The wise pundit, in the same novel, 'secured his attention to forms and ceremonies which were the object of his secret derision.'³⁵ She loves to draw parallels between religions to confirm that their differences are only apparent. Quite logically, in *The Missionary; an Indian Tale* and in *The Novice of Saint Dominick*, she demonstrates that religious conversion is an illusion and that it can only be conducive to disaster. She compares formal religion: 'a little code of local ceremonies, drawn up by human invention of the lowest order, of useless mysteries and childish bugbears, set up to puzzle, not to convince – made to terrify not to instruct.'³⁶ And the sincere and natural faith of the woodcutter who says grace 'with a devotional energy, which shewed it not the result of habitual ceremony, but the pious effusion of existing and grateful feelings.'³⁷ Just as Rousseau proclaims 'j'admire l'ouvrier dans le détail de son ouvrage'³⁸, for Glorvina, in *The Wild Irish Girl; a National Tale*, 'the created has become the awakening medium of that adoration I offered to the Creator.'³⁹

³¹ *Emile*, p. 361.

³² *Emile*, p. 374.

³³ *Emile*, p. 385.

³⁴ Lady Morgan, *The Missionary; an Indian Tale*, p. 37.

³⁵ *The Missionary*, p. 18.

³⁶ Lady Morgan, *The Novice of Saint Dominick* (London: Thomas Hughes, 1823) (1805), vol. 1, p. 234.

³⁷ *The Novice*, vol. 1, p. 320.

³⁸ *Emile*, p. 332.

³⁹ Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl; a National Tale*, p. 252.

This interest in political, social and religious issues naturally enough leads Lady Morgan to reflect on the questions of education. Although educational questions are omnipresent in her works, it is probably the second volume of *Woman, or Ida of Athens* which offers the clearest and most complete description of her views on education. Here again the French influence, and more particularly, Rousseau's is to be observed. Inside some thirty five pages she gives a most detailed account of Ida's education 'under the influence of philosophy and nature'.⁴⁰ Reading these pages is like reading an abstract of Rousseau's *Emile ou de l'éducation*. Ida's uncle becomes her preceptor when she is only two years old. Even at this early age Rousseau's principles are applied: 'no ligatures restrained the formation and the growth of those beautiful proportions, which nature only perfects and art can only injure.'⁴¹ In her first years, 'impressions' (p. 21) and 'sensations' (p. 22) are all that matter in accordance with Rousseau's principle that « la première raison de l'homme est une raison sensitive; c'est elle qui sert de base à la raison intellectuelle. »⁴² Her preceptor 'knew that feeling preceded intelligence',⁴³ 'He had adopted no system – he had laid down no method',⁴⁴ 'all around him breathed the pure and rich enjoyments nature dictates – the simplicity and moderation which wisdom orders.'⁴⁵ 'Nature brought with each day, her own progressive perfect plan of education; he watched the senses, gradually correcting by hourly experience, the natural errors of a first timid experiment, and communicating the intellectual power, those images from whence ideas spring.'⁴⁶

Lady Morgan also insists on 'the folly of man, that forces on the memory of childhood a premature information which the senses have not yet experienced'⁴⁷ and like Rousseau, Ida's preceptor never actually 'teaches' religion to his pupil but brings her to discover 'the great arrangement of the universal system [...] and the power of a superior

⁴⁰ Lady Morgan, *Woman; or Ida of Athens, op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

⁴¹ Lady Morgan, *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, vol. 2, p. 20.

⁴² *Emile*, p. 128.

⁴³ Lady Morgan, *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, vol. 2, p. 30.

⁴⁴ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, p. 29.

⁴⁶ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, p. 30.

⁴⁷ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, p.30.

mind.’⁴⁸ Religion as taught to Ida ‘was no abstract idea which sophistry might dispute – it was sensible feeling arising from the testimony of her senses, and the influence of her mind.’⁴⁹

Of course the observations made in France had an impact on Lady Morgan’s attitude to the problems of Ireland. It must be understood that this was by no means a one-way process. She turned to French culture, French literature and France in general because of her interest in politics and in return, she reached a new degree of awareness concerning her country and its problems. In fact, the ideal which she rapidly reached was one of tolerance. Because she had been able to enjoy difference abroad, she was able to understand and accept it at home. Her efforts, both as a writer and a citizen were particularly intense concerning the position of women in society, Catholic Emancipation and the fate of the most down-trodden. When Catholic Emancipation was finally granted, she considered it partly as a personal success. This had already been her reaction on the occasion of the 1818 General Election in France when La Fayette was returned in La Sarthe. On October, 31, 1818, she wrote to her sister: ‘The triumph is universal, and they say my book, ‘France’ was the best canvasser La Fayette had.’⁵⁰

Clearly, Lady Morgan found in France an adequate metonymy for Ireland. And equally clearly, on many occasions when she is analysing the French situation prior to the Revolution, this must be understood as a kind of warning to her contemporaries in Great Britain. To confirm this point we can refer again to ‘those fearful symptoms, by which nature in her great volcanic struggles rights itself, and vindicates her violated laws’. If we put this quotation side by side with the statement made in *Italy* (vol. 2, note p. 75) that ‘*where* force alone rules and there is no law save the will of the despot, *there* force will oppose itself to force, and fraud to fraud; and [...] the personal insecurity of the tyrant is a necessary consequence of a necessary law of man’s moral nature’ then we can fully grasp the deep meaning of the scene described in *Dramatic Scenes from Real Life* in which a miserable farm labourer exclaims:

‘My country! – a country to starve and perish in! What laws are there for me; if, when labouring to support a wife and five children, out of sixpence a day,

⁴⁸ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁹ *Woman; or Ida of Athens*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Lady Morgan, *Passages from my Autobiography, an Odd Volume*, p. 151.

paid me by that landlord shark, for twelve hours' work, I was unable to pay him his rint!(sic)⁵¹

In reality, Lady Morgan, when travelling in France and when writing about the country, in her travel books, autobiography or novels, is essentially on the look-out for observations that may be of use to her own nation. It is interesting to note that France as evoked by Lady Morgan is characterised by the confusion of political and religious issues (*The Novice of Saint Dominick, passim*), the importance of patriotism (*The Novice of Saint Dominick*, vol. 3, pp. 45-46), the disastrous impact of absenteeism (*The Novice of Saint Dominick, passim*). It also suggests several parallels with Ireland concerning the peasants' laziness and alcoholism. The whole of Lady Morgan's 'foreign' works in fact offers a vast transposition of the difficulties to which the Ireland of her time was confronted. This is organised around two basic writing techniques: parallel and contrast. How significant the following statements (all taken from *France*) may have sounded to all those with some knowledge of Ireland:

Tithes:

The *tithe*, that vexatious tax upon the most laborious class of society, for the support and luxury of the most indolent⁵²,

Peaceful and happy peasantry:

The peasantry, thus abandoned to contempt and to neglect, and cultivating a plenteous soil for others, which they could never hope to reap for themselves, submitted from generation to generation with a debasing acquiescence to their iron destiny; and though they lightened the burthen of a miserable existence by constitutional gaiety; though they sang in chains and danced in rags; yet how sensibly they suffered, was marked in their meagre features and attenuated forms; how keenly they felt, was evinced in the reaction of their feelings, when circumstances placed the sword of retribution in their hands, and vengeance exceeded her customary horrors, in the ferocious deeds of the *Carmagnoles* and the *Marseillois*.⁵³

Fixity of tenure:

⁵¹ Lady Morgan, *Dramatic Scenes from Real Life* (London, Saunders & Otley, 1833), vol. 1, pp. 317-318.

⁵² Lady Morgan, *France*, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁵³ *France*, vol. 1, p.7-8.

The little spot of earth [the peasant] labours is his own: the portion of grain he sows he will reap: his children will eat of the fruit of the tree his hand has planted...⁵⁴

And to end this short list, concerning absenteeism, the order given by Comte de Saint Dorval to his daughter 'that her residence in Paris should never exceed three [months]; and that she should chiefly reside at the chateau de St. Dorval, conducing to the happiness and comforts of her tenantry and vassals, promoting virtue by her example, and encouraging industry by her countenance and reward.'⁵⁵

This is a 'lean-to' kind of writing, one in which the statements that cannot be openly made concerning Ireland are nevertheless to be found in Lady Morgan's literary production (novels and travel books) provided the reader takes the time to put side by side the statements that, in reality, constitute a whole. This was probably the price Lady Morgan had to pay to avoid being censored. The result today is that the revolutionary nature of her writings is often lost on the reader who turns to her 'national' or 'patriotic' works and does not find there the kind of 'message' he is looking for. This metonymic characteristic of Lady Morgan's prose does not limit itself to her books written on France. The quotations extracted from her 'Indian tale' as well as many other examples confirm the fact that writing about France, Italy, Belgium, Greece or India, she was, in fact, from her special position (that of a female having no say in political affairs), trying to contribute to the welfare of her own country.

Lady Morgan's is a literature with a purpose and it was in part by 'leaning' against a foreign culture – that of France – that she managed to make her seventy odd volumes the bearers of her doctrines. The most visible, and probably unfortunate trace of the influence of France on her literary production is her inveterate habit of larding her prose with French phrases and words. This was the basis of one of the most aggressive and justified criticisms hurled at *France*. In the preface to the first edition, Lady Morgan acknowledges this weakness with typical honesty: 'To the inaccuracies of haste, a fault less excusable has been added; I mean the frequent recurrence of French sentences and dialogues, which break up and disfigure the text; a fault which arose from my anxiety to give im-

⁵⁴ *France*, vol. 1, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Lady Morgan, *The Novice of Saint Dominick*, vol. 3, p. 205.

pressions with all the warmth and vigour with which I received them.'⁵⁶ Even worse, her French is fraught with mistakes, which gave her enemies an even better chance of criticizing her book.

Because of her personal involvement and of her desire to convince, the author often becomes more visible than should be the case in fiction. Or, to put it another way, the narrator is murdered by the author. This (unconscious) rejection of one of the basic conventions of fiction writing is revealed through the abundant notes that characterize her 'French' novel, *The Novice of Saint Dominick*. A note, on page 122 of volume 3, for example, explains: 'This species of holy kidnapping was practised by Madame Maintenon with singular success after the revocation of the edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. A recent instance of this description of pious fraud took place in the kingdom of Ireland, when the young earl of G - was carried off from his family, by a French Jesuitical tutor, to France, lest the heresies of his mother should affect the orthodoxy of his religious tenets.'

At the end of the day it is clear that France had a major influence on Lady Morgan and her literary production. Her connection with France was far from superficial. Her first visit to France and the composition of the travel book that ensued constituted a turning point in her literary career. Her discovery of the Paris literary salons, of the role played by ladies and of the highly political nature of conversation gave a legitimacy to the strategy that had been hers from the beginning: the hijacking of a literary genre which did not exclude women, that is to say, the novel. She turned it into the tool of her liberated expression in the fields that she had selected. Her meetings with prominent figures of French society, including several women, her acceptance by these Parisian circles as a 'full citizen', showed her that her frustration at being prevented from participating in the national political debate was shared by many other women outside Ireland and outside Great Britain and that the way she had found around obstacles more or less corresponded to the strategy adopted by others in France.

Another consequence of her fascination with France was that, even before her first visit there, the French part of her education led her to observe and denounce the catastrophic situation of her country in terms that did not strictly oppose Irish interest to British interest, Irish virtue to Brit-

⁵⁶ *France*, pref., p. VI.

ish vice. Her approach is, on the whole, more that of an economist than that of an ideologist. Her patriotism and that of the heroines that are so visibly her twin sisters is as pragmatic in its content as it is romantic in its expression. The observations she made during her stays in France led her to a sort of dispassionate approach of political issues in her own country. This specific attitude constitutes the main difference between Lady Morgan and her followers in the field of the Irish novel in English. Hers were national novels, theirs, very often, nationalist ones. This is probably one the reasons why posterity, in particular in Ireland, has been so harsh on her. The fact that she has been studied so far mostly outside Ireland may be a sign that her attitude and her literary production stand more of a chance of a fair evaluation in her native country now that the colonial trauma has been largely overcome and that the clear and sometimes simplistic signals that tend to be necessary during the phase of emergence of a national identity are no longer needed.

Anne Markey

Chapter Seven: French culture and Oscar Wilde's fairy tales: an unexplored interlink with neglected works of art

Oscar Wilde had an enduring, inspirational, satisfying love affair with France, which predated and outlasted his other ordinary and extraordinary passions. In his own words, he was 'Irlandais de race', but 'Français de sympathie'.¹ In order to appreciate the nature of Wilde's emotional identification with France, it will be helpful to trace the roots of his familiarity with that country and her language. This will facilitate a discussion of his recourse to French literature in his work in general, and an exploration of how his fairy tales in particular reflect his familiarity with aspects of French culture. This exploration will show that French interlinks with Wilde's fairy tales add to their aesthetic complexity in ways that demand a reevaluation of their importance within contemporary Wilde studies.

Recent scholarship has addressed the contribution made by Wilde's Irishness to the style and content of his work.² Increasingly, a link has been posited between Irish folklore and what are commonly known as Wilde's two collections of fairy tales.³ While Wilde's Irish background is an important context for the consideration of his work, it is equally im-

¹ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 505.

² See Davis Coakley, *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of being Irish* (Dublin: Townhouse, 1994); Richard Pine, *The Thief of Reason: Oscar Wilde and Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995); *Wilde, the Irishman*, edited by Jerusha McCormack (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000) and *The Wilde Legacy*, edited by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (Dublin: Four Courts Press 2003).

³ Recent examples of the identification of a link between these collections and Irish folklore include Sally Brown, *Oscar Wilde 1854-1900* (London: British Library, 2000), pp. 22-23 and John Sloan, *Authors in Context: Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 79-80.

portant to remember that he was a cosmopolitan figure who described himself as ‘a most recalcitrant patriot’.⁴ As well as being Irish, he was also European. Born in Dublin in 1854, he lived most of his adult life in England, and died in Paris in 1900. His affection for all things French was kindled during childhood, perhaps by his early lessons in the language, or by the French *bonne* who worked for his family at 1 Merrion Square in Dublin.⁵ It was certainly whetted by his numerous visits to France, all undertaken at significant stages in his life. France was the adoptive, encouraging and forgiving mother who welcomed him at the start of his literary career, embraced him during his years of success, and succoured him after his downfall.

His first visit, in the company of his actual mother, Lady Jane, and brother, Willie, took place in 1874, after the announcement of his successful application for a Demyship (scholarship) at Oxford.⁶ His next came in 1883, just after his tour of America publicising *Patience* for Richard D’Oyly Carte when he had money in his pocket and no fixed career prospects. During the three months he spent in Paris, he met several luminaries of intellectual and cultural life, including Verlaine, Hugo, Mallarmé, Zola, Degas and Edmond de Goncourt, and became increasingly aware of the dizzy, but dangerous, delights of decadence.⁷ He returned the following year on honeymoon, discovering not only a degree of conjugal contentment with Constance, but also the powerful, poisonous pleasures of Huysmans’s *A Rebours*, which had just been published.⁸ He completed work on his French language drama, *Salomé*, in Paris in 1891 and when the British Lord Chamberlain banned the London production of the play the following year, Wilde said he considered leaving England and becoming a French citizen.⁹ In the event, he stayed in England, where he enjoyed considerable success as a playwright, with *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *An Ideal Husband* being first produced for appreciative London audiences between 1892 and 1893. Wilde stopped briefly in Paris while returning from Algeria with Lord Alfred Douglas just before the London premiere of *The Importance*

⁴ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 371.

⁵ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1988) p. 18.

⁶ Ellmann, p. 34.

⁷ Ellmann, pp. 213-218; *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 195.

⁸ Ellmann, pp. 238-239.

⁹ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 531

of being *Earnest* in 1895. He refused to flee to France to escape criminal prosecution later that year, but on release from prison in 1898 travelled to Dieppe, then sought sanctuary in the tiny village of Berneval-sur-Mer. He finally settled in Paris, where he died and was buried in 1900.

Wilde's love of France was due, in part, to his admiration for what he described as 'that subtle instrument of music, the French tongue'.¹⁰ A French acquaintance, Henry Mazel, recalled:

Oscar Wilde spoke French very well, and when he did stop for a word it was not like a foreigner unfamiliar with the vocabulary, but as a stylist who brings to conversation the same desire for picturesque and imaginative expression which he shows when writing at his desk.¹¹

In 1898, two years before his death, Wilde impressed the merits of the language on a correspondent: 'The great thing is for you to learn French [...] Every artist should know French, and every gentleman'.¹² For Wilde, knowledge of the French language not only conferred social status but also offered rich possibilities for artistic expression. However, France's greatest attraction for the enamoured Wilde was that it represented the liberal antithesis to English intolerance. French culture completely contrasted with English philistinism, hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness and insensitivity. Again and again, in interviews, letters, and critical writings, he highlighted the differences between the two countries.

In 1891, interviewed by Jacques Daurelle for the *Echo de Paris*, Wilde remarked: 'Paris is a city which pleases me greatly. While in London one hides everything, in Paris one reveals everything. One can go where one likes, and no-one dreams of criticising one'.¹³ On another occasion, he noted: 'There is a great deal of hypocrisy in England which you in France very justly find fault with. The typical Briton is Tartuffe seated in his shop behind the counter'.¹⁴ In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,

¹⁰ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 553.

¹¹ Cited in E. H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Vol 2 (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 444.

¹² *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1102.

¹³ Cited in E. H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Vol 1 (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 170.

¹⁴ Mikhail, Vol 1, p. 190.

Lord Henry advises Dorian not to become involved in the scandal after Sybil Vane's suicide: 'Things like that make a man fashionable in Paris but in London people are so prejudiced'.¹⁵ In response to a review criticising the novel in the *St. James's Gazette*, Wilde wrote:

Such an article as you have published really makes one despair of the possibility of any general culture in England. Were I a French author, and my book brought out in Paris, there is not a single literary critic in France, on any paper of high standing, who would think for a moment of criticising it from an ethical standpoint.¹⁶

In a similar vein, he remarked in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism':

There is not a single real poet or prose-writer of this century, for instance, on whom the British public has not solemnly conferred diplomas of immorality, and these same diplomas take the place, with us, of what in France is the formal recognition of an Academy of Letters.¹⁷

In that same critical essay, he compared the absolute tyranny of the English press as it revelled in revealing the private lives of public figures with the more reticent approach of the French: 'In France, in fact, they limit the journalist, and allow the artist almost perfect freedom. Here we allow absolute freedom to the journalist, and entirely limit the artist'.¹⁸ The most telling, revealing, and personal distinction between the two countries is crystallised in a letter written during Wilde's exile in Berneval: 'The French were charming to me all the time, and produced my play *Salomé*, and wrote about me as a living artist, but the English denied me even the barren recognition one gives to the dead'.¹⁹

France, for Wilde, represented artistic freedom and public acceptance, neither of which he ever fully enjoyed in England. Small wonder, then, that he looked to French models when writing his own plays and fictions. Contemporary and later reviewers of his society comedies have noted similarities between his plays and the work of Victorien Sardou and

¹⁵ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 80.

¹⁶ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 434.

¹⁷ *The Soul of Man under Socialism & Selected Critical Prose*, edited by Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 145.

¹⁸ Dowling, p. 149.

¹⁹ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 863.

Alexandre Dumas.²⁰ On its publication in book form in 1891, the *Daily Chronicle* critic described *The Picture of Dorian Grey* as 'a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Décadents – a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction'.²¹ Later critics have drawn particular attention to the influence of Huysmans and Gautier on Wilde's novel.²² The influence of Flaubert and Gautier on *Salomé* has been the subject of critical attention since the play was published in Paris in 1893, with recent critics like William Tydeman and Steven Price adding Moreau, Mallarmé and Huysmans to the list of French influences on the play.²³ As we can see, then, there has been an important and ongoing critical consensus, lasting from the author's lifetime until the present day, that Wilde's appreciation of French literary culture is reflected in his own writings.

However, there is a dearth of critical focus on how Wilde's fairy tales, the Cinderella of his oeuvre, reflect this acknowledged fascination with French culture. As Ian Small points out, since these stories were published over a century ago, 'literary critics have had little to say about them: either they are dismissed as juvenilia, or they are simply overlooked'.²⁴ Wilde's two collections of fairy tales, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891) deserve to be retrieved from the nursery to which, like the portrait of Dorian Gray, they have been ignominiously banished. Like that portrait, they are lovingly produced, finely crafted works of art that contain hidden depths and surprising powers of revelation. Wilde wrote of his tales: 'I did not start with an idea and clothe it in form, but began with a form and strove to make it beautiful enough to have many secrets, and many answers'.²⁵ The form

²⁰ See Karl Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1970), pp. 121, 160; Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 56, 73.

²¹ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 435.

²² See, for example, Christa Satzinger, *The French Influence on Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Salomé* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), pp. 147-187.

²³ Beckson, p. 136; William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salomé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

²⁴ Ian Small, "Introduction", *Oscar Wilde: Complete Short Fiction* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. x-xxx, p. xxx.

²⁵ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 354.

he chose was that of the fairy tale, and one of the ways he strove to make it beautiful, mysterious, and revelatory was by allusion to French literary models.

Wilde's nine fairy tales were not written exclusively for children but, as they continually query moral and social values, were designed to challenge adult and child readers alike. His contemporaries were quick to point out that the stories contained in *The Happy Prince* and *A House of Pomegranates* did not conform stylistically or linguistically to the conventions associated with fairy tales written for consumption in the Victorian nursery. An anonymous reviewer in the *Athenaeum* noted: 'There is a piquant touch of contemporary satire which differentiates Mr. Wilde from the teller of pure fairy tales', while Alexander Galt Ross in the *Saturday Review* wrote: 'Children do not care for satire and the dominant spirit of these stories is satire – a bitter satire'.²⁶ Another contemporary reviewer disliked the elaborate descriptions and compared the account of the Young King's chamber to 'an extract from a catalogue at Christie's'.²⁷ Wilde's fascination with beautiful, precious objects reflects the influence of Huysmans and Gautier but it also aligns his work with the tradition of the provocative French literary fairy tale. The critic in the *Saturday Review* wondered if Wilde's tales were 'a deliberate provocation to the *bourgeois au front glabre*', while his counterpart in the *Pall Mall Gazette* detected the influence of 'the Countess d'Aulnoy's charming tales' in the 'sumptuous detail' that suffuses Wilde's stories.²⁸ Jacques Barchilon, the twentieth century editor of d'Aulnoy's corpus of literary fairy tales, concurs, noting that her ironic humour and her stylistic use of language align her work with the English tradition exemplified by Oscar Wilde.²⁹

Mme d'Aulnoy (1650/51 – 1705) was a seventeenth century French aristocrat, renowned for her ready wit and conversational skills. She frequently attended the salon of Mme Lambert, opened in 1692, where the vogue for telling sophisticated fairy tales took off.³⁰ One of her contem-

²⁶ Beckson, pp. 60, 61.

²⁷ Beckson, p. 117.

²⁸ Beckson, pp. 114, 113.

²⁹ Jacques Barchilon, « Introduction », Mme d'Aulnoy, *Contes I: Les Contes des Fées*, édition de tricentaire (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1997), pp. v-lvi, p. xxxii.

³⁰ Barchilon, pp. xviii-xix.

poraries, Mme de Murat, felt that d'Aulnoy's conversation outshone her written work: 'J'ai fort connu Mme d'Aulnoy, on ne s'ennuyait jamais avec elle, et sa conversation vive et enjouée était bien au-dessus de ses livres'.³¹ Wilde, too, was an accomplished raconteur, renowned for his dazzling conversation. W.B. Yeats, his fellow Irishman, remembered Wilde primarily as 'an excellent talker', whose 'plays and dialogues have what merit they possess from being now an imitation, now a record of his talk'.³² André Gide recalled his first meeting with the man whose reputation as a brilliant talker had preceded him: 'Wilde did not converse: he narrated. Throughout almost the whole of the meal, he did not stop narrating. He narrated gently, slowly; his very voice was wonderful'.³³ Henri de Regnier shared Gide's admiration for Wilde's storytelling ability: 'His *causerie* was all purely imaginative. He was an incomparable teller of tales'.³⁴ Through the ages, Mme d'Aulnoy and Wilde are linked through their scintillating conversation, which some contemporaries judged to be more impressive than their written work, and through their ability to spin sparkling oral stories that entertained their sophisticated listeners. The first collection of Wilde's spoken stories, containing over a hundred tales, edited by Guillot de Saix, was published in French, in Paris, in 1942.³⁵ The French, it seems, who invented the salon fairy tale continued to appreciate Wilde's contribution to the genre long after his death.

The French also contributed to the development of the literary fairy tale during the seventeenth century and Mme d'Aulnoy and Wilde are linked through their production of stylised, thought-provoking examples of this genre. As author of twenty-five such stories, Mme d'Aulnoy was renowned for her use of ornate language, ironic humour and elaborate descriptions in fairy tales that were often surprisingly sombre.³⁶ Contemporary reviewers of Wilde's fairy tales drew attention to their heightened

³¹ Cited in Barchilon, p. xxx.

³² W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 135.

³³ Cited in Mikhail, Vol 2, p. 290.

³⁴ Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde*, Vol. 1, p. 171.

³⁵ *Le Chant du Cygne: Contes parlés d'Oscar Wilde*, recueillis et rédigés par Guillot de Saix (Paris: Mercure de France 1942).

³⁶ See Mary E. Storer, *Un épisode littéraire de la fin du 17e siècle: La mode des contes de fées (1685-1700)* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1972), p. 41; Jack Zipes, *When Dreams Came True* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 39.

descriptions, artificial style and frequent recourse to poetic writing.³⁷ Across the centuries and the Channel, d'Aulnoy and Wilde are allied through their aesthetic, ironic adaptation of the fairy tale form to comment on social and political issues. For example, 'Belle-Belle ou le chevalier Fortuné', by Mme d'Aulnoy, opens with a portrait of 'un roi fort aimable, fort doux, & fort puissant', who has just been vanquished by a more powerful emperor, a clear reminder that no monarch is invincible.³⁸ The victorious emperor has seized his opponent's treasure and the defeated king has barely managed to escape with his life. Belle-Belle is the youngest daughter of an impoverished father who eventually marries the beleaguered king and saves the kingdom. This apparently conventional fairy tale can be related to the political problems, including military defeats and financial difficulties, which beset Louis XIV in the latter years of his reign. Belle-Belle, who eventually goes on to save the kingdom, is the daughter of a nobleman. Seen in this light, d'Aulnoy's portrait of royal vulnerability can be read as an ironic reversal of the progressive loss of status experienced by French noblemen from the time of Richelieu onwards. Her story engages obliquely with social and political tensions of her contemporary moment. In a similar fashion, both Wilde's 'The Happy Prince' and 'The Young King' can be read as veiled critiques of the crass materialism and bourgeois philistinism that underpinned the monarchical society of late Victorian England.

The issue of coded criticism raises the question of intended readership. Mme d'Aulnoy's fairy tales, often interwoven into complex framing narratives, seem to have been intended for an educated, primarily adult audience. By contrast, the first collection of traditional French tales, generally attributed to Charles Perrault and published in 1697, seems to address a young audience.³⁹ The full title of the collection, *Les Contes de ma Mère Loye, Histoires ou Contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez*, seems to underline its suitability for a child reader and its overall didactic function. However, the verse morals added to the traditional stories contained in the collection complicate the issue of intended readership as

³⁷ Beckson, pp. 114, 117.

³⁸ Mme d'Aulnoy, *Contes II: Contes Nouveaux ou Les Fées à la Mode*, édition de tricentenaire (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1998), p. 215.

³⁹ See Marc Soriano, *Les Contes de Perrault: culture savante et traditions populaires* revised and corrected edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 22-29, for an account of the controversy about whether Perrault himself or his son produced the collection.

they frequently address a worldly-wise adult, not a naïve child. One moral that the compiler suggests can be drawn from 'Cendrillon' is that resolve, courage, high birth and good sense are less useful for social advancement than patronage.⁴⁰ In a similar vein, the reader of 'Le Chat Botté' is told that 'l'industrie et le savoir-faire valent mieux que des biens acquis'.⁴¹ As the simple prose style of the stories themselves is accessible to a child reader, it seems that *Les Contes de ma Mère Loye* deliberately addresses a dual audience. Wilde insisted that his fairy stories were 'meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the child-like faculties of wonder and joy'.⁴² Despite the fact that Wilde's ideal adult reader is less worldly wise than Perrault's implied one, both writers aim to appeal to adult and child readers. While Wilde's prose style aligns his fairy tales with those written by Mme d'Aulnoy, the deliberate courting of a dual readership echoes the example of Perrault.

Wilde's fairy tales in general evoke the guiding spirit of seventeenth century French literary fairy tales but they also allude to more recent French literary models. 'The Happy Prince', for example, alludes to Théophile Gautier. In Wilde's story, a swallow defers his migration to Egypt in order to help a statue of a young prince alleviate the poverty of his subjects. The swallow's descriptions of the Temple of Balbec and the second cataract of the Nile are drawn directly from a poem in Gautier's *Émaux et Camées*, 'Ce que disent les hirondelles', in which the speaker listens enviously to a group of swallows preparing to fly to Egypt and compares himself to a captive bird who cannot escape to warmer climes. Wilde uses Gautier's exotic imagery to highlight the harsh reality of life in the unnamed city and thereby emphasize the unselfish nature of the Swallow's decision to stay with the statue. The intertextual echo also aligns the figure of the swallow with the artist who longs to break free of the constraints that prevent him from taking flight. Here, the influence of Gautier adds aesthetic complexity to Wilde's tale by drawing attention to artistic frustration and to the various forms of material and spiritual impoverishment that characterise life in a cold, northern city, not unlike Victorian London.

⁴⁰ Charles Perrault, *Contes*, édition présentée et annotée par Nathalie Froloff (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 101.

⁴¹ Perrault, p. 87.

⁴² *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 352

The eponymous protagonist of Wilde's 'The Young King' resembles Des Esseintes, the protagonist of *A Rebours* by Huysmans, which, as we have seen, Wilde read on his honeymoon in Paris shortly after the novel was published. Both orphaned protagonists enjoy contented lives until the time comes for them to take their allotted place in society. Both, at an early stage of their development, are fascinated by rare and costly materials and both delight in the works of art that decorate their living spaces. Wilde's fairy tale, like the novel by Huysmans, deliberately eschews naturalistic modes of narration to explore the lure of decadence for a character whose privileged position enables him to indulge his strange appetite for beauty. Wilde, however, goes further than Huysmans as his fairy tale develops the novel's suggestion that a solipsistic retreat from life into art is ultimately self-defeating. As the Young King comes to realise the human cost involved in procuring beautiful objects, his social conscience awakens and the immature decadent is transformed into a Christ-like figure. 'The Young King' is a Christian parable whose advocacy of social responsibility is enhanced by its evocation of French literary decadence.

Perhaps surprisingly, 'The Birthday of the Infanta', which deals with the relationship between the good and the beautiful against the background of the Spanish court, has strong links with France. It tells of how a young dwarf, a near relation of Rousseau's noble savage, is brought from the forest to entertain the princess on her birthday. Partly as a jest and partly to annoy a court official, she throws a white rose to him, which he takes to be a symbol of love. He falls in love with her, but on seeing his reflection in a mirror for the first time, realises that she has been laughing at him and he dies of a broken heart. Not only does this story draw heavily on French literary models, as we shall see, but also it was first published in both the English and French versions of *Paris Illustré* on 30 March, 1889. As Wilde's name appears at the end of the French version, entitled 'L'Anniversaire de la naissance de la petite Princesse', he may have translated the story himself. He told an acquaintance that it was based on 'the Infanta of Velasquez in the Louvre, with a pink rose in her hand'.⁴³ The inspiration for the story is ultimately Velasquez but it is mediated by French cultural interest in the visual arts.

⁴³ *Works and Days: from the Journal of Michael Field*, edited by T. & D. C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 136.

That same picture inspired Victor Hugo's 'La Rose de l'Infante' from *La Légende des Siècles* (1859). If Wilde was not familiar with this work in its original form, he was very likely to have come across an English prose translation since this appeared in the same issue of *Century Guild Hobby Horse* as a fulsome review of his mother's collection of Irish folklore *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*.⁴⁴ Like Wilde's story, Hugo's poem departs imaginatively from the Velasquez portrait which inspired it and from historical fact. Hugo moves the child from the interior setting of the portrait and places her outside, under the care of a Duenna, beside a shaded fountain, and makes her father Philip II, not Philip IV of Spain. The text switches between the graceful, innocent child standing beside the fountain to an upstairs room where her father, who has never been known to smile, follows, in spirit, the progress of his great Armada. An unexpected wind arises, scattering the petals of the rose on the now turbulent fountain in which the bewildered child can see a foundering fleet. The poem concludes with the Duenna's observation that that on earth everything belongs to princes except the wind.

Both Hugo's poem and Wilde's fairy tale use the figure of the Infanta, as painted by Velasquez, to show that beneath a superficial air of childish innocence and grace lurks a will of steel. Hugo's serene and charming Infanta is nonetheless disdainful and imperious:

Elle est l'infante, elle a cinq ans, elle dédaigne.
 Car les enfants des rois sont ainsi; leurs fronts blancs
 Portent un cercle d'ombre, et leurs pas chancelants
 Sont des commencements de règne. Elle respire
 Sa fleur en attendant qu'on lui cueille un empire.
 Et son regard, déjà royal, dit: C'est à moi.⁴⁵

Wilde's Infanta, while less serene and more wilful than Hugo's, shares her precocious air of superiority and haughty sense that everything exists only in relation to herself. Both texts place the central figure of the Infanta against a threatening background of political uncertainty and reli-

⁴⁴ "The Rose of the Infanta", translated into English prose by Anne Gilchrist, *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, Vol. II, 1887, pp. 10-17; Galton, Arthur, "Ancient Legends of Ireland", *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, Vol. II, 1887, pp. 67-94.

⁴⁵ Victor Hugo, *La Légende des Siècles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1945), p. 472.

gious upheaval. In both, the child is under the care of a female courtier while her preoccupied father seems scarcely aware of her existence. In Hugo's text, the fountain, in which the child foresees the impending destruction of the Spanish fleet, is a mirror that reflects an unwelcome and threatening truth. In Wilde's story, the mirror, which reveals the dwarf's ugliness to him, reflects a similarly appalling and catastrophic truth. Both writers, therefore, introduce the theme of reflection, albeit for different ends – Hugo to comment on the limitations of temporal power and Wilde to comment on the disastrous consequences of seeing ourselves as others see us. Hugo's poem shows how Velasquez's static portrait of the Infanta can provide the starting point or inspiration for a dynamic narrative that imaginatively expands the subject matter of the original work of art. Wilde adopts a similar technique in 'The Birthday of the Infanta' but goes further than Hugo in exploring the relationship between visual and literary representation. By the chilling end of Wilde's story, the reader is aware that the Infanta's superficial grace and charm mask her heartless cruelty. The tale is effectively a mirror which reveals the Infanta's true nature to the reader and highlights literature's superior capacity to represent the dangerous reality that lurks beneath the surfaces reflected by visual art forms. By alluding to the work of both Velasquez and Hugo, Wilde incorporates literary and visual inspiration and imagery to produce an ekphrastic story that demonstrates the primacy of language over other forms of representation.

'The Birthday of the Infanta' very obviously engages with the traditional fairy tale of 'Beauty and the Beast', which became immensely popular after it was published by Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont, a French woman working as a governess in England, in *Magazine des Enfants* in 1757. Wilde inverts this classic fairy tale in significant ways. Christopher Nassaar notes that Wilde gives us 'a beauty who is a heartless egocentric and a beast who remains a beast and dies of a broken heart'.⁴⁶ As the ugly suitor is not transformed into a handsome prince, Wilde's story inverts Leprince de Beaumont's happy ending in favour of an unhappy one that unsettles conventional perceptions of the relationship between the good and the beautiful. Mme d'Aulnoy also explored this relationship in a number of stories, including 'Le Prince Lutin' and 'Le

⁴⁶ Christopher Nassaar, "Andersen's 'The Ugly Duckling' and Wilde's 'The Birthday of the Infanta'", in *The Explicator*, Winter 1997 Vol. 55, No. 2, pp. 83-85, p. 83.

Nain Jaune', which equate physical deformity with malevolent heartlessness and suggest that the ugly suitor is undeserving of the hand of the fair maid. Wilde reverses this in a story which suggests that the heartless Infanta does not deserve her ugly suitor. In this way, he invokes and then departs from models provided by French literary fairy tales to suggest that conventional perceptions of the relationship between the good and the beautiful are misleading and destructive.

By contrasting the dwarf's ugly appearance with his inner beauty, Wilde finds 'le beau dans l'horrible', a concept he associated with Charles Baudelaire, whom he greatly admired. He cited two lines from 'Un Voyage à Cythère' in his Oxford notebook: 'O Seigneur! Donnez-moi la force et le courage De contempler mon corps et mon coeur sans degout [sic]'.⁴⁷ In fact, Baudelaire's poem reads 'mon coeur et mon corps', so Wilde slightly misquotes, giving greater priority to the body than the heart. Wilde includes these two lines, with the same reversal of body and heart, in his long prison letter to Sir Alfred Douglas, which has come to be known as *De Profundis*. Wilde was intrigued for a long period by Baudelaire's identification of the self-loathing that one's body can inspire. In 'The Birthday of the Infanta', he explores this theme, showing how the dwarf's inability to contemplate his body without disgust results in his broken heart.

In presenting the dwarf as a clown, Wilde is perhaps alluding to the tradition of the Shakespearean fool as social critic. However, in presenting the dwarf as a disfigured clown who is never taken seriously and who is ultimately disillusioned and destroyed, Wilde is mining a rich seam of nineteenth century French literature. Like Quasimodo, in Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), the dwarf's ugliness contrasts with the beauty of the beloved and in both texts, the ugly suitor's knowledge of his unsightliness forces the realisation that he will never be loved in return and precipitates his death. In Hugo's verse drama, *Le Roi s'Amuse* (1832), Triboulet is the deformed street clown brought to court by Francis I. As W. D. Howarth notes, he 'is the epitome of physical and moral deformity'.⁴⁸ When the king, for his own amusement, seduces his jester's beloved

⁴⁷ Oscar Wilde's *Oxford Notebooks: A Portrait of the Mind in the Making*, edited by Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 135.

⁴⁸ W. D. Howarth, "Hugo and the Romantic Drama in Verse", in *Victor Hugo*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), pp. 63-84, p. 76.

daughter, Blanche, an idealised, innocent figure, he destroys both their lives. Wilde's dwarf resembles both Triboulet who discovers that an admired figure is a callous egoist, and the naïve Blanche, who falls passionately in love with a Royal monster. In *L'Homme qui rit* (1869), Gwynplaine is a compassionate youth whose mutilated face resembles a clown's mask. Wilde's dwarf, like Gwynplaine, is a loving creature, condemned by his deformity to be tolerated as an amusing fool who is never taken seriously. A mixture of their own ingenuousness and the cruelty of others destroys Hugo's disfigured performers. The clown, therefore, can be seen as the figure of the misunderstood artist destroyed by those on whose patronage he depends. Wilde's dwarf can be seen in a similar light.

Wilde continues his investigation of the relationship between the good and the beautiful in 'The Star Child'. While Wilde's charming, cruel Infanta resembles Salomé, the graceful, destructive daughter of Flaubert's 'Herodias', the influence of 'La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier' on 'The Star-Child' is unmistakable. The eponymous protagonists of both stories are unaware that they are destined for future greatness, one as a saint and the other as a king. Both are proud, solitary, cruel children who revel in inflicting pain on defenceless animals. Both undergo changes of heart, are compelled to leave home and suffer many hardships. In each case, their kindness to a leper proves redemptive and their destiny is fulfilled. Both stories are concerned with the duality of man, who is at once bestial and divine. Here, the example of Flaubert enriches Wilde's exploration of gratuitous cruelty, repentance, and redemption within a framework strengthened by its acknowledgement of the complexity of human nature and the implacable inscrutability of divine providence.

Wilde's fairy tales disclose his fascination with French culture in general, and literature in particular, as they reveal his debt to French literary fairy tales and Romantic and decadent writers. Nevertheless, that fascination is not reflected in all his tales or equally between his two volumes. In *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* it can only be detected in the title story. In *A House of Pomegranates*, the lush descriptions and the attention paid to ornamentation and decoration in all four stylised stories might suggest debts to writers as varied as d'Aulnoy, Gautier and Huysmans. A general atmosphere of French decadence is deliberately evoked to challenge Wilde's English reader, 'the *bourgeois au front glabre*', whose sensibilities and preconceptions are further assaulted by individual

stories, particularly 'The Birthday of the Infanta' and 'The Star-Child' which engage directly with specific French texts.

In his two collections of fairy tales, Wilde selectively evokes French intertexts to various effects: to convey a sense of liberating exoticism; to explore the complex relationships between the good and the beautiful, the human and the divine; to portray the frustrated artist with clipped wings and the suffering artist as clown, the descendant of the mocked figure that Pontius Pilate exhibited to a scornful, ignorant crowd. French interlinks add to the aesthetic complexity of Wilde's fairy tales, highlighting the fact that these polished, multi-faceted works of art deserve greater critical attention than they have received to date.

Mary S. Pierse

Chapter Eight: George Moore and 'le moment célibataire'

In the course of George Moore's enduring efforts to develop and enrich the English novel, he drew heavily on his experiences of art, literature and life in France in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Amongst the various French innovations and trends imported by him into the novel were elements of naturalism, symbolism, the artist novel, interior monologue, a perceived daring in subject matter and its treatment, and the atmosphere and ingredients of what has been called '*le moment célibataire*'. This essay aims to illustrate some of the assorted features that were generally associated with that 'moment' and its literature in France, and then, by reference to some of Moore's fictional characters in *Celibates* (1895), to portray the salient aspects of its putative nature in a particular English social climate. It will be seen that, against some common preconceptions and the contemporaneous reality, George Moore expanded the references beyond the preciousness of the male *célibataire* or the aesthete or the artist to include a wider society. In so doing, he mirrored pervasive English worries concerning single persons of both sexes, as well as several related issues of the 1880s and 1890s.¹

The label '*le moment célibataire*' may require some elaboration since the name is not as widely known as are the more encompassing umbrella titles such as 'fin de siècle' or 'naturalist' or 'late Victorian'. Jean Borie must be credited with launching the appellation, mainly in *Le Célibataire français* (1976).² Although aspects of Borie's concept were

¹ It is not just in *Celibates* (London: Walter Scott, 1895) but also in several other stories that Moore refuses any simplistic and reductive notions.

² *Le Célibataire français* was first published in 1976 and subsequently revised. The references in this paper are to a new augmented Livre de Poche edition (Paris: Grasset, 2002). See pp171-172 re *le moment célibataire*.

immediately challenged by Yves Vadé,³ it would appear that its central characteristics can plausibly be attached to aspects of a particular period in France, and to some of its art and literature.⁴ The title has not, to date, become common currency in English, and translation of the French phrase is open to argument, but possible renditions seem less inspired or pithy than the original. Yet, the gist of any proposed English label would convey the sense of ‘the bachelor era’ or the ‘age of the single man’ and such concepts are central to the *moment*.

It has been persuasively suggested by Borie that a situation where considerable attention was paid to unmarried persons – real or fictional – could only arise in the context of a conspicuous pro-marriage philosophy.⁵ It is also clear that such a determined pro-marriage attitude would in turn emerge from particular social circumstances and that in such an atmosphere, the unmarried person could become, on occasion, somewhat suspect. Add in the traditional association of celibacy with clergy and religious, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, and the possibility for conflict on the subject is increased and rationality might not always apply. For example, this was the situation in the context of the Third Republic in France: liberals and radicals saw that Church as an enemy of progress, as being against secular education and thus opposed to the Jules Ferry laws (1880); at the same time, a large number of Catholics, both lay and clerical, favoured the monarchy instead of the republic, thus further increasing the potential divisions. With society at large being vehemently pro-marriage, and with depiction of the single man as a threat, the societal divisions allowed matters as varied as anti-clerical sentiments, fears of homosexuality, nationalistic outlook, hysteria, misogyny, first wave feminism, patriarchy, class, and the artist novel all to become tied up with *le moment célibataire*. It is arguable that those patently potent ingredients of sex, religion, education and politics stirred writers to prose; between

³ « L'historien et le célibataire. A propos de Jean Borie: *Le Célibataire français* », in *Romantisme* 16 (1977) pp.95-100.

⁴ Vadé's good-humoured argument mainly reproaches Borie for not treating the subject as a sociologist or a social historian would have done, for not producing census figures to back his case, and for extrapolating from the literary to the general celibate. Vadé also expresses some doubt as to whether society unequivocally viewed the *célibataire* as an enemy of the family but that point would appear to be an over-simplification of the case presented by Borie.

⁵ Borie, pp.11, 24-26. Yves Vadé acknowledges societal prioritising of family (p.98).

the relative contributions made by economic effects, social conditions, popular attitudes, artistic opportunity, and literary compositions, the characteristics of that cultural moment appeared and the literature fuelled societal development and attitude. Where the circular influences actually began may be in doubt but what is clear is that some distinct literary types emerged, and that to an extent they reflected both their authors, and some of the opinions of the wider society. Gender and sexuality are clearly important in this atmosphere but so too is the confusion that compounded the contemporary understanding and anxieties.

From a literary point of view, Borie has placed four writers at the core of this phenomenon in France in the second half of the nineteenth century: Gustave Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and Joris-Karl Huysmans. Accordingly, he identifies a relatively lengthy twenty to twenty-five year period during which what he describes as the *événement* could be discerned.⁶ Conflict and controversy were vital elements in constituting the moment and, according to Borie, the presence of that debate is critical for the label's usage. Thus, while Balzac made caustic and apposite remarks about bachelors in *Les Célibataires*,⁷ the single person was not generally a subject of hot dispute and so the Balzac years would not earn the title of *un moment célibataire*. Society and fiction had changed by the time of the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, Huysmans and some others, and the linkages between life and art in their own *personae* augmented the quarrels. Amongst the distinguishing features of single characters in their prose (and arguably in themselves) are their artistic connections and their anti-hero qualities, both of which represented notable departures from precedent. The identification of an artist as necessarily single was one that was made by the general public and also by individual artists. For the public at the time, an apparent decision not to marry was taken as anti-establishment, or as Borie puts it 'un acte de sécession anti-bourgeoise',⁸ and therefore the imputation was that anyone deciding on such a course would probably belong to a more bohemian and less-respectable world and could represent a threat to society; on the other

⁶ Borie sees Flaubert's *Correspondance* and the *Journal* of the Goncourts as the seminal documents of the *célibataire* archives (pp.184-5).

⁷ Honoré de Balzac, « The Abbé Birotteau ». *The Novels of Balzac*. Translated by Clara Bell (Philadelphia: Gebbie, 1899). Balzac declared that celibates make habits take the place of feelings, that they are egoistic and mischievous or useless (p.210).

⁸ Borie, p.24.

hand, an artistic vocation (whether in writing, sculpture, painting or music) was also one espoused, and advertised, by single persons, sometimes quite defensively, in relation to, or in justification of, their single state. Consequently, it is probable that self-interest and self-identification lay behind the compositions of some of those same *célibataires*. An extra factor that contributed to putting the *célibataire* centre-stage in the eyes of the community was the medicalisation of singleness by doctors who made the single person into a decadent, nervous degenerate, who was a minority figure, but still an unsafe one, on the margins of society, a possible disseminator of venereal disease, and a dangerous example. In the medical world, the artist fitted immediately into that mould.⁹ More generally, the single person was distrusted – and yet envied – because of his freedom from the restrictions of family burdens.

Noteworthy French literary examples that reinforce the message of genius and production of artistic works not being compatible with marriage would include the 1867 novel *Manette Salomon* by the Goncourt brothers, a text in which the painter Coriolis has resolved not to marry, not because he is against marriage as such, but because he sees that state as being a happy one that is just not open to the serious artist. This is a belief often reiterated by artists and by their fictional constructs. In the case of Coriolis, it is Manette who is portrayed as forcing him to compromise his art for money – the link with a woman is his downfall. The Goncourts advocated the Romantic idea (that would be seized on by the medical establishment) that artistic talent was linked to acute nervousness and sensitivity: ‘sickness sensitises one’s observational faculties like a photographic plate’.¹⁰ The postulated incompatibility of the artist and marriage also occurs in Zola’s novel *L’Oeuvre*, although Zola would definitely not be identified with the four ‘*célibataires*’. Christine sees Claude’s painting - for which she is the model - as a rival. Her husband is more married to the painting than to her; she is left ‘single’ and he commits suicide when the painting is judged a failure (‘je mourrais de ne plus peindre . . . rien n’existe en dehors’). All of this reinforces that message of the mutual unsuitability of art and marriage. Moreover, its presentation

⁹ The longevity of such medical slurs is remarkable. Borie records that the 1940 *Larousse médical* declares that tertiary syphilis is found mostly in artists and intellectuals. p.73.

¹⁰ *Idées et sensations* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1866), p.228.

by Zola confirms the popularity and ubiquity of the idea. In his 1884 novel *A Rebours* (*Against Nature*), Huysmans' character Des Esseintes is the ultimate decadent creation and sickly single man of the period. He is a connoisseur of literature and things of beauty; his careful devotion to décor, to music – and his abuse of a street child – could be seen as caricaturing contemporary symbolists and singles. In the life-to-literature connection, Des Esseintes reads works by Flaubert and the Goncourts¹¹, each of whom was a *célibataire*, if only in the sense of not being legally married. From the wide range of the thematic treatment in French literature, those few examples are moderately representative of the types of fictional singles variously involved in art, and they come complete with hints of misogyny, of religion, and of racism (Manette was a Jew).

A part of the period's uncertainty can be seen as stemming from quite different understandings of the words *célibat* [celibacy] and *célibataire* [a celibate or single person]. On occasion, the definitions included reference to chastity, virginity, abstention from sexual relations – and sometimes they conveyed nothing more than the absence of a formal marriage contract. Such lack of clarity¹² (one that persists, and will also be seen in the English context) added to the possible connotations, and to the interest in *le célibataire*, that person who has even been deemed to be the *figure emblématique* of the nineteenth century.¹³ The mood and judgments received an august stamp of approval from *Le Grand Larousse* in its 1866-76 edition. Its entry on celibacy quoted medical opinion to the effect that genius is a neurosis and hence the genius is single. The article lent support to the notion of necessary separation of an artistic life from the applauded institutions of home and family by noting the following: that Luther only married to give good example, not because he wished to do so; that Bacon and Goethe only married after they had produced their best work; and that Thackeray was only a writer of note during his wife's madness and thus he was virtually a *célibataire*. In concluding that Genius is celibate, it reflected and sustained a prevalent attitude, one often

¹¹ J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature* (London: Penguin, 1959) pp. 181-182.

¹² Currently in France, a person planning a first marriage must sign an affidavit entitled 'Attestation de célibat et d'identité'; for a second marriage, the affidavit is called 'Attestation de non-remariage et d'identité'. Thus the semantic confusion persists.

¹³ This title is bestowed by Per Buvik in *La Luxure et la Pureté: Essai sur l'œuvre de J.-K. Huysmans* (Paris, Oslo: Didier Érudition; Solum Forlag, 1989), p.109.

voiced if not always totally believed.¹⁴ Antipathy towards the singles, genius or otherwise, was behind the 1871 proposal to tax the *célibataires* because they were sterile, gave bad example, and were agents of corruption and active destroyers of the social framework.¹⁵

The verdict of Havelock Ellis, the English sexologist, on *A Rebours* was that 'Certain aesthetic ideals of the latter half of the 19th century are more quintessentially expressed in that book than in any other'.¹⁶ In that judgment, one can see recognition in England, and in English literature, of the existence of an atmosphere that is very similar to that found in France somewhat earlier. It might not have appeared in England until the late 1880s and 1890s but the ground had been laid in the marriage/celebrity battle of the mid century, one that was waged memorably and novelistically by Charles Kingsley (Anglican clergyman and onetime chaplain to Queen Victoria) and John Henry Newman (a convert to Roman Catholicism who subsequently became a cardinal). In *Loss and Gain* and in *Callista*, Newman lauded celibacy for men and women. Kingsley's name was frequently linked to the phrase 'muscular Christianity' and in his books (for instance, in *Hypatia*), he depicts marriage as the highest Christian calling and as a safe refuge for women from the coldness of celibacy. He conveyed that celibate men and women were neurotic, not to be trusted, and possibly that celibacy promoted homosexuality. Hence, the nature of that marriage/celebrity battle was familiar territory and it was unnecessary for artists of the *fin de siècle* to overtly cover the ground again; all sides knew the score and equally all understood that it concerned the conversion to Catholicism of a high number of rather important persons, a perceived weakening of 'muscular Christianity' in the Anglican communion (for example, by the Puseyites and by defectors to Roman Catholicism), hints at homosexuality, and a desire to restrict the education and opportunities of women. Moreover, as the physique of army recruits was steadily diminishing and the instance of venereal disease was reaching frightening proportions, the singles issue was related to a Darwinian linked fear that the race was declining. The single man and woman definitely posed problems but some of them were to be exported:

¹⁴ Borie, pp.21, 65-67, 71, 75-86; Buvik, pp.119-120.

¹⁵ Borie, p.81. The entry for *Célibataires* in Gustave Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des Idées reçues* (Paris: Éditions Mouton, 1978) offers 'debauched egoists' as a synonym.

¹⁶ In the Introduction (part 1) to the 1903 English edition (reprint New York: Dover, 1997).

it became important to find work in the colonies for single men from lower classes lest they become troublesome at home. It was also frightening for the establishment and the patriarchy that what George Gissing called 'the odd women'¹⁷ seemed to become more numerous and to be on hand to take work opportunities that might otherwise be available to men.

By its very title, George Moore's *Celibates* (1895)¹⁸ suggests the centrality of single persons within its pages. The name flags its lineage from Balzac's *Les Célibataires*, and it marks an intertextual connection of theme with Flaubert, Huysmans and the Goncourt brothers. Following the example of those writers, the word 'celibate' is not found scattered through the text. It is the title word, it makes the headline but thereafter the reader will have to define its parameters from the information supplied. The principal characters in the three stories are Mildred Lawson, John Norton and Agnes Lahens – none of whom is married by the end. Although they might be considered as having anti-hero qualities and artistic connections, the variety of their singleness, and that of those around them, signals Moore's intention to dispute any simplistic or judgmental definition of the single state, and also to spark discussion and consideration of character diversity, and of underlying societal problems: in these tales by Moore, artistic success is not inevitably achieved by single persons; single persons are not necessarily nervous, neurasthenic, hysteric or remarkable. Moore does not pass direct comment on marriage either but, as a by-product of representing his *célibataires*, and barely perceptible in the progressing of the narrative, he performs a subterranean demolition of Victorian England's vaunted construction of it.

John Norton, in the story in *Celibates* that bears his name, is single. He appears to be shaped or distorted by family and by education. He resists the idea of marriage while his mother views it as an essential tool for clinging to their property. Initially, John displays some of the malaise of the anxious male; he seeks the all-male monkish retreat that has been identified by psychologists as a boundary between the homosocial and homosexual, and as a code for the 'condition of manliness' question.¹⁹ John's hatred of feminine qualities is expressive of Victorian fears of effeminisation; his preoccupation with art and music would be seen as dis-

¹⁷ The title of his 1893 novel, *The Odd Women*.

¹⁸ *Celibates*. (London: Walter Scott, 1895).

¹⁹ Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) pp. 1-7.

placement of male desire on to art objects.²⁰ His place in managing the estate is capably filled by his mother, and he does not produce an heir – thus representing contemporary worries over heredity and degeneration. Yet, in mid story, John falls for Kitty and Moore's portrayal suggests that John is now escaping from the philosophic and religious straitjacket he had elaborated to protect himself from the trauma of his early years. It intimates that heterosexual urges are finally about to germinate, despite years of repression and John's espousal of creeds that facilitated their stifling. That change in John – who had previously voiced much interest in choir boys and much disgust for women – implies mutability in gendering that was certainly not encompassed by Victorian dicta and beliefs, nor by notions about decadent males. However, Kitty dies and John remains a virgin, one who predates Marcel Prévost's fictional version in *L'homme vierge*, and who anticipates the real-life monastic choices of Joris-Karl Huysmans. Connections between English John and French Des Esseintes are made obvious in the text, only to be then discounted by their marked differences.²¹

The other two main *célibataires* of the volume are both women and this choice by Moore is expressive of his tendency to egalitarianism in gender, as well as marking his urge to avoid one-dimensional or simplistic assumption and debate. It is a distinct departure from the French model where the *célibataires* were male.²² Mildred Lawson is a would-be artist who goes to Paris to further her studies and to escape marriage and its anticipated boredom. She moves from man to man, from art to dilettante journalism and, en route and following the fashion of the time, her need of 'a more intimate consolation than Protestantism can give' (p.243) sees her toying with romanticism and mysticism by converting to Roman Catholicism. Moore even lets her visit Lourdes in the course of her brief 'perversion' (p.233).²³ As Mildred's religious moods lessen, she becomes what she calls a 'Newmanite' (p.248). Mildred views marriage as a last resort for failures; when she doesn't succeed in some of her other plans,

²⁰ Sussman, pp.1-7, 76-77, 186.

²¹ See my "European influences and the novels of George Moore", in Leon Litvack & Colin Graham (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 173-185.

²² Different connotations attached to *vieilles filles*. (Borie, p.175).

²³ *Lourdes* was also the title of the Zola book that had been extensively reviewed in *The Speaker* just a year previously.

she says 'Perhaps I was only fitted for marriage after all' (p.276). Her unmarried brother's attitude is 'And for what better purpose could a woman be fitted – although in his own words he is 'in no hurry' to take a similar step (p.262). The precarious existence of the female single is acknowledged in the short line, 'she knew she would have to leave Sutton if Harold married' (p.262). The increasing freedom sought by single women is reflected in Mildred's unease, in her changing ambitions, and in mention of the relatively recent educational opportunities for women at Oxford and Girton (pp.3, 14). Mildred seeks a platform for herself, and a partner is desirable only in achievement of her successive target stages. According to Moore, Mildred is 'the real demi-vierge, that combination of sexlessness and sensuality'. Marcel Prévost was surely the source of Moore's phrase, and Mildred's stay with the Delacours echoes many of the features of the French '*milieu pervers*'.²⁴ Still, Mildred is pictured against more than one backdrop, and with different attitudes and opinions, so she cannot be slotted readily either into the 'sexlessness' that Moore attributes to her, or into the depravity that others might automatically level against her. Nevertheless, Moore purposely positions Mildred under the umbrella of celibates and shows that this single does not seek marriage - in contrast to Prévost's female characters who are intent on marriage and not interested in artistic or independent careers.

When Mildred first appears, she is defined by several relationships and functions: she is sister to Harold, the businessman; she is fiancée of Alfred who is going up the career ladder; she is mistress of the household; she feels envious of the Girton-educated Mrs Fergus. When railing against marriage, Mildred unexpectedly tags on 'always the eternal question of sex, as if there was nothing else in the world' (p.7). That was the fate that would befall her if she failed at art but yet 'she would like to have all the nicest men in love with her' (p.96). When Moore shows a rather equal sexual double-dealing by Mildred and by her artist admirers, a judgment is demanded from readers: either they are to be complicit in a Victorian double standard or they must confront the inequality and inappropriateness of such standards for all singles. So, very gently, and without explicit condemnation, Moore underscores the incompatibility of prevailing reality with neat Victorian gender edicts and verdicts on the singles. It is a subtle assault on contemporary beliefs regarding the nature

²⁴ Marcel Prévost, *Les Demi-Vierges* (Paris : Lemerre, 1894), p.vi.

and behaviour of those of Mildred's sex, class and single status. Piling on the evidence, Moore also registers the restrictions on Mildred. She is expected to keep house for her brother; in contrast, Harold can admit that 'if I had to remain here all day, I should go mad; it is my business in the city that keeps me alive' (p.303). His escape is sanctioned by society; hers is not. A career is not readily open to her, neither is further education, and she feels 'there was nothing in life except a little fruitless striving, and then marriage' (p.285). She epitomises the diagnosis of Lady Wilde: talented women cannot rest contented in the dull monotony of daily tasks.²⁵ It was challenging for contemporary readers that Moore should mitigate Mildred's faults by portraying her as a victim, as a casualty of the tight Victorian grip on young single females in her milieu (pp.282-3). He also affords her equal status as a single person, neither making her villain nor idealised Madonna. The portrait of Mildred, accomplished by broad brush strokes, is an artistic riposte to the notion of the exclusively male 'club' of celibates.

When their mother died, Mildred didn't grieve but 'Harold wept for mother' – thus Moore demolishes, in a mere four words, the Victorian ideal of the strong masculine man (p.303). However, the depiction of Harold, the solid businessman, also denies any notion of the single man as effete, dangerously aesthetic, or wishing to be definitively apart from the warm family home. He will not be found slumming nor involved in 'rough trade'. At the same time, this story portrays what is the probable end of a family line since neither marriage nor reproduction is on the mind of any significant character in that tale. A similar fate looks likely for John Norton, as it does also for the central character of the third story of *Celibates*, Agnes Lahens. The associated, ever-present but unspoken question in this text is whether any of the ill-repute that was often attributed to the celibates should not be re-directed towards the stifling and hypocritical nature of the Victorian family ideal.

Agnes Lahens is a child, too young to harbour romantic, sexual or religious thoughts concerning marriage, and equally too young to make decisions on being single. It is the reality of her parents' marital situation that will send her rushing from the prospect of marriage and home. To include her under the label of celibates is technically correct in Moore's

²⁵ Lady Wilde, "The Bondage of Woman", in *Social Studies* (London: Ward & Downey, 1893) p.20.

terms but to number her thus is another challenge by him to the notions that were commonly and contemporaneously associated with that state. Agnes is identified by both parents as an innocent. Her arrival home from convent school is planned so that she might see a little of the world before deciding whether to join the nuns – she is only sixteen. Faced with her mother's rejection and her father's perturbation, she opts to lessen the stress for all by fleeing to the safety of convent life, the only security she knows. She acknowledges that convent life is simple but as one of her mother's friends says about it: "There must be satisfaction in having something definite to do, to know where you are going and what you are striving for" (p.492). This support for religious celibacy is *not* one usually associated with George Moore! Nevertheless, it is a dispassionate statement that carries weight in itself, and also in contrast with the aimless and dissolute paths followed by several characters (singles and others) in the story. Inadequate relationship with her mother and a lack of contact with her father are aspects of family malaise that Agnes shares with Mildred Lawson and John Norton, but unlike them, Agnes is clear on where she is going. This celibate seeks peace and purpose; her lack of strong interest in the opposite sex, when it is represented by paedophiles and elderly lechers who want a young virgin, can be easily comprehended. Thus, without categorising the problems or choices, Moore undermines any assumption of the happy home, the saintly mother, the patriarchal and powerful father, or flight to a convent being caused by a broken love-affair – and several other cherished and prevalent notions to boot.

In his writings, Moore refrains from the definite pronouncements of Balzac on the *célibataire*.²⁶ His openness to possibility for his characters, and to outcomes influenced by individual action, rather than by fatalistic determination or by fixed notions of the *célibataire*, is mirrored in the minor key endings of each story where nothing is concluded. The absence of the 'happy ever after' leaves the characters quite alone and exposes the perilous foundations of Victorian society – and also confronts the patterns of traditional Victorian fiction. Moore's apparently unusual men and women seem to stay single, all reject marriage and they touch raw nerves in the context of ongoing concern with the condition of British manhood and womanhood, the threat to patriarchal authority, the emergence of 'surplus' women, the vogue for religious and spiritual experience, and the

²⁶ See note 7.

antipathy towards things French. Contemporary critical reception of *Celibates* said 'it is plain that the sentimental reader need not turn to this book for sympathetic delineations of the love which makes the world go round and is understood to make the novel circulate'.²⁷ Nevertheless, the battleground was instantly recognised as 'the warfare of sex' and the complaint was that Moore 'had not shown a greater delicacy in dealing with difficult problems'.²⁸ That typical, late-Victorian circumlocution is best translated as 'do not mention the single person and do not rock the boat'. One reviewer ventured to define celibate as 'one in whom sex is dormant' and found the book 'gross and un-English'.²⁹ This particular opinion is noteworthy for at least two reasons: firstly, for 'un-English', one was surely to read 'French' and the terror of *le moment célibataire*; secondly, one can perceive the persistent confusion regarding the word celibate. Moore's response was lengthy and he had recourse to the dictionary to claim that celibate meant nothing more than the single state, the unmarried state. He made no reference to chastity or to sexuality.

It is within that dictionary definition that George Moore transposes *le moment célibataire* into the 1890s English novel and society. In a period when the dandy and the aesthete were suspect and on trial, and contrasted with the ideal home and family, Moore subtly conveys images of family and family life that are less-than-ideal. He eschews any simplistic portrayal of singles or celibates, and he broadens those categories immeasurably. While sometimes only vaguely hinted at, there are to be found within this one book the single adulterer, the single fornicator, the prostitute, the demi-vierge, the mistress, the nun, the cuckold, the struggling journalist, the female artists, the widow with managerial qualities and dynastical ambitions, the philistine Jesuits, a selection of disparate clergy, and many others. The focus is expanded considerably from the neurasthenic artist or artist manqué, or even the feared aesthete and his unmentionable practices. Thus Moore's cast not only disturbs any reductive restriction of the label *célibataire* to the artist or other peripheral figure, or just to the male; it presents a large human troupe of single and married persons who evince a wide variety of characteristics and tastes,

²⁷ "Mr George Moore's New Stories", in *The Daily Chronicle* (1 June 1895), p.3.

²⁸ "Mr George Moore's Latest", in *The Pall Mall Gazette* (5 June 1895), p.4.

²⁹ Frank Danby (alias of Julia Frankau), "Mr George Moore's New Novel", in *The Saturday Review* (27 July 1895), pp.105-106.

and defy pigeonholing. In so doing, Moore confronts the legacy of France's *moment célibataire*, engages with the worries of Britain's *fin de siècle*, and effectively invalidates the rush to judgment.³⁰

³⁰ I gratefully acknowledge the IRCHSS Government of Ireland Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship (2004-2006) that has made it possible for me to continue the study of George Moore's writings. This paper arises from a part of that work.

Part III

Convergence of 19th and 20th Century Thought

Brigitte Le Juez

Chapter Nine: « A l'instar du grand Gustave... » et à l'encontre des psittacidés : Beckett héritier de Flaubert

Bien qu'elle construise sa propre origine (son originalité), toute œuvre s'inscrit dans une généalogie qu'elle peut faire plus ou moins apparaître.¹ Elizabeth Bowen décrit cette généalogie comme une hérédité artistique nécessaire.² Les éléments de cette filiation sont variés (citation, allusion, parodie, reprise, plagiat...). En ce qui concerne la réception de l'œuvre de Gustave Flaubert, les auteurs irlandais offrent bien des illustrations de ces divers composants. Entre autres, George Moore plagia *L'Education sentimentale* dans *A Modern Lover* ;³ Oscar Wilde rendit hommage à *Hérodiade* et *Salammbô* avec *Salomé* ;⁴ W. B. Yeats cita l'un des inédits de Flaubert, *La Spirale*, dans *A Vision* ;⁵ James Joyce emprunta à la correspondance de Flaubert pour énoncer le manifeste esthétique de Stephen Dedalus ;⁶ et Bowen dans l'une des ses nouvelles, *The Parrot*, répondit à

¹ Cf. Tiphaine Samoyault, *L'Intertextualité. Mémoire de la littérature* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2005), « 128 » No258, p.5.

² Cf. Elizabeth Bowen, « Sources of Influence », in *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962), p.205-9.

³ A comparer, par ex., deux passages où chacun des protagonistes rêve sur le Pont-Neuf : dans *L'Education sentimentale* (*Œuvres* II, Paris : Gallimard, « Pléiade », 1952), p.359, et *A Modern Lover* (London: Walter Scott, 1893), p.165.

⁴ Cf. Brigitte Le Juez, « Art, écriture et moralité : Flaubert modèle d'Oscar Wilde », in *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship*, edited by E. Maher & G. Neville (Frankfurt-am-Main : Peter Lang, 2004), pp.83-97.

⁵ Cf. *A Vision* (London: Papermac, 1989, p.70) où Yeats montre qu'il s'intéresse au thème de *La Spirale*.

⁶ « L'artiste doit être dans son œuvre comme Dieu dans la création, invisible et tout-puissant ; qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne le voie pas. » (Lettre de Flaubert à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 mars 1857) « *The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails* » (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Granada, 1981), pp.194-5.

une question laissée en suspens dans *Un cœur simple*.⁷ L'une des caractéristiques majeures de la littérature est le perpétuel dialogue qu'elle engage avec elle-même. Les références intertextuelles représentent parfois un hommage, le plus souvent une subversion (« *Remember*, dans la littérature il faut toujours tuer son père », comme dirait Wilde).⁸ Elles participent en tout cas à la création d'une nouvelle œuvre, qu'elles y apparaissent consciemment ou pas, et révèlent comment l'inspiration d'un artiste provient en partie, dans une œuvre donnée, de sa réception d'un autre artiste.

Les observations que Beckett offre à ses étudiants de littérature française à Trinity College, en 1931,⁹ démontrent qu'il fut très tôt conscient des héritages artistiques qui marquent un auteur et laissent des traces dans son œuvre. Beckett annonce, par exemple, que Flaubert et Dostoïevski ont influencé André Gide (*RB*, 3) et, tandis qu'il analyse l'œuvre de Gide, se réfère constamment à d'autres auteurs, comme Rimbaud, Racine, Balzac ou Proust, mais aussi Fielding ou Hardy. Ces références font entrer l'auteur en question dans un contexte littéraire plus large que celui de sa culture d'origine ou de sa génération. Beckett saisit et établit lui-même aisément les liens entre ses lectures, et cela se remarque aussi dans ses écrits, dès son premier essai, sur Proust (1931), et dès son premier roman, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), où les références abondent.

Bien des études ont déjà établi l'influence importante de Dante et Joyce sur l'œuvre de Beckett. Beckett, étant le lecteur insatiable que l'on connaît, en subit d'autres. Celle de Flaubert est moins évidente car elle remonte à sa jeunesse, et Beckett n'en parla apparemment jamais. Je propose d'en étudier ici quelques signes à titre d'exemples reliant avec certitude Beckett à Flaubert. Ce dernier étant considéré par bien des écrivains

⁷ Cf. Brigitte Le Juez, « 'Is the writer much more than a sophisticated parrot?': Elizabeth Bowen's reception of Gustave Flaubert », in *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, janvier-mars 1999, No.1, p.5-27, et « Un perroquet peut en cacher un autre: Elizabeth Bowen lectrice de Gustave Flaubert », in *Entrelacs franco-irlandais: langue, mémoire, imaginaire*, edited by M. O'Dea & P. Brennan (Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2004), pp.181-96.

⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p.354.

⁹ Voir les notes de cours de Rachel Burrows, étudiante de Beckett à Trinity College, Dublin. Ce cahier est disponible à la salle des manuscrits de la bibliothèque de Trinity. A partir d'ici, RB dans le texte.

de la génération de Beckett comme « le précurseur », ¹⁰ comment eut-il pu en être autrement ? Parmi les nombreux liens existant entre les deux auteurs, je m'arrêterai spécifiquement sur le rapport langage et identité et, pour ce faire, m'intéresserai surtout à la trilogie de Beckett, *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* et *L'Innommable*, comme base de comparaison avec l'un des *Trois contes* de Flaubert, *Un cœur simple*.

Contre Balzac

C'est dans ses cours à Trinity que Beckett dévoile son appréciation de Flaubert.¹¹ Celle-ci est en fait indissociable de sa position par rapport à Balzac qui représente, pour lui, le contre-exemple du roman moderne, alors que Flaubert, au contraire, en est l'esprit novateur. Beckett se place alors à l'opposé de ses compatriotes. Selon Seán O'Faoláin, en général, les écrivains de sa génération préfèrent Balzac à Flaubert : pour lui, ils sont pris entre deux tendances, une imagination romantique et l'envie de décrire à la fois leur histoire mouvementée et leur vie ordinaire. Balzac leur fournit le modèle, pas Flaubert qui prône l'impersonnalité.¹² Beckett n'adhère pas à ces principes et affirme avec désapprobation devant ses étudiants : « *In Balzac all reality is a determined, statistical entity, [it is] distorted, [...] not respected* » (RB, 21), et dans *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, son narrateur se plaint que :

To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, [...] he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages...¹³

Beckett est favorable à l'impersonnalité de l'auteur et surtout à l'absence de finalité dans le texte, seules conditions possibles à qui veut tenter d'exprimer la condition humaine. Très tôt, il s'insurge contre le contrôle et l'embellissement de la réalité, contre la mythification. Tout comme

¹⁰ Cf. Nathalie Sarraute, « Flaubert le Précurseur », *Preuves*, N°15, février 1965, pp.3-12.

¹¹ L'étude du contenu de ces cours est le sujet d'un livre à paraître : Brigitte Le Juez, *Beckett avant la lettre* (Paris : Grasset, 2007).

¹² Cf. Seán O'Faoláin, « *The Irish Conscience ?* », *The Bell*, vol. XIII, No3, December 1946, pp.67-71.

¹³ *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), pp.119-20.

Flaubert, il réfute le romantisme, les explications consolatrices dans une existence de déceptions. Il se démarque ainsi de la plupart de ses congénères, et, à l'époque où il commence à écrire, dit clairement sa position : Flaubert est l'un des initiateurs du roman moderne, pas Balzac (cf. *RB*, 95).

Dès son premier cours sur ce sujet, Beckett annonce que Flaubert possède la complexité authentique qui représente l'élément essentiel, selon lui, à la définition même de la modernité en littérature. Il voit dans *Madame Bovary* et *Salammbô* deux Flaubert différents : « *Not photographer or image-monger, best is equilibrium between the two* », avance-t-il (*RB*, 3). Beckett abonde ainsi dans le sens de Flaubert qui refusait l'étiquette d'écrivain réaliste, et suggère en même temps qu'il appréhende honnêtement le réel. La complexité authentique et la juste appréhension du réel sont des critères récurrents dans l'appréciation littéraire de Beckett professeur — critères absents, selon lui, chez Balzac. James Knowlson, biographe de Beckett, confirme que ce dernier rejeta la manière dont Balzac abordait la création littéraire. A propos de *Mercier et Camier*, Knowlson montre que la profusion de clichés et de proverbes n'est pas sans rappeler le *Bouvard et Pécuchet* de Flaubert et ajoute que le titre du roman de Beckett signale cette dette.¹⁴

Ce que Beckett apprécie particulièrement chez Flaubert, c'est qu'il est *onomatomanic* néologisme qui désigne l'attachement linguistique de Flaubert à l'expression de l'incohérence du réel. Beckett est convaincu que la précision intrinsèque d'un texte est en contradiction avec la réalité, car on ne peut pas réduire la confusion que les personnages ressentent vis-à-vis de leur existence et, en fin de compte, l'exactitude savamment ordonnée rend le roman incohérent (cf. *RB*, 95). Beckett apprécie aussi que Flaubert, plutôt que de fabriquer des héros, crée des circonstances qui réduisent ses personnages à la banalité (cf. *RB*, 5), les renvoient à leur illogisme et leur bêtise, ce contre quoi Henry James s'insurgea : « *Why did Flaubert choose, as special conduits of the life he proposed to depict, such inferior and in the case of Frédéric such abject human specimens?* ».¹⁵ Flaubert s'était déjà chargé de répondre à ce genre de critique en avançant que le style était « à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir

¹⁴ Cf. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp.55, 146 et 361.

¹⁵ Cité par Philip Grover, *Henry James and the French Novel, A Study in Inspiration* (London: Elek Books, 1973), p. 70.

les choses ». ¹⁶ Il refuse ainsi de dissocier forme et fond « car l'idée n'existe qu'en vertu de sa forme ». ¹⁷ Beckett approuve totalement cette approche de l'écriture et, avant même de devenir écrivain, en fait l'un de ses principes essentiels en matière de modernité littéraire. Définissant l'essentiel de l'innovation littéraire de Joyce, il reprend implicitement celle de Flaubert et annonce la sienne :

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. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself. ¹⁸

Cette définition est proche de celle du « livre sur rien » de Flaubert qui rêvait

... [d'] un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. Les œuvres les plus belles sont celles où il y a le moins de matière ; plus l'expression se rapproche de la pensée, plus le mot colle dessus et disparaît, plus c'est beau. Je crois que l'avenir de l'Art est dans ces voies. ¹⁹

C'est en tout cas la voie que choisit Beckett en poursuivant l'innovation flaubertienne qui consiste à déplacer l'intérêt stylistique pour le monde des objets vers le mot comme objet. Le langage se libère ainsi de ses liens avec le réel et le concret pour se projeter vers un domaine autonome fait de rythme et d'harmonie. ²⁰ Les différents sujets que Bouvard et Pécuchet adoptent et abandonnent successivement s'avèrent ainsi inadéquats à la compréhension d'une réalité hors des mots. Flaubert, en multipliant les champs lexicaux à l'intérieur d'un même ouvrage, créait une sensation de

¹⁶ Lettre du 16/01/1852 à Louise Colet

¹⁷ Lettre de 1846 mentionnée par Charles Carlut dans *La Correspondance de Flaubert* (Paris : Nizet, 1968), p.392.

¹⁸ « Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce », in *Disjecta, Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), p.27.

¹⁹ Lettre du 16/01/1852 à Louise Colet.

²⁰ Cf. Charles Bernheimer, « *Grammacentricity and Modernism* », in *Mosaic* 11, No1 (Fall 1977), p.103-16.

vide, le « rien » qu'il disait rechercher, à travers la répétition infinie, la spirale langagière.

Beckett le rejoint en adoptant la perspective inverse, décrivant le banal avec une méticulosité ironique, car, comme le dit Watt, « le seul moyen de parler de rien est d'en parler comme de quelque chose ».²¹

Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north [...], and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down.²²

Le ton sérieux du passage et la minutie des descriptions contrastent clairement avec l'exagération des mouvements décrits, ceux de Watt se rendant vaguement quelque part vers l'est. La parfaite cadence de la phrase reflète non seulement celle de la marche du protagoniste, mais aussi la répétition intrinsèque du texte beckettien. Le principe de répétition permet le détachement de l'auteur et annule toute possibilité de réalisme en offrant un déplacement de sens. La répétition de mêmes mots fait que le lecteur ne retient que l'aspect phonique du langage, ce dernier en perdant sa signification familière. De telles constructions répétitives servent aussi bien à Flaubert qu'à Beckett à exprimer le chaos de la réalité. Plus le sujet est trivial, plus il prend de place et plus l'auteur l'analyse, et il semble que ce soit finalement dans les gestes et les objets les plus banals que cette analyse prend son sens puisqu'elle mène, de manière plus révélatrice qu'aucune autre démarche, à la description intime du personnage et à la révélation de son moi.

Sales perroquets

La notion de répétition, en particulier quand elle est associée à l'impuissance du langage, chez Flaubert comme chez Beckett, passe par le perroquet. En effet, celui-ci représente le psittacisme, c'est-à-dire la ré-

²¹ Watt (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1968), p.78. A part cette citation, je vais citer les textes de Beckett dans la langue de leur première parution.

²² Watt (London: Picador, 1988), p.28.

pétition mécanique de mots, de phrases entendues, sans que le sujet les comprenne. Dans *Murphy* Beckett mettait déjà en parallèle les paroles qu'une personne peut répéter sans comprendre ou sans réfléchir et celles d'un perroquet : « 'Not the slightest idea,' he murmured, 'of what her words mean. No more insight into their implications than a parrot into its profanities' ». ²³

Le psittacidé (chez Beckett, il peut s'agir d'un cacatoès, donc d'un perroquet qui ne parle pas) permet aux deux auteurs de représenter l'importance du langage dans la définition d'une identité, et d'exprimer l'impossibilité de se libérer des conditionnements, de l'ordre établi, du regard de l'autre et de la difficulté pour l'individu de gouverner ses perceptions intérieures et extérieures — autant d'obstacles à l'entendement de soi. La cage du perroquet représente l'emprisonnement de la parole et l'empêchement à la recherche de l'identité. « Je me demande quel sera mon dernier mot, écrit, les autres s'envolent, au lieu de rester. Cet inventaire non plus je ne l'achèverai pas, un petit oiseau me le dit, le paraclet peut-être, au nom de psittacidé. Ainsi soit-il », avance Malone. ²⁴ L'association entre le perroquet et le Saint-Esprit, on s'en souvient, est provoquée en premier lieu par l'imagination dévote de la protagoniste d'*Un cœur simple*. ²⁵ C'est Flaubert qui n'acheva pas son inventaire, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, pour écrire ses *Trois contes*, avant de mourir. Le perroquet qui parle au narrateur beckettien est peut-être celui de Flaubert. ²⁶

Le perroquet n'apparaît dans certains textes que dans le décor ou par association d'idées pour traduire un conditionnement. Le narrateur de *Murphy* associe, par exemple, l'incompétence du personnage à formuler sa pensée aux représentations de la transmission de la parole divine par l'Archange, symbolisé par un perroquet : « *Neary began to speak, or, as it rather sounded, be spoken through. [...] Altogether he had a great look of Luke's portrait of Matthew with the angel perched like a parrot on his*

²³ *Murphy* (London: Picador, 1973), p.26.

²⁴ *Malone meurt* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1951), p.124.

²⁵ « A l'église, elle contemplait toujours le Saint-Esprit, et observa qu'il avait quelque chose du perroquet. Sa ressemblance lui parut encore plus manifeste sur une image d'Epinal, représentant le baptême de Notre-Seigneur. Avec ses ailes de pourpre et son corps d'émeraude, c'était vraiment le portrait de Loulou. » *Un cœur simple, Trois contes*, in *Œuvres II, op. cit.*, p.617. A partir de cette citation, CS dans le texte.

²⁶ Cf. Brigitte Le Juez, *Le Papegai et le papelard dans 'Un Cœur simple' de Gustave Flaubert* (Amsterdam & Atlanta : Rodopi, 1999).

shoulder ». ²⁷ En fait, le narrateur mélange deux tableaux, celui de *Saint Mathieu et l'Ange*, de Rembrandt, qui se trouve au Louvre, et celui de *Saint Luc dessinant la Vierge* de Rogier van der Weyden qui se trouve à la *National Gallery of Ireland*. Dans les représentations religieuses, le perroquet se perche uniquement sur l'épaule de Marie puisqu'il répète la parole divine qui imprègne la Vierge. ²⁸

Qui d'autre que Flaubert s'était déjà inspiré d'une telle méprise pour montrer, dans ce cas, l'effet du discours religieux sur l'esprit d'une simple campagnarde ? « Et Félicité priait en regardant l'image [du paraclet], mais de temps à autre se tournait un peu vers l'oiseau [le perroquet]. Elle eut envie de se mettre dans les demoiselles de la Vierge » (CS, 618). L'image du perroquet-archange réapparaît plus tard dans l'esprit de la vierge Félicité, qui vient de chercher Loulou, son perroquet envolé, sans succès : « Enfin elle rentra, épuisée, les savates en lambeaux, [...] elle racontait toutes ses démarches, quand un poids léger lui tomba *sur l'épaule* : Loulou ! Que diable avait-il fait ? » (CS, 614, je souligne). Cette mésaventure la bouleverse au point qu'elle en devient sourde, du moins au profane : « Un seul bruit arrivait maintenant à ses oreilles, la voix du perroquet » (CS, 615).

L'acquisition de toute connaissance, pas seulement religieuse, passe par la répétition et l'imitation, ce qui présuppose la fiabilité de certaines aptitudes, dont la mémoire, mais surtout la fiabilité de cette connaissance. Flaubert et Beckett jettent le doute sur l'ensemble et créent la confusion. Celle-ci révèle alors un trait typique au perroquet et pour lequel Flaubert et Beckett ont une certaine prédilection : le désordre. C'est d'ailleurs le mot clé d'une citation tirée de *L'Education sentimentale* que Beckett choisit pour commencer son article sur l'art et le rôle de l'artiste, intitulé « Les Deux Besoins ». ²⁹

²⁷ Murphy, p.147.

²⁸ Par exemple, *La Madone, l'Enfant et l'Ange* de Hans Baldung Grien, dans lequel le perroquet est perché sur l'épaule gauche de Marie.

²⁹ « Et le pharmacien [...] entonna (à pleine poitrine) : 'J'ai deux grands bœufs dans mon étable, Deux grands bœufs blancs...' Sénécals lui mit la main sur la bouche, il n'aimait pas le désordre... »

[...] Il n'y a sans doute que l'artiste qui puisse finir par voir [...] la monotone centralité de ce qu'un chacun veut, pense, fait et souffre, de ce qu'un chacun est. [...] Les autres, les innombrables béats et sains d'esprit, l'ignorent. [...] D'où cette vie toute en marge de son principe, cette vie faite de décisions, de satisfactions, de réponses, de menus besoins assassinés... » (*Disjecta*, pp.55-7)

Le perroquet est en outre un oiseau plein d'espièglerie qui, par la culture populaire, est de surcroît associé à la plaisanterie, voire à la grivoiserie. Il est le personnage non conforme, dérangeant. Dans *Un cœur simple*, Loulou est rejeté par Mme Aubain parce qu'il apporte, dans son petit monde autrement bien réglé, un élément de désordre : « il avait la fatigante manie de mordre son bâton, s'arrachait les plumes, éparpillait ses ordures, répandait l'eau de sa baignoire ; Mme Aubain, qu'il ennuyait, le donna pour toujours à Félicité » (CS, 613). Il s'agit d'éliminer l'élément discordant du décor immédiat. Les pauvres et les malades, y compris Félicité avant sa mort, subissent d'ailleurs le même sort dans *Un cœur simple*, et sont tout bonnement abandonnés à leur déclin physique et mental, narré sans sentimentalité.

La progression d'un même déclin chez leurs perroquets est donnée dans le détail par nos deux auteurs. Loulou ne meurt pas soudainement. D'abord, il « devint malade, ne pouvait plus parler ni manger. C'était sous sa langue une épaisseur, comme en ont les poules quelquefois » (CS, 614). Il meurt d'une psittacose, affection qui atteint le poumon et qui se caractérise, dans sa forme neurologique, par la confusion mentale. Le perroquet d'Hélène (*Mercier et Camier*) semble souffrir de troubles du même ordre :

Sur son bâton, suspendu à un angle du plafond, et qu'agitaient confusément des propensions oscillatoires et tourbillonnantes, il se tenait en équilibre inquiet. [...] Sa poitrine allait faiblement se bombant et se creusant, avec une arythmie oppressée. D'imperceptibles frissons soulevaient le duvet, à chaque expiration. De temps en temps le bec s'ouvrait et restait pendant quelques secondes ouvert. [...] Alors on voyait la langue noire et fuselée qui remuait.³⁰

Les deux perroquets meurent, semble-t-il, d'avoir la langue malade, comme empoisonnée. Après les passages cités, le premier devient une sorte de totem le temps d'une cérémonie avant de pourrir empaillé, le second disparaît totalement du texte, non sans, semble-t-il, avoir transmis sa maladie à Hélène, qui, elle, la transmet à Camier. Loulou avait lui aussi transmis sa psittacose à Félicité qui passait de la surdité à la cécité puis à l'égarément, jusqu'à la mort. La mère de Molloy montrait les signes d'un dépérissement identique :

³⁰ *Mercier et Camier* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1970), pp.39-40.

... il y avait belle lurette qu'elle ne voyait plus rien [...] il y avait une éternité qu'elle était sourde comme un pot. [...] Elle articulait mal, dans un fracas de râtelier, et la plupart du temps ne se rendait pas compte de ce qu'elle disait [...] cette vieille femme sourde, aveugle, impotente et folle...³¹

Les perroquets, comme les personnages, souffrent d'une double impuissance, physique et verbale. Toutefois, Flaubert et Beckett peignent des univers pathologiques souvent de manière humoristique. Flaubert affirme d'ailleurs rire de tout, en passant sur les faits comme sur les gens sa « bouffonnerie, comme un rouleau de fer à lustrer les pièces d'étoffes », pour que le sentiment qu'il en reste soit « débarrassé de toutes ces convenances si utiles pour faire tenir debout les pourritures ». ³² Le rouleau est aussi l'image que Beckett emploie à propos de son *Proust* qui équivaldrait « au passage au rouleau compresseur de certains aspects ou de la confusion de certains aspects de moi-même ». ³³ C'est avec un esprit ironique et sans concession que les deux auteurs s'accordent à éliminer l'hypocrisie.

Si le perroquet amène un élément de bouffonnerie, il tient ainsi un rôle très sérieux, celui de chambarder les idées reçues et de dénoncer les carcans de toutes sortes :

Ils m'en ont raconté [...]. Je n'ai pas voulu les croire. N'empêche qu'il m'en est resté. [...] Ce sont eux aussi qui m'ont appris à compter, à raisonner. Ce sont des trucs qui m'ont rendu des services, je ne dirai pas le contraire, des services dont je n'aurais pas eu besoin si on m'avait laissé tranquille. Depuis quand ce bourrage de crâne a-t-il cessé ? Et a-t-il cessé ?³⁴

Bien que le narrateur de *L'Innommable* avance : « je compte bien pouvoir balayer tout ça en très peu de temps » (*LI*, 9), la tâche à accomplir est incommensurable. Prendre à rebours toutes les associations et tous les gestes automatiques acquis au cours d'une vie n'est pas une mince affaire, les êtres étant transformés en « pantins » (*LI*, 8). Flaubert avait déjà ébauché cette idée en décrivant Félicité comme « une femme en bois,

³¹ *Molloy* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1951), pp.24-7. A partir de cette citation, MO dans le texte.

³² Lettre du 27/03/1852 à Louise Colet.

³³ Lettre à Thomas MacGreevy, 11/03/1931, inédite, ma traduction.

³⁴ *L'Innommable* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1953), p.17-9. A partir de cette citation, LI dans le texte.

fonctionnant d'une manière automatique » (CS, 592), une femme formée à servir. Beckett répudie les divers enseignements reçus comme autant d'informations superflues. Le narrateur de *Textes pour rien* se traite lui-même de « sale perroquet ». ³⁵ L'identité des personnages et narrateurs se perd dans les méandres des langages inculqués.

Expression morte

La répétition inhérente aux textes flaubertiens et beckettien dénonce l'exercice sociolinguistique de l'éducation. Basé sur l'imitation, il devient un conditionnement qui incite à un comportement stéréotypé. Philippe Dufour souligne que le héros flaubertien parle peu et plutôt mal, et qu'en réalité, ce sont les personnages secondaires qui dominent les dialogues que les protagonistes ne font qu'entendre : « L'enjeu du dialogue est devenu métalinguistique : il manifeste une parole impersonnelle tenue par des personnes sans personnalité. Le dialogue [...] est *insignifiant* — et puise là sa raison d'être : signifier l'insignifiance ». ³⁶ Il est effectivement remarquable que les conversations à plus de deux personnes, dans les récits de Flaubert, deviennent rapidement cacophoniques ³⁷ au point qu'on ne sait plus qui dit quoi. Ce procédé démontre que les idées que « je » croit avoir sont en fait autant celles des « autres », que la parole étant ainsi rendue collective, elle reste indéfinie ou passive. Le cliché étant, par excellence, le produit d'une imagination à la fois collective et anonyme, il est indifférent à toute expérience individuelle. Il représente en fait la catégorisation annihilante de celle-ci et donc l'obstacle typique à toute tentative d'expression originale. Il emprisonne les mots dans un sens figé.

Comme Flaubert, Beckett se sert de clichés et de proverbes qu'il transforme ironiquement. Malone s'en défie : « Je connais ces petites phrases qui n'ont l'air de rien et qui, une fois admises, peuvent vous empiéter toute une langue. *Rien n'est plus réel que rien*. Elles sortent de l'abîme et n'ont de cesse qu'elles n'y entraînent » (MM, 29-30). Avec *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Flaubert énonçait toutes les connaissances qu'on

³⁵ *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1958), p.177.

³⁶ Philippe Dufour, *Flaubert et le Pignouf, Essai sur la représentation romanesque du langage* (Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, « L'imaginaire du texte », 1993), p.68-9.

³⁷ Voir, par ex., les discussions politiques dans *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, *Œuvres II*, pp.847 et 852.

peut acquérir sans arriver à quelque réponse que ce soit. Beckett démontre d'emblée que la connaissance est une illusion :

... je m'intéressais à l'astronomie, autrefois. Je ne veux pas le nier. Puis ce fut la géologie qui me fit passer un bout de temps. Ensuite c'est avec l'anthropologie que je me fis brièvement chier et avec les autres disciplines, telle la psychiatrie, qui s'y rattachent, s'en détachent et s'y rattachent à nouveau, selon les dernières découvertes. [...]. Mais je n'ai jamais eu à ce propos que des idées fort confuses, connaissant mal les hommes et ne sachant pas très bien ce que cela veut dire, être. Oh j'ai tout essayé. Ce fut enfin à la magie qu'échut l'honneur de s'installer dans mes décombres... (*MO*, 62-3)

Les matières nommées sont également au nombre de celles sur lesquelles Bouvard et Pécuchet se penchent, après s'être lamentablement essayés au jardinage. Macmann (*Malone meurt*) n'obtenait pas de meilleurs résultats qu'eux dans ce domaine non plus, semant le désordre plutôt que les légumes, ne sachant pas les distinguer des mauvaises herbes.

Grâce au perroquet, le désordre envahit aussi l'élocution. Loulou accorde, par exemple, peu d'importance à la conversation : il ne parle plus du moment qu'on le regarde et, par contre, interrompt les parties de cartes chez les Aubain en cognant « les vitres avec ses ailes » et en se démenant « si furieusement qu'il était impossible de s'entendre » (*CS*, 613). De plus, bien qu'il n'ait appris de Félicité que des expressions décentes (« Charmant garçon ! Serviteur, Monsieur ! Je vous salue, Marie ! », *ibid.*), la menace de la parole indécente pèse sur lui dès qu'apparaît Fabu, le garçon boucher, qui a « plutôt du penchant pour le perroquet, jusqu'à vouloir, par humeur joviale, lui apprendre des jurons » (*ibid.*). Parmi les perroquets de Beckett, celui de Lousse est particulièrement volubile et grossier :

Il disait de temps en temps, Putain de conasse de merde de chiaison. Il avait dû appartenir à une personne française avant d'appartenir à Lousse. Les animaux changent souvent de propriétaire. Il ne disait pas grand'chose d'autre. Si, il disait aussi, Fuck ! Ce n'était pourtant pas une personne française qui lui avait appris à dire, Fuck ! Peut-être qu'il l'avait trouvé tout seul, ça ne m'étonnerait pas. Lousse essayait de lui faire dire, Pretty Polly ! Je crois que c'était trop tard. Il écoutait, la tête de côté, réfléchissait, puis disait, Putain de conasse de merde de chiaison. On voyait qu'il faisait un effort. (*MO*, 59-60)

La parole du perroquet s'est figée dans le trop-plein de non-sens. Bien que le perroquet de Lousse fasse de son mieux, il ne peut acquérir de

nouveaux clichés. Le perroquet de Jackson (*Malone meurt*), le plus érudit des perroquets beckettien, souffre de la même incapacité :

... [Jackson] ne disposait que d'un perroquet, gris et rouge, auquel il apprenait à dire, *Nihil in intellectu, etc.* Ces trois premiers mots, l'oiseau les prononçait bien, mais la célèbre restriction ne passait pas, on n'entendait que couah couah couah couah couah. Et lorsque Jackson, s'énervant, s'acharnait à la lui faire reprendre, Polly se fâchait tout rouge et se retirait dans un coin de sa cage. (*MM*, 72)

Beckett pousse ici l'ironie jusqu'à faire répéter une formule scolastique au perroquet, bien appropriée à son cas. Alan Astro la rétablit et la commente :

Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu, c'est-à-dire « il n'y a rien dans l'intellect qui ne fût d'abord dans les sens ». Selon cette phrase, nous ne savons rien dont nous n'ayons fait au préalable l'expérience directe ; il n'y a pas de connaissances innées. La réalité telle qu'elle est perçue s'inscrit sur la table rase qu'est l'intellect. Mais dans la version de cette formule reproduite par le perroquet, qui ne consiste qu'en les paroles : *nihil in intellectu*, la table rase reste vide. Le réel qui aurait dû y être inscrit ne revient que sous la forme de cris aigus...³⁸

Le « etc. » qui bloque le perroquet de Jackson et qui lui fait prononcer quelque chose qui ressemble à la fois à « quoi » et à « couac », montre qu'il ne comprend pas et qu'il parle faux. Il rappelle le « can, can, can » des canards dans *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.³⁹ Mais le côté humoristique de l'écriture beckettienne, comme chez Flaubert, révèle une dimension tragique. Ces cris aigus, les « couah couah » répétés, dépassent la seule difficulté à prononcer « etc. ». Ils renvoient au *quaquaqua* de Lucky (*En attendant Godot*) qui traduisait déjà la défaillance de la parole et à l'aliénation de l'individu par les mots.

Devenue sourde, Félicité percevait « Des bourdonnements illusoire [qui] achevaient de la troubler » (*CS*, 614). L'expérience de Molloy nous éclaire sur ces bourdonnements : « les mots [...] me faisaient l'effet d'un bourdonnement d'insecte » (*MO*, 81). La répétition intertextuelle con-

³⁸ Alan Astro, « Le nom de Beckett », *Critique*, tome 46, N^{os} 519-20, août-septembre 1990, p.737-54

³⁹ *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, p.801.

firme la signification du son : moins qu'une parole, plutôt un bruit, un murmure, le bourdonnement que perçoivent les personnages correspond à leur incompréhension et à leur détachement grandissant du signifié.

Le narrateur de *L'Innommable*, celui que l'on ne peut nommer et qui ne peut se nommer lui-même, est placé face à une double impossibilité, celle de s'exprimer et de se taire, à moins de faire le « pensum » qui lui a été donné pour ne pas avoir su dire sa leçon. Alors, seulement, aura-t-il « le droit de rester tranquillement dans [son] coin, à baver et à vivre, la bouche fermée, la langue inerte » (*LI*, 40), comme un perroquet malade. Le langage, de l'outil qu'il est censé être, devient une arme hostile à travers laquelle la raison, le savoir et le discours humains sont réprimés : « les mots sont partout, dans moi, hors moi, [...] impossible de les arrêter, impossible de s'arrêter, je suis en mots, je suis fait de mots, des mots des autres [...], je suis tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers » (*LI*, 166). Les narrateurs beckettien souffrent de ce qu'ils ne peuvent sortir du discours narratif, ne peuvent s'empêcher de se raconter des histoires, de se raconter par des histoires, sans pour autant pouvoir parler d'eux-mêmes ou pour eux-mêmes.

Le discours est lié à la relation idéologique entre l'être et le monde. Les moyens disponibles pour tenter d'articuler une identité sont informés et contrôlés par le langage. Les mots viennent à l'esprit avant d'y être conviés. Loin d'être justes, ils sont inopportuns et étrangers : « J'ai à parler, n'ayant rien à dire, rien que les paroles des autres. Ne sachant pas parler, ne voulant pas parler, j'ai à parler » (*LI*, 46). Afin de se défendre de cet envahissement de la parole, l'écriture beckettienne tend vers l'abstraction en usant d'un procédé de fragmentation de la narration et d'une simplicité apparente, issue d'un style parlé, idiomatique, mais en même temps laborieux, qui empêche le sens d'être prévisible et déconcerte son lecteur. *L'Innommable*, par exemple, tente de débarrasser sa narration des personnages, objets, temps, espace qui l'encombrent, pour ne garder que les mots, pour libérer la voix narratrice de l'influence des conventions et stratégies narratives. Il s'agit surtout pour Beckett d'exprimer la vie telle qu'il la voit, aussi bien de l'intérieur que de l'extérieur, chaotique, fluctuante et absurde, le seul ordre qu'il y observe étant celui apporté, imposé par l'homme, pour se rassurer.

Les humains, comme les perroquets, sont prisonniers du langage qu'on leur a transmis, de son insuffisance, et des cages linguistiques qu'on leur a construites. La répétition, en dehors de son effet comique, confirme l'impossibilité de s'exprimer. Stirling Haig, citant l'épisode de

la non demande en mariage dans *Madame Bovary* — « 'Père Rouault..., père Rouault,' balbutia Charles. 'Moi, je ne demande pas mieux,' continua le fermier »⁴⁰ — reconnaît chez Flaubert quelques signes avant-coureurs du style beckettien :

... not only has [Charles] become an automaton failing once again to formulate an utterance, but he does so in what I shall call a 'doubling' scheme that formally enacts his repeated incapacity to articulate a thought process. Flaubert was often to construct similar signs of verbal stumbling that signal communicative breakdown and yield textual space filled with inanities, or better, vacuities. [...] We do not emerge from linguistic mazes in Flaubert, but continue to turn, to move without progressing, in a ritual fashion that anticipates a Beckettian 'act without words'.⁴¹

Le narrateur beckettien est effectivement pris dans une spirale langagière dans laquelle il ne fait qu'aller et venir, dont il est prisonnier.

Flaubert, comme Beckett après lui, rechercha « la copie sans modèle, l'énonciation sans origine, l'écriture comme *inquiétante étrangeté* ». ⁴² Avec le troisième volet de la trilogie, néanmoins, Beckett détruit tous les espoirs sur les possibilités de l'écriture, le problème venant du langage lui-même :

... je suis tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers [...], et que j'écoute, et que j'entends, et que je cherche, comme une bête née en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées et mortes en cage nées et mortes en cage de bêtes nées en cage mortes en cage nées et mortes nées et mortes en cage en cage nées et puis mortes nées et puis mortes... (*LI*, 166-7)

Dans ce passage de *L'Innommable*, le narrateur est devenu tout à fait perroquet, répétant les mots qui ne lui appartiennent pas, faillissant à sa tentative d'exprimer. Le perroquet devient le représentant de l'auteur lui-même, de son échec à exprimer. Dans une entrevue avec Georges Duthuit, Beckett définit l'impasse dans laquelle, selon lui, se trouve l'écriture qui devient : « *the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing*

⁴⁰ *Madame Bovary*, p.313.

⁴¹ Stirling Haig, *Flaubert and the Gift of Speech, Dialogue and Discourse in Four 'Modern' Novels* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.57-8.

⁴² Lettre du 31/01/1852 à Louise Colet.

with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express ». ⁴³ Beckett remet ainsi en question la relation traditionnellement établie entre l'artiste et son sujet. Pour lui, cette relation n'existe pas. L'action de l'artiste n'est engagée que par la *nécessité* d'exprimer, malgré le manque de moyens d'exprimer, d'où échec de l'artiste à exprimer : « *to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail* ». ⁴⁴

Conclusion

C'est souvent dans leur jeunesse, au stade de l'expérimentation, que les jeunes auteurs font l'expérience de découvertes essentielles à leur développement. Leur imagination, déjà créatrice, et qui se trouve dans un état de réceptivité vis-à-vis d'esprits littéraires innovateurs ou de philosophies artistiques nouvelles, s'en trouve fécondée. Ainsi Beckett, dans sa jeunesse, fut-il pareillement stimulé à la lecture de Flaubert. Les références intertextuelles en témoignant, nous l'avons vu, ne manquent pas. S'intéressant personnellement aux rapports entre langage et identité et à l'évolution de l'écriture, Beckett fut sensible à la quête artistique de Flaubert et, « à l'instar du grand Gustave », il poursuivit dignement avec la sienne celle de son aîné. ⁴⁵ Ainsi, bien que Beckett ait certainement construit son originalité, son œuvre s'inscrit-elle dans la généalogie de Flaubert.

Mais d'où vient cette expression, « A l'instar du grand Gustave » ? Le jeune Beckett, qui aimait remplir des cahiers de notes durant ses lectures, ne manqua pas, semble-t-il, de relever certains traits de caractère appartenant à Flaubert, traits dont il affubla Jacques Moran, l'un des personnages de son roman *Molloy*. En effet, ce dernier avance : « J'allais me mettre en colère si je ne faisais pas attention. Et la colère est un luxe que je ne peux me permettre. Car alors je deviens aveugle, un rideau de sang se met devant mes yeux et, à l'instar du grand Gustave, j'entends craquer les bancs de la cour d'assises » (*MO*, 210, je souligne). C'est évidemment

⁴³ *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), p.103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁴⁵ Voir aussi Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians, Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett* (University of California Press, 1974), et Robert Louit, « Gustave, Henry, James et les autres », in *Magazine Littéraire*, « Flaubert et ses héritiers », N° 250, février 1988, pp.47-50.

dans le journal des frères Goncourt que Beckett tira l'idée de cette comparaison. Les Goncourt y notent, en effet, à deux reprises une anecdote concernant la relation orageuse entre Flaubert et Louise Colet, Flaubert racontant à ses amis que lors d'une dispute, un jour, « il a failli la tuer : 'J'ai entendu craquer sous moi les bancs de la Cour d'assises' », se serait-il exclamé.⁴⁶ Cette référence représente un hommage, obscur certes, à cette autre qualité que Beckett reconnaît chez Flaubert, et qu'il partage avec lui, ... le sens de l'humour.

⁴⁶ Edmond et Jules Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie Littéraire* (Monaco : Fasquelle et Flammarion, 1956), tomes V (21 février 1862) et VIII (20 janvier 1869).

John McDonagh

Chapter Ten: “Tore down à la Rimbaud”: Brendan Kennelly and the French Connection

Shown me different shapes and colours
Shown me many different roads
Gave me very clear instructions
When I was in the dark night of the soul.¹

In 1961, Brendan Kennelly graduated with a double-first in French and English from Trinity College, Dublin, being nominated for the University's Gold Medal in the process. The late A. Norman Jeffares, then Professor of English at Leeds, was the external adjudicator who awarded Kennelly second place. Both men soon got over this potentially embarrassing episode when Kennelly spent a year (1962/3) with Jeffares at Leeds working on his PhD thesis, an analysis of the role of the epic poem in the work of, amongst others, W.B. Yeats, Patrick Kavanagh and Austin Clarke. Kennelly, of course, went on to achieve his PhD in 1966 and only 7 years later, in 1973, he was appointed Chair of Modern English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, a post he held until the summer of 2005. The importance of French literature in his intellectual make-up is something that he rarely alludes to but on closer inspection there is a clear and consistently radical streak in Kennelly's work that is worth exploring outside of the traditionally accepted schools of contemporary Irish poetry. Kennelly has acknowledged four poets in particular as crucial in the development of an eclectic poetic career that has stretched over fifty years, and the influence of each is there to see across his large corpus of poetry, novels, plays and criticism. These four poets share a remarkably similar

¹ Van Morrison, “Tore down a la Rimbaud”, *A Sense of Wonder* (music album), 1984.

history of youthful brilliance, counter-cultural social and political views, popular notoriety, a fondness for mind-altering substances, a tendency towards self-destruction and a passion for the long poem. Although Kennelly has not made the link explicit, their complex personal characteristics can just as easily be applied to him at various junctures in his eventful life.

Unsurprisingly, Patrick Kavanagh (1904-67) is a seminal figure and the first influence to be mentioned. There are strong parallels between Kennelly's unromanticised, spare and often harsh portrayal of his community and the poetry of Kavanagh in the early 1940s, both clearly displaying a natural empathy with and deep understanding of their respective birthplaces, although the poetic desire to see beneath and beyond the surface of an apparently idyllic rural existence soon emerges. It is not surprising that Kennelly recalls writing out by hand Kavanagh's excoriating 1942 epic *The Great Hunger* in the National Library in Dublin when a student in Trinity College in the 1950s, an early indication of his fondness for Irish interpretations of the epic form which were to prove such a successful poetic vehicle later in his career. What particularly attracted Kennelly to Kavanagh was the latter's debunking of a pervasive rural mythology, a literary and cultural hangover from the revivalist movement of the late 19th/early 20th centuries as well as a sharp observation of the ordinary events of daily life. Kennelly notes Kavanagh's wonder at 'the startling significance and beauty inherent in casual things'² and there can be little doubt that Kavanagh's poetry liberated a great many succeeding poets into writing about the commonplace, be it Derek Mahon's brilliantly evocative 'Garage in Co. Cork', Michael Hartnett's savage indictment of rural life 'A Small Farm' or Seamus Heaney's topographical masterpiece 'Bogland'. However, Kennelly's work is more complex than a mere rendering of the often difficult circumstances of his rural upbringing, and it is here that the other influences begin to be heard.

The second acknowledged influence, again somewhat predictably given Kennelly's outward looking perspective, is Allen Ginsberg (1926-97), the leading light of what came to be known in 1950s America as the Beat generation of poets. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1926, Gins-

² Ake Persson, *Journey into Joy – Selected Prose* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p. 122.

berg's fame coincided with that of Kavanagh's and despite their clear stylistic and thematic differences, it is easy to see how Kennelly could be attracted to both. Ginsberg's extraordinary 1955 long poem 'Howl' can be regarded as an American *Great Hunger*, a rambling tirade against the hypocrisies of Ginsberg's contemporary society and a brutally honest examination of a troubled self. Interestingly, like *The Great Hunger* in 1942, *Howl* was lifted from the bookshelves in 1957 on the grounds of obscenity, the poem dealing explicitly with the sexual conquests of Ginsberg's drug-addled fellow writers. The following obscenity trial in 1957 failed when the judge declared that the poem was of redeeming social importance and it has since gained iconic status in the canon of American poetry.

There is a remarkable similarity between many of the poems in Kennelly's 1983 epic sequence *Cromwell* and the extraordinary cacophony of Ginsberg's *Howl*, with Oliver Cromwell portrayed as high on dexedrine throughout his Irish campaign, hallucinating during battle of fornicating with the recently dead, his hormones raging in an orgy of violence, brutality and sexual depravity. Ginsberg, on the other hand, sees 'the best minds' of his generation destroyed by 'the endless ride on benzedrine', the favoured drug of the Beat generation. Whether Kennelly meant this connection or not, the link between Cromwell's dexedrine and Ginsberg's benzedrine is clear, and indeed, in some poems in *Cromwell*, the eponymous Oliver rambles and experiments to such an extent that he would have made an unusual yet comfortable travelling companion for the great Beat trio of Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs. In Kennelly's work, the outward-looking insularity and celebration of the ordinary in Kavanagh's poetry is blended with the often bizarre yet nonetheless searing social commentary of Ginsberg to produce a corpus of work that challenges ideologies and conventions on a variety of fronts and which is forever shifting in terms of its focus and style.

Coincidentally, Ginsberg, like Kavanagh, was no fan of academic assessments of his work, referring to the 'blather and built-in misunderstanding' of academics and reviewers, people he condemns as 'intellectual bastards and snobs and vulgarians and hypocrites'. À la Rimbaud, Ginsberg insisted in 1961 that 'the mind must be trained, ie. let loose, freed – to deal with itself as it actually is, and not to impose on itself an arbitrarily preconceived pattern. The only pattern or value of interest in poetry is the solitary, individual pattern peculiar to the poet's moment and the poem discovered in the mind and in the process of writing it out

on the page'.³ Given that two years later, in 1963, Kennelly produced his first solo collection, *Let Fall No Burning Leaf*, Ginsberg offered a Kavanaghese freedom to the burgeoning poet to plough his own furrow in search of the elusive true note. It can only be conjectured whether the title of Kennelly's collection was a tacit endorsement of Ginsberg's famous assertion that 'the only poetic tradition is the voice out of the burning bush'.⁴

That both Kavanagh and Ginsberg were such important figures in the development of Kennelly's poetics should come as no real surprise. Kennelly was, and still is, a voracious reader with a photographic memory, and as his style developed in the early 1960s he could not but have encountered the establishment shattering work of the Monaghan farmer and the New Jersey refusnik. Indeed, as a child, Kennelly was nicknamed 'the monk' by his siblings for his reading habits, spending long hours bent over a table by a window overlooking the main street of Ballylongford in what the family referred to as the 'big room'. His brother Paddy recalls Brendan's 12-hour study schedule, 9 till 9, seven days a week, punctuated only by meal breaks and brisk walks. This work ethic is a side of his personality that Kennelly rarely alludes to but the fruits of such concentration are clear to see in the intellectual breadth of his work. As a result of his relatively enlightened education and prodigious memory, Kennelly quickly took to languages. His natural flair for French led directly to the emergence of two other, arguably less predictable, seminal figures in the development of his poetic sensibility and technique, namely the nineteenth century poets Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91). Whilst nearly all Irish poets of the late twentieth century have emerged under the shadow of the twin peaks of Yeats and Kavanagh, few acknowledge these two giants of French poetry as determining influences, and yet their desire to break poetic conventions was, in many ways, a feature of a good deal of Irish poetry throughout the late 20th century. A common feature of their work is their concern with the marginalised, the dispossessed and the voiceless, an interest born, perhaps, out of their own troubled personal histories. Indeed, Kennelly, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, three counter-culturalists to varying degrees,

³ W.N Herbert and M.Hollis (eds), *Strong Words – Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), p. 130.

⁴ Herbert and Hollis, *Strong Words*, p. 131.

share remarkably similar biographies, from brilliant young student to traumatic adult personal relationships.

The trio endured lifelong battles with alcohol addiction although Kennelly has thankfully avoided the rather pathetic ends that eventually faced his French counterparts. Baudelaire died in 1867 of medical complications brought about by syphilis, a condition compounded by a heavy and prolonged addiction to opium, hashish and absinthe. Rimbaud did not even manage to reach Baudelaire's 46 years on this earth, succumbing in 1891, at the age 37, to complications brought about from a botched leg amputation, his life shaped by addiction, violence and a tempestuous and near fatal affair with his fellow poet Paul Verlaine. It is fascinating that a poet like Kennelly, so immersed in the forms and traditions of Irish poetry, would cite such figures as Baudelaire and Rimbaud as central influences in the development of his eclectic and prolific poetic career. Clearly his ability to read French was a crucial factor but on closer examination the stylistic innovations of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud would appear to be hugely influential. Equally important, perhaps, was their desire to question and interrogate the social and moral fabric of their respective societies, mobilising their poetry almost as a form of cultural protest aimed at they perceived to be the suffocating influence of dominant political and social discourses.

Kennelly first encountered the modernist work of Baudelaire and Rimbaud during his enlightened education in St. Ita's school in Tarbert Co. Kerry, which he attended from 1948 to 1953. The school was a fee-paying boarding school established by Jane Agnes Mc Kenna, a woman of extraordinary pedagogical vision and energy. Indeed, Kennelly's indebtedness to her influence is acknowledged by the dedication to her of his 1992 collection *Breathing Spaces*, an important book in the body of Kennelly's work as it contains a good many previously unavailable early poems. In the introduction, he notes that 'there is always the hope that education and learning, like law and justice, may occasionally coincide'⁵ and there is no doubt that Kennelly took to this school with great relish. His sister Mary recalls 'his dedication to study' and she notes that 'when Miss McKenna was ill he filled in as teacher'.

⁵ Brendan Kennelly, *Breathing Spaces* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), p. 13.

Any hope the students might have had that the youthful Brendan would be a pushover were soon dashed, however, as Mary, two years younger than Brendan, notes with considerable understatement that he was no 'soft touch'! His time at St. Ita's was filled with an eclectic reading schedule and it was here that he was introduced, under Mc Kenna's tutelage, to the exciting, challenging and complex poetry of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud, as well as the more predictable figures of Kavanagh and Yeats. From the latter he gleaned the confidence to write about the ordinary and a passionate belief in the necessity of articulating the essence of a personal vision. The fact that from a very early age he was immersing himself in a tradition outside of the familiar certainly imbues his early poetry with an air of the experimental, despite the fact that the tyranny of influence is clear in the early works of most poets. Kennelly is distinctly aware of the importance of striking a distinct note, hinted at in the concluding stanzas of his 1963 poem 'The Whistler':

But now the whistler's sauntering across a bridge,
 Head cocked jauntily like a blackbird's
 As he indicates a headland or a ledge

Of his delight. The simple truth, you see,
 Is that the man is utterly himself
 And owns you with his lucid mastery.⁶

What exactly one poet learns, either consciously or unconsciously, from another poet is notoriously difficult to quantify. All poets seek the establishment of their distinct, unique voice, gradually accreting perspectives and themes whilst simultaneously borrowing from the dominant movements, motifs and individuals of their contemporary time, what Seamus Heaney refers to as 'a ring of truth in the medium, the sounding out of inner workings, the sense of being in the presence of a self-absorbed and undistracted endeavour'.⁷ In his essay 'Patrick Kavanagh's Comic Vision', Kennelly admires the 'simplicity that stems from a totally coherent

⁶ Brendan Kennelly, *Green Townlands* (Leeds: University Bibliographic Press, 1963), p. 6.

⁷ John McDonagh and Stephen Newman (eds), *Remembering Michael Hartnett* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p.11.

and lucid vision',⁸ and a good deal of his own poetry is characterised by this desire to strip away the excesses of expression in favour of an accessible, tangible form and imagery. What Kennelly has gleaned from Baudelaire and Rimbaud is less obvious but no less important. In his introduction to Christopher Isherwood's translation of Baudelaire's various prose writings, *Intimate Journals*, T.S. Eliot brilliantly summarises what he perceives to be Baudelaire's outstanding contribution to the development of nineteenth century poetry:

It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery in the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity* – presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself – that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men.⁹

Eliot's perceptive elevation of Baudelaire's use of concrete and local imagery to the level of a rare sensory and emotional intensity is an insight that could equally be applied to Kennelly. In his poetry, Kennelly consistently uses the ordinary, commonplace images of his childhood to portray the intensity of life as he experienced it. Equally, these often simple poems, revolving around the everyday activities of his village community, are imbued with the timeless significance that only a carefully constructed casualness can achieve. Although he is probably better known for his rural poems, Kennelly is an important poetic chronicler of Dublin, where he has lived for over forty years. For example, his 1995 epic sequence *Poetry My Arse* foregrounds a Dublin packed with begrudgers, chancers, spoofers, liars and hypocrites, and is undoubtedly one of the funniest, sharply observed and overlooked portraits of, as Eliot put it, 'the sordid life of a great metropolis'. Eliot's wonderfully simple and perceptive concept of the *first intensity* captures the essential power and effectiveness of poetry. Whatever about the craft of the poet, in terms of the symmetry of vowels, syntax and punctuation, a poem works if it can move the reader to a level of understanding that makes this infinitely complex world a more tangible reality. The attempt to elevate the ordi-

⁸ Ake Persson, *Journey Into Joy* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p.112.

⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*. Translated by Christopher Isherwood (London: Blackmore Press, 1989) p. ii.

nary into the universal is one of the most obvious connections between Kennelly and Baudelaire and the latter's admission that 'je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit'¹⁰ parallels Kennelly's assertion that 'poetry is a gift that challenges and questions everything, including self'.¹¹

At his best, Kennelly presents an uncluttered, uncompromising series of images, complimented by a simple, persuasive and effective form, in which the ordinary, unspectacular experiences of rural life speak to a universality of human experiences, and there can be little doubt that it is in these poems that the influence of Baudelaire can be most readily accessed. For example, in 'That Look', a much anthologised poem first published in Kennelly's 1980 collection *The Boats Are Home*, the evocation of a dirty, cold farmyard and the quick, remorseless killing of a rat by a wire terrier is carried forward in spare, descriptive language, devoid of adjectives and adverbs. The power and intensity of the imagery is entirely complimented by the steady iambic rhythm which drives the poem forward, a rhythm perfectly in harmony with the ordinariness of the rodent's grisly death. In his *Intimate Journals*, Baudelaire writes of the primacy of 'order and symmetry',¹² in not only the construction of poetry but as 'primal needs of the human spirit', a view he based on his contemplation of a large ship in motion. He notes the synchronization of the ship's construction and in particular focuses on the 'intricacy and harmony' of the ship as it glides through the water. He remarks upon the 'real elements of the object', the combination of vast quantities of steel, plastic and wood that occur and reoccur in specific curves and designs. From this contemplation he posits the idea that the poetic endeavour should similarly aspire towards a 'perfectly harmonised entity' in which language, form and theme become an organic whole, one inseparable from the other.

Paradoxically, however, each element of the poem can be identified and the internal workings quantified and measured, but it is in their overall construction that the effectiveness of the general work becomes apparent. Again, the very fact that Baudelaire regularly chose the long prose

¹⁰ C.A. Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹¹ Brendan Kennelly, *Familiar Strangers* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2004), p. 20.

¹² Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, p.18.

poem as a vehicle for poetic expression links him with Kennelly's preferred epic sequence in which dozens of poems are thematically and narratively linked in such a way as to disrupt the conventional generic expectations of the reader. Indeed, this subvention of the genres of poetry and prose was a foundational aesthetic principal in Baudelaire's work, exemplifying his doctrine of surprise: 'après le plaisir d'être étonné, il n'en est pas de plus grand que causer une surprise'¹³. This generic dislocation has to be viewed in the context of Baudelaire's overall intellectual agenda in his prose poems, in which, according to Sonya Stephens, 'the texts are a continuum of different views, of conflicting perspectives, as mobile and as unstable as the clouds'¹⁴. Indeed, it could certainly be argued that in the poems and letters of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud lie the roots for the emergence of the French schools which were to dominate the intellectualisation and theorisation of language studies for a good deal of the 20th century.

Indeed, Baudelaire's reflection on the aesthetic uniformity and beauty of the ship in his *Intimate Journals* are very similar in both theme and style to Roland Barthes' more famous 1957 essay on the Citroen DS 19, a seminal text in the development of 20th century structuralist thinking. Barthes short essay, entitled 'The New Citroën', celebrated the production, in 1955, of the DS 19, nicknamed the *Déesse*, a car noted for its futuristic aerodynamic styling and advanced technology. The influence of Baudelaire's earlier reflections on the imperious beauty of the ship in motion is palpable in Barthes' essay and many parallels can be drawn between these two important pieces of work. Where Baudelaire sees 'order and symmetry' allied to 'intricacy and harmony' as the dominant aesthetic feature of the ship, Barthes notes a 'transformation of life into matter'¹⁵ in the shape of the DS. The smooth, curved lines of the car, in which the welding and bolting are discretely hidden, prompt Barthes to claim that a new era in design has arrived, the progression being from 'a world 'where elements are welded to a world where they are juxtaposed and hold together by sole virtue of their wondrous shape'.¹⁶ Similarly,

¹³ Claude Pichois, *Charles Baudelaire – Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 2 vols., p. 323.

¹⁴ Sonya Stephens, *Baudelaire's Prose Poems – The Practice and Politics of Irony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 21.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973), p.88.

¹⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, pp. 88-9.

Baudelaire notes the second order of signification in the design of the ship, building on the already acknowledged symmetry and harmony of its construction, when he notes the 'successive multiplication and generation of all the curves and imaginary figures described in space',¹⁷ a process whereby the ship transcends its physical construction to embody broader mythological aspirations of unity and precision. Both Baudelaire and Barthes appear to be deconstructing that which appears to be whole into its composite, physical parts, thereby denuding myth of arguably its greatest power, namely the ability to disguise ideology as part of the natural, accepted order of society. Equally, then, this deconstruction can be applied to poetry, in which the poet can recognise the crucial role played by a recognisable and quantifiable form in the construction of the poetic conceit.

This close attention, one could almost say obsession, with form characterises Baudelaire's musings on the nature of poetry writing. For Kennelly, there is a similar if redirected passion for the perfect poetic structure. It is clear from Kennelly's earliest poetic publications that he is engaging with Baudelaire's distinction between the 'dessin physiognomique' and the 'dessin de création',¹⁸ and this engagement is one that he has continued throughout his career. Nearly every poet will, at one time or another, experiment with form, and Kennelly has ranged over the historical epic, the ballad, the sonnet and the epigram in the attempt to strike what he refers to as the 'true note'. Again mindful of Baudelaire's legacy, Kennelly has often eschewed the application of a recognisable regular form altogether, relying upon his astute knowledge of rhythm and its melodic undertones to produce an often unexpected response in the reader. Indeed, the more this is explored, the more fascinating the connections appear. In 1865, the 21 year-old Paul Verlaine published a series of articles in the magazine *l'Art* where he praises the bold, imaginative and increasingly free-verse work of Baudelaire, and these articles were later referred to by Arthur Rimbaud as significant in his poetic development. In 1871, Rimbaud encouraged his fellow poets to 'trouvez une langue' - 'find a language...this language will be of the soul and for the soul, summing up everything, perfumes, sounds, colours, thought seizing thought and extending it'. This move towards a less formulaic poetics

¹⁷ Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, p. 45.

was paralleled later in Ireland principally in the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh, when he advocated the local over the national as well as a stylistic move away from dominant poetic forms. Indeed his magnificent 1942 poem *The Great Hunger*, one of the seminal poems in the development of contemporary Irish poetry, was given a mixed critical reaction, and the February 15 review by Roibeard O'Farachain from *The Irish Times* refers to one of 'Kavanagh's old faults' as 'a lack of form', noting the poet's 'blindness to the fascination of the stanza'¹⁹. Clearly, even as late as the 1940s, the critical responses to a poetics that challenged and manipulated traditional forms was luke warm at best. Baudelaire's chief legacy, therefore, as acknowledged by Kennelly, lies in his championing of the power of words and their innate ability to define and refine our perception of the world. This in itself is hardly radical, but placed in the context of a parallel shift in what was considered as suitable material for poetic enquiry, a clear platform for the emergence of a less formulaic and more locally based poetics begins to emerge. Given this, it is perhaps surprising that more Irish poets fail to acknowledge the role played by Baudelaire and Rimbaud in the increased democratisation of poetry throughout the 19th century, a process that was to find a more complex expression in the Modernist literary movement of the early 20th century.

The fact that Kennelly has cited Arthur Rimbaud as another of his seminal influences appears, on the surface, to be a natural progression from his interest in Baudelaire. In a letter to Paul Demeny in May, 1871, Rimbaud remarks: '*Baudelaire est le premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu*' (trans. 'Baudelaire is the first visionary, the king of poets, and a true god'). Rimbaud constantly referred to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a seminal text in his development as a poet and there are strong Baudelairean undertones in his 1886 collection *Les Illuminations*, particularly in his desire to write what for many critics was a revolutionary style of free-verse poetry. Cecil Hackett identifies Rimbaud's central theme as the 'alternation and conflict between forces of destruction and creation' while his dominant stylistic features are detailed as 'vivid images, dynamic and rapidly changing rhythms, swift transitions from short sentences to sustained rhetoric, abruptness and finality of utterance'.²⁰ This emphasis on the clear, unambiguous image, underscored with an unobtru-

¹⁹ *The Irish Times*, February 21, 1942.

²⁰ Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction*, p.51.

sive, natural rhythm that is designed to engender a vitality and tangibility into the poem, is an element of Rimbaud's aesthetic that is apparent in Kennelly's statement that 'what matters is not time but intensity'.²¹ Of course these sentiments are not entirely new, given that as early as 1802, in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth wrote of 'the real language of nature' being the desired goal of poetry, and asking the question 'how, then, can the poet's words differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel so vividly and see clearly?'²² Rimbaud's 1886 work, *Une Saison en enfer*, is a model of personal reflection and self-laceration, the archetypal self-analysis that characterises much of what passes for Modernist literature. The book is dominated by Rimbaud's attempt to articulate and occasionally reconcile the dominant antitheses that characterise his perception of the world, juxtapositions that Hackett describes as obsessions with 'God and Satan, Good and Evil, Sin and Innocence, Past and Future, Body and Mind, and at least thirty other antithetical couples'.²³ Rimbaud himself is playfully elusive in all of this, acknowledging 'Je suis caché et je ne le suis pas',²⁴ his feeling of being lost merely adding to the wonderful ambiguity of so much of *Une Saison en enfer*. Equally, in the 'Acenote', the introduction to *Poetry My Arse*, Kennelly celebrates what he refers to as 'the unique vitality derived from feeling a bit lost'²⁵ and the style of this introduction, as well as many of Kennelly's other introductions to his work, echo Rimbaud's epigrammatic comments on the nature of the human condition. Rimbaud states that 'La vie est la farce à mener par tous',²⁶ while Kennelly notes that 'In Dublin, the joke is king because the reality of any person, event or achievement can be measured by the extent to which he or she is parodied, twisted and caricatured'.²⁷ Both Rimbaud and Kennelly, perhaps somewhat disingenuously, continually attempt to elide the importance of the ego in the poetic exercise, a move ultimately designed to place the

²¹ Kennelly, *Breathing Spaces*, p. 12.

²² M.H. Abrams et.al. (eds), *Norton Anthology of English literature, Sixth Edition, Volume Two* (New York: Norton and Co., 1993), p. 151.

²³ Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction*, p. 87.

²⁴ Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction*, p. 90.

²⁵ Brendan Kennelly, *Poetry My Arse* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), 15.

²⁶ Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction*, p.91.

²⁷ Kennelly, *Poetry My Arse*, p. 16.

text at the forefront of the interpretive engagement between poet and reader.

The link between Kennelly, Baudelaire and Rimbaud becomes more apparent when one examines the dominant concerns apparent in the work of each poet. Kennelly has long set himself against social conventions and norms, resisting the tendency towards social and cultural labelling while railing against the hypocritical nature of historical constructs. His anger, like Rimbaud's, is often clearly directed towards a particular target, and there is a strong inference in the longer poems of each poet that they need the discipline of poetry in order to give their invective a sharper focus. In his 1871 poem 'L'Homme juste', Rimbaud rails against the hypocrisies of those who set themselves up as the moral guardians of the state, in almost precisely the same way that Kennelly attacks a variety of social pretensions in his 1980 poem 'Six of One'. Kennelly's clever poem isolates six manifestations of the social and moral hypocrisy that so infuriated Rimbaud. In a particularly Irish context, he sets his sights on, amongst others, the body politic who have used an unquestioning acceptance of a brutal nationalism to establish themselves as the arbiters of historical hermeneutics, portraying themselves as 'pregnant with honour in service to The Cause'²⁸. This zeal is allied to a religious pragmatism that transforms the collective faith of a people into yet another arm of state control, again disallowing any critical reflection on the role of the individual in the construction of identity. 'Six of One' is a powerful indictment of the Irish version of Baudelaire's 'l'homme juste' and it is perhaps fitting that, as the least man standing, so to speak, the last word should be left to Kennelly:

The area is limited, it is true.
 His knowledge of the area is not.
 Right from the start, he knew what to do
 And how to do it. All the fish he caught
 Were salmon of knowledge and not once
 Did he burn his thumb although he touched the fire
 Of minds zealous as his own. God's a dunce
 When the expert pronounces in his sphere
 For he has scoured the fecund libraries

²⁸ Brendan Kennelly, *Familiar Strangers* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2004), p. 317.

Till each one yielded all its special riches.
Prometheus, overworked and undersexed,
Files in his mind the succulent clarities
Knowing, from the ways of pricks and bitches,
Living is a footnote to the authentic text.²⁹

²⁹ Kennelly, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 316.

Sarah Nolan

Chapter Eleven: Modern Living, Modern Loving - Baudelaire and Sirr

In this chapter I will examine and connect two treatments of the city, that of Charles Baudelaire and Peter Sirr. I hope to map out what the city represents for these two poets, and discover why it is so recurrent and resonant in their work. Both use the city to locate man and his passage through the mundane. For both it is a place where woman is discovered, rediscovered and abandoned. Man has lost track of who he is and in trying to discover his own identity, finds woman. Woman is comfort, confusion and conundrum. While man neither fully understands himself, or woman, woman is a means by which he gets a bit closer to himself and to self-comprehension. The city becomes a way of life and a part of living, it is character and place, part of every city citizen's possessions and personality. Baudelaire's 'Fourmillante cité' swarms again in Sirr's 'grubby city', both defined by the spectres that haunt them and the insecurity and instability of their inhabitants. These dwellers are unsure of their reality and the cities' streets and traits are the only measure of their existence; the corners at which they turn, falter, fall and through which they retrace their steps in search of meaning. Baudelaire's treatment and exposure of the city brought it into its modern metaphorical being, a usage that would be developed by poets such as Sirr. T.S. Eliot wrote, "from Baudelaire I learned first [...] the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic".¹

Baudelaire dedicates the *Tableaux Parisiens* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Paris and shows the reader the bizarre spectrum of images that

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.126.

are needed to portray the 'Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves'.² This is a city of stark contrasts where 'le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant'³, but also one where even 'l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements'.⁴ Baudelaire praises the feelings, 'tendre et mélancolique', that can be used to portray real, modern life in his *Curiosités Esthétiques*⁵ and this can be linked with his views on pain and pleasure. Pain and pleasure, when mixed, represent the duality of modern city life, moments of happiness swallowed by periods of desolation and regret. Baudelaire will also use these contrasting poles to create his montage of woman, one whose colours and tones are often interchangeable with those of the city.

Elation and a sense of wild discovery in Sirr's city streets are also often overshadowed by the banal and mind-numbing routine. So much is the city a part of everyday routine and a character in its inhabitants' lives that Sirr finds himself using the city as a means of expressing his feelings and as a measure of his despair and helplessness, 'my blood / chatters, my bones cry out / my eyes feed on the noise of trees, my voice is a city / sunk in sand'.⁶ The mundanity of the city surrounds him, 'the wheeze of buses / bearing names to the suburbs' and yet there is some fantasy.⁷ Although his 'journey home in darkness' is 'through mystery suburbs', he sees 'the city splayed before' him 'like a toy', something he can turn and examine, yet daren't break, roads to run and march on and hear his image echoed back to him.⁸ The 'faubourgs brumeux' of Paris are mirrored in Sirr's poem "Cabbage" where a 'song of Rathmines, [a] song of Rathgar' is a 'song of lavish ugliness' due to the 'expense spared' by the landlords who never find themselves in the 'hell of their own furnishings'.⁹ Sirr's

² Charles Baudelaire, "Les Septs Vieillards", in *Tableaux Parisiens* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p.87. (All Baudelaire references will be from the *Œuvres complètes* unless otherwise stated. All poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* will be named, and, when referred to for the first time, will be followed by the name of the section from which they are taken.)

³ Baudelaire, "Les Septs Vieillards", p.87.

⁴ Baudelaire, "Les Petites Vieilles", *Tableaux Parisiens*, p.89.

⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques, L'Art Romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p.62.

⁶ Peter Sirr, "Gospels", *Bring Everything* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2000), p.36.

⁷ Sirr, "Detail", *Bring Everything*, p.46.

⁸ Sirr, "The Beautiful Engines", *Bring Everything*, p.47.

⁹ Sirr, "Cabbage", *Bring Everything*, p.49.

Dublin is real, yet his eyes are open to images of the unreal, to moments when he finds 'the cities gone, the roads unpeeled', the future of his habitation momentarily unclear, his foot afraid to fall into some unknown gutter.¹⁰

For Sirr, love itself is grafted into the inclines and twists of the city streets. The city acts as witness to, and participant in, various acts of love and betrayal. In Paris, women are dark and destructive, strange and seemingly indomitable. Baudelaire dominates them with his words, with city settings and city comparisons, and with an adoration that focuses on, and is preoccupied by, the fragmented woman. Sirr's city woman is also shot in detail. The lens that focuses on patterns of streets and canals absorbs her into its light and freezes moments as memories. Revisiting these preserved zooms is simultaneous to and equated with walking through the streets again. The streets are the backdrop and setting and costume, the wallpaper and clothing, the touches and kisses. Women are intrinsically linked with Baudelaire's Paris and, although sometimes distanced, they provide an escape from the boredom and oblivion of city life. Sirr wants assurance, wants to 'prove this city real',¹¹ and uses women to do so, while in Baudelaire's city 'Les mystères partout coulent',¹² waiting to be understood or rescued and made real. To discover the connection between Baudelaire and Sirr one must walk on 'graves set up above the ground', on pavements strewn with human debris.¹³

It is the evils of modern life that Baudelaire wants to present to city dwellers, and to the rest of the modern world. The harshness, barrenness, sordidness of what is portrayed is meant to cause unease, but unease because the reader has become more self-aware, has recognized glaringly his or her modern environment and actual city in the poetry, 'Horrible vie! Horrible ville!'.¹⁴ Baudelaire said in "Le chien et le Flaçon" that to the public 'il ne faut jamais présenter des parfums délicats qui l'exaspèrent, mais les ordures soigneusement choisies'.¹⁵ He knew that the reader had to be brought into the poem, to see him or herself, in order

¹⁰ Sirr, "Songs in Winter and Spring", *Bring Everything*, p.68.

¹¹ Peter Sirr, "Smoke", *Talk, Talk* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1987), p.30.

¹² Baudelaire, "Les Septs Vieillards", p.87.

¹³ Sirr, "A Legacy", *Talk, Talk*, p.61.

¹⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "À une heure du matin", *Le Spleen de Paris (Petits poèmes en prose)*, p.287.

¹⁵ Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.284.

that the reality of his or her situation in city life be realized. Baudelaire's Paris was a city full of the living dead, people disillusioned and no longer hopeful, the heart of the city affecting the hearts and hopes of its occupants.

Baudelaire depicted the change that his city had undergone, 'Le vieux Paris n'est plus' and sighs, 'hélas', that the shape of the city changes faster than the human heart.¹⁶ The dilapidated buildings and weeds become representative of society's decay and the collapse of values. In "Le Cygne" Baudelaire continues to lament the sorry state of the present, and his own sorry state, 'Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N'a bougé'.¹⁷ The new palaces, old districts, and scaffolding all become allegories and mix with memories. Baudelaire talks of 'le chaos des vivantes cités', of Paris' swarming scene, 'fourmillant tableau', which does nothing to rouse him or anyone else from the engulfing melancholy.¹⁸ Everyone is caught up in the 'délire officiel d'une grande ville', something which affects especially 'le cerveau du solitaire', and it is on his own experience, and so on that of the individual, that Baudelaire focuses on.¹⁹ Watching 'un fantôme débile', 'cet être fragile',²⁰ he concludes that all the souls have come from the same hell, heading towards the same 'but inconnu'.²¹ Located and living 'dans les labyrinthes pierreux d'une capitale',²² night brings the inhabitants one step closer to the realization that "tout est néant, excepté la mort".²³

The city is home to thieves and prostitutes, thieves who steal to clothe their mistresses, and prostitutes who move like enemies, waiting to attack as they lurk 'au sein de la cité de fange'.²⁴ Most of the inhabitants 'n'ont jamais vécu', and are caught in eternal suffering.²⁵ Baudelaire focuses in particular on the female victim: 'Mères au Coeur saignant, courtisanes ou saintes', wives overloaded with suffering by husbands, by

¹⁶ Baudelaire, "Le Cygne", *Tableaux Parisiens*, p.85.

¹⁷ Baudelaire, "Le Cygne", p.85.

¹⁸ Baudelaire, "Les Petites Vieilles", p.89.

¹⁹ Baudelaire, "Un Plaisant", *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.279.

²⁰ Baudelaire, "Les Petites Vieilles", p.89.

²¹ Baudelaire, "Les Septs Vieillards", p.87.

²² Baudelaire, "Le Crépuscule du Soir", *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.312.

²³ Baudelaire, "Le Tir et le cimetière", *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.351.

²⁴ Baudelaire, "Le Crépuscule du soir", p.94.

²⁵ Baudelaire, "Le Crépuscule du soir", p.94.

children, all of whom could make ‘un fleuve avec leurs pleurs’, women who have become dislocated monsters, insulted by passing drunks who fail to see that these women ‘ce sont encore des âmes’.²⁶ This gruesome portrayal of woman as wreck, as beings who are ‘bossus / Ou tordus’, will be relevant further on, in a discussion of Baudelaire’s choice, again, of a female character in the poem “Le Masque”. Ironically, the hardened crucibles of these women’s eyes attract him, ‘ces yeux mystérieux ont d’invincibles charmes’. Suckled by Paris, by ‘Infortune’, Baudelaire has lost hope, in the same way that over time city living has killed off the sparkle that once hung in the eyes of the ‘Monstres brisés’.²⁷ ‘La méchanceté’ that lurks in old men’s eyes makes him draw back.²⁸ While exposing the hellish reality of the city he disgusts even himself with the portrayals of pained, hopeless and almost invisible citizens who are lost in the ‘brouillard sale et jaune’.²⁹

Baudelaire sees frail ghosts crossing Paris who are the ‘Débris d’humanité’ and are ready for the next world, ‘ombres ratatinées, [...] le dos bas’,³⁰ ‘condamnés à espérer toujours’.³¹ It seems that on earth no escape is possible, that only through death can these city dwellers escape the harsh reality of decay that they have contributed to. Baudelaire exclaims, ‘J’ai vu l’horreur de mon taudis’ and knows he must pull his readers out of the deadness, out of the ‘triste monde engourdi’ and into consciousness.³² For Baudelaire boredom is presented as the worst possible vice, an enemy in modern city living, admitting, ‘Oui! Ce taudis, ce séjour de l’éternel ennui, est bien le mien’.³³ It is a vice which permits death and decay, a vacuum in which any evil may be committed. Ennui allowed the invasion of all kinds of sin, and bred banality and despair. It is comparable to the dullness and lacklustre of Sirm’s city dwellers’ lives of routine and impermanence.

The *Spleen et Idéal* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* contains four poems entitled “Spleen”, all centred around boredom. These poems explic-

²⁶ Baudelaire, “Les Petites Vieilles”, p.89.

²⁷ Baudelaire, “Les Petites Vieilles”, p.89.

²⁸ Baudelaire, “Les Septs Vieillards”, p.87.

²⁹ Baudelaire, “Les Septs Vieillards”, p.87.

³⁰ Baudelaire, “Les Petites Vieilles”, p.89.

³¹ Baudelaire, “Chacun sa Chimera”, *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.283.

³² Baudelaire, “Rêve Parisien”, *Tableaux Parisiens*, p.103.

³³ Baudelaire, “La Chambre Double”, *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.280.

itly link the city and boredom. 'Les faubourgs brumeux' contain a population plagued by death, physical and mental.³⁴ Individuals are stranded in the monstrous form that is the city, prey to boredom. Baudelaire presents an image of the expansion of boredom, 'L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité, / Prend les proportions de l'immortalité'.³⁵ Boredom is like a vicious absolute that silently drags one down. Like 'Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux', those affected are left unmarked upon the map with an eternity of waiting ahead of them, accompanied by a millenium of memories, each, like Baudelaire 'un cimetière abhorré de la lune'.³⁶ In "Elévation" Baudelaire talks of a place above and beyond the city and nature, and most importantly, one untouched by the curse of boredom, 'Derrière les ennuis et les vastes chagrins'.³⁷ The city is used to locate man and his passage through the mundane. Baudelaire unveils the dangers of the city, of boredom, points out the destruction that it leads to and the endless cycle that it creates.

In Sirr's "Alternative Sites", the waking, walking phantoms of Baudelaire's Paris are 'wheezing towards Rathmines', people lost in meaningless routine, 'The extras lumbering from the pubs'.³⁸ The cranes are living brothers of the men, 'Neurotic monsters' and equal city creatures, 'spluttering' in origin while their human counterparts stumble in search of 'somebody's affordable myth'. Never satisfied, because they are living according to other people's standards and chasing others' expectations, their lives inevitably run into a cycle of routine brought on by boredom, just as is the case for Baudelaire's city sufferers. They are 'fitful', and like those who control them 'go berserk on cue'. The mindless ritual of monotonous and mundane routine, the careful Hoovering of floor after floor by workers, marks the continuance of something 'tacky' and at the same time 'prehistoric'. The developments and modernisations in the city are doing little for the average being. 'This could be a breakthrough' but evidently it's not.³⁹ Things are washed in 'the costly / Cleanliness' of modern homes in the 'confident city' that thrives on 'other people's

³⁴ Baudelaire, "Spleen", LXXV, *Spleen et Idéal*, p.72.

³⁵ Baudelaire, "Spleen", LXXVI, p.73.

³⁶ Baudelaire, "Spleen", LXXVI, p.73.

³⁷ Baudelaire, "Elévation", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.11.

³⁸ Peter Sirr, "Alternative Sites", *Marginal Zones* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1984), p.17.

³⁹ Sirr, "Alternative Sites", *Marginal Zones*, p.17.

wants'.⁴⁰ The individual is left to settle for convention, and forced to conform, pushed continually 'One estate nearer / Some ultimate commuter belt'. The clothes on the ironing board are waiting 'to have their old lives rubbed out', and it seems that with this action another week of humdrum life and living will be effaced.⁴¹ City living has wiped out individuality and leaves everyone clambering to attain some ideal standard of living that does not necessarily guarantee happiness.

Like Baudelaire, Sirr notices a city that deteriorates, and like Baudelaire's Paris, Sirr's Dublin clouds its contents with melancholy, 'Our city declines, the world is still bleak'.⁴² Sirr's citizens are caught in a limbo, trying to move forward into something new, trying to force out the next word, begging to be heard, 'Listen, I am / trying to come back to you as the line / that ran on'.⁴³ City lives are being half-lived with people 'in rooms for the never completed'. Also in the poem "Office Hours", Sirr mentions how 'working lives continue in their own time'.⁴⁴ Time spent working, lost in routine and slave to various machines is time spent in parallel, absent. 'The workers disappear into their buildings' and another day is disgarded, like 'the broken chair / no one has yet rendered secure / pending disposal or repair'.⁴⁵ All of life is 'waiting / like an opened flask' yet seems to be escaping into air that carries it away before it has pronounced itself.⁴⁶ The 'city multiplies' and, as in Baudelaire's Paris, 'the dead walk their streets again'.⁴⁷

While city life is to be lived and remembered, nature is to be imagined and idealised, something to be juxtaposed with a defiled, derailed city. It is a level of escape possible before the final escape. Mirroring in a strange way the pervasive character of boredom, nature takes on proportions of the extreme in "Correspondances". Nature is 'l'expansion des choses infinies', it is 'Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté'. For Baudelaire 'la Nature est un temple', somewhere which echoes the reverence of sweet smelling oboes, somewhere which confounds and at the

⁴⁰ Sirr, "A Song from Suburbia", *Marginal Zones*, p.30.

⁴¹ Sirr, "A Song from Suburbia", *Marginal Zones*, p.30.

⁴² Sirr, "Beginnings", *Talk, Talk*, p.18.

⁴³ Sirr, "Beginnings", *Talk, Talk*, p.18.

⁴⁴ Peter Sirr, "Office Hours", *Nonetheless* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2004), p.18.

⁴⁵ Sirr, "Office Hours", *Nonetheless*, p.18.

⁴⁶ Sirr, "Beginnings", *Talk, Talk*, p.18.

⁴⁷ Sirr, "Home", *Nonetheless*, p.27.

same time comforts the senses.⁴⁸ For Sirr it is also other-worldly, the forest a place where 'a reign endures', 'Someone's lordship of small noises'. Sirr, like Baudelaire, sees nature as a place of poetry, considers 'ash-*lied* and oak-elegy'.⁴⁹ Sirr's "The King in the Forest" shows someone of city mentality caught out by nature, 'The limbed light comes through the trees / I am the startled interloper'.⁵⁰ Here nature is elusive and avoids words although man continually tries to mark it onto paper. Man is the intruder, unsure of himself out of his city surrounds. In "Correspondances" man uses nature for lyrics, and wanders past nature's sounds, 'L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles', concentrating instead on its dictionary of metaphors. Nature is an extension for language, a vehicle that extends and transports. It is something to 'stay inside and watch', something to examine and compare with already collected images and definitions, 'like something dreamed / Or the idea of a tree, imperfectly grasped'.⁵¹

The idea of a mask is useful when trying to qualify Baudelaire's attitudes towards women, because women compel and revolt him alternately. The city remains quite separate from nature, which sneaks in to punctuate the buildings and confinement, in the form of a canal, or fog. Nature is mingled harshly and uncomfortably with reality in Sirr's "In the Japanese Garden", where the rubbish of city life, 'fag ends and coke cans', is scattered about what could have been a sanctuary.⁵² Just as nature plays the role of 'other' in comparisons between the city's cement and stagnation and nature's purity and originality, so woman provides the 'other' against whom man can gauge his progress through the city. Woman's reactions, desires and ideals are different from the male poet's and, for Baudelaire in particular, often incomprehensible, and too quickly judged to be inferior. Like nature, woman is employed as a metaphor for blossom and decay, as a stock of beautiful, yet repulsive, images to be ravaged as Baudelaire and Sirr map out the reality of their modern city. For Sirr, woman offers a real possibility of happiness, and Sirr values woman accordingly. She is imbued with melancholy and temptation, as by Baudelaire, but becomes more human than Baudelaire's women, while retaining her mys-

⁴⁸ Baudelaire, "Correspondances", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.11.

⁴⁹ Sirr, "The King in the Forest", *Marginal Zones*, p.11.

⁵⁰ Sirr, "The King in the Forest", *Marginal Zones*, p.11.

⁵¹ Sirr, "The Collector's Marginalis", *Marginal Zones*, p.26.

⁵² Sirr, "In the Japanese Garden", *Marginal Zones*, p.18.

tery and while stirring in the poet a will to plan carefully his mode and method of seduction and attack. In Sirr's poetry one gets the sense that he wants to discover himself, and that he uses women and cities to do this, visiting and revisiting, forming impressions, taking some things as precious and hoping to remain unmoved to a certain extent, despite the constant dislocation.⁵³

The idea of a mask is useful when trying to qualify Baudelaire's attitudes towards women, because women attract and revolt him in equal measure. This can perhaps be explained by the contradictory sentiments that Baudelaire felt as a child, 'l'horreur de la vie at l'extase de la vie', which are mixed in the poetic, yet sordid, city life depicted by the poet, and in the horror of intimacy that he reveals in his writing.⁵⁴ Baudelaire claims that 'l'artiste ne sort jamais de lui-même' and what he fears in leaving himself is losing himself in something or someone else, and so, he prefers refuge in a mistress or prostitute, where emotional dependence does not exist as it would in a relationship of committed love.⁵⁵ Baudelaire is open about these moments of intimacy in order to display the often unequal sides of the same intimate experience, and the disappointments that illusions or preconceptions of such unity can cause, especially in the context of the emotional decay and loneliness of the modern city: 'Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle, / Femme impure! L'ennui rend ton âme cruelle'.⁵⁶ In the short-story "Fanfarlo" the protagonist, who is 'a caricature of the young Baudelaire' among other things,⁵⁷ finds himself 'souvent seul dans son paradis, nul ne pouvant l'habiter avec lui'.⁵⁸ Having been inspired by Fanfarlo - 'il lui semblait voir l'infini derrière les yeux clairs de cette beauté' - he is unable to bring her to the heavens, to the Idéal where his love reigns, no matter how he seizes or drags her, 'elle restait toujours en arrière'.⁵⁹ She finds in him 'l'attrait de la nouveauté' but each is nevertheless solitary, and this leads to his love becom-

⁵³ Sirr, "Smoke", *Talk, Talk*, p.30.

⁵⁴ Baudelaire, "Mon Cœur Mis à Nu", *Journaux Intimes*, p.703.

⁵⁵ Baudelaire, "Mon Cœur Mis à Nu", p.702.

⁵⁶ Baudelaire, "XXV", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.27.

⁵⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *The Poems in Prose*, edited, introduced and translated by Francis Scarfe. (London: Anvill Press Poetry, 1989), p.19.

⁵⁸ Baudelaire, "La Fanfarlo", *Essais et Nouvelles*, p.578.

⁵⁹ Baudelaire, "La Fanfarlo", p.577-8.

ing 'triste et malade de la mélancolie du bleu'.⁶⁰ Intimacy with women creates momentary wholeness, something physical which the mind can hold on to, but which opens one for a more profound emptiness, 'Après une débauche, on se sent toujours plus seul, plus abandonné'.⁶¹

Sirr recognizes woman as other, as something almost incomprehensible. In "A Tolerable Space" Sirr talks of 'her excitable figure marching in like a buyer'. He asks, 'What do women want of houses?', in an attempt to understand their desires.⁶² He observes women, sees what they hold to be ideal and valuable. He wants a head start, to gain an advantage in conquering and re-conquering the same woman. In poems such as "Routine Inquiries" woman is a place you seek, entwined in the streets, a place you map out, scale, graph, explore and leave, but with the intention of returning at a later date.⁶³ Sirr's understanding of woman is linked in his mind, through endless connections, with the city. The layout of a city becomes a guide to its women. He begins the line romantically with 'O', and then makes his request for the 'geography' of her town, 'squares to pin you down, maps to gauge'. He asks her, 'let me know [...] which streets run one way', in an attempt to chart the terrain of her body and the city it is equated to, to know the back streets and lanes as well as he knows the lines on her hand.⁶⁴ Sirr is willing to make an effort to get to know woman, as he would give time to familiarising himself with the layout and cultural idiosyncrasies of a certain city, 'We're learning a new language / To guide us through the strange / Territories of each other'.⁶⁵ He is impatient in his desire to plan his journey through the city, through woman, 'phone me now and let me know how many metres farther from the sky you lie'. Knowing the cityscape, 'the bliss of geography', will allow Sirr to measure his impact, watch his own success unfold in a place from which he has eliminated the danger of the unknown.⁶⁶ It is through the city that he is validated, it is the only true measure of life that he and Baudelaire know. Sirr needs the city to react to him, so much is it part of his real life and psyche. As he shouts 'I love you' in Dutch he demands,

⁶⁰ Baudelaire, "La Fanfarlo", p.577-8.

⁶¹ Baudelaire, "Fusées. Hygiène. Projets", *Journaux Intimes*, p.668.

⁶² Sirr, "A Tolerable Space", *Talk, Talk*, p.25.

⁶³ Sirr, "Routine Inquiries", *Talk, Talk*, p.29.

⁶⁴ Sirr, "Routine Inquiries", p.29.

⁶⁵ Sirr, "Journeying Inland", *Marginal Zones*, p.38.

⁶⁶ Sirr, "Routine Inquiries", p.29.

'which rooftops shudder when I call', because, while abhorring the monotony of city life, he needs the city to respond to him, like woman, to witness his life.⁶⁷ The city is a character, just as woman who walks in it.

Often in Baudelaire's poetry, woman and desire are equated with redness, with life and energy, something with which to momentarily combat 'ennui'. In "Sed non Satiata" he praises his black mistress Jeanne Duval, (on whom the 'aggressively sexy and immodest' character Fanfarlo was based),⁶⁸ referring to her as a 'Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuets'.⁶⁹ The blackness of his mistress becomes part of the fantasy because it reinforces the otherness of woman from the white poet. The woman is black and different, possesses a deep redness that is different and that he can only imagine. The fantasy created out of this woman is intensified by her comparison to a 'bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits' and a 'démon sans pitié'.⁷⁰ Baudelaire's views on women and on beauty are affected by the city surrounding him. The sense of boredom and futility that abound create in him an admiration for the gentleness and calm of melancholy, 'Une tête séduisante et belle [...] c'est une tête qui fait rêver à la fois, - mais d'une manière confuse, - de volupté et de tristesse'.⁷¹ The female face is 'une provocation d'autant plus attirante' the more that face is 'mélancolique'.⁷² The crowds in the city have given him a heightened sense of his own individuality and solitude and this has put a slant on how he views relations with others, particularly women. Women stand out dramatically as the other, as temptation, as the unavoidable which should have been avoided.

In "L'Idéal" he speaks of pale pink flowers which are nothing like his real and red desire, his 'rouge idéal'.⁷³ This redness, though, takes on a more morbid significance in poems such as "Les Bijoux" where it is associated with an eroticised death scene.⁷⁴ This fits in with Baudelaire's

⁶⁷ Sirr, "Routine Inquiries", p.29.

⁶⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *The Poems in Prose*, edited, introduced and translated by Francis Scarfe, p.20.

⁶⁹ Baudelaire, "Sed non Satiata", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.29.

⁷⁰ Baudelaire, "Sed non Satiata", p.29.

⁷¹ Baudelaire, "Fusées", p.657.

⁷² Baudelaire, "Fusées", p.657.

⁷³ Baudelaire, "l'Idéal", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.22.

⁷⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "Les Bijoux", *Pièces Condamnées Tirées des «Fleurs du Mal»*, p.158.

belief that extreme pain was equal to extreme pleasure, that both ‘Cruauté et volupté, sensations identiques, comme l’extrême chaud et l’extrême froid’, could provide an intense experience of pleasure.⁷⁵ Having mistresses or prostitutes as companions enabled Baudelaire to avoid the potential dangers of a more anchored relationship, and he would not be required to leave himself or belong to anyone else. In a similar way, Sirr’s movement from city to city is impulsive and unsettling, with woman remaining the constant amid the changing road maps and languages. The sudden arrivals and departures leave Sirr in control, woman is related to as a home you return to, that remains, waiting. In “Postscript” he asks, ‘Could we ever live, you and I, / safe from the trashy grief / of airports, train stations’. The ‘last nights in borrowed flats’ signal ‘absence’, but also herald return, the movement like an ‘impulsive flourish’ ‘across Europe’.⁷⁶

Love is an important theme in Baudelaire’s poetry, but not in the conventional sense. Long term love becomes boring or dangerous, as it compromises the poet’s ability to observe his surrounds in all their decay. Somehow, committed love would involve losing a connection with his simultaneously loved and hated city. Love, for Baudelaire, is often too much of a risk, as he explains, ‘tout amour est-il prostitution’.⁷⁷ The very nature of being a poet means that Baudelaire must leave himself and inhabit the thoughts and actions and feelings of others. To add to this the risk of losing himself in love is too much for him, ‘L’étude du beau est un duel où l’artiste crie de frayeur avant d’être vaincu’.⁷⁸ Baudelaire embraces his singular status among the crowds. He is capable of ‘peupler sa solitude’.⁷⁹ He declares in “Les Foules”, ‘Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu’il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui’. He cannot be stopped, ‘il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun’, ‘pour lui seul, tout est vacant’. The multitudes to be observed wandering the city aimlessly, or going about their business, are what intrigue him and inform him of what he is. He is capable of despising them, and himself, but recognises the ‘singulière ivresse de cette universelle communion’,

⁷⁵ Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, p.683.

⁷⁶ Sirr, “Postscript”, *Talk, Talk*, p.37.

⁷⁷ Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, p.692.

⁷⁸ Charles Baudelaire, “Le Confiteur de L’Artiste”, *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.278.

⁷⁹ Baudelaire, “Les Foules”, *Le Spleen de Paris*, p.291.

‘cette sainte prostitution de l’âme qui se donne tout entière [...] à l’inconnu qui passe’.⁸⁰

In Baudelaire’s “Sed non Satiata” the poet evades boredom through his mistress, his restlessness drinks from her eyes and so he is occupied. However momentarily, he transcends the monotony that is an inevitable evil of modern city life, and the partner, for she, as an individual, is immaterial to him in his pleasurable release, ‘ô femme, ô reine des péchés, [...] vil animal’.⁸¹ Baudelaire and Surr deliver images of a woman of flesh, something Baudelaire was chastised for, but Surr leaves woman more intact than Baudelaire does. By breaking woman up into bits, Baudelaire can confront different aspects of her beauty, ugliness or realness without being overwhelmed by a complete other. Eliane DalMolin’s remark that, in general, ‘the male body itself seldom appears in bits and pieces, enjoying, instead, its special status as the body of the poet’ can be very aptly applied to the work of both Surr, and especially, Baudelaire.⁸² In Baudelaire’s poem to a female passer-by, the woman’s calmness, amid the roar of a city street, is emphasised by ‘sa jambe de statue’.⁸³ Baudelaire does not compare her to a statue, but focuses on her statuesque leg. Her eyes and hands are fetishized. His poem “La Chevelure” concentrates completely on the beauty of a head of hair and many of Surr’s poems mention a woman’s hair, making it representative to the reader of the whole woman. To remember the woman is an attempt to put her together again, until she becomes a ‘collage of anachronistic parts’.⁸⁴

Sartre, in his essay on Baudelaire, says that the latter ‘was a voyeur and a fetishist precisely because such vices alleviated volupté, because they stood for possession at a distance’. This volupté, or desire, could be fulfilled and released safely, without leaving one’s own private sphere because it was ‘in a symbolical form’, because the ‘voyeur never leaves himself’.⁸⁵ Baudelaire, in *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu*, declared that ‘La femme est naturelle, c’est à dire abominable’ and therefore sees her as something

⁸⁰ Baudelaire, “Les Foules”, p.291.

⁸¹ Baudelaire, “Sed non Satiata”, *Spleen et Idéal*, p.29.

⁸² Eliane DalMolin, *Cutting the Body*, (New York: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p.18.

⁸³ Baudelaire, “À une passante”, *Tableaux Parisiens*, p.92.

⁸⁴ Eliane DalMolin, *Cutting the Body*, p.48.

⁸⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*. Translated by. Martin Turnell. (New York: New Directions Paperback, 1967), p.77.

to be feared because she is uncontrollable.⁸⁶ In *Fusées*, Baudelaire expressed terror and disgust at woman's desire, and ability, to consume food, drink and penis. Baudelaire is afraid of this absorption into the unknown and so finds it necessary to control woman, whether this is achieved through fragmentation of image or fantasy. Baudelaire's "Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne" expresses the poet's increasing desire for the woman in question as she remains quiet and spurns his attentions. Her quietness allows him space to create a fantasy, where he can climb 'aux assauts, / Comme après un cadavre un chœur de vermis-seaux'. The more she grows aloof and still, the more he feels he has the power to do with her what he will.⁸⁷ She becomes some kind of erotic ideal, a partner who may be devoured as one who is dead, because alive she is 'toujours vulgaire', that is to say the complete opposite of himself, 'le contraire du Dandy'.⁸⁸ To Sartre's mind, sex was something which gave Baudelaire the 'sensation of freedom and solitude'. He thought of 'sin in the form of eroticism' and saw boredom and the city as conditions which accommodated this sin.⁸⁹

Sirr's women also offer escape and, like Baudelaire, Sirr relishes moments of intimacy as capsules of memory. These shared moments are revisited more often by Sirr than Baudelaire, who uses women as a transitory respite from city oblivion, then loses them back to this oblivion. Sirr cherishes the same woman, and memories of her, 'having returned to haunt / my three weeks haunting of you here'.⁹⁰ In "Smoke" he also hopes 'to discover the one street you never found or in which / we somehow forgot to hold hands'. Here we sense Sirr's tenderness towards women, something not found so often in Baudelaire's poetry. His revisitation of time spent is linked with questions about the city. It's as if 'toy-town' may have been the location of these perfect, simple memories, and time is relying on place for verification. Sirr is an animal of the city, taking advantage of easily available flights from one to the other, in a way Baudelaire could not. He is also a product of woman, and reassures the one he visits, the one who lends him words, of his love, 'know me still your creature'.⁹¹ T.S. Eliot saw through Baudelaire's artistry in artificial

⁸⁶ Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, p.677.

⁸⁷ Baudelaire, "Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne", *Spleen et Idéal*, p.27.

⁸⁸ Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, p.677.

⁸⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p.78.

⁹⁰ Sirr, "Smoke", p.30.

form to identify the French poet's main objective: that he was 'searching for a form of life'.⁹² In *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu* Baudelaire states that 'il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan'.⁹³ Sirr joins Baudelaire in confronting old themes and images, making them new in their crude relevance to modern life. Both poets are seeking to portray the depressing boredom and unchanging routine of city life, while being seemingly unable to extricate themselves from the cities they live in, and in Sirr's case, those that he visits. Sirr needs more maps than Baudelaire but the city outline that is sketched and studied casts the same stark shadow, with woman emerging as temptation and possible hope. As Sirr remarks, 'the visible city's here to stay'.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Sirr, "Smoke", *Talk, Talk*, p.30.

⁹² T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p.424.

⁹³ Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, p.682.

⁹⁴ Sirr, "Le città invisible", *Talk, Talk*, p.39.

Sylvie Mikowski

Chapter Twelve: *The Barracks* de John McGahern et Flaubert

Bien que dans son autobiographie récemment publiée, *Memoir*,¹ McGahern n'accorde qu'une importance limitée à son éducation littéraire et artistique, se contentant de raconter sa découverte de la bibliothèque de ses voisins protestants, qui déclencha sa passion pour la lecture, on ne peut pas moins le considérer comme ce que l'anglais appelle « a writers' writer ». Il a reconnu dans plusieurs entretiens, dont un avec Liliane Louvel publié en 1995² qu'il ne serait pas devenu écrivain sans la rencontre avec les œuvres contenues dans cette bibliothèque, évoquant un souvenir de son enfance où, étant tellement absorbé dans la lecture d'un livre, ses sœurs purent lui retirer ses chaussures et lui poser un chapeau sur la tête sans qu'il ne réagisse-souvenir d'ailleurs raconté à peu près dans des termes identiques dans *Memoir*. Dans les différents entretiens que McGahern a pu donner au cours de sa carrière, ou les rares essais qu'il a publiés, il cite de multiples noms d'écrivains, irlandais bien sûr, comme Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Patrick Kavanagh, Samuel Beckett ou Joyce, mais aussi américains, comme Henry James, J.D. Salinger, Mark Twain ou Scott Fitzgerald, italiens, comme Pirandello ou Leonardo Sciascia, ainsi que des Français comme Céline, Proust, Camus, sans compter l'hommage au russe Tchekhov dans la nouvelle « The Beginning of an Idea », titre d'ailleurs traduit en français par « Les huîtres de Tchekhov ». ³ Cependant, mon propos ici n'est pas de repérer les citations directes ou indirectes des ces œuvres dans les romans de McGahern, ou de démontrer qu'il fait un usage conscient et systématique de l'intertextualité à la ma-

¹ John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber& Faber, 2005).

² « Entretien avec Liliane Louvel, Gilles Ménégaldo et Claudine Verley », in *La Licorne* (Poitiers : Université de Poitiers, 1995), p. 22.

³ *Les Huîtres de Tchekhov et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1985), traduction Alain Delahaye.

nière de certains romans contemporains dits « postmodernes » qui pratiquent le collage, le pastiche et la ré-écriture ; il ne s'agit pas non plus de retrouver chez lui une quelconque « angoisse de l'influence » susceptible de faire apparaître les étapes de son développement en tant qu'artiste.

Replacer McGahern dans la perspective des écrivains qu'il dit avoir beaucoup lus et aimés peut surtout nous aider à mieux appréhender son univers, à saisir sa vision du monde et de l'humanité, et surtout à comprendre et à décrire son projet esthétique. Dans ce but j'ai choisi de lire *The Barracks* à la lumière de Flaubert, dont McGahern cite, dans l'entretien avec Liliane Louvel, un des commentaires, selon lequel « it takes a strong feeling and clear thinking in order to find the right words », et dont la formulation en langue originale est : « bien écrire c'est à la fois bien sentir, bien penser et bien dire », ⁴ phrase empruntée par Flaubert à Buffon. On peut aussi s'interroger sur le choix de privilégier Flaubert par rapport à Proust qui semblerait pourtant s'imposer, à cause de l'importance pour ce dernier comme pour McGahern du matériau autobiographique à la source de l'écriture romanesque, comme la publication de *Memoir* l'a encore fait apparaître de manière éclatante. Mais Proust est aussi le peintre d'une société aristocratique parisienne extrêmement éloignée de celle évoquée par McGahern ; et la longue phrase proustienne, ainsi que l'ampleur de ce monument-cathédrale que constitue *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, n'ont rien en commun avec la sécheresse de la prose de McGahern ni avec la parcimonie avec laquelle il publia ses romans, qui se rapprochent en revanche de la peine extrême qu'il coûtait à Flaubert de terminer une nouvelle œuvre.

Lire McGahern et Flaubert en regard permet, en découvrant tout ce qui rassemble mais aussi éloigne les deux œuvres, d'appliquer au premier certains des concepts qui ont été utilisés pour le second ou même inventés par lui, tels que le « livre sur rien », « l'écrivain-artisan », « le roman de la médiocrité », « le roman immobile », « le psycho-récit », « le bovarysme », « l'art pur », « la haine du réalisme ». Quant au choix de me restreindre à *The Barracks* dans cette étude flaubertiste de McGahern, il se justifie d'abord par les liens thématiques flagrants qui rattachent ce roman à *Madame Bovary*, à tel point qu'on peut se demander si Elizabeth Reegan n'est pas une Emma Bovary irlandaise, et cela en dépit de différences évidentes dans le comportement des deux personnages. Mais *The Bar-*

⁴ Lettre à George Sand du 10-14 mars 1876.

racks est aussi le roman le plus classique de McGahern, au sens où il n'y a tenté aucune expérimentation formelle, comme il l'a fait dès le roman suivant, effort poursuivi d'œuvre en œuvre jusqu'à l'écriture d'un livre aussi singulier que *That They May Face the Rising Sun*.⁵ Dans *The Barracks*, McGahern s'appuie cependant sur tous les procédés du roman moderne - jeu sur la temporalité, creusement de la durée, focalisation interne, pauvreté de l'action - procédés tous inaugurés par Flaubert dans *Madame Bovary*. De même que le roman de Flaubert fut annexé malgré lui à l'école des réalistes et des naturalistes, la tentation est grande de s'arrêter à une classification de *The Barracks* comme chef d'œuvre naturaliste ; mais, comme c'est mon ambition de le montrer, cette appellation se révèle aussi limitative que pour Flaubert. Par-delà les comparaisons thématiques avec *Madame Bovary*, on verra que d'autres romans comme *L'Éducation sentimentale*, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, ou encore la nouvelle « Un Cœur simple » entrent également en résonance avec le premier roman de McGahern. Dans cette confrontation entre un auteur contemporain et un grand prédécesseur du dix-neuvième siècle, considéré comme un précurseur de la modernité, on fera émerger la continuité de l'un à l'autre d'une quête morale et esthétique d'une forme susceptible de transformer le matériau médiocre du quotidien en création artistique transcendant les limites d'une destinée individuelle à la fois banale et tragique.

Un des éléments principaux du socle commun entre les deux auteurs est la conscience que la littérature est l'expression de la société, et Flaubert comme McGahern sont les témoins d'une société en pleine transformation. La société décrite par Flaubert a connu la révolution populaire de 1848, qui s'est soldée par un échec, laissant la voie à des régimes autoritaires et répressifs que sont la Monarchie de Juillet et le Second Empire. Paris et les grandes villes voient l'ascension d'une classe bourgeoise qui promeut les valeurs de l'argent et de la rentabilité, tandis que les campagnes restent marquées par l'archaïsme et la stagnation. L'échec des utopies révolutionnaires et le triomphe du matérialisme et du conformisme alimentent d'une part la pensée romantique, avec ses aspirations à l'Idéal, au culte du Beau et de l'Art pour l'Art : en réaction, le réalisme récuse l'utopie romantique : il s'agit à présent de trouver une forme capable de représenter une réalité détestable, d'où un déplacement de

⁵ John McGahern, *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

l'intérêt du signifié vers le signe lui-même. Flaubert, marqué par la révolution de 1848, écrit à Louise Colet :

Je me délecte profondément dans la contemplation de toutes les ambitions aplaties. Je ne sais si la forme nouvelle du gouvernement et l'état social qui en résultera sera favorable à l'art. C'est une question. On ne pourra être plus bourgeois ni plus nul. Quant à plus bête, est-ce possible ?⁶

McGahern décrit lui aussi dans *The Barracks* une société marquée par les conséquences d'une révolution qui se voulait populaire, porteuse de liberté et d'espérance de bonheur, et pour laquelle certains des personnages ont sacrifié une partie de leur jeunesse : 'But he'd been born into a generation wild with ideals : they'd free Ireland, they'd be a nation once again'⁷ pense le Sergent Reegan. Mais l'idéal révolutionnaire a accouché d'une nation de « petits épiciers » que Yeats avait déjà prise en horreur et que Frank O'Connor décrivait en 1942 comme 'sectarian, utilitarian, the two always go together, vulgar and provincial...'⁸ De même, Flaubert se donne pour tâche de faire apparaître le vide et la vulgarité de la société émergente de son temps, et exprimera aussi la désillusion politique dans *L'Education sentimentale*. Si *Madame Bovary* est une négation de l'idéalisme, une critique du lyrisme sentimental, McGahern s'inscrit pour sa part dans une lignée d'écrivains irlandais qui s'insurgent contre le romantisme idéaliste attaché au Mouvement du Celtic Revival mais aussi à l'idéologie nationaliste et sa vision pastorale d'une Irlande rurale et éternelle, génération qui éprouve la nécessité d'adopter un mode d'écriture résolument réaliste : ainsi Sean O'Faolain écrivait en 1962 : 'We need to explore Irish life with an objectivity never hitherto applied to it - and in this Joyce rather than Yeats is our inspiration.'⁹ A l'idéal pastoral des nationalistes, McGahern oppose la pauvreté sociale, économique et culturelle du Leitrim, tandis que Flaubert dans *Madame Bovary* dénonce la médiocrité de son temps en établissant un contraste entre la grande ville –

⁶ Cité par Gérard Gengembre, *Madame Bovary* (Paris: PUF, 1990), p.15.

⁷ John McGahern, *The Barracks* (London: Faber&Faber, 1963), p.109.

⁸ Frank O'Connor, « The Future of Irish Literature », *Horizon*, vol.V, n°25 (January 1942), pp.56-8. Cité dans Terence Brown, *Ireland, a Social and Cultural History 1922-1985* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), p. 154.

⁹ Sean O'Faolain, « Fifty Years of Irish Writing », in *Studies*, Spring 1962, pp.100-101.

Paris – et la province – Yonville. L’ancrage dans un lieu donné sert aux deux écrivains non seulement à soumettre leurs personnages à un déterminisme social implacable, mais aussi à déployer une poétique de l’espace qui va signifier l’enfermement, et même la condamnation à mort de leurs protagonistes. Yonville est décrit comme ce lieu privé de toute élévation, étriqué, dont Emma ne sort que pour rendre visite à la nourrice de son enfant ou à ses amants : ainsi lors d’une promenade, une vue de son village lui apparaît : « Emma fermait à demi les paupières pour reconnaître sa maison, et jamais ce pauvre village où elle vivait ne lui avait semblé si petit. »¹⁰ Comme l’écrit Philippe Dufour : « Le personnage n’entretient pas avec son espace une relation d’intimité, il y connaît au contraire le sentiment d’un enfermement, d’un étouffement. »¹¹ Elizabeth Reegan sortant d’une visite chez le médecin se trouve soudain perdue dans le labyrinthe des rues du village :

Where did Main Street lead to but to Bridge Street and Bridge Street led to St Patrick’s Terrace or the Dublin Road and where in the name of Jesus did they lead but to other streets and roads and towns and countries? (84)

L’espace joue un rôle primordial dans *Madame Bovary* comme dans *The Barracks*. Flaubert exprime la monotonie de l’existence de ses personnages par la platitude des paysages normands, ternes, banals, tristes, comme le paysage également plat et uniforme que contemple Elizabeth par la fenêtre de la caserne : ‘The river was out there and the hill and the hedge of whitehorns half-way up ; the great sycamore stood inside the netting-wire, a few dead leaves caught in its meshes.’ (160), phrase dans laquelle les signifiants ‘hedge’, ‘inside’, ‘netting-wire’, ‘dead’, ‘caught’ et ‘meshes’ constituent un champ sémantique de l’emprisonnement et de la sclérose. La maison est également un lieu d’enfermement, rempli d’objets qui dans les deux romans prennent une importance emblématique et apparaissent moins pour leur valeur d’usage que pour leur épaisseur symbolique ; non seulement ils reflètent les niveaux sociaux et culturels des personnages, mais ils signifient l’aliénation généralisée. Les objets sont humanisés pendant qu’- inversement les êtres sont réifiés. Ainsi en va-t-il de l’assiette d’Emma sur laquelle lui semble « servie toute

¹⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1972), p. 187.

¹¹ Sean O’Faolain, « Fifty Years of Irish Writing, pp.100-101.

l'amertume de l'existence » (77), ou des objets qui entourent Elizabeth dans la caserne :

In the silence the clock beside the statue of St Therese on the sideboard beat like a living thing.... She looked at the mantelpiece and clothes-horse and sideboard and doors and windows. She was alone in the great barrack kitchen, (49)

les portes et fenêtres jouant dans les deux romans un rôle à la fois littéral et métaphorique : pour Emma, « L'avenir était un corridor tout noir, et qui avait au fond sa porte bien fermée » (74), tandis que le jour de Noël les habitants de la caserne cherchent désespérément à échapper à l'ennui en regardant par la fenêtre, car même si les portes restent ouvertes, personne ne les franchira de la journée :

Through the windows vague shapes of birds flew towards the wood. There was a pause in the game. The lamp was lit, the blinds drawn, the table laid for tea, the kettle put to boil. None of them was hungry. They nervously searched each other's faces. The phone did not ring. The doors were open. No one would come. (184)

Tout dans cette phrase exprime la dissolution des contours des individus dans un grand tout impersonnel et chosifié : les oiseaux ne sont plus que des formes vagues, l'activité humaine, exprimée par un minimum de verbes d'action, ne se concentre que sur le maniement de quelques objets, la parataxe souligne l'enchaînement machinal des gestes, le mode impersonnel suggère la réversibilité des êtres et des choses. Le critique Jean Rousset a fourni une analyse magistrale de la signification des fenêtres dans *Madame Bovary* : elles sont à la fois ouverture sur un espace qui favorise la rêverie, et matérialisation de la frontière indépassable entre le quotidien aliénant et un ailleurs impossible. Emma regarde par la fenêtre, et entendant sonner l'angélus, « la pensée de la jeune femme s'égarait dans ses vieux souvenirs de jeunesse et de pension. » (131). Regardant elle aussi par la fenêtre d'un café où elle se repose après sa visite chez le médecin, l'imagination d'Elizabeth la ramène vers l'époque où elle vivait à Londres et vivait une passion amoureuse avec Halliday :

Her awareness of the café, the river coming white and broken between dark rocks in the arches beyond the side-windows, the shopping street shifting

backwards and forwards outside the glass door were greyed away. She was in London, with Halliday... (86)

La fenêtre sert ici d'écran de projection sur lequel se produit un véritable effet cinématographique de « fondu-enchaîné » ('greyed away') ; la substitution d'un mode assertif au mode hypothétique – 'she was in London' et non pas 'it was as if she was' – se substituant à la coupure du montage filmique. Une autre fois Elizabeth s'approche des fenêtres de la caserne où repose un vase de roses et le geste de respirer ces fleurs prend dans sa conscience une signification épiphanique : 'she'd want to go away and have other loves and when she'd accidentally return that fragrance would be given back to her fresh as after rain' (152), sentiment qui mène vite au désespoir : 'she could love too much, break the vase, cast herself on the ground, and be what she was, powerless and helpless, a broken thing'. L'utilisation du mot 'thing' rappelle la distinction que fait le critique Claude Duchet entre les objets et les choses dans *Madame Bovary* : « l'objet, même dérisoire ou grotesque, est d'abord de la vie ; la chose est de la mort, et comme sa substance. »¹² Et à propos du passage suivant du roman de Flaubert : « Morte, s'épandant au-dehors d'elle-même, elle se perdait confusément dans l'entourage des choses, dans le silence, dans la nuit, dans le vent qui passait, dans les senteurs humides qui montaient » (391), le critique conclue : « Emma a quitté la terre des objets pour l'immense vie des choses ». ¹³ Elizabeth est à l'écoute des bruits qui seuls perturbent le grand silence qui l'entoure :

The village was waking. The green mail car came ; then the newsboy from the Dublin train, the cylinders of paper piled high on his carrier bicycle. A tractor with ploughs on its trailer went past at speed, and some carts. There was blasting in the council quarries ; four muffled explosions sounded and the thud-thud of blown rocks falling. The screaming rise-and-fall of the saws came without ceasing from the woods across the lake, (47)

bruits insignifiants et monotones qui font écho à ceux qui symbolisent l'ennui d'Emma Bovary : « Elle écoutait, dans un hébètement attentif, tinter un à un les coups fêlés de la cloche... Au loin, parfois, un chien

¹² Claude Duchet, « Roman et objets », in *Travail de Flaubert* (Paris : Seuil, 1983), p.42.

¹³ Dufour, p.35.

hurlait : et la cloche, à temps égaux, continuait sa sonnerie monotone qui se perdait dans la campagne » (74). Le son de la cloche qui scande l'écoulement du temps est évidemment un vecteur de sens, exploité par les deux écrivains. Ainsi, c'est la sonnerie de la cloche de l'église qui accompagne l'agonie d'Elizabeth :

'But that was the first bell, wasn't it ?'
 'No, 'twas the Angelus, Elizabeth', the child gave a short laugh, though it couldn't be possible that Elizabeth was trying to play tricks with her. 'It's the bell for the Angelus,' Elizabeth repeated, obviously trying to understand.
 (221)

La mention des bruits pourtant insignifiants perçus par les protagonistes des deux romans met en relief le silence qui domine leurs existences. Philippe Dufour a consacré un essai à ce qu'il nomme « la prose du silence » de Flaubert, dans lequel il suggère que « le silence est chez Flaubert plus qu'une absence de bruit : il est aussi le moment où tout se dérobe autour d'un sujet désorienté », ¹⁴ et cite comme exemple d'un bruit venant signifier l'angoisse du personnage, ce passage extrait de *L'Education sentimentale* dans lequel Frédéric se rend chez Mme Arnoux :

Alors, il se fit un grand silence ; et tout, dans l'appartement, sembla plus immobile. Un cercle lumineux, au-dessus de la carcel, blanchissait le plafond, tandis que dans les coins, l'ombre s'étendait comme des gazes noires superposées ; on entendait le tic-tac de la pendule avec la crépitation du feu. ¹⁵

Dufour ajoute que dans ce passage « les référents du quotidien se métamorphosent en signifiants d'effroi ». Or il est très intéressant de mettre ce passage en regard avec l'incipit de *The Barracks*, scène d'intimité familiale également minée par l'angoisse, suggérée par un réseau de signifiants de l'ombre et de l'obscurité : 'the daylight gone', 'the failing light', 'increasing darkness', 'the coming night', obscurité seulement déchirée par des lumières tout aussi inquiétantes : 'the sudden flashes of firelight', 'the dusk turned reddish from the Sacred Heart lamp', 'the long darning

¹⁴ Dufour p. 29.

¹⁵ Gustave Flaubert, *L'Education sentimentale* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969), p.196.

needle flashing', le champ lexical utilisé s'appliquant à subvertir le *topos* de la domesticité heureuse et sécurisante. L'expression 'the spell of silence' placée au centre du passage donne le ton à l'ensemble non seulement de la scène mais du roman, en particulier à cause de la polysémie du mot 'spell', qui suggère aussi bien la durée qu'un état presque hypnotique : dans *The Barracks* le silence signifie bien sûr le vide de l'existence et l'ennui, mais aussi la condition qui rend possible la fuite dans la rêverie et le souvenir. Les personnages sont murés dans leur silence autant que dans une cellule de prison : mari et femme ruminent chacun leurs appréhensions côte à côte dans la nuit, 'silence lay between them like a knife' (111), inversion ironique de l'épée qui sépare Tristan d'Iseult afin qu'ils ne puissent assouvir la passion amoureuse qui brûle en eux, alors que Reegan songe à son travail aliénant : 'he was **slaving** at the turf-banks these days as well as doing his police work', et Elizabeth à sa maladie : 'she'd be seized with **terror** that it would all end like this, a mere interruption of these banalities and nothing more'. A propos de *Madame Bovary*, Dufour remarque : « le personnage pense d'avance qu'il serait incompris et se résout à taire ce qui le tourmente ». ¹⁶ Ainsi, Charles Bovary se révèle un piètre confident, tourné en dérision par l'implacable ironie de l'auteur :

Quelquefois aussi, elle lui parlait des choses qu'elle avait lues, comme d'un passage de roman, d'une pièce nouvelle, ou de l'anecdote du *grand monde* que l'on racontait dans le feuilleton ; car enfin, Charles était quelqu'un, une oreille toujours ouverte, une approbation toujours prête ! Elle faisait bien des confidences à sa levrette ! Elle en eût fait aux bûches de la cheminée et au balancier de la pendule. (73)

Le Sergent Reegan est lui aussi plus ou moins assimilé à une bûche, tant son désir est grand d'anesthésier sa conscience du monde et surtout des êtres qui l'entourent : 'all he wanted now was to lounge before the fire and lose himself in the fantastic flaming of the branches'. (18) Dès son apparition dans le récit, le personnage de Reegan est caractérisé par la répétition qui équivaut à la perte du sens, à l'aliénation du langage : de retour de sa tournée il raconte plusieurs fois de suite sa rencontre avec le Superintendent Quirke, allant jusqu'à imiter sa voix, terminant la troisième mouture de son récit par la double exclamation : 'But what do I

¹⁶ Dufour, p.66.

care ? Why should I care about the bastard ? '(20). Charles Bovary, dont le personnage se confond avec la description de son improbable casquette qui constitue l'incipit du roman de Flaubert, réduit par le jeu des comparaisons et des métaphores à l'animalité suggérée par son patronyme bovin et à la chosification, souffre autant de la médiocrité dégradante de son métier de médecin de campagne que le Sergent de sa position de policier dans un lieu où aucun délit n'est jamais commis :

Charles, à la neige, à la pluie, chevauchait par les chemins de traverse. Il mangeait des omelettes sur la table des fermes, entraînait son bras dans des lits humides, recevait au visage le jet tiède des saignées, écoutait des râles, examinait des cuvettes, retrouvait bien du linge sale, (71)

image qui rappelle celle de Reegan rentrant trempé par la pluie de sa tournée à vélo : "Wet to the bloody skin," he complained. « A terrible night to have to cycle about like a fool » (11). Au début de son mariage, Charles représente pour Emma ce que le Sergent Reegan représente pour Elizabeth, un moyen d'échapper à l'exploitation dont elles sont elles-mêmes victimes de la part de leurs parents qui les considèrent comme un de leurs biens ou comme une monnaie d'échange : le Père Rouault est heureux de se débarrasser d'Emma (« Le Père Rouault n'eût pas été fâché qu'on le débarrassât de sa fille, qui ne lui servait guère dans sa maison.» (27)), les parents d'Elizabeth rechignent à la voir partir : 'she knew it would suit them if she stayed, stayed to nurse her mother.. .. it would have suited her brother who'd never marry if she had to stop and keep house for him' (15). Mais les deux femmes sont passées d'une forme d'aliénation à une autre. Quatre ans seulement après son mariage, Elizabeth ne peut davantage confier son ennui à Reegan qu'Emma à Charles :

The children's steel nibs scratched in the silence when Elizabeth wasn't moving. She knew the mood he was in and lingered over the little jobs tonight... putting off the time ...when the drowsy boredom of the hours before bedtime would begin. (18)

Le silence qui sépare les époux n'est rompu d'une part que par les bruits de la nature ou de la vie quotidienne, d'autre part par les conversations, ou plutôt les bavardages, avec ou entre les personnages qui les entourent. Car malgré l'importance du silence dans les deux œuvres, McGahern sur le modèle de Flaubert n'en accorde pas moins un soin particulier au dialogue. Comme le dit Gérard Gengembre, « il s'agit moins de faire avan-

cer une action que de décrire les personnages, d'en donner l'essence langagière». ¹⁷ Or les personnages se caractérisent par la banalité et la médiocrité, et sont bien plus parlés par le discours social qu'ils ne parlent eux-mêmes, d'où l'accumulation de clichés, stéréotypes, jeux de mots éculés jusqu'à l'absurdité, qui trahissent le vide de la parole. Dans *Bouvard et Pécuchet* Flaubert pousse la représentation de paroles jusqu'à en faire ce qu'une critique nomme « un théâtre des discours », et dans son *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* il compte « faire l'apologie de la canaillerie humaine sur toutes ses faces, ironique et hurlante ». McGahern ajoute quelques fragments à ce dictionnaire, lorsqu'il imagine la soirée dans la salle commune de la caserne, où les policiers tuent le temps en échangeant 'a litany of truisms' (26), discutant par exemple de la taille réglementaire pour s'enrôler dans l'armée, ou qu'il rapporte les conversations 'echoing a thousand others' (51) entre Elizabeth et les autres femmes de policiers, ou encore celle qu'elle entend dans la salle d'attente du médecin, et qu'elle perçoit comme :

the frightening impatience of the listening, holding back the dogs of their egos till they could unleash them to the sweet indulgence of their own unique complaint and wonder ; the one or two who dominated and the ridden faces of the many who had learned to wait in the hope of getting a word of their own world in edgeways. (79)

On n'est pas éloigné de la « canaillerie humaine ironique et hurlante » de Flaubert. Celui-ci ironise sur la conversation de Charles, « plate comme un trottoir de rue, et les idées de tout le monde y défilaient, dans leur costume ordinaire, sans exciter d'émotion, de rire ou de rêverie » (48). McGahern reproduit le dialogisme flaubertien en incorporant dans le récit des fragments de conversations saturées de clichés mais aussi de prières que les personnages égrènent quotidiennement et d'émissions radiophoniques, le tout se mêlant dans un flot indistinct de paroles dans lequel le sacré comme le profane, le spirituel comme le temporel sont réduits à un vain bavardage.

Face au silence et au bavardage stéréotypé, s'élève ce qu'on peut appeler la parole intérieure, si fortement représentée chez McGahern comme chez celui qui est le grand maître du style indirect libre, Flaubert, pour qui « la parole advient comme un contre-langage silencieusement

¹⁷ Gengembre, p.70.

opposé à la parole convenue de la connivence, à ces dialogues bardés de l'inaltérable certitude du cliché. »¹⁸ La parole intérieure est, chez McGahern comme chez Flaubert, commandée par le désir d'un ailleurs. Bien sûr, Elizabeth Reegan n'est pas vraiment Emma Bovary, dans la mesure où elle ne partage ni ses illusions romantiques ni ses rêveries sentimentales alimentées par une passion dévorante pour la lecture de romans, et à cet égard se trouve beaucoup moins la victime de l'ironie dévastatrice de son créateur que ne l'est Emma, Flaubert disant à travers elle son rejet de l'idéalisme. Certes, Elizabeth ne rêve pas d'amours passionnés et surtout ne commet pas l'adultère. Cependant, tandis que Emma « se laisse glisser dans les méandres lamartiniens » (45), il faut tout de même rappeler l'attachement d'Elizabeth à certains livres conservés soigneusement dans un coffre, comme on conserve au plus profond de soi-même des aspirations secrètes, et connaît par cœur des passages de *Dom Juan* de Lord Byron, l'œuvre la plus irrévérencieuse du plus romantique des poètes, célébrant le mythe du plus grand séducteur de la littérature. Elle passe de longues heures absorbée dans la lecture de livres qui nourrissent sa vie intérieure : 'books that'd grown in her life as if they'd been grafted there, that she'd sometimes only to handle again to experience blindingly'.(39) Comme Emma qui rêve de Paris, du Bal de la Vaubyessard, ou de quelque « pays nouveau » où elle partirait avec son amant, Elizabeth berce son imagination des noms des villes où son fiancé d'autrefois Michael Halliday voulait l'emmener :

Chalon on the way down, Lyons, Valence, Avignon, Nîmes, Montpellier, Sète across the marshlands high above the Mediterranean ; poplars and the road glowing white between the open vineyards, the cicadas beating and the earth and sky throbbing together in the noonday as you went on to Carcas-sonne to sit with a glass of wine in the evening at a sidewalk table and wonder how long more you could make your money last out, (93)

passage à comparer avec la célèbre rêverie d'Emma commentée par Gérard Genette qui, soulignant le luxe des détails, remarque : « Cet excès de présence matérielle dans des tableaux en principe tout subjectifs où la vraisemblance appellerait au contraire des évocations vagues, diffuses, insaisissables, est un des aspects les plus marqués de l'écriture de Flau-

¹⁸ Gisèle Séginger, *Flaubert, une éthique de l'art pur* (Paris : Sedes, 2000), p. 192.

bert. », ¹⁹ qui l'entraîne, selon le critique, vers la suspension de toute action dramatique ou romanesque, vers le fameux «livre sur rien». Par ailleurs, si Elizabeth ne commet pas l'adultère, du moins entretient-elle le souvenir d'un amour passionné avec Michael Halliday, passion romantique à l'excès puisqu'elle se termine par la mort d'un des amants.

C'est d'ailleurs sur le personnage de Halliday que viennent se greffer certaines caractéristiques du bovarysme, la phrase le caractérisant : 'What the hell is all this living and dying about anyway ?' faisant écho à cette interrogation d'Emma : « D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait ? », la médiocrité insupportable du réel s'opposant chez l'un comme chez l'autre personnage à l'infini du désir ('the wild greed of youth', (87)) et les menant à la mort violente. La mort d'Elizabeth quant à elle, constitue le tissu même du récit de *The Barracks*, tandis que celle d'Emma n'intervient que dans la dernière partie du roman de Flaubert. Mais elle est la conclusion logique de toutes les déterminations narratives qui la conduisent à s'empoisonner. Dans une lettre de septembre 1855, Flaubert confie : « J'espère que dans un mois la Bovary aura son arsenic dans le ventre. » Le cancer d'Elizabeth peut d'ailleurs être interprété comme la métaphore du mal qui ronge ces héroïnes incapables de se satisfaire de l'étroitesse du monde dans lequel elles sont enfermées, les cellules cancéreuses rongent l'organisme d'Elizabeth comme la sclérose et l'aliénation rongent la société toute entière, étouffée par la bêtise, la médiocrité, la vulgarité, à Yonville comme dans le Leitrim. Emma et Elizabeth meurent parce que sont déjà morts autour d'elles la beauté, l'idéal et la foi en un au-delà transcendantal ; McGahern partage avec Flaubert la critique des religions auquel s'oppose son respect pour le sentiment religieux. Flaubert ironise certes sur le mysticisme d'Emma, qui « voulut devenir une sainte. Elle acheta des chapelets » (253), il écrit à George Sand : « le XIXe siècle est destiné à voir périr toutes les religions. Amen ! je n'en pleure aucune », ²⁰ mais il compose un grand roman religieux, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, exalte les croyances naïves de Félicité dans « Un Cœur simple », et retient de la religion l'aspiration à un au-delà, le sacrifice, voire le fanatisme de l'art. De même Elizabeth a rejeté le réconfort de la foi et ne laisse qu'à regret le prêtre s'approcher d'elle à l'heure de

¹⁹ Gérard Genette, « Silences de Flaubert », in *Figures I* (Paris : Seuil, 1966), p. 227.

²⁰ Gustave Flaubert, Lettre à Louise Colet, 16 décembre 1852.

l'extrême-onction, mais elle admire les rituels religieux, seule forme d'art dans son univers qui en est foncièrement dénué :

The rosary had grown into her life : she'd come to love its words, its rhythm, its repetitions, its confident chanting, its eternal mysteries ; what it meant didn't matter , whether it meant anything at all or not it gave the last need of her heart release, the need to praise and celebrate, in which everything rejoiced. (220)

Ainsi s'exprime une conception du langage que McGahern explore à la suite de Flaubert : le pouvoir de suggérer par-delà le signifié, par le rythme et le son. « Il en est en style comme en musique : ce qu'il y a de plus beau et de plus rare c'est la pureté du son », explique Flaubert à Louise Colet,²¹ et tout le monde connaît l'existence du « gueuloir », laboratoire d'expérimentation du rythme juste. Pour Philippe Dufour, « Flaubert écrit des poèmes en prose. Il est le romancier qui a conféré à la prose la densité de la poésie, sans repos, là où chaque mot importe, et son rythme'.²² Dans les rares textes théoriques que McGahern a écrits ou dans les entretiens qu'il a donnés le mot « rythme » revient sans cesse : « Change any word in a single sentence and immediately all the other words demand to be rearranged », dit-il dans un de ces textes.²³ Le rythme des mots, c'est bien tout ce qui reste à Elizabeth alors que le sens continue à lui échapper au moment de sa mort : ainsi, alors qu'elle tente d'écrire une lettre à une amie, fait-elle l'expérience de la quête du mot juste, raturant la page encore et encore, cherchant à exprimer l'insaisissable, l'indicible, à trouver le langage qui ne soit ni vrai ni faux : 'Her words had reached praise of something at last, and it didn't appear more false or true than any of the other things she'd written and crossed out'(187). Elizabeth se voit comme Flaubert contrainte de récrire indéfiniment son texte : « Ah ! Quels découragements quelquefois, quel rocher de Sisyphe à rouler que le style, et la prose surtout ! *ça n'est jamais fini.* » se plaint l'écrivain.²⁴ Il est en effet difficile à Elizabeth de raconter à son amie sa vie quotidienne, dans laquelle il ne se passe rien, sinon l'avènement progressif de sa propre disparition. Pourtant, ce récit existe,

²¹ Gustave Flaubert, Lettre à Sand, 16 décembre 1875.

²² Dufour, p.5.

²³ John McGahern, "The Devil Finds Work for Idle Hands", in *The Agony and the Ego*, edited by Clare Boylan (London: Penguin Books, 1998) pp. 97-104.

et c'est celui de *The Barracks*. Héritier de Flaubert, le premier, comme le dit Gérard Genette, à « opérer cette dédramatisation, on voudrait presque dire cette déromanisation du roman par où commencerait toute la littérature moderne », ²⁵ la filiation de McGahern inclue tous les écrivains qui de Proust, grand admirateur du « style et de la vision de Flaubert », à Joyce, auteur de quelques beaux « romans paralysés », pour utiliser l'expression de Malraux à propos de Flaubert, et à Beckett, qui met en scène l'impuissance de la parole et réduit ses personnages au silence, ont transformé de manière décisive le genre romanesque et rendu périmées les notions classiques de personnages, d'histoire et d'intrigue.

²⁴ Flaubert, Lettre à L. Colet, 1853

²⁵ Genette, p.243.

Part IV

20th Century Literature

Raymond Mullen

Chapter Thirteen: ‘The womb and the grave’: Living, Loving and Dying in John McGahern’s *The Pornographer* and Albert Camus’ *L’Étranger*

There are few Irish writers, with the exception of Samuel Beckett and W.B. Yeats, who have written of the mystery of life, physical disintegration and death as beautifully, or as powerfully, as John McGahern. Indeed, the fundamental concern of McGahern’s work has always been the experience of living and the mystery that is made of our existence by death. In the past, this aspect of McGahern’s fiction has been overlooked in favour of well-practiced socio-political paradigms. However, from *The Barracks* to *That They May Face the Rising Sun* and even *Memoir*, politics are rendered in an indicative context and it is clear that more ubiquitous, or existential, mysteries are of greater concern.

In his article ‘One God, one disciple: the case of John McGahern’, David Coad insists that there is very little to be gained from mentioning Camus in a study of McGahern as, in the critic’s own words, McGahern is an ‘unphilosophical’ writer who has expressed an ‘unintellectual’ interest in Camus.¹ Yet many critics of McGahern’s work, notably Sampson, Maher, and van der Ziel, have expressed the importance of Camus—and his novel *L’Étranger* in particular—as an influence on his writing. Coad cites from Patrick Gordon’s interview, in which McGahern states: ‘I like [Camus’] travel writing very much [...] I wouldn’t read Camus for his ideas’—a remark not unlike Beckett’s declaration to an unfortunate French interviewer that he did not read philosophy. It is important to locate such statements within their context: the interview was conducted in 1984, the year in which *The Leavetaking*—a novel which also focuses, as James Whyte has written, ‘upon the search of the individual for meaning

¹ David Coad, “One God, one disciple: the case of John McGahern”, *Études Britanniques Contemporaines* n° 6 (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de Montpellier, 1995), p. 59.

in life'²—was reissued following extensive rewriting. McGahern notes in the preface to the second edition of *The Leavetaking*:

Several years after its first publication, I found myself working through it again with its French translator, the poet Alain Delehayé. The more I saw of it the more sure I was that it had to be changed. The crudity I was attempting to portray, the irredeemable imprisonment of the beloved in reportage, had itself become too close to the 'Idea', and the work lacked that distance, that inner formality or calm, that all writing, no matter what it is attempting, must possess.³

It is hardly surprising then, just five years after the publication of *The Pornographer* and around the time of the publication of this significantly reworked *The Leavetaking*, that McGahern would, naturally, react cautiously to any attempt to link his aesthetic, or philosophical outlook, to that of Camus'. In an interview with Eamon Maher, almost twenty years later however, McGahern confirmed, not only that had he read *L'Étranger*, but that he admired it and thought it Camus' best novel.⁴

Whilst it is true that John McGahern would no doubt balk at the idea of being pigeon-holed under the expansive label of 'Existentialist', both McGahern's *The Pornographer* and Camus' *L'Étranger* share many of the characteristics of early twentieth century French existentialist fiction. As Sartre acknowledged in his philosophical tract *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* in 1946 that the term had, even then, all but lost its original meaning (if it had ever been understood in the first place) and was being attributed in fashionable circles to all things scandalous. Camus, himself, eventually turned away from what he perceived as Sartre's and Beauvoir's ever-increasing Marxist existentialism towards a more personalised existentialist philosophy of 'the absurd', or rather a *sensibilité absurde*.

Terry Keefe has noted that a common theme of early French existentialist writing, which virtually imposes itself as a starting point, is the

² James Whyte, *History, Myth and Ritual in the Fiction of John McGahern* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 44.

³ John McGahern, "Preface to the Second Edition" of *The Leavetaking* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

⁴ Eamon Maher, "An Interview with John McGahern", from the Appendix of *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003).

concept of solitude.⁵ But, as Keefe recognises, this spurious claim is in need of some shoring-up and requires much more careful analysis than is commonly acknowledged. The protagonists of *The Pornographer* and *L'Étranger* may indeed be solitary figures but the definition and sense of 'solitude' needs to be exact if it is to be applied to the pornographer, on the one hand, who has a number of friends and acquaintances, close family ties, and certain very intimate relationships, and on the other hand, Meursault, who for half of *L'Étranger* is entirely cut off from the few people he knows.

The idea of what constitutes solitude should of course be clarified to ensure that the term is employed in as meaningful a way as possible. First of all, solitude is relative and not an absolute notion—the pornographer and Meursault are not exactly hermits. However, a degree of physical isolation is evident in both novels: Meursault in *L'Étranger* (like Pablo Ibbieta in Sartre's 'Le Mur', a work which echoes throughout McGahern's oeuvre from *The Barracks* onwards) is imprisoned; the pornographer often confines himself to his cell-like room ('I reflected as I always did with some satisfaction after an absence that the poor light of day hardly ever got into this room')⁶ and refuses to interact with his fellow lodgers. He explains to Josephine why he avoids contact with his housemates:

'There are times when you can't stand even the best company in the world. Why I avoid getting involved with anybody here is that I know myself too well [...] If I got involved with someone here and they turned out boring or bothersome, I'd not get out in time—because I can't stand the tension that sets up—and I'd wind up having to do something violent like leaving the house altogether'. (*P*, 59)

Nevertheless both the protagonists maintain some form of contact with society and the outside world at various times. It is, after all, in a crowded dance hall on O'Connell Street—Dublin's main thoroughfare—where the pornographer seeks out 'the heavy excitement of preying and vulnerable flesh' (*P*, 31) and meets Josephine; he has regular meetings in pubs and

⁵ Terry Keefe, *French Existentialist Fiction: Changing Moral Perspectives* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 15.

⁶ John McGahern, *The Pornographer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 20. Further reference to this work will appear in parenthesis within the body of the text as '*P*' followed by appropriate page numbers for each quotation or citation.

bars with his editor Maloney (a curious character, something of a composite portrait of Brendan Behan and the Austin Clarke/Ticklepenny caricature in Beckett's *Murphy*, who often acts as the narrator's proxy sub-consciousness); and, of course, he is eventually reintegrated into his bucolic and familial ideal through that great conduit of life and death, the hospital, where he is introduced to, falls in love with and makes love to Nurse Brady. Herein lies one of the main differences between the two protagonists: by the end of *L'Étranger*, alone in his prison cell, Meursault has spiralled into an absurdist acceptance of 'la tendre indifférence du monde'⁷; in contrast, the protagonist of *The Pornographer* by the end of the novel has decided 'to try to make a go of it' (P, 251); in other words he will abandon his solitary existence and propose marriage to Nurse Brady and if she turns him down 'it won't matter': 'The life has to be lived afterwards anyway, no matter what the answer. Won't it be even more difficult if the answer is yes?' (P, 251).

This leads to a second point regarding solitude: it is as much a matter of mental attitude as of a quantifiable degree of isolation. This must eventually raise the question of what exactly 'solitude' amounts to in the case of characters freely mixing with their friends and associates. Nevertheless, it may be stated—bearing the above caution in mind—that the predominant state of the protagonists in these two novels is that of solitude. Even before his trial and subsequent imprisonment, Meursault leads a somewhat solitary existence. For example, the second chapter of *L'Étranger* is dominated by an extended account of how Meursault spends a tedious Sunday alone in his apartment, despite his relationship with Marie and blossoming friendship with Raymond. Similarly the pornographer, despite his social ties, remains very much an outsider for most of the novel and admits to feeling a type of 'meaning in this crowded solitude' (P, 62).

These instances taken together show that solitude is not a constant and, as Keefe has explained, that far from being a simple quantitative matter of lack of relations with others: 'it is one inseparably bound up with complex qualitative questions concerning what is expected of these

⁷ Albert Camus, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2000), p. 186. Further reference to this novel will appear with in the body of the essay in parenthesis as 'É' with appropriate page numbers for each citation.

relationships as well as their adequacy or successfulness'.⁸ They also raise the issue that it would be an oversimplification to regard solitude as a state that is imposed, or self-imposed, upon each of the protagonists. On more than one occasion in both of these novels, a form of pleasure is clearly derived from solitude. Moreover, the pornographer displays much of the 'anamnestic intoxication'⁹ beloved of the various incarnations of the solitary *flâneur* as described by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. After an encounter with Josephine—and at point in their relationship where he begins to feel his solitude encroached upon—the pornographer is overcome by a '[need] to walk' (*P*, 60). This is followed the next day by a five mile journey on foot across the city to visit his aunt which acts as an anamnestic conduit, evocative of Proust's involuntary memory scenes in *A la recherche du temps perdu*:

It was night when I came out, starlit with frost. I paused at how beautiful the chrysanthemums were—rust, yellow, pink—under the naked bulb hanging from the canvas. I knew she'd hardly like the flowers but on impulse bought her a bunch because of their amazing beauty in the frost. On many frozen evenings such as this she and I used to go to Lenten Devotions, down the hill and to the left up Church Street, and stand at the back of the cold, near-empty church. (*P*, 60)

Of course, as Benjamin notes, '[basic] to *flânerie*, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labour'¹⁰ and the pornographer duly obliges:

The next day I put aside for what I liked doing best. I did nothing, the nothing of walking the streets in the heart of the city, looking at the faces, going into chance bars to rest, eating lunch and dinner alone in cheap, crowded restaurants. And without any desire for meaning [...] I sometimes felt meaning in this crowded solitude. That it all had a purpose, that it had to have, the people coming and going, the ships tied along the North Wall, the changing delicate lights and ripples of the river, the cranes and building, lights of the shops, and the sky through a blue haze of smoke and frost. And then it slipped away, and I found myself walking with a light and eager step to no-

⁸ Keefe, p. 18.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project/Das Passagen-werk*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap Press, 1999), [M1, 5].

¹⁰ Benjamin, [M20a, 1].

where among others, in a meaningless haze of goodwill and general benediction and shuffle, everything fragmented again. (*P*, 62-63)

Once again, the resonance of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is apparent:

With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name.¹¹

Meursault eventually adjusts to his life in prison with considerable success, and discovers the delights of memory and of looking up at the sky from the floor of his cell. Although Meursault's adjustment to this solitary life is impressive, he has little alternative but to make the most of his isolation: solitude is far from being championed as a desirable state in these works—neither Meursault nor the pornographer could be described as a seedy, Beckettian solipsist.

This does not entirely answer the question as to whether the protagonists' isolation is a blessing or a curse: in the majority of cases Meursault and the pornographer are almost always shown to have learned something as a result of their solitude. They learn about the nature of solitude, evidently, but more importantly that solitude is associated in their experiences with certain discoveries that they both make about themselves, the nature of life and of human relations, and of their place in the world; in other words, metaphysical discoveries. McGahern allows the pornographer to reveal a starkly honest explanation of these existential moments of enlightenment:

We have to go inland, in the solitude that is both pain and joy, and there make our own truth, and even if that proves nothing too, we have still that hard joy of having gone the hard and only way there is to go, we have not backed away or staggered to one side, but gone on and on and on even when there was nothing, knowing there was nothing on any other way. We had gone too deep inland to think that a different physique or climate would change anything. We were outside change because we were change. All the doctrines that we had learned by heart and could not understand and fretted over became laughingly clear. (*P*, 203)

¹¹ Benjamin, [M1, 3].

This insight comes on the cusp of the birth of the pornographer's unwanted child and the death of his aunt and has all the hallmarks of, what Stanley van der Ziel calls, the 'existentialist epiphany' which Meursault famously experiences at the end of *L'Étranger*.¹²

It is important to be realise that both Meursault and the pornographer are open to metaphysical insights precisely because they are not convinced or practicing Christians with a wealth of doctrine and dogma upon which they can comfortably rely; as Keefe has pointed out in relation to Meursault—a point which is equally applicable to the pornographer—it is in contrast to Christianity that the insights concerned stand out as significant.¹³

What I wanted to say was that I had a fierce need to pray, for myself, Maloney, my uncle, the girl, the whole shoot. The prayers could not be answered, but prayers that cannot be answered need to be the more completely said, being their own beginning as well as end. (*P*, 252)

And it is in response to a series of involuntary memories preceding and during a visit to his aunt in hospital (referred to earlier in this chapter), rather than Christian spirituality, that the following vision is described:

Through the window above the bed I could see the clear sky of frost, pierced with stars, and the reflection of all the lights of the city beyond the bare trees, and beside them this woman's fierce desire to live, and in the long ward, all the little groups about, the same desire in each bed, small shining jewels in an infinite unfathomable band. Everywhere there was a joy that was part of weeping ... There was the need, too, to give thanks and praise; and no one to turn to. (*P*, 62)

An example of Meursault's development in the second part of *L'Étranger* is that—while he reacts rather coolly and impassively when the examining magistrate forces a crucifix under his nose just after his arrest—he has an unaccustomed outburst of anger at the end of the novel when the prison chaplain offers to pray for him. It is, in effect, in defiance of the chaplain's Christian perspective that he affirms his own position:

¹² Stanley van der Ziel, "John McGahern's *The Dark*", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2005), p. 120.

¹³ Keefe, p. 21.

Il voulait encore me parler de Dieu, mais je me suis avancé vers lui et j'ai tenté de lui expliquer une dernière fois qu'il me restait peu de temps. Je ne voulais pas le perdre avec Dieu. (*É*, 182)

Meursault's imposed isolation and his death-sentence have forced him to make clear his own philosophic outlook and beliefs (both to the world and to himself), perhaps for the first time. The most fundamental of these are without doubt metaphysical in character and are similar to the pornographer's in their imputation of an insignificant place in the universe to the individual—this tender indifference. There are important distinctions of emphasis too: by the end of *L'Étranger*, in addition to being less interested in the existence of material things and the physical world than the pornographer, Meursault is understandably more concerned with death and all its implications, although he finds the implications a more fruitful topic for meditation than the idea itself:

Des odeurs de nuit, de terre et de sel rafraîchissaient mes tempes. La merveilleuse paix de cet été endormi entrainait en moi comme une marée. A ce moment, et à la limite de la nuit, des sirènes ont hurlé. Elles annonçaient des départs pour un monde qui maintenant m'était à jamais indifférent. (*É*, 185)

Since the notion of spiritual immortality is a rudimentary component of Christianity—be it eternally saved or eternally damned—it is to be expected that the characters in these two books will, by contrast, sometimes be preoccupied with the very conclusiveness of death, for if extinction as such rarely seems to worry them, there is always the knowledge that death affects an irrevocable summation of all the actions in the life of an individual and perpetuates indefinitely any doubts that may attach to that life. Death is ubiquitous in *The Pornographer*, from the moment the narrator meets his uncle at Connolly Station to the novel's end. But it is his aunt's fierce will to live in the face of imminent death—unlike Meursault, who faces the possibility of his own extinction—and his involvement with it which encourages the pornographer to philosophical examination of life's one true mystery.

The cycle of life is a significant motif in the McGahern canon and throughout *The Pornographer* death and sex are closely associated: at his most pessimistic, the pornographer sees man torn from one delicate gash in the mother, then desperately spending his life trying to re-enter another, before being buried in a hole in mother earth (as Maloney might have it):

"The womb and the grave ... The christening party becomes the funeral, the shudder that makes us flesh becomes the shudder that makes us meat". (*P*, 30)

The pornographer's above soliloquy pays obvious homage to *Hamlet*: 'the funeral baked-meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables'¹⁴; but it bares more than a passing similarity to Vladimir's famous lines in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

'Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener. (*He looks again at Estragon.*) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (*Pause.*) I can't go on!¹⁵

And there are echoes of 'I can't go on' (followed by 'I'll go on' at the end of *The Unnamable*) in the pornographer's aunt's mantra of 'To just go on [...] To go on' (*P*, 143). This idea of the circularity of existence resonates most notably in *The Pornographer* when an orgasm is compared to the last gasp of life:

Death must sometimes come this way, the tension leaving the body, in pain and no tin this sweetness and pride, but a last time, the circle completed, never having to come back to catch the flying moment that was always the same, always on the wing. (*P*, 57)

Elsewhere, too, in McGahern's fiction, it is impossible to separate the moment of birth from the finality of death; for example, in the short story 'Coming into his Kingdom' when Stevie discovers how he came to be born:

He'd come out of his mother's body the way the calf came... His mother's body was now buried; the body his father had done that to, out of which he'd

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 37.

¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot—A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, (New York: Grove Press, 1954), pp. 58-59.

come; the body in a rotting coffin, under the clay, under the covering gravel.¹⁶

In a comic exaggeration of this theme Maloney, learning of the pornographer's plans to move to London and live with Josephine while she has their baby, proposes a different solution:

'I'll get a pram made in the shape of a coffin, miniature handles, crucifix, brown varnish, the lid at an angle of forty-five degrees to keep out the rain, a white handgrip for pushing, big wheels and small wheels.

'[...] The three of us—why, the four of us, will go to Paris, put the baby into the morality play of a pram, and go for our evening stroll in the gardens.

'[...] It'd drive them mad to be confronted with the logical end of the activity, all these fat smug Parisian pigeons standing around and sitting at cafés. They'll be incensed. They'll turn on us in fury. We'll be in all the newspapers'. (P, 127-28)

The whole 'plan' is, of course, a 'farce'—a word Josephine uses to describe sexual intercourse using contraceptives—and Maloney himself agrees in tones which are not far removed from McGahern's own 'too close to the idea' statement of the Preface to the second edition of *The Leavetaking*:

'It'd be striking too near the roots for that. It'd be too close to reality for that. Reality is a great stick for beating the people. They can't stand it, we're told, but everybody appears very vague about what it is'. (P, 128)

Although McGahern's and Camus' philosophical frameworks are certainly less formal and rigorous than that lying behind, say, Sartre's stories, examples are to be found in *The Pornographer* and *L'Étranger*, of failed attempts by characters to 'annex' another consciousness.¹⁷ The most striking example of an attempt to annex another's consciousness in *L'Étranger*, of course, is the effort of the examining magistrate and prison chaplain efforts to reconvert Meursault to Christianity. It may be assumed that it is precisely because of a growing awareness of this en-

¹⁶ John McGahern, "Coming into his Kingdom", in *The Collected Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 21.

¹⁷ Keefe, p. 24.

deavoured annexation of the mind which causes Meursault's uncharacteristic and violent outburst at the chaplain's offer of prayer.

Another lesser example—but nonetheless just as potent when we consider the pornographer's relationship with Josephine—is that of Marie, whom Meursault agrees to marry, but she cannot get him to say he loves her, nor to give up any of the freedoms associated with his way of life. Similarly, Josephine's attempts to annex the pornographer's consciousness end in similar disappointment. When Josephine suspects that she has fallen pregnant, the pornographer initially agrees to marry her in order that she will not lose her marriage gratuity from her job at the bank, but, as he makes clear, he intends leaving her the moment the child is born. Following a discussion with an old university friend, Peter White—a doctor who arranged for a second, thorough pregnancy test—the pornographer decides against marriage. At one point in the meeting over dinner at the doctor's house White raises the suspicion, one which the reader, if not the pornographer, has suspected:

‘The woman obviously wanted to get pregnant. I see it every day in the hospital. Time running out? Get pregnant, and it'll be taken care of. Bored with life? Get pregnant, and it'll stir things up. Not getting enough attention? Get pregnant, and it'll bring an overdose of attention. Hit me now with the child in my arms,’ he laughed jeeringly. (*P*, 112-13)

Whilst the pornographer is indeed manipulative and perceptive, throughout much of the novel he is merely interested in occupying his prey's body rather than their mind. In the pornographer's defence, the doctor's theory that Josephine allowed herself to become pregnant seems perfectly justified—after all, she refused to use a condom during intercourse describing it as ‘unnatural’.

‘It turns the whole thing into a farce’
 ‘I was just wearing it for you,’ I lied.
 ‘How wearing it for me?’
 ‘You have more to lose. What if you got pregnant?’
 ‘I don't know. It would seem more natural. It'd seem far less of a farce. At least something would be going on. You can bet your life something would be going on, I thought, but said, ‘If you don't want it that way there's no way you have to have it that way,’ and pulled away the rubber and throw it to one side. (*P*, 56)

Of course, what follows is a far greater farce—perhaps in Josephine’s eyes, even a tragedy—but the pornographer had warned her from the outset, stating moments later: ‘If I got you pregnant I wouldn’t marry you’ (*P*, 56).

Josephine, like Marie in *L’Étranger*, cannot get the pornographer to say he loves her; but the pornographer goes one step further by dismissing even the potential to love her, though she constantly reminds him that she has enough love for the both of them: ‘‘And I love you [...] I want to eat and drink you’’ (*P*, 190). As Josephine desperately tries to attach herself to the pornographer with smothering declarations of love, he recollects how he mirrored her actions in the past and drove his former lover away: ‘I thought nobody could tell anybody that’ (*P*, 190):

When I cried I cannot live without you, I had cried against the loss of a dream, and believed it was worse than death, since it could not find oblivion. I had thought no suffering could be worse. I was wrong.

I had gone in and suffered, when it was clear my love could not be returned, like the loss of my own life in the other. This now was worse. The Other would now happily lose her life in me and I would live the nightmare. It would be worse than loss. It would be a lived loss, and many must have been caught this way and made to live it. (*P*, 103-4)

It would not be unreasonable to postulate that the pornographer is the same unnamed, jilted lover who narrates the short story ‘Parachutes’ (perhaps a pun on Camus’ novel *La Chute*). Certainly the ‘She’, whom both characters pine for, leaves the pornographer and the narrator of ‘Parachutes’ in an identical way, they share a similar social milieu (one in the throes of sexual revolution), both are writers and their narrative voices are very similar. It would appear likely, if not definite, that this break-up was the catalyst which forced the pornographer’s retreat from society and a point from where he only returns once he believes he has made a worthwhile connection with another person—Nurse Brady rather than Josephine.

The pornographer’s rejection of his child and Josephine’s love is as callous and inhumane in the eyes of Josephine’s surrogate family (her two American friends in Dublin, and the Kavanaghs in London) as Meursault’s refusal to offer his remorse for killing the Arab and his reluctance to publicly grieve for his mother are viewed in the eyes of ‘the French people’. Josephine’s reaction is complete denial: she continues to make

plans for the two of them involving all the horrors of petty bourgeois suburbia dreaded by the pornographer: 'roads and drives and avenues of brown-tiled semis [...] an ugly mildness' (*P*, 51).

In *The Pornographer* the character of Maloney often merges with the pornographer's consciousness and at times, as alluded to in the opening of this essay, it could be argued that his thoughts and views are in some form interwoven with the pornographer's sub-coconscious. Not only does he provide the pornographer with an output for his writing and financial support to do so, he also offers emotional support and advice—though at times dubious, as witnessed in the Luxembourg Gardens scene. Maloney's annoyance at the pornographer's ability to escape Josephine, fatherhood and marriage betrays his own feelings of being trapped in a relationship:

'And why didn't you [marry Josephine], old boy? That's how I got married—but I was in love. My wife was going to ditch me but then found she was pregnant and married me; then on our wedding night she discovered it was a false alarm, that she wasn't pregnant after all. [...] Well, why didn't you follow your father's good example, even in the eye of rejection, to the altar?' (*P*, 125-26)

Their lives have seemingly overlapped—and even merged—Maloney remarks: 'I don't like people starting things I was doing ten years ago' (*P*, 251).

A notable feature of *The Pornographer* and *L'Étranger* is the inability of human relationships to offer answers to major metaphysical dilemmas: any failure or inadequacy in the relationship is not to be attributed to external pressures, or even to psychological factors in the narrow sense. Both doubtless have a part to play, but at a general level, problems are seen within the context of a certain broad view of human relations that emphasise the need for personal freedom and the consequent conflict that is bound to ensue between individuals. We may now begin to see that much of the solitude experienced by the main characters of these novels has less to do with what is sometimes called 'la séparation des consciences' than with the inability of people to live together in harmony echoing Sartre's maxim: 'L'enfer, c'est les autres'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Keefe, p. 26.

The discovery of what Sartre calls our 'being-for-other' has a critical role to play in Meursault's convictions that he is 'un homme ordinaire'. From the very beginning he shows signs of an uncomfortable awareness of the gaze and judgement of others, but from early in the second section he begins to realise that others see him as a criminal, and this feeling reaches its height during the trial:

[Pour] la première fois depuis bien des années, j'ai eu une envie stupide de pleurer parce que j'ai senti combien j'étais détesté par tout ces gens-là (*É*, 138).

One of the crucial changes that overcome Meursault in the course of the book is precisely this recognition that others see his life and values in an entirely different perspective from his own. He eventually draws strength from this discrepancy—which is as much a result of his long-term solitude as of his crime—and this brings about the final state of exhilaration that he attains at the end of the novel.

The affair between the pornographer and Nurse Brady marks a defining moment in the pornographer's life—it is an awakening from his emotional indifference. For the first time in the novel he is involved in a relationship which is not based entirely on sex but one which also requires an emotional commitment:

[The nurse's] body was the shelter of the self. Like all walls and shelters it would break and age and let the enemy in. but holding it now was like holding glory, and having held it once was to hold it—no matter how broken and conquered—in glory still, and with the more terrible tenderness. (*P*, 177)

Furthermore, she helps to re-establish his connection with the rural world of his youth; as the pornographer and Nurse Brady make their way to the nurses' home, he is overcome by a scent which instantly recalls memories from his childhood:

An old sweet scent rushed through the taxi window as soon as we passed beyond the hospital, so familiar that I started, and yet could not place or find its name, it so surrounded the summers of my life, lay everywhere at my feet; not woodbine, not mint, not wild rose ...

'They were cutting it today. I was on night duty last night and was trying to get to sleep but couldn't with the mower rattling past the window,' she gave the name. Of course it was hay. (*P*, 172-73)

The pressure of judgement is just one fragment of a gloomy and pessimistic picture of the panorama of personal relations presented in these stories. The dominant pattern—with the exception of the pornographer's relationship with Nurse Brady—is that of breakdown or abandonment, or at least of reduction in the quality of these relationships. However, while the pornographer moves towards a renewed connection with the world, Meursault moves invariably towards an ever-greater solitude. In addition to hoping for 'des cris de haine' (*É*, 186) at his execution, Meursault recognises his changed attitude towards Marie:

Comment l'aurais-je su puis qu'en dehors de nos deux corps maintenant séparés, rien ne nous liait et ne nous rappelait l'un à l'autre. A partir de ce moment, d'ailleurs, le souvenir de Marie m'aurait été indifférent. Morte, elle ne m'intéressait plus. (*É*, 175)

This trajectory towards solitude—which Meursault achieves, ultimately by default—is an inversion of the pornographer's eventual move away from his detached existence towards an acceptance of society. But this does not negate *The Pornographer's* existentialist credentials, as Sartre made clear in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*:

Existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity.¹⁹

Recognition of the various mechanisms which underlie these movements away from or towards solitude provides a means for the protagonists of *The Pornographer* and *L'Étranger* to negotiate the chasm of life which separates birth from death: 'To find we had to lose', the pornographer says, 'the road away became the road back' (*P*, 203).

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948), p. 24.

Eamon Maher

Chapter Fourteen: John Broderick (1924-89) and the French 'Roman Catholique'

Before embarking on any analysis of the extent to which the Irish writer John Broderick was influenced by the French 'Roman Catholique', it is important that we have some idea of how that particular form of writing experienced a renewal of popularity in France at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, the work of Richard Griffiths is an indispensable reference point.¹ Griffiths argues that Catholic writing was in some ways at variance with religious developments at the time, in that 'le renouveau littéraire s'affirmait comme un retour en arrière, une tentative de restauration des valeurs des siècles passés.'² Writers like Huysmans, Bloy and Bernanos felt a certain nostalgia for a glorious Catholic past and their novels emphasised how the supernatural can make its presence felt on the temporal world. Thus, we encounter in their works numerous examples of dramatic events such as divine revelations, miraculous cures, people with the ability to read into others' souls, things that were not commonly embraced in the more cultivated Catholic circles of the time. They were united in their strong distrust of the secular Republic and the materialistic concerns of the bourgeoisie, as well as in their support of the poor and the downtrodden. But fear was also a strong motivation:

Jusque dans les efforts de dissémination de leur foi, ils étaient poursuivis par la peur, peur d'être une minorité écrasée par la masse. Ils se concentraient sur la vie intérieure, ne pratiquant plus l'apostolat que par la prière personnelle, l'acceptation de la souffrance, ayant presque toujours renoncé à prêcher et à persuader. Cette tendance n'était pas uniquement le fruit de la peur, bien entendu ; elle provenait aussi

¹ Richard Griffiths, *Révolution à rebours : Le renouveau catholique dans la littérature en France de 1870 à 1914*. Translated by Marthe Lory (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1971).

² Griffiths, p.317.

d'une attention exagérée apportée aux phénomènes mystiques et à leurs effets tangibles ; la vie mystique apparaissait donc comme la forme la plus importante et la plus agissante de l'action.³

There was a deep-seated enmity between anticlerical republicans and Catholics in France at the end of the nineteenth century and thus, in some ways as a reaction against their republican enemies, many Catholic writers emphasised the mystical and the supernatural and encouraged a return to a hierarchical class system. Such a system would be one in which rich and poor worked in harmony and where the rights of all were respected. The idealisation of the past is a common thread running through Catholic literature in France up to the outbreak of World War I in particular – it remains strong in Bernanos throughout his works. Anti-modern, pro-mystical, anti-republican and pro-monarchy, these are the distinguishing features of many French Catholic writers. Bernanos had no qualms about openly attacking his enemies – particularly Anatole France, Brémond and Gide – in his pamphlets and novels. He also revealed an anti-Semitic bias at times. Miracles abound in his writings, many of which feature priests as their main characters. With Mauriac, it was less a question of attacking enemies and emphasising the spectacular power of grace than of exploring the anguished souls of his characters, whose spiritual dilemmas reflected many of the writer's own religious doubts. He despised hypocrisy in all its guises, a trait he shares with Bernanos and the French-American, Julien Green. Bernanos, Mauriac and Green are the best-known French Catholic novelists. But the term is not one that particularly suited any of them. It is strange to note that the decline of Christian faith in France coincided to a large degree with the popularity of the 'Roman Catholique'. The Catholic novelists go against the trend that was described by T.S. Eliot as 'the gradual secularization of literature.' But, in the opinion of Malcolm Scott:

The term 'Catholic novelist', which is the only one I can think of to embrace Barbey d'Aurville, Bloy, the later Huysmans, Mauriac, Bernanos, and Julien Green,

³ Griffiths, p.319.

has been blighted by unhelpful assumptions that it must refer to a novelist who puts his art to the service of the orthodox views of the Catholic Church and faith.⁴

Scott makes a very valid point here, namely that novelists who also happened to be Catholic did not necessarily see their role as one of fighting the cause of the Catholic Church. Rather, they saw themselves as writers first and foremost, and then Catholics – this is less true of Bernanos than the other two writers. They didn't want to be conscripted to a non-literary cause, to become apologists for the Catholic faith. What the reader should bear in mind when reading this chapter is that there is no simple definition that covers all the preoccupations of the 'Roman Catholique' in the same way as there is no way of supplying a list of normative values that inspire any group of writers belonging to a certain 'school'.

John Broderick, from the Irish midlands town of Athlone, where his family owned the local bakery, is a novelist who has not to date been given the sort of recognition that his talent deserves. It is true that his later novels suffered from what Patrick Murray described as a steady 'de-clension'⁵, particularly evident after *An Apology for Roses* (1973), and that he never again regained the tightness and focus of the novels of the 1960s, especially his first offering, *The Pilgrimage* (1961), and another book from the same decade, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (1965), which will form the main thrust of this chapter. In addition to being a novelist, Broderick was also a literary critic with *The Irish Times* and in this task he displayed the same type of inconsistency that would mark his personality and literary production. A huge admirer of Kate O'Brien, he was similarly well-disposed to his younger distant cousin, John McGahern. On the other hand, he was scathing in his dismissal of Edna O'Brien and was equally suspicious of the British reputation of Seamus Heaney, which according to Patrick Murray, 'he thought had more to do with political than literary criteria.'⁶ So when we speak of Broderick, we are dealing with a complex man, someone who at times deliberately courted

⁴ Malcolm Scott, *The Struggle for the Soul of the French Novel: French Catholic and Realist Novelists 1850-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.4.

⁵ Patrick Murray, "Athlone's John Broderick", in *Éire-Ireland*, Volume XXVII, Number 4, Geimhradh-Winter 1992, pp.20-39, p.35. This is by far the most comprehensive assessment of Broderick's *oeuvre* currently available.

⁶ "Athlone's John Broderick", p.22.

the limelight by being controversial. He was not at all amused either when his own work was attacked by literary critics, and one of his failings as a writer was his inability to rectify flaws that were correctly pointed out by prescient readers.

By his own admission, Broderick looked to continental Europe, and particularly to France, for his literary inspiration. In *The Irish Times* (1 June, 1989), he stated that François Mauriac was the only literary influence of which he was aware. He was also a close friend of the French-American, Julien Green, whom he visited in Paris and for whom he acted as guide when Green came to visit Ireland in the 1970s. Mauriac and Green, as we have already seen, are closely associated with the genre known as the 'Roman Catholique' - or Catholic Novel - in France, a label both rejected quite vigorously. Mauriac struggled to convince some of his Catholic readers that what he wrote was compatible with his religious convictions. In *Le Roman*, a work in which he outlined his philosophy of the novel, he stated that at the beginning of the 20th century, it was necessary for French writers to move out from under the shadow of Balzac, whose characters were confined to the role of types, and move closer to the illogicality that characterises the creations of Dostoevsky, many of whom, like Mauriac's own, are consumed by evil. His strong religious beliefs were a major source of conflict for Mauriac who wondered if the very act of writing was compatible with the state of grace. He summed up his dilemma in the following terms:

Un écrivain catholique avance sur une crête étroite entre deux abîmes : ne pas scandaliser, mais ne pas mentir ; ne pas exciter les convoitises de la chair, mais se garder aussi de falsifier la vie. Où est le plus grand péril : faire rêver dangereusement les jeunes hommes ou, à force de fades mensonges, leur inspirer le dégoût du Christ et de son Église ?⁷

In the end, Mauriac came up with the following formula: you must purify the source. By this he meant that his responsibility as a novelist was to

⁷ 'A Catholic writer advances along a narrow crest between two chasms: he cannot be a cause of scandal and yet he cannot lie either; he must not excite the desires of the flesh and yet he must also beware of the danger of giving a false picture of life. Which is the greater danger: making young people dream in an aberrant manner or inspiring disgust in them for Christ and His Church?' François Mauriac, *Le Roman* (Paris: L'Artisan du Livre, 1928), p.80. My translation.

write with a pure heart so that those who subsequently read him would not be contaminated by his books. Such an approach did not always work. Donat O'Donnell (*nom de plume* for Conor Cruise O'Brien), writing in his ground-breaking study, *Maria Cross*, was sensitive to Mauriac's dilemma when he described the 'haunted landscape' of the novels of the 1920s, 'through which flows a fiery river of lust' and concluding that 'evil is not merely tangible and odorous but often seductive as well.'⁸ As will be clear from the quotation above from *Le Roman*, Mauriac knew that his position was perilous. How was he to supply an authentic portrayal of the modern world without compromising his Catholic beliefs? The problem would have been far less grave if he didn't at times betray a connivance with sin and sinners. Catholic critics felt they had the right to expect an uncompromising detestation of sin from a Catholic writer. In response to a rather provocative question from Frédéric Lefèvre, "Monsieur François Mauriac, romancier catholique ?", Mauriac replied: "I am a writer and a Catholic and there is the conflict [...] I believe, in fact, that it is fortunate for a novelist to be a Catholic, but I am also quite sure that it is very dangerous for a Catholic to be a novelist."⁹ Mauriac thought long and hard about the possible reconciliation of his writing with his religious beliefs without ever truly coming up with a solution other than attempting to ensure that what he wrote didn't corrupt his readers. As an artist, however, he had a duty to allow his characters the sort of latitude that God affords to Mankind. From an artistic point of view also, there is a natural preference, in Mauriac's view, for the prodigal son:

[...] lorsque l'un des mes héros avance docilement dans la direction que je lui ai assignée, lorsqu'il accomplit toutes les étapes fixées par moi, et fait tous les gestes que j'attendais de lui, je m'inquiète ; cette soumission à mes desseins prouve qu'il n'a pas de vie propre, qu'il ne s'est pas détaché de moi, qu'il demeure une entité, une abstraction ; je ne suis content de mon travail que lorsque ma créature me résiste, lorsqu'elle se cabre devant les actions

⁸ Donat O'Donnell, *Maria Cross* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp.3, 5.

⁹ Taken from Lefèvre's interviews, *Une Heure avec...* (Paris : Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1924).

que j'avais résolu de lui faire commettre ; peut-être est-ce le fait de tous les créateurs de préférer à l'enfant sage l'enfant récalcitrant, l'enfant prodigue.¹⁰

The setting of most of Mauriac's novels, the rural bourgeois area of Les Landes, near Bordeaux, is at something of a remove from Broderick's Athlone with its 'nouveau riche' merchant class, and yet both writers were fascinated by the prevalence of social posturing and religious hypocrisy among the class into which they were born. Both were committed Catholics, and Catholicism plays a major role in their novels. The same is true of Julien Green, a convert from Protestantism, for whom spirituality and art were inseparable. He often claimed that he revealed more about himself through his fictions than he did in his autobiographical writing. In his *Journal*, he wrote:

Je travaille avec la rage d'oublier, de me plonger dans un monde imaginaire. Et qu'est-ce que je retrouve dans ce monde imaginaire ? Mes problèmes démesurément grandis jusqu'à atteindre des proportions terrifiantes.¹¹

Green was tormented by his homosexual leanings, which conflicted with his deep-rooted spirituality – Broderick experienced similar problems. Green and Broderick explore homosexual attraction among many of their male protagonists and at times betray misogynist tendencies in their portrayal of women who are in many instances lascivious, insatiable and immoral.¹² Both men retained a wistful nostalgia for Tridentine rituals and deeply regretted the abolition of the Mass in Latin in the wake of Vatican II. Writing in the *Weekend Supplement* of *The Irish Times* on the 14th of April, 1979, Broderick excoriated the manner in which the Catho-

¹⁰ *Le Roman*, pp.62-3.

¹¹ "I write out of an urgent need to forget, to plunge myself into a fictional world. And what do I find in this fictional world? My own problems which have been greatly heightened, to the point where they attain terrifying proportions." Quoted by Jacques Petit, *Julien Green, 'l'homme qui venait d'ailleurs'* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), p.236. My translation.

¹² Patrick Murray argues that it is tempting to read Broderick in Freudian terms. His father died when John was only three and his mother's remarriage to Paddy Flynn, foreman at the bakery, caused much upset for the young boy: 'His lifelong attitude to his mother, which influenced his view of other women both in his fictions and in his life, was compounded of an intense devotion and an underlying sense of betrayal.' Murray, "Athlone's John Broderick", pp.31-2.

lic Church was pursuing the popular line to the point of endangering the mystery at the heart of the Eucharist:

It is now clear that the clergy are prepared, either through ignorance or self-indulgence, to play down to the worst instincts of the people. We are told that Pop Masses appeal to the young; which is like saying that Barbara Cartland should be encouraged because she appeals to more readers than Jane Austen.¹³

As you can see, he didn't believe in taking prisoners! But his comments are revealing of his conservative leanings. Having pointed out some of the general preoccupations the Irish writer shared with his French counterparts, Mauriac and Green, we will now move on to a discussion of a couple of his novels, which dramatise the concerns of all three writers.

The Pilgrimage is a Mauriacian novel in terms of its classical, economical style and the psychological probing of its main character, Julia Glynn, the wife of a wealthy builder in a provincial Irish town. Julia's husband, Michael, a good deal older than she, is crippled with arthritis and this affords her the freedom to engage in sexual adventures with various lovers, most notably Michael's nephew, Jim, a doctor with a practice in Dublin and who comes to visit his uncle once a week. This visit twins as an occasion for Jim and Julia to make love:

There was always the necessity for haste. At first Julia had found this exciting: the brutal directness of such lovemaking had something of the anonymity of elemental sensuality. It was enough merely to hold that great body, never more than half undressed, in her arms on the bed, or more often simply standing against the locked door of the darkened room.¹⁴

This furtive lovemaking takes place when the manservant, Stephen, drives Fr. Victor back to the monastery after his weekly visit to the Glynn household. Fr. Victor is encouraging Michael to take a trip to Lourdes where he may be cured of his illness. Nobody really believes that the miracle will take place, but they indulge the invalid by having Masses

¹³ John Broderick, "A Curate's Egg at Easter". *Weekend Supplement to the Irish Times*, 14 April, 1979.

¹⁴ John Broderick, *The Pilgrimage* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.13. All the subsequent quotes will be from this edition, with page numbers in brackets.

said for his special intention and saying prayers in his room. There is a marked contrast between the religiosity of Michael and the immorality of his wife. When anonymous letters begin to arrive describing her affair with Jim in graphic terms, Julia fears that her comfortable life could be coming to an end. Her relief is huge when she discovers that it is Stephen, mad with jealousy, who is responsible for sending them. A sensual woman, Julia needs lovers in the same way as others crave money or jewellery. An easy conscience makes her deceptions even more pleasurable: 'She had never at any time suffered from a sense of sin.' (p.27)

While definitely no saint, Broderick doesn't imply that Julia is any worse than those who surround her. For example, during their honeymoon Michael became infatuated with a German man, with whom he corresponded for some time after their return to Ireland. On the infrequent occasions he chose to make love to his wife, he showed a tendency towards brutality. In fact, sexuality in the book is rarely bereft of a sordid element. Stephen is besotted with a local homosexual, Tommy Baggot. His feelings never assume any overt sexual dimension – he is a devout Catholic and is totally unaware of Tommy's notorious reputation in the locality and in Dublin. Stephen is, in fact, quite the innocent and his relationship with Julia begins when he makes love to her one night while she is totally inebriated. He doesn't refer to the incident the next day: everything is couched in silence. While she is happy to have a ready replacement for Jim when his engagement to the daughter of a wealthy business man and politician spells an end to their liaison, Julia is nonetheless conscious of the fact that Stephen would suffer serious remorse if he felt that his relationship with her was not inspired by love. He had, in her view, a repressed sexuality:

She doubted if Stephen, who, she had no doubt, loved her in his own fashion, would ever be able to dissociate lovemaking from the furtive, the sordid, and the unclean. Few Irishmen, she knew, ever were. The puritanism which was bred in their bones, and encouraged in their youth by every possible outside pressure, was never entirely eradicated. (p.171)

Such a distorted attitude to sex brings to mind Julien Green's Joseph Day, the hero of his chef d'oeuvre, *Moira*, published 10 years before *The Pilgrimage*, and a book that Broderick would most certainly have read. Day goes to university in Virginia (Green himself did his university studies in the American south) to study Greek with a view to reading the Bible in the original. His red hair and fiery disposition reflect his passionate na-

ture, a nature he attempts in vain to subdue. Attracted to a classmate, Praileau, whose disparaging comments lead to a serious fight between the two, Joseph ends up being seduced by his landlady's daughter, Moïra (which means fate in Greek). When he wakes up and realises that she has been the occasion of sin, he suffocates her with a pillow. Joseph Day, like Stephen, is distrustful of the flesh and sees women as little better than harlots. He is horrified when he notices his landlady is wearing rouge on her lips, like a Jezebel! She is attracted to her lodger who is almost totally unaware of the emotions he evokes in others. She tries to provoke him with some robust questions and this causes Joseph to question what is behind her attitude towards him:

Pourquoi cette femme lui avait-elle parlé de cette manière ? Et pourquoi donc avait-elle ri ? Sans doute, il aurait pu se montrer plus aimable, mais ce visage fardé lui avait paru horrible. Chez lui, un garçon honnête ne parlait pas à une femme fardée et celle-ci était peinte comme une Jézabel.¹⁵

He tells his friend, David Laird, that he hates the sexual instinct as it is an obstacle that intrudes between him and God. The underlying tension in *Moïra* is that Joseph Day cannot fight his true leanings: his nature and destiny point him towards Praileau in a situation that mirrors Green's own itinerary. In 1973, in the Pléiade edition of his works, Green took the decision to include a section entitled "Jean's Confession" that he had excised from the original 1948 version of *Le Malfaiteur*. It constitutes a moving plea for more understanding in relation to homosexuality:

C'est là le plus dur châtement de l'individu qu'un penchant sexuel met au ban de la société ; il en est réduit à feindre ou à faire un éclat, et si le cœur lui manque de se déclarer, il est injustement contraint à vivre en hypocrite.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Moïra*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome III, édité par Jacques Petit (Paris : Gallimard/Éditions de la Pléiade, 1993), p.7.

¹⁶ 'The most wrenching punishment that can befall an individual whose sexual orientation causes his banishment from society is that he be reduced to pretence or to making a major scene. And if he doesn't have the heart to declare himself, he is unjustly obliged to live like a hypocrite.' Julien Green, *Le Malfaiteur* (Paris: Fayard/Livre de Poche, 1955), p.141. My translation.

Green and Broderick struggled with their homosexuality to a significant degree and this tension manifested itself in their fiction. Broderick stated in an interview with Julia Carlson¹⁷ that the Irish were pathological when it came to homosexuality and it is difficult to disagree with him on that point. What brings Green and Broderick close, however, more than their homosexuality, is their fascination with the mystery that is at the heart of existence. The element that shocked Irish readers most when *The Pilgrimage* was first published in 1961 was not so much the daring descriptions of sex but rather the last sentence of the novel: 'In this way they set off on their pilgrimage, from which a week later Michael returned completely cured.' (p.191) Many found it blasphemous that a man as flawed as Michael should be the recipient of grace. Julien Green penned an excellent Preface to the French translation of the novel, which is reproduced in English in the Lilliput edition (2004). After stating his admiration for an 'extraordinarily gripping' book, Green asserts the soundness of Broderick's theology: 'Since when has healing been exclusively available to the just?' (p.2), he asks. There are indeed many examples in the Bible of how God's justice and curing were often extended to sinners and so Green correctly defends Broderick's choice of ending.

But let's return for a moment to the portrayal of sexuality by the two writers. In *Moira*, Green shows how difficult it is for religious fanaticism and a healthy sexuality to co-exist. In the course of the novel, Joseph Day struggles with his passionate nature, which he attempts to overcome. Simon Demuth's homosexual attraction towards him makes Joseph feel uncomfortable, but even the most obvious signs of his unspoken love, such as the flower Simon places on the hero's desk, fail to alert him to what is happening. He is as innocent about others' sexuality as he is about his own. His fight with Praileau provides an insight into where his true nature lies:

C'était en vain que son ennemi se tournait et se retournait de fureur entre ses bras ; a présent il le tenait sous lui dans l'étau de ses jambes et il lui fit toucher terre des deux épaules à la fois. [...] Joseph lui prit la tête entre les

¹⁷ Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p.46.

poings et d'une voix rauque, entrecoupée par l'effort, il s'écria : « Si je voulais, je pourrais t'ouvrir la tête aussi facilement qu'on casse un œuf. »¹⁸

What is being worked out in this scene is the struggle Green himself endured all his life with his homosexuality. Jacques Petit, in the Pléiade edition, points out the importance of the fight scene: 'Cette scène de bataille est peut-être la plus importante du roman. Elle est, Julien Green l'a noté, une « scène d'amour » (*Journal*, 23 septembre 1950) ; Joseph, sinon Praileau, l'ignore et le romancier lui-même n'en prend conscience qu'assez tard (*Journal*, 13 octobre 1948), lorsqu'il découvre le lien entre le désir et le crime chez son personnage.'¹⁹ It is in this context that we should consider the comment of Praileau, who predicts to Joseph: "Il y a en toi un assassin."²⁰ Joseph tries to kill with violence his sexual nature and it results in an actual murder at the end of the novel when he kills Moïra, who enters his room by stealth and to whose charms he finally succumbs. Having access to Green's *Journal* is of inestimable value when it comes to assessing his thoughts as he was composing his novels. With Broderick, no such resource is available. What is clear, however, is that the two novelists saw women and sexuality in general as being closely associated with sin. Grace intervened at times, as at the end of *The Pilgrimage*, but it was a rare occurrence indeed.

The Waking Of Willie Ryan possibly brings to mind Mauriac more than Green. It is a fine analysis of the hypocrisy and callousness of a well-to-do family when one of their number, Willie, becomes involved with a local widower, Roger. Thanks to the machinations of his sister-in-law, Mary, who claims he assaulted her years previously, the silence of his brother, Michael, who abused him sexually during their childhood, and the collusion of the local priest, Fr. Mannix, Willie is incarcerated in a lunatic asylum for over 30 years. Everybody who knows him realises that Willie is no madman. A combination of his homosexuality and his neglect of his religious duties are sufficient cause in the eyes of the family for his committal to the mental home. They are greatly shocked when he reappears one day and goes to stay with his nephew, Chris, who takes his side once he realises what really happened all those years ago. Mrs. Ryan tries to justify their actions to her son by pointing out that Willie

¹⁸ *Moïra*, p.24.

¹⁹ *Oeuvres complètes*, p.1574.

²⁰ *Moïra*, p.26.

was a pagan: “He has never been to Mass or confession since he was a young man, and he didn’t change his ways in the asylum.”²¹ Religious hypocrisy was a major bugbear of Broderick’s, as it was for Mauriac and Green. Mrs. Ryan herself is quick to find fault with the Church’s new-found interest in, and commitment to, the poorer elements of society and contrasts this to Fr. Mannix’s lifestyle: “Who does he think he is anyway? Ten minutes late every morning saying Mass and the rest of the time playing golf and bridge!” (p.62) She also wonders how appropriate it is for a priest to be driving around in a big Mercedes.

Always quick to emphasise her own piety and commitment to religion, Mrs. Ryan is someone whose courtship of social respectability resembles that of Bernard Desqueyroux, in Mauriac’s finest novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. In fact, Mauriac’s heroine, Thérèse, is so filled with abhorrence for her husband’s hypocrisy that she attempts to poison him. A prude when it came to sexual behaviour, this did not prevent Bernard from assuming a hideous appearance when taking possession of his wife, who is described as his ‘accustomed prey’.²² Shocked by the shameful appearance of women in a Parisian night club they visit at the end of their honeymoon, Thérèse can only marvel that this outwardly chaste, judgemental man is the same one who will soon be making her submit to his ‘patient inventions in the dark.’ (p.49) She notes: ‘I’ve often seen Bernard sink himself entirely in his pleasure – and me, I played dead, as if the slightest movement on my part could make this madman, this epileptic, strangle me.’ (p.49) Social respectability is what matters above all else to people like Mrs. Ryan and Bernard Desqueyroux. They never pause to reflect on how their own behaviour is at variance with the values they outwardly cherish most.

The best parts in *The Waking of Willie Ryan* are undoubtedly the exchanges between Willie and Fr. Mannix. The cleric is aware that Willie only agreed to receive Holy Communion at a special Mass organised by the family to prove his rehabilitation to the outside world, so that he could live out his remaining days in peace. The two discuss Willie’s former lover, Roger, and how he apparently renounced his sinful ways and

²¹ John Broderick, *The Waking of Willie Ryan* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.47.

²² François Mauriac, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Translated by Raymond Mackenzie (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005), p.55. All references will be to this edition with the page numbers in brackets.

reconciled himself with the Church. What Fr. Mannix didn't realise was that Roger and Willie continued to see each other in secret. Willie takes great pleasure in setting the record straight:

"Roger never gave up what you like to call 'vice'. If it's of any interest to you now I never wanted it, not with him anyway. It was he who – how would you put it? – seduced me. Yes, that's how you'd put it. I hated it: but I did it because I loved him." (pp.200-201)

The priest is visibly thrown by that revelation. One of Broderick's successes in this novel is the manner in which he resists the temptation to demonise Fr. Mannix who only realises late in life that his parish is inhabited by people who are in the main apathetic to religion outside of the social, utilitarian value it can afford them. He is closer in many ways to Willie, whose reasons for not practising his religion are more honourable than those who use it simply for their own advancement. Before the fateful Mass in his nephew's cottage, Willie has a moment of revolt when he is tempted not to go through with what he knows to be a sham. He says to Susan, his nephew's girlfriend: "Oh God [...] it's the same old pattern all over again. Toe the line and play the hypocrite! If I had done that twenty-five years ago I wouldn't have been sent away." (p.172) Like many of Mauriac's characters, including Thérèse, Willie has a much stronger attraction for the supernatural than the rest of his family. It is their superficial observance of their religion, their parody of the Christian life, that prevent him from opening up to the possibility of a divine presence. His comment to Fr. Mannix is revealing: "Perhaps you only recognise what you call 'infernal grace' when you're told about it. After all it's easy to preach to the converted, even if they only pretend to be converted." (p.199)

Willie achieves some kind of peace at the end of his life. The night he dies, Broderick notes: 'Outside the falling snow muffled the earth. And the old weep quietly.' (p.236) There is a serene sadness about this description, a hint that some kind of supernatural presence may be at work. The impression given is that Willie, like Michael at the end of *The Pilgrimage*, could have been the beneficiary of grace. Remark the way in which nothing is stated with certainty. The same is true of the endings of *Moïra* and *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Joseph Day, after murdering Moïra, is offered a means of escape by his former adversary, Praileau, but chooses instead to give himself up to the authorities. He meets with the calm

David Laird whom he beseeches not to speak to him about God. David saw the danger with his friend's passionate nature and yet admits to him:

« Je ne te juge pas, je ne t'ai jamais jugé. [...] J'ai toujours cru que tu valais mieux que moi. Je le crois encore. Moi, je ne serai jamais qu'un petit pasteur. Mais toi... »²³

The last lines of the novel describe a man coming towards Joseph in the twilight. We are not informed who this person is or what his role will be in the hero's destiny. What we do know is that Joseph has been humbled by his experiences and made aware of his weaknesses. There is some hope in that alone.

What of Thérèse then? The end of the novel sees Bernard accompanying her to Paris, where she will be allowed to spend her life free from the cage of family. Her accommodation with her husband has been achieved mainly as a result of her having played the role of dutiful wife in front of her sister-in-law's fiancé, who naturally harboured some doubts about this infamous family member. For a brief moment, Thérèse considers the possibility of resuming her life with Bernard: 'Now she seemed to perceive a light, a kind of dawning, and she imagined a return to that secret, sad country: she imagined a whole life of meditation, of perfecting herself in the Argelouse silence, an interior journey in search of God ...' (p.119) She who was considered a renegade by her husband and his family has a spirituality that is lacking in them. She at least knows she is a sinner. When Bernard asks her why she tried to poison him, she attempts to explain:

"What I wanted? It would probably be easier to say what I didn't want. I didn't want to keep on playing a role, speaking only set formulas, denying every second a Thérèse who ... But no, Bernard, look: I'm only trying to be truthful – so why does everything I tell you sound so false?" (p.121)

Her husband, regretting his momentary weakness, immediately resumes the role of respectability: "Lower your voice: the man behind us has started to listen." (p.121) The attempted reconciliation breaks down because of Bernard's inability to comprehend his wife's complex character. For him, everything is black and white and Thérèse's paradoxes only of-

²³ *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.192.

fer him agitation. No one but God can say what fate holds in store for the likes of Joseph Day, Willie Ryan or Thérèse Desqueyroux.

So, for all that separated Broderick's fictional world from that portrayed in the French 'Roman Catholique' there is enough convergence in his portrayal of sinners who reach an accommodation with God for us to speak of what the French refer to as 'connivence', or complicity, with the likes of Mauriac and Green. In her book dealing with the life and works of John Broderick, Madeline Kingston suggests something which coincides with our own reading of events:

The Catholic Church in republican, secular France was very different from the Catholic Church of Holy Ireland: its novelists were originally defending the Church against the overt onslaughts of the state and later against the tide of scepticism and scientific advance. But if, as has been suggested, Broderick in writing this work was attempting to reinvent himself as a French-style catholic novelist, he came close to success.²⁴

The problem lies with determining exactly what we mean by the term 'Catholic Novel'. At the beginning of this chapter and elsewhere²⁵ I have attempted to come to grips with this concept. I find much to admire in the definition of Albert Sonnenfeld:

It (the Catholic Novel) is a novel written by a Catholic, using Catholicism as its informing mythopoeic structure or generative symbolic system, and where the principal and decisive issue is the salvation or damnation of the hero or heroine.²⁶

There is no such tradition I can detect in the Irish novel, with the possible exception of Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (1934). Broderick's characters are without doubt placed in a world whose 'generative symbolic system' (to use Sonnenfeld's phrase) is definitely governed by Catholicism,

²⁴ Madeline Kingston, *Something in the Head: The Life and Work of John Broderick* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004), p.122.

²⁵ Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher (eds), *Irish and Catholic? Towards an Understanding of Identity* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006). See chapter 6, "Representations of Catholicism in the Twentieth-Century Irish Novel", pp.103-119.

²⁶ Albert Sonnenfeld, *Crossroads: Essays on the Catholic Novelists* (York {South Carolina}: French Literature Publishing Company, 1980), p.vii.

but the salvation or damnation of his heroes or heroines is not the controlling preoccupation of his novels. He is much more concerned with social satire than with theology. *The Pilgrimage* is the closest he comes to producing a 'Catholic Novel' but the heroine's spiritual plight is rarely, if ever, touched on. Her husband is the one who benefits from grace and we are never given access to his private thoughts. The Irish wrote out of a tradition that was completely different to that of the French. There had not been the debates between positivism and Catholicism that marked the Enlightenment, for example, or the upheaval of the French Revolution, the separation of Church and State in 1905. In Ireland, Catholicism was the majority religion and people tended to blindly follow its dictates because they didn't possess the sound grounding in philosophy that characterises the French educational system and which trains people to critically assess and filter the knowledge that is imparted to them. Brian O'Rourke captures the reasons why the Catholic Novel did not flourish in this country:

However, I feel it is only fair to say at this point that I suspect that the non-emergence, to any notable degree, of an Irish 'Catholic novel', may have something to do with statistics and voluntary stance, as well as with imaginative disposition. Several of the French novelists we have studied speak of their work as constituting a conscious witness to the faith and this seems to me not unconnected with their consciousness of writing for a de-Christianised public. Conversely, I have the impression that some of the Irish novelists might have been more 'Catholic' if more of their compatriots were less so.²⁷

The French Catholic novelists of the twentieth century were aware that their audience was mainly constituted of people who were at best lukewarm about their religion. They sought therefore to put forward dramatic examples of characters whose main concern is to ensure eternal salvation. The Irish, on the other hand, rather than emphasising the metaphysical, tended to concentrate on underlining the hypocrisy and intolerance of those who used religion for their own purposes. This is a possible explanation for the difference between the role of the Catholic novel in the two cultures. In Broderick's case we find someone who is more comfortable

²⁷ Brian O'Rourke, *The Conscience of the Race: Sex and Religion in Irish and French Novels 1941-1973* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1980), p.62.

when attacking complacency than when exploring the nuances of inner turmoil. While definitely influenced by Julien Green and François Mauriac, he stopped short of ever producing an Irish equivalent of the 'Roman Catholique'. I'll close with a revealing comment by Aunt Kate, a defrocked nun who appears in Broderick's second novel, *The Fugitives*. She captures the stance of the Irish novelist very well:

"Only the really religious people turn against religion in this country. The ones that are at the top and bottom of every religious organisation are the ones that have no religion at all."

Joan Dargan

Chapter Fifteen: From “Omphalos” to “Testimonies”: France in the Works of Seamus Heaney

In his poem ‘Testimonies,’ Seamus Heaney recalls a troop of American soldiers hiking through the fields near his family’s farm, ‘[u]nknown, unnamed,/ Heading for Normandy.’ These were members of the 82nd Airborne Division, temporarily stationed near Castledawson in late 1943, soon to depart for England and further training. Knowledge of the fierce combat awaiting them at their D-Day destination of Ste-Mère-Eglise, its surrounding farmland and bogs not dissimilar to his native territory, surely haunts the mature poet along with his memories of the brief encounter dramatized here:

i

‘We were killing pigs when the Americans arrived.
A Tuesday morning, sunlight and gutter blood
Outside the slaughter house. From the main road
They would have heard the screaming,
Then heard it stop and had a view of us
In our gloves and aprons coming down the hill.
Two lines of them, guns on their shoulders, marching.
Armoured cars and tanks and open jeeps,
Sunburnt hands and arms. Unknown, unnamed,
Heading for Normandy.

Not that we knew then

Where they were headed, standing there like youngsters
As they tossed us gum and tubes of coloured sweets.’

ii

‘I saw them that same day. I was up a tree,
Solidly supported in a beech-fork,
But loving too the over and aboveness
Of creeping out on airier, bendier branches.
And now I see them in a flittered light
Cut by fire and shrapnel in the wave,

But even so—*confiteor*—must confess:
 My sit-out there is what has stood to me,
 Braced against myself and bark and bole,
 All else occurring apparitional.’¹

With its double vantage point of the adult onlookers interrupted in the midst of butchering hogs, and of the child perched in a favorite tree, Heaney’s poem provides a glimpse of the intrusion of a foreign military presence into the Ulster countryside, itself no stranger to violence. The presence of France is tangential, outside the poem, and in a sense insubstantial (now residing in the borrowed memory of the adult, the ‘flittered light’ of film);² but it is the imminent fighting in Normandy that has brought about this glimpse, this encounter, at all. And clearly it made a great impression on the young child Heaney was in 1943; he has referred to this memory many times in interviews and statements, and it has now resurfaced in *District and Circle* (2006) in the poems ‘Anahorish 1944’ (the revised and shortened version of ‘Testimonies’) and ‘The Aerodrome.’

It had not been so long ago that Irish soldiers had fought in France in the Great War, as the adults somberly watching the troops go by would have held in living memory. Readers today gratefully acknowledge Frank McGuinness and Sebastian Barry for their masterful reminders of this history. The scale of this new deployment in 1943 must have been astonishing. Indeed, as early as December 1941, immediately in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized plans to send American troops into Northern Ireland in anticipation of an invasion of the Continent. Two divisions of the U.S. Army, the 34th Infantry and 1st Armored, arrived in January 1942, preparing the infrastructure for

¹ This intriguing version of the poem was published in 2003 as a broadside by the University of Iowa Center for the Book; an earlier version entitled ‘Testimony’ appeared in *The Irish Times* on March 15, 2002. Heaney’s subsequent revision of the poem retains the first section of the broadside version only, with minor changes; retitled ‘Anahorish 1944,’ it appears in his latest collection *District and Circle* (London: Faber, 2006) and in the book by John P. McCann cited below.

² This brief notation immediately links this version of the poem to the majestic ‘District and Circle,’ which concludes with the image of the poet ‘[r]eflecting in a window mirror-backed/ By blasted weeping rock-walls./ Flicker-lit’ (*District and Circle*, p. 19).

what was to become a buildup of 41,000 troops by the summer. Many camps had to be built. A year later, as preparation for Operation Overlord began in earnest, some 120,000 American troops were stationed in Northern Ireland, and many more were to come by the end of 1943. Among these were the 12,000 paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division, who arrived in Belfast in December and early January. Most were veterans of the campaigns in Sicily and Italy, and had left on transport ships in late November from Oran.³ Others in regiments newly attached to the 82nd had sailed directly from the United States a few weeks later, under what had passed for strict secrecy. As one of the paratroopers who had left New York Harbor recalled: 'We were aboard ship for eleven days, after which we landed in Belfast... When we landed in Ireland, the 'Berlin Bitch' not only identified us as our unit, but she also knew what days were going to be payday.'⁴ It was perhaps men from among these newer airborne troops who settled outside Castledawson, about a mile from the Heaney farm. (In an interview, Heaney cites the neighboring troops as belonging to '[t]he 103rd Airborne Division,'⁵ no doubt meaning the 101st Airborne Division, from which replacements arriving from the States had been drawn.) Training in Northern Ireland lasted only for a matter of weeks. On February 13, 1944, the 82nd Airborne began a month-long process of vacating their camps and traveling to the port of Belfast, where they boarded ferries to Glasgow, on their way to pre-invasion camps in England. Over the next five months some 300,000 other American troops stationed in Northern Ireland would follow the same route leading ultimately to France.⁶

Heaney's prose work 'Mossbawn,'⁷ apparently a collection of several radio pieces of reminiscences about his childhood written in the 1970s, opens with a section entitled 'Omphalos,' and it is striking that as

³ All of this information has been gleaned from John P. McCann's exemplary tribute, *Passing Through: The 82nd Airborne Division in Northern Ireland 1943-44* (Newtonards: Colourpoint, 2005), pp. 9-10.

⁴ Phil Nordyke, *All-American All the Way: The Combat History of the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith, 2005), p. 164.

⁵ Clíodhna Ní Anluain (ed.), *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), p. 83.

⁶ McCann, pp. 93-94.

⁷ Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), pp. 17-27.

he journeys to the center of his personal mythological universe he almost immediately registers the presence of the American forces in its sky and on its ground:

...omphalos, omphalos, omphalos...its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. It is Co. Derry in the early 1940s. The American bombers groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, the American troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all of that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard. There the pump stands, a slender, iron idol, snouted, helmeted... Five households drew water from it. Women came and went, came rattling between empty enamel buckets, went evenly away, weighed down by silent water. The horses came home to it in those first lengthening evenings of spring...⁸

Overlaid with the sound of erudition, the farm rhythms go on in memory, ancient and primordial; the ‘great historical action’ becomes part of the scenery, transitory, peripheral, but, as the child will learn, part of a larger recurrent pattern. For, as the growing child discovers his native landscape—peadrills, hollow willow tree, bog, Lough Beg—the battlefields in France loom nearby:

St. Patrick, they said, had fasted and prayed [on Church Island, in the center of the lake] fifteen hundred years before. The old graveyard was shoulder-high with meadowsweet and cow parsley, overhung with thick, unmolested yew trees and, somehow, those yews fetched me away to Agincourt and Crécy, where the English archers’ bows, I knew, were made of yew also.⁹

A Scholar of Shakespeare, Heaney is propelled instantly by these yew trees to the old battlegrounds of northern France, in the general vicinity of the Somme; a disciple of St. Germanus of Auxerre, St. Patrick made the reverse journey from Gaul when he returned to Ireland as a bishop in 432.¹⁰ Heaney’s intuitive connection is all the richer for its geographic precision; in the late sixth century Irish missionaries came to the area near Abbeville, on the Somme, one of their converts going on to found

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰ “Patrick, Saint”, *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 2162.

the abbey of St. Riquier. To the southwest the Scardon River 'is swelled by the junction with the Mirandeuil or Misendeuil, a name derived from the fact that it was at this spot the ladies of [the town of] St. Riquier first heard the fatal news that their husbands had fallen in the battle at Crécy.'¹¹ As he continues to absorb the reality of the history of warfare in its manifestations at home and abroad, the young Heaney's imaginative peregrinations rejoin an ancient pattern of crossings.

Particularly memorable is '[a] textbook with large type and heavy Celticized illustrations [that] dealt with the matter of Ireland from Tuatha De Danaan to the Norman Invasion.'¹² Heaney's schooling proceeds as if the upheaval of the Second World War, for all the conspicuous local presence of the American troops, had not taken place or, being merely the most recent episode in a long history of conflict, did not bear mentioning:

I am amazed to realize that at the age of eleven I was spouting great passages of Byron and Keats by rote until the zinc roof of the Nissen hut that served for our schoolhouse (the previous school had been cleared during the war to make room for an aerodrome) rang to the half-understood magnificence of:

There was a sound of revelry by night
And Belgium's capital had gathered then
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men.¹³

So it is that Byron's poem 'The Eve of Waterloo' literally has more resonance in the makeshift schoolhouse than the D-Day landings to which it owes its existence.

In the prose work 'Mossbawn,' the poet moves outward from omphalos to rhyme, his earliest memories populated by an invasion force and his schooling framed by a Nissen hut. And he evokes a France repeatedly associated with warfare—origin, locus, magnet, perhaps—that sweeps away schoolhouses and brings slaughter in its wake. For Heaney the poet, the 'rhythms of the yard' are source and sustenance; the rhymes learned in childhood outlast the recycled temporary shelter where they

¹¹ Margaret Stokes, *Three Months in the Forests of France: A Pilgrimage in Search of Vestiges of Irish Saints* (London: G. Bell, 1895), p. 77.

¹² *Preoccupations*, p. 23.

¹³ *Preoccupations*, p. 26.

first ring out, to say nothing of 'fair women and brave men.' At the same time, the imminence and imprint of organized violence glimpsed in the landscape and the literature of his childhood have been displaced to another country—France—only to return, reconfigured and deadly, in the Ireland of his adulthood and mature poetry. An implicit affinity and sad premonition seem to hide in these early memories of reading and study.

A more explicitly literary France appears occasionally in Heaney's poetry. The collection *North* (1975) includes his fine translation of Baudelaire's poem 'Le squelette laboureur,' so called after an engraving found in a bookstall along the Seine.¹⁴ Heaney's version, entitled 'The Digging Skeleton,' concludes with these lines: 'Some traitor breath// Revives our clay, sends us abroad/ And by the sweat of our stripped brows/ We earn our deaths; our one repose/ When the bleeding instep finds its spade.'¹⁵ Baudelaire assails the skeletons for perhaps exposing a threatening truth: 'Et que sempiternellement,/ Hélas! il nous faudra peut-être// Dans quelque pays inconnu/ Ecorcher la terre revêche/ Et pousser une lourde bêche/ Sous notre pied sanglant et nu?'¹⁶ Some grim justice emerges to confront that 'traitor breath' in Heaney's version ('We earn our deaths'); the scalding question rages, unanswered, in Baudelaire. The poem fits wonderfully in Heaney's excavation in *North* of the common ground of Northern Europe and Ireland—another refraction—where '[t]he 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse.'¹⁷

A few years later in *Field Work* (1979), Heaney writes in memory of Francis Ledwige, 'killed in France';¹⁸ and Wilfred Owen, also killed in France during the Great War, is a constant in Heaney's field of reference in his prose and poetry. Still, Heaney's kinship with these poets is not primarily geographical in nature. In 'Night Drive,' Heaney travels near the Somme, but on the road place exists only as signpost; the weight of history, literary or military, does not slow the hurrying poet down: 'Signposts whitened relentlessly./ Montreuil, Abbéville, Beauvais/ Were promised, promised, came and went,/ Each place granting its name's fulfill-

¹⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), vol. I, p. 1023.

¹⁵ Heaney, *North* (Faber Library 11) (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 18.

¹⁶ Baudelaire, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁷ *North*, p. 53.

¹⁸ Heaney, *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 59.

ment.’¹⁹ (One need only think of Michael Longley’s poems full of battlefield and graveside visits inspired by his father’s experience in the Great War, by way of instructive contrast).²⁰ Alluding (primarily) in his prose to Joyce, Yeats, Synge and Wilde’s various stays in Paris, Heaney acknowledges the French capital as a locus for the cultivation of the native, and displaced, literature of Ireland; but once again he seems to be disinclined to stop and undertake a pilgrimage, at least for the record.

Perhaps a trip he made to Lourdes as a teenager in 1956 cured him of such an impulse; invoking ‘the thurifer I was in an open-air procession,’ Heaney recalls, ‘I nearly fainted from the heat and fumes.’²¹ Clearly a model of helpfulness, he served also as stretcher-bearer, as described in ‘Brancardier,’ the middle section of his poem written in memory of Czeslaw Milosz, ‘Out of this World.’ The aspiration for one universal faith, intoned in ‘the *unam sanctam catholicam* acoustic/ Of that underground basilica,’ he weighs in the balance with the plastic souvenirs and certificate of service he brought back home; it was a vision, a fervor ‘maybe/ Not gone but not what was meant to be.’²² The word ‘brancardier,’ which conjures up the image of the wounded being carried to ambulances on the battlefield, reminds us that universal harmony is not likely achievable in that domain either. The adolescent confronting the limitations of his religious heritage is no longer the unfettered child spying down from a tree with beguiling insouciance; he is becoming more like the unsentimental adults in their butcher aprons, weighed down by the sad knowledge in their hearts.

Indeed, the vividness of the poem ‘Testimonies,’ a work anchoring the poet in traumatic contemporary history and the child in remembered wonderment, attests to the magnetic pull and presence of France in this wonderfully responsive and open-minded poetry. A poet born near Belfast in 1939 had no need to travel to Normandy or Paris or Ors to locate the reality of war or the presence of literature. He did not need to make France or French culture a central preoccupation of his poetry, but even so he has surely acknowledged its stature, paying tribute to its history, its poetry, and its connections with Irish history and poetry. Heaney has had

¹⁹ Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 34.

²⁰ These works have been collected in his *Cenotaph of Snow* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2005).

²¹ Heaney, ‘Out of the Bag,’ in *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 8.

²² *District and Circle*, p. 49.

his own ground to open, imperatively, with the nib of his digging instrument. And yet he may be, in his unobtrusive way, a true Francophile. In his review of Italo Calvino's novel *Mr. Palomar*, he lingers approvingly over the following lines:

Behind every cheese, [he muses] there is a pasture of a different green under a different sky: meadows caked with salt that the tides of Normandy deposit every evening; meadows scented with aromas in the windy sunlight of Provence; there are different flocks, with their stablings and their transhumances; there are secret processes handed down over the centuries. This shop is a museum: Mr. Palomar, visiting it, feels as he does in the Louvre, behind every displayed object the presence of the civilization that has given it form and takes form from it.²³

The tides of Normandy may well have influenced his earliest memories, however imperceptibly, and one suspects that Heaney did not have to wait for the example of Mr. Palomar to appreciate their peaceful uses or, as he wrote years ago of the coast near Calais, 'the smells of ordinari-ness'²⁴ on the drive inland or the mysteriousness of that electric exchange between the damp, scented ground and a life spent digging for treasure.

²³ Heaney, *Finders Keepers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 393.

²⁴ *Door into the Dark*, p. 34.

Part V

Theoretical / Cultural Links

Eugene O'Brien

Chapter Sixteen: Vivre la différ[a]ence: French and Irish Republicanism – towards a deconstructive inter-textual critique

Any attempt to provide an articulation of Irish and French republicanism is a difficult task. Epistemologically, while both share a common signifier, the attached signifieds are so different as to be almost in conflict. The secular, enlightenment-driven ideology of French republicanism would seem to be at odds with the often Catholic and narrow Irish version of the term. Indeed the difference between Irish republicanism and nationalism is often a very narrow one. Thus, if an articulation between the two is to be assayed, a different perspective must be used, and it is for such a perspective that I turn to the work of Jacques Lacan.

Writing in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan focuses on Hans Holbein's 1533 painting of *The Ambassadors*.¹ In this painting, the gaze of the reader is fixed on two men, Jean de Dinteville, and Georges de Selve, who appear to be gazing back at the viewer. Between them is a table on which are placed various objects, 'symbolic of the sciences and arts as they were grouped at the time in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*',² and at the bottom of the painting, at a forty-degree angle to the horizontal is an anamorphic skull, which also appears to stare back at the viewer. For Lacan, this anamorphosis is not noticed at first:

What, then, before this display of the domain of appearance in all its most fascinating forms, is this object, which from some angles appears to be flying through the air, at others to be tilted? Begin by walking out of the room in which no doubt it has long held your attention. It is then that, turning round

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 85-90.

² Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 88.

as you leave – as the author of the *Anamorphosis* describes it – you apprehend in this form ...What? A skull.³

The existence of the skull is dependent on perspective. It is only when the gaze turns away from the full frontal perspective, that the anamorphic scopic field allows the skeleton which undercuts the optimistic vision of the picture to emerge. The perspectival interaction of the emblems of renaissance power and intellectual mastery with the classic emblem of mortality, the skull, provides a broader range of meaning to the picture.

The dialectic between mastery over nature through increased scientific and geographical knowledge, and the constant presence of death, is part of the meaning of that picture; indeed, it is the relationship between the two perspectives that creates the complexity of Holbein's work. To look at this picture is to constantly oscillate between the different perspectives, and this, I would contend, is the 'meaning' of the picture. I would argue that one of the strongest influences of the discourse that can be called, for convenience, French theory, is this very oscillation of perspective where different positions can mutually influence our sense of the normative, and go on to challenge and critique those very notions of normativity. A similar anamorphic gaze, I would contend, will allow us to clarify the positions of Irish and French republicanism, and to demonstrate how the same signifier is attached to very different signifieds. I would argue that the meaning of the term 'republicanism' is fractures and fraught and can really only be found in the differential dialectic between the different significations of the term. I would begin this exploration if these political ideologies by moving on from the different perspectives between Holbein's bodies and skull to a dead body and the competing discourses that were set up by that oscillation to another dead body and other competing discourses. It may seem an unusual place to begin but I would like to start by recounting the story of Anna Nicole Smith, who recently died in tragic circumstances. Anna Nicole Smith is a former *Playboy* Playmate of the Year, has been the star of her own eponymous reality show on the E-cable channel, has been a columnist for the *National Enquirer* and as a front saleswoman on television for TrimSpa diet pills.

But on February 28th 2006, she was to be found inside one of the most prestigious state buildings in America, namely the Supreme Court in

³ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 88.

Washington DC as her case against her stepson was debated. Smith is the spouse of the late Texas oil plutocrat J. Howard Marshall II – whom she wed in 1994, when she was 26 and he was 89. He died the following year. According to Anna Nicole, J. Howard intended to give her half of a \$1.6 billion from his estate, but his plan was fraudulently thwarted by his son, Pierce, who wanted the old man's money for himself. She has been fighting Pierce ever since.

The Supreme Court justices seemed aware of stepping into an epic soap opera of the kind that could have happened only in Texas. The battle between Anna Nicole and Pierce 'is quite a story', as Justice Stephen G. Breyer observed. Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. noted that the case 'involved a substantial amount of assets,' presumably not intending any *double entendre* in the case of a woman who last year stripped to the waist at the MTV Australia Video Music Awards, revealing breasts covered with the MTV logo.

For his part, Pierce, 67, says that he did nothing wrong and that his stepmother is a frustrated gold digger who lost her case in a Texas court. For the Supreme Court, the nub of the problem is that different courts have come down on opposite sides of the case. A federal bankruptcy judge and federal district judge in California both ruled for Anna Nicole, with the latter awarding her \$88 million in 2002. But a Texas probate court had ruled in favour of Pierce in 2001. The San Francisco-based federal appeals court ruled last year that the Texas court's decision should trump because matters having to do with wills and estates, or probate, as the lawyers call it, belong exclusively in the state courts. Anna Nicole's claims are just a dressed-up attempt to refight a settled will contest, the appeals court ruled. But based on their questions and comments yesterday, the justices seem to see things Anna Nicole's way.

Her claim that Pierce interfered with what she says was J. Howard's promised gift of a sizable inheritance in return for marrying him is a separate legal claim she could, indeed, take to federal court without violating the longstanding but vaguely defined general rule against federal court intervention in probate cases, several justices suggested. 'She's saying, 'I just want some money from this guy,' ' Justice David H. Souter said, cutting to the chase. 'That's all she's saying. 'I'll assume the will is valid; just give me some money.'⁴

⁴ Charles Lane, *Washington Post*, March 1st 2006, p. A01.

Now at this juncture you are probably looking at this chapter and wondering at the connection between all of this and the title of the chapter. The reason for looking at this case is because it makes a point about the form and nature of an inheritance, in a very specific manner. So, to allay your fears, let me now move from Anna Nicole Smith, J. Howard Marshall II and temporally turn the clock back some eighty years from 1994 to 1916 and spatially move from Texas to Dublin, where another notion of inheritance is being enunciated.

This time we are not inside a state building but outside of one, the General Post Office in Sackville Street, in Dublin, where the leader of a group of insurgents, is speaking:

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.⁵

Thus spoke Patrick Pearse on the steps of the General Post Office in the centre of Dublin on Easter Monday 1916, when he proclaimed the inception of the Irish Republic. The dead generations to which Pearse refers include those who previously fought and died for Ireland. In an oration given at the grave of Tone, in Bodenstown, County Kildare, in 1913, Pearse enfolded Tone in the following narrative structure:

We have come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists.... We have come to renew our adhesion to the faith of Tone: to express once more our full acceptance of the gospel of Irish Nationalism which he was the first to formulate in worldly terms. This man's soul was a burning flame, so ardent, so generous, so pure, that to come into communion with it is to come unto a new baptism, into a new regeneration and cleansing.⁶

Consequently, when the Provisional IRA stand at Bodenstown, they are connected, mythically and unconsciously, *not* with the historical Wolfe Tone, but with a narrative image of Tone, which functions as a *point de*

⁵ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1990), p.280.

⁶ Patrick Pearse, *Collected Works of Pádraig H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches*, 5 volumes (Dublin: Phoenix, 1917-22), volume 2, p.58.

capiton from which they trace their political and ideological heritage. Such a mythic fusion is part of the modality of nationalism, the idea that:

a whole nation could be like a congregation; singing the same hymns, listening to the same gospel, sharing the same emotions, linked not only to each other, but to the dead beneath their feet.⁷

This bond with the dead imbues the land for which they gave their lives, and in which they are buried, with a lococentric form of transcendence. It is as if, symbolically, by giving their lives *for* the land, they give life *to* the land, and they embody the potential for the resurrection of their ideological positions *from* the land..

To step forward in time to 1999, at Tone's grave in Bodenstown, another republican, Gerry Adams, the leader of provisional Sinn Féin, was speaking at the annual commemoration of 1916, and again the topic of inheritances was very much to the fore. Adams says that:

We have a spirit of genius in this nation – no less. It reaches back to our Gaelic roots and draws as well on our interactions with the other cultures of this continent, and indeed of the world further afield, particularly where our people have traveled and settled. Our unique Irishness is the outcome of a rich inheritance and the result of constant innovation. We must therefore continue to cherish our past.⁸

Part of this past, of course, is Wolfe Tone, and in 2004, commemorating the 200th anniversary of his birth, Adams quoted the following lines:

Tone said during his trial in 1798: 'From my earliest youth, I have regarded the connection between Ireland and Great Britain, as the curse of the Irish nation; and felt convinced, that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy'.⁹

This is seen as a motivating fact in Sinn Féin's homage to 'a republican hero' and these words are seen as validating political and military

⁷ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging* (London: Vintage, 1993) p.95

⁸ Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin Ard Fheis Speech, March 20th, 1999.
http://www.sinnfein.ie/pdf/Speech_ArdFheis99.pdf.

⁹ Gerry Adams, Bodenstown Speech, June 20th, 2004.
<http://www.sinnfein.ie/peace/speech/13>.

processes which serve to break this connection. However, ironically, Adams quotes the words of another leader of 1916, James Connolly, who said that 'We are told to imitate Wolfe Tone, but the greatness of Wolfe Tone lay in the fact that he imitated nobody'.¹⁰ Adams goes on: 'So too is it with Sinn Féin. We are mapping out our own vision for the future and our policies for the here and now.' The irony here is lost on him. Tone did not imitate the past, instead he focused on the future whereas Adams will imitate Tone by not actually imitating him but instead do so by 'continuing to cherish our past'.¹¹

Now you are wondering about the connection between Anna Nicole Smith, Padraic Pearse, Theobald Wolfe Tone and Gerry Adams. I would argue that the connection is that all of these people are involved in a discourse about an inheritance of different sorts. For Smith it is money; for Pearse it is continuity of resistance to Britain; for Adams it is following Pearse. All of these are speaking as if they had some deep, intuitive grasp of the wishes of the dead. They are voicing the wishes of the past in the present. Pearse and Smith are assuming the role of ventriloquists, able to put words into the mouths of the deceased dead generations (singular in Smith's case, plural in Pearse's). In both cases, they are offering an interpretation of an inheritance, but with a significant difference. Smith has gone through the courts to interpret her inheritance whereas Pearse and Adams take it upon themselves to interpret the voices of the dead. For Smith, the oppositional interpretation of the inheritance of her husband, embodied in Pierce Marshall is clear; for Pearse and Adams, there would seem to be only one possible interpretation of Tone, the avatar of Irish nationalism. However, this is where another interpreter of inheritances can become useful in our discussion, namely Jacques Derrida.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida makes the point that an inheritance, which, far from issuing from a fixed centre, and from containing an unequivocal meaning, 'is never gathered together, it is never one with itself'.¹² Derrida's perspective allows for the influence of the present, and the future, in interpreting the past, a present that must be shaped by factors that were never available in the past. In other words, he takes cogni-

¹⁰ Adams, Bodenstown Speech, 2004.

¹¹ Adams, Bodenstown Speech, 2004

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p.16.

sance of the fact that messages need to be interpreted, that ideologies are subject to change and that it is through the act of reading, an act which, by definition, takes place in the present, that the past is given voice. Hence Derrida's point that, in interpreting the past, one must 'filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction'.¹³

In this sense, Derrida speaks about the achronicity between past, present and future. He tells us that 'an inheritance is never a given, it is always a task',¹⁴ meaning that the past must always be interpreted. Derrida, in the case of the concepts of both justice and democracy, chooses to do so in terms of an unspecified future as opposed to looking for guard-rails from the past – he speaks of this as an 'experience of the emancipatory promise'.¹⁵

By moving away from the central preoccupations of Pearse, Derrida's perspective allows for the influence of the present, and the future, in interpreting the past, a present that must be shaped by factors that were never available in the past. In other words, he takes cognisance of the fact that messages need to be interpreted, that ideologies are subject to change and that it is through the act of reading, an act which, by definition, takes place in the present, that the past is given voice. Hence Derrida's point that, in interpreting the past, one must one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction'.¹⁶ It also leaves room for some kind of dialogue with alterity, in that if even our ghosts are monological and monocultural, there will be no room for any other voices in the creation and presentation of Irish identity.

This is a perspective shared by a contemporary of Pearse's, James Joyce, who in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has his hero, Stephen Dedalus, attempt to achieve a perspectival sea-change, by leaving Ireland so that he can better understand what Irishness actually is. By emigrating, he is expressing a negative knowledge of Irishness, a *hauntological* Irishness, and through this, he can, from the wider circumference, proceed to redefine Irishness by changing the forces that create it.

¹³ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.16.

Thus, for Derrida what is crucial about the structure of inheritance is what he calls in *Specters of Marx* the 'visor effect'¹⁷ the reference being to the suit of armour worn by Hamlet's ghost--which means that we cannot see the specter, even as 'we sense or think we are being watched.' In other words, there is a constant need to interpret, to assess, to analyse and to assuage contested views in terms of any inheritance, be it financial, ideological or temporal. And as Derrida reminds us, 'There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility',¹⁸ and this responsibility is to the plurality of the inheritance. The interpretation of an injunction from the past is, of necessity, always a form of misreading. So J. Howard Marshall may have wanted his son to have all of his fortune until he was 93, but in his final year, he had decided that Anna Nicole Smith should have a call on half of his fortune – which decision is the correct one, which decision is the bona fide inheritance?

As Derrida puts it, 'Inheritance is *never* a given, it is *always* a task' (emphasis in original).¹⁹ If there is such a thing as 'a' heritage (and the singular poses serious problems), then it is marked by a dynamic of decisions and interpretation. Questions of heritage thus pose questions not only of inheritance and of iteration, but crucially for us here, of reading, of interpretation and of decision (what do we inherit? how to inherit it? and so forth). Derrida sets up these dynamics as critical elements of inheritance: those 'different possibles' and the lack of gathering. In fact, an inheritance is activated in its own future and always in the present, so the interpretation is contemporary as opposed to historical.

If inheritance were a given, then there would be no question of interpretation. But inheritance is never given over but must be taken, actively constructed. This holds in cases of relations between writers and in general in the dynamics of interpretation and appropriation of others. It delimits certain conditions of what we could meaningfully describe as inheritance. 'If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it'.²⁰ Hence Derrida's framing of inheritance can be described as 'positive' or 'affirmative'. To meaningfully inherit something, or aspects of someone's work, the relation be-

¹⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.7.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.91.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 54.

²⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 16.

tween one and the other should not simply be one of passive acquiescence to a demand. This comes through clearly, for example, in Derrida's discussion of Nelson Mandela's relation to the European tradition of parliamentary democracy. Derrida, discussing Mandela's 'critical' relation to that tradition, comments:

... if he [Mandela] admires this tradition, does that mean he is its inheritor, simply its inheritor? Yes and no, according to what one understands here by inheritance. One can recognise an authentic inheritor in he who conserves and reproduces, but also in he who respects the logic of the legacy to the point of turning it back on occasion against those who claim to be its holders, to the point of showing up against the usurpers the very thing that in the inheritance has never yet been seen: to the point of bringing to light, by the unheard-of act of a reflection, what had never seen the light.²¹

Framed in this way, inheritance requires more than a blunt submission to, or acceptance of, a legacy or of a particular way of reading a legacy. It involves an active interpretation, an affirmative reading which does not simply accept the word of the law when instructed to read a legacy in a particular way. It may involve 'repetition', but that repetition will always be at least partially transformative through the notion of iterability, which denotes repetition-with-a-difference, Derrida shows how language is always threatened by the possibility of repetition in an altered context. Meaning, therefore, is always subject to becoming something other than what it is, and this destabilises the role of context in the production of meaning. If language can be repeated, quoted or cited in an altered context, then, as Derrida states: 'no context can entirely enclose it'.²² The possibility of repeatability must exist in the process of communication and Derrida uses the term 'iterability' to describe this condition of repeatability. He states:

In order for my "written communication" to retain its function of writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be re-

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "The laws of reflection: Nelson Mandela, in admiration", in Jacques Derrida and Mustapha Tlili (eds.), *For Nelson Mandela*. Translated by Mary Ann Caws and Isabelle Lorenz (New York: Seaver, 1987), p. 456.

²² Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 9.

repeatable – iterable – in the absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability – (*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved [...] A writing that is not structurally readable – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing.²³

Every mark of writing, according to the logic of iterability, must be repeatable if meaning is to be communicated and rendered readable in the absence of the sender, and iterability ‘ties repetition to alterity’ so what is involved is repetition with a difference. In other words, the singularity that can be attributed to a particular structure is made possible only by virtue of the potential of repeatability and this repetition must occur with a difference if the singularity of the structure is to be maintained in the first place. Thus, every repetition produces a difference. This structure of sameness-and-difference conditions every singularity. To repeat something is to alter it, to make a difference. As Derrida has argued:

every text has a provenance, and the date, like the signature, exhibits the counter-logic of iterability: serving to fix for the future a specific and unique time and place, it can only do so on the basis of its readability, which is to say that it has to remain open to repetition and reinscription; its repeatability is a condition of its singularity, its effacement a condition of its legibility.²⁴

In other words, for Derrida, inheritance is differential, to use his own term:

Every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system, within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality....*Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences.²⁵

²³ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, p. 7.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 371.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), p.11.

So there is no single accurate interpretation of what J Howard Marshall willed in terms of his 1.6 billion, and, I would argue, there is no single correct interpretation of the ideological inheritance of Wolfe Tone either. Each inheritance, whether ideological or financial, is part of a legal structure of repetition, but also a singular interpretation and enunciation of that structure.

The genesis of the term ‘republicanism,’ in a specifically Irish context, can be traced to the period antedating 1798. Wolfe Tone, a Dublin-born Protestant, was sent to Trinity College to study logic, and was later called to the Irish bar in 1789.²⁶ He was far from the typical image of a British-hating Irish nationalist; indeed, one of his early career plans involved the setting up of a British colony in the South Seas, and he went so far as to hand in a copy of his plan for this colony to Number 10 Downing Street (he received no reply from Pitt, the Prime Minister).²⁷ Tone’s aims, in terms of this projected colony were to ‘put a bridle on Spain in time of peace and to annoy her grievously in time of war’.²⁸ He also planned to serve with his brother in the British East India company at another stage of his career, before returning to Dublin in 1788.²⁹

Clearly then, Wolfe Tone was far from an essentialist in terms of his nationalist principles. As late as 1790 (keeping in mind that the United Irishmen were founded in October 1791), Tone was still thinking of embarking on his Imperial South Seas project, about which he had by now received a cautious acknowledgement from the government. His political position was influenced largely by the French Revolution, which, as he wrote later ‘changed in an instant the politics of Ireland’, dividing political thinkers from that moment into ‘aristocrats and democrats’.³⁰

Perhaps the central socio-political influence of the French Revolution was the libertarian and emancipatory thrust of its informing secular Enlightenment ethic. The writings of Enlightenment thinkers were disseminated thoroughly throughout different parts of Ireland, especially in

²⁶ Marianne Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 61-74.

²⁷ Robert Kee, *The Most Distressful Country*, volume I of *The Green Flag* (London: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 48.

²⁸ William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.) *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 2 volumes (Washington, 1826), pp. 27-28.

²⁹ Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, p. 60

³⁰ Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe*, vol 1, p. 43.

the North of Ireland, where they found a ready reading public among Presbyterians. The work of Tom Paine was especially influential, with four Irish newspapers reprinting *The Rights of Man*, a work labelled by Tone as the Koran of Belfast.³¹ Enlightenment theories of society and government, embodied in practice by the French Revolution, offered an example of how a seemingly stratified and hierarchical society could be completely changed according to the will of the people. They also offered an ethical demand that alterity, in the shape of the people, be protected by the force of law.

That most of the sources of this Enlightenment knowledge came from locations outside Ireland further underpins the cosmopolitan impetus of the United Irishmen. To this end pamphlets, which distilled the writings of Enlightenment thinkers, were distributed among the peasants of the North of Ireland, between 1795 and 1797, which contained the writings of Godwin, Locke (especially his notion of the implied contract between ruler and ruled), and Paine as well as those of Voltaire and De Volney.³² The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen makes for an impressive list of liberal thinkers on social and political issues, and further reinforces the claim that their views on identity were necessarily pluralist – their aim was to broaden the notion of Irishness so that it might be inclusive of the different socio-religious traditions of Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter. The centrifugal nature of the epistemology of the United Irishmen is further foregrounded by the nature of the following passage from the United Irish Catechism, found in Cork in 1797:

What is that in your hand?	It is a branch
Of what?	Of the tree of Liberty
Where did it first grow?	In America
Where does it bloom?	In France
Where did the seeds fall?	In Ireland. ³³

³¹ Edith Mary Johnston, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century. The Gill History of Ireland*, volume 8 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 168.

³² Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830*, Critical Conditions Series (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 63.

³³ Whelan, *Tree of Liberty*, p. 57.

The importance of this catechism for an analysis of the inheritance of Tone is crucial. Firstly, Ireland is seen as a nation, in its own right, standing equally with America and France. There is no sense of its being a possession or a colony of Britain, instead, in common with the other two countries, it is part of the blossoming tree of liberty. Secondly, Ireland is being defined in terms of an ongoing revolutionary and Enlightenment movement which is not culture-specific. Ireland is seen as a secular entity which, rather than looking inward for self-definition, is part of an almost organic movement which connects its proleptic revolution with that of America in 1776 and France in 1789. If one reads the answers only, the pluralism of the United Irish project is very clear, theirs is a contemporary struggle which is universal in nature: they are but one branch of the 'tree of liberty':

...we have thought little about our ancestors, much of our posterity. Are we forever to walk like beasts of prey, over the fields which these ancestors stained with blood?³⁴

Here, the whole idea of an inheritance from the past is overturned, as the perspective of these Enlightenment thinkers is futuristic and utopian as opposed to being mired in the past. This is precisely the opposite of Pearse's valorisation of the past and of Adams's idea of cherishing the past.

Is it not hugely ironic then that the rioters who stopped the rally through Dublin of the Love Ulster march, in late February of this year, 2006, literally wrapped themselves in the tricolour and saw themselves as republicans who were stopping unionist aggression. By so doing, and given that republican Sinn Féin are widely believed to have orchestrated the march. They are acting in total contradiction to the expressed wishes of both Wolfe Tone, who wishes to substitute the common name of Irishman for Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, and of the Enlightenment rationality of people who influenced Tone, like Voltaire, who famously gave a performative definition of democracy by stating 'while I deeply disagree with what you say, I will defend to the death your right to say it'. This was very much not the type of republicanism that was on display in Dublin on Saturday February 18th as hundreds of rioters refused to allow

³⁴ *Northern Star*: 1791, December 5th

a march by their fellow Irish people who happened to espouse a different set of beliefs as to what constitutes the notion of being Irish. The concept of a monological inheritance here is clearly a damaging one, which allows for no sense of interpretation or of mediation of the past. In this perspective an inheritance is like a stone, passed from generation to generation unchanged and unchanging. Both Gerry Adams and Sean Crowe of Sinn Féin talked about not being incited by this provocative march, and this is especially interesting given the Enlightenment rationality that pervaded the epistemology of the United Irishmen. To be provoked is to deem the act of another not to be an act of agency in its own right, but rather to be some form of negative action in itself with no other purpose than to incite those who have the preponderance of right on their side. Thus, the monological sense of inheritance that republicans see themselves as possessing can have serious and violent consequences.

Hence the editorial of *An Phoblacht*, March 2nd 2006, makes the point that:

The sectarian and one sided nature of the interpretation of victimhood by FAIR and Love Ulster cannot be ignored. Michael McDowell's decision to meet with the organisers of Saturday's march must be seen in the light of his failure to meet with the victims of Unionist and British state violence, who attended Leinster House on two occasions last year.

However Sinn Féin defends the right to demonstrate and to march. This is not an absolute right but city centres should be neutral venues and even people as objectionable and provocative as Willie Frazier and his various associates should be allowed to march peacefully there. Saturday's rioting violated this principle.

In no way can the actions of the rioters be described as republican. The participants were a combination of deluded people who may or may not call themselves republicans and various drunken, anti-social and criminal elements using the riots as a cover to loot. Some in the rioting crowd showed flagrant disrespect for the Tricolour, using it variously as a cloak or a mask. These are not the actions of republicans.³⁵

Once again, the very act of freedom of expression is seen as provocative, provocative to the inheritance of republicanism, but ironically, that inheritance is a pluralist one which values all shades of political and religious opinion! Clearly, there are lessons in deconstruction required at

³⁵ *An Phoblacht*, March 2, 2006

Sinn Féin headquarters! Anna Nicole Smith and Pierce Marshall, whatever their differences, are debating the notion of inheritance with words, they are not using bricks, stones and petrol bombs – and it is interesting that those political commentators who seek to blame an emergent underclass for these riots would seem to have conveniently forgotten that petrol bombs are normally not readily available on the streets of our cities on Saturday afternoons. The presence of such a large number of such bombs would seem to be an index of advance preparation.

However the principles of iterability and singularity and the notion of the need to constantly debate and critique an inheritance have been demonstrated within the republican community in recent times as well. On January 27, 2007, Sinn Féin, at a special Ard Fheis in Dublin, voted by a majority of some ninety per cent, to endorse a motion which called on Republicans to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Thus, even as their rhetoric denies any break with the past, what is happening in Irish republicanism is exactly that singular enunciation of the iterable pattern of the inheritance, as an organisation which eschewed parliamentary participation in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (often still derisively termed the Free State) is now fully represented in both jurisdictions, and in is coming to a stage of being fully compliant with the law in both jurisdictions. Interestingly, the rhetoric of Gerry Adams in this discussion is centred on the future:

That means beginning a real dialogue, an anti-sectarian dialogue, between nationalism and republicanism and unionism. A dialogue which can move us all beyond the current impasse into a living, hopeful future that will cherish all our people equally. To achieve that, we must begin to co-operate in managing the process of change ... We face into the future filled with hope, confident in our own ability and growing stronger day by day.³⁶

Derrida has said, in *Positions*: ‘reading is transformational’,³⁷ in terms of espousing a position that is ‘neither *this* nor *that*; but rather *this and that*’

³⁶ Gerry Adams, Special Ard Fheis Speech, January 27, 2007.
<http://www.sinnfeinonline.com/news/3188>

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 63).

are clear.³⁸ Yet again, there are echoes of Derrida who says that we 'have to cross the border but not to destroy the border';³⁹ instead, the border, as a limit point of one community, becomes an opening to the other community. As Derrida has put it, in a broadly similar context, the relation to alterity as the responsibility to the other is also a 'responsibility toward the *future*, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear' and can hence 'come to transform what we know or think we know'.⁴⁰

It is this project of reimagining the historical, cultural, linguistic and societal givens that is the great inheritance, if I may use that term, of French literary theory as applied to contemporary Irish politics:

The possibilities within a culture, cultural inheritance if you like, are what mediate between the individual psyche and the uncontrollable size of the reality out there, the unknowable size of society. Cultural inheritance... allows some form of negotiation to take place, to make sense of it all.⁴¹

The whole point about an inheritance is that it is temporally located. It is a verbal or written interpretation of actions, thoughts or words that were uttered in the past. By definition, the interpretation must be made in the aftermath of that inheritance and also it must be made within a particular context. Such interpretations are never straightforward, and are contextually and ideologically driven, and they also affect the future. This has been made actual in the recent power-sharing agreement between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party in Stormont in March 2007. To see Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams sitting together after thirty years of violence, and to see them discuss sharing power is to see a reimagining of the past and a reinterpretation of an inheritance. As Seamus Heaney has

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p.161.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, "On Responsibility." Interview with Jonathan Dronsfeld, Nick Midgley and Adrian Wilding, in *Responsibilities of Deconstruction: PLI – Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, edited by Jonathan Dronsfeld and Nick Midgley, volume 6, Summer (1997), pp. 19-36.

⁴⁰ Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Richard Kearney (ed.), *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. First published in 1984. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 108.

put it in 'The Settle Bed,' a poem from his volume *Seeing Things*, 'an inheritance' is from 'the long ago,' and yet it can be made 'willable forward/Again and again and again,' because: 'whatever is given/can always be reimagined'.⁴² It is this process of reimagining that has been the subject of this chapter, and it will also be the subject of politics in Ireland for the foreseeable future – long may the reimagining proceed.

⁴² Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber, 1991), p.29.

Paula Murphy

Chapter Seventeen: French Theory and Irish Theatre on the *Hinterland* of Modernity

The relationship between French literary theory and Irish literature has been and is being highlighted by a coterie of scholars in books such as *France and the Struggle Against Globalisation*,¹ *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship*² and the latest collection of *New Voices in Irish Criticism*³ that traces the theoretical turn in Irish studies. Following on from this vein of research, this chapter will examine the relationship between French literary theory and Irish theatre, specifically that which relates to the post-modernity of Sebastian Barry's play, *Hinterland*. Although theory has been an integral facet of theatre criticism in other countries,⁴ in Ireland this approach has not been popular. This is part of a broader paucity of theoretical perspectives within Irish studies, with the exception of post-colonialism, a theory whose popularity is in itself illuminating of the energy divested into analysing Ireland's relationship to its colonial other, and the consequent neglect of other areas of theoretical research. With the rapid social and cultural changes of the 1980s and especially the 1990s, Ireland changed almost overnight from being overwhelmingly a monocultural, monoracial state, dominated by a majority religion to a multicultural, multiracial state,

¹ Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien (eds.), *France and the Struggle against Globalisation/ La France face à la Mondialisation* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, forthcoming, 2007).

² Eamon Maher and Grace Neville (eds.), *France-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004).

³ Paula Murphy and Cathy McGlynn (eds.), *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, forthcoming, 2007)

⁴ Mark Fortier states that '[t]heatre is an area in which theory has a powerful influence. There are learned journals rife with theoretical studies of theatre and many books that apply deconstruction, semiotics, psychoanalysis or some other theoretical perspective to various theatrical works' [Mark Fortier, *Theory/ Theatre: An Introduction* (Routledge: London, 1997, reprinted 2002), p. 2.]

notable for its steady decline in religious practice and its questioning of previous political, religious and social norms. This kind of society can be described as postmodern, and Ireland became postmodern later and more quickly than its European counterparts. In France for example, home of the primary theorists of postmodernity such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jean François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, the seeds of the postmodern questioning of the givens of identity had already been sown with the work of these philosophers. In other areas, Roland Barthes developed a mode of analysis based on semiotics or sign systems of all kinds. Michel Foucault's work spread into areas as diverse as madness, punishment of criminals and sexuality through history. In psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan re-wrote many of the prevailing beliefs about the unconscious to place language at the centre of that system. Later, Jacques Derrida overturned centers of every sort in his critique of Western philosophy and its logocentrism. This rich Francophone tradition provides tools for the analysis of Ireland's changing postmodern society, as will be illuminated in relation to *Hinterland*.

The plays of Barry present over a century of Irish life in microcosm and can be said to chart the journey from pre-modernity to post-modernity. They span a chronological period from the late 1880s with *The Only True History of Lizzie Flynn*⁵ to the contemporary setting of *Hinterland*.⁶ Barry's talents are not confined to drama, and he is possibly better known for his novels, which include *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*,⁷ *Annie Dunne*⁸ and *A Long, Long Way*.⁹ He has also written collections of poetry, his most recent entitled *The Pinkening Boy*,¹⁰ published in 2004. Like Billy Roche, Barry's plays have had a warm critical reception in Great Britain, and this is evidenced by number of British awards he has won: the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize, the London Critics' Circle Award, the British Writers' Guild Award and the Lloyd's Private Banking Playwright of the Year Award. Barry has received encouragement, particularly in the form of institutional support, from his native country: he was Writer Fellow at Trinity College, and Writer in Association at the Abbey Theatre.

⁵ Sebastian Barry, *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* in *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 1997).

⁶ Sebastian Barry, *Hinterland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

⁷ Sebastian Barry, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* (London: Picador, 1998).

⁸ Sebastian Barry, *Annie Dunne* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

⁹ Sebastian Barry, *A Long, Long Way* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

¹⁰ Sebastian Barry, *The Pinkening Boy: New Poems* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2004)

However, he has expressed uncertainty about the Irish critical response to his plays. He states in interview, '[t]here are certain towns I don't want to go back to unprotected, and Dublin is one of them, and that's where I was born'.¹¹

Barry is not the only Irish playwright who feels harshly treated in his native country. Conor McPherson has premiered many of his plays in London, perhaps because of the more positive critical reception he has found there.¹² Roche too, had the first play of his Wexford Trilogy, *A Handful of Stars*, rejected by the Abbey, eventually producing it in the Bush theatre in London. The reluctance to engage with playwrights like Roche, McPherson and Barry, does not bode well for the vitality of Irish theatre. While the national theatre, the Abbey, is often criticised for its lack of relevance to contemporary Irish life, it seems that when it *does* support playwrights who deal with controversial aspects of modern Ireland, there is a lack of support from theatre critics. Defending the Abbey's production of *Hinterland*, Ben Barnes remarked that it is ironic that when it attempts 'to grapple with contemporary social and political mores, it is inundated with outraged complaints'.¹³ This resistance to these new playwrights may stem from the lack of a discursive space in which to situate them, and I would argue that this space is not to be found within Irish studies, but in the cultural, philosophical and literary movements of the continent, and particularly France, which provide a template for the analysis of Ireland's postmodernity.

Broadly speaking, Barry's drama coheres with drama of the last two decades in Ireland in the sense that it rarely deals directly with issues of a political or public nature, which has been central to the dramatic conflict of so many Irish plays in the past. In his introduction to a collection of five of

¹¹ Sebastian Barry, "Sebastian Barry in Conversation with Ger Fitzgibbon", in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*, edited by Lilian Chambers, Ger Fitzgibbon, Eamonn Jordan, Dan Farrelly and Cathy Leeney (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001), pp. 16-28, p. 24.

¹² Barry's plays may be welcome in London because in the main they represent historical Irish identity, albeit with a postmodern slant, and his plays are mostly set in rural locations. Anthony Roche observes that 'younger writers who sought to show contemporary images of Irishness found less of a welcome on the London stage'. Anthony Roche, "The 'Irish' Play on the London Stage", in *Players and Painted Stage: Aspects of the Twentieth Century Theatre in Ireland*, edited by Christopher Fitz-Simon (Dublin: New Island, 2004) pp. 129-141, p. 141.

¹³ Ben Barnes, cited Victoria White, "*Hinterland* defended by Abbey's Artistic Director", *The Irish Times* (February 14th, 2002).

Barry's plays, Fintan O'Toole states that he 'writes from a perspective in which both the grand narrative of history and the framework of fixed ways of understanding the world are falling apart. The history that informs them is a history of obscurities and counter-currents, of lost strands, and untold stories'.¹⁴ This is arguably part of a larger shift in Irish literature and film, which is fundamentally postmodern in the sense that the grand narratives of the past have been replaced by more heterogeneous accounts of Irish histories and identities, both past and present. According to Lyotard, postmodernism is co-terminus with the post-industrial age in society. That which is modern is centered on a universal grounding principle. In the post-industrial age, or what could justifiably be called the technological age, there is an absence of universal principles. These principles Lyotard refers to as metanarratives or grand narratives. He goes on to state that '[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable'.¹⁵ Irish society has wrested knowledge from the authorities, through the uncovering of the state secrets of politics in tribunals, and religious secrets with the coming to light of clerical paedophilia scandals and institutional abuse in industrial schools and Magdalen laundries. This opening up of the past and the undoing of official history to reveal multiple, individual stories, shows the 'sensitivity to differences' characteristic of postmodernity. Considering the manifestations of postmodernism in contemporary discourses on Irish Catholicism, Eugene O'Brien incisively summarises its splintering effects:

The ability of a single overarching structure to answer all the questions, and provide the epistemological structures ... to organise a contemporary complex society has been deconstructed by the fractured nature of selfhood, and consequently, what has emerged is a number of smaller narratives, both complementary and contradictory, which compete for the attention and loyalty of the subject.¹⁶

¹⁴ Fintan O' Toole, "Introduction: A True History of Lies", in *Sebastian Barry: Plays 1*: (London: Methuen, 1997), pp. vii-xiv, p. x.

¹⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature series, Vol. 10. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxv.

¹⁶ Eugene O'Brien, "'Kicking Bishop Brennan up the Arse...': Catholicism, Deconstruction and Postmodernity in Contemporary Irish Culture", in *Irish and*

Yet, Christopher Murray contends that in contemporary theatre, 'postmodernism is not congenial to Irish audiences, whose sense of history remains too strong for it to be shredded'.¹⁷ It is clear however, that the metanarratives of religion and politics that have structured Irish history *are* being broken down, and there has been a major change in attitude to knowledge and power that confirms the postmodernity of Ireland, one that is being explored in at least some, if not all, recent Irish drama.

The psychoanalytic term 'parallax' is an appropriate way of describing this new perspective with its openness to difference. It means an apparent change in the constitution of an object due to a change in the position of the onlooker. According to Lacan, subjectivity can be divided into three distinct realms of experience: the symbolic is the order of language and social structures; the imaginary is the order of visual identifications; the real is the order of instinctual drives and instincts, and a pre-linguistic wholeness that is denied to the subject by the divisive nature of the symbolic once language has been acquired. The most authoritative view is not from one particular realm, but from 'the shift of perspective between them',¹⁸ the parallax. Lacanian psychoanalysis takes a postmodern view of history in its acceptance of the impossibility of any completely objective representation in this regard, because while a greater sensitivity to difference can be acquired by the ability to move between the three realms, an omniscient viewpoint cannot be sustained. In Irish history, this change in perspective has been ushered in under the auspices of revisionism, and in drama, its effects are to be seen in the new emphases on marginalized groups: the experience of the working classes in the drama of Roche and Dermot Bolger, the accounts of women in the Troubles in Christina Reid's work, and the problematisation of homogenous identity-constructs in the work of much recent Irish theatre. In all of these developments, there is an emphasis on exploring history from unusual, often marginal viewpoints.

Barry's contribution to the rapidly changing political, religious and cultural climate of Ireland, and one that in a characteristically postmodern way, acknowledges the importance of accommodating difference, is that

Catholic?: Towards an Understanding of Identity, edited by Louise Fuller, John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), pp. 47-67, p. 49.

¹⁷ Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to a Nation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 223.

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 6.

his plays belie the lack of unity and common purpose amongst people in Irish history. In *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* for example, he follows the events in the life of a dancer working in the music-halls in England, whose father had been a poet who travelled round to the houses of aristocrats in search of patronage. Her husband is the son of a landlord who turns against his own class by becoming pro-Boer in the Boer war, a change of heart that suggests his support for those agitating for Irish freedom. *Prayers of Sherkin* is also counter-cultural because it explores the life of a family of the Millenarian sect, who lives an isolated life on Sherkin Island and sees both Catholics and Protestants as alien. The protagonist of *The Steward of Christendom* is the Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police who feels disenfranchised when his force is replaced by the Garda Síochána after the advent of the Free State Government. *White Woman Street* follows the adventures of ex-patriate Trooper O'Hara, an immigrant to America. He spends Easter 1916 hatching plans for a train robbery that will allow him to go back to an Ireland he remembers in an idealized and sentimental way. Through these alternative perspectives, perspectives that do not adhere to the historical grand narrative, Barry brings a postmodern, pluralistic, liminal perspective to bear on Irish history, as he does in *Hinterland*.

When *Hinterland* premiered in 2002, the *Irish Times* literary correspondent Eileen Battersby described it as a 'vulgar, tacky travesty'; 'silly trash', its attempt at satire 'moronic' and its treatment of Charles J. Haughey, on whom Barry models his protagonist Johnny Silvester, 'naïve' and 'undergraduate'.¹⁹ Yet even the most cursory examination of the play's thematic imperative suggests that it warrants attention on this basis alone. The subject of the play is the friendships and family relationships of former Taoiseach Johnny Silvester, who is soon to face tribunals regarding his political misdeeds. He is undergoing medical tests of an unspecified nature on his sexual organs, and is coping with his wife's unfading anger about an affair he had some years ago with a woman called Connie: a fictional Terry Keane. The play examines the private life of this character at a late stage in his life and at a pivotal moment for him personally. Faced with the possibility of his life's work being written into history in a less than flattering light, Johnny is forced to reflect on how his political activities have af-

¹⁹ Eileen Battersby, "Poor Drama and Bad Manners", *The Irish Times*, February 9th (2002).

fectured his family and close friends. In what has come to be a typical dramatic manoeuvre of Barry's, the public conflict is in the background of the play, evoked in an original and sensitive manner in its narration through the character of Johnny and those around him. That apart, the play does constitute a definitive shift in Barry's work in the sense that contemporary public conflict is dealt with at all. As the director of the Abbey production, Max Stafford-Clark states, '[w]hile the lyrical gifts are still there, there's something new in the writing: it lives in the present'.²⁰

The play opens with Johnny sitting in his study, writing a letter to his Aunts in Derry, where he spent much of his own childhood. The occasion causes him to ponder how partition affected Derry, dividing the city from 'her own hinterland of Donegal'.²¹ During the play, 'hinterland' becomes a shifting signifier, deployed by Johnny to denote various aspects of his identity. It is the re-zoned land outside Dublin on which his mansion is built; his penis, the symbol of his sexuality and patriarchal authority (p. 21); the 'haunted terrain' (p. 53) of Derry, and the past, 'that powerful hinterland' (p. 61). 'Hinterland' is the past and the present; it is political and personal, physical and spectral. In the play as a whole, it perhaps represents the limit or hinterland of modernity and the beginnings of postmodernity. In the philosophical sense, it represents a trend for preoccupations with marginality and difference in Irish theatre, themes that are central to this and Barry's other plays.

It is clear that Johnny's Derry childhood and his relationship with his father during that time have had a significant bearing on his self-image. In the letter to his Aunts, he remarks that the separation necessitated by the border was ontological as well as geographical: it separated 'heart from heartland, and indeed, as in our case, father from fatherland'.²² Johnny believes that his father's subsequent physical breakdown may have been propelled by this political division. It is clear that he admires his father, and evident that he has inherited his patriarchal attitudes from him. Describing Ireland as 'fatherland' contradicts the usual association between femininity and nationalism, which has persisted in Irish drama under various guises

²⁰ Max Stafford-Clark, cited in Helen Meany "Political Hinterland: Trials and Tribunals", *The Irish Times*, January 19th (2002).

²¹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 7.

²² Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 7.

since Yeats' literary revival play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.²³ In his essay 'Hinterland: The Public Becomes Private', Colm Tóibín remarks that Barry 'sought to move the drama about fathers and their failures', a trope that he sketches in relation to Irish literature, 'from a purely domestic space into the public realm'.²⁴ Johnny's description of the relationship between fatherhood and nationhood is undoubtedly more accurate than the traditional nationalist analogy, in which the symbolisation of women concealed their relative lack of tangible power. It also describes the historically male-dominated arena of Irish politics, with which he enthusiastically identifies.

In this opening scene, it is made apparent to the audience that Johnny's trendy, modern tastes, evidenced by the 'storm of modern Irish paintings, Le Broquy, O'Malley, etc',²⁵ are merely a superficial gloss on an old-fashioned patriarch. This aura of antiquated authority also emanates from his dress. There is a strong narrative voice in the stage directions that reveals Barry's novelist alter-ego, and the reader is told that Johnny is 'finely dressed to the point of mummified dandyism'.²⁶ His concern with appearances also includes his house, which is a Georgian mansion, and likely to be an allusion to Haughey's Abbeville abode: '[h]interland of the city. Almost Dublin. The zoning is very advantageous'.²⁷ As Johnny writes his letter, he looks back at the growing dark behind him that he can see through the window, a symbol perhaps, of the political misdemeanours that are catching up with him. He relates to his wife with high levels of emotional repression. Struggling to articulate his thoughts in the letter is he writing, he states: '[i]t's at times like this that a person might want to talk to his wife. But I mustn't do that. It would be moral weakness of the high-

²³ Barry states that when he was a young child, he was taken to a performance of the Yeats play, at the end of which he was shocked to discover that his mother had acted in the leading role. He claims that it 'gave rise to an intimation that has not really left me, that the stage contains mysteries and transformations beyond greasepaint and explanation', Sebastian Barry, "Art that Marked Me", in *The Irish Times*, January 25th (2002).

²⁴ Colm Tóibín, "Hinterland: The Public Becomes Private", in *Out of History: Essays on the Writings of Sebastian Barry*, edited with an introduction by Christina Hunt Mahony (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press), pp. 199-208, p. 200.

²⁵ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 7.

²⁶ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 7.

²⁷ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 14.

est order'.²⁸ Johnny's attitude to women, his correlation of paternity with nationhood, his outward display of wealth and elegance and his assurance of masculine superiority, all combine to convey an individual whose vision of social organisation is hierarchial and outdated. His treatment of his patient, elderly servant Stephen is employed to give substance to this portrait, as Johnny relies on him to supply him with information about domestic and external matters, but never enquires about him personally. Johnny is set up as a figure who, from attitude to identity, is the polar opposite of postmodern Ireland.

He feels that he has been wronged by the Irish public, who used his political acumen when they needed it, and are guiltless in their condemnation of him now that his utility has been exhausted. Although he is condemnatory about the actions of his wife's father, he envies him his unquestioned record: 'I wish I had his history to call my own'.²⁹ He confides in his son Jack about his disappointment:

I've gone from king to criminal in the space of a couple of years. Did I not serve this country well? Did I not create this plenty they enjoy now? I couldn't have done what I have done without being the man I was and the man I am...I gave them their paradise of European roads, and low unemployment. They are on the pig's back'.³⁰

Plainly, Johnny is unable to comprehend the social changes that have occurred in Ireland in the last twenty years, and in particular the turn away from traditional bastions of authority like politicians and the Church. Rather than portraying him in the play as a relic of a bygone era however, Barry allows one of his old party companions to give the audience a sense of his persona at the height of his political power. This character is called Cornelius, a fictional recreation of Brian Lenihan, and although he is dead, he appears during the play from a cupboard in Johnny's study. His entrances are the only aberration from conventional realism in the play, but to view them only in this way would be to miss Barry's point. As in so many of his plays, the protagonist's sense of time is not chronological: rather, it is psychological. In the decline of his life, Johnny roams freely through the

²⁸ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 8.

²⁹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 21.

³⁰ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 32.

hinterland of the present into past memories. '[B]y the hokey, man', he says to Cornelius, 'I was at your funeral. Five years ago'.³¹

Having Cornelius enter from the cupboard where the State papers were held is also significant to the overall theme of the play. He represents what is missing from the official records of Johnny's political life, in another instance of Barry's postmodern dismantling of the grand narrative of official history. Moreover, the emergence of Cornelius symbolises how Johnny's past is also coming out of the closet, not only politically, but also personally, obvious when Johnny's former mistress comes to visit him and he hides her in the same cupboard later in the play. As the tribunal does not take place during the play, another of Cornelius's functions is to hold Johnny to account for his wrong-doings. Their previous relationship makes him suitable for this role, because he has been sacked by Johnny in the past, quashing his own political ambitions. If he is the prosecutor, he is also the arbiter of justice, because he likes Johnny but is aware of his faults. When Johnny tries to defend himself, Cornelius responds, '[t]he trouble is, you prescribed the hair shirt for everyone else, even as you enriched yourself'.³²

Johnny has been a disciple of the old tradition of political leadership in Irish politics and he asks Cornelius 'Would De Valera be proud of his country now?'³³ Contrary to the view of the Irish public, he thinks that his generation were the honest ones, and it is the present generation that are deceitful. He tells Cornelius that he has denied all the charges against him, but 'in this dishonest era, everything you say now is questioned. They won't play the game now'.³⁴ 'They', are likely to be the Supreme Court judges. Barry suggests that at the heart of Johnny's attitude is rife not only with old-fashioned authority, but also old-fashioned snobbery. His problem with the Supreme Court judges is not that they refuse to ignore his crimes, but that they have no right to make any decisions about him: 'they live in great, concrete-clad mausoleums out in the suburbs, with ridiculous gardens and knick-knacks...Must I be judged by the likes of them?'.³⁵ From Johnny's point of view, they lack the necessary refinement that would give them the right to operate within the uppermost echelons of Irish society.

³¹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 12.

³² Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 16.

³³ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 16.

³⁴ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 14.

³⁵ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 15.

This 'refinement' is of a kind associated with middle and upper-classes that is accessible only to those from privileged backgrounds. It excludes the working class completely, not to mention the multifarious social backgrounds of the migrant workers, immigrants and asylum seekers who reside in contemporary Ireland. This prejudice is displayed in the play through Johnny's hypocritical dealings with Cornelius, who speaks in colloquial language, and who, from Johnny's perspective, would probably be considered uncultured too, were it not for their long association. Johnny's championing of an elite minority is also clear from his patronising sentimentality in relation to folk wisdom. During the play, he looks smilingly into his tea-cup and says '[m]y Derry great-aunts could tell you the future from these tea leaves. The dregs'.³⁶ Although 'dregs' is a word used to describe tea leaves left in a cup, the phrase could also refer to the Aunts themselves and Johnny's view of them.

Johnny's distaste at the dispersal of power amongst people who have not had a family history of affluence, illustrates one of the ways in which Irish society has changed with the advent of postmodernity: consumerism. Baudrillard has two terms for modernity and postmodernity in relation to consumerism: traditional capitalism and technostucture, respectively. In the technostucture, products constitute a value system in themselves, and consumption is 'a collective and active behaviour, a constraint, a morality, and an institution'.³⁷ If Johnny is to be believed, he had an important part to play in the creation of this system of values that postmodern Ireland espouses: it is the 'pig's back' that he refers to, or perhaps more appropriately, the tiger's back. He does not seem to realise however, that the onset of consumerism levels some of the differences between social classes and consequently deprives him of much of his power. Although Baudrillard does not acknowledge it, products have always constituted a system of value. The difference between traditional capitalism and technostucture is that in the latter, everyone can invest in this system at some level. For ex-

³⁶ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 18.

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (2nd edition), edited by Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 52. The collective and active behaviour refers to the common past-time of recreational shopping; the constraint is the society's demand of the individual to seek pleasure and enjoy oneself, which Baudrillard calls the 'fun-system' (Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, p. 51); the morality is the perceived 'right' to satisfy oneself and the institution is the systems of consumption and production that control and manipulate their subjects, the consumers.

ample, not everyone can afford the Louis le Broquy painting that hangs in Johnny's office, but the print, or in postmodern parlance, the simulacrum, of the same, is eminently affordable. Johnny calls the possessions of those he believes are beneath him 'knick-knacks' because unlike them, he comes from an era where material goods of authentic quality signified social rank and power. In postmodern Ireland, the value system has changed.

Through Johnny's wife Daisy, Barry shows that it is not only the systems of production and consumption that have changed in Ireland: gender roles have also undergone a significant transformation. It is another manifestation of the increased acceptance of difference that Lyotard identifies in the postmodern era. Daisy comes from a political family, and their marriage possibly had a political imperative. Because of this, she understands the role customarily given to the wife of a prominent politician. When Johnny enquires if she is alright, she replies, 'I am always alright. It is my job. It was formerly, at any rate. I don't know about these days'.³⁸ In postmodern Ireland, roles and identities can be taken on and off like clothes and a woman's identity is less likely to be defined in relation to a man. But although Daisy is aware that she has had to play a role that a younger generation of women have not, she is almost as frightened as her husband at the unsettling of their core values. For her, this anxiety is manifested in an unnatural attachment to antiques. She polishes a piece of Irish porcelain that belonged to her parents, which reminds her of 'the old days',³⁹ and sleeps with a ceramic hot-water bottle that reminds her of her childhood. Daisy's antiques parallel Johnny's mummified dress-sense, casting both of them as old-fashioned.

The tension between Johnny and his wife appears to be the result of unresolved antagonism over his affair some years previously. In a play that explores the public realm within the private, the affair provides a counterbalance, and perhaps a metaphor, for Johnny's public disgrace by dwelling on his private betrayal. Barry uses a similar device in *The Steward of Christendom*, in which Thomas's relationship with his father represents his father's place in the state. Daisy still feels hurt, although her upbringing in a political household means that she was accustomed to the unspoken extramarital relationships of political leaders: 'I was born a politician's daughter and I know the life. I know the triumph of men like you, when the

³⁸ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 18.

³⁹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 19.

whole world votes for you and you are made King of Ireland...I know what it does to the families of such men'.⁴⁰

Although Barry makes reference to Johnny's familial relationships in the context of politics, his portrayal of family also has a broader frame of reference as regards changing gender roles in Ireland. Johnny is an old-style patriarch, a character that has been described in detail in novels like John McGahern's *Amongst Women*, and he thinks fondly of the time when his Aunts 'prized him so greatly just for being a boy'.⁴¹ Like Moran in McGahern's novel, Johnny finds it difficult to communicate with his family, and is constantly hindered by his concept of masculinity, in which the expression of emotion is regarded as weakness. This is apparent from Daisy's complaint when Johnny attempts to tell her about the medical tests he has been undergoing: 'you ought to be able to speak to your wife in full sentences'.⁴² There is another facet to Johnny's fatherhood too: Tóibín notes that the fathers in Irish drama of the early twentieth century 'were not caught between two worlds as one collapsed and the other took its place'.⁴³ Instead, they were locked into the past with no sign of an alternative future. The most scathing indictment of Johnny from his wife concerns the neglect of his son, Jack. Reminding Johnny of Jack's youth, she tells him '[w]hen a little boy is sick, his whole body strains to broadcast a special signal...to be cuddled there in the arms of his father...If that slight signal is not attended to, there really is no family, party or country. Because the oldest law on earth has been violated'.⁴⁴

The issue of paternity hovers over this play: in the 'fatherland' of Ireland, Johnny's own disappointing relationship with his father, whose multiple sclerosis confined him to bed and made him a 'shadow-man'⁴⁵ for his son, and Johnny's lack of understanding for his own son, Jack. Daisy's comment to Johnny shows that she regards the father-son relationship as the building block of the country. Consequently, Johnny's relationship with him, reveals, like his relationships with Connie and Cornelius, the public in the private. Jack's first entrance in the play requires him to carry a sandwich on a plate, and although he is initially unaware of its significance, the

⁴⁰ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 24.

⁴¹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 70.

⁴² Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 21.

⁴³ Tóibín, "*Hinterland*: The Public Becomes Private", p. 201.

⁴⁴ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 25.

plate has come from Johnny's old homestead in Derry. So, although Jack also carries physical symbols of the past with him like his parents, he is the only one who unknowingly does so. Despite the fact that Jack has not chosen the political and historical baggage with which he is lumbered, it still affects him as much as if he had. In Johnny's eyes, Jack is a failure. He has dropped out of college because of depression, a state of mind that Johnny seems unable to understand: 'Depression. My backside. The finest veterinarian student of your year, Jack! You must get back to the horses and cows. That will restore you'.⁴⁶

In an attempt to bond with his son, Johnny asks him what he has been listening to on the walkman he carries with him. Jack answers casually, 'Verdi. Moby'.⁴⁷ Jack is referring to the classical composer and a contemporary music artist, but Johnny's response reveals the gap in their respective cultural references, as well as Johnny's desire to control every situation and to show off his knowledge in the process: 'Verdi's *Moby Dick*? Did he write about the Great White Whale?'.⁴⁸ Jack's choice of music also shows that although he cannot help being a victim of his father's history, his own default position is an essentially postmodern one, as is evident from the combination of musical forms, from both high and popular culture, in his walkman: as Lyotard states, 'eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture'.⁴⁹ The stance is also deconstructive. According to Derrida, the logical step forward from the 'modern' philosophies centred on a universal principle (as defined by Lyotard) is a new kind of philosophy that critiques such logocentrism. This philosophy actively tries to break down hierarchical structures, in an attempt to construct more egalitarian ones. The function of these centers, such as God and patriarchy, 'was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure...but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure'.⁵⁰ In *Hinterland*, Johnny exemplifies Lyotard's modernity and Derrida's logocentrism. His views on social and familial organisation put upper-middle class and male values respectively, in the central or superior position. In contrast, Jack is postmodern in

⁴⁶ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 278.

his lack of regard for the cultural hierarchies of classical and popular music and in his treatment of his father, for whom the love that he feels is without predication on his political power. Although Jack is portrayed as shy and unassuming, his presence highlights the inherent snobbery of his father, and the relative merit of his own position, which is arguably also that of postmodern Ireland.

The looming tribunal has affected every member of the family deeply, and none more so than Jack. It seems to have exacerbated his psychological problems and stunted his attempts at creating a life away from the overbearing presence of his father. Yet, in spite of the complete absence of common ground between the two men, Jack is ironically the only character in the play that admits to liking Johnny, and tells him so with childlike honesty: 'there is something about you, Daddy. I like you, is what it is'.⁵¹ However, Jack's sensitivity and capacity for love and forgiveness leaves him vulnerable, and at the end of act one, he attempts to commit suicide by a hanging himself from the ceiling light, but is thwarted when the ceiling gives way. By the conclusion of the play, having discovered his father's infidelity, his characteristically postmodern blurring of forms descends into nonsense, and becomes a verbal realisation of his mental state as he combines Moby Dick, Moby, and fairytales: 'Chapelizod Bridge, the whale, the man crushed in his bubble-car. Then old Moby Dick drifted out to sea. The Irish Sea swallowed the Great White Whale. And that was the end of the story. Oh Lordy, trouble so hard, oh Lordy'.⁵²

If Jack is a symbol of postmodern Ireland, then Aisling is even more so. A student who comes to interview Johnny about his Derry background, it appears that she is to bring some solace to Johnny in the midst of his personal and political upheaval by reassuring him of his place in the annals of history and giving him the respect he believes he deserves. Johnny's assumptions are proven unsubstantiated however, when Aisling turns out not to be a doctoral student, as he had thought, but an undergraduate. Prior to her arrival, Johnny condescendingly informs his son what an Aisling is, when the subject arises in conversation: '[a]n Aisling, Jack, is Ireland personified by a young woman, in many a plaintive Irish poem of the eighteenth century, when the number was up with the old order of chieftains and

⁵¹ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 33.

⁵² Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 60.

kings'.⁵³ It is quite obvious from this definition that when Aisling appears, she represents the Ireland of the moment, and signals the demise of the old order that preceded her, of which Johnny is exemplary. This interpretation is strengthened when his wife asks him how the interview went, and he replies with a traditional metaphor for death: 'West, I fear'.⁵⁴

Like Jack, Aisling displays the postmodern dismantling of the grand narrative, particularly in terms of status and class. She tells Johnny that she wants to be an actress, even though, 'I could go and read to be a lawyer, I've got the grades for that'.⁵⁵ For Aisling, career choices are not predicated on old social rankings but on the pursuit of her interests. Johnny becomes even more irate when he discovers that Aisling's father is a lecturer in modern Irish history: '[a]cademia, the last refuge of the scoundrel'.⁵⁶ Although Johnny revels in quoting (and misquoting) from literature, he is at heart an anti-intellectual. He represents a social order in which knowledge was the privilege of a wealthy, powerful, minority, and resents its dissemination and the effects it has had on him: 'I am tired of the outpourings of men like your father. They speak, they write, and they do not know what they do to me. They are killing me'.⁵⁷

The harsh criticism of this play has been based in the main upon Barry's treatment of the actual story of Haughey. Gerry Dukes states of Barry's writing that, 'the real play gets lost behind a myth', and of the production that 'there is a far better play here than has been allowed to emerge between Stafford-Clark [the director] and Malahide [the lead actor]'.⁵⁸ Battersby's criticisms focus on Barry's treatment of the political figure too. She states that literary criticism demands 'a suspension of moral judgement', but argues that *Hinterland* cannot be considered in this neutral way because of the 'moronic obviousness of its satire'.⁵⁹ Justin O'Brien's biography of Haughey begins by slamming *Hinterland*, which he calls 'a

⁵³ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 46.

⁵⁴ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 57.

⁵⁷ Barry, *Hinterland*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ Gerry Dukes, "Hinterland by Sebastian Barry", in *Irish Theatre Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 11, (2002), pp. 101-102.

⁵⁹ Battersby, "Poor Drama and Bad Manners".

vaudevillian farce dressed up as social realism'.⁶⁰ In critical and theoretical terms however, literature is no longer valued solely for its mimesis and disparaged when it fails to accurately portray reality: the existence of literary genres such as surrealism, fantasy, and magic realism contradict that view. Since literature began to be explored in explicitly theoretical terms, it is widely acknowledged that even realism contains unconscious motivations and that is shaped by the context of prevailing ideologies. As Tóibín puts it, 'Fiction, by its very nature, is a form of deceit'.⁶¹ Moreover, at the level of the individual playwright, it would be misleading to consider *Hinterland* in isolation, particularly in its exposition of real events and people, without taking into account the unusual perspective of *all* of Barry's plays. In the preface to his collection of plays, he states,

I am in fear as a playwright of facts and dates and I will never make an historian...It is all a mystery to me really but diligent research in the annals of national libraries has not been my practice. I am content, I am forced, to try and guess the shape of things in the ordinary dark.⁶²

A playwright who tries to create a replica of the outside world on a theatre stage might do better to become a historian. This has not been Barry's habit, and it is his toying with reality, and his constant striving for marginal positions from which to evoke his country that ensures his originality and importance.

If Murray is correct in asserting that postmodernity is not congenial to Irish audiences, then it is certain that those audiences will dislike Barry's work and that of many other contemporary Irish playwrights. *Hinterland* is an important play because it catalogues the transition to postmodernity through comparison of the values and attitudes of Johnny and his wife Daisy to those of the younger generation, Jack and Aisling. The nation that he conjures through this generation is pluralistic and heterogenous. The manner in which the play deals with the topic of tribunals and indeed the often brash allusions to the real Charles J. Haughey confirm that in contemporary Ireland, the grand narratives of history and politics are indeed being broken down: in the public arena and in art. Barry's evocation of the consumer society of postmodern Ireland, and his description of Johnny's

⁶⁰ Justin O'Brien, *The Modern Prince: Charles J. Haughey and the Quest for Power* (Dublin: Merlin Publishing, 2002), p. 1.

⁶¹ Tóibín, "*Hinterland: The Public Becomes Private*", p. 207.

⁶² Barry, *Plays 1*, p. xv.

disbelief that those who are benefiting from it have turned on him, reveals much about the social and economic affects of postmodernity, both good and bad. In his portraits of Daisy and Aisling, Barry shows how postmodernity has impacted on gender roles by explicitly showing the contrast between the passively accepted role of politician's wife taken on by Daisy, and the actively chosen role of actress decided on by Aisling, who makes choosing a career seem as easy as picking a soft drink in a supermarket. For all these reasons, through the insights of French theorists like Lyotard, Derrida and Baudrillard, whose philosophies interrogate these changes in the structure of society and culture that Ireland is only beginning to experience, the theatre of Barry can be seen to traverse the hinterland of modernity into the unchartered terrain of postmodern Ireland.

Emilie Bordenave

Chapter Eighteen: Nicolas Bouvier : un regard « français » sur les îles d'Aran

Rien est un mot spécieux qui ne veut rien dire. Rien m'a toujours mis la puce à l'oreille. [...]Empaqueté comme un esquimau, je suis sorti pour voir de quoi ce rien était fait.¹

C'est par cette notion, d'emblée ambivalente, que Bouvier dévoile quel regard il a posé sur les îles d'Aran, ce que nous nous proposons d'étudier. Mais il convient de préciser un élément du titre, les guillemets du mot « français ». Car s'il s'agit bien d'une langue, d'une écriture françaises au moyen desquelles s'exprime son regard (et c'est cela qui nous intéresse ici), Nicolas Bouvier, lui, n'est pas français, mais suisse. Il est né près de Genève en 1929.

Cumulant ses passions pour les mots et pour les voyages, il nous a laissé à son décès en 1995, une œuvre issue de ses pérégrinations, que l'on s'accorde aujourd'hui à reconnaître comme un renouvellement formidable du genre de « la littérature de voyage ». Bouvier décrit avec humour un sens du monde puisé dans la rencontre et l'échange, dans l'émerveillement toujours renouvelé de la route à faire ; et ce, grâce à : 'Une subtile et profonde intelligence de ce monde qui est celui du flâneur et du nomade.'² Apportant un œil nouveau à la fois admiratif et sensible, humble et ironique sur ce que représente l'ailleurs et son écriture, Bou-

¹ Nicolas Bouvier, *Journal des Iles d'Aran et Autres Lieux* in *Œuvres* (Paris : Gallimard, 2004 (collection Quarto)), p.958. (Toutes les futures références à cet ouvrage seront abrégées en : *J.*, suivi du numéro de page directement à la suite de la référence).

² Introduction de Daniel Girardin à Nicolas Bouvier, *L'œil du Voyageur* (Paris : éd. Hoebeke, 2001), p.6.

vier s'est défini comme un « voyageur-écrivain », c'est-à-dire quelqu'un qui préfère, sur la route, renoncer à ses vieilles certitudes, s'infliger le dénuement le plus rude pour parvenir à mettre à nu l'essentiel. Comme il le précise :

Tout le problème quand on a eu comme moi une formation universitaire, c'est d'oublier ce bagage et de l'user sur les routes comme on use les semelles de ses chaussures. C'est au moment où cette culture fait un peu l'épreuve du feu, qu'elle est assimilée et qu'elle est communicable à un lecteur sans qu'on ait l'impression pédante de lui donner des leçons.³

En février 1985, Bouvier se retrouve à devoir écrire un article pour le magazine *Géo* sur l'Irlande, plus exactement les îles d'Aran, ces « îlots perdus tout au bout de la brume » d'après le titre donné alors à l'article. Il y passera une huitaine de jours, au cœur de l'hiver, malade, ce qui donnera à son récit un aspect hallucinatoire représentatif de cette fièvre typhoïde qui troubla son regard. Bouvier découvre des îles qui, par leur géographie, leur culture et l'atmosphère qu'elles dégagent, placent celui qui est à la fois, homme, écrivain et voyageur, devant « le vide qu'on porte en soi »⁴, en s'associant à ce vide apparent du monde aranais.

Comment Bouvier nous donne-t-il un portrait de l'esprit irlandais de ces îles qui se font interprètes de l'Irlande originelle, dont le vide qui fait en réalité sa richesse devient le symbole du vide intérieur du voyageur ? Bouvier dépeint notamment cela d'après quelques allusions à John Millington Synge, auteur irlandais, dublinois plus exactement, qui nous a donné sa description de ce monde aranais dans *The Aran Islands*, récit des séjours qu'il y fit entre 1898 et 1902. C'est un regard à la fois irlandais et voyageur, empreint du romantisme d'un écrivain qui, voulant dépeindre une Irlande originelle mais idéalisée, est déchiré entre les notions de communauté et de « moi » individuel, tant pour les lieux que pour l'homme ou pour l'artiste ; autant de dimensions reprises par Bouvier plus tard. De l'un à l'autre, les réalités découvertes au cours du séjour se confrontent aux stéréotypes des lieux, source d'une tonalité aussi admirative qu'ironique.

³ Citation de Nicolas Bouvier, extraite de l'interview filmée « *Aventuriers et écrivains* », *Nicolas Bouvier* de Marc Bessou.

⁴ Nicolas Bouvier, *L'Usage du Monde* in *Œuvres*, p.387.

Aran vu comme le cœur de l'Irishness ; exprimer le regard porté sur son séjour ; se discerner soi et son écriture grâce à la découverte des lieux, tels sont les thèmes qui vont nous faire apercevoir avec Bouvier « de quoi ce rien était fait ». (*J.*, 958)

Bouvier, tout comme Synge avant lui, décrit le quotidien aranais qu'il tente de mettre à jour, ce que demande tout récit de voyage. Analyse et sensations se mêlent pour décrire un monde qui se révèle immédiatement complexe pour traduire la chaleureuse richesse des contacts humains et le « rien » des lieux.

Les îles d'Aran, on y entre comme dans un rêve, en s'avancant vers un monde qui semble particulier, encore plus loin « in a dense shroud of mist »⁵ dit Synge, et « si le temps le permet » (*J.*, 954) précise Bouvier. « Deeper in the mist »⁶, dit Synge, c'est à dire : « deeper in the Irish spirit. »

Les habitants sont surtout décrits dans leur rapport à la nature, que non seulement ils respectent mais à laquelle ils s'adaptent, en raison des conditions géographiques. Bouvier le découvre immédiatement, lorsqu'il cherche, par exemple, à connaître la raison de la sinuosité des routes :

Quand [j'ai] demandé la raison de ce tracé erratique, il m'a répondu qu'ici, autrefois, les chemins étaient empierrés par les femmes qui n'aimaient pas que le vent les décoiffe ; quand il tournait, elles en faisaient autant. Cette explication m'a entièrement satisfait. (*J.*, 951)

Les réalités de l'Irlande s'imposent mais celles des hommes aussi ; en ressortent, certes des méandres culturels tout autant que géographiques, mais surtout une communion entre êtres humains et nature, propre aux lieux et leur histoire, et qui se retrouve à chaque instant. S'adaptant à ces nécessités, le monde aranais se présente donc rapidement comme une superbe et très enviable cohésion humaine, parfait équilibre entre une vie en communauté et un réel respect de l'individu. Ainsi, Bouvier remarque qu'il n'y a pas de prison sur l'île :

⁵ John Millington Synge, *The Aran Islands* (London: Penguin Books/Twentieth Century Classics, 1992), p.5.

⁶ *The Aran Islands*, p.6.

Cette retenue n'est pas due à l'influence de la calotte, qui est ici modeste, mais à la force de la cellule familiale sans laquelle, pendant très longtemps, on n'aurait pas survécu. (*J.*, 971)

Cette cohésion qui finit par faire office de loi et de protection de chacun contre ses « passions » telles que les nomment Synge (désirs amoureux emportés ou alcool essentiellement), ouvre sur une riche solidarité qui soude les rapports humains :

Michael me dit qu'on n'est jamais en peine ici lorsqu'on a besoin d'un coup de main. Il pense que cette solidarité à la fois joviale et taciturne est due à l'existence précaire que les îliens ont si longtemps menée. (*J.*, 963-4)

Répondant à la chaleureuse réputation des Irlandais, sur les îles d'Aran où les conditions sont encore plus rudes que sur « the mainland », on a compris que les « bénédictions gaéliques (« cent fois bienvenu » ou « cent fois bon retour ») » (*J.*, 964) allègent un quotidien indigent. Même si ce n'est plus le cas à l'époque de Bouvier, l'on découvre une île qui fut ravagée par une pauvreté qu'elle a dépassée par la richesse de son langage (entre anglais et gaélique) et son sens de la solidarité, tant et si bien que nos deux voyageurs ne remarquent aucune différence sociale entre les habitants. Tous partagent une île « qu'ils ont, littéralement, faite de leurs mains » (*J.*, 964), d'où « une pointe de chauvinisme insulaire » (*J.*, 965). Là se découvre tout l'idéal de Synge (la tradition irlandaise face à l'impérialisme anglais), alors que Bouvier n'est plus réellement plongé dans ces interrogations qui ont longtemps animé l'Irlande. S'il ne l'évoque donc que du bout de la plume, il en prend néanmoins conscience, ceci correspondant aussi à tout un intérêt du voyage : rencontrer ces individus et ces communautés, pour s'en nourrir culturellement.

La richesse de cette culture s'impose très vite à Bouvier, grâce à l'hôte et surtout son vieil oncle, peu avares de raconter leurs histoires et le folklore au coin du feu :

[...] j'écoute l'oncle. Je ne me souviens pas d'avoir posé une seule question. Il suffit que je m'installe en face de lui, que je fasse tinter ma cuiller dans la tasse pour que son récit se mette à chantonner comme bouilloire sur le feu. Je ne serais pas là qu'il se redirait toutes ces choses à lui-même. Je suis là, et il remplit de ses récits le vide de cette île que le vent a éteint comme une chandelle. (*J.*, 965)

Tous les sujets se succèdent alors pour notre plus grand bonheur : la vie en Amérique, l'origine des « dunns » et autre forts, les fées et les lutins, les malédictions de ceux que l'on appelle « The Good People », qui viennent du Side, le Monde de l'ombre, accomplir leurs œuvres destructrices.

De même Synge avait construit son récit avec pour constante la reprise de récits irlandais, exposés dans des circonstances similaires (au coin du feu par le vieil aveugle Old Mairtin ou le charismatique Pat Dirane). Le quotidien même constitue un folklore, avec les croyances des anciens qui les emporteront avec eux, conclusion à laquelle aboutissent Bouvier et son humilité réaliste tout autant que le sens bien éveillé de Synge malgré sa tendance à l'idéalisation utopique.

Le monde aranais se présente surtout par contrastes, donc complexité. L'aspect sauvage du premier aperçu des îles se dénoue dans un accueil chaleureux autour du feu, des histoires et du whisky ; la tradition irlandaise répond à la modernité de ceux qui ont fait leur vie en Amérique et se tournent vers le monde du tourisme ; à la force des îliens et des îles face au climat, à leur rudesse de caractère correspond un respect poli presque tendre et le rire des femmes. Le monde d'Aran révèle toute la complexité d'une Irlande insaisissable et multiple. Chaque petit ou grand événement raconté au lecteur se présente comme une expérience et une explication de l'esprit insulaire qui repose sur une certaine tradition qui est le cœur de l'Irlande, bien mieux préservée sur ces îles que partout ailleurs. Donnant l'exemple de la langue gaélique, pratiquée bien mieux et bien plus qu'ailleurs et symbolisant tout l'esprit irlandais pour Synge, il s'exclame : « Yet, it is only in the intonation of a few sentences or some old fragments of melody that I catch the real spirit of the island »⁷, et donc tout l'esprit irlandais. Complexité et richesse chaleureuse de ce monde répondent aussi à son autre réalité : celle d'un vide apparent. Ce contraste constant mérite un approfondissement.

La notion du « rien » transperce immédiatement l'écrit de Bouvier, tout autant que sa négation, lorsque son hôte, surpris d'avoir un voyageur au cœur de l'hiver, ne sait plus comment vanter la beauté de son île :

En venant ici hors saison, je le prends à la déloyale. S'il sait vanter ses anémones souffrées, il n'a pas encore appris à vendre du vent. [...] Rien ? Pourtant ce bestiaire frissonnant dans ce froid polaire et ce rugissement continu, ce n'est pas rien. C'est plutôt « autre chose ». (J., 960)

⁷ *The Aran Islands*, p.15.

En effet, les îles se définissent premièrement par un vocabulaire négatif, celui du vide, du vertige, de l'absence tant de vie, de culture que d'histoire. La première page de *Journal des Iles d'Aran et Autres Lieux* donne à lire « nothing », « desolate », « naked », « a lonely chapel »⁸ ; Bouvier « chemine des kilomètres sans rencontrer d'autres signes de vies que quelques foulques et petits échassiers » (J., 975), on ne sait lui dater les « dunns », les maisons sont isolées, l'histoire orale donc non écrite ne repose au final sur rien et se définit surtout par le non-événement. Bouvier cite le fait que les Romains ne soient pas venus en Irlande, ce qui a des conséquences sur l'organisation des lieux, tant dans sa mythologie que sa structure, comme par exemple :

Les Romains ne sont pas venus ici. Pas de Romains, pas d'urbs, pas de bornes militaires, pas trace de ces systèmes qui réduisent la nature à des droites et à leur perpendiculaire. (J., 951)

Et pourtant, toute une succession de petits détails remplissent les réalités culturelles du pays qui se définit par eux et en retire sa propre originalité et richesse ; l'exemple précédent le sous-entend déjà, mais Bouvier le précise :

Quatre siècles d'épreuves et de guignon historique ont rendu l'Irlandais si fataliste qu'il oublie de souligner ce que cette frugalité, cette maigreur, ce manque, comme la quête incessante à laquelle on se livre pour y remédier, peuvent avoir de positif et de précieux. (J., 978)

L'Irlande se définit par un vide qui n'est qu'apparent et que sa réalité interne ne fait que nier, car agissant tout en contraste, elle sait s'en nourrir et en retirer le nécessaire, oubliant tout ce qui ne l'identifie pas purement. Les auteurs irlandais en ont joué et ont rempli ce qui manquait de leur imaginaire, notamment Synge défini par Yeats comme ayant « little personality, little personal will, but fiery and brooding imagination »⁹, ce que réaffirme Bouvier également. (J., 977-8) Cette réalité du vide ouvre sur

⁸ *The Aran Islands*, p.5.

⁹ Williams Butler Yeats, "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time," in E.H. Mikhail, *J.M. Synge, Interviews and Recollections* (London: The McMillan Press LTD, 1977), p.138.

une écriture particulière de cette dimension qu'il faut parvenir à représenter.

L'écriture du vide aranais se fait par un processus généralisé de description et, comme l'explique Tom Robinson au sujet de Synge, mais cela est parfaitement valable pour Bouvier : 'It is as if he wanted to generalize his islands into elemental simplicity and atemporality.'¹⁰ Afin d'exprimer une simplicité visuelle qui échappe, sont utilisés des jeux sur les idées, les mots et les structures notamment ellipses, périphrases de l'absence. Le texte stylistique mime ainsi la réalité qu'il décrit, comme ici :

Jamais en Irlande même je n'ai éprouvé un sentiment de plénitude. Quelque chose de blanc, de troué, d'incomplet comme une octave à laquelle manquerait une note. L'absence d'un son, d'une couleur, peut-être d'une personne me donnait l'impression d'arriver dans l'instant juste un peu trop tôt ou un peu trop tard, de le surprendre en état de manque. (J., 977)

Cette évocation du vide joue sur un style riche et simple, et crée un hors-temps dans le texte, représentatif de ce que Bouvier pouvait alors ressentir. De même Synge écrit la mystérieuse dimension d'un crépuscule dans un style mimétique de la solitude, du vide qui le saisissent et seulement traversés par les bruissements du vent et le grondement des vagues rendus par des allitérations et une certaine longueur des phrases. « L'autre chose » irlandais qui constitue sa culture est donc mis en abîme dans le microcosme aranais. Le contraste du vide et de la richesse s'affirme dans deux écrits et deux époques, mais il convient d'en voir les évolutions.

L'esprit irlandais s'écrit entre légendes et réalité et en accord avec le regard qui s'y pose. De Synge à Bouvier, les choses ne s'écrivent plus de la même façon, car elles dépendent d'un contexte et d'une conception du monde. L'homme face aux îles écrit selon ce qu'elles lui inspirent.

Synge écrit l'Irlande selon une certaine vision romantique et idéale dont il trouve de parfaits exemple dans le monde d'Aran ; Bouvier y fait allusion avec une ironie propre à celui qui n'écrit que pour son voyage et non de son pays, mais cette ironie n'empêche en rien l'écriture d'un récit aussi admiratif et réfléchi que celui de Synge. Ainsi l'écriture de la culturalité correspond à ce que les auteurs ont voulu révéler en décrivant les lieux.

¹⁰ Tom Robinson, "Introduction" to *The Aran Islands*, p.8.

Pour Synge, il s'agit d'une critique de l'Irlande moderne, voire du monde moderne, au profit de cette société aranaise quelque peu primitive qu'il rencontre, mais dans un sens positif, les habitants apparaissant tels les « bons sauvages » de Rousseau.

Bouvier évalue une définition du « moi » face à l'autre, face à l'ailleurs, jouant sur une interprétation de l'être « étant », pris dans le « devenir » du voyage, notion présumée par ce dernier. Partir à la découverte des limites du corps et de l'esprit tels qu'ils existent au moment de l'expérience, et ce, en leurs faisant passer les épreuves et obstacles, propres à la mobilité du voyage : c'est ainsi pour Bouvier que peut se mettre à nu l'individu-voyageur.

Dans les deux cas, objectivité et subjectivité se complètent pour saisir au mieux les lieux et les idées littéraires qui s'en dégagent. Le récit démarre sur du pur informatif pour aboutir à du subjectif et à une réflexion sur soi et sur ce que symbolise les îles, au fur et à mesure de l'immersion. Bouvier joue en cela avec l'écriture journalistique demandée à laquelle il ajoute la réalité de son voyage qu'il a évoqué :

J'avais des crises de fièvre et de dysenterie toute la nuit, et la journée, la fièvre tombait. C'était très bizarre. J'allais me promener, comme je ne pouvais plus m'alimenter convenablement, je me suis nourri d'air marin et de vent - qui avaient des qualités roboratives exceptionnelles - ce qui a donné à ce texte un côté allumé, halluciné.¹¹

En effet, très souvent, la réalité des faits se conclue sur une subjectivité magique de la description, inspirée par l'esprit des lieux. Entre récit informatif et romance autobiographique, les genres se mêlent dans les références et jusque dans les structures.

La structure des textes évoque un certain principe du voyage et d'expression de la culture irlandaise placés sous la plume de l'écrivain. Synge affirme la réalité de son récit en introduction, mais le fait qu'il en ait pré-écrit une partie en France et la structure se rapprochant très fortement du journal et de plus en plus fragmentée au fil des pages, révèle sa subjectivité tout en n'enlevant rien à la réalité de l'expérience.

Bouvier utilise le sous-titre « feuilles de route » pour son texte : tel un journal de bord mais avec la légèreté des idées saisies au gré de la route et

¹¹ Citation de Nicolas Bouvier, extraite de l'interview filmée « *Aventuriers et écrivains* ».

de la découverte de l'ailleurs. Ceci se traduit par l'absence récurrente de pronoms, le « moi » écrivant disparaissant au profit des réalités de son expérience : ce n'est plus l'auteur mais un simple être empli et dominé par le monde d'Aran qu'il décrit : « cheminé des kilomètres... », « trouvés mes hôtes... » (*J.*, 975-6). Cette structure objective se complète par l'expression ironique des sensations, ainsi surgit cette nouvelle écriture du récit de voyage propre à Bouvier. De plus, l'essentiel du texte a été écrit après son voyage, ce qui relativise ainsi la notion de « feuilles de route », l'important dans l'écriture étant surtout de faire, poétiquement, partager les choses :

'Il faut trouver un langage clair, direct et frais qui permettent aux autres de vivre ce que l'on a vécu car la sensibilité des sédentaires est moins riche que celles des nomades.'¹²

Comme se plaisait à le dire Bouvier, le voyage se fait plus qu'on ne le fait ; il en est de même du récit qui se construit presque seul selon le voyage et les expériences, simplement car en restant au plus près des sensations, on fait en sorte de retranscrire au plus juste un pays, une atmosphère. Mais pour un même lieu peuvent s'exprimer des réalités différentes, en jouant avec le texte tout autant que ce qui est évoqué, comme par exemple, les stéréotypes du lieu.

Synge en redéfinit certains limitant l'aspect traditionnel qui commence à se perdre à son époque. 80 ans plus tard, Bouvier fait de même, ajoutant là son regard étranger. Il s'étonne par exemple que ses hôtes apprécient les anglais : 'Ce qui leur plaît c'est la courtoisie anglaise, et qu'ils manifestent à tout propos leur satisfaction.'*(J.*, 976) Mais beaucoup de ce que nous nommons stéréotypes se révèlent vrais, si bien que l'on peut s'interroger sur la validité de la notion. Plutôt l'affirmation de l'authenticité un peu plus sauvegardée qu'ailleurs de ces « îlots » qui restaient encore à l'époque de Bouvier un véritable bastion culturel. Néanmoins le jeu sur les stéréotypes est surtout source d'un décalage humoristique sur une réalité nécessairement changeante qui l'est moins.

Les références au Side et au mystère irlandais sont un bon exemple. Synge y croit encore, mais plus Bouvier. Le contraste ne peut que faire sourire : là où Synge exprime très sérieusement une explication « locale »

¹² Citation de Bouvier, extraite de l'interview "Aventuriers et écrivains".

et biblique des « Good people », Bouvier s'exclame : « Il fallait bien les caser quelque part dans les Saintes Ecritures. La solution qu'ils ont trouvée sent à plein nez le bricolage et la panique. » (*J.*, 988) Bouvier rend l'aspect surnaturel par son regard halluciné, et en accord avec cette citation de Charles-Albert Cingria qui ouvre son récit : « Si l'on ne trouve pas surnaturel l'ordinaire, à quoi bon poursuivre ? »¹³. En effet, le rapport entre surnaturel et ordinaire, « ce qui fait partie des tracas quotidiens » (*J.*, 986), fait aussi tout l'intérêt du voyage en Irlande.

Cette contrée s'écrit et se réécrit au fur et à mesure du récit, révélant l'homme face à son voyage qui le guide et s'impose à lui. Ceci mime dans l'écriture la révélation du voyageur à lui-même que représente le voyage dans le monde d'Aran.

Le voyageur va à la rencontre des autres pour se vider de ses certitudes puis se compléter ensuite, de retour à la solitude ; pour remplir ce « vide qu'on porte en soi »¹⁴ révélé par le voyage, symbolisé parfaitement par la bourrasque de vent qui emporte Bouvier, léger dans sa petitesse face aux éléments :

A quelques mètres du fort, une rafale m'a pris de plein fouet, jeté par terre et promené dans la caillasse et les ronces comme une manchette de journal. [...] Je me suis mis à rire, j'ai toujours souffert de ma lourdeur ; être baladé comme une feuille morte m'avait fouetté le sang. (*J.*, 968-9)

Telle est la notion du voyage pour Bouvier, et l'Irlande et son vide-plein s'y prêtent merveilleusement, c'est pourquoi :

Dans ces paysages faits de peu, je me sens chez moi, et marcher seul est un exercice salubre et liturgique qui donne à ce peu - en nous ou au dehors - sa chance d'être perçu [...] mais dont notre surdité au monde nous prive trop souvent. (*J.*, 975-6)

Le voyage en Irlande se joue des difficultés (rudesse du climat, maladies de Synge et de Bouvier) pour offrir une dimension littéraire unique. Au fur et à mesure qu'il s'écrit, il révèle le voyageur à lui-même, lui qui s'avance vers l'autre (personne ou lieu), s'y confronte et le comprend. De

¹³ *Le Journal des Iles d'Aran*, p.943. La citation de Cingria est tirée de *La Fourmi Rouge*.

¹⁴ *L'usage du monde*, p.387.

plus, en révélant le vide de l'écrivain, le séjour révèle aussi celui de la page blanche. Ecrire ce voyage ouvre ainsi sur toute une réflexion sur l'existence des mots.

Au plus s'écrit le vide du pays, au plus se découvre « l'insuffisance centrale de l'âme »¹⁵ de l'homme-voyageur. Au plus se découvre aussi, leur enrichissement. Les îles d'Aran sont décrites comme un ailleurs qui renouvelle l'âme, l'être par la confrontation de l'homme et des lieux. Par conséquent, l'écriture de l'un s'embrasse avec l'écriture de l'autre, et des parallèles peuvent être aisément établis.

Par exemple, la beauté de l'île est cent fois plus impressionnante selon Bouvier « dans l'absolue sauvagerie des tempêtes d'hiver » (*J.*, 960), soit dans le « rien » de l'hôte. De même, Bouvier malade, jeûnant, ne se nourrit que de l'air grisant d'Aran qui :

[...] dilate, tonifie, saoule, allège, libère [...]. Il réunit les vertus du champagne, de la cocaïne, de la caféine, du transport amoureux, et l'office du tourisme a bien tort de l'oublier dans ses prospectus. Ici j'en aurai très bien vécu pendant une semaine de jeûne absolu et de marches harassantes, dans une sorte d'ébriété ébahie. (*J.*, 967)

Ce qui est l'incarnation même du « rien » de l'île, l'air, sustente et remplit le voyageur, tout comme le vide remplit l'œil du voyageur de la beauté des lieux. Au fur et à mesure du voyage, l'écrivain se découvre face aux paysages et aux autochtones qu'il rencontre. Se projetant en eux comme en un miroir, il s'explore et se discerne. Le personnage du vieil aveugle qui guide Synge à son arrivée en est un symbole : celui qui traditionnellement voit plus loin à l'intérieur des hommes de ne pouvoir voir l'extérieur, va guider le héros voyageur dans cette même voie : voir en soi. Le fait que Old Mairtin lui expose la fameuse énigme du Sphinx définissant l'homme,¹⁶ le révèle.

¹⁵ Bouvier, *L'Usage du Monde*, p. 387 (Citation complète : « Comme une eau, le monde nous traverse et pour un temps nous prête ses couleurs. Puis se retire et vous replace devant ce vide qu'on porte en soi, cette insuffisance centrale de l'âme, qu'il faut bien apprendre à côtoyer, à combattre et qui paradoxalement est peut-être notre moteur le plus sûr. »).

¹⁶ John Millington Synge, *The Aran Islands*, p.12 “ ‘Did ever you hear what it is goes on four legs when it is young, and on two after that, and on three legs when it does be old?’ I gave him the answer. ‘The blessing of God be on you. Well, I’m on three

Ce qui s'expose, c'est le vide et la médiocrité du « moi ». Synge déjà, mais sans l'esprit aussi analytique de Bouvier, révélait ce pouvoir évocateur de l'Irlande, lorsque face à la mer et à la roche nue, il exprimait son sentiment de nudité intérieure et de faiblesse ; son voyage lui révélait son être, sa place.

La principale différence avec Bouvier est que Synge semble surpris de ce sentiment d'infériorité auquel il est confronté face aux éléments auxquels il ne peut se mesurer, à la différence des habitants des îles qui travaillent quel que soit le temps. Bouvier, lui, connaît la force du voyage et recherche cette remise en question du « moi » qu'il juge extrêmement positive car elle est une évasion de ce « moi » face à ses préjugés et ses habitudes, éléments dont il a toujours cherché à se défaire :

Le sentiment d'indigence, de vacuité, de nullité n'est pas une surprise mais un exercice salubre. Quand cette insuffisance centrale que j'occultais ou remplissais tant bien que mal avec celle des autres devient intolérable, je sais qu'il faut attendre qu'une poterne inconnue de moi s'ouvre sur un instant de liberté frais comme une cressonnière. Patience. L'épuisement physique donne une chance de plus à ces tentatives d'évasion. (*J.*, 970)

Dans l'écriture de l'individualité, se révèle le rapport complexe entre l'évocation du soi dans le voyage et l'évocation des lieux ; compléments, union et pré-supposés de l'un par rapport à l'autre rythment le récit.

Cependant, il faut comprendre qu'aussi loin que soient allés ces auteurs, ils n'ont jamais eu l'intention de se fuir ; le retour sur soi dévoile plutôt combien ils avaient une conscience inquiète de leur voyage. L'Irlande et sa description qui se marie parfaitement avec l'état d'esprit propre au voyageur, fonctionne comme une source d'hygiène de vie, une façon détournée de mettre au jour ses paysages intérieurs face aux paysages qui se présentent. Le voyage est ainsi un aller vers autrui qui se solde par un retour sur soi.

Par exemple, on peut se demander au final, qui est Bouvier ? Il n'est pas tout à fait écrivain (il n'écrit rien au cours du voyage), ni journaliste, ni même peut-être un homme pour l'oncle, « qui conclut en riant : « C'est une personne du Side ! » (*J.*, 985). En cela, le passage du « portrait-robot de « l'étranger-sur-l'île-en-hiver » » (*J.*, 985) est révélateur de cette poé-

legs this minute, but the old man beyond is back on four; I don't know if I'm better than the way he is; he's got his sight and I'm only an old dark man.' ”

tique. De même, la récurrence de la question de la mort et de la maladie montre combien ce voyage-ci est aussi une réflexion sur le « dernier voyage ». Pour deux malades, ceci prend un caractère particulier : cette question existentielle dégonfle l'ego et fait découvrir sa médiocrité. L'Irlande, une nouvelle fois, se prête idéalement à cette réflexion, au vu de la réalité du voyage, du vide et de l'absence qui en font l'atmosphère. Face aux landes de pierres nues, la pensée de la mort surgit, elle si particulière au voyageur Bouvier qui la considère comme « une douane aux tarifs inconnus ». ¹⁷ Dans sa fatigue et sa maladie, ce dernier revient ainsi sur « ce corps qui se défait pour partir ailleurs » (*J.*, 984), que ce soit ceux du cimetière de la baie de Kileany (*J.*, 984) qu'il va visiter ou le sien propre qu'il tente de surmonter : « La fatigue aura peut-être raison de la fièvre : il faut épuiser les maladies qui nous visitent ; le plus souvent, elles lâchent prise avant le corps. » (*J.*, 985).

Aran se fait symbole de l'écriture du « moi » et du voyage en général et quel qu'il soit, en tant que terre marquée par les migrations et terre d'ouverture entre les continents, les cultures, les religions, entre microcosme et cosmopolitisme. Il se fait aussi la mise en abîme symbolique de l'écriture.

Le vide irlandais ouvre sur la page blanche du « devoir écrire », qui est de combler le voyage avec des mots. La difficulté d'expression est rendue par l'incapacité reconnue de Bouvier à écrire au cours du voyage ; il lui faut le laisser mûrir, « l'investir » donc. Ceci est particulièrement visible dans son récit aranais qui se compose, en plus de l'expérience subjective, de plusieurs historiques sur divers aspects de l'Irlande, de poèmes et citations inclus dans la narration, de récits folkloriques et autres formes de paratextes qui complètent et remplissent aussi le séjour tout autant que le vide de l'écriture. Mais ce n'est qu'une source parallèle ; c'est au contact de l'Irlande que Bouvier trouve le langage adéquat pour faire partager l'ailleurs, l'expérience de la marche et de la rencontre, selon ce principe qu'il explique :

L'écriture est un mouvement pendulaire qui passe du « voir » au « donner à voir », la parole naissant, non de l'exotisme qui n'est que preuve de malentendu, mais d'une géographie concrète patiemment investie et subie. ¹⁸

¹⁷ Nicolas Bouvier, *Le Hibou et la Baleine* (Paris, éd. Zoé, 1993), pp.28-29.

¹⁸ Nicolas Bouvier, « Réflexions sur l'espace et l'écriture », in *Œuvres*, p.1054.

Or, les récits de nos auteurs dévoilent combien ils ont pris le temps de se mêler à l'esprit de l'île pour pouvoir la retranscrire, notamment par un jeu avec les mots qui traduit la richesse de son néant apparent.

Plus généralement, l'Irlande invite à l'écriture de l'ailleurs. Les sensations et découvertes y sont telles qu'il faut les transcrire, particulièrement en Irlande, où la culture orale en fait un pays dont il faut encore écrire l'histoire si riche que le lecteur s'y perd, comme l'explique Bouvier :

Il ne faut pas se laisser abuser par l'extrême complexité de la mythologie celtique qui [...] parfois laisse le lecteur en route. A l'âge d'or de l'Irlande, l'encre n'était pas encore sèche sur la page du moine copiste que déjà un Viking surgissait pour la détruire ou l'emporter. (*J.*, 986)

De même la richesse culturelle et géographique amène à de multiples comparaisons avec des pays lointains et d'autres voyages, ce qui devient un principe d'inspiration littéraire ; déjà Synge faisait des comparaisons avec la France et même la Chine. Pour Bouvier, il s'agit du Tibet, du Japon, de la Suisse. Il ne faut pas oublier que le récit des îles d'Aran ouvre sur deux autres récits en Corée et en Chine (*Les chemins du Halla-san et Xian*). Car le récit irlandais ne peut s'arrêter si simplement, il ne s'achève d'ailleurs pas réellement puisque les dernières phrases sont une question et une supposition sur un dernier aspect du « rien » ultime, la mort :

« Ashes to ashes and dust to dust ». Quelque chose clochait dans cette maxime funèbre : avec un vent pareil, rien ne retourne à rien. Un mensonge de plus ? Bien probable. (*J.*, 990)

Pareillement, les séjours de Synge ne s'arrêteront pas à l'écriture de *The Aran Islands*, mais ce monde continuera d'exister et d'influencer l'auteur de *The Rider of the Sea* et *The Shadow of the Glen*.

Leur voyage amène les auteurs à évaluer toutes les dimensions d'un lieu, de leur être et de leur écriture. Or, cette dernière révèle la mise en abîme entre l'attitude du voyageur et celle de l'écrivain, car ils nous offrent un travail d'analyse du fond et de la forme des îles d'Aran, véritable invitation vers la découverte de cet ailleurs. La double perspective de Synge et Bouvier fait le portrait de l'esprit irlandais au travers de ces îles d'Aran qui fonctionnent comme un microcosme et comme le symbole insulaire de « The Mainland ». Donnant le sentiment d'être perdu au bout du monde, l'auteur décrit le vide et le plein de cette « finis terrae » qui le

« traverse comme une eau » (J., 990) et le replace face à l'interrogation du monde qu'il parcourt. L'écrivain est balayé aussi physiquement que moralement par un lieu qui le met à nu.

Dépassant les stéréotypes, l'esprit irlandais est décrit dans toutes ses dimensions, ce qui révèle sa richesse et sa complexité, entre communauté et individualisme, force et fragilité, vide et plein surtout d'un lieu dont le mystère et son rapport étroit au naturel « surnaturel » (des paysages, de la culture) complexifient une compréhension parfaite. L'Irlande se fait terre d'écriture et de remise en question du voyageur-écrivain qui s'inspire de sa dualité intrinsèque (le fameux « *crisscross* » irlandais). Chez Synge mais surtout chez Bouvier, au regard étranger et purement voyageur, moins au fait des us irlandais et de l'esprit insulaire, l'Irlande se présente donc comme une source littéraire d'interrogations de l'être, de l'âme et de la connaissance de l'homme-artiste-voyageur. Elle dégage une poétique du vide, miroir de l'acte du voyageur, car comme le faisait très justement remarquer Bouvier :

On ne voyage pas pour se garnir d'exotisme et d'anecdotes comme un sapin de Noël, mais pour que la route vous plume, vous rince, vous essore.¹⁹

¹⁹ Nicolas Bouvier, *Le Poisson-Scorpion*, in *Œuvres*, p.567.

Philip Dine

Chapter Nineteen: Tackling *Les Diables Verts*: French Writers on Irish Rugby

Introduction: making sense of sport

Few commentators on contemporary France and/or Ireland would doubt the social significance of sport as a mode of individual and communal interaction, and, particularly, of cultural representation. For, since the mid-19th century, modern sports have exerted a powerful influence on both personal and collective self-images, and have thereby impacted significantly on local and national politics, and even on the international order itself. The case of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in Ireland stands as a paradigm of this multifaceted social role, while the cultural and political mobilisation around France's historic win in the 1998 (football) World Cup amply demonstrated the societal changes that sporting events may both reflect and inspire. In these and associated ways, sport has made a distinctive contribution to the imaginative life, and thus the identity politics, of nation-states, in Europe and well beyond.

Against this general background, rugby football may productively be examined in terms of the specific interactions and representations that this doubly minority sport has permitted between the two very different sporting cultures of France and Ireland. Following Ireland's first international match against France in 1909, and France's admission the following year to a new Five Nations championship (competed for annually with the four 'Home Unions' of the British Isles), the two countries have met more regularly on the rugby field than in any other sporting arena. After losing every match played against the Irish between 1909 and 1919, the French recorded historic back-to-back wins in Dublin in 1920 and Paris in 1921, and have more than held their own since then. France currently leads the 80-match series between the two countries by 47 victories to 28, with five draws; while of their last ten meetings, Ireland have won only two encounters to France's eight. This is part of a broader shift that would see France become the dominant force in the Five Nations tourna-

ment after 1945, winning the competition jointly for the first time in 1954, and then outright in 1959. France's first Grand Slam of victories over all four of the other teams came in 1968, with subsequent repeats in 1977, 1981, 1987, 1997, and 1998. This is a pattern that has continued since the admission of Italy to the new Six Nations competition in 2000, with further Grand Slams achieved in 2002 and 2004.

All of which may be compared with Ireland's significantly more modest single Grand Slam in 1948. Yet any such comparison must be kept in a proper perspective, in that the respective playing strengths of the two countries are very different. Thus, Ireland's pool of barely 15,000 players is a mere fraction of that of France, with around a dozen French players currently active for every one of their Irish counterparts.¹ However, these figures must themselves be set against the background of the game's particular development in these two, very different, locations. Historically, rugby in Ireland was one of a number of 'foreign' or 'barracks' games imported – and variously adopted or imposed – by the British, along with such typical pastimes as cricket and association football (soccer). It was consequently rejected by Irish nationalists in favour of re-invented indigenous alternatives such as Gaelic football, hurling, and handball, as part of a thoroughgoing hostility to British cultural and political domination.

In France too, rugby had an important colonial dimension, in that the game's implantation and expansion on the other side of the English Channel was the great exception to the general pattern of this sport's diffusion and development within the British imperial bloc. Moreover, rugby was France's first modern team sport, and underwent a very particular evolution in social, geographic, and symbolic terms. More specifically, it became the site of significant local, regional, and national investment, both moral and material. Above all, rugby's development in France was characterised by the apparently mysterious, but undoubtedly profound, *méridionalisation* of the game. This saw an exercise initially imported by aristocratic Parisian anglophiles become the most popular – and properly hegemonic – sporting activity across great swaths of rural

¹ The corresponding ratio between England and Ireland, at 30 to 1, is even more striking. Figures from Jean-Pierre Bodis, *Le Rugby d'Irlande: Identité, Territorialité* (Bordeaux: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1993), p.16.

France south and west of the river Loire. French commentators on this manifestly foreign game have consequently sought to make sense of it to a variety of French audiences. For a sporting world whose traditional centres of gravity typically lie far from Paris – whether in Brive or Bath, Castres or Cardiff, Dax or Dunedin – has long required explanation for the nation's newspaper readers, radio listeners, and television viewers. Within this tradition of explanatory commentary, Ireland, at once both within and outside the British sphere of sporting and cultural influence, has proved a particularly attractive object of discussion.

It is the French 'literary' representation of rugby-playing Ireland that provides the focus for the present survey. Jean Lacouture, Jean Cormier, and Jean-Pierre Bodis are the three writers considered here. They are working for the most part within the context of broader overviews of rugby as a global sport, rather than on the Irish game's own terms, although Bodis is a partial exception to this pattern, and altogether a special case. They are writing, essentially, for like-minded readers: i.e. predominantly middle-aged, middle-class, white males, often former players themselves, with a tendency to look to the apparent continuities of sport for reassurance in a period of rapid, and radical, societal change – an audience uncomfortably resembling the author of the present chapter, in short. However, a degree of analytical awareness and critical distance should, nevertheless, permit the drawing of some legitimate conclusions about this body of writing. To that end, and throughout this discussion, we would do well to remember the culturally and even politically conservative charge attached to the sporting evocation of past matches and perceived glories. As John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler have pointed out in an important essay on rugby and masculine identity: 'Such discourses promote a feeling of nostalgia, a cultural 'security-blanket' and reference point that helps tell people who they have been (or at least who someone with the power to assert these discourses says they have been) in the face of insecurities in the present'.²

Jean Lacouture is widely known as the biographer of General de Gaulle, among others, but was also *Le Monde's* rugby correspondent in

² John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler (eds), *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 3. Cf. Philip Dine, 'Du collégien à l'homme (aller-retour). Rugby et masculinité en Grande-Bretagne et en France', in *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 198, January-March 2002, pp. 75-90.

the 1970s – producing match reports of a characteristically cerebral kind for the national journal of record – and is also a talented amateur historian of the game. He is typical of a French tradition of highly literate sports journalism, epitomized by the respected novelist Antoine Blondin's cycling chronicles in the sports daily *L'Équipe* between 1954 and 1982. Two books by Lacouture are considered here: *Le rugby, c'est un monde* (collected articles from *Le Monde*, 1979) and *Voyous et Gentlemen: Une histoire du rugby* (1993). The broader influence of Blondin is particularly to the fore in the writing of Jean Cormier, a professional sports journalist for the popular *Parisien* newspaper, who collaborated with his regular colleague Roger Bastide to produce a celebration of the fine work and eccentric world of the notoriously alcoholic writer in their revealingly titled *Alcools de Nuit: Antoine Blondin* (1988). In contrast, Jean-Pierre Bodis is a professional historian and academic, and one of the very few in France to have come to sport from a background in mainstream history. Bodis is the sports historian's sports historian – or, at least, a serious contender for consideration as the foremost historian not only of French rugby but also of the world game. The conceptual sweep of his thesis for the *doctorat d'État*, the pinnacle of the French state examination system, is as impressive as its sheer scale at no less than 2,446 pages: *Rugby, Politique et Société dans le monde des origines du jeu à nos jours: Étude comparée* (University of Toulouse, 1986). Fortunately, for all but the most conscientious reader, his study of the game's Irish history, *Le Rugby d'Irlande: Identité, Territorialité* (1993), is one of several such edited extracts from this *magnum opus*, and is a much more manageable 157 pages. However, as we shall see, this relatively modest work is every bit as incisive as it is accessible.

Why are these various writers focusing on Irish rugby at all? There are two main answers to that question. First, Lacouture and Cormier are typical of French attempts to make sense of what certainly was – and perhaps still is – a foreign and even 'exotic' sport to audiences in France, at least outside its adopted homeland in the South West of the country. This was particularly true of the new, national television audience for international matches that emerged in the later 1950s and 1960s, when iconic commentators Roger Couderc and Pierre Albaladejo together became as synonymous with rugby in France as Mícheál Ó Hehir and Mícheál Ó Muirheartaigh were successively to become with the GAA in Ireland. For Bodis, the professional historian, this primary motivation is undoubtedly present, but is also combined with a genuine interest – even passion

– for making sense of the local specificity of this particular ‘global’ game – in Ireland, as in his native France, and elsewhere. In addition, Bodis is acutely conscious of the self-imposed ‘universal vocation’ of French historians, and of his profession’s general reluctance (at best) to engage with sports history as a legitimate field of enquiry. Perhaps predictably, this independence of spirit has not served him well as regards either career development or recognition from his peers. However, it has, at least, made for some very good sports history, even if still of a characteristically French kind, in that it is regularly introspective and reflexive. For, at the deepest level, French writing on anything is always, in truth, about France.

Jean Lacouture: from Celts and *caid* to inter-confessional harmony (calling at all clichés in between...)

Let us begin, then, at the beginning, with Jean Lacouture’s reflections on the origins of the game of rugby, which is conventionally credited to the ground-breaking actions of a senior pupil at Rugby School in Warwickshire, one William Webb Ellis, who in 1823, ‘with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive character of the Rugby game’.³ Interestingly, Lacouture puts his own Celtic spin on this English ‘public’ (i.e. private) school creation myth by repeating the old chestnut about this same William Webb Ellis, who, as a child, is supposed to have accompanied his father to Ireland following a British forces posting, being exposed there (in Tipperary specifically) to the traditional Irish football known as *caid*, an experience which purportedly inspired his heroic exploit at Rugby School. Historians have cast doubt on both parts of this story, but that does not really matter to Lacouture, who is primarily concerned to demonstrate the intrinsic strangeness – and even the madness – of rugby football, for the purposes of his own critical and domestic agenda. Ireland and the Irish provide the perfect vehicle for this, as the following quotation shows:

A vrai dire comment n’être pas tenté par cette piste irlandaise ? Qui d’autre que les compatriotes de Yeats et de Synge, d’O’Casey, de Wilde et de Shaw aurait été assez fou pour inventer cette fête sauvage orchestrée par un légiste,

³ Commemorative plaque at Rugby School, erected in 1900, and reproduced in Sean Smith, *The Union Game: A Rugby History* (London: BBC, 1999), p. 18.

ce jeu de tabellions pyromanes où règne une absurdité millimétrique, où le comble de la loi bride le pire de la furie, ce jeu qui rassemble si fort aux Landes venteuses et déchiquetées du Connemara.⁴

The fact that rugby has historically had very little to do with Connemara – *pace* the current Galway-based club of that name – is of little interest to Lacouture. His primary objective is rather to demonstrate to his French readership his own familiarity with Ireland's geography and culture, the latter revealingly equated with its English-language literary history. However, in this characteristically intellectualized, and itself consciously literary, example of his sports writing, Lacouture is also making another important point. Here, as elsewhere, he is keen to depict both Ireland and its rugby as intrinsically Celtic, in common with that of Wales and, to a lesser extent, Scotland. For him, this means that the Irish game is typified by passion, invention, playfulness, and even poetry, as well as an apparently genetic combativity generally summed up as 'le *fighting spirit*'. In fact, so persuaded is Lacouture of the Celtic origins of rugby that he likens *caid* to the violent traditional football known as *soule*, which the French themselves are inclined to see as the home-grown origin of the game's popularity there, and he bemoans the failure of rugby to take root in its 'natural' French home, soccer-playing and cycling-mad Brittany, which he describes as being peopled by 'Des Celtes aux mains coupées'.⁵

A second key theme in Lacouture's presentation is the idea that Irish rugby is essentially a small-scale affair, with a limited number of clubs, a distinctly modest international record, and just a few world-class players to its credit. He really only puts two great players into this category – Jack Kyle and Mike Gibson – with honourable mentions for the likes of Tony O'Reilly, Andy Mulligan, Tom Kiernan, Fergus Slattery, Ken Kennedy, Ray McLoughlin, and, of course, the 'monumental' Willie John McBride, or 'Bill the Buffalo' as Lacouture prefers to refer to him. However, this apparently dismissive image of Ireland as a fairly lightweight competitor is not actually a negative representation, for it enables Lacouture to emphasize that Irish teams are motivated first and foremost by the love of the game, rather than by a desire to win at all costs, which he sees as the ruination of the French game in the 1970s. His real target is thus

⁴ Jean Lacouture, *Voyous et gentlemen : Une histoire du rugby* (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), p. 18.

⁵ Jean Lacouture, *Le rugby, c'est un monde* (Paris : Seuil, 1979), pp. 40-1.

the bludgeoning approach to the game adopted first by the period's dominant club side, Béziers, and then by the national team captained and later coached by the 'Little Corporal', Jacques Fouroux. Epitomized by the regularly brutal French side that won the 1977 Grand Slam, this determination on the part of both the country's leading club and the national team to win *coûte que coûte* was to result in long-running doctrinal disputes over the 'soul' of the French game.⁶ In consequence, Lacouture is actually delighted to report successive Irish wins over the French in 1972 and 1973, and again in 1975. Lacouture stresses throughout the spontaneity, improvisation, verve, and sheer sense of fun of the Irish players, who are regularly likened to 'inspired schoolboys' in their approach to the game. Indeed, he sees these Irish teams as true representatives of their nation and its native genius. In 1973, after a narrow Irish victory (6-4) over France at Lansdowne Road, he asks:

Des gens qui ont choisi de jouer de cet instrument biscornu qu'est un ballon ovale, et de surcroît avec des Irlandais, peuple que ne gouverne pas d'ordinaire la raison mais la fantaisie, ne sauraient attendre de quatre-vingts minutes de course, de sauts, de chocs et de coups la conclusion la plus logique. [...]

A Dublin, avec ses rues pleines de fous, de poètes et de filles au regard libre, sa rivière de pure bière et ses arbres où semblent encore nicher des grappes de francs-tireurs, et les ivrognes de John Ford, et les tueurs de Flaherty, et l'ombre de Mr. Bloom, qui s'attend, sur une pelouse de rugby, à autre chose qu'à un accès de fièvre joyeuse, à une ivresse violente et à une explosion de cette forme très particulière de courage que les Anglais appellent *gallantry*? Un mot qui, dans leur esprit, vise tout particulièrement ces peuples un peu barbares qui, au sud comme à l'ouest, n'ont retenu de leurs tentatives de les civiliser que le goût du whisky et les règles du rugby?⁷

This is all in contrast to the rational, percentage-based, 'accountant's' rugby so visible elsewhere at this time, according to Lacouture, and especially in France. French victories over Ireland are summarily dismissed, including even the Grand Slam decider in Dublin in 1977 – the first won by an unchanged side, and without conceding a try in any of its four matches – under the heading in *Le Monde*: 'Les plus forts seront-ils les

⁶ See Philip Dine, *French Rugby Football: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 151-69.

⁷ Lacouture, *Le rugby, c'est un monde*, p. 96.

meilleurs?’⁸ Lacouture goes on to pay Mike Gibson the ultimate compliment of wondering whether the emblematic figures of France’s post-war *rugby-champagne*, André Boniface and Jean Gachassin, were ever tempted to sneak into the Irish changing-room and don a couple of green shirts, for the sheer pleasure of running out alongside the great North of Ireland play-maker, whom he calls ‘the best attacking footballer in the world’ and ‘the outstanding centre of his generation’.⁹

As a Protestant lawyer from Belfast, the mercurial figure of Mike Gibson is regularly to the fore in a third key aspect of Lacouture’s representation of Irish rugby, namely his account of the inter-confessional harmony that the game is widely supposed to bring about between players from North and South of the border, and thus between Catholics and Protestants, and nationalists and unionists. The following is typical, and comes from his 1993 history of the world game: ‘C’est même la gloire du rugby irlandais d’être l’un des très rares domaines où, à la différence du football et des autres sports, protestants et catholiques fraternisent sous le même maillot vert marqué du trèfle, et sans jamais qu’un incident notable, provoqué par une rivalité de vedettes ou autre, ne vienne troubler cet accord’.¹⁰ Of course, this is hardly original. Indeed, the same point is habitually – and uncritically – made by commentators in France, Britain, and further afield. More surprisingly, perhaps, Ireland’s own historians of the game – Sean Diffley (1973), and Edmund Van Esbeck (1974 and 1986)¹¹ – have encouraged the conventional view that Irish rugby provides proof that sport can transcend religion and politics, peacefully overcoming barriers between traditions and communities.

As John Sugden and Alan Bairner have noted in their *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland* (1993), this is ‘[a] large claim indeed, but one that is supported vehemently by the main historians of Irish rugby.’¹² Sugden and Bairner argue instead for a less attractive, but significantly more plausible reading of rugby in Ireland, and particularly

⁸ Lacouture, pp. 184-8.

⁹ Lacouture, pp. 69, 141, & 185.

¹⁰ Lacouture, *Voyous et gentlemen*, p. 36.

¹¹ Sean Diffley, *The Men in Green: The Story of Irish Rugby* (London: Pelham Books, 1973); Edmund Van Esbeck, *One Hundred Years of Irish Rugby* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1974) and *The Story of Irish Rugby* (London: Stanley Paul, 1986).

¹² John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p. 53.

in the six contested counties of Northern Ireland, as ‘a largely middle-class game which, in Ulster, is played almost exclusively by Protestants’ and which everywhere is ‘deeply implicated in the politics of division’.¹³ To find a persuasive French view on such matters, we shall need to consider the sophisticated historical analysis of Jean-Pierre Bodis. However, before we do so, it is instructive to consider the representation of Irish rugby proposed by a second respected French sports writer.

Jean Cormier: in the footsteps – and the watering-holes – of Antoine Blondin

The clear linkage in the French journalistic imagination between Irish rugby, heroic drinking, and, not infrequently, violent disorder has already been hinted at in the work of Jean Lacouture. It is to the fore in Roger Bastide’s and Jean Cormier’s joint celebration of the drink-sodden world and work of Antoine Blondin: *Alcools de nuit* (1988). Although Blondin, a self-confessed ‘drinker who writes, rather than a writer who drinks’, was not actually a party to the particular *histoire irlandaise* recounted by Jean Cormier, the ambience is very similar to his own writing – and, in particular, the extended confession of a series of drunken scrapes with the law presented in his *Monsieur Jadis ou l’École du soir* (1970).¹⁴ More specifically, on the Thursday evening before the 1982 France-Ireland match at the Parc des Princes, the Irish were on the verge of only their second ever Grand Slam, while France, if defeated, would be condemned to the ‘wooden spoon’ metaphorically reserved for the team finishing bottom in the competition. Cormier profited from the occasion to meet up with an old friend, perceived as the epitome of the paradoxical virtues of the Irish *rugbyman*:

Une fastueuse soirée est donnée, ce jeudi 18 mars [1982], par une amie, quai Albert-1^{er}. Je me suis permis, avec son autorisation, de convier mon vieil ami le docteur Ken Kennedy, ancien talonneur de l’équipe d’Irlande. Il a été, pendant une dizaine d’années, entre 1965 et 1975, la terreur des joueurs français. A la fois gentleman et voyou, pratiquant sur le terrain l’insulte, le crachat au visage, la ruade sauvage pour redevenir, une fois le combat terminé, un être charmeur et désarmant, même et surtout envers ceux qui venaient de subir les rigueurs de son « fighting spirit » sur le terrain. Le docteur Kennedy

¹³ Sugden and Bairner, p. 54.

¹⁴ Antoine Blondin, *Monsieur Jadis ou l’École du soir* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1970).

adore la France, les Français, les alcools et les vins français, les dames françaises et les troisièmes mi-temps françaises. Le cheveu court, le verbe assuré dans notre langue, il circule dans le microcosme du Tout-Paris avec une superbe désinvolture.

Mais Ken n'est pas arrivé seul à cette soirée. Il est accompagné de deux beaux spécimens appelés à en découdre samedi sur l'herbe du Parc [des Princes], deux éléments dynamiteurs du pack, Fergus Slattery et Willy Duggan, l'ancien et futur capitaine de l'équipe du Trèfle. Visiblement, ils ne sont pas adeptes de la veillée d'armes des chevaliers du Moyen Age qui se préparaient au combat dans le jeûne et la prière.¹⁵

Many drinks and assorted bars later, and after picaresque misadventures that involve the usual singing and dancing, as well as a punch-up with a group of taxi-drivers, Slattery and Duggan are eventually released from policy custody into the care of Jean Cormier, following payment of substantial compensation. With Duggan unable to play as a result of a hand injury sustained in the fight, and Slattery still the worse the wear from his hangover, it is small wonder that France beat Ireland comfortably (22-9) in the match the following day. Yet, for Cormier, what counts is not the result, but the spirit in which the game is played, and, especially, the accompanying festivity to which it gives rise. In fact, he joins Lacouture in criticizing the win-at-all-costs mentality that was ultimately to transform their cherished (and avowedly amateur) *sport roi* into just one more professional spectacle. If hope lies anywhere, he suggests, it is with the Irish, as represented by Kennedy, Slattery, and Duggan; as well as by Parisian bar-owners like Andy McElhone at Harry's Bar, Brian Laughney at Kitty O'Shea's, and former player Andy Mulligan – 'le plus parisien de tous', for Cormier, and the author of a well-received volume of memoirs, *Ouvert l'après-midi: dix ans de rugby* (1964).¹⁶

Jean-Pierre Bodis: foregrounding North-South (and East-West) antagonisms, and mapping the island as an archipelago

¹⁵ Roger Bastide and Jean Cormier, *Alcools de nuit: Antoine Blondin* (Paris: Michel Lafon, 1988), p. 160. I am indebted to my colleague Ruadhán Cooke for bringing this text to my attention.

¹⁶ Bastide and Cormier, *Alcools de nuit*, p. 118; Andrew Mulligan, *Ouvert l'après-midi: dix ans de rugby* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1964; translated by Jacques Arnaud).

In sharp contrast to the amused – and, to be fair, often amusing – myth-making of Jean Lacouture and Jean Cormier, Jean-Pierre Bodis's focus is on everything that happens, as he puts it 'before the teams come out of the changing-rooms and after the final-whistle has blown': his study is a detailed archival exploration of individuals and institutions, actors and structures, with the key emphasis on rugby's role in the construction of Irish identities at both the local and national levels.¹⁷ His principal fields of analysis are the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and its provincial branches, the leading clubs, secondary and university education, professions and careers (especially medicine), moral beliefs, religious convictions, political attitudes, and patterns of sociability. All very solid, and just what we would expect to find in a serious history of the sport. Moreover, Bodis is just as interested in discourses – although he does not use that term – as he is in practices, and particularly in the *non-dits* or unspoken aspects of Irish rugby as well as its openly (even loudly) asserted virtues. The diasporic dimensions of Irish rugby are additionally given appropriate attention. He has a keen French eye for paradox and ambiguity too, as when looking at the playing careers in this 'foreign game' of such nationalist icons as Kevin Barry and Michael Cusack.

However, above all, he is rightly critical of all those French writers, Lacouture and Cormier to the fore, who have settled for trotting out the usual clichés for so long, whenever the annual international match comes around. Indeed, early on in his survey he presents a catechism of clichéd Irishry of which the great humorist Flann O'Brien [Brian O'Nolan] might well have been proud:

Et puis, que savons-nous de l'Irlande ? C'est une île massive, au large de la Grande-Bretagne, la terre de l'eau, celle qui tombe en pluies, en averses, en bruine, en crachin et celle des ruisseaux, des rivières et des lacs ; le royaume des ciels changeants et des vents qui chassent les nuages pour une embellie avant d'autres nuages. Quand parlons-nous d'elle ? Au moins une fois par an : pour le match de rugby du Tournoi des cinq nations avec des approximations qui touchent à la désinvolture. Pour le reste des clichés, les sorties de pêche au saumon ou les parties de golf au milieu de populations rustiques mais pittoresques ; les lacs du Connemara puisque Michel Sardou les a chantés ; la Guinness brune et la bière rousse « irlandaise » Killian brassée à

¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Bodis, *Le Rugby d'Irlande: Identité, Territorialité* (Bordeaux : Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1993), p. 16.

Dunkerque et dont les Dublinois n'ont jamais entendu parler ; des coureurs cyclistes de brave talent, Sean Kelly et Stephen Roche qui ont le goût exquis de parler français ; un délectable scandale religieux sexuel, soit un évêque catholique, père honteux d'un adolescent monté en graine longtemps caché en Amérique. Et, avec une monotonie qui tue l'attention parce qu'elle la banalise, au cours du journal télévisé, des attentats en Irlande du Nord, un ou deux, ou trois morts, à Newry, ou au Bogside de Londonderry, ou à Belfast, du côté de Falls Road et de Shankill Road, ce que l'on appelle simplement « the Shankill ».

Eh bien, l'Irlande vaut mieux. Il y a d'abord un pays superbe, même quand il pleut, surtout quand il pleut [...]. Et l'histoire, les hommes ? [...] L'occasion se présente ainsi grâce au rugby de réfléchir sur la notion d'une identité, probable ou improbable, sur les problèmes d'une île particulière qui tourne le dos à la mer.¹⁸

It is to the great credit of Bodis that he does, indeed, deliver a significantly better analysis of Ireland and Irishness than other French commentators on the country's distinctive engagement with the 'foreign game' of rugby football. Central to his critique of more conventional French representations is the generally supposed tradition of political and religious harmony noted above, and it is thus to his survey of the 'secret history' of sectarianism in the Irish game that we must now turn.

Among the many examples of religious and political tensions highlighted by Bodis, the following are worthy of particular attention, but are simply listed here:

- the cancellation of fixtures in 1913 by the North of Ireland [rugby] Football Club to assist recruitment and training by the (Protestant) Ulster Volunteer Force;
- the split between Catholic and Protestant players during the 1914-1918 Great War over playing (or not) during the conflict – and, more seriously, over volunteering (or not) for British military service;
- the related and more generally problematic issue of playing on Sundays;
- the death during the 1916 Easter Rising of Fred Bowring, President of the IRFU and a British territorial army officer – an event regarded by Bodis as 'no accident', but rather the result of political choices, and as such imbued with potent symbolism;
- the postponement of the 1920 Munster Junior Cup Final between Cork Constitution and Shannon of Limerick, at the latter club's insistence, following

¹⁸ Bodis, *Le Rugby d'Irlande*, p. 18.

the assassination of Thomas MacCurtain, Lord Mayor of Cork, by undercover British soldiers in reprisal for the local electoral success of Irish nationalists – the match was eventually played on the highly symbolic Easter Sunday;

-the debate over the flying of the tricolour at Lansdowne road following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922;

-the ‘forgotten’ crisis of 1954 regarding flags and emblems prior to what, in the event, was to be the last international match played at Ravenhill in Belfast, and which included a threatened strike by players from the Republic – henceforth, all matches would be played in Dublin, with the tricolour flown, and *Amhrán na bhFiann* [the Soldier’s Song] played as the single national anthem.¹⁹

As Bodis concludes, with a telling swipe at all those dewy-eyed French commentators whose writing typically dominates French representations of Irish rugby:

Dans cette histoire tourmentée, parfois sanglante, toujours passionnelle, la division religieuse, pour grossir le trait, perdue entre Catholiques et Protestants. Les insultes sur le champ de jeu contre les sales Papistes ou le salaud de pilier protestant sont plus fréquentes que ne le donneraient à penser bien des journalistes français, qui, avec une niaiserie consternante transmises de génération en génération, pleurent d’émotion devant ce merveilleux rugby en qui se trouve la force surhumaine d’unir ce que l’histoire a séparé.²⁰

More generally, the main lines of Bodis’s analysis may be summarized in terms of his emphasis on the patterns of implantation and diffusion of the game in Ireland. He thus sees Irish rugby as characterized by its limited demographic base, which draws essentially on the country’s schools – especially the socially elitist fee-paying institutions – and universities, with its primary constituency being the urban middle classes, especially those involved in service professions such as the law, medicine, education, and the civil service. From this perspective, Bodis explains, the GAA’s historic prohibition of nationalist participation in ‘foreign games’ did not significantly affect the IRFU, because it had never really developed a base in rural, Catholic Ireland. Indeed, ‘the ban’ may even have protected Irish rugby in and after the turmoil of 1922 and the Civil War. Bodis cites in

¹⁹ Bodis, pp.47, 59-72 *passim*, 82-85.

²⁰ Bodis, p. 17.

evidence the 1923-24 season, which was to all intents and purposes a return to business as usual, and in the course of which numerous Belfast-Dublin club matches were played without difficulty.²¹

The great exception to this pattern of socially stratified development is, of course, to be found in the city of Limerick, where rugby is characterized by Catholic and nationalist participation across the classes. Indeed, although Bodis does not actually develop the comparison, there is an undeniable similarity between the ‘mystery’ attached to the emergence of working-class rugby in Munster, the south-western province of Ireland, and the ‘mystery’ of the game’s popularity, and democratic nature, in the corresponding region of France.²² To make sense of the game’s popular base in Limerick, Bodis conducts a detailed examination of the city’s clubs and their typical constituencies. On that basis, he suggests the following elements of an explanation:

- Limerick rugby clubs’ resemblance to the GAA in their broad social and cultural role within the local community;
- the general enthusiasm for all sports in the city, including both GAA and soccer, as well as rugby;
- the local importance of the rugby-playing Christian Brothers, who were particularly responsible for educating the city’s working classes;
- the possible role of the specific British military garrison in the city, where the Welsh Fusiliers offered the spectacle of a socially inclusive variety of rugby;
- the traditional independence of spirit of the city, vis-à-vis both (GAA-dominated) Cork and Dublin, which has strong undercurrents of provincialism and even tribalism.²³

Whatever the reasons, there developed in Limerick – and in Munster rugby more generally – what Bodis describes as a characteristically inward-looking sporting culture, on the part of players, administrators, and supporters alike. Yet, he goes on to argue, an externally closed local identity of this kind is not the exception in Irish rugby, but rather the norm, as similar patterns of sporting identity-construction are clearly visible in Belfast and Ulster, just as they are in Dublin and Leinster; with Galway

²¹ Bodis, p. 65.

²² See Philip Dine, *French Rugby Football: A Cultural History*, pp. 61-77.

²³ Bodis, *Le Rugby d’Irlande*, pp. 42-44.

and Connacht perpetually cast as the poor relations, and even the ghost at the Irish rugby feast.

Hence, for Bodis, rugby-playing Ireland should properly be understood not as an island, but rather as an archipelago.²⁴ This is borne out by the institutional and functional characteristics of the IRFU, which clearly does not play the strongly centralizing and determinedly managerial role of its French counterpart, the Fédération Française de Rugby (FFR), serving instead to maintain a much looser and essentially pragmatic confederation of otherwise autonomous provinces. Within such an organization, the principal marker of identity in all cases is a mistrust of – and even contempt [*mépris*] for – outsiders.²⁵ This challenging model of reciprocal animosities is considerably more persuasive than the rosy-tinted vision of inter-confessional harmony typically foregrounded by French commentators on Irish rugby. Indeed, although written in 1993, this particular aspect of Jean-Pierre Bodis's incisive analysis goes a long way towards explaining the remarkable achievements of Irish provincial sides in the professional era that followed the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and particularly the objectively regarded overachievement of Munster, the most strongly self-aware of Irish provinces. Having famously beaten the All Blacks in 1978, Munster rugby had an enviable record of accomplishment against all-comers long before the professional era. This proud history undoubtedly contributed to a strong sense of the province's uniqueness in more recent times: 'Alone it stands', to adopt the expression used by a highly successful 1999 stage play based on the province's celebrated exploit against the touring New Zealanders.²⁶ Moreover, since 1995, Munster has been the backbone of a reinvented Irish national side, which has performed with great credit despite only being able to draw on a strictly limited pool of genuinely capable players. However, it is in the European Cup competition, where Munster has played by and for itself, that the province's greatest feats have been accomplished. From its fortress-like home at Thomond Park in Limerick, the Munster side has done battle with the finest professional sides in Europe, reaching the final of the competition twice in 2000 and 2002, before finally winning the trophy in

²⁴ Bodis, p. 65.

²⁵ Bodis, pp. 138-40.

²⁶ John Breen, *Alone It Stands* (unpublished script; first produced in Waterford on 15th September 1999).

2006. They thus became the second Irish side to do so, following Ulster's own remarkable achievements in 1999.

Conclusion: the Grand Slam that never was

All of which adds particular spice to Bodis's intriguing analysis of the 1972 Five Nations championship and the Irish 'Grand Slam that never was', and it is thus with that tale of British treachery and Franco-Irish solidarity that we will conclude this short survey. Following the first such Irish victory over all four of their international opponents in 1948, when local surgeon Jack Kyle captained his side to final triumph at Ravenhill in Belfast, Ireland has never been able to recapture this coveted European crown. However, the team that took the field at the start of the 1972 international season contained, in Bodis's estimation, at least seven players worthy of a place in world rugby's pantheon of great performers: Tom Kiernan, Mike Gibson, Kevin Flynn, Ken Kennedy, Ray McLoughlin, Willie John McBride, and Fergus Slattery. The Irish duly started by beating both France and England away, only to be cruelly denied by the cancellation of their two scheduled home games against Scotland and Wales at the height of the Northern 'Troubles'. An enraged Sean Diffley, in the *Sunday Press*, called upon the IRFU to do everything in its power to expand Irish horizons, and specifically to look outside the 'British clan' in order to make rugby a truly world game.²⁷ All of which would surely have appealed to the French, given their own country's experience of isolation by the British between 1931 and 1939, together with France's ongoing exclusion from the world governing body, the International Rugby Board (which had been established in 1886, but to which the FFR was eventually admitted only in 1978). This background of conflict also helps to explain the remarkable gesture of solidarity by the French, who came to Lansdowne Road to play Ireland for a second time that season – primarily to compensate the IRFU for the substantial income lost from the two cancelled matches – gallantly losing again, into the bargain.

However, it was very much back to business as usual the following season, when the emergence on to the same pitch of the 1973 England team was greeted with a full five minutes of applause from the Dublin

²⁷ Bodis, *Le Rugby d'Irlande*, p. 93.

crowd.²⁸ Bodis does not draw the inevitable conclusion, but his French reader undoubtedly can: Ireland's 'Auld Enemy' is not really an enemy at all, and it is, as always, France that remains the real outsider in European competitions, and, indeed, in the Anglophone rugby-playing world as a whole. Indeed, from a French perspective, sporting Ireland remains radically 'other', in spite of both shared traditions – *mutatis mutandis* – of Catholicism and Republicanism, and the clear identification of a common hereditary enemy in the shape of Great Britain. All in all, it is more a question of 1789 than 1798 on the international rugby field, with France ultimately alone, but always visionary and revolutionary, leading a benighted world – including even its sportsmen, with the Irish fondly included – towards a brighter future.

²⁸ Bodis, p. 94. On the history of French and Irish international encounters, see additionally Jean-Pierre Bodis, « Une amitié musclée: Français et Irlandais sur les terrains de rugby », in Sarah Alyn Stacey (ed.), *Essays on Heroism in Sport in Ireland and France* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 55-69.

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