16

ARES

Advanced Research in English Series

Exercise in memory: Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at UFSC – 10 years

editora ufsc

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

ARES | Advanced Research in English Series
Volume 16

Exercise in memory: Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at UFSC – 10 years

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes | Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos
Vinicius Garcia Valim
| Orgs. |

editora ufsc

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês | Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
2026 | Florianópolis | Santa Catarina | Brasil

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

Reitor

Amir Antônio Martins de Oliveira Júnior

Vice-Reitora

Felipa Rafaela Amadigi

EDITORA DA UFSC

Diretor Executivo

Fábio Lopes da Silva

Conselho Editorial

Fábio Lopes da Silva (Presidente)
Alexandre Bergamo Idargo
Antonio Fernando Boing
Camila Feix Vidal
Débora Maria Russiano Pereira
Francisco Emílio de Medeiros
Guilherme Wagner
Joana Vieira Borges
Jucinei José Comin
Karine Daufenbach
Laise Orsi Becker
Marcio Camargo Cunha Filho
Maria Conceição de Oliveira
Mario Rodolfo Roldán Daquilema
Ricardo Gaiotto de Moraes
Saulo Henrique Vasconcelos Novaes

Editora da UFSC

Campus Universitário – Trindade
88040-900 – Florianópolis-SC
Fone: (48) 3721-9408
editora@contato.ufsc.br
www.editora.ufsc.br

ARES | Advanced Research in English Series

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês

Centro de Comunicação e Expressão | CCE

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina | UFSC

2026

Editoras-Chefes | Chief Editors

Rosane Silveira (UFSC)

Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos (UFSC)

Conselho Editorial | Editorial Board

Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes (UFSC)

Daniel Ferraz (USP)

Genilda Azerêdo (UFPB)

Kyria R. Finardi (UFES)

Lêda M. Braga Tomitch (UFSC)

Margaret Kelleher (University College Dublin)

Paige Reynolds (College of the Holy Cross)

Robert Burgoyne (University of St. Andrews)

Vitor Alevato do Amaral (UFF)

Walcir Cardoso (Concordia University)

Revisão | Proofreading

Ronei Lucas Gonçalves

Thalyta Bianca Pinto Argivaes

Projeto gráfico e editoração

Ane Girondi

Catalogação na fonte pela Biblioteca Universitária da
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

E96 Exercise in memory [recurso eletrônico] : Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at UFSC – 10 years / Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, Vinicius Garcia Valim, Orgs. . – Florianópolis : Editora da UFSC, 2026.
358 p. : il. – (Advanced Research in English Series ; 16).

E-book (PDF)
Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.5007/*978-65-5805-145-9*

ISBN *978-65-5805-145-9*

1. Estudos irlandeses. 2. Tradução e interpretação. I. Fernandes, Alinne Balduino P. II. Bastos, Beatriz Kopschitz. III. Valim, Vinicius Garcia. IV. Série.

CDU: 801=03:82

Elaborado pelo bibliotecário Jonathas Troglio – CRB 14/1093

Este livro está sob a licença Creative Commons, que segue o princípio do acesso público à informação. O livro pode ser compartilhado desde que atribuídos os devidos créditos de autoria. Não é permitida nenhuma forma de alteração ou a sua utilização para #ns comerciais.
br.creativecommons.org

Table of contents

Foreword _____ 8

Irish diplomats currently serving in Brazil

Foreword _____ 12

Margaret Kelleher

NEI 10th anniversary celebration _____ 15

Alan Gilsenan

Exercise in memory: NEI's collaboration with Ireland and beyond____ 19

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, and Vinicius Garcia Valim

THEATRE

Extract from *The Boy* _____ 34

Marina Carr

Extract from *Tempesta* _____ 37

Deirdre Kinahan

O sonhar dos ossos _____ 62

W. B. Yeats, translated by Maria Rita Drumond Viana

RADIO DRAMA

Como criar sua própria sereia ____ 75

Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes

Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel: airwaves of time, reconstruction, imagination ____ 88

Vincent Woods

A última ceia no Hotel Imperial ____ 92

Vincent Woods, translated by Bruno Ricardo Gessner and Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes

SHORT STORY

Os mortos ____ 95

James Joyce, translated by José Roberto O'Shea

POETRY

Affreca and the Rooks ____ 137

Kathleen McCracken

MEMOIR

The other side of Palestrina in the darkness: queer Dublin in the 1980s ____ 146

Lance Pettitt

VISUAL ARTS AND DANCE

Horrible Creature ____ 161

Áine Stapleton

ESSAYS

FILM

The body in the bog, *Crá*, and historical memory _____ 163

Ruth Barton

THEATRE

Irish Greek tragedy: re-tuning or adapting _____ 174

Nicholas Grene

"We are still a nation of storytellers" – but at what cost? Art, value and public funding for theatre on the island of Ireland _____ 189

Miriam Haughton, Tricia O'Beirne, and Finian O'Gorman

Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*'s centenary production at the Gielgud Theatre London: a performance perspective _____ 207

Eamonn Jordan

Becoming a playwright _____ 222

Colin Murphy

Stewart Parker's contacts with the epic theatre _____ 233

Domingos Nunez

Negotiating modernity: Irish language pantomimes at the Abbey Theatre _____ 242

Ian R. Walsh

PROSE FICTION

James Joyce and the senses of disability _____ 254

Vitor Alevato do Amaral

On writing *Openings* 269

Lucy Caldwell

Short stories, novels, and the fluidity of form 273

Paul Delaney

Post-Celtic Tiger pastoral: looking to landscapes in Sara Baume's *A Line Made By Walking* and Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* 286

Deirdre Flynn

Anxious intimacy: Gothic afterlives and online dating under Covid in Eva Kenny's "Christmas Story" 298

Paige Reynolds

READING AND EDITING

What reading means when reading is not allowed: "literacy events" in the Magdalene Oral History Archive 314

James Little

From national canon to feminist archive: central writers in the *Field Day Anthology*, vols. I-V 329

Vinicius Garcia Valim

About the Authors 343

Foreword

A contribution from Irish diplomats currently serving in Brazil

It is with great pleasure that we, the Irish diplomats currently serving in the Embassy of Ireland in Brasília and the Consulate General of Ireland in São Paulo, offer this foreword in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Nucleus of Irish Studies (NEI) based at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). The sustained commitment of NEI's professors, students, and the wider university over the past decade to promote cultural exchange, dialogue and the deepening of understanding between Ireland and Brazil is deeply valued by the Government of Ireland.

Last year, 2025, marked a historic moment, as Ireland and Brazil celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations. However, the Ireland-Brazil relationship – which has seen such growth in recent decades – began hundreds of years before the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975. Our respective diasporas, affinity diasporas, and strong people-to-people connections have been instrumental in strengthening these relationships.

Ireland and Brazil, though geographically distant, share more than is often assumed. Both societies have been shaped by histories of colonisation and migration, by the central role of language and storytelling, and both have produced vibrant diasporas that carry culture beyond borders. Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that Irish literature, history, and cultural studies find receptive audiences in Brazil, nor that Brazilian scholars bring fresh and insightful perspectives to Irish themes. One of the first aspects Irish diplomats in Brazil notice when they arrive in the country is the fact that Brazilians have

such a strong appreciation for Irish culture. At the heart of this is the thriving network of Irish studies groups present in universities across the country and supported by the Association of Irish Studies in Brazil (ABEI), making Brazil one of the most prolific Irish studies landscapes in the world.

Founded ten years ago in 2016, NEI at UFSC is a key example of the development of Irish studies in the south of Brazil. We are profoundly grateful for the work of Professors Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes, Maria Rita Drumond Viana, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and José Roberto O'Shea in coordinating its establishment and for helping it to grow and develop over the past ten years. In 2023, the then President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, presented Dr. Kopschitz Bastos with the prestigious Presidential Distinguished Service Award in the category of Arts, Culture and Sport, recognising her outstanding service in fostering lasting links between Brazil and Ireland, as well as contributing to the strength, vibrancy and richness of Irish Studies and Irish arts and culture in Brazil.

As diplomats, we are always humbled to visit Florianópolis for the annual NEI Jornada, and to meet not only the academics who have devoted their careers to studying Irish culture, history and literature, but the students across all levels who express such passion about Ireland. We were delighted to discover at the 2025 Jornada that, according to the students, Irish Studies is now considered one of the "trendiest" subjects on campus. This is a testament to the commitment of both professors and students, for which we will remain forever indebted. This sentiment has been echoed by our colleagues and previous diplomats who have worked in Brazil, who have extended both their gratitude and congratulations.

Visits by so many established and emerging Irish writers, filmmakers, poets and dramatists to UFSC over the past decade have provided Irish diplomats in Brazil with the opportunity to share the stage with some of our most celebrated creative individuals, a chance many of us might not otherwise have had. The interest in contemporary Irish culture, the warm Brazilian reception that these artists have received, and the insightful questions posed by the future writers and academics that they met while here ensure that Brazil makes a deep and lasting impression on each of these visitors. In our short time here, the current diplomats have had the opportunity to meet Irish names in Florianópolis such as poet Paul Muldoon, filmmaker Alan Gilsenan, playwright Deirdre Kinahan, and writer Lucy Caldwell, as well as leading Irish academics from various universities across Ireland. We know that each of those who visited left with a desire to return and a confidence that Irish studies in Brazil will continue to go from strength to strength.

Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme provides financial support to organisations that work to assist the Irish diaspora and promote Irish heritage abroad. This programme is a particularly important part of Ireland's outreach in Brazil and it has allowed us to establish connections with a range of groups working in these areas, including NEI at UFSC.

Additionally, in São Paulo, the award-winning theatre company Cia Ludens has dedicated its work to translating and performing Irish plays on the Brazilian stage for over twenty years, under the curation of production director Dr. Kopschitz Bastos and artistic director Domingos Nunez. Year after year, Cia Ludens demonstrates outstanding commitment to the promotion, translation and interpretation of Irish literature for a Brazilian audience, including promoting visibility and accessibility for people with disabilities, with Rosaleen McDonagh's *Rings* translated and performed by an outstanding deaf actor through Brazilian sign language (Libras). *Rings* (*Luvas e anéis* in Portuguese) has toured with SESC in various locations across the state of São Paulo. The original author, Rosaleen McDonagh, a traveller woman and wheelchair user, had the special opportunity to see the Brazilian production of her own play at Sesc Santana in 2023, with a visit to Brazil facilitated by NEI.

NEI's focus on contemporary and female writers, on marginalised voices, on disability awareness and visibility, and on radio drama and theatre contributes to the richness of the Irish studies landscape in Brazil. The countless books and studies published, plays produced and conferences organised are a testament to its legacy.

As part of the commemorations of 50 years of diplomatic relations, the Embassy and Consulate were honoured to partner with both NEI and Cia Ludens on a symbolic event at the Museum of Image and of Sound in São Paulo in May 2025. The event featured the launch of NEI's collection of five Irish plays translated into Portuguese with a focus on protagonists with a disability. It also featured a dramatic reading by Cia Ludens of one of Deirdre Kinahan's recent plays, *An Old Song Half Forgotten*, portraying a window into the life and soul of an older actor who is living in care with Alzheimer's disease; a deeply moving performance. The work of both NEI and Cia Ludens in highlighting important social issues through the celebration of Irish literature is greatly valued, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Representing Ireland abroad is an enormous privilege, and representing Ireland in Brazil even more so. It is thought that over 70,000 Brazilians are now studying and working in Ireland – making Ireland the EU Member State with the largest resident Brazilian

community after Portugal and Germany. The growth of the Brazilian diaspora in Ireland represents one of the biggest shifts in our bilateral relations in the past few decades, and we have no doubt this will only serve to strengthen our many connections.

The depth and variety of work in Brazil for Irish diplomats is both fascinating and never-ending, and much of the work that has been done to forge the deep relations that we enjoy today is nothing short of awe-inspiring. We are proud to partner with NEI on so many cultural projects, including last year's highly successful Irish language film festival in São Paulo, that have helped to amplify Irish culture and to strengthen people-to-people links between our two countries. That said, as we mark half a century of diplomatic relations between our two countries, we also recognise that we have still only scratched the surface of the huge potential that exists in the Ireland-Brazil relationship.

As we look forward to the next 10 years of NEI, we are excited to witness new generations of Irish studies students bringing new perspectives and ideas to the table, and to continue our joint partnerships on various cultural initiatives. We are confident that the success of NEI in promoting contemporary Irish studies in the south of Brazil will continue to grow and develop in the years to come, as will the vibrant Irish studies landscape across this vast country.

Embassy of Ireland, Brasília
H.E. Martin Gallagher, Ambassador
Maurice Nolan, Deputy Head of Mission
Sophie Mc Guirk, Second Secretary and Consul

Consulate General of Ireland, São Paulo
Robert Jackson, Consul General
Niamh Casey, Deputy Consul General

Foreword

Margaret Kelleher

According to Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead". For many of us, the richest way to discoveries about Irish literature has been via Florianópolis, and thanks to the vision of NEI at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Three graces, in particular, come to mind as I reflect on the centre's work of the past ten years, so well represented in the multidisciplinary contributions to this volume, and these are creativity, collaboration and hospitality.

Creativity radiates throughout these essays as it does from all the activities of the centre: in teaching and research, journal publications and roundtables, special events and collaborations. This has involved a visionary and courageous recognition by the NEI members of new genres, interdisciplinary crosscurrents and previously undervalued themes in Irish studies, which often they have championed long before they came to be recognised elsewhere; the centre's role in fostering work in documentary theatre, radio drama and visual arts, on Irish theatre and disability, literature and technology, and ecocriticism provides just some examples.

During the period of COVID-19, the centre's determination to persist in collaborative activities was a true beacon of light and brought much pleasure to kitchens and bedrooms in Ireland, Brazil and other places. A cherished personal memory is watching live, on 14 October 2020, the digital round table *How the Story Travels: The Contemporary Irish Short Story*, the first online event. It featured contributions by Oein DeBhairduin, Eloisa Dall'Bello, Melatu Uche Okorie, Vincent Woods and its chair Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos that resonate powerfully still, and I continue to share this invaluable resource with my own students who are now thankfully back in person in our classrooms.

Just a fortnight later followed "Shakespeare in Ireland and Brazil: Translation and Performance", with speakers Patrick Lonergan, José Roberto O'Shea, Janaina Mirian

Rosa, and the following Spring the "Irish Literature and Ecocriticism" round table which explored aspects of ecocriticism in Irish literary and cultural studies, focusing on archipelagic literature, poetry and gender, and theatre studies, with contributions by John Brannigan, Lucy Collins, Alinne Fernandes and Melina Savi, both also chaired by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos. Bringing these events to fruition in trying times involved much hard labour and dedication by NEI, and I salute all those involved in these inspiring examples of collaboration, including the important support provided by the Embassy of Ireland, Brasilia, and the Consulate Generate of Ireland, São Paulo, for these and the other NEI activities.

From the past, to the present and to the future, this volume vividly demonstrates the dynamic and innovative work of the NEI centre and its partners. It is striking how many of the contributions bring us "behind the scenes" of theatrical events or "between the lines" of literary authorship, for example in Colin Murphy's reflections on becoming a playwright or Lucy Caldwell's on the act of writing *Openings*. Others stage much-needed acts of historical retrieval with topics that range from the undervalued Irish-language pantomimes at the Abbey theatre to the persistence of Greek tragedy in Irish theatre. And others focus bravely on current challenges that have vital future significance, most notably the status of public funding for theatre on the island of Ireland.

Readers will encounter new authors to discover and relish – thanks to Paige Reynolds' essay on writer Eva Kenny or Paul Delaney's analysis of the work of Stuart Neville. Other pieces pay tribute to departed figures in a historical sweep that extends from Lance Pettitt's memoir of his friend Éibhear Walshe back to Kathleen McCracken's poem about the twelfth-century woman Affreca.

The themes of translation and adaptation are central to this volume as they have been to the work of NEI from the beginning, enabling Brazilian readers and audiences to share in the reading and performance of numerous Irish writers, and also encouraging Irish audiences and readers to appreciate these works in new ways. Sections on theatre, on radio drama and on theatre and television, and the visual arts provide a sparkling kaleidoscope of examples in this regard, ranging from Yeats (translated by Maria Rita Drumond Viana) and O'Casey to the work of Marina Carr, Stewart Parker, Vincent Woods and Deidre Kinahan. Similarly, essays on prose fiction present vital new perspectives, such as that of Joyce and the senses of disability, and the continuing relevance of the pastoral in Irish fiction. The final essays on "reading and editing" remind us of the

fundamental power of anthologies, their power to include or exclude, and of the value of reading itself, most especially when it is forbidden or controlled.

One word that recurs and reverberates in these pieces is that of "empathy", the audience's readiness for empathy as discussed by Domingos Nunez in his chapter on Stewart Parker, and echoing in Colin Murphy's essay "Becoming a playwright". I draw from Colin's words at some length since they capture for me not only the joy of theatre but, by extension, the shared pleasure and importance of being a member of the audience of NEI's work, whether in person at a production or reading or lecture, or online at a round table, or through the pages of their publications. As Colin writes, "Fundamentally, this is all about empathy. This is why we do it – and this is why, in a world growing ever more digital, theatre grows perhaps more necessary. To sit amongst an audience in a theatre at a play is the opposite of scrolling on a phone or talking to a chatbot. It is not an anachronism – it is an antidote".

As all the above examples make clear, creativity and collaboration are deeply intertwined in the achievements of NEI over the past ten years. And so finally, to my third grace of hospitality, which I cite in grateful recognition of both the intellectual and material sustenance provided by NEI through its range of activities. Here I return to Joyce and this time to his short story "The Dead", or "Os mortos" as translated by José Roberto O'Shea for this collection. In his speech of thanks to his hosts, the Three Graces, Gabriel delivers the following toast, and I borrow his words to express, on behalf of the many who have benefited from the work of NEI, our gratitude, esteem and future good wishes: "Let us toast them all three together. Let us drink to their health, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity and may they long continue to hold the proud and self-won position which they hold in their profession and the position of honour and affection which they hold in our hearts".

NEI 10th anniversary celebration

Alan Gilsenan

There is something undoubtedly magical about Florianópolis. *Ilha da Magia*. And this is not just a slogan, some easy tourism tagline. It is tangible, and yet paradoxically intangible as well. Something, perhaps, connected to the strange physical geography of the island. Its tenuous bridge to the Brazilian mainland. The disconcerting saltwater lagoon at Lagoa da Conceição. Something too of its history. The beautiful Azorean villages facing seawards and eastwards across the Atlantic Ocean, dreaming of home.

Over the years, my occasional visits to Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina have had a similar magical quality. My somewhat irrational and romantic connection to Latin America and towards Brazil, in particular, plays a part in all this. The rare beauty of the island too, of course, and its recent bohemian past. But the warmth of the NEI/UFSC welcome and the generous hospitality of my hosts is a hugely significant factor as well.

That there is a jewel of Irish Studies based here seems remarkable too. The quality of the discourse around all aspects of Irish cultural and intellectual life amongst scholars and students alike is always enlightening. There is a rich tradition of Irish Studies across Brazil, led largely by inspiring and charismatic academics, most of whom were (and remain to this day) women. It seems to have emerged solely from their deep love of Irish literature allied to an enduring spirit and their steely determination.

Last year, the Irish government rightly celebrated fifty years of diplomatic relations with Brazil. This welcome anniversary masks deeper ties between the two nations. In 1906, of course, Irishman Roger Casement was sent by the British Foreign Office to serve as consul in Santos. His profound impact on the indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest is now finally acknowledged. I remember, many years ago, speaking with an elder of one of the Huitoto tribes, hidden deep in the Putumayo region, where he

passionately recalled – as if it were only last week – how Casement had saved his people by bravely exposing the genocidal intent of the Peruvian Amazon Company, under the cruel direction of the avaricious rubber baron Julio César Arana.

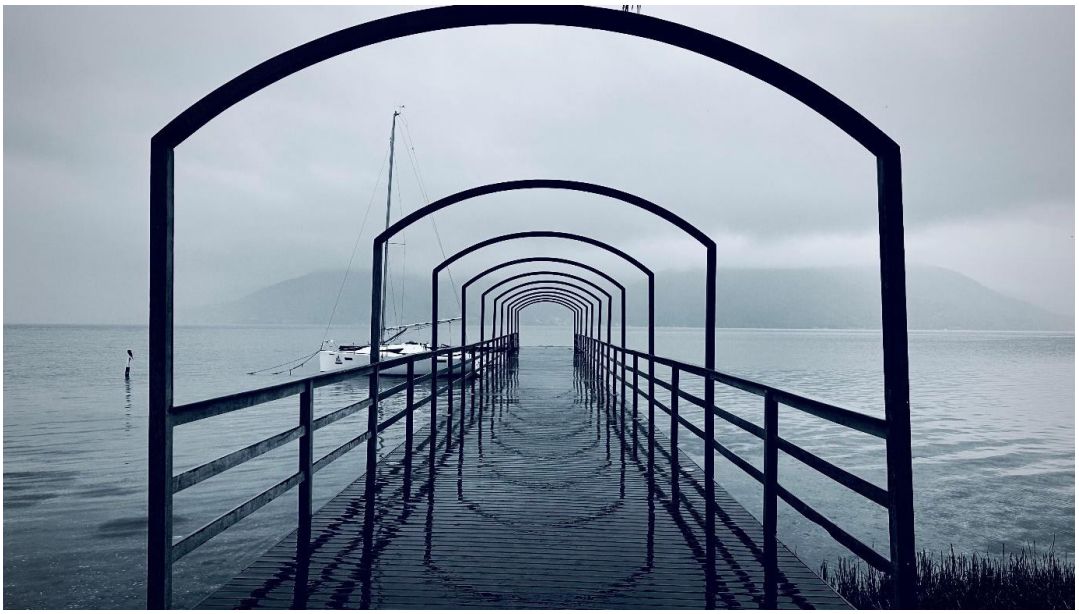
But the long-standing history between Ireland and this wondrous part of the globe began many, many years before, and that story is only now unfolding with a fresh wave of scholarship beginning to research and relate those important chapters of Irish experience. But this relationship is a two-way street. Throughout the last decade, scholars and students at the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses in UFSC have shared profound and original readings and re-readings of Irish works. Over those years, I have been gratified to sit and listen to papers that have informed and broadened my understanding of my own culture. Brazilian voices – with no apparent ancestral connection to the island of Ireland – have enriched my own understanding and appreciation of the likes of Marina Carr, Tom Murphy, Sinead O'Connor, Paul Muldoon, John T. Davis, Colin Murphy, Planxty, Maeve Brennan, Brian Friel amongst many, many others. Perhaps one has to get away to really understand oneself and, in some ways, these insights, given and received on this distant island, seem more potent and fresh.

Reflecting on the last decade of seminars, screenings and lectures, I also recall the bonds formed with other Irish visitors – talking about contemporary Irish fiction with the great Professor Margaret Kelleher, learning much about Irish traditional music and dance from Dr Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, and talking all things Casement with the great Prof. Owen Dudley Edwards as we strolled along a beach like strange colonial figures. (On returning home to County Wicklow, Owen would post me the most detailed notes on my adaptation of Mario Vargas Llosa's novel about Casement, *The Dream of the Celt*. I am grateful for them to this day.

There were deep friendships forged too with our Brazilian colleagues (*Greetings to our friends in Brazil*, to intone the late Paul Durcan). These were profound and long-lasting relationships that cast a wider net of connection across our two nations. Not to mention the graciousness and generosity of successive members of the Irish diplomatic service over the years.

Fond times... It is a joy to celebrate ten years of Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. I raise a glass to all and send my warmest *abraços*.

Figure 1: Pier in Florianópolis



Source: Alan Gilsenan

Figure 2: Margaret Kelleher, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and Lance Pettitt, Florianópolis, 2016



Source: Alan Gilsenan

Figure 3: José Roberto O'Shea and Paul Muldoon, Florianópolis, 2025



Source: Alan Gilsenan

Figure 4: Owen Dudley Edwards, Florianópolis, 2016



Source: Alan Gilsenan

Exercise in memory: NEI's collaboration with Ireland and beyond

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes
Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos
Vinicius Garcia Valim

This volume emerges from an exercise in memory. It invites us to look back at the seeds from which *Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses* (NEI) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) grew, tracing the encounters, friendships, and circumstances that allowed them to take root and flourish. There is a great deal of serendipity in NEI's existence, and this history deserves to be acknowledged.

Long before NEI was officially and formally established, José Roberto O'Shea was already teaching and translating Irish literature, among his many scholarly and creative pursuits, as prolific then as he has always been. Sharing research interests and building on a friendship, O'Shea and Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos began collaborating in 2005, when Kopschitz Bastos conducted a postdoctoral research project on Irish theatre at the Post-graduate Programme in English (PPGI) at UFSC. Their collaboration later expanded to include the organisation of Irish Studies events. In 2015, Kopschitz Bastos undertook a second postdoctoral research project at PPGI/UFSC, this time on Irish cinema, with Anelise Reich Corseuil. That same year, Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes and Maria Rita Drumond Viana, both scholars specialising in Irish Studies, joined the university as tenured lecturers. NEI emerged from these encounters and confluences. What followed was not only a series of professional and academic endeavours, but also – and perhaps more importantly – a series of acts of friendship.

In "The Municipal Gallery Re-visited" (1937), W. B. Yeats visits the Dublin Municipal Gallery, where he reminisces about Irish history as he looks at the portraits of some of the key figures who helped shape the newly independent country. Among them, of course, there hung portraits of his friends. This book is a gallery of sorts. Like portraits,

the essays, papers, and artistic works featured here offer glimpses of the life that has coursed through our academic and institutional veins over the past ten years. By walking down this memory lane, we offer readers glances of NEI's achievements, encounters, and collaborations. In Yeats's words:

> You that would judge me do not judge alone
> This book or that, come to this hallowed place
> Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
> Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
> Think where man's glory most begins and ends
> And say my glory was I had such friends. (Yeats, 1989, p. 321)

As in Yeats's experience, no matter how far NEI goes, our glory was – and is – that we had – and have – such friends.

Now, more formally speaking, founded in 2016, *Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses* (NEI)[1] is a research cluster at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). We are dedicated to educational, artistic, cultural, and scholarly activities in the field of Irish Studies. Our research projects and artistic productions are multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary in nature, promoting dialogue with a wide range of fields beyond literature. These include the humanities, such as history, geography, social sciences, and philosophy, as well as linguistics and the arts, including theatre, radio drama, film, and music.

This celebratory volume attests not only to the quality of NEI's academic productions and artistic creations, but, most importantly, to its capacity to foster meaningful human connections. Many of the works included here result from collaborations between and among Irish, Brazilian and other scholars and artists from the global Irish Studies community, as well as Irish diplomacy. The three forewords – by the Irish diplomats currently serving in Brazil, Professor Margaret Kelleher, from UCD, and filmmaker Alan Gilsenan – vouch for this above all.

In the article "Brazil-Ireland Relations and the Irish Studies Centre at UFSC: Cultural Diplomacy and Sustainable Activity," published in the volume of the *ABEI Journal* dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Irish diplomatic relations between Brazil and Ireland, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes (2025) provide a detailed account of NEI's activities and, moreover, of the cultural diplomacy exercised by Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs in support of and in collaboration with the Centre.

[1] See https://nei.ufsc.br (last access on 07 Aug 2026).

As they observe, "cultural diplomacy uses 'the exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and peoples in order to foster mutual understanding' (Cummings, *apud* UNESCO) – and strengthen relationships" (Bastos; Fernandes, 2025, p. 69). The concept of cultural diplomacy, they further argue, has, however, "recently developed to encompass issues such as social inclusion, inequality, migration, post-conflict resolution, and climate change, focusing on the power of culture – as well as that of investment and trade – to advance cooperation" (p. 69).

In many ways, the research and artistic productions carried out by NEI members not only shed light on Irish and Northern Irish political, cultural, and historical issues, but also on Brazilian ones, by means of promoting intercultural conversations. Ireland shows its mirror up to Brazil and vice-versa. This rich and fruitful environment has created valuable opportunities for both established researchers and students at all stages of their academic careers, from early undergraduates to MA and PhD candidates.

NEI acknowledges its partnership with Irish cultural diplomacy over the past decade, which has taken various forms, including financial support through the Emigrant Support Programme since 2022.

Professor Margaret Kelleher features among the most distinguished friends of Irish Studies in Brazil. Her first visit to the country, to the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1998, was the first of many to follow. Her standing as an Irish Studies scholar is widely recognised. With her characteristic combination of scholarly rigor, acumen and sensibility, Kelleher honoured NEI with a lecture on the occasion of the III *Jornada do Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses da UFSC*, in 2018. Following the *Jornada*, she interviewed Sinéad Gleeson, also a speaker at UFSC, at Casa de Cultura Laura Alvim, in Rio de Janeiro, before a mesmerised audience. Previously, she had also been a guest speaker at the film festival and series of lectures dedicated to the work of Alan Gilsenan, in 2016.

Collaboration between NEI/UFSC and Margaret Kelleher/UCD has been a two-way exchange. Professor Kelleher has hosted Brazilian scholars and students at UCD for research purposes, including Alinne Fernandes, and has coordinated academic exchange initiatives between the Postgraduate Programme in English at UFSC and the Department of English at UCD. Moreover, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos serves on the Ulysses Council at the Museum of Literature Ireland, in Dublin, whose committee is chaired by Kelleher. That her foreword features at the opening of this volume is a testament to the depth and significance of this longstanding collaboration.

Perhaps the most frequent collaborator with NEI's events has been Alan Gilsenan, himself a regular visitor to Brazil and South America. In 2015 and 2016, a festival and series of lectures, *Irish Lives: The Cinema of Alan Gilsenan*, featuring screenings and discussions of several of his screen biographies, took place at UFSC. The festival later travelled to the Cinemateca Brasileira, in São Paulo, in 2019. These events subsequently resulted in the publication of the book *Vidas Irlandesas: o cinema de Alan Gilsenan em contexto* (Insular, 2019), organised by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and José Roberto O'Shea.

Gilsenan was also a speaker at the IX *Jornada do NEI* in 2025, when his bilingual Irish-English biopic, *Paul Muldoon: Laoithe 's Liricí / A Life in Lyrics* (2024), was screened. His *Ulysses* | *Film* (2020) was screened on the occasion of the launch of the mural "Hades", by Luiz Felipe Serigheli, as part of the project "Ulysses 100 pelos olhos brasileiros", led by the Embassy of Ireland in Brazil, in 2022. *Ghosts of Baggotonia* (2022) was, likewise, shown during the VIII *Jornada* in 2024. We are indebted to Gilsenan beyond words for his friendship, generosity, and support over the past decade.

Following our three forewords, we present our literature and arts section, before moving on to a broader section featuring academic articles and essays on film, theatre, prose fiction, reading, and editing. These sections include extracts, complete translations, and commentaries on artistic works by the artists themselves, alongside academic papers published here for the first time.

Marina Carr opens the literary and arts section with an extract from her recent double bill play *The Boy*. The play, inspired by Sophocles' Theban trilogy, premiered at the Abbey in September 2025; its full text was published by Faber & Faber in the same year. In the selected extract, Carr's Antigone fiercely confronts Creon over her brother Polynices' body. Not only does she promise to give him a proper burial service, but she also threatens to drown Creon in a sewer. Although Creon tries to belittle her by calling her "little niece, little godchild", she shows no intimidation. Turning to what she unmistakably believes to be greater than the will of despots and tyrants, Antigone chooses to believe "in the mystery" as her life's purpose.

Carr's plays have been the object of study of many of our students, including that of Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes's doctoral thesis at Queen's University Belfast. Carr came to Brazil as our invited artist at *II Jornada do NEI* in 2017, when she was interviewed by Fernandes. On that occasion, Fernandes's translation of Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*, *Era uma vez, no Pântano dos Gatos…* was published by Rafael Copetti Editor and premiered

on the stage of Centro Brasileiro Britânico in São Paulo, in a rehearsed reading by Cia Ludens, directed by Domingos Nunez. In a full house, Marina Carr watched her play in Brazilian Portuguese and, with Fernandes, launched the Brazilian translation of her play.

Deirdre Kinahan's extract from *Tempesta* (2023) fictionalises the real lives of Louis Doyle, a communist and union activist in Dublin, and Jewish Ellie Rosen, in the 1930s. The two lovers are separated due to Louis's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, which engenders the age-old ethical questioning of the "enemy", as he ponders, "[S]ometimes I don't know who I'm killing, why I am killing because all I want is love… […] And prosperity for everyone, for all of us, even for them! Because sometimes I wonder if every soldier on the opposite hill is really a Fascist at all?"

The interplay of representation of memory, past and present in the extract nicely ties in with her works produced by Cia Ludens in Brazil in 2023, 2025, and 2026. Kinahan's plays *Knocknashee*, translated by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos and Lúcia K. X. Bastos, and *An Old Song, Half Forgotten*, translated by Domingos Nunez, consecrate NEI's involvement with and celebration of her work in Brazil. Kinahan was NEI's invited writer in 2025 for the launch of the collection of Irish plays on Irish theatre and disability, organised by Beatriz and published by Editora Iluminuras.

Subsequently, W. B. Yeats's Noh-inspired one-act play *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919) is made available here in Brazilian Portuguese for the first time in a translation by Yeats specialist Maria Rita Drumond Viana. Viana's masterful translation of this verse play takes us back to the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising. Yeats' play, like Kinahan's, offers us yet another reflection on idealism and war, also with ill-starred lovers of Irish history, Diarmuid and Dervorgilla. The play opens with a song by the musicians, "Have not old writers said/ That dizzy dreams can spring/ From the dry bones of the dead?", beautifully translated by Viana as "Não disseram os escritores antigos/ Que sonhos sôfregos podem surgir/ Dos ossos secos dos mortos?" Viana is one of NEI's co-founders, with Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, and José Roberto O'Shea. She was chair of NEI from 2016 until 2019, and keynote speaker at the X *Jornada do NEI* in 2026, on NEI's 10th anniversary.

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes's full script of her radio drama adaptation of Marina Carr's short story "Grow a Mermaid" (1996) is also published here for the first time, under the title "Como criar sua própria sereia". The audio play results from her collaborations with Universidade de Brasília (UnB) and UCD in 2022-2023, with César Lignelli and Margaret

Kelleher, respectively. This original full script provides indications of sound effects for the full production by Fernandes's collaboration with Lignelli's research group Vocalidade & Cena (Vocality & Scene), which can be accessed on NEI's sound archives.[2] The audio play has received two collective listening sessions in 2023, one at UnB's arts festival *Cometas Cenas*, attended by Ireland's Ambassador to Brazil, Seán Hoy, and at the VII *Jornada do NEI*. Fernandes's pioneering practice-based research on radio drama has received multiple grants from Brazil's national research council, CNPq, since 2023. She is one of NEI's co-founders and chair since 2020.

Also featured in the radio drama subsection, one of NEI's major research areas, is celebrated broadcaster and multi-genre writer Vincent Woods's essay about the seeds for his border- and Covid-play *Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel* (2021), commissioned for this celebratory volume. The one-actor radio play, originally performed by Derbhle Crotty and available for streaming on RTÉ – Drama on One,[3] results from various border women and ghostly border hotels. "The artist is a magpie, an observer, a predator of sorts, keen and alert, even when seeming distracted or sleepy or focused on some distant horizon", ponders Woods. Fernandes's co-translation with former NEI member Bruno Gessner follows Woods's essay.[4] The Brazilian Virginia Mary is performed by Marina Bento Veshagem, an UFSC alumna, a Florianópolis actor and member of the theatre troupe Elefants. The translation results from various conversations with Woods about the play, a work that is profoundly rooted in the Irish and Northern Irish border history. The play received a collective listening session at the X *Jornada do NEI*, on NEI's tenth anniversary, when Woods was NEI's invited writer.

The short-story section offers acclaimed Brazilian translator and scholar José Roberto O'Shea's translation of James Joyce's canonical "The Dead" (1914). His translation, "Os mortos", was originally published in the full short-story collection *Dublinenses* by the São Paulo-based publisher Hedra in 2012. As a must-read meditation on love and death, O'Shea's translation invites us to enjoy the Joycean rhythmic prose so skilfully rendered in Brazilian Portuguese: "Sua alma desfalecia lentamente enquanto ele ouvia a neve precipitando-se placidamente no universo e placidamente se precipitando, descendo como a hora final sobre todos os vivos e os mortos" ("His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of

[2] See: https://nei.ufsc.br/2025/11/06/como-criar-sua-propria-sereia-2/ (last access on 05 Aug 2026).

[3] See: https://www.rte.ie/radio/dramaonone/1188791-last-supper-at-the-imperial-hotel (last access on 05 Aug 2026).

[4] The play is available for streaming here: https://nei.ufsc.br/prototipo-tema-individual/.

their last end, upon all the living and the dead"). An award-winning translator and prolific Shakespearean scholar, O'Shea is also one of NEI's co-founders and major enthusiasts. His expertise and steady contributions towards NEI's students' academic development throughout the years have been vital to NEI's institutional health.

Kathleen McCracken features in our poetry section with her poem "Affreca and the Rooks", published in a book for the first time in this collection and followed by an afterword. The poem, originally cast on a bronze plaque designed by Alan Cargo, is part of the public art project "Art at the Heart of the Peninsula" and is a constitutive element of a permanent on-site installation commissioned by the Northern Irish Institute for Conflict Resolution in 2019. It sits beside Eleanor Wheeler's ceramic bench sculpture, also commissioned by the institute, which can be seen in four photographs following McCracken's afterword. The project, as McCracken explains, "was designed to raise awareness of the history, migration and diversity of those people who have come to and from the Ards Peninsula in County Down, Northern Ireland". Her poem, thus, is a homage to the twelfth-century founder of Grey Abbey, Affreca de Courcy. Both the poem and afterword reveal McCracken's profound representation of and homage to Affreca, in her reflections about "her daily life as a twelfth-century woman, her responses to the wildlife and landscapes of Strangford Lough, the nature of her spiritual beliefs". McCracken was an invited speaker at UFSC in 2014, on the occasion of the Brazilian launch of her bilingual English-Portuguese poetry collection *Double Self-Portrait With Mirror*, translated by José Roberto O'Shea and edited by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, and at NEI's fourth online roundtable, "Creative Writing: Towards a Pedagogy", in 2021.[5]

Lance Pettitt contributes to the literary and arts section with a poignant memoir and tribute to Éibhear Walshe (1962–2024), "The other side of Palestrina in the darkness: queer Dublin in the 1980s". Rather than offering a critical assessment of Walshe's academic and creative work, Pettitt's personal piece focuses on his own memories of the period between 1985 and 1990. As Pettitt explains, "It's a partial memoir of the man I met in Belfield, UCD, with whom I remained friends up until his untimely death in the summer of 2024. […] In this kind of life-writing mode, what I write about Éibhear says as much about me – or me then – as it does about him". A co-editor of the series *Ireland on Film: Screenplays and Critical Contexts*, with Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, two volumes of which have been published by NEI and EdUFSC, Pettitt was also a speaker

[5] A recording of the roundtable is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LQ9qUSy3H0 (last access on 05 Aug 2026).

at the NEI digital round table "Contemporary Irish Film Studies", in 2021.[6] Indeed, his engagement with the life-writing genre in this new work also resonates with one of NEI's research strands.

In visual arts and dance, still images from Áine Stapleton's experimental dance film *Horrible Creature* are presented with a brief introduction to Stapleton's work. The film, second in a trilogy based on the life of Lucia Joyce, daughter of Irish writer James Joyce, premiered at the Irish Film Institute (IFI) in 2019. *Horrible Creature* was filmed in various locations in Switzerland, where Lucia spent part of her life. Like Stapleton, Lucia was also a dancer, but her career ended in 1930, when she was forced into psychiatric treatment for the first time. With the trilogy, Stapleton rewrites Lucia's official biographical accounts by questioning the interruption of her artistic career. Stapleton was an invited speaker at NEI's seventh online roundtable, "Contemporary Joyces", in 2022.[7]

Following the section dedicated to the creative arts, Ruth Barton opens the more, though not exclusively, academic part with "The body in the bog, *Crá*, and historical memory", an analysis of a contemporary Irish thriller. She reflects on issues of trauma and historical memory, considering the two directions in which the film operates: "one outwards to an international audience looking for new variations on the genre […] and the other inwards to a local audience for whom a myriad of references offer meanings unavailable to those unfamiliar with the specifics of Irish, Gaeltacht, culture". Barton was a speaker at the II *Jornada do NEI*, in 2017, as well as in the "Contemporary Irish Film Studies" round table, in 2021, contributing significantly to NEI's research and publications on film. She also supervised former UFSC PhD student, Ketlyn Mara Rosa, during a two-year RIC-funded post-doctoral research fellowship at TCD, from 2020 to 2022.

Barton's emphasis on Irish-language film reflects a new area of interest for NEI that has developed over the past couple of years. In 2025, NEI contributed to the organisation of a film festival – *Fleadh Scannán na Gaelige / Festival de Cinema em Língua Irlandesa* – at the Cinemateca Brasileira, in partnership with the Consulate General of Ireland in São Paulo. Moreover, this year, we will host our first workshop in the Irish language.

Like film, theatre, theatre translation and adaptation, theatre production, and performance constitute some of the strongest strands of NEI's work, both in theory and

[6] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk_ExTIeB-A (last access on 06 Aug 2026).

[7] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbL1FRiNeto (last access on 06 Aug 2026).

practice. In this respect, the essays that follow address these areas through a wide range of contributions.

Nicholas Grene, also a long-standing friend of Irish Studies in Brazil, took part in the digital round table dedicated to the theatre of Tom Murphy,[8] in 2021. The event marked the re-launch of the collection of four plays by Tom Murphy by Editora Iluminuras, translated by Domingos Nunez, organized by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, in 2020. Grene contributes here with a reflection on adaptations and "re-tunings" of Greek tragedy, entitled "Irish Greek tragedy: re-tuning or adapting". Grene explores the nuances of Yeats's *Oedipus the King*; Derek Mahon's adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae*; Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*, based on Sophocles' *Antigone*; Marina Carr's original play *By the Bog of Cats…*, loosely based on Euripides' *Medea*; and Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, based on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Grene's article attests to what Margaret Kelleher, in her foreword to this volume, has called "the persistence of Greek tragedy in Irish theatre".

In "'We are still a nation of storytellers' – but at what cost? Art, value and public funding for theatre on the island of Ireland", Miriam Haughton, who was a speaker at the 13th Annual Irish Theatrical Conference in 2017 and at the IV *Jornada do NEI*, in 2019, as well as a Government of Ireland-funded researcher at UFSC, and her co-authors, Tricia O'Beirne and Finian O'Gorman, turn their attention to theatre production in Ireland and its *costs*. They contextualise and assess the financial structures in place before and after the 2008 crash, as well as how theatre and performance are produced within this context. This article resonates strongly with NEI, a centre directly involved in theatre production within this context. Haughton has been a decade-long collaborator of NEI, having undertaken multiple projects on theatre and politics with Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes.

Performance is also the focus of Eamonn Jordan's article aptly titled "Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*'s centenary production at the Gielgud Theatre, London: a performance perspective. Performance dates: 29 & 30 October 2024". Jordan took part in the digital round table dedicated to the theatre and cinema of Martin McDonagh, in 2023.[9] Here, he turns his attention to the centenary production of Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, directed by Matthew Warchus. He approaches the performance event through his "own very distinct particularities, which invariably inform [his] expectations and responses".

[8] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p08Q4nuI178 (last access on 06 Ago 2026).

[9] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwf5t0dVlk0 (last access on 06 Aug 2026).

As Jordan explains, his attendance was "more than partially work related", since he had taught the play regularly over the years and had previously written about it from the perspective of social class.

At the threshold between criticism and creative writing, and perhaps even memoir, Colin Murphy presents us with an account of his "Becoming a playwright". His essay traces his career as a dramatist, drawing on a wealth of details from his personal and professional life – names, friends, colleagues, and social and historical contexts – that have informed his predominantly political documentary theatre. Particular attention is given to his relationship with Brazil, NEI, and the Cia Ludens theatre company, which staged his play *Guaranteed!* as part of a cycle of readings dedicated to Irish documentary theatre in 2014. Murphy was also a speaker at the IV *Jornada do NEI* in 2019, and poignantly acknowledges: "Beatriz and her colleagues and students have become one of the constants in my career, supporting and interrogating my work. It has been a joy to work with them".

A long-established partner of NEI, Domingos Nunez, artistic director of the Cia Ludens theatre company, presented the play *The Two Deaths of Roger Casement*, which he wrote and directed, at the Teatro Carmen Fonsari, UFSC, during the 13th Annual Irish Theatrical Diaspora Conference, "Irish Theatre and Latin America", in 2017. Ludens' collaboration with NEI, through reading cycles, theatre productions, and publications, is one of the centre's most valuable and enduring partnerships. Also an academic, Nunez revisits Stewart Parker's theatre in "Stewart Parker's contacts with the epic theatre", exploring how Parker's plays engage in dialogue with the elements of epic theatre developed and theorised by Bertolt Brecht.

Closing the theatre section, Ian R. Walsh's article, "Negotiating Modernity: Irish Language Pantomimes at the Abbey Theatre", in his own words,

> examines the much-maligned Irish-language pantomimes staged at the Abbey from 1945 to 1966. These pantomimes, intended to aid the state's revival of the Irish language, took the form of popular Christmas family entertainments to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. They were popular with patrons but despised by critics and denounced by subsequent scholarship as a low point in the history of Irish theatre.

A neglected genre brought to light through Ian Walsh's scholarly insight, pantomime has seldom received the critical attention it deserves. Walsh was a speaker at the III *Jornada do NEI* in 2018.

NEI dedicated 2023 to the theme of Irish Arts and Disability. The year's many activities included a cycle of readings featuring five plays with protagonists with disabilities, in partnership with Cia Ludens; the publication of seven plays with the same theme, with Editora Iluminuras, between 2023 and 2026; and full productions of Rosaleen McDonagh's *Rings*, translated by Cristiane Nascimento as *Luvas e anéis*, and Deirdre Kinahan's *An Old Song Half Forgotten*, translated by Domingos Nunez, both directed by Nunez, also in collaboration with Cia Ludens, in São Paulo.

On the academic front, Vitor Alevato do Amaral delivered the lecture "James Joyce and the Senses of Disability", now published here. Drawing on the relationship between Disability Studies and Joyce Studies, Alevato do Amaral demonstrates, through examples from *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *Ulysses* (1922), that "Joyce started as a writer who treated disability as a metaphor for the city's moral flaws and became conscious of people's bodily and mental differences as subjects themselves".

Still in the realm of fiction, the literary essay, "On writing *Openings*", by Lucy Caldwell, explores the labour of writing, rewriting – or, as she puts it, retyping:

> I think the stories in *Openings* are about the ways that our lives can ossify, can shut down, close in on themselves, under the weight of the roles we play, the expectations we have of others, and they of us – and about the ways they can open up. The ways in which, up until the last minute, we can rewrite the script.

For Caldwell, this process is central to understanding writing on a metaphysical level, rather than as an activity solely concerned with producing a finished product. NEI was fortunate to benefit from the brilliance of Caldwell's reflections on this process, as well as from her reading of excerpts from her prose fiction, during the VIII *Jornada do NEI* in 2024.

Paul Delaney, also a speaker at the VIII *Jornada*, reflects on the form of prose fiction in "Short stories, novels, and the fluidity of form". Drawing on a diachronic review of the distinction between novels and short stories as literary forms – and on a wealth of examples, with a particular focus on the latter – Delaney argues that "categorical distinctions between novels and short stories are blurred". In recent years, he observes, "critical attention has consequently begun to shift from a restrictive preoccupation with short-story length towards an analysis of 'the uncertain status of the form', as commentators have looked towards short fiction's interdisciplinary base, its fluidity of

practice, and its multiple venues for publication" (Delaney and Hunter, 2019, p. 2). In 2020, Delaney hosted the then PhD student Eloísa Dall'Bello for a research period at TCD.

Contemporary fiction is, indeed, a hallmark of scholarly interest among researchers and students of Irish Studies. The following two contributions, by Deirdre Flynn and Paige Reynolds, attest to this.

Flynn, who was also as a guest at the VIII *Jornada* and facilitated exchange experiences with NEI members at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, contributes to this volume with an original perspective on post-Celtic Tiger fiction in her essay, "Post-Celtic Tiger Pastoral: Looking to Landscapes in Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking* and Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*." Starting from the premise that "Ireland's Celtic Tiger had a major impact on Irish identity," Flynn examines two contemporary Irish novels whose protagonists, she argues, return to the rural "as a response to the romanticisation of urban space during the Celtic Tiger, and a reminder of the real implications of excessive capitalism on the rural space," a process she terms "the pastoral turn." Drawing on ecocritical approaches – a field of particular interest to members of NEI – Flynn guides the reader through a compelling analysis of these two novels and of the social conditions that gave rise to them.

Having Reynolds as a speaker at both the IV *Jornada*, in 2019, and the VI *Jornada*, in 2022, was a privilege for the Irish Studies community at NEI. In this volume, she offers a re-evaluation of the Gothic mode in contemporary Irish fiction. As Reynolds argues, the Gothic, a literary movement from the past, continues to be invoked in contemporary Irish writing. Given that the Gothic is a mode frequently explored by students at NEI and at other Irish Studies centres in Brazil, Reynolds's reading of Eva Kenny's short fiction – "Anxious intimacy: Gothic afterlives and online dating under Covid in Eva Kenny's 'Christmas Story'", as a representation of the intensity and anxiety of romantic intimacy in the digital age, is likely to attract new readers to the mode.

We are honoured to note that Reynolds concludes her edited collection *The New Irish Studies* with a generous tribute to NEI:

> One exciting mandate for Irish Studies can be found in how we can recruit, train, and promote scholars who reflect the recent and rapid diversification found in Ireland. […] This is a project that spans the globe, as evidenced by the caliber of work produced, for example, by scholars and students of Irish literature and performance at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – Florianópolis, where the converse between the Portuguese and English

> languages and cultures enables a new type of attention to the contours of Irish writing and history and further underscores their significance in the contemporary moment. (Reynolds, 2020, p. 281)

Last, but certainly not least, this volume closes with reflections on archives, reading and editing: "What reading means when reading is not allowed: 'literacy events' in the Magdalene oral history archive", by James Little, and "From national canon to feminist archive: central writers in the Field Day Anthology, vols. I-V", by Vinicius Garcia Valim.

James Little examines solitary reading in carceral and other contexts of coercive confinement, such as the Magdalene Laundries, in his essay based on archival research conducted as part of the Magdalene Oral History Project, led by Katherine O'Donnell. Through a series of case studies, he explores instances of "reading as discipline", focusing on "literacy events where reading was used to impose order on laundry inmates". Other forms of reading, such as letter reading, might also have played an important role; however, correspondence was subject to strict censorship and was often withheld altogether. Written in a compelling and creative academic style, Little's essay leads the reader to recognise that "restricting reading practices to solitary reading inhibits knowledge production, reinforces hierarchies between different categories of prisoners and erases valuable knowledge about 'social institutions and power relations which sustain them' (Barton and Hamilton, 2005, p. 1)".

A co-editor of this volume, a founding member of NEI, and a former BA, MA, and PhD student in Irish Studies at UFSC, under the supervision of Maria Rita Drumond Viana, Vinicius Garcia Valim offers a timely reassessment of the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing – and of the controversies surrounding it – in his essay "From National Canon to Feminist Archive: Central Writers in the Field Day Anthology, Vols. I–V." As Valim observes, "Published in 1991, the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing constituted one of the most notable projects for a national anthology within the English-speaking world in recent history". In his article, he examines how the two sets of volumes I-III and IV-V, approach what he calls the "central figures" – "those Irish writers most accepted in traditional conceptions of the canon, in different ways and to different ends". Vinicius's work fits within one of NEI's research strands: Irish non-fiction and the materiality and history of the book, led by Drumond Viana.

The richness of the papers, essays, and artistic works featured here attest to NEI's wide range of research interests and collaborations. The interactions among NEI members

and our high-calibre guest speakers, from early career to established ones, result from a combination of academic rigour and a humane and affective environment.

NEI expresses its sincere gratitude to all the contributors to this volume – not only for their pieces, but also for their support of and participation in NEI's activities throughout the past ten years, across its many endeavours.

NEI is also indebted to those who, for various reasons, do not feature in this volume but who have nonetheless made significant contributions as speakers, moderators, writers, translators, partners, and collaborators in NEI's events, artistic productions and publications: Lúcia K. X. Bastos; Alice Butler; Magali Sterling Beck; Alessandra Brandão; John Brannigan; Jane Brennan; Lucy Collins; Anelise Corseuil; Lígia Cortez; Seán Crosson; Eloísa Dall'Bello; Renata Dalmaso; Oein DeBhairduin; Matias Corbett Garcez; Sinéad Gleeson; Stacey Gregg; Paulo Silva Gregório; Alberto Heller; John Hill; Barry Houlihan; Ivan Kavanagh; Marcelo Kremer; Larissa Lagos; César Lignelli; Fábio Lopes; Patrick Lonergan; Claire Lynch; Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins; Maria Helena Silva Mello; Eimear McBride; Rosaleen McDonagh; Emmie McFadden; Emer McHugh; Cahal McLaughlin; Trish McTighe; Chris Morash; Fernanda Korovsky Moura; George Ayres Mousinho; Cristiane Bezerra do Nascimento; Olegario da Costa Maya Neto; Pat Murphy; Paul Muldoon; Rióna Ní Fhrighil; Méabh Ní Fhuartháin; Maeve Murphy; Nuala O'Connor; Melatu Okorie; Fintan O'Toole; Emilie Pine; Paul Perry; Pedro Rebelo; Shaun Richards; André Roman; Ketlyn Mara Rosa; Janaina Mirian Rosa; Aline M. Sanfelici; Dominique Santos; Sanio Santos; Melina Savi; and Melissa Sihra.

Likewise, we gratefully acknowledge the support of the former Irish diplomats who have served in Brazil over the past decade: H.E. Ambassador Brian Glynn; H.E. Ambassador Seán Hoy; H.E. Ambassador Fiona Flood; Consul General Sharon Lennon; Consul General Barry Tumelty; Consul General Eoin Bennis; Deputy Consul General Ciara Gilvarry; Deputy Consul General Jill Henneberry; and Deputy Consul General Rachel Fitzpatrick.

Our indebtedness goes finally to UFSC, UFSC's staff, our colleagues, and, above all, to our students, past and present, who have helped make NEI what it is today.

May the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at UFSC continue to thrive for many decades to come!

References

BARTON, David; HAMILTON, Mary; IVANIČ, Roz (eds.). **Situated Literacies**: **Reading and Writing in Context**. London and New York, Routledge, 2005.

BASTOS. Beatriz Kopschitz; FERNANDES, Alinne Balduino P. Brazil-Ireland Relations and the Irish Studies Centre at UFSC: Cultural Diplomacy and Sustainable Activity. **ABEI Journal**, São Paulo, v. 27, n. 1, p. 67-84, jun. 2025.

DELANEY, Paul and HUNTER, Adrian. Introduction. *In*: DELANEY, Paul and HUNTER, Adrian (eds.). **The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 1-6.

REYNOLDS, Paige. (Ed.) **The New Irish Studies**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

UNESCO. **Cutting Edge | From standing out to reaching out: cultural diplomacy for sustainable development. Available at** https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-standing-out-reaching-out-cultural-diplomacy-sustainable-development. Accessed on 06 Ago 2026.

YEATS, W.B. The Municipal Gallery Re-visited. **The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Vol. 1. The Poems**. Edited by Richard J. Finnernan. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989, p 319-321.

THEATRE

Extract from *The Boy*

Marina Carr

Creon Move! Put him back where she found him!

Antigone If you dare!

Creon Oh I dare. Better still fling him on the dungheap…

Antigone Do not touch my brother!

Creon The battlefield too good for him. Let slurry and sewer be his grave.

Antigone (*going for Creon*) I'll dig him up and bury him again and then I'll drown you in that sewer.

Women moving in as Antigone and Creon struggle. Soldiers frozen over Polynices' body, not sure who to obey.

Creon (*holding Antigone in a vice grip*) Stay back! You're hot on the boil and I'm out of grace with you.

Antigone wallops him, he wallops her back.

You know your problem little niece, little godchild, you don't know when to put a door on your mouth.

Clamps his hand over her mouth.

Your bolshy talk is wind and water to try and sway the people. I don't see them swaying. You know why? Because they know full well where the curse of Oedipus and his tainted brood has brought us to. This ravaged city of weeping mothers and orphans all because of your father's arrogant crimes and your mother's filthy marriage bed and your brother's at each other's throats like blinded rats. All without a thought for the cost to Thebes and Thebans. And still you have the gall to stand here and pontificate about your rights and your Gods as if you know them. No one knows the Gods. And least of all a deluded upstart girl.

Antigone No delusion I assure you Uncle. To live in the mystery of our lives. To die in the mystery. Believing in the mystery. This is our purpose. Not to be seduced by the fallible decrees of despots and tyrants. Not to buckle under the spite and evil of monsters who make their laws on the hoof for personal gain. They walked among us once. They made us in their image. They taught us the first laws. The blood laws. We know them in our bowels. Laws that are the touchstone of our race, the memory of our ancient beginnings and immortal longings. These things happened. These beings exist. Realer than us. They are here still. And the dead are here too, wailing from their pits. Listen, they cry, do not do as I did. Do not forget the insane miracle that is your brief sojourn before you swoon back down the stairs of time into the arms of the void. Our lives are arrows aimed at the dark. Phantoms in the making, scavengers of the land, when we should be souls standing tall in the blessed finery of skin and limb and thought, our hearts stamped with the imprint of Olympus before its golden gates clanged on our exiled backs. There is home. Not here. There is our first and true home. Not here. And it is the dictates of there I obey first. Not you and this desecration, this gobbledygook you dare to call the law. Hunted and haunted I may be but I am sure of one thing. The God's glorious dream for us. And it is glorious. And I will honour it whatever the price. I will bury my brother though it cost me my life.

Creon Then go to your dream you sorrow-drenched rip. Down with you to Hades' house where the walls are black as the sloe. Where the dead weep for the light up here. Blessed Boetian light. Away with her to the old tomb where they say the sown men are buried and you can converse with their bones to your hearts content.

All look at him.

I said take her away!

All of you!

Go!

All exit, soldiers with Polynices. Other soldiers with Antigone, procession of women. Haimon entering as Antigone exits.

Extract from *Tempesta*

Deirdre Kinahan

My idea for the opening is that live Music summons Louie and Ellie to tell their tale. They live within the music, sprits locked in the carnage of their time.
I imagine some very traditional Spanish hand clapping & heel stepping from our two characters like a mix of Catalan & Irish summoning which can be heard coming from the shadows joining Steve on instrument.

Then a light comes up on Louie Doyle (Young Earnest Dublin Communist – 22).

Louie My Ma is raped by her Da's brother when she is little more than a girl but
always tells me that I am the son of a Spanish Sailor.
Maybe that's why I'm here –
Jarama! Jarama!
Tarancón,
Barcelona,
Brunete,
Ebro.

A light comes up on Ellie Rosen (Young Dublin Jewish Girl – 23).

Ellie Jarama! Jarama!
Tarancón,
Barcelona,
Brunete,
Ebro.
I roll these names around my mouth like kisses. I stitch them into the secret pocket of my soul. So playful, so beautiful,
so different to my War.

There is a clicking of heels like bullets.
Both physically respond as if their bodies are being assailed by a hail of gun-shot.
They then fall into each other's arms, kissing, fumbling, passionate…

Ellie God Louie! What are you doing?

Louie Trying to open these bloody buttons.

Ellie Forget the buttons, I can't wait, won't wait.

Louie But I like it, love it, you know that, when we are naked.

Ellie No, no, inside…just get inside me…please…

Louie But...

Ellie Come on Louie, Come on…you know I have to get home...

Louie Okay…okay…O God!

Ellie Yes. Yes.
God O God!

She laughs, they fall to the floor, the lights change, Louie stands, turns, speaks.

Louie Ellie. Ellie Rosen. It is your face of course that first appears in the scream of that bullet, my bullet, your face that splinters, shatters in my mind's eye.
Ellie! Ellie!
Your face!
Flushed.
Your face smiling.
Your face kissing, speaking, holding, calling, flicking, laughing.
Your face is in my sky now.
Your face is in the glaring sun.
Your face is in the hills. Hills. All the small hills.
The small glinting gnarling hills of Spain.
Where you will find not a hint of grass. No, not a blade.

Only boots on stone. Boots on shingle.
My new boots dusting on up along the parched white granite track –
where a Grenade sings – where a sniper cuts.
Where machine gun fire is as constant as the song of the birds back home.
Where I am one of hundreds, one of thousands inching our way across this scorched and sacred earth.
Voices filling my head with story, Ellie.
Voices filling my head with glory, Ellie.
Or failure, murder, laughter, hope.
Voices ringing from all over Europe. All over Ireland.
The Red voices of the Socialistas! Communistas! Anarchistas!
Voices from America, Ellie. Voices from Russia, England, Scotland, Poland and now more and more of a Spanish furore… because this is after all a Spanish War, a Spanish push, a last gasp to grasp and hold Madrid.
To hold on to their dear Republic, our dear Republic.
To hold Franco and his fascist hounds at bay.
No Passaran! No Passaran! I say.
Before I hear that bullet, my bullet…before I feel it…before…

Beat.

Ellie There is no "before" you Louie Doyle.
And if there is I don't remember, won't remember.
You sit right beside me on your first day in our school.
Your young face is tense.
Your thick dark curls hang cleverly over sharp blue eyes.
You are not one of us. You wear no Kuppa. You wear no blazer.
Whispers tell me that you come from a place called Wexford.
I notice that you hold your pencil incorrectly.
Hold it in the knuckle of your hand.
The wrong hand.
Our teacher says that if you write that way, you write with the devil,
but no matter how many times she slaps you Louie Doyle you cannot help but pick up your pencil in your left hand.
So I do the same.
At first my efforts are useless – a silly shaky scrawl. But with

patience, with practice, I too can write my name with the devil… if I
choose.
I notice that you don't live beside our school Louie Doyle.
You don't live in Portobello or Lennox or Lombard or Clanbrassil. You live over the canal in Harold's Cross. In one of those lovely little cottages, with your Ma. And it is your Ma who walks you up to school every morning. Then walks on to work in her new job at a Printer's shop just around the corner.

Louie I notice/

Ellie I notice that you know all your sums Louie Doyle. That you know all your letters and your tables and that you kick a football better than any other boy in our yard. Then you bring me in a box of chalk for my Eighth birthday because you know that I love hopscotch.
I draw all the numbers on the concrete with my left hand.
Then you know that I am in love with you Louie Doyle.
And somehow we both know, that this love is for life.
No matter what the world says.
No matter what Dublin says.
Or my Mama.
My love for Louie Doyle and yours for me.
It is for life.
For life L'Chaim.

Louie Life and beyond.
Life and beyond Ellie.

Beat.

Ellie starts dancing and singing a Jewish folk song, it is childlike.
Louie watches her.
Louie interrupts.

Louie I see you everywhere since coming to Spain Ellie.
I see you in the children playing in the dust on the village square.
I see you in the soaring pink of a wild rose.
I think I see you in a line of refugees. In all the lines and lines of fleeing refugees. I think I

see you in their headscarfs. I think I see you in their fear. I think I see you bent and spent and pulling along a cart of chickens, cart of children, cart of hope!
I see you in the swell and curve of a female comrade Ellie, in the turn of her hip, the lush of her hair.
Christ, I see you everywhere. I see you in everyone and everything because I love you, still love you, always love you and don't know where you are, how you are or even if you are…in all this War…

Ellie! Ellie!
Dear Ellie…

Beat.

Ellie I grow up with you in Dublin Louie Doyle. I grow up with my sisters and our cousins and the Smullen and the Steinberg and the Alderman and the Appleton and the Vogel and the Noyek and the Flitterman and the Kahn and always on the outskirts, always on the fringe are you Louie Doyle.
An outsider from the inside.
My outsider from the inside of this country, my country, your country: Ireland, Eire, Saorstáit Éireann, this country that my Mama forever refuses to call home.

Beat.

The play out this scene from the past.

Ellie I got us tickets for the Carlton!

Louie For the Carlton? For tonight?

Ellie Yes tonight!
Mr Levins gave me an extra half hour for lunch so that I could run around to buy them.

Louie O!

Ellie O?

Louie What's on at the Carlton?

Ellie Tarzan the Ape Man.

Louie Tarzan, again!

Ellie I know. I love it. I just love all the animals.
You can meet me there at eight.

Louie I can't Ellie.

Ellie What?

Louie I said I'd set up chairs for a meeting down at the *Banba Hall*.

Ellie A meeting?/

Louie *Class Struggle and Coercion.*

Ellie O for God's sake!

Louie There's a speaker over from Liverpool. He's head of the
District Carter's and Motormen's Union.
You could come with me?

Ellie Are you joking?

Louie He's an old comrade of Jim Larkin.

Ellie I don't care who he is. I'm not spending my evening in that dusty hall listening to you lot all shouting at each other!

Louie But we've seen Tarzan!

Ellie And you've seen every one of those union screamers a thousand times!

Louie It's important, he's important. He's led some very successful socialist campaigns in Liverpool.

Ellie I'm not interested!

Louie I think you should be interested.

Ellie O do you now?!

Louie Capitalism is running amok in this country…

Ellie Well lucky bloody Capitalism! I wouldn't mind a bit of running amok myself…on a summer's evening…on a summer's evening when I can get out of my flippin' house Louie!

Louie So I'll meet you after the picture.

Ellie No you won't.

Louie Ah go on Ellie. You can bring Anna, I'll pay for her ticket for a treat.

Ellie Bring Anna?
Bring my sister?
How charming!
Maybe I won't bring Anna! Maybe I'll bring a nice Jewish boy, like Mama always wants me to! A nice Jewish boy, with money, and a fine house, who plays tennis, knows his Torah and doesn't sit around making argument with all the scabby shabby communists of Dublin!

Louie Scabby?

Ellie Every single one!

He laughs

Louie But nice Jewish boys don't kiss like I do.

Ellie How do you know?

Louie How do YOU know?!

He starts trying to kiss her. She pretends to turn away.

Ah come on Ellie. I'll leave straight after the meeting I promise.

Ellie No.You're not getting away with it that easy...

Louie And I'll bring chocolate.

Ellie Chocolate?! O well now, that's a different matter, what kind of chocolate?

Louie Whatever kind you like..

Ellie Okay…okay so… if you do the scream!.

Louie What scream?

Ellie The Tarzan scream.

Louie No!

Ellie Ahhh go on!

He laughs and does the Tarzan Scream.

Louie Ahhhhh Ahhhhhh Shhhhhh

Ellie Again!

Louie Ahhhh Ahhhhhhhhhh!

Ellie Again!

She makes to run, playful. He makes to run after her but stops.
She looks at him in the present.

Beat.

Ellie I love you, loved you, love you Louie Doyle.

Louie Ellie!
Dear Ellie…

Ellie No. No. No. No. No. No….

Beat.

Ellie I love Dublin, as I grow up.
I love the cobble. Love the commotion.
Love the noise, the stench, the heave, the trams.
I love the smell of bacon that comes steaming in from Mrs Finnegan's house next door. Love the blue Geranium that powers up out of the small patch of earth to the left of our front gate. I love the hoot of a barge as it arrives up the canal from out there somewhere in the Irish green. I love Clanbrassil Street on a Thursday as we all shop for the Sabbath. Prams filled with fish or vegetables, neighbours jostling, voices calling in a host of languages stowed away in the throats of women born in Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland. I love the drunken songs you might hear when passing a public house. Love the yap and the chat and the argument that fills the air of every street. I love everything that my MaMa hates about Dublin.

Louie Your Mama hates Dublin.
Your Mama hates me.

Ellie But I don't hate MaMa.
Can't hate Mama Louie…not even when…. not even...

Beat.

Again they play a scene from the past.

Louie Why don't you tell her Ellie?
Sure she's known me since I was a kid, I don't understand?!

Ellie No, I know you don't understand.

Louie And I hate all this skulking around!

Ellie I'm sorry Louie, but it's not possible, we're not possible any other way.

Louie We'll have to tell her some day!

Ellie Why? Aren't we grand the way we are?

Louie But what about when we want to get married?

Ellie Married!
I'm way too young to get married.

Louie So? I'm not asking you yet am I?
I'm just saying…

Ellie O you're not asking me "yet" are you?!

Louie My Ma has no problem with us.
My Ma thinks you're gorgeous.

Ellie Your Ma's different.
Different from any other woman I know.

Louie Different, how?

Ellie No husband! Her own job!
And all those friends of hers that talk about Medicine! Art! Elections!

Louie The world is changing Ellie!

Ellie Not on Clanbrassil Street it isn't.

Louie I can't keep whistling to you from the back lane, it's ridiculous.

Ellie I come as soon as I can.

Louie It makes me feel like a criminal.

Ellie Well to Mama, to Mama, you're not far off!
You know she's terrified of politics.
And your name was printed in the newspaper after you went on that stupid docker's strike.

Louie Stupid? Did you say stupid?

Ellie It makes you look like a hoodlum.
It makes you look like a danger Louie.

Louie What? Standing up to the Bosses! Standing up for our rights, her rights, your own Da's rights!

Ellie Mama doesn't see it that way...

Louie Yeah well Mama doesn't see a man's face when he's turned away from work.
Turned away from work by a crooked boss who demands shillings left in matchboxes or pints or backhanders or God-knows-what just coz he controls which docker gets to go out on the boat that morning, which docker gets to lift his shovel to feed his kids that day.

Ellie But you always get work.

Louie Because I'm young Ellie. Because I'm strong. But what happens if I hurt myself like Willie Dolan that got hit by a cart last month?
I starve, that's what! And my family starves.
We have to take them on Ellie.
We have to smash their absolute control.
And if that means withdrawing our labour then so be it. We do what we
can in order to force the bastards to give a little…

Ellie God I hate it when you talk like that!

Louie Talk like what?

Ellie Trouble. Trouble. Trouble. It's always trouble when you talk like that… trouble and police and newspapers!

Louie Because they're all in league with the Employers!

Ellie Not all employers!

Louie Enough of them.

Ellie Not Mr. Levins.

Louie So! I've no problem with Mr. Levins.

Ellie He looks after all of us!
Good break-times. Good materials. Good machines.

Louie As he should.

Ellie (*she says in Mr Levin's voice*)
"*Happy seamstress. Happy shop. Happy customer*".

Louie Well I wish there were more like Mr Levins.
Maybe he'd like to get involved?

Ellie Involved?

Louie With the party? With the union?

Ellie Are you mad? My God...my God Louie, don't you see that's just what Mama would be terrified of! Mama still thinks Ireland is England like it was when she came here. Mama still wishes Dublin was London where the natives don't go out on strike, or (*In Mama's voice*) roam around in gangs or shoot each other in the streets!

Louie Your Mama landed in the middle of the Tan war.

Ellie Exactly! So she thinks every Irish man is a gun-man! And whatever chance I have, whatever chance WE have…well, it's not in telling Mama…not now. She'll lock me up.

She'll chain me to the house. Or send me packing off to Jerusalem! Is that what you want?

Louie We have to tell her sometime!

Ellie Yes…sometime.
Maybe…sometime.
But not now.

Beat.

Ellie MaMa.
My Mama had to run.
My Mama had to run from her own war. All war.
Why in the world is there always War?
Run from Odessa. When she was just a girl.
Run from the murdering soldiers, run from the murdering men.
With her own MaMa and her two sisters. (*In her Mama's voice.*)
"*Run! Run! Ellie. We had to run with whatever we could carry! My Father dead. My brother dead…*"
That is her *Majse*. That is her story.
So in her heart my MaMa still runs, Louie.
In her fear my MaMa still runs.
In her love. In her love.

Louie But I love you too Ellie Rosen.
And I want you Ellie Rosen.
You will be safe with me.

Beat.

Dear Ellie..

Beat.

Ellie (*she whispers*) Dear Ellie…

Louie …I leave the small village early this morning with our Irish Column.

I leave the safe cluster of whitewashed peasant homes that I have grown to love in Spain. I leave the goats. I leave the tangling brilliant climbing roses. Leave the steps, steep from River to Church. Leave the small fountain, ancient well, dusty taberna… and turn to the hills, turn to this battle, another battle, another mighty push to save Madrid.

Dear Ellie…

Ellie Jarama.
Jarama.
Tarancón,
Barcelona,
Brunete,
Ebro.

Louie We cross the River Ebro at dawn.
Me and Paddy and George and Mick. Me and Frank and Johnny and Jim. Me and Hughie and Willie and Chris. From all the four Irish green fields. A song skitters into the air.

Ellie (*whispers*) Dear Ellie.

Louie A song to settle us. A song to drive us. A song to keep us strong.
(*Ellie sings óro sé do breatha abhaile then continues humming under the following speech/ or Steve plays it.*)
Hughie's song. Hughie's song that was sung across the hills and bogs of Ireland in his war, another war, an older war. All war.
Hughie's song that drove Irish feet, Irish hearts out into a wall of British Might. Hughie's song that crushed it. Hughie's song that brought the British to their knees. That's my favourite song to sing out here because it won us Ireland. Ireland! But as Hughie says *"haven't we gone and made a fine mess of Ireland since 1916"*. So now Hughie and Chris and Willie and me throw our Irish hearts at another enemy in another war in the hope that we might bring socialism home.
Socialism to the world.
I couldn't lift a gun for Ireland.
I wasn't born on time.
But I can lift a gun for revolution here Ellie, for freedom for the likes of you, the likes of me, here, Ellie.

Ellie Freedom.

Louie So Hughie and Chris and Willie and me cross the mighty flowing force of the River Ebro.
Cross to fight Franco.
Cross in small boats.
Cross on swinging pontoons.
Cross on mules.
Cross with rifles.
Cross with light machine gun.
Cross with heavy machine gun.
Cross with kit.
Cross with grenades.
Cross like a swaying time-bomb.
Cross like an oscillating swarm of harm.
Hundreds of us. Thousands of us.
Crossing, crossing, crossing into no-man's land, into the mess of another war, civil war, all war.
Why in the world is there always War?

Louie We reach the shore.
We run up the hill.
Always up a hill in Spain.
We dig our trenches.
We dig in.

Beat.

Ellie You believe like your Ma believes, in a new order, a new world.
You believe, like your Ma believes, in socialism, in feminism, in radicalism, in a host of "isms" that are just anathema to my family and my world. My world, Louie! My little Jerusalem carved out of the clutter of Dublin. My twist of lanes and synagogue and shops and tailors and overcrowded devout and boisterous homes. My little red-bricked wonderland that steams in the mid-day sun, steams in the constant rain.
Teems with men in long black coats and great boots of Latvian leather.
Teems with Mezuzah on the doorposts. Menorah in the window. Gefilte fish in the sink, ready to be cleaned, stuffed, baked and devoured.

Teems with the hum of prayer.
Hum of prayer in the morning. Hum of prayer in the afternoon.
Hum of prayer in the evening. Then the hum of gossip – constant!
Hum of fear. Hum of hope. Hum of graft. Hum of joy. Small joys such as the success of a son in university. The expansion of a business. The birth of a boy. Bar Mitzvah! Kiddushin! Yom Kippur! We are our own world. We are the descendants of Abraham, of Jacob, of Rebecca. Looking to London. Looking to New York. Looking always elsewhere. Yet we are here! Here in Dublin and I want…I want to walk in Dublin, walk with you, in your world Louie. Live and love with you, in your world Louie.

Beat.

They play out a scene from the past in Estelle Solomon's Studio. Louie is dressing, while Ellie stands at a bookshelf, letting her fingers spin along the titles.

Ellie So many books. So many books.
Just like at your Ma's house.

Louie She went to university, teaches in university I think...

Ellie Estelle?

Louie Yeah.

Ellie What does she teach?

Louie Painting I presume.

Ellie Painting.

Louie Yeah.
Aren't you going to get dressed Ellie? She'll be here soon. She paints here in the evenings.

Ellie I'd like to go to university!

Louie So why don't you?!

She gives a derisive snort!

Ellie Some of the books are written in Irish.

Louie Are they?

Ellie Does she speak Irish, Estelle?
Louie I don't know, I think so, I'd say so…she was in the movement, *Cumman Na Mban*.
That's how my Ma met her, how they became friends.

Ellie A Jewish woman in the movement?!
A Jewish woman with a painting studio.
And Irish books! And a goy lover!
She must be some Jewish woman, a rich woman.

Louie Are you not cold?

Ellie Does she know I'm here with you?

Louie No. I don't know.
She told me I could use the studio for whatever I need.

Ellie But why?

Louie Because she supports what I do Ellie.
What we do at the Union.

Ellie (*amazed*) Oy! And a communist to boot!
Some woman.

Louie Jaysus, so many questions!
(*Looks at her and smiles*) You like it don't you? You like it here?

Ellie Like it?
I love it. I bloody love it Louie!

She opens a book and puts it in front of him

Read it to me.
Will you read that to me?

Louie *Abhaile.*

Ellie That's the title?

Louie Yes.

Ellie What's *Abhaile*?

Louie Home. But sure you know that?

Ellie How would I know? Mrs Reynolds did as little Irish as possible in our school.

Louie True.

Ellie Do you think I could borrow it?

Louie Why not?

Ellie And you could read it to me,
will you read it to me?

Louie Of course I will if you want me to.

Ellie So what's the Irish for heart?

Louie *Croi.*

Ellie Love?

Louie *Grá.*

Ellie Head?

Louie *Ceann.*

Ellie Shoulders?

Moving closer.

Louie *Guaillí.*

Ellie Lips?

Louie *Liopaí.*

Ellie Tongue?

Louie *Teanga.*

Ellie Kiss?

Louie *Póg.*

They start to kiss.
They break, then stand apart but looking at each other.

Ellie Estelle's Studio.

Louie Estelle's Studio.

Ellie Our favourite place.

Louie Our holy place.

Ellie Our safe place.

Louie Our home.

Ellie Abhaile.

Beat.

Louie is sucked back into his story.

Louie Dear Ellie….
We are hungry, exhausted, thrilled and tense as we wait for another battle.
Dear Ellie…
We clean our guns.
We shake out the water, remove the bolt and pray that it dries out before combat. Franco's fascists seem to have deserted the hills around the Ebro for now.
So we sit in their debris.
We sift through what they have discarded – ammunition, food, boots, bags. Franco's fascists are well equipped. Franco's fascists have good guns and good girdles. We have nothing like this. I carry my ammunition in a trouser leg that has been sewn together. I carry my grenades in my pocket. I carry a tricky old Czech Carbine that sometimes jams. Many of my comrades have even older Russian guns. Many of my comrades have no boots but fight in rope soled shoes. Morale is not what it was when we were fighting here in the early days in Spain. Morale is not what it was when we were fighting alongside the brave young militia mustered from the streets of Barcelona, her unions, her factories, her tenements, her squares! War has taken its tole. Like War will take its tole.
But morale is still high enough in our column today, our
Irish column. Our belief is still high. It has to be.

He sings a few bars of The Red Flag.

Beat.

Ellie I meet you Louie Doyle, most nights now, at Estelle's studio.

Louie Estelle's Studio.

Ellie I sneak in after I finish work. Finish prayer. Finish housework. Finish dinner.

Louie I walk in after I finish work. Finish a pint.
Finish a union meeting or step off a picket.

Ellie I am happy in the new freedoms Estelle's studio gives us. Happy in the discovery of you, discovery of me…O God, O God how I love you Louie Doyle.

Louie How I want you Ellie Rosen.

Ellie I am happy in the new freedoms my work at Levins' gives to me. I am happy to get the tram into town. Happy to dance down at our favourite little club on Dawson Street, enjoy the music or go the pictures. I am happy with my 8d a day though most of it I give to MaMa for house-keeping and savings for Leon to attend university. Every decision of our house revolves around Leon's ambition to attend university, though in truth the ambition is more Mama's and Papa's. My poor brother has his head stuck in books from morning til night and if I'm honest I say nothing because it keeps them nicely preoccupied with his future and not mine. I know Anna takes the same tack. Anna likes music too. Anna likes Jazz. Anna is in love with a boy plays guitar in the club – Bill – but she daren't tell Mama who believes **t**hat all music should be avoided in order to mourn the destruction of the second temple of Jerusalem in 7AD.
7AD!

Louie You'd think she might have got over it by now.

Ellie Thankfully Papa is less concerned with such strictures. Papa is happy so long as he can cross to his synagogue every morning to make Kaddish before heading off around the homes of Dublin and Wicklow with his cart of wares.
Papa is kind. Papa is mostly silent. Head in the paper. Head in the
scriptures. Head bowed in prayer.

Louie Prayer. I'm glad my Ma never brought religion into our home. Some of the lads still pray out here Ellie, old habits die hard. Hughie still prays. Hughie Keenaghan from the bogs of Offaly. Hughie Keenaghan my friend. Hughie who thankfully taught me how to fire this blasted Carbine when I arrived in Albecete, Ellie, because there was little or no training before we were shifted out to battle. If it wasn't for Hughie', I don't think I'd have lasted a week, let alone eighteen months, is it eighteen months Ellie? And almost two years since I tasted you, lay with you, trembled…. God. Dear God if you are out there… if you care at all, why? Why the fuck would you give us such love, only to take it away?
(*He shakes his head.*)
Are you safe Ellie? Are you out of harm's way?
That's all I care about now.
Can this old gun of mine, aimed out of a Spanish rock somehow save you, somehow warn you, ….Ellie!
Dear Ellie….

Beat.

Ellie Letter after letter arrives.
Letter after letter from May…May 1937.

Louie Dear Ellie…

Ellie Letters torn. Letters scrawled. Letters opened. Letters marked.
Letters smeared. Letters kissed.
A storm of letters. A tempest!
Into my aching quiet. Into my aching loneliness but
I couldn't…

Louie Dear Ellie.

Ellie Didn't….

Louie Dear Ellie.

Ellie Dare open them.

Louie Dear Ellie.

Ellie Not for months.
Not for almost a year!

Beat.

Louie Hughie once fashioned an Altar, an actual altar out of the rocks around us in Jarama. Knelt there every morning he did, taking his rosary beads out of the same pocket in which he kept his grenades. A communist in prayer. I can never get my head around it.
Organised religion is the enemy of thought, I say.
Organised religion is a bastion of the rich, a traitor to the poor.
Hughie nods, Hughie agrees…but Hughie still prays.
I have Hughie tormented for tales of the old war in Ireland Ellie. That's no surprise says you. I have to dig it out of him mostly but if I can get my hands on a *Poron* of wine then that might loosen up his tongue a little.

"You still going on about that bloody Irish war Hughie?
You Might be better served to keep your head in this one!"
That's George.
George from the city of London, one of our gang. George from the city of London, a close comrade even though George from the city of London once fought in Dublin in a British uniform back in the day.
Fuck sake! All war. Why in the world is there always War Ellie?
Because George says he thought he was fighting for liberty then, thinks he is fighting for liberty now…hand in hand we.all soldiers..we walk hand in hand because sometimes I don't know who I'm killing, why I am killing because all I want is love…all I want is equality Ellie…and freedom…and prosperity for everyone, for all of us, even for them!
Because sometimes I wonder if every soldier on the opposite hill is really a Fascist at all?
Or are they just poor village boys, farm-boys, shop-boys, road layers, dockers, drivers… poor bastards just like us only they've been sucked in on the wrong side?
I don't know Ellie.
I used to be so sure, so sure of right and wrong, so sure of good and bad.
Now! Here! I feel sure of nothing.
Sure of nothing but death.
That's all that war can bring Ellie,
Death.

Ellie Dear Ellie…

Louie I see a church sacked in a small village, just outside of Barcelona.

Ellie Dear Ellie…

Louie A group of villagers are steadily hurling statues and benches and bibles out of the windows and down down the front steps and into their square.
They set light to a confession box.
Set light to the wood and the stigma and the shame.
So I applauded. I applaud.
But Hughie', he shakes his head.
And Hughie', he says "*No! No!… No good will come of this".*
Even though Hughie knows as well as I know that the priests of Ireland, like the priests of Spain send out their collection boxes in support of Franco! And then send out their God to condone his fascist murder, fascist genocide, fascist hate.

Ellie Dear Ellie…

Louie I watch the confessional burn.
I watch centuries of sin evaporate.
As the wood splits, as the paint smokes and the velvet curtain catches flame.
It makes me think of Estelle's Ellie.

Ellie Abhaile.

Louie It makes me think of our own fire…yet how God held..God holds…God still holds you hostage too.

They fall into each other's arms and act out the following exactly as they did at the top of the play.

Ellie God Louie! What are you doing?

Louie Trying to open these bloody buttons.

Ellie Forget the buttons, I can't wait, won't wait.

Louie But I like it, love it, you know that, when we are naked.

Ellie No, no, inside…just get inside me…please…

Beat.

They break. They stand apart. They look intensely at each other.

Ellie I like to look at you.

Louie I know.

Ellie My adonis, like one of those greek statues in a gallery, all muscle and strength and thigh. Alabaster white.

Louie I like to look at you.

Ellie I know.

Louie With your hair loose and scattered. Your legs loose, your round belly, round breasts. Pink. Brown. White.

Ellie In the permission of Estelle's studio..

Louie Abhaile.
In the flicker of the lamplight..

Ellie Abhaile.
I can still see it.
I can still see us.

Louie Me too.

O sonhar dos ossos

1919

W. B. Yeats
Tradução de Maria Rita Drumond Viana

PERSONAGENS

Três músicos (*com rostos maquiados para parecerem máscaras*)
Um rapaz
Um desconhecido (*usando máscara*)
Uma moça (*usando máscara*)

Ambientação – 1916

Como palco pode-se usar qualquer sala onde haja um espaço vazio perto da parede. Pode-se apoiar na parede uma tela ou painel representando as montanhas e o céu, ou mesmo perdurar-se uma cortina com a mesma padronagem, desde que a estampa apenas simbolize ou sugira montanhas e céu. Um músico entra e então os outros dois; o primeiro fica de pé cantando, como nas peças anteriores, enquanto os outros tomam seus lugares. Então todos os três sentam-se contra a parede perto de seus instrumentos, que já estão lá – um tambor, uma cítara e uma flauta. Ou então eles desdobram um pano como em "At the Hawk's Well" enquanto os instrumentos são trazidos.

Canção para dobrar e desdobrar o pano.

Primeiro Músico (*ou todos os três músicos, cantando*)
Por que bate assim meu coração?
Não passou uma sombra?
Passou há pouco.

Quem poderia ter pisado na grama?
Que bandido andaria à noite?
Não disseram os escritores antigos
Que sonhos sôfregos podem surgir
Dos ossos secos dos mortos?
E muitas noites parece
Que todo o vale se enche
Com aqueles sonhos fantásticos.
Eles transbordam as colinas,
Tão apaixonada é a sombra,
Como o vinho que enche até o topo
Da taça de jade verde-acinzentada,
Ou talvez uma taça de ágata.

Os três músicos agora estão sentados perto do tambor, flauta e cítara ao fundo do palco. O Primeiro Músico fala.

A hora antes do amanhecer e a lua encoberta;
A pequena vila de Abbey está encoberta;
A pequena trilha estreita que liga
A estrada branca até a Abadia de Corcomroe
Está encoberta; e por toda parte as colinas
São como um círculo de ágata ou de jade.
Em algum lugar no meio de grandes rochas e na grama rala
Os pássaros cantam, cantam sua solidão.
Até a luz do sol poderia se sentir sozinha aqui,
Até o calor do meio-dia é solitário. Ouço um passo –
Lá vem um rapaz e seu lampião.
Ele parece um pescador de Aran, pois usa
Um *bawneen* de flanela e sapato de couro de vaca.
Ele tropeça cansado, e caído, reza.

O Rapaz entra, rezando em irlandês.

Mais uma vez os pássaros cantam na solidão,
Mas agora voam ao redor de nossas cabeças; e agora
Pousam na pedra cinza a nordeste.

O Desconhecido e A Moça, vestidos com trajes do passado, entram. Portam máscaras heroicas.

Rapaz (*levantando o lampião*) Quem está aí? Não consigo ver suas feições,
Venham para a luz.

Desconhecido Mas o que temes?

Rapaz E por que surgiram furtivos da escuridão? (*A moça apaga o lampião.*)
O vento apagou meu lampião. Onde estão?
Vi duas cabeças emolduradas pelo céu
E depois as perdi; mas têm razão,
Eu não deveria ter medo no condado de Clare;
E se deveria ou não temer, não tenho escolha,
Tenho que me colocar em suas mãos,
Agora que minha vela se apagou.

Desconhecido Lutastes em Dublin?

Rapaz Estive no Correio Central, e se apreendido
Serei posto contra a parede e fuzilado.

Desconhecido Sabes onde encontrar refúgio, tens algum plano
Ou amigo que virá ao teu encontro?

Rapaz Devo esperar
Durante o amanhecer na montanha e ficar de guarda
Até que uma jangada de Aran atraque
Em Muckanish ou na costa rochosa
Sob Finvarra, mas certamente quebraria o pescoço
Se tivesse que vaguear até lá sozinho, no escuro.

Desconhecido Conhecemos os caminhos que as ovelhas trilham,
E todos os esconderijos das colinas,
E também que elas tinham, antigamente, esconderijos melhores.

Rapaz Quer dizer que eram melhores antes que os ladrões ingleses
Cortassem as árvores ou ateassem-lhes fogo
Receosos de que seus reais donos encontrassem abrigo.
Que barulho é esse?

Desconhecido Um cavalo velho que se perdeu.
Vem vagando pela estrada a noite toda.

Rapaz Tomei-o por um homem a cavalo. Policiais
Rondam todas as estradas. No final do Levante
Acho que não havia homem entre nós que não odiasse
Atirar em soldados que apenas cumpriam seu dever
E não eram da nossa raça. Mas quando um homem
Nascido da Irlanda e de sangue irlandês,
Vira-se contra nós –

Desconhecido Irei proteger-te,
Os olhos de nenhum ser vivo poderão ver-te;
Já os dos mortos, não tenho como garantir.

Rapaz Que mortos?

Desconhecido Certos dias, as pedras onde deves ficar
São, na hora antes do amanhecer
Assombradas.

Rapaz Mas não nasci à meia-noite.

Desconhecido Muitos que nasceram em plena luz do dia
Conseguem vê-los claramente, por eles passar na estrada principal
Ou no mercado apinhado da cidade,
E nunca saber que estão mortos.

Rapaz Minha avó
Dizia que faziam sua penitência em toda parte;
Alguns revivendo suas antigas vidas.

Desconhecido Como em um sonho;
E alguns, por escrúpulo antigo, ficam empalados
Nos topos oscilantes das árvores altas;
Outros são consumidos pelo fogo, ou murcham
Com o granizo do Norte invernal,
Outros ainda, apenas revivem suas antigas vidas.

Rapaz Bem, deixe-os sonhar da forma que quiserem
E lotar montanhas devastadas com o tumulto invisível
Da consciência fantástica. Não os temo;
Não podem prender-me nem atirar em mim.
E ao verem que gente de sua estirpe retornou a estes campos
Vermelhos de tanto beber sangue como o meu,
Não me trairiam, ainda que pudessem.

Desconhecido Esta trilha
Segue até as ruínas da Abadia de Corcomroe;
Passada a Abadia, logo chegamos às pedras
E estaremos no cume antes que os galos
De Aughanish ou Bailevelehan
Ou da cinza Aughtmana balancem suas asas e cacarejem.

Dão uma volta no palco.

Primeiro Músico (*falando*) Eles passam pelo poço raso e pedra plana
Sujos pelo gado que bebe, a estreita passagem
Por onde os enlutados carregam, há cinco séculos
Nobres ou camponeses para o enterro;
Uma coruja canta sob suas cabeças.

Cantando.

Por que deve se assustar o coração?
O que faz com que bata tanto?
A doçura amarga da noite
Tornou-o apenas uma coisa solitária.
Pássaro vermelho de março, comece a cacarejar,

Levante o pescoço e bata a asa
Galo vermelho, e cacareje!

Dão uma volta no palco. O Primeiro Músico fala.

E agora galgaram o longo campo gramado
E passaram pelas árvores espinhentas e pela brecha
Da sebe antiga; e a coruja aninhada no túmulo,
Na altura dos pés, bate vagamente sua asa.

Cantando.

Minha cabeça nas nuvens;
Largaria todo o mundo;
Meu coração bandido está orgulhoso
Relembrando e relembrando.
Pássaro vermelho de março, comece a cacarejar,
Levante o pescoço e bata a asa
Galo vermelho, e cacareje!

Dão uma volta no palco. O Primeiro Músico fala.

Estão entre as pedras sob os freixos
Acima das espinheiras e das sarças e da grama rala;
Escondido em meio à sombra bem abaixo deles
O pássaro com cabeça de gato está cantando.

Cantando.

Os ossos sonhadores clamam
Porque os ventos da noite sopram
E o céu é uma mancha nublada;
A calamidade pode lançar-se.
Pássaro vermelho de março, comece a cacarejar,
Levante o pescoço e bata a asa
Galo vermelho, e cacareje!

Desconhecido Estamos quase no cume e podemos descansar.
A estrada é uma sombra tênue ali; e ali
Está a Abadia em meio a seus túmulos partidos.
Antigamente teríamos ouvido um sino
Chamando os monges para rezar antes de raiar o dia;
E quando o dia vencia o cume,
O canto dos galos.

Rapaz Não há casa
Famosa por sua santidade ou beleza arquitetônica
Em Clare ou Kerry, ou em toda a vasta Connacht
Que o inimigo não tenha destelhado?

Desconhecido Perto do altar
Danificado por vento e geada e carcomido pelo tempo
De Donough O'Brien vê-se o túmulo, seu nome em latim.
Ele usava roupas finas e conhecia os segredos das mulheres,
Mas rebelou-se contra o Rei de Thomond
E morreu jovem.

Rapaz E por que se rebelou?
O Rei de Thomond era seu legítimo senhor.
Foram homens como Donough que enfraqueceram a Irlanda —
Maldita toda essa tropa, e quando eu morrer
Abandonarei meu corpo, se tiver alguma escolha
Longe de seu pé de hera e sua coruja. Será que os tais,
Se for mesmo verdade, que têm que fazer sua penitência
No topo da montanha onde devo me esconder,
Teriam vindo do cemitério da Abadia?

Moça Não têm eles tanta sorte,
São mais solitários ainda; aqueles que estão enterrados lá
Guerrearam no calor do sangue; se rebeldes foram
Um impulso momentâneo os tornou rebeldes,
Ou as ordens de algum rei mesquinho
Que odiava Thomond. Pois são apenas pecadores comuns,
E não foram responsáveis por trazer estrangeiros do além-mar.

Eles e seus inimigos do bando de Thomond
Misturam-se em breves batalhas oníricas, por cima de seus ossos;
Ou juntam-se num tumulto; ou vagueiam companheiros;
Ou na pressa da ronda celeste
Esquecem seus nomes terrestres. Estes aqui estão sozinhos
Malditos que são.

Rapaz Mas se o que parece é verdade
E há mais no outro lado
Do que neste lado da morte, muitos fantasmas
devem encontrá-los face a face e com eles trocar palavras
Mesmo nesta colina cinzenta e desolada.

Moça Até agora nenhum fantasma ou homem vivo
Falou com eles, embora tenham decorrido sete séculos
Desde que eles, cansados da vida e dos olhos dos homens,
Atiraram seus ossos em algum lugar esquecido
Malditos que são.

Rapaz Ouvi dizer que existem almas
Que, tendo pecado de maneira monstruosa,
Assumem, depois de mortos, formas monstruosas
Para que os vivos, caso vislumbrem seus rostos,
Tornem-se loucos, e para aterrorizar os mortos.

Moça Mas estes
Que eram bonitos mesmo na meia-idade
Mantêm, agora que estão mortos, a imagem
Da sua primeira juventude, pois foi na juventude
Que seu pecado começou.

Rapaz Ouvi falar de fantasmas furiosos
Que vagueiam em solidão voluntária.

Moça Estes não pensam em nada senão o amor; ou o júbilo
A não ser do instante em que sua penitência
Chega ao máximo ou quando se retorcem dois corações

A ponto de quase se partirem, se é que corações de sombras se partem,
Quando olhos dele misturam-se aos dela; nenhuma dor
É tão amarga quanto aquele olhar duplo,
Malditos que são.

Rapaz Mas o que é essa estranha penitência –
Que quando seus olhares se encontram retorcem-nos mais?

Moça É que embora se encontrem os olhares, os lábios não se tocam jamais.

Rapaz E ainda assim parece-me que eles vagam lado a lado.
Mas sem dúvida concordam que quando lábios se tocam
Sem terem nervos vivos, não é bem um encontro.

Moça Embora não tenham sangue, nem nervos vivos,
Aqueles que um dia se deitaram aquecidos, vivendo a vida de uma noite inteira
Nos braços um do outro, e sabem que papéis
Que têm na vida, já que são agora apenas pessoas dos sonhos,
São papéis no sonhar; embora sejam apenas sombras,
Pairando entre um espinheiro e uma pedra,
Amontoando noite após noite alada; embora
Nenhuma sombra, não importa quão atormentada e consumida
Trocaria sua própria calamidade pela deles,
Sua quase-vida seria abençoada se apenas seus lábios pudessem
Tocar-se por um momento; mas sempre que ele baixa sua cabeça
Perto da dela, ou quando mão acariciaria mão
A lembrança do seu crime flui por entre eles
E os afasta.

Rapaz A lembrança de um crime –
Ele a tirou da casa do marido, talvez,
Mas a penitência por um pecado passional
Pode durar assim tantos séculos?

Moça Não, não;
O homem que ela escolheu, o homem que a escolheu
Pouco se importava e pouco se importa com a quem pertence a casa

De onde fugiram em direção ao amanhecer, em meio às flechas,
Ou que era de um marido e de um rei;
E como, se fosse só isso, não lhe faltaria amigos,
Em estradas movimentadas ou em colinas desertas?
A própria Helena escancarara a porta
Onde noite após noite ela sonha acordada
E traz para seu seio um homem sonhador.

Rapaz Que crime fica tão marcado na memória?
Que crime pode separar os lábios de amantes
Que vagam sozinhos?

Moça Seu rei e amante
Foi derrubado em batalha pelo marido
E ele, por ela e por si próprio, cego que estava
Amargo e amargamente apaixonado, trouxe
Um exército estrangeiro do além-mar.

Rapaz Falam de Diarmuid e de Dervorgilla
Que trouxeram o invasor normando?

Moça. Sim, sim, falo
Daquele mais desgraçado e mais amaldiçoado dos casais
Que vendeu seu país para a escravidão; e ainda assim
Não estaria tão completamente desgraçado e amaldiçoado
Se alguém da sua raça finalmente dissesse:
"Eu os perdoo".

Rapaz Oh, nunca, nunca
Serão perdoados Diarmuid e Dervorgilla.

Moça Se alguém de sua raça os perdoasse, finalmente
Lábio poderia unir-se a lábio.

Rapaz Oh, nunca, nunca
Serão perdoados Diarmuid e Dervorgilla.
Contaram tão bem a história, tão bem mesmo

Que não pude deixar de entrar no espírito
E por um tempo acreditar que era verdade
Ou parcialmente acreditar; mas é melhor apertarmos o passo agora.
O horizonte ao leste está ficando mais claro.

Eles dão uma volta no palco uma vez. Os músicos tocam.

Então aqui estamos no cume. Consigo ver
As Ilhas Aran, as Colinas de Connemara,
E Galway na luz do romper; por lá também
O inimigo derrubou telhado e empena;
E arrancou painéis de antigos cômodos;
O que gerações de anciões conheceram
Como as palmas das próprias mãos, e que crianças admiraram,
Serviu para cozinhar o mingau da tropa. Aquela cidade ainda estaria,
Não fosse o casal que querem que eu perdoe,
Em meio a frontões e ameias
Como qualquer antiga e admirada cidade italiana;
Pois embora não tenhamos carvão nem minério de ferro,
Para tornar-nos ricos e corromper o ar,
Nosso país, se esse crime não tivesse sido cometido,
Teria sido o mais belo. Por que dançam?
Por que fitam, e com olhos tão apaixonados,
Um ao outro; para então afastarem-se,
Cobrindo os olhos e entrelaçando-se em uma dança?
Quem são vocês? O que são? Não são naturais.

Moça Faz setecentos anos que nossos lábios não se tocam.

Rapaz Por que se olham de forma tão estranha?
Tão estranha e tão doce?

Moça Setecentos anos.

Rapaz Tão estranha e tão doce. Toda a ruína.
Tudo, tudo o que fizeram apagado,
Como se o ar da montanha levasse embora,

Só porque seus olhares se cruzaram. Não ouvem mais,
Pois estão enroscados e escondidos em sua dança.
Agora a dança está mudando. Baixaram seus olhos,
Cobriram os olhos como se seus corações
De repente se partissem — nunca, nunca
Serão perdoados Diarmuid e Dervorgilla.
Flutuaram em sua dança de rocha em rocha.
Ergueram as mãos como se quisessem roubar o sono
Que permanece sempre no abismo do céu
Embora jamais possam alcançá-lo. Uma nuvem flutua
E cobre todo o topo da montanha em um só momento;
E agora dissipa e os leva embora.

O Desconhecido e a Moça saem.

Quase cedi e perdoei tudo –
Aqui é mesmo um lugar de terríveis tentações.

Os Músicos começam a desdobrar e dobrar um pano preto. O Primeiro Músico vem para a frente do palco, ao centro. Segura o pano diante de si. Os outros dois vêm, um de cada lado, e desdobram o pano. Depois, dobram-no da mesma maneira. Enquanto desdobram o pano, o Rapaz deixa o palco.

Músicas para desdobrar e dobrar o pano.

Os Músicos (*cantando*)

I

No topo cinzento da colina
A música de um reino perdido
Toca e toca e de repente para.
Os ventos de Clare-Galway
Carregam-na: de repente ela para.

Ouvi no ar da noite
Uma música errante e arejada;

E preso naquela armadilha
Um homem se perde de repente,
Naquela doce e errante armadilha.

Qual dedo tocou primeiro
A música de um reino perdido?
Eles sonham que riram no sol.
Ossos secos que sonham são amargos,
Eles sonham e escurecem nosso sol.

Esses dedos enlouquecidos tocam
Uma música errante e arejada;
Nossa sorte murchou,
E o trigo secou na espiga,
E o vento o leva embora.

II

Meu coração disparou quando ouviu
O maçarico cantar na alvorada
E o turbilhonante pássaro com cabeça de gato;
Mas agora a noite se foi.
E ouvi de lá debaixo
Os fortes pássaros de março cacarejando,
Levantem o pescoço e batam as asas
Galos vermelhos, e cacarejem!

RADIO DRAMA

Como criar sua própria sereia
Peça radiofônica em um ato[1]

Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes

Traduzido e adaptado por Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes do conto de autoria de Marina Carr "Grow a Mermaid", pelo qual Carr recebeu o prêmio *Hennessy Award for Best First Story* em 1994.[2]

O conto foi publicado pela primeira vez na coletânea *The Hennessy Book of Irish Fiction* em 1995 e republicado em 26 de setembro de 2020 em celebração à reinstituição do concurso. O processo de adaptação do conto para uma peça de radioteatro foi realizado durante o estágio pós-doutoral de Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes na Universidade de Brasília (UnB), sob a supervisão de César Lignelli. A estreia da peça ocorreu em sessão de escuta coletiva em 22 de julho de 2023, no 78º Festival Cometa Cenas 2023, na UnB. A peça está disponível para ouvir no acervo digital do Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses e em seu canal do Spotify.[3]

Elenco:

Menina, 8 anos – Estela Lignelli
Menina, 20 anos depois – Alinne Balduino

[1] This work was supported by Brazil's National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), grant numbers 310189/2022-5 and 408300/2021-3.

[2] Apesar de existir uma tradução para o português do Brasil sob o título "Crie uma sereia só para você" e autoria de Brunilda T. Reichmann, publicada no livro *O mundo e suas criaturas – uma antologia do conto irlandês* (org. Munira Mutran, Associação Editorial Humanitas, 2006), para realizar minha tradução integral do conto e posterior adaptação para radioteatro, não fiz qualquer tipo de consulta à tradução publicada existente.

[3] Para acessar a peça: https://nei.ufsc.br/2025/11/06/como-criar-sua-propria-sereia-2/ e https://open.spotify.com/e/1QmJrhEFZpzpcMXE2S5MP7?si=KnpdroTHSA2WCV2QDsEUig&nd=1&dlsi=592984d4b28c4d3f.

Mãe, 30 e poucos anos – Sulian Vieira
Vó Blaize, 50 e poucos anos – Sulian Vieira
Menino, irmão da menina, 5 anos – Arthur Fernandes da Silva
Pai das crianças, 30 e poucos anos – Guilherme Mayer
Vizinhos (todos)
Médico – César Lignelli
Voz da Sereia – Estela Lignelli
Tritão – César Lignelli
Diretor artístico: César Lignelli
Dramaturgista: Alinne Balduino P. Fernandes
Editor de som: Guilherme Mayer

Observação: a sigla "sfx" é uma marcação usada para indicar os efeitos sonoros da peça, que não estão exaustivamente marcados no roteiro. As informações entre colchetes [ ] indicam aspectos técnicos da edição de som, efeitos sonoros ou alternância entre os diferentes planos ou níveis de escuta, marcados pelo volume do som quando em referência à distância do ponto de escuta, ou os planos da realidade, do pensamento e da imaginação ou sonho.

Como criar sua própria sereia

Cena I

A Menina está em cena sozinha, sentada à mesa. A qualidade dos poucos móveis revela um ambiente doméstico bastante simples. A mesa é de fórmica azul. A Menina está sentada numa cadeira de plástico. Murmura para si mesma enquanto tenta ler o jornal. De repente, depara-se com um anúncio que lhe interessa.

Menina "Cri-e-su-a-pró-pri-a-se-re-ia" (*Pausa*. *Sensação de surpresa e assombro. Passa o dedo indicador pelas linhas do jornal para auxiliá-la na leitura.*) Crie sua própria sereia? (*Dá risos de empolgação.*) "En-vi-e-nos-dois-cinco-zero-e-vo-cê-re-ce-be-rá-se-men-tes-de-se-reia-e-de-ca-va-lo-ma-ri-nho". Dois, cinco, zero? Ah, dois vírgula cinquenta. Dois reais e cinquenta centavos. "Bas-ta-co-lo-car-na-á-gua-que-e-les-cres-cem-e-a-té-po-dem-con-ver-sar-com-vo-cê." (*Em êxtase.*) Eles até podem conversar com você! Sobre o que será que as sereias falam?

Cena II

A cena se passa na cozinha da casa. A Mãe está à beira do fogão, mexendo o feijão e cantarolando [*sfx de sons de trabalhos domésticos na cozinha.*] *Vó Blaize está em seus devaneios, parece enxergar algo que ninguém mais enxerga e puxa um fio imaginário com os dedos. A Menina observa a avó. A mãe repara na ação da filha e se dá conta do que Vó Blaize está fazendo.*

Mãe [*em plano sonoro secundário*] Eia, para com isso, Vó Blaize!

Menina (*para si mesma, em pensamento*) Vovó é sempre tão esquisita. Mas é bem engraçada, apesar de não dar para conversar com ela. Será que ela vê portas escondidas? Acho que ela tem um cordão mágico, daí ela usa esse cordão pra abrir portas mágicas e ir pra outros lugares, bem longe daqui (*com ênfase.*) Por uma passagem secreta e invisível.

[*Pausa. Sfx da menina mexendo no jornal.*]

Menina Mãe, olha, uma sereia que cresce na água.

Mãe [*vem para o ponto de escuta junto à filha*] (*aproxima-se da filha, mas não dá muita importância*) Ah, isso. (*Pausa. Parece se interessar, mas desmerece a empolgação da filha. Lê:*) "Crie a sua própria sereia". (*Enfeitiçada pela sereia.)* Você acha mesmo que... olha, que bonitinha, acenando de dentro do aquário... (*Em desalento.*) Mas eu nunca ouvi falar em coisa assim.

Menina A gente pode, mãe?

Mãe Pode o quê?

Menina Mandar dinheiro pra ganhar uma sereia?

Mãe (*suspirando*) Ah, vou ver. Ai, droga, os feijões tão queimando. (*Vira-se e volta para o fogão.*)

Cena III

[*Sfx: É noite em região interiorana, ambiente rural.*] *A Mãe e a Menina estão deitadas. Dormem na mesma cama. A Mãe puxa assunto porque está sem sono e um pouco ansiosa.*

Mãe A casa nova já tá quase pronta. Falta só metade agora. Mas é segredo, não conta pra ninguém que senão os vizinhos vão ficar perguntando de onde a gente tirou dinheiro pra construir a casa. (*Agora, em segredo, sussurra no ouvido da filha.*) Fiz empréstimo em quatro bancos diferentes. Com a casa nova, seu pai vai voltar pra casa, ah vai. Até que enfim. Vai ter até uma sala de música. Ele vai gostar. (*Como se olhasse para cima e visse a casa, fala em tom de voz empolgada.*) Vai ter um monte de janelas – janelas por todos os lados! E o seu quarto vai ser todo amarelo, vai ter uma pia amarela, cortinas amarelas, almofadas amarelas e um tapetão amarelo!

Menina (*em pensamento*) Nem gosto de amarelo. Queria que meu quarto fosse azul e verde, que nem quarto de sereia. Mas tudo bem. Mamãe faz como ela quiser e aí eu puxo com um cordão invisível o azul e o verde que nem a vovó.

Mãe Filhinha, vem aqui, deixa eu te abraçar. (*Aperta a menina debaixo da coberta ao ponto de quase sufocá-la.* [*Sfx que exprima sons de sufocamento.*]) Desgraçado! Filho da puta! Depois de tudo o que eu fiz por ele! É assim que ele agradece?

[*Sfx: Sons que refletem tentativas da menina de tentar tomar ar fora da coberta. A Mãe puxa a menina de volta para debaixo da coberta.*]

Mãe (*cantarola no ouvido da filha enquanto a segura*) Minha menininha… *Enquanto isso, a menina grita tentando escapar do abraço sufocante da Mãe. Ela sua de tanto calor que sente.*

Vó Blaize (*Canta uma canção de ninar.* [*Voz um pouco distante, por estar em outro cômodo, do outro lado do corredor.*])

[*A canção de Vó Blaize deve ser justaposta ao fim da fala da Mãe e continuar até o fim da Cena III. O som da voz de Vó Blaize fica ainda mais baixo enquanto a Menina imagina seu encontro com a sereia. Ela está entre a vigília e o sono. Plano da imaginação.*]

Menina (*em pensamentos, que são quase sonhos*) Vou pegar água do lago e botar num potinho. Daí vou botar as sementes da sereia e pronto. A sereia vai crescer e eu vou contar tudo pra ela. (*Pausa. A Menina imagina a cena.*) A Martina às vezes brinca comigo, sabe, sereiazinha? Uma vez a gente viu um balão voando lá no céu. A gente correu e correu atrás dele. Sabia que aqui perto, numa rua sem saída, tem uma fada que ninguém

nunca viu? (*Bocejo, fala arrastada.*) Ela se chama Apolônia. Mas eu já vi Apolônia váaarias vezes... (*sua voz, em pensamento, vai esmaecendo até a Menina dormir*).

Cena IV

Vó Blaize está em seu quarto, deitada na cama. [*Sfx com sons fumando seu cachimbo de ópio.*] *Briga com um fantasma. A Menina observa a avó pela fechadura da porta.* [*O ponto de escuta é da Menina. Vó Blaize, portanto, está em plano sonoro secundário.*]

Vó Blaize Tudo o que você fez a vida inteira foi encher o bucho, seu inútil de uma figa! (*Puxa o cachimbo na tentativa de se acalmar.*)

Menina (*voz interior, em pensamento*) Todo santo dia vovó briga com esse fantasma. É bem divertido. Mamãe disse que esse fantasma é o vovô, que foi atrás de um pouco de ar puro e nunca mais voltou. Parece que foi quando ela era pequena, uns trinta anos atrás. (*Pausa.*) Um dia ele mandou um cartão postal bonito pra vovó, lá da Itália.

Vó Blaize (*lendo, raivosa*) Clima agradável, o céu aqui é um espetáculo ao pôr-do-sol. Venha ver um dia. [*Sfx: cobre o postal com um plástico e o esmurra*.]

A Menina, concomitantemente à ação da avó, ri e se debate na porta de tanto rir.

Cena V

Mãe (*gritando com a Menina*) Tira a roupa agora!

Menina Por quê, mãe?

Mãe (*gritando*) Você comeu os doces do seu irmão! Não eram seus! Ele tá doente! Vai já pra sala e tira a roupa imediatamente! Me espera lá, quietinha, que eu já volto.

(*Pausa.* [*Sons de passos da mãe, que vai até outro cômodo para buscar um cabide de madeira.*]) Tá vendo isso aqui? O que é isso aqui na minha mão?

Menina Um cabide de madeira?

Silêncio.

[*Som de batidas com o cabide.*] *A Menina desmaia.* [*Plano da imaginação.*] *A cena que segue é ambivalente para o público. Semiacordada, imagina:*

Voz de um homem (*afável, só a Menina o escuta. É um tritão no fundo do mar*) É por aqui, é por aqui, venha.

Menina Demora muito?

Voz de um homem Já vai, já vai, é só mais um pouquinho.

Intervalo, pausa. [*Sons de respiração saindo do ponto de escuta da menina.*] *A Menina acorda e se depara com a Mãe, que a encara.*

Mãe (*ainda raivosa*) Você tem alguma coisa pra me dizer?

Menina (*resignada*) Desculpa, mãe.

Mãe Promete que nunca mais vai fazer de novo? (*Pausa. Ainda mais raivosa por conta da hesitação da Menina.*) Promete? Nunca mais?

Menina (*resignada*) Não. (*Silêncio breve.*) Nunca mais.

Mãe (*cedendo e agora tentando fazer as pazes. Voz carinhosa que não convence a filha, que está cheia de vergões muito doloridos no corpo todo*) Vem cá no meu colo, minha menina.

A Menina começa a contar suas respirações. [*Sons de passos da mãe, que se distancia.*]

Menina (*para si mesma*) Tenho que dar um jeito de criar a sereia fora daqui, senão ela vai morrer.

Cena VI

Clima festivo. O Pai está de volta em casa e brinca de mágico com as crianças. [*Sfx que reproduzam esse clima.*]

Pai Respeitável público, com vocês, o grande mágico animador de objetos outrora inanimados! E quem seria este menininho? Menininho, venha aqui. Posso fazer você desaparecer! Gostou da ideia? (*Pausa.*) Não ouvi?

Menino Siiiim!

Pai O único problema é que você nunca mais vai voltar ao mundo das coisas visíveis!

Menino (*abrindo o berreiro, assustado*) Bu-aaaaaah!!

Pai Tá tudo bem, tá tudo bem. Não vou fazer você desaparecer.

Menino (*agora envergonhado, continua a chorar, funga, um choro contido*) Hunf, hunf, bu-aah, bu-aah

Menina Pai. Me faz desaparecer.

Pai Mas você nunca mais vai voltar.

Menina Eu não quero voltar.

Pai (*assustado com a reação firme da Menina*) Você é muito nova pra esse truque. (*Sai.* [*Sfx que indique essa saída.*])

Menina (*cochichando*) Ei, mano, bora ali atrás. Lá o papai nem a mamãe vão conseguir ver a gente.

[*Segundo plano: sons de risos de crianças alegres. Vozes das crianças ao fundo.*]

Menina "Gostaria de água de nabo com folhas de chá?"

Menino "Sim, brigado"...

[*Falas em segundo plano até o som esmaecer e a cena se finalizar.*]

Cena VII

[*Sfx: Som de motor de trator ligado.*] *Em cena: Mãe, Vó Blaize, Menina, Menino e Pai.*

Pai Vamo lá, sobe aqui, me dá a mão e... [*som de esforço enquanto ergue a Menina para cima do reboque do trator.*] Força! (*Para a Menina*) E aí, filhona, bom andar de trator

sentada num sofazinho, né? (*Para a Mãe*) Você tá bonita, mulher. Nunca te vi com o cabelo preso assim antes. Fica bonito, dá pra ver bem o seu cangote.

Ouvem-se risos da Mãe, que está alegre pela primeira vez.

[*Sfx de transição de cena, que marquem a passagem do tempo.*] *Na manhã seguinte.*

Mãe (*alegre*) Bom dia na casa nova! Bom dia, bom dia! (*De repente, apreensiva.*) Cadê ele? (*A voz vai aumentando, exasperada.*) Cadê o seu pai? Cadê o seu pai? Filho, por que você não fala nada? (*Com raiva.*) Não vai falar?

Menino Não! Não, mãe!

[*Sfx: estrondo. A Mãe bate a cabeça do Menino contra a parede de vidro. Som de batida e vidro quebrando. Com muita dor e assustado, o menino chora.*]

[*Sfx de transição. No médico. Como na Cena V, a Menina respira alto e conta suas próprias respirações, que são rápidas e curtas. Isso faz parte do sfx.*]

Médico Muito bem, garotinho, você é bem corajoso. Agora só mais um ponto aqui... [*Sfx: tesoura, instrumentos...*] Quase foi no olho, mas você deu sorte. Sete pontos na cabeça e cacos de vidro removidos. Olha só, mais cuidado com vidro da próxima vez, hein?

Mãe (*puxando conversa com o médico, faz mea culpa*) Tão difícil ficar de olho nessa criançada. Quando você pisca, já tão em perigo!... Pra animar todo mundo, vamos lá no Oásis tomar um sorvete?

Menina e Menino Sim!

Mãe Sorvete com jujubas coloridas pra todo mundo!

Menino Êee, legal!

Menina As minhas vão ser douradas e verdes, que nem a cauda da sereia.

Cena VIII

É noite. A Menina sonha. [*Plano do sonho.*]

Menina (*falando enquanto dorme*) Não, mãe, não quero virar comida!

Vozes diversas Ai que carninha de menina mais gostosa! Bem saborosa e macia!

Menina (*acorda, assustada e grita*) Aaaaaah! [*Sfx marcam que está ofegante. Respirações rápidas e curtas.*]

Cena IX

Na sala da casa nova. Vó Blaize fuma seu cachimbo enquanto a Mãe toma uísque e as crianças brincam no chão. [*Sfx: sons noturnos, coaxar de sapos etc.*]

Vó Blaize cantarola e fuma. Baforadas de cachimbo.

[*Menino narra uma brincadeira em segundo plano.*]

Mãe, sentada próxima a uma janela que fica de frente para o lago. Levanta-se e se aproxima dos filhos.

Mãe Venham aqui, meus filhinhos. (*Beija-os.*) Chuac, chuac.

Menina Ai, mãe, que bafo de cachaça!

Mãe (*ignorando a Menina e suspirando*) Qualquer hora dessas... qualquer hora dessas...

[*Sfx: sons noturnos. Coaxar de sapos.*]

Cena X

Na madrugada, a Mãe da Menina suicidou-se no lago perto da casa. Agora é dia. Em cena: Menina e Pai.

O Pai chora sem parar.

Menina (*em sua imaginação, conversa com a sereia em tom jocoso*) Ri-ri-ri. Ele chora que nem um bebezão. (*Contemplativa, mas sem tristeza.*) Que silêncio aqui, né? Foi só a mamãe se mandar pro lago que a casa ficou calma. Até meu irmão parou de falar.

Cena XI

[*Sfx de transição.*] *A cena agora se passa à beira do lago, enquanto as buscas pelo corpo da Mãe ocorrem. Menina, Pai e vizinhos.*

O Pai não fala. Só chora e se lamenta. [*O som de choro e lamúrias do pai ficam em segundo plano na hierarquia do som, mais distantes.*]

[*Sfx de máquina, uma espécie de guincho, usada para içar o corpo da Mãe.*]

Menina (*canta e toca um violão antigo, de criança. Enquanto canta, erra as notas diversas vezes, para e continua várias vezes*)

Ó, querida, ó, querida,
Ó, querida Clementina,
Você se foi pra todo sempre,
Que tristeza, Clementina.

Sua doçura, sua pureza
Era como um bebezinho,
Mi'a criança adorada,
Te dei todo meu carinho

Para mina, foi seu pai
E ficou só a Clementina,
Que foi brincar como menina
E na lagoa se afogou

Ó, querida, ó, querida,
Ó, querida Clementina,
Você se foi pra todo sempre,
Que tristeza, Clementina.

[*Sfx do guindaste erguendo o corpo da Mãe* (*algum apito de alerta, por exemplo*)*, girando para a margem e baixando o corpo vagarosamente e depositando-o sobre a relva.*]

A Menina continua cantando e tocando violão.

[*O som da canção da Menina vai esmaecendo até ficar em segundo plano. Em primeiro plano.*]

Menina (*em pensamento*) Ela tá até meio parecida com a sereia. Mas tem essas mordidas no braço. Devem ser de lúcio. Não sabia que peixe gostava de carne de gente. Mas pelo jeito não gosta. Deve ter deixado pras enguias. Mamãe dizia que as enguias é que costumam comer as coisas mais sujas, do fundo do lago. (*Pausa.*) Mas parece que elas nem chegaram perto. As enguias devem ter lá seus princípios.

Vizinho Chega, menina! Que falta de respeito!

Menina (*cantando ainda mais alto*) Ó, querida, ó, querida,
Ó, querida Clementina,
Você se foi pra todo sempre,
Que tristeza, Clementina.

Sua doçura, sua pureza
Era como um bebezinho,
Mi'a criança adorada,
Te dei todo meu carinho

Para mina, foi seu pai
E ficou só a Clementina,
Que foi brincar como menina
E na lagoa se afogou

Ó, querida, ó, querida,
Ó, querida Clementina,
Você se foi pra todo sempre,
Que tristeza, Clementina.

[*Em justaposição, os vizinhos rezam Ave Maria, fazendo um cortejo fúnebre.*]

Vizinhos Ave Maria, cheia de graça,
o Senhor é convosco,
bendita sois vós entre as mulheres
e bendito é o fruto do vosso ventre, Jesus.

Santa Maria, Mãe de Deus,
rogai por nós pecadores,
agora e na hora da nossa morte. Amém.

Repetem.

Cena XII

Na sala de jantar. Menina, Menino e Pai.

Pai Em homenagem à sua querida mãe… (*Hesita.*) Em homenagem à sua querida mãe, vou fazer um voto de celibato de seis meses.

Menino O que é isso, papai?

Pai (*seco, sem filtro com as crianças*) Não vou pra cama com ninguém pelos próximos seis meses.

Menina (*raivosa*) Que nojo! (*Sai e vai até o quarto do Pai.* [*Sfx de passos de criança correndo dentro de casa. O sfx vai se afastando. Pausa. A Menina volta ao ponto de escuta. No quarto do Pai e para si mesma.*] Eu sei que ele tem umas coisas feias escondidas aqui, onde é que tá, onde é que tá? Achei! [*Sfx da menina folheando revistas.*] Ui, que nojo, quanta mulher gorda, horrorosa nessas revistas!

[*Plano distinto, em sonho.*] Isso, papai, dorme, dorme. Vou tirar só um olho seu, tá? [*Sfx enquanto arranca o olho, num puxão.*] (*Observa o olho no sonho.*) Olha só, nunca tinha reparado, dependendo da luz, fica meio caramelo… calma, papai, calma. (*Com prontidão.*) Vou costurar de volta.

Cena XIII

Menina [*plano sonoro do pensamento*] Logo depois que mamãe morreu, vovó começou a arrancar todos os dentes. Pareciam macios que nem balas de caramelo. Mas não eram não. Tinham gosto de cueca velha. Do que eu *acho* que seja o gosto de cueca velha, sei lá. [*Sfx: Sons de dentes que trituram dentes moles. A Menina sai de casa e caminha até o lago. Cospe as lascas de dente na água.*] Eles vão pro fundo do lago, que nem mamãe. Será que lúcio gosta de pedaço de dente de gente?

Cena XIV

Vinte anos depois. [*Sons de cidade, buzinas, motores etc.*] *A Menina, que agora é uma mulher, caminha apressadamente na rua. Para perto de uma lixeira.*

Menina (*agora vinte anos mais velha. Para si mesma*) Papai me deu esse anel, que era de mamãe. Arrancou do seu dedo depois que ela foi resgatada do lago. Estranho esse presente, né? Tirar uma coisa de uma pessoa morta e dar pra outra. Mas já carreguei isso aqui por tempo demais. (*Atira o anel dentro de uma lata de lixo.*) Tchau, mãe. (*Pausa.*) Tchau pela última vez.

[*Corte abrupto.*]

Cena XV

[*Sfx de água.*] *A Menina mergulha numa piscina profunda. Esforça-se para chegar até o fundo. Por alguns segundos, escuta-se o som da água. A Menina chega a uma fortaleza. Sfx de porta que se abre rangendo.*

Menina (*como na cena anterior, é adulta*) Até que enfim você chegou! Nem acredito que finalmente te encontrei. O seu sorriso é igual ao do jornal.

Sereia (*voz alegre*) Como é bom te ver aqui! Não mudei muito mesmo. E aí, tá pronta? Ainda temos uma longa jornada até o fundo do mar. Mas pode deixar que ilumino o caminho com a minha cauda.

[*Sfx de água.*]

Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel: airwaves of time, reconstruction, imagination

Vincent Woods

How does any work of art come into being? The great Irish designer Eileen Gray advised the artist to "question everything" before making a new work. I suppose that by our nature we tend to do that anyway, but rigour never goes astray. On the other hand (or is it the same hand, other side?), the novelist Colum McCann recently told the audience at the Iron Mountain Festival in Leitrim that any writer who says they know exactly what they're doing is almost certainly lying. But then the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky said that imagination begins with our first lie – so we arrive back at square one, the original question.

Speaking for myself, some poems arrived seemingly fully formed, others took (and take) years to gestate and shape, some will go through many drafts, others seem complete right away. All plays take several drafts and a huge amount of editing and reworking. Each poem, each play is different and, like each cripple, has its own way of walking. *Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel* emerged from a phone call and commission in 2020, the Year of Covid and Lockdown; Kevin Reynolds, Series Producer of Drama in RTÉ Radio 1 (Ireland's national radio station), phoned me out of the blue to ask if I'd write a short monologue for an actor of my choice. I said yes and immediately knew that I would ask the actor Derbhle Crotty to be my muse. She, too, said yes and almost immediately I saw, imagined or day-dreamt a hotel on the Irish border and a woman sitting at the window with a rifle.

I had watched Derbhle grow as an actor down and across the years from the 1990s when she stalked the stage in the first production of Marina Carr's *The Mai* at the Abbey/Peacock and in the Druid production of Portia Coughlan. She had a particular burn of energy and a brilliant, indefinable raw openness that marked her out as special. Her later work – with the Abbey, Druid, Landmark, the Gate, the National Theatre and RSC in the

UK, and in film and television – confirmed and consolidated her power and edge, and I looked forward to any production with Derbhle in it.

The border hotel was a kind of ghost image, one of the many ghost-hotels that used to cast their light and shadow on the quiet streets of towns-run-to-seed. In my youth I had caught sight of their former commercial glory; the Royal Hotel in Boyle, the County Hotel and Bush Hotel in Carrick-on-Shannon were little empires of wedding parties, dinner dances, Pioneer Total Abstinence Association gatherings, business meetings; and glimpses of other lives – commercial travellers eating mixed grill dinners, stout, be-hatted women whispering behind teapots and cakes, the occasional priest having a discreet half-one of a winter evening. They were places of story and music – there was always a piano to hand, and many a set of hands took to the ivories and tinkled out Percy French or Thomas Moore songs or a sultry setting of "Strangers in the Night". How could one not be haunted by the sights and sounds, the long corridors with red-and-yellow carpet and muted lighting, the clatter of pots and dishes from the kitchen, the murmur of voices from behind closed doors, the silence and noise and cigarette fumes from the bars?

And although the word for matriarch would not have been in my young vocabulary, the living reality was always present – strong, formidable women who kept the hotel and pub doors open, the businesses afloat, the show on the road; who managed weak husbands and canny bank managers and wide boys of all hues and stripes.

Then there was a vivid memory of a random encounter with a distraught woman on a remote country road in Co. Monaghan in or around 2002. I was out walking, and I saw her coming towards me, practically running, talking away to herself, distraught, agitated, a little dishevelled, maybe in her early forties, and she stopped to talk to me.

I sometimes wonder did I dream her, but I know she was real. She gestured to a farmhouse in the near distance and told me a terrible story of a marriage gone feral, vicious religious hatred and bigotry held and festering under one roof, a near-murder using a cess-pit, all rounded off with the despairing and heartfelt declaration; "These mixed marriages is diabolical". Her face was a mask of suffering, her speech was hard, fast, unrelenting.

Then there was Patricia, a wonderful old Tory in the south of France, one of the most generous and opinionated people I have ever known, a woman who sacrificed a great deal for honourable principles in politics and public life. She loved good wine and food and treasured good conversation. She gave me the inimitable line "Mummy was a bitch".

The Indian takeaway of the play has its genesis in a visit to Swanlinbar on the Cavan-Fermanagh border in October 2017 with my beloved friends Henry Glassie and Pravina Shukla. Henry, eminent folklorist and writer, had spent many a day and night in Lunney's bar in the town when he lived in Ballymenone, Fermanagh in the 1970s; his years in Fermanagh gave the world a series of brilliant books, including All Silver and No Brass, Passing the Time in Ballymenone and The Stars of Ballymenone, and inspired a path of connection that led to Pat Collins making the masterful documentary film Field Work on Henry's work in Brazil, Turkey, the U.S. and Ireland.

On our Sunday afternoon car journey through Leitrim, Fermanagh and Cavan Henry talked about his memories of Swanlinbar as a thriving market town, thronged with young and old at weekends, the pubs alight with talk and song. When we arrived in Swad (as the town is known locally), there wasn't a soul or sinner to be seen, scarcely a light in any house or building; the feeling was one of abandonment, near dereliction. And then an Indian man crossed the street, I think he came from or was going to an Indian take-away restaurant, but maybe I'm imagining that. Anyway, that image spurred the idea for Aadijay in Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel. Then there was a memory of a man standing in the pooled shadow-light of a faded pub in a Cavan border town one night, spiral of cigarette smoke rising up from his hand; I glimpsed him from a bus window, and there was something cocky, dangerous and vulnerable about his stance that made me imagine him as a target for a sniper…

Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel wrote itself, so it seemed. Derbhle loved the text and tackled into it with relish. Goretti Slevin produced it for RTÉ, and it was broadcast in January 2021. Derbhle told me the play had many strong undertows of connection to her family – her aunt, a woman of some considerable character, ran a hotel in the borderlands for years and many a story emerged from there. Derbhle and I planned to meet for lunch to raise a glass to her mulligatawny matriarch and the fictional Imperial Hotel, but Covid kept getting in the way. We eventually celebrated the play in light of her brilliant performance in Conor McPherson's *The Brightening Air* at the Old Vic in London in June 2025 – with many spirits, real and fictional, honoured in the basement bar of that great old theatre. I watched Derbhle walk off into the London night and felt immensely grateful for our connection and understanding.

These are some of the fragments that make the intact world of *Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel*: the shapes and flashes of colour, language and character that come together to make a whole; pulled from air, place, memory, a roadside encounter, days in Languedoc,

a journey with dear friends, the memorable voice of an actor, the sound of piano music from a ruined old bar in north Leitrim. The artist is a magpie, an observer, a predator of sorts, keen and alert, even when seeming distracted or sleepy or focused on some distant horizon. The material is stored away, then the phone rings, a commission arrives, ink rises up in the pen, the screen comes to life, and in they glide, the characters who've been waiting in the shadows, and the minor miracle unfolds.

A última ceia no Hotel Imperial[1]

Vincent Woods (2021)
Tradução de Bruno Ricardo Gessner e Alinne Fernandes (2026)
Adaptação de Alinne Fernandes

Mulligatawny. Não há sopa igual. A favorita da mamãe. Mamãe era danada – entrada, prato principal e pudim. Ainda assim, desejo é desejo... Como aquela vez em que o Charlie me trouxe para jantar no Hotel Claridge's. A melhor sopa mulligatawny de todas. Tão boa que resolvemos passar a noite lá. Me lembro de ele dizer: "Que se dane a pobreza! (*Pausa.*) Matar um império – atacando por dentro. Roma não ruiu em um dia". E o champanhe sibilava. "Moët", disse ele, "apenas o melhor dos champanhes intermediários. Não se derrota um império sem um pouco de grana sobrando no bolso de trás. Guarde um pouco, querida, tenha sempre uma reserva no tanque". E o Charlie tinha bastante naquele tanque grande e quente – montei nele bem no coração de Mayfair. Tinha até papel de parede vermelho aveludado no quarto. E lá estou eu, olhando para dentro dos seus olhos azuis como pedras. E ele me perguntou: "Você gosta de ghee – aquela manteiga indiana – no meu mulligatawny? Eu adoro!", ele diz, suando em bicas. E então ele se levanta... e morre.

Esse foi o fim do Charlie.

O pessoal do hotel foi simpático. Me deixaram ficar mais uma noite. Ótimo buffet de café da manhã, comida à vontade. Tinha até enguia defumada – apesar da tendência a me dar refluxo, e com tudo o que tinha acontecido, meu apetite não estava tão grande...

As coisas que você vê daqui – e ouve dentro da própria cabeça. Margô voltando para casa com sua máscara tricolor, a velha garrafa de gim barato escondida entre as compras respeitáveis. "Um bom repolhozinho para o Jim". Peidão feito um cavalo

[1] This work was supported by Brazil's National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), grant numbers 310189/2022-5 and 408300/2021-3.

fujão, o Jim – dá pra ouvir a um quilômetro de distância. E com o lírio laranja, símbolo-mor protestante, à espreita.

Você não ia querer engatar uma conversa com a Margô. Ela logo começa com um papo de que "Casamentos entre católicos e protestantes são coisa do diabo. Num minuto você está cantando aquele belo hino "Pregado na cruz com Cristo", Marjorie sacudindo o pandeiro à sua esquerda, e, no minuto seguinte, você está olhando para as narinas peludas do velho Padre enquanto aperta a mão dele, e lá vem a hóstia... E aí você cai no poço de silagem, começa a se afogar, e eles ficam ali boquiabertos só assistindo você se afogar. Não se pode confiar neles – com casamento ou sem. Terra, propriedade, é tudo o que querem".

Terra e – como é que os americanos chamam? O mercado imobiliário. Eles adorariam pôr as mãos nisso aqui, esfregar suas fuças nessa janela, admirar a vista do velho Hotel Imperial – a melhor vista da rua principal, como papai sempre dizia. E ele pronunciava "principal" (do mesmo jeito que dizem "cara de pau"). "A rica ambiguidade linguística do nosso povo – onde estaríamos sem ela?". Papai tinha as mãos mais lindas – dedos longos e elegantes. "Não que ele soubesse usá-los", segundo o Evangelho da Mamãe. Ela fez seu próprio testamento e o usou contra todos os interessados. (*Pausa.*) As mãos do papai eram mais felizes tocando piano. Brahms, Beethoven. "Só não me peçam para tocar aquelas melodias sentimentais de Thomas Moore. Ou Percy French. Ou 'Londonderry Air'". Mas é claro que pediam. "Toca 'Come Back Paddy Reilly', Norman". "Manda um 'The Last Rose of Summer', Norman". "'Danny Boy' para o aniversário de Mary, Norman". Ele tocava e dava pra ver que estava sofrendo. Nada comparado ao que sofreu depois – mas como ele iria saber que o arrancariam de casa e dariam um tiro em sua cabeça? Assim é a guerra.

Papai e Charlie. Engraçado como todos os homens parecem morrer por minha causa. Bem, não todos. O Frank não morreu, o que é uma pena. Foi a muito custo que me livrei dele. E será que posso dizer que o Hughie era um homem? Ele era, na verdade, um homenzinho-feto, e eu não suportava isso. Pegamos um ônibus para a clínica – Londres de novo – e o motorista passou na frente do Palácio de Buckingham. "Um pequeno desvio, meninas, para deixá-las mais animadas. Sua Majestade está em casa, vejam, a bandeira foi hasteada". Estavam todas chorando e soluçando no ônibus. Foi hilário. Melhor momento da minha vida – quase – quando tudo acabou e eu pude sair de lá. Deixou uma leve sensação de alegria em mim. O ar estava adorável. O Hughie teria trinta anos agora... Jesus, dá para imaginar?!

Não sei quem foi o espertinho que inventou o apelido "Exército da Fronteira" para o Hotel Imperial. Expressão local – e pegou.

Até pensei em me vingar. Eu me sentaria aqui na janela e daria uma de Lee Harvey Oswald, pra quem não se lembra, é o cara que matou o Kennedy. Não é difícil conseguir uma arma por aqui, se você tem dinheiro. Olharia aquele perna torta de merda indo para o verdadeiro Exército da Fronteira do outro lado da rua e esperaria a hora certa – três chopes, é o tempo que ele leva. Lá vem ele, fica na porta, olha em volta, sozinho, cigarro, isqueiro, o rei da cidade, um grande convencido, levanta a cabeça, eu aponto o cano da arma pra aquela testa grande e lisa. Com o meu olho direito, a mira dança e se estabiliza. E bam! Lá se vai ele.

Ah, seria demais! Maravilhoso. Vai sonhando, Macduff. Uma tragédia shakespeariana. Ainda assim, há muitas maneiras de se esfolar um cavalo. Eles acham que conseguiram. Acham que me compraram com a oferta pelo Hotel. E estou feliz com o preço. É o suficiente para curtir o sol pelo resto dos meus dias. Paris, por um tempo, depois Milão com direito a uma peça no teatro La Scala. E depois uma volta no mediterrâneo. Sentar ao sol, beber e olhar os garçons secando as jovenzinhas. Bem, nunca se sabe. Talvez um pouco disso tudo. Dinheiro sempre deixa as pessoas mais corajosas.

Mas eles nunca colocarão as mãos aqui. Amanhã estarei longe daqui, do Hotel Imperial. Um peixe fora d'água. Na semana que vem, a Coluna de Nelson, o grande símbolo do Império Britânico em solo irlandês, vai explodir em chamas. Dinheiro, de novo. Pode-se comprar qualquer coisa. E nada como um fósforo para provar o ódio.

Lá vem Adjay agora, saindo da Casa da Índia e atravessando a rua. Viva o bastante e você consegue tudo. Ele tem mãos lindas também. Tão elegante, a terrina amarela de cerâmica em cima de uma bandeja de prata, me trazendo a melhor sopa mulligatawny deste lado do rio Ganges.

SHORT STORY

Os mortos

James Joyce
Tradução de José Roberto O'Shea

Lily, a filha do zelador, literalmente, não se aguentava mais em pé. Mal acompanhara um cavalheiro até a despensa atrás do escritório no primeiro andar e de ajudá-lo a tirar o sobretudo quando o som sibilante da campainha da porta ecoou novamente e ela teve de correr pelo corredor vazio para receber mais um convidado. Felizmente não precisava recepcionar as senhoras também. Mas Miss Kate e Miss Julia tinham pensado nisso e convertido o banheiro do segundo andar em toalete feminino. Miss Kate e Miss Julia estavam lá, alvoroçadas e fofocando e rindo, andando uma atrás da outra até o topo da escada, olhando por cima da balaustrada e chamando Lily para perguntar quem havia chegado.

Era sempre um grande acontecimento, a festa anual das irmãs Morkan. Todo mundo que as conhecia vinha à festa, parentes, velhos amigos da família, integrantes do coral em que Julia cantava, alunos de Kate com idade suficiente, e até mesmo alguns dos alunos de Mary Jane. A festa jamais fracassara. Ano após ano tudo sempre transcorrera em grande estilo até onde as pessoas podiam se lembrar; desde que Kate e Julia, depois da morte do irmão, Pat, mudaram-se da casa em Stoney Batter e levaram Mary Jane, única sobrinha, para morar com elas em Usher's Island numa casa escura e lúgubre, cuja parte superior fora alugada de um tal Mr. Fulham, um negociante de cereais que morava no andar térreo. Isso fora há exatamente trinta anos. Mary Jane, que à época era uma garotinha, atualmente era o esteio da casa, pois tocava órgão em Haddington Road. Completara o curso no Conservatório e todo ano apresentava um concerto com seus alunos na sala do segundo andar do Antient Concert Rooms. Muitos de seus alunos provinham de boas famílias residentes na linha de Kingstown e Dalkey. Apesar de idosas, as tias faziam a sua parte. Julia, embora já bastante grisalha, cantava como primeiro soprano na igreja de Adam and Eve e Kate, fraca demais para sair muito à rua, dava lições de música para principiantes no velho piano de armário no quarto dos fundos.

Lily, a filha do zelador, realizava para elas serviços domésticos. Embora levassem uma vida modesta, gostavam de comer bem; tudo do bom e do melhor: alcatra da boa, chá do mais caro e sempre a melhor cerveja em garrafa. Lily raramente cometia deslizes ao encomendar mantimentos, portanto tinha uma boa relação com as três patroas. Eram exigentes, só isso. Mas a única coisa que não toleravam era contestação.

É claro, tinham toda razão de serem exigentes naquela noite. E também já passava das dez horas e nem sinal de Gabriel com a mulher. Além disso, estavam mortas de medo que Freddy Malins aparecesse embriagado. Não queriam por nada deste mundo que algum aluno de Mary Jane o visse em tal estado: e quando estava alto às vezes era muito difícil controlá-lo. Freddy Malins sempre chegava tarde mas elas se perguntavam o que poderia estar detendo Gabriel: e por isso a cada dois minutos elas vinham até a balaustrada para perguntar a Lily se Gabriel ou Freddy tinham chegado.

– Ah, Mr. Conroy – disse Lily a Gabriel ao abrir-lhe a porta –, Miss Kate e Miss Julia estavam pensando que o senhor não chegaria nunca. Boa noite, Mrs. Conroy.
– Suponho que estivessem mesmo – disse Gabriel –, mas elas se esquecem que minha mulher leva três horas intermináveis pra se arrumar.

Parou um instante sobre o capacho, raspando a neve das galochas, enquanto Lily conduzia a esposa até o pé da escada e gritava:

– Miss Kate, Mrs. Conroy está aqui.

Kate e Julia desceram a escada escura um tanto trôpegas. Ambas beijaram a mulher de Gabriel, disseram que ela devia estar morta de cansada e perguntaram se Gabriel viera com ela.

– Aqui estou, confiável como o Correio, tia Kate! Podem subir. Subo já – disse Gabriel, do *hall* escuro.

Ele continuou a limpar vigorosamente os pés enquanto as três mulheres subiam a escada, rindo, em direção ao banheiro feminino. Uma leve camada de neve se formara como uma capa nas ombreiras de seu sobretudo e como biqueiras nas pontas das galochas; e, no momento em que os botões do sobretudo roçaram os frisos da roupa enrijecidos pelo frio, produzindo um leve rangido, um aroma gélido de ar livre exalou das pregas e das dobras.

– Está nevando de novo, Mr. Conroy? – perguntou Lily.

Ela o precedera até a pequena sala para ajudá-lo a tirar o sobretudo. Gabriel sorriu ao ouvir a jovem pronunciar seu sobrenome com três sílabas e olhou para ela. Era uma garota esbelta, na flor da idade, e tinha a tez pálida e os cabelos cor de feno. A luz da lamparina a gás que havia na despensa tornava-a mais pálida ainda. Gabriel a conhecia desde a época em que ela era criança e costumava sentar-se no primeiro degrau da escada embalando uma boneca de pano.

– Está, Lily – ele respondeu –, e acho que vai continuar a noite toda.

Ele olhou para o teto da despensa, que tremia com o arrastar e bater de pés no andar de cima, escutou por um instante o som do piano e voltou a olhar para a moça, que dobrava o sobretudo cuidadosamente, colocando-o no canto de uma prateleira.

– Diga-me, Lily – ele disse, com um tom de voz amável –, você ainda está na escola?
– Ah, não senhor – ela respondeu. – Acabei meus estudos este ano e já chega.
– Ah, nesse caso – disse Gabriel, brincando –, suponho que qualquer dia seremos convidados para o seu casório, hein?
A moça olhou para ele por cima do ombro e disse com amargura:
– Os homens de hoje só querem saber de conversa fiada e de se aproveitar da gente.

Gabriel enrubesceu, como se percebesse que cometera uma gafe e, desviando o olhar, sacudiu os pés para livrar-se das galochas e com o cachecol lustrou os sapatos de couro.

Era um jovem forte, de boa estatura. O tom corado de suas faces subia até quase a testa, onde se dispersava em manchas amorfas e avermelhadas; e em seu rosto escanhoado cintilavam as lentes cristalinas e os aros dourados dos óculos que lhe protegiam os olhos suaves e inquietos. Seu cabelo preto e brilhante era repartido ao meio e penteado numa longa curva por trás das orelhas, onde revelava uma pequena onda formada pela marca do chapéu.

Depois de lustrar os sapatos levantou-se e puxou a sobrecasaca para ajustá-la ao corpo rechonchudo. Então retirou do bolso mais do que depressa uma moeda.

– Ah, Lily – ele disse, enfiando a moeda na mão da moça –, estamos na época do Natal, não é? É só… uma pequena…

E acelerou o passo em direção à porta.

– Que é isso! – exclamou a moça, saindo atrás dele. – Não posso, senhor, não posso aceitar.
– Natal! Natal! – disse Gabriel, quase correndo em direção à escada e fazendo com a mão um gesto de deprecação.

A moça, vendo que ele chegara ao topo da escada, gritou:

– Então, obrigada, senhor!

Ele aguardou do outro lado da porta do salão até que a valsa terminasse, ouvindo o roçar das saias na porta e o arrastar dos pés. Ainda estava abalado devido à resposta inesperada e amarga da moça. A resposta tinha provocado uma melancolia que ele agora tentava afastar arrumando os punhos da camisa e o laço da gravata. Então retirou do bolso do colete um pedaço de papel e passou os olhos sobre os tópicos a serem abordados no discurso. Estava hesitante em relação aos versos de Robert Browning, pois receava que não estivessem ao alcance dos ouvintes. Alguma citação que eles pudessem reconhecer de Shakespeare ou das Melodies seria mais apropriada. O rude estalar de saltos e o arrastar das solas dos sapatos dos homens faziam-no lembrar que o nível cultural dos presentes diferia do seu. Faria papel ridículo ao citar versos que os presentes não pudessem compreender. Pensariam que estava exibindo sua educação universitária. Cometeria um deslize com eles assim como deslizara com a moça na despensa. Adotara o tom errado. O discurso era um equívoco do começo ao fim, um fracasso total.

Naquele momento as tias e a esposa saíram do banheiro feminino. As tias eram duas velhotas pequeninas, vestidas com discrição. Tia Julia era alguns centímetros mais alta. Seus cabelos, presos e encobrindo ligeiramente as orelhas, eram grisalhos; e igualmente acinzentado, com sombreados escuros, era seu rosto grande e flácido. Embora tivesse postura firme e ereta, o olhar vago e a boca entreaberta davam-lhe a aparência de uma mulher que não sabia onde estava nem para onde ia. Tia Kate era mais animada. Seu rosto, mais saudável que o da irmã, era só rugas e sulcos, como uma maçã vermelha e murcha, mas seus cabelos, trançados à moda antiga, conservavam o tom de nozes maduras.

As duas beijaram Gabriel sem a menor cerimônia. Era o sobrinho predileto, filho de Ellen, a irmã mais velha já falecida, que se casara com T. J. Conroy, funcionário do cais do porto.

– A Gretta me disse que vocês não vão tomar um coche de volta a Monkstown no final da noite, Gabriel – disse tia Kate.
– Não – disse Gabriel, virando-se para a mulher. – Basta o que nos aconteceu no ano passado, não é? A senhora está lembrada, tia Kate, do resfriado que a Gretta pegou? As janelas do coche chacoalhando e o vento leste soprando depois que passamos por Merrion. Uma beleza. A Gretta pegou um belo resfriado.

Tia Kate franziu a testa e meneou a cabeça a cada palavra.

– Está certo, Gabriel, está certo – ela disse. – Todo cuidado é pouco.
– Mas quanto à Gretta – disse Gabriel –, ela voltaria pra casa caminhando na neve, se eu deixasse.

Mrs. Conroy riu.

– Não dê ouvidos a ele, tia Kate – ela disse. – É mesmo um chato, com o abajur verde pra proteger a vista do Tom à noite e obrigando o menino a fazer halteres e forçando a Eva a tomar mingau. Pobre criança! E ela não consegue nem olhar pro mingau!… Ah, mas vocês nem imaginam o que ele me faz usar agora!

Deu uma gargalhada e olhou de relance para o marido, cujo olhar cheio de admiração e felicidade perambulava do vestido para o rosto e em seguida para o cabelo da mulher. As duas tias também riram a valer, pois o excesso de preocupação por parte de Gabriel era para elas motivo de constantes brincadeiras.

– Galochas! – disse Mrs. Conroy. – Essa foi a última. Sempre que está molhado lá fora eu tenho de usar minhas galochas. Até numa noite como a de hoje ele queria que eu usasse galochas mas recusei-me. A próxima coisa que vai comprar pra mim será um escafandro.

Gabriel exibiu um sorriso nervoso e endireitou o nó da gravata, tentando aparentar segurança, enquanto tia Kate quase rolava de rir, de tanto que gostou da piada. O sorriso logo desapareceu do rosto de tia Julia e seus olhos sisudos dirigiram-se ao rosto do sobrinho. Depois de uma pausa ela perguntou:

– E o que são galochas, Gabriel?
– Galochas, Julia! – exclamou a irmã. – Deus do céu, você não sabe o que são galochas? A gente as calça por cima dos… por cima dos sapatos, não é, Gretta?

– Sim – disse Mrs. Conroy. – São umas coisas de látex. Cada um de nós dois tem agora um par. Gabriel diz que todo mundo usa galocha no continente.
– Ah, no continente – murmurou tia Julia, meneando lentamente a cabeça.

Gabriel franziu a testa e disse, como se estivesse um pouco zangado:

– Não é nada do outro mundo, mas a Gretta acha muita graça porque diz que a palavra a faz lembrar dos Christy Minstrels.
– Mas diga-me, Gabriel – disse tia Kate, com muito tato. – Decerto, você providenciou o quarto. A Gretta estava dizendo…
– Ah, o quarto está garantido – replicou Gabriel. – Fiz reservas no Gresham.
– Com certeza – disse tia Kate –, foi a melhor providência a ser tomada. E as crianças, Gretta, você não fica preocupada?
– Ah, é só uma noite – disse Mrs. Conroy. – Além disso, a Bessie vai cuidar delas.
– Com certeza – disse tia Kate novamente. – Que sossego é ter uma moça como aquela, em quem se pode confiar! Vejam essa Lily, não sei o que está acontecendo com ela ultimamente. Já não é mais a mesma.

Gabriel estava prestes a fazer algumas perguntas a respeito desse assunto, mas ela desviara subitamente o olhar em direção à irmã, que começara a descer a escada e agora se curvava por cima da balaustrada.

– Essa agora, por favor! – ela disse quase irritada – Aonde vai a Julia? Julia! Julia! Aonde você vai?

Julia, que alcançara a metade da escada, voltou e anunciou calmamente:

– Freddy chegou.

Naquele momento uma salva de palmas e os acordes finais da pianista indicavam que a valsa tinha terminado. A porta do salão foi aberta pelo lado de dentro e alguns pares saíram. Tia Kate puxou Gabriel subitamente para um canto e murmurou-lhe ao ouvido:

– Dê um pulo lá embaixo, Gabriel, por favor, e veja se ele está em condições, e não permita que suba se estiver alto. Tenho certeza de que está alto. Tenho certeza.

Gabriel foi até a escada e pôs-se a escutar. Ouvia duas pessoas falando na despensa.

Então reconheceu a risada de Freddy Malins. Desceu a escada pisando duro.

– Que alívio – disse tia Kate a Mrs. Conroy – Gabriel estar aqui. Sempre fico mais tranquila quando ele está aqui… Julia, Miss Daly e Miss Power vão aceitar um refresco. Obrigada pela bela valsa, Miss Daly. Foi lindo.

Um sujeito alto, de rosto murcho, bigode rijo e grisalho e pele morena, que saía da sala ao lado de sua parceira, disse:

– E nós podemos beber alguma coisa, também, Miss Morkan?
– Julia – disse tia Kate sumariamente –, aqui estão Mr. Browne e Miss Furlong. Leve-os para dentro, Julia, com Miss Daly e Miss Power.
– Estou sempre bem acompanhado – disse Mr. Browne, apertando os lábios até eriçar o bigode e sorrindo com todas as rugas. – A senhora sabe, Miss Morkan, o motivo para que gostem tanto de mim é que…

Não terminou a frase mas, percebendo que tia Kate tinha se afastado e que não o escutaria, conduziu imediatamente as três jovens à sala dos fundos. No meio da sala havia duas mesas quadradas, lado a lado, sobre as quais tia Julia e o zelador estavam estendendo uma grande toalha. No aparador havia travessas e pratos e copos e montes de facas e garfos e colheres. A tampa do piano de armário também servia de aparador para salgados e doces. Ao lado de um aparador menor num canto dois rapazes bebiam refresco.

Mr. Browne dirigiu suas protegidas para lá e convidou-as, em tom de galhofa, a beber do ponche especialmente preparado para as senhoras, quentinho, forte e doce. De vez que elas disseram que não bebiam nada forte, ele abriu três garrafas de limonada. Então pediu licença a um dos rapazes e, apoderando-se da garrafa, serviu-se de uma generosa dose de uísque. Os rapazes olharam-no com respeito enquanto ele experimentava a bebida.

– Que Deus me ajude – ele disse, sorrindo –, é prescrição médica.

Em seu rosto murcho abriu-se um sorriso largo, e as três jovens responderam ao gracejo com sonoras risadinhas que lhes sacudiram o corpo, fazendo-lhes tremer os ombros num gesto nervoso. A mais afoita disse:

– Ora, Mr. Browne, tenho certeza de que o médico nunca lhe prescreveu esse tipo de remédio.

Mr. Browne tomou mais um gole do uísque e disse, fazendo uma imitação desajeitada:

– Sabem de uma coisa, eu sou como a célebre Mrs. Cassidy, que supostamente dizia: Olha, Mary Grimes, se eu não estiver bebendo, obrigue-me a fazê-lo, pois sei que quero beber.

Seu rosto aquecido tinha se aproximado com excessiva intimidade e a sua voz descambara para o sotaque rude das classes mais baixas de Dublin, de modo que as moças, instintivamente, calaram-se após o gracejo. Miss Furlong, que era aluna de Mary Jane, perguntou a Miss Daly o nome da bela valsa que acabara de executar; e Mr. Browne, vendo-se ignorado, virou-se prontamente para os dois rapazes, que se mostraram mais receptivos.

Uma jovem de faces rosadas e vestido violeta entrou agitada na sala, batendo palmas e gritando:

– Quadrilles! Quadrilles!

Nos calcanhares dela veio tia Kate, gritando:

– Dois cavalheiros e três damas, Mary Jane!
– Ah, aqui estão Mr. Bergin e Mr. Kerrigan – disse Mary Jane. – Mr. Kerrigan, o senhor dançaria com Miss Power? Miss Furlong, por favor, a senhora fica com Mr. Bergin. Ah, agora está tudo certo.
– Três damas, Mary Jane – disse tia Kate.

Os dois rapazes perguntaram às damas se estas lhes dariam o prazer de dançar, e Mary Jane voltou-se para Miss Daly.

– Ah, Miss Daly! Você é mesmo muito gentil, depois de tocar duas valsas, mas estamos com poucas damas esta noite.
– Não tem o menor problema, Miss Morkan.
– Mas eu tenho um par encantador para você, Mr. Bartell D'Arcy, o tenor. Vou fazer com que ele cante mais tarde. Toda Dublin está empolgada com ele.

– Voz adorável, voz adorável! – disse tia Kate.

No momento em que o piano repetiu a introdução da primeira quadrilha Mary Jane apressou-se em conduzir seu grupo para fora do salão. Mal haviam saído quando tia Julia entrou, olhando para trás.

– O que houve, Julia? – perguntou tia Kate preocupada. – Quem é?

Julia, que carregava uma pilha de guardanapos, virou-se para a irmã e disse, calmamente, como se a pergunta lhe causasse espécie:

– É o Freddy, Kate, e o Gabriel está com ele.

De fato, logo atrás dela Gabriel podia ser visto guiando os passos de Freddy Malins no patamar da escada. Este, homem de seus quarenta anos de idade, tinha a altura e o porte de Gabriel, e os ombros um tanto caídos. Seu rosto era gordo e pálido e os únicos vestígios de cor estavam localizados nos lóbulos carnudos das orelhas e nas narinas largas. Tinha traços grosseiros, nariz chato, a fronte convexa e lábios inchados e protuberantes. As pálpebras pesadas e o cabelo ralo e emaranhado conferiam-lhe um aspecto sonolento. Gargalhava estridentemente de uma história que contara a Gabriel enquanto subiam a escada e ao mesmo tempo esfregava o olho esquerdo com as costas do punho esquerdo.

– Boa noite, Freddy – disse tia Julia.

Freddy Malins deu boa-noite às irmãs Morkan de um modo que parecia displicente em virtude da voz sempre um pouco engrolada e, vendo que Mr. Browne sorria para ele ao lado do aparador, atravessou um tanto cambaleante a sala e começou a repetir à meia voz a história que acabara de contar a Gabriel.

– Ele não está tão ruim assim, não é? – disse tia Kate a Gabriel.

O cenho de Gabriel estava carregado mas ele ergueu as sobrancelhas prontamente e respondeu:

– Não, não! Mal dá pra se notar.

– Mas que sujeitinho terrível! – ela disse. – Pensar que a pobre mãe na véspera do Ano Novo o fez jurar abstinência. Mas, vamos, Gabriel, para o salão.

Antes de sair da sala de jantar ao lado de Gabriel, ela fez um sinal de advertência com o dedo em riste para Mr. Browne. Mr. Browne balançou a cabeça indicando que compreendera o aviso e, assim que ela se foi, disse a Freddy Malins:

– Escute aqui, Freddy, vou lhe servir um bom copo de limonada pra você se sentir melhor.

Freddy Malins, que se aproximava do clímax da história, recusou a oferta com um gesto impaciente mas Mr. Browne, depois de chamar a atenção de Freddy Malins para o estado lastimável de seus trajes, serviu-lhe um copo cheio de limonada. A mão esquerda de Freddy Malins aceitou mecanicamente o copo, já que a mão direita, também mecanicamente, ocupava-se em ajeitar a roupa. Mr. Browne, cujo rosto tornara a se enrugar num sorriso, serviu-se de uísque enquanto Freddy Malins, antes mesmo de chegar ao clímax da história, explodia num ataque de riso estridente misturado a um acesso de tosse e, colocando na mesa o copo intato e transbordante, esfregava as costas da mão esquerda no olho esquerdo, tentando repetir a última frase, à medida que o acesso de riso lhe permitisse.

*

Gabriel não conseguia prestar atenção à peça clássica, cheia de floreios e trechos difíceis, com a qual Mary Jane se graduara no Conservatório e que ora executava diante do salão silencioso. Gostava de música, mas, para ele, a peça que ela tocava era desprovida de melodia e ele duvidava que fosse melódica para os outros ouvintes, embora estes tivessem insistido para que Mary Jane tocasse algo. Quatro rapazes, que ao ouvirem os primeiros acordes do piano tinham vindo da sala de jantar até a porta do salão, em questão de minutos retiraram-se discretamente, dois de cada vez. As únicas pessoas que pareciam acompanhar a música eram a própria Mary Jane, cujas mãos deslizavam pelo teclado e, nas pausas, dele afastavam-se tal e qual uma sacerdotisa durante uma imprecação, e tia Kate de pé a seu lado virando as páginas da partitura.

Os olhos de Gabriel, ofuscados pelo assoalho encerado, que brilhava embaixo do grande candelabro, desviaram-se para a parede que ficava atrás do piano. Nela havia um quadro da cena da sacada de Romeu e Julieta e ao lado um outro quadro tecido por tia Julia quando menina, em lã vermelha, azul e marrom, com os dois principezinhos

assassinados na Torre. Com certeza, aquele tipo de trabalho manual era ensinado na escola que elas frequentaram quando meninas, pois, como presente de aniversário, sua mãe bordara para ele umas cabecinhas de raposa num colete de seda lilás forrado de cetim marrom e com botões redondos em formato de amora. Era estranho que sua mãe não tivesse nenhum talento musical, mas tia Kate costumava referir-se a ela como o cérebro da família Morkan. Tanto Kate quanto Julia sempre deixavam transparecer certo orgulho da irmã sisuda e conservadora. Havia um retrato dela em frente ao espelho do aparador. Ela trazia ao colo um livro aberto onde apontava alguma coisa para Constantino, sentado a seus pés e vestido de marinheiro. Os nomes dos filhos tinham sido escolhas dela, visto que ela era muito ciosa da importância da vida em família. Graças a ela, Constantino era hoje pároco de Balbriggan e, graças a ela, Gabriel graduara-se pela Royal University. Uma sombra abateu-se em seu rosto quando se lembrou da objeção carrancuda que ela fizera a seu casamento. Ainda sofria ao se lembrar de certas frases sarcásticas; certa vez, a mãe chamara Gretta de roceira esperta e isso, absolutamente, não era verdade. Foi Gretta quem tratou dela durante o longo período terminal de sua doença na casa de Monkstown.

Ele sabia que Mary Jane se aproximava do final da peça pois ela agora tocava novamente a melodia do prelúdio, executando uma série de floreios após cada acorde e enquanto aguardava o desfecho seu ressentimento esmoreceu. A peça encerrou com um harpejo de oitavas agudas e uma forte oitava final no grave. Uma calorosa salva de palmas felicitou Mary Jane que, enrubescendo e enrolando às pressas a partitura, fugiu do salão. Os aplausos mais vigorosos partiram dos quatro rapazes de pé próximos a porta, que tinham se retirado para a sala de jantar no início da apresentação e que voltaram assim que o piano silenciou.

Organizou-se uma dança típica, lanceiros. Gabriel fez par com Miss Ivors. Ela era uma jovem franca e falante, com rosto sardento e grandes olhos castanhos. Não usava decote e o grande broche preso à gola de sua blusa estampava o emblema irlandês.

Quando tomaram seus lugares ela disse bruscamente.

– Tenho uma conta a acertar com você.
– Comigo? – disse Gabriel.

Ela meneou a cabeça com ar sério.

– De que se trata? – perguntou Gabriel, sorrindo diante do ar solene da jovem.
– Quem é G. C.? – respondeu Miss Ivors, olhando firme para ele.

Gabriel enrubesceu e começava a franzir a testa, como se não compreendesse, quando ela disse asperamente:

– Ah, como ele é inocente! Descobri que você escreve para o Daily Express. Não se envergonha?
– Por que haveria de me envergonhar? – perguntou Gabriel, piscando os olhos e tentando sorrir.
– Pois eu sinto vergonha por você – disse Miss Ivors com franqueza. – Escrever pra um jornal como aquele. Não imaginava que você fosse anglófilo.

Um ar de perplexidade estampou-se no rosto de Gabriel. Era verdade que escrevia uma coluna literária todas as quartas-feiras para o Daily Express, pelo que recebia quinze shillings. Mas isso certamente não queria dizer que fosse anglófilo. Os livros que ele recebia para resenhar eram quase mais gratificantes que o mísero cheque. Sentia imenso prazer em manusear capas e virar páginas de livros que acabaram de sair da máquina tipográfica. Quase todos os dias quando terminava de dar suas aulas costumava caminhar pelo cais até os sebos, o Hickey's em Bachelor's Walk, o Webb's ou o Massey's, em Aston's Quay, ou o O'Clohissey's, que ficava numa travessa. Não sabia como se defender da acusação. Queria dizer que a literatura estava acima da política. Mas eram amigos havia muitos anos e suas carreiras tinham transcorrido paralelamente, primeiro na universidade e depois como professores: não ousaria responder-lhe com uma frase pedante. Continuou a piscar os olhos, tentando sorrir, e murmurou um tanto desajeitado que não via nada de político no ato de escrever resenhas literárias.

Quando chegou a vez de os dois atravessarem o salão ele ainda estava perplexo e avoado. Miss Ivors tomou-lhe calidamente a mão e disse com um tom de voz suave e amistoso:

– É claro que eu estava só brincando. Vamos, é nossa vez de atravessar o salão.

Quando voltaram a ficar lado a lado ela começou a falar a respeito da universidade e Gabriel sentiu-se mais à vontade. Uma amiga tinha-lhe mostrado a crítica que ele fizera dos poemas de Browning. Assim descobrira o segredo: mas ela gostara imensamente da resenha. Então disse, subitamente:

– Ah, Conroy, você faria uma excursão às Ilhas Aran nó próximo verão? Vamos ficar por lá um mês inteiro. Vai ser maravilhoso, em pleno Atlântico. Você deveria ir. Mr. Clancy vai, e também Mr. Kilkelly e Kathleen Kearney. Seria maravilhoso para a Gretta, também, se ela quisesse ir. Ela é de Connacht, não é?

– A família dela – disse Gabriel secamente.
– Mas você vai, não vai? – disse Miss Ivors, tocando o braço dele com sua mão cálida e certa ansiedade.
– A questão é – disse Gabriel – que já fiz planos para ir…
– Ir pra onde? – perguntou Miss Ivors.
– Bem, é que todo ano eu faço uma viagem de bicicleta com uns amigos e assim…
– Mas onde? – perguntou Miss Ivors.
– Bem, costumamos ir à França ou à Bélgica ou talvez à Alemanha – disse Gabriel, com certo embaraço.
– E por que você vai à França e à Bélgica – disse Miss Ivors – em vez de conhecer o seu país?
– Bem – disse Gabriel –, por um lado pra praticar os idiomas e por outro pra mudar de ares.
– E você não precisa praticar o seu próprio idioma, o irlandês? – perguntou Miss Ivors.
– Bem – disse Gabriel –, se a questão é essa, você sabe, irlandês não é o meu idioma.

Os pares mais próximos tinham se voltado e prestavam atenção ao interrogatório. Nervoso, Gabriel olhava para a direita e para a esquerda e tentava manter o bom humor em meio àquela situação constrangedora que começava a causar uma vermelhidão em sua fronte.

– E por que não visita a sua terra – prosseguiu Miss Ivors –, a respeito da qual é tão ignorante, a sua gente, o seu país?
– Ah, pra dizer a verdade – retrucou Gabriel subitamente – estou farto do meu país, farto!
– Por quê? – perguntou Miss Ivors.

Gabriel calou-se pois a resposta o deixara exaltado.

– Por quê? – repetiu Miss Ivors.

Chegara o momento da dança em que tinham de fazer a visita a outros pares e, como ele nada respondera, Miss Ivors disse com amabilidade:

– Está claro que você não tem o que responder.

Gabriel tentou disfarçar o nervosismo dançando com grande energia. Evitava olhá-la nos olhos pois vira em seu rosto um ar de rancor. Mas quando voltaram a se encontrar na roda ficou surpreso ao sentir que ela lhe apertava a mão com firmeza. Ela fitou-o inquisitivamente até fazê-lo sorrir. Então, no momento em que a roda ia recomeçar a girar, ela ficou na ponta dos pés e sussurrou-lhe ao ouvido:

– Anglófilo!

Quando a dança terminou Gabriel dirigiu-se a um dos cantos do salão, onde a mãe de Freddy Malins estava sentada. Era uma velhota corpulenta e doente, de cabeça branca. Sua voz falhava como a do filho e ela era ligeiramente gaga. Tinha sido informada de que Freddy chegara e que estava razoavelmente sóbrio. Gabriel perguntou-lhe se tinha feito uma boa travessia. Ela morava em Glasgow com a filha casada e visitava Dublin uma vez por ano. Ela respondeu placidamente que fizera uma travessia excelente e que o capitão tinha sido muito atencioso com ela. Falou também a respeito da linda casa da filha em Glasgow e do ótimo círculo de amizades que tinha. Enquanto ela tagarelava, Gabriel procurava tirar da cabeça o incidente desagradável entre ele e Miss Ivors. É claro que a moça ou mulher, ou seja lá o que fosse, era bastante patriota, mas tudo tem sua hora. Talvez ele não devesse ter respondido daquela maneira. Mas ela não tinha o direito de chamá-lo de anglófilo em público, nem de brincadeira. Tentara ridicularizá-lo em público, fazendo-lhe perguntas embaraçosas e fitando-o com aqueles olhos de coelha.

Viu a esposa caminhando em sua direção em meio aos pares que valsavam. Quando chegou ao seu lado, ela lhe disse ao ouvido:

– Gabriel, tia Kate quer saber se você vai trinchar o ganso, como de costume. Miss Daly vai cortar o pernil e eu vou servir o suflê.
– Está bem – disse Gabriel.
– Ela vai mandar as crianças comerem lá dentro assim que terminar esta valsa para que possamos ter a mesa só para nós.
– Você estava dançando? – perguntou Gabriel.
– Claro que estava. Você não me viu? Que discussão foi aquela com Molly Ivors?

– Nada. Por quê? Ela comentou alguma coisa com você?
– Por alto. Estou tentando convencer esse tal Mr. D'Arcy a cantar para nós. Ele é muito pretensioso, eu acho.
– Não foi discussão – disse Gabriel, mal-humorado –, ela queria que eu fizesse uma viagem ao oeste da Irlanda e eu disse que não iria.

A esposa juntou as mãos com alegria e deu um pequeno salto.

– Ah, vamos, Gabriel! – ela disse. – Eu adoraria rever Galway.
– Você pode ir, se quiser – disse Gabriel com frieza.

Ela fitou-o por um instante, então virou-se para Mrs. Malins e disse:

– Eis um bom marido, Mrs. Malins.

Enquanto ela se afastava pelo meio do salão, Mrs. Malins, sem se abalar com a interrupção, começou a falar a Gabriel dos lindos recantos e das lindas paisagens da Escócia. O genro todo ano levava a família aos lagos onde costumavam pescar. O genro era um pescador de mão cheia. Certa vez pescara um peixe, um peixão lindo, que o cozinheiro do hotel preparou para o jantar.

Gabriel mal escutava o que ela dizia. Agora que se aproximava a hora da ceia ele voltara a pensar no discurso e na citação. Ao ver Freddy Malins atravessando o salão para falar com a mãe, Gabriel cedeu-lhe a cadeira e retirou-se para o vão da janela. O salão já estava vazio e da sala de jantar ouvia-se o tilintar de pratos e talheres. As pessoas que permaneciam no salão pareciam cansadas de dançar e conversavam à meia voz em pequenos grupos. Gabriel tamborilou os dedos trêmulos e cálidos na vidraça fria da janela. Como devia estar frio lá fora! Como seria agradável sair caminhando sozinho ao longo do rio e pelo parque! A neve estaria encobrindo os galhos das árvores e formando um chapéu lustroso no topo do monumento em homenagem a Wellington. Como seria mais agradável ficar lá fora do que sentar-se àquela mesa!

Examinou os tópicos do discurso: hospitalidade irlandesa, tristes recordações, as Três Graças, Páris, a citação de Browning. Lembrou-se de uma frase que escrevera na resenha: *Tem-se a sensação de estar ouvindo uma música atormentada pelo pensamento*. Miss Ivors elogiara a resenha. Teria sido sincera? Teria ela vida própria por trás de todo aquele propagandismo? Nunca houvera nenhum ressentimento entre os dois até aquela noite.

Sentia-se abatido diante da ideia de que ela estaria à mesa do jantar, observando-o com aquele olhar crítico e inquisitivo enquanto ele discursasse. Talvez nem se importasse em vê-lo fracassar no discurso. Veio-lhe à mente uma ideia encorajadora. Ele diria, em alusão a tia Kate e tia Julia: *Senhoras e Senhores, a geração que ora declina entre nós pode ter tido seus defeitos mas a meu ver possui certas qualidades, como hospitalidade, senso de humor, simpatia, solidariedade, as quais a nova geração séria e intelectualizada que ora cresce entre nós parece carecer*. Ótimo: palavras perfeitas para Miss Ivors. O que importava se suas tias não passavam de duas velhas ignorantes?

Um burburinho na sala atraiu-lhe a atenção. Mr. Browne aproximava-se pela porta, escoltando galantemente tia Julia, que se apoiava em seu braço, sorrindo e inclinando a cabeça para o lado. Uma salva de palmas um tanto fraca acompanhou-a até o piano e então, quando Mary Jane sentou-se na banqueta, e tia Julia, que já não sorria, voltou-se de modo a projetar a voz na sala, as palmas gradualmente se estancaram. Gabriel reconheceu o prelúdio. Era uma antiga canção de tia Julia: *Arrayed for the Bridal*.[1] Sua voz, forte e límpida, dominava os trinados que embelezavam a melodia e embora cantasse numa cadência acelerada não atropelava um floreio sequer. Acompanhar aquela voz, sem olhar para o rosto da cantora, era deixar-se levar num voo veloz e seguro. Gabriel e os que estavam a sua volta aplaudiram vigorosamente quando a canção terminou, unindo-se aos aplausos calorosos que vieram da sala de jantar. A ovação parecia tão autêntica que um pingo de rubor surgiu nas faces de tia Julia no momento em que se curvava para recolocar sobre o atril o velho livro de partituras encadernado em couro, com suas iniciais gravadas na capa. Freddy Malins, que inclinara a cabeça para ouvir melhor, ainda aplaudia depois que todos tinham parado e tagarelava com a mãe, que meneava a cabeça com um ar grave em sinal de aprovação. Quando finalmente parou de aplaudir, ele se levantou com um salto e atravessou a sala a passos largos em direção à tia Julia, cuja mão ele espremeu entre as suas, agitando-a pois as palavras lhe faltavam ou a rouquidão o impedia de falar.

– Eu estava acabando de dizer pra mamãe – ele disse – que nunca ouvi a senhora cantar tão bem, nunca. Nunca ouvi a voz da senhora tão bela quanto esta noite. Ora! Acredita em mim? É a pura verdade. Palavra de honra que é verdade. Nunca ouvi a sua voz tão límpida e tão… tão clara e límpida, nunca.

[1] Isto é, "vestida para as núpcias". N. do T.

Tia Julia abriu um grande sorriso e murmurou alguma coisa a respeito de elogios enquanto se desvencilhava das mãos dele. Mr. Browne estendeu-lhe a mão e disse aos que estavam perto dele como se fosse um mestre-de-cerimônias apresentando uma estrela à plateia:

– Miss Julia Morkan, minha descoberta mais recente!

Ele ria a valer de suas próprias palavras, quando Freddy Malins virou-se para ele e disse:

– Olhe, Browne, não sei se você está falando sério, mas uma descoberta melhor do que essa você não faria. O que eu posso dizer é que nunca a ouvi cantar tão bem assim desde que aqui compareço. É a pura verdade.
– Nem eu – disse Mr. Browne. – Acho que a voz dela progrediu muito.

Tia Julia deu de ombros e disse com um orgulho contido:

– Trinta anos atrás até que a minha voz não era das piores.
– Eu sempre disse pra Julia – disse tia Kate enfaticamente – que ela estava perdendo tempo naquele coral. Mas ela nunca ouve meus conselhos.

Ela se virou como se desejasse apelar para o bom senso dos circunstantes no sentido de coibir uma criança teimosa enquanto tia Julia olhava absorta para um ponto a sua frente, com um sorriso vago e reminiscente estampado no rosto.

– Não – continuou tia Kate –, ela nunca ouviu nem obedeceu a ninguém, se matando dia e noite naquele coral, noite e dia. Seis horas da manhã, em pleno dia de Natal! E tudo isso pra quê?
– Não seria para honrar a Deus, tia Kate? – perguntou Mary Jane, girando na banqueta do piano e sorrindo.

Tia Kate voltou-se indignada para a sobrinha e disse:

– Eu sei muito bem que é pra honrar a Deus, Mary Jane, mas não vejo nada de honrado quando o Papa manda botar pra fora do coral senhoras que se mataram a vida toda e recruta uns fedelhos pra ocuparem seus lugares. Suponho que seja pelo bem da Igreja, já que a medida partiu do Papa. Mas não é justo, Mary Jane, e não está certo.

Ela se deixara levar pela emoção e teria prosseguido em defesa da irmã, visto que o assunto era para ela algo não resolvido, mas Mary Jane, notando que os pares tinham voltado, interveio em tom apaziguador:

– Calma, tia Kate, a senhora está fazendo um escândalo na frente de Mr. Browne, que pertence a outra fé.

Tia Kate virou-se para Mr. Browne, que sorria em virtude da referência feita a sua religião, e apressou-se em dizer:

– Ah, eu não duvido que o Papa esteja certo. Não passo de uma velha ignorante e não me atreveria a uma coisa dessas. Mas existe algo que se chama cortesia e gratidão. E se eu estivesse no lugar da Julia, eu teria dito isso ao próprio Padre Healy…
– E além do mais, tia Kate – disse Mary Jane –, estamos todos com fome e quando estamos com fome somos todos uns briguentos.
– E quando estamos com sede também somos briguentos – aduziu Mr. Browne.
– Então é melhor começarmos a cear – disse Mary Jane – e acabar essa discussão mais tarde.

No patamar da escada, em frente à porta do salão, Gabriel encontrou a esposa e Mary Jane tentando convencer Miss Ivors a ficar para a ceia. Mas Miss Ivors, que já estava de chapéu e agora abotoava a capa, recusava-se a permanecer. Não tinha o menor apetite e já passava da hora de se retirar.

– Só mais dez minutos, Molly – disse Mrs. Conroy. – Dez minutos não vão atrasá-la tanto assim.
– Só pra dar uma beliscada – disse Mary Jane –, depois de tanto que você dançou.
– Realmente, não posso – disse Miss Ivors.
– Estou achando que você não se divertiu nada – disse Mary Jane decepcionada.
– Claro que me diverti, pode ter certeza – disse Miss Ivors. – Mas agora tenho mesmo de ir embora.
– Mas como você vai pra casa? – perguntou Mrs. Conroy.
– Ah, daqui até o cais é um pulinho.
Gabriel hesitou um instante e disse:
– Se me permite, Miss Ivors, acompanho a senhorita até a sua casa, já que precisa mesmo ir embora.

Miss Ivors desvencilhou-se deles.

– Nem me fale nisso! – ela exclamou. – Pelo amor de Deus, vão jantar e não se preocupem comigo. Sei muito bem cuidar de mim mesma.
– Você é de fato um número, Molly – disse Mrs. Conroy com franqueza.
– *Beannacht libh*![2] – gritou Miss Ivors, em meio a uma risada, enquanto descia a escada correndo.

Mary Jane assistiu à cena, com uma expressão de perplexidade estampada no rosto, enquanto Mrs. Conroy debruçou-se sobre a balaustrada para ouvir bater a porta do *hall*. Gabriel perguntou a si mesmo se não seria ele o responsável por aquela saída repentina. Mas ela não parecia estar mal-humorada: fora embora rindo. Ele ficou olhando pensativo para a escada.

Naquele momento tia Kate surgiu com seus passos trôpegos, vindo da sala de jantar, torcendo as mãos em sinal de desespero.

– Onde está o Gabriel? – ela gritou. – Onde se meteu o Gabriel? Estão todos esperando lá dentro, e ninguém para trinchar o ganso!
– Aqui estou, tia Kate! – exclamou Gabriel, tomado de súbita animação. – Pronto para trinchar um bando de gansos, se for preciso.

Um ganso gordo e bem assado encontrava-se numa das extremidades da mesa e na outra, em cima de uma camada de papel amassado e enfeitado com raminhos de salsa, havia um grande pernil sem pele, polvilhado com farinha de rosca, o osso meticulosamente envolto com papel cortado em franjas e ao lado via-se um peso de carne assada. Entre os pratos rivais, posicionados nas extremidades da mesa, havia fileiras de acompanhamentos: dois pequenos potes com gelatina, vermelha e amarela; uma travessa rasa cheia de cubos de manjar branco com calda vermelha; uma grande travessa verde, em formato de folha e com o cabo imitando um talo, contendo rubros cachos de passas e amêndoas descascadas; duas travessas formando par, contendo figos de Smirna arrumados na forma de retângulos; um pudim com pedacinhos de nozes na cobertura; um pequeno pote com bombons de chocolate e confeitos embrulhados em papel dourado e prateado; e uma jarra de cristal contendo longos talos de aipo. No centro da mesa, como sentinelas guardando uma fruteira que exibia uma pirâmide de

[2] Isto é, literalmente, "bençãos para vocês", ou seja, "adeus". N. do T.

laranjas e maçãs americanas, havia duas garrafas bojudas de vidro lapidado, uma com vinho do Porto e a outra com *sherry*. Sobre o piano um pudim aguardava numa enorme travessa amarela e atrás do pudim havia três esquadrões de garrafas de cerveja e água mineral, perfilados de acordo com as cores dos uniformes: as garrafas dos dois primeiros esquadrões eram escuras, com rótulos nas cores marrom e vermelho, e as do terceiro eram menores e brancas, com faixas verdes enviesadas.

Gabriel ocupou seu posto resolutamente à cabeceira da mesa e, após examinar o fio da faca de trinchar, enterrou com firmeza o garfo no ganso. Sentia-se confiante, pois trinchava uma ave como ninguém e gostava imensamente de ocupar a cabeceira de uma mesa farta.

– Miss Furlong, o que a senhora deseja? – ele perguntou. – Uma asa ou uma fatia do peito?
– Só uma fatiazinha do peito.
– E a senhorita, Miss Higgins?
– Ah, como queira, Mr. Conroy.

Enquanto Gabriel e Miss Daly serviam ganso, pernil ou carne assada, Lily levava de convidado a convidado uma travessa de batatas empanadas quentes cobertas por um guardanapo branco. Isso tinha sido ideia de Mary Jane que sugerira também purê de maçã para acompanhar o ganso, mas tia Kate dissera que ganso assado simples, sem purê de maçã, sempre fora mais do que suficiente. Mary Jane servia os alunos e escolhia para eles os melhores pedaços, e tia Kate e tia Julia abriam e traziam de cima do piano garrafas de cerveja para os cavalheiros e garrafas de água mineral para as damas. Havia uma certa balbúrdia, muito riso e ruído, ruído de vozes fazendo e corrigindo pedidos, de facas e garfos, de rolhas saltando. Gabriel começou a servir novas porções assim que terminou a primeira rodada antes mesmo de ter se servido. Houve protestos generalizados e veementes e ele aquiesceu, tomando um grande gole de cerveja, pois a função de trinchar o ganso o deixara encalorado. Mary Jane sentou-se discretamente para jantar mas tia Kate e tia Julia continuavam a cambalear à volta da mesa, uma atrás da outra, uma atrapalhando a outra, uma dando à outra ordens que não eram ouvidas. Mr. Browne exortou-as a se sentarem para jantar e Gabriel fez o mesmo mas elas afirmavam que mais tarde comeriam, e finalmente Freddy Malins levantou-se e, agarrando tia Kate, achatou-a na cadeira em meio à risada geral.

Quando todos estavam bem servidos, Gabriel disse, sorrindo:

– Agora, se alguém mais quiser um pouco do que as pessoas vulgares chamam de boia que se manifeste.

Um clamor de vozes insistiu para que ele começasse a cear e Lily aproximou-se, trazendo-lhe três batatas por ela especialmente guardadas.

– Muito bem – disse Gabriel, educadamente, enquanto tomava mais um gole de cerveja –, por favor, esqueçam que eu existo, senhoras e senhores, por alguns minutos.

Começou a comer e se manteve fora da conversa que transcorria na mesa enquanto Lily retirava os pratos. O assunto era a companhia de ópera que ora se apresentava no Theatre Royal. Mr. Bartell D'Arcy, o tenor, jovem moreno com um belo bigode, rasgou elogios à primeira contralto da companhia mas Miss Furlong disse que ela tivera uma performance um tanto vulgar. Freddy Malins disse que um líder negro estava cantando na segunda parte do show de variedades do Gaiety e que o sujeito era dono de uma das mais belas vozes de tenor que ele ouvira na sua vida.

– O senhor já teve a oportunidade de ouvi-lo? – ele perguntou a Mr. Bartell D'Arcy sentado do outro lado da mesa.
– Não – respondeu Mr. Bartell D'Arcy com descaso.
– Pois é – Freddy Malins explicou –, eu gostaria de saber o que o senhor acha dele. Eu acho que ele tem uma grande voz.
– Só mesmo o Teddy,[3] pra descobrir as coisas que valem a pena – disse Mr. Browne para que todos ouvissem.
– E por que ele não teria uma boa voz? – perguntou Freddy Malins com aspereza. – Só porque é negro?

Ninguém respondeu à pergunta e Mary Jane conduziu a conversa de volta à ópera legítima. Um de seus alunos dera-lhe um ingresso para assistir à uma apresentação de *Mignon*. É claro que a produção tinha sido muito boa, disse ela, mas não fora capaz de tirar da cabeça a pobre Georgina Burns. Mr. Browne lembrava-se de uma época ainda mais remota, quando as antigas companhias italianas costumavam vir a Dublin – Tieljens, Ilma de Murzka, Campanini, a grande Trebelli, Guiglini, Ravelli, Aramburo. Naquele tempo, disse ele, ouvia-se em Dublin canto de verdade. Contou também como a galeria superior do velho Theatre Royal costumava lotar noite após noite, e como certa noite um

[3] Mr. Browne se confunde ao mencionar o primeiro nome de Malins. N. do T.

tenor italiano bisou cinco vezes o "Deixe-me tombar como soldado", sem omitir o dó de peito uma única vez, e ainda como, em seu entusiasmo, os rapazes que frequentavam as galerias às vezes desatrelavam os cavalos do coche de uma *prima donna* e puxavam eles mesmos o veículo até o hotel em que ela se hospedava. Por que não encenavam mais as grandes óperas, ele perguntou, *Dinorah, Lucrezia Borgia*? Porque não encontravam vozes capazes: eis o porquê.

– Ora – disse Mr. Bartell D'Arcy –, suponho que hoje em dia existam cantores tão bons como os de antigamente.
– Onde estão eles? – perguntou Mr. Browne em tom de desafio.
– Em Londres, Paris, Milão – disse Mr. Bartell D'Arcy com amabilidade. – Suponho que Caruso, por exemplo, seja muito bom, se não for melhor que qualquer um dos homens que o senhor mencionou.
– Pode ser – disse Mr. Browne. – Mas confesso que duvido muito.
– Ah, eu daria tudo pra ouvir Caruso cantar – disse Mary Jane.
– Pra mim – disse tia Kate, que estivera às voltas com um pedaço de osso – só existiu um tenor. Do meu gosto, quero dizer. Mas imagino que nenhum de vocês ouviu falar dele.
– Quem, Miss Morkan? – perguntou Mr. Bartell D'Arcy educadamente.
– Chamava-se – disse tia Kate – Parkinson. Ouvi-o cantar quando estava no auge e acho que ele tinha a voz de tenor mais límpida que já se ouviu de um ser humano.
– Estranho – disse Mr. Bartell D'Arcy. – Realmente, nunca ouvi falar dele.
– Sim, sim, Miss Morkan tem razão – disse Mr. Browne. – Já ouvi falar do velho Parkinson, mas não foi do meu tempo.
– Foi um tenor inglês, bonito, com uma voz límpida, doce, aveludada – disse tia Kate com entusiasmo.

Assim que Gabriel terminou, o enorme pudim foi transferido para a mesa. O tilintar de garfos e colheres recomeçou. A mulher de Gabriel servia as fatias de pudim e passava os pratos pela mesa. No meio do caminho eles eram detidos por Mary Jane, que acrescentava gelatina de framboesa ou laranja ou ainda manjar e calda. O pudim tinha sido feito por tia Julia e ela recebeu elogios de todos os cantos da mesa. Ela entretanto disse que o mesmo não ficara bem dourado.

– Espero, Miss Morkan – disse Mr. Browne –,que a senhora ache que eu esteja bem dourado, pois sou "bronzeado" da cabeça aos pés.[4]

[4] As palavras de Mr. Browne, referindo-se ao seu próprio nome, encerram um trocadilho intraduzível, em torno do verbo *to brown*, dourar, tostar, e do adjetivo *brown*, tostado, dourado (marrom). N. do T.

Todos os cavalheiros, à exceção de Gabriel, experimentaram o pudim em deferência à tia Julia. De vez que Gabriel jamais comia doce, o aipo fora deixado especialmente para ele. Freddy Malins também comeu um talo de aipo acompanhando o pudim. Tinha sido informado de que aipo era excelente para o sangue e estava sob cuidados médicos à época. Mrs. Malins, que se mantivera calada durante toda a ceia, disse que o filho iria para Mount Melleray dentro de uma ou duas semanas. Os presentes então falaram sobre Mount Melleray, de como o ar era puro naquela região, de como eram hospitaleiros os monges e que jamais pediam um único centavo aos hóspedes.

– Vocês estão dizendo – perguntou Mr. Browne incrédulo – que um sujeito pode se hospedar lá, como se fosse um hotel, comer e beber e sair sem pagar um centavo?

– Ah, a maioria das pessoas na hora de ir embora faz uma doação ao monastério – disse Mary Jane.

– Seria bom se tivéssemos uma instituição dessas na nossa igreja – disse Mr. Browne com franqueza.

Ficou atônito ao ser informado que os monges faziam voto de silêncio, levantavam-se às duas horas da manhã e dormiam em seus próprios caixões. Perguntou a razão de tal comportamento.

– São as regras da congregação – afirmou tia Kate com firmeza.

– Sim, mas por que isso? – perguntou Mr. Browne.

Tia Kate repetiu que eram regras, nada mais. Mr. Browne continuava sem entender. Freddy Malins explicou, da melhor maneira que pôde, que os monges procuravam reparar os pecados cometidos por todos os pecadores do mundo. A explicação não fez muito sentido pois Mr. Browne sorriu e disse:

– A ideia até que me agrada mas um confortável colchão de molas não seria melhor que um caixão?

– O caixão – disse Mary Jane – é pra lembrar-lhes da morte.

O assunto tornara-se lúgubre e fora enterrado no silêncio da mesa, durante o qual ouvia-se Mrs. Malins dizer, à meia voz, à pessoa que estava a seu lado na mesa:

– São homens muito bons, os monges, muito devotos.

Passas e amêndoas e figos e maçãs e laranjas e bombons de chocolate e confeitos percorriam a mesa e tia Julia pedia aos convidados que se servissem de vinho do Porto ou de sherry. A princípio Mr. Bartell D'Arcy nada aceitou mas foi cutucado por uma das pessoas que estavam a seu lado, que lhe sussurrou algo, e resolveu aceitar. Aos poucos, à medida que as últimas taças eram servidas, a conversa foi esmorecendo. Fez-se uma pausa, interrompida apenas pelo ruído do vinho e pelo ranger de cadeiras. As irmãs Morkan, as três, fixaram o olhar na toalha da mesa. Alguém tossiu uma ou duas vezes e então alguns cavalheiros começaram a dar umas pancadinhas no tampo da mesa pedindo silêncio. Fez-se silêncio e Gabriel empurrou a cadeira para trás e se levantou.

As batidas na mesa tornaram-se imediatamente mais audíveis, como incentivo, e finalmente cessaram por completo. Gabriel apoiou os dez dedos trêmulos sobre a toalha e sorriu para os presentes sem conseguir esconder o nervosismo. Diante das fileiras de rostos que o encaravam ele ergueu os olhos para o lustre. O piano tocava uma valsa e ele ouvia o farfalhar das saias roçando na porta do salão. Talvez houvesse pessoas no cais lá fora, na neve, olhando para as janelas iluminadas e ouvindo a valsa. O ar lá fora era puro. Ao longe estendia-se o parque onde os galhos das árvores pesavam com a neve. O monumento a Wellington usava um cintilante chapéu de neve que piscava no sentido oeste por cima da brancura que cobria o parque Fifteen Acres.

Ele começou:

– Senhoras e Senhores. Coube a mim esta noite, conforme sucedeu nos anos anteriores, desempenhar uma tarefa das mais agradáveis, uma tarefa para a qual, todavia, receio serem inadequadas minhas pobres qualidades de orador.
– Não, não! – disse Mr. Browne.
– Mas, seja como for, peço apenas que levem em conta a minha intenção e que me ouçam por alguns momentos enquanto eu tento traduzir em palavras tudo o que sinto esta noite.
– Senhoras e Senhores, não é a primeira vez que nos reunimos sob este teto hospitaleiro, em torno desta mesa farta. Não é a primeira vez que somos alvo ou... talvez, melhor dizendo... vítimas da hospitalidade de certas damas tão amáveis.

Traçou com o braço um círculo no ar e parou. Todos riram e olharam para tia Kate e tia Julia e Mary Jane, que enrubesceram de satisfação. Gabriel prosseguiu com mais segurança:

– A cada ano que passa aumenta minha certeza de que nenhuma tradição honra tanto o nosso país e deve ser defendida com mais fervor do que nossa hospitalidade. A meu ver, trata-se de uma tradição ímpar (e tenho viajado bastante por esse mundo afora) entre as nações modernas. Alguns podem dizer que, no nosso caso, essa hospitalidade é mais um defeito que uma qualidade da qual devemos nos orgulhar. Mesmo que isso seja verdade, trata-se, creio eu, de um defeito magnífico, um defeito que espero seja sempre cultivado entre nós. De uma coisa, ao menos, estou certo. Enquanto este teto abrigar as referidas e amáveis senhoras – e desejo de coração que o faça por muitos e muitos anos – a tradição da autêntica, calorosa e cordial hospitalidade irlandesa, a nós legada por nossos antepassados e que por nós deve ser legada a nossos descendentes, há de permanecer viva.

Um burburinho de entusiástica aprovação percorreu a mesa. Passou pela mente de Gabriel a lembrança de que Miss Ivors não se achava mais ali e que se retirara com uma atitude pouco gentil: ele disse com autoconfiança:

– Senhoras e Senhores. Uma nova geração cresce em nosso meio, uma geração impulsionada por novas ideias e novos princípios. É uma geração séria e entusiasmada com essas novas ideias, e tal entusiasmo, mesmo quando mal direcionado, é, a meu ver, na maioria dos casos autêntico. Mas vivemos numa época de ceticismo e, permitam-me dizer, numa época atormentada pelo pensamento: e às vezes receio que essa nova geração, intelectualizada ou superintelectualizada, carecerá das qualidades humanas, como a hospitalidade e o bom humor que pertencem a um tempo passado. Ouvindo há pouco os nomes de todos aqueles grandes cantores do passado, confesso que me pareceu estarmos vivendo numa época menos grandiosa. Aqueles dias, sem exagero, podem ser chamados de grandiosos: e se ora estão além de nossa lembrança esperemos, ao menos, que em congraçamentos como este ainda possamos recordá-los com orgulho e carinho, que ainda possamos trazer em nossos corações a memória daqueles mortos ilustres cuja glória o mundo não há de deixar perecer.

– Muito bem! – disse Mr. Browne em voz alta.

– No entanto – continuou Gabriel, a voz assumindo uma inflexão mais suave –, em congraçamentos como este sempre nos ocorrem tristes recordações: recordações do passado, da juventude, de como as coisas mudaram, de rostos ausentes aqui esta noite. Nossa caminhada pela vida é marcada por essas lembranças tristes: e se nos permitíssemos ficar remoendo tais lembranças não teríamos a coragem de seguir em

frente com destemor na nossa luta em meio aos vivos. Todos temos deveres vivos e afetos vivos que requerem, e têm o direito de requerer, a nossa incansável dedicação.

– Por conseguinte, não me deterei no passado. Não permitirei que reflexões melancólicas e moralistas se intrometam em nosso meio esta noite. Estamos aqui reunidos para uma breve pausa em meio ao corre-corre da nossa vida cotidiana. Estamos aqui reunidos como amigos, com espírito de amizade, como companheiros, e por que não dizer, até com espírito de *camaraderie*, e ainda como convidados das – como haverei de chamá-las? – das Três Graças do mundo musical de Dublin.

A mesa irrompeu em aplausos e risos diante dessa tirada. Tia Julia, envaidecida, perguntou às pessoas que estavam ao seu lado na mesa o que fora mesmo que Gabriel dissera.

– Disse que somos as Três Graças, tia Julia – disse Mary Jane.

Tia Julia não compreendeu, mas ergueu os olhos, sorrindo para Gabriel, que prosseguiu no mesmo tom:

– Senhoras e Senhores. Não me atreverei a proceder aqui como procedeu Páris em outra ocasião. Não ousarei fazer uma escolha entre elas. A tarefa seria ao mesmo tempo antipática e acima de minha pobre capacidade. Pois quando penso em cada uma delas, seja a nossa principal anfitriã, cujo bom coração, bom até demais, é objeto de elogio por todos que a conhecem; seja sua irmã, que parece dotada de eterna juventude e cujo canto foi para todos nós esta noite uma surpresa e uma revelação; ou, finalmente, quando penso em nossa mais jovem anfitriã, talentosa, alegre, esforçada, a melhor sobrinha do mundo, confesso, senhoras e senhores, que não sei a qual das três concederia o prêmio.

Gabriel olhou de relance para as tias e, vendo o largo sorriso estampado no rosto de tia Julia e as lágrimas nos olhos de tia Kate, apressou-se em concluir o discurso. Ergueu garbosamente a taça de vinho do Porto, enquanto todos os presentes tomavam nas mãos as suas respectivas taças, em expectativa, e disse com sonoridade:

– Brindemos às três. Brindemos à sua saúde, prosperidade, longevidade e felicidade, e que continuem por muito tempo a ocupar a invejável posição que, pelo seu próprio esforço, galgaram em suas profissões, bem como o lugar de honra e carinho que ora ocupam no coração de cada um de nós.

Todos os convidados levantaram-se, de taça na mão e, virando-se para as três senhoras, cantaram em uníssono, sob o comando de Mr. Browne:

As três são boas companheiras,
As três são boas companheiras,
As três são boas companheiras,
Ninguém pode negar.

Tia Kate recorria abertamente ao lenço e até tia Julia parecia comovida. Freddy Malins marcava o ritmo com o garfo do pudim e os cantores entreolhavam-se, como numa conversa melodiosa, enquanto concluíam enfaticamente:

Mentiras não podem pregar,
Mentiras não podem pregar.

Então, voltando-se novamente para as anfitriãs, repetiram:

As três são boas companheiras,
As três são boas companheiras,
As três são boas companheiras,
Ninguém pode negar.

A aclamação encontrou eco além da porta da sala de jantar, por parte de vários outros convidados, e Freddy Malins, de garfo em punho, continuava a reger.

*

O ar cortante da madrugada entrou no *hall* em que eles estavam e tia Kate disse:

– Fechem a porta, por favor. Mrs. Malins vai pegar um baita resfriado.
– O Browne está lá fora, tia Kate – disse Mary Jane.
– O Browne está em toda parte – disse tia Kate, baixando o volume da voz.

Mary Jane riu do tom de voz da tia.

– Ora, tia Kate – ela disse com certa malícia. – Ele até que é bastante atencioso.

– Grudou aqui como esparadrapo – disse tia Kate no mesmo tom – durante todo o Natal.

Riu de suas próprias palavras, dessa vez num tom mais brando, e então acrescentou rapidamente:

– Mas peça a ele que entre, Mary Jane, e feche a porta. Queira Deus que ele não me tenha ouvido.

Naquele momento a porta do *hall* se abriu e Mr. Browne entrou, dobrando-se de rir. Vestia um sobretudo verde comprido, com punhos e gola imitando astracã, e trazia à cabeça um gorro de pele ovalado. Apontou em direção ao cais coberto de neve de onde vinha um assobio longo e sibilante.

– Teddy vai atrair todos os coches de Dublin – ele disse.

Gabriel surgiu da despensa, vestindo com dificuldade o sobretudo e, olhando a sua volta no *hall*, disse:

– A Gretta ainda não desceu?
– Foi apanhar as coisas dela, Gabriel – disse tia Kate.
– Quem está tocando lá em cima? – perguntou Gabriel.
– Ninguém. Todos já se foram.
– Não, não, tia Kate – disse Mary Jane. – Bartell D'Arcy e Miss O'Callaghan ainda não se foram.
– Em todo caso, alguém está brincando ao piano – disse Gabriel.

Mary Jane olhou para Gabriel e para Mr. Browne e disse sentindo um arrepio:

– Só de olhar pra vocês dois encapotados assim já sinto frio. Eu não gostaria de estar no lugar de vocês e ter de ir pra casa numa hora dessas.
– Pois nada me agradaria tanto neste momento – disse Mr. Browne intrepidamente – quanto uma estimulante caminhada no campo ou um passeio numa charrete em alta velocidade puxada por um animal fogoso.
– Nós tínhamos um ótimo cavalo e uma charrete – disse tia Julia com ar melancólico.
– O inesquecível Johnny – disse Mary Jane, rindo.

Tia Kate e Gabriel também riram.

– Ora! O que havia de tão extraordinário nesse Johnny? – perguntou Mr. Browne.
– O falecido e saudoso Patrick Morkan, ou seja, nosso avô – explicou Gabriel –, conhecido no fim da vida como o velho cavalheiro, era fabricante de cola.
– Um momento, Gabriel – disse tia Kate, rindo–, ele fabricava goma de amido.
– Seja lá cola ou goma – disse Gabriel –, o velho tinha um cavalo chamado Johnny. E Johnny trabalhava pro velho, dando volta atrás de volta pra ativar o moinho. Até aí, tudo bem; mas agora vem o lado trágico da história do Johnny. Um belo dia o velho cavalheiro resolveu acompanhar a fina flor local para assistir a uma parada militar no parque.
– Que Deus tenha piedade da alma dele – disse tia Kate com misericórdia.
– Amém – disse Gabriel. – Então, como eu dizia, o velho cavalheiro arreou Johnny e pôs a melhor cartola e o melhor colarinho e partiu em grande estilo, saindo, da mansão de seus antepassados, perto de Back Lane, creio eu.

Todos riram, até Mrs. Malins, da maneira como Gabriel contava a história e tia Kate disse:

– Um momento, Gabriel, na verdade, ele não morava em Back Lane. O moinho é que ficava lá.
– E da mansão dos antepassados – continuou Gabriel – partiu ele, montado em Johnny. E tudo correu muito bem até que Johnny avistou a estátua do Rei William: e se ele se apaixonou pelo cavalo montado pelo rei ou se achou que estava de volta ao moinho, ninguém sabe, mas o fato é que começou a dar voltas em torno da estátua.

Já tendo calçado as galochas, Gabriel deu uma volta pelo *hall* em meio ao riso geral.

– Uma volta, e outra volta, lá ia ele – disse Gabriel – e o velho cavalheiro, que era todo metido a elegante, ficou indignado: *Vamos, animal! 0 que significa isso? Johnny! Johnny! Que modos são esses! Como posso entender esse cavalo!*

As gargalhadas que se seguiram à encenação que Gabriel fez do incidente foram interrompidas por sonoras batidas à porta da rua. Mary Jane correu e fez entrar Freddy Malins. Freddy Malins, com o chapéu no alto da cabeça e os ombros encolhidos de frio, bufava em virtude do esforço despendido.

– Só consegui um coche – disse ele.
– Ah, nós pegamos um mais abaixo no cais – disse Gabriel.
– Isso mesmo – disse tia Kate. – É melhor não deixar Mrs. Malins exposta a correntes de ar.

Mrs. Malins desceu os degraus da entrada da casa amparada pelo filho e por Mr. Browne e, com muita dificuldade, foi içada para dentro de um coche. Freddy Malins também entrou no coche com dificuldade e levou um bom tempo para acomodá-la no assento, tudo sob a orientação de Mr. Browne. Finalmente ela foi acomodada e Freddy Malins convidou Mr. Browne a subir no coche. Após um longo falatório, Mr. Browne entrou no veículo. O cocheiro ajeitou a manta sobre os joelhos, e curvou-se para ouvir o endereço. O falatório aumentou e o homem recebeu instruções conflitantes de Freddy Malins e de Mr. Browne, cada qual com a cabeça do lado de fora de uma janela do coche. O problema era decidir em que ponto do caminho deixariam Mr. Browne, e tia Kate, tia Julia e Mary Jane, de pé na porta da casa, davam seus palpites em meio a instruções truncadas, contradições e muito riso. Quanto a Freddy Malins, já não podia falar de tanto rir. Esticava a cabeça pela janela e voltava a se sentar, a cada instante, arriscando perder o chapéu, e informava à mãe sobre o progresso das negociações, até que finalmente Mr. Browne deu um berro, assustando o cocheiro e abafando as gargalhadas:

– Sabe onde fica o Trinity College?
– Sei, sim senhor – disse o cocheiro.
– Então, vá direto em direção aos portões do Trinity College – disse Mr. Browne – e de lá nós lhe diremos como prosseguir. Entendeu?
– Sim, senhor – disse o cocheiro.
– Então, voando para o Trinity College!
– Certo, senhor – disse o cocheiro.

O cavalo levou uma chibatada e o coche partiu sacolejando pelo cais em meio a um coro de risadas e despedidas.

Gabriel não fora até a porta juntar-se aos outros. Ficara numa parte escura do *hall* olhando escada acima. Uma mulher estava de pé próxima ao primeiro patamar, igualmente na penumbra. Ele não conseguia ver o rosto dela, mas os babados da saia em tons terra e salmão eram visíveis e na sombra pareciam preto e branco. Era sua esposa. Estava encostada na balaustrada ouvindo alguma coisa. Gabriel surpreendeu-se ao vê-la tão imóvel e prestou atenção para ouvir também. Mas pouco ouvia a não ser o rumor das risadas e da conversa vindo da porta da rua, alguns acordes de piano e algumas notas cantadas por uma voz masculina.

Deteve-se ali na penumbra do *hall*, tentando identificar a canção que a voz entoava e com o olhar fixo na mulher. Havia em sua atitude graça e mistério como se ela fosse símbolo

de algo. Perguntou a si mesmo o que poderia simbolizar uma mulher na penumbra, no topo de uma escada, ouvindo música ao longe. Se fosse pintor ele a retrataria naquela pose. O chapéu de feltro azul ressaltaria o bronze dos cabelos contrastando com o fundo escuro e os babados escuros da saia contrastariam com os mais claros. *Música ao Longe*, ele intitularia o quadro se fosse pintor.

A porta foi fechada; e tia Kate, tia Julia e Mary Jane entraram pelo *hall*, ainda rindo.

– Mas o Freddy não é impossível? – disse Mary, Jane. – É mesmo impossível.

Gabriel nada disse mas apontou para a parte superior da escada onde se via sua esposa. Agora que a a porta da rua estava fechada a voz e o piano eram mais audíveis. Gabriel fez um sinal com a mão para que elas ficassem caladas. A canção parecia composta numa tonalidade irlandesa arcaica e o cantor estava inseguro tanto em relação à letra quanto à voz. A voz, que parecia dorida em virtude da distância em que se encontrava o cantor bem como de uma forte rouquidão, tentava em vão ressaltar a cadência da melodia com palavras que exprimiam sofrimento:

> *Ah, a chuva cai nos meus espessos cachos*
> *E o orvalho umedece a minha pele,*
> *Meu filho jaz enregelado…*

– Ah! – exclamou Mary Jane. É Bartell D'Arcy cantando, e a noite inteira ele tinha se recusado a cantar. Ah, mas vou obrigá-lo a cantar uma canção antes de ir embora.
– Ah, isso mesmo, Mary Jane – disse tia Kate.

Mary Jane adiantou-se rapidamente e correu até a escada, mas antes mesmo de alcançar o primeiro degrau o canto foi interrompido e o teclado do piano foi fechado bruscamente.

– Ah, que pena! – ela exclamou. – Ele está descendo, Gretta?

Gabriel ouviu a mulher responder que sim e a viu descer a escada em sua direção. Logo atrás vinham Mr. Bartell D'Arcy e Miss O'Callaghan.

– Ah, Mr. D'Arcy! – exclamou Mary Jane. – Que maldade sua parar de cantar logo agora que nós estávamos entusiasmados ouvindo o senhor.

– Insisti com ele a noite toda – disse Miss O'Callaghan –, Mrs. Conroy e eu, e ele nos disse que estava com um resfriado terrível e que não podia cantar.
– Ah, Mr. D'Arcy – disse tia Kate –, mas que balela!
– Vocês não perceberam que estou rouco como uma arara? – disse Mr. D'Arcy com aspereza.

Ele entrou na despensa às pressas e vestiu o sobretudo.

Os demais, desconcertados diante da resposta grosseira, não sabiam o que dizer. Tia Kate franziu a testa e fez sinal para os outros indicando que deixassem o assunto de lado. Mr. D'Arcy, com o semblante carregado, agasalhava cuidadosamente o pescoço com o cachecol.

– É esse tempo – disse tia Julia, depois de uma pausa.
– Pois é, todo mundo anda resfriado – disse tia Kate prontamente –, todo mundo.
– Estão dizendo – acrescentou Mary Jane – que faz trinta anos que não neva desse jeito; e eu li esta manhã no jornal que está nevando em toda a Irlanda.
– Adoro ver neve – disse tia Julia com um ar triste.
– Eu também – disse Miss O'Callaghan. – Acho que Natal só é Natal com neve na rua.
– Mas o pobre Mr. D'Arcy não gosta de neve – disse tia Kate, sorrindo.

Mr. D'Arcy surgiu da despensa, todo enrolado e abotoado, e em tom de arrependimento explicou-lhes como apanhara o resfriado. Todos deram-lhe conselhos e disseram que era uma pena vê-lo assim e que deveria proteger bem a garganta do sereno. Gabriel observava a esposa, que não entrara na conversa. Ela estava de pé exatamente embaixo da claraboia empoeirada e a chama da lamparina iluminava-lhe o bronze dos cabelos, cabelos que poucos dias atrás ele a vira secar diante da lareira. Ela permanecia imóvel e parecia não se dar conta da conversa a sua volta. Finalmente voltou-se para eles e Gabriel notou que nas faces dela havia um rubor e que seus olhos brilhavam. Uma súbita onda de alegria invadiu-lhe o coração.

– Mr. D'Arcy – ela disse –, qual é o nome dessa canção que o senhor estava cantando?
– *The Lass of Aughrim*[5] – disse Mr. D'Arcy –, mas não consegui me lembrar da letra direito. Por quê? A senhora conhece a canção?
– *The Lass of Aughrim* – ela repetiu. – Não conseguia me lembrar do nome.

[5] Isto é, "A Jovem de Aughrim". N. do T.

– É uma bela canção – disse Mary Jane. – É uma pena o senhor estar sem voz hoje.
– Ora, Mary Jane – disse tia Kate –, não amole Mr. D'Arcy. Não admito que o amolem.

Vendo que estavam prontos para sair, ela os rebanhou até a porta, onde se despediram:

– Então, boa noite, tia Kate, e obrigado, foi uma noite tão agradável.
– Boa noite, Gabriel. Boa noite, Gretta!
– Boa noite, tia Kate, e muito obrigada. Boa noite, tia Julia.
– Ah, boa noite, Gretta; eu não tinha visto você.
– Boa noite, Mr. D'Arcy. Boa noite, Miss O'Callaghan.
– Boa noite, Miss Morkan.
– Mais uma vez, boa noite.
– Boa noite a todos. Bom regresso.
– Boa noite. Boa noite.

A madrugada ainda estava escura. Uma luz pálida e amarelada pairava sobre as casas e o rio; e o céu parecia estar despencando. Neve derretida misturava-se com lama sob os pés, e havia apenas filetes e tufos de neve nos telhados, na mureta do cais e nas grades. Os lampiões ainda ardiam refletindo sua luz avermelhada no ar brumoso e, do outro lado do rio, o palácio Four Courts erguia-se imponente desafiando o céu carregado.

Ela caminhava à frente dele ao lado de Mr. Bartell D'Arcy, trazendo os sapatos debaixo do braço dentro de um embrulho marrom e suspendendo a barra da saia com as mãos para não sujá-la. Ela já não exibia uma postura elegante, mas os olhos de Gabriel ainda brilhavam de felicidade. O sangue latejava-lhe nas veias; e os pensamentos precipitavam-se em sua mente, orgulhosos, felizes, carinhosos, intrépidos.

Ela caminhava à frente dele tão leve e tão ereta que ele desejava alcançá-la na surdina, agarrá-la pelos ombros e sussurrar-lhe ao ouvido algo tolo e apaixonado. Parecia-lhe tão frágil que tinha ímpetos de defendê-la de um perigo qualquer e então ficar a sós com ela. Momentos da vida íntima dos dois irromperam-lhe na memória como estrelas. Um envelope lilás ao lado da xícara de café e ele afagando o papel com a mão. Passarinhos cantando na hera e o reflexo ensolarado da cortina tremeluzindo no assoalho: na ocasião sentira-se tão feliz que não conseguira comer. Os dois numa plataforma repleta de gente e ele pressionando o tíquete da passagem contra a palma de sua mão cálida e enluvada. Os dois lado a lado no frio, espiando através de uma janela gradeada um homem fazendo garrafas de vidro diante de um forno ardente. Fazia muito frio. A face

dela, fragrante no ar frio, estava bem próxima à dele; e subitamente ele se dirigiu ao sujeito que estava diante do forno:

– O fogo está quente, moço?

Mas o homem não pôde ouvi-lo devido ao ruído do forno. Foi melhor assim. Ele poderia ter dado uma resposta grosseira.

Uma onda de felicidade terna e ainda mais intensa emergiu do coração dele e percorreu-lhe as artérias numa cálida torrente. Como o brilho terno das estrelas, momentos da vida deles juntos, dos quais ninguém tinha e jamais teria conhecimento, precipitavam-se e iluminavam-lhe a memória. Ele ansiava por fazê-la lembrar daqueles momentos, fazê-la esquecer os anos de sua insípida vida conjugal e lembrar somente dos momentos de êxtase. Pois os anos, a seu ver, não tinham aniquilado suas almas. Os filhos, os escritos dele, os afazeres domésticos dela não tinham apagado a terna chama que traziam na alma. Em uma carta que escrevera a ela àquela época ele dissera: *Por que será que palavras como estas parecem-me tão insípidas e frias? Será porque não existe palavra terna o bastante para expressar o seu nome?*

Como música ao longe essas palavras por ele escritas anos antes chegavam até ele vindas do passado. Ansiava por ficar a sós com ela. Quando todos tivessem ido embora, quando estivessem no quarto do hotel, então estariam a sós. Ele pronunciaria seu nome à meia voz:

– Gretta!

Talvez ela não escutasse na primeira vez: estaria se despindo. Então algo na voz dele chamaria sua atenção. Ela se voltaria para olhá-lo…

Na esquina de Winetavern Street encontraram um coche. O ruído do coche sacolejante proporcionou-lhe alívio pois tinha uma desculpa para não puxar conversa. Ela olhava pela janela e parecia cansada. Os demais falavam pouco, apontando algum edifício ou alguma rua. O cavalo galopava exausto sob o céu sombrio da madrugada, puxando o coche sacolejante, e Gabriel sentiu-se novamente ao lado dela num coche, galopando para embarcar no navio, galopando para a lua-de-mel.

Quando o coche passou pela O'Connell Bridge, Miss O'Callaghan disse:

– Dizem que sempre que a gente atravessa a O'Connell Bridge vê um cavalo branco.
– Desta vez estou vendo um homem branco – disse Gabriel.
– Onde? – perguntou Mr. Bartell D'Arcy.

Gabriel apontou para a estátua, parcialmente coberta pela neve. Então cumprimentou a estátua com um meneio de cabeça e um aceno.

– Boa noite, Dan – ele disse em tom jocoso.

Quando o coche parou à entrada do hotel Gabriel desceu rapidamente e, apesar dos protestos de Mr. Bartell D'Arcy, pagou a corrida. Deu ao cocheiro um shilling de gorjeta. O homem agradeceu e disse:

– Um próspero Ano Novo pro senhor, doutor.
– Pra você, também – disse Gabriel cordialmente.

Ao descer do coche ela se apoiou um instante no braço dele e assim permaneceu enquanto se despedia dos outros na calçada. Apoiava-se levemente no braço dele, com a mesma leveza com que o fizera quando dançaram juntos algumas horas antes. Naquele momento ele tinha se sentido orgulhoso e feliz, feliz por tê-la para si, orgulhoso de sua postura graciosa e digna. Mas agora, após tantas memórias agradáveis, o primeiro toque do corpo dela, musical e exótico e perfumado, despertou nele um desejo ardente. Protegido pelo silêncio dela pressionou-lhe o braço contra seu corpo; e, em frente à porta do hotel, ele teve a sensação de que haviam escapado de suas próprias vidas e de suas obrigações, escapado do lar e dos amigos e fugido juntos com corações exultantes para uma nova aventura.

Um velho cochilava numa enorme poltrona no saguão de entrada. Ele acendeu uma vela e guiou-os até a escada. Os dois seguiram-no em silêncio, com passos suaves sobre o espesso tapete que cobria os degraus. Ela subia logo atrás do porteiro, de cabeça baixa, com os ombros delicados caídos como se suportassem um peso, e com a saia firmemente segura. Ele desejava abraçá-la na altura dos quadris e suspendê-la no ar, pois seus braços tremiam de desejo de tocá-la e somente cravando as unhas na palma da mão pôde ele conter o impulso de arrebatá-la. O porteiro parou no meio da escada para endireitar a vela gotejante. Eles também pararam degraus abaixo. No silêncio Gabriel podia ouvir a cera derretida pingando no pratinho e o coração batendo-lhe no peito.

O porteiro conduziu-os por um corredor e abriu uma porta. Então colocou sobre a mesa de cabeceira a vela instável e perguntou a que horas gostariam de ser despertados.

– Às oito – disse Gabriel.

O porteiro apontou para o interruptor de luz elétrica e começou a balbuciar uma desculpa, mas Gabriel interrompeu-o.

– Não queremos luz nenhuma. A luz que vem da rua já basta. E digo mais – acrescentou, apontando para a vela –, o senhor pode levar essa beleza de vela, por gentileza.

O porteiro pegou a vela, ainda que lentamente, pois ficou surpreso com a ordem inusitada. Em seguida murmurou "boa noite" e retirou-se. Gabriel passou o trinco na porta.

Uma luz espectral do lampião da rua formava um longo feixe que ia da janela até a porta. Gabriel atirou sobre o sofá o sobretudo e o chapéu e atravessou o quarto em direção à janela. Ficou olhando para a rua no intuito de abrandar um pouco a emoção que sentia. Então virou-se e encostou-se na cômoda de costas para a luz. Ela retirara o chapéu e o casaco e estava de pé diante de um grande espelho giratório, abrindo os colchetes do cós da saia. Gabriel deteve-se um momento, observando-a, e então disse:

– Gretta!

Ela se afastou lentamente do espelho e caminhou em direção a ele dentro do feixe de luz. Tinha o rosto tão grave e cansado que Gabriel não conseguiu pronunciar uma palavra sequer. Não, ainda não era o momento.

– Parece cansada – ele disse.
– Um pouco – ela respondeu.
– Sentindo alguma coisa?
– Não, cansaço: só isso.

Ela foi até a janela e ali se posicionou, olhando a rua. Gabriel esperou um pouco mais e então, temeroso de que a timidez o dominasse, disse bruscamente:

– A propósito, Gretta!
– Sim?

– Sabe, o coitado do Malins – ele disse rapidamente.
– Sim. O que tem ele?
– Pois é, coitado, até que é um sujeito decente – prosseguiu Gabriel num tom de voz forçado. – Pagou aquele dinheiro que me devia, e sinceramente eu nem esperava que fosse pagar. É uma pena ele não sair do lado do Browne, porque no fundo ele não é mau sujeito.

Sentia-se trêmulo de contrariedade. Por que se mostrava ela tão distante? Não sabia como começar. Será que ela também estava contrariada por algum motivo? Se ao menos se voltasse para ele ou viesse ao seu encontro de livre e espontânea vontade! Arrebatá-la naquele estado seria brutal. Não, aguardaria até ver um pouco de ardor nos olhos dela. Ansiava por desvendar o motivo do estranho estado de espírito em que ela se encontrava.

– Quando foi que você lhe emprestou dinheiro? – ela perguntou, após uma pausa.

Gabriel esforçou-se para não explodir num linguajar grosseiro a respeito do bêbado do Malins e do dinheiro. Queria gritar-lhe do fundo da alma, apertar o corpo dela contra o seu, subjugá-la. Mas disse:

– Ah, no Natal, quando ele abriu aquela lojinha de cartões de boas-festas em Henry Street.

Estava em tal estado de exaltação e desejo que não ouviu quando ela se aproximou, vindo da janela. Ela parou um instante diante dele, fitando-o com um olhar estranho. Então, colocando-se subitamente na ponta dos pés e repousando as mãos suavemente nos ombros dele, ela o beijou.

– Você é uma pessoa muito generosa, Gabriel – ela disse.

Gabriel, trêmulo de prazer diante do beijo inesperado e das palavras inusitadas, passou levemente as mãos nos cabelos dela, quase sem tocá-los. Os cabelos estavam lavados e viçosos. O coração dele transbordava de felicidade. Exatamente quando mais a desejava ela viera por vontade própria. Talvez os pensamentos dela estivessem correndo paralelamente aos dele. Talvez ela tivesse sentido o desejo impetuoso que o consumia, e então resolvera ceder. Agora que ela se rendera tão facilmente, ele se perguntava por que tinha sido tão tímido.

Segurou o rosto dela entre as mãos. Então, envolvendo-a com um dos braços e trazendo-a para junto de si, disse à meia voz:

– Gretta, querida, em que você está pensando?

Ela não respondeu e tampouco cedeu inteiramente ao abraço. Ele repetiu, à meia voz:

– Conta pra mim, Gretta. Acho que já sei do que se trata. Será que sei?

Ela não respondeu de imediato. Então disse em meio a uma explosão de lágrimas:

– Ah, estou pensando naquela canção, *The Lass of Aughrim*.

Desvencilhou-se dos braços dele e correu para a cama e, agarrando-se à cabeceira, escondeu o rosto. Gabriel ficou atônito durante alguns instantes e então foi ao encontro dela. Quando passou na frente do espelho giratório viu sua própria figura, em corpo inteiro, o tórax largo e robusto, o rosto cuja expressão sempre o intrigava quando diante de um espelho e os óculos dourados, brilhantes. Deteve-se a alguns passos dela e disse:

– O que tem a ver a canção? Por que ela te faz chorar?

Ela ergueu a cabeça que estava apoiada nos braços e enxugou os olhos com as costas da mão como uma criança. A voz dele assumiu um tom mais benévolo do que ele pretendia.

– Por que, Gretta? – ele perguntou.
– Estou pensando numa pessoa que muito tempo atrás costumava cantar aquela canção.
– E que pessoa foi essa muito tempo atrás? – perguntou Gabriel, sorrindo.
– Foi uma pessoa que conheci em Galway quando eu morava com minha avó – ela disse.

O sorriso desapareceu do rosto de Gabriel. Uma raiva maçante voltou a se instalar em sua mente e o calor maçante do desejo voltou a esquentar-lhe as veias.

– Alguém por quem você esteve apaixonada? – ele perguntou ironicamente.

– Foi um rapaz que eu conheci –, ela respondeu –, chamado Michael Furey. Ele costumava cantar essa canção, *The Lass of Aughrim*. Ele era muito sensível.

Gabriel ficou calado. Não queria que ela pensasse que ele estava interessado no tal rapaz sensível.

– Lembro-me tão bem dele – ela disse após um momento. – Que olhos ele tinha: olhos grandes, negros! E que expressão, que expressão!
– Ah, então você está apaixonada por ele? – disse Gabriel.
– Eu costumava sair pra caminhar com ele – ela disse – na época em que morava em Galway.

Um pensamento passou pela mente de Gabriel.

– Então era por isso que você queria ir a Galway com Molly Ivors? – ele disse com frieza.

Ela olhou para ele e perguntou espantada:

– Para quê?

O olhar dela o desconcertou. Ele deu de ombros e disse:

– Sei lá eu? Pra ver o tal rapaz, talvez.

Ela desviou o olhar em direção ao feixe de luz e à janela e permaneceu em silêncio.

– Ele está morto – ela disse finalmente. – Morreu aos dezessete anos de idade. Não é terrível morrer tão jovem assim?
– O que ele fazia na vida? – perguntou Gabriel, ainda com ironia.
– Trabalhava no gasômetro – ela disse.

Gabriel sentiu-se diminuído pelo fracasso de sua ironia e pela evocação da figura do morto, um garoto que trabalhava no gasômetro. Enquanto ele revivia as lembranças da vida íntima do casal, cheio de ternura e alegria e desejo, ela o comparava mentalmente com um outro homem. Uma grande sensação de insegurança o assaltou. Via-se como uma figura ridícula, um menino fazendo gracinhas para as tias, um sentimental nervoso e ingênuo, discursando para plebeus e idealizando seus próprios desejos ridículos, o sujeito presunçoso que vira refletido no espelho. Instintivamente deu as costas para a luz com receio de que ela visse a vergonha que lhe queimava a fronte.

Procurou manter o tom frio de interrogatório mas quando voltou a falar a voz soou humilde e inócua.

– Imagino que você esteve apaixonada por esse Michael Furey, Gretta – ele disse.
– Fui feliz ao lado dele naquela época – ela disse.

Tinha a voz velada e triste. Gabriel, dando-se conta de que seria inútil tentar levá-la na direção em que pretendera, acariciou a mão dela e disse, igualmente triste:

– E ele morreu de quê, Gretta, tão jovem? Foi tuberculose?
– Acho que morreu por mim – ela respondeu.

Ao ouvir a resposta um vago terror apossou-se de Gabriel como se, no momento em que esperava triunfar, algum ser intangível e vingativo o atacasse, reunindo em seu mundo obscuro forças para atacá-lo. Mas, procurando agir racionalmente, livrou-se da sensação e continuou a acariciar a mão dela. Não fez mais perguntas, pois achava que tudo se revelaria espontaneamente. A mão dela estava cálida e úmida: não respondia ao seu toque, mas ele continuou a acariciá-la assim como tinha acariciado a primeira carta dela naquela manhã de primavera.

– Foi no inverno – ela disse –, no início do inverno, quando eu estava prestes a deixar a casa de minha avó pra vir estudar aqui no colégio de freiras. Ele estava adoentado na pensão em Galway e não o deixavam sair, e escreveram pra família dele, em Oughterard. Estava definhando, foi o que disseram, ou algo assim. Eu nunca soube ao certo.

Fez uma pausa e suspirou.

– Pobre rapaz – ela prosseguiu. – Gostava muito de mim e como era meigo. Costumávamos sair juntos, caminhando, você sabe, como se faz no interior. Ele ia estudar canto por motivo de saúde. Tinha uma ótima voz, pobre Michael Furey.
– Sim, e daí? – perguntou Gabriel.
– E daí quando chegou o momento de eu ir embora de Galway e vir pro colégio interno ele piorou muito e não me deixaram vê-lo, então escrevi uma carta dizendo que ia pra Dublin e que voltaria no verão e que quando voltasse esperava vê-lo bem melhor.

Fez uma pausa para controlar a voz e então prosseguiu:

– Então, na véspera da partida, eu estava na casa da minha avó em Nun's Island, fazendo as malas, quando ouvi uma pedrinha bater na vidraça. A janela estava tão úmida que eu não conseguia ver nada lá fora, então do jeito que eu estava, desci a escada correndo e saí pela porta dos fundos e lá estava o pobre coitado, no fundo do quintal, tiritando.
– E você não disse a ele que voltasse pra casa? – perguntou Gabriel.
– Eu implorei que voltasse imediatamente pra casa e disse que a chuva ia acabar com ele. Mas ele disse que não queria viver. Lembro-me muito bem dos olhos dele, muito bem! Lá estava ele no canto do muro ao lado de uma árvore.
– E ele foi pra casa? – perguntou Gabriel.
– Sim, foi pra casa. E quando eu completei uma semana no colégio interno ele morreu e foi enterrado em Oughterard, que é a terra da família dele. Ah, o dia em que recebi a notícia que… que ele estava morto!

Ela parou, sufocada pelos soluços e, prostrada pela emoção, atirou-se de bruços sobre a colcha, soluçando. Gabriel ainda lhe segurou a mão um pouco, indeciso, e então, constrangido por imiscuir-se na dor da mulher, largou gentilmente a mão e caminhou em silêncio até a janela.

*

Ela adormecera.

Gabriel, apoiado no cotovelo, olhou um instante sem ressentimento para os cabelos emaranhados da mulher e para a boca entreaberta, e ouviu sua respiração profunda. Então ela vivenciara aquele romance: um homem morrera por sua causa. Pouco lhe doía agora o papel sem importância que ele, o marido, desempenhara na vida dela. Olhava para ela adormecida, como se os dois jamais tivessem vivido juntos como marido e mulher. Seus olhos curiosos fitaram longamente o rosto e os cabelos dela: e, ao imaginar como ela fora na época em que era dotada de uma beleza infantil, um estranho sentimento de compaixão invadiu-lhe a alma. Não ousava dizer nem para si mesmo que o rosto dela já não era belo, mas sabia que já não era o rosto pelo qual Michael Furey enfrentara a morte.

Talvez ela não tivesse lhe contado a história inteira. Desviou o olhar para a cadeira onde ela atirara algumas peças de roupa. Uma alça de combinação pendia sobre o chão. Uma bota estava de pé, com o cano caído: a outra estava tombada ao lado. Lembrou-se do turbilhão de emoções que sentira uma hora atrás. De onde surgira tudo aquilo? Da festa na casa das tias, do discurso idiota, do vinho e da dança, das despedidas alegres no

hall, do prazer da caminhada na neve ao longo do rio. Pobre tia Julia! Ela também em breve seria um espectro ao lado do espectro de Patrick Morkan e seu cavalo. Ele bem que notara o olhar abatido da senhora quando cantou *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Talvez em breve ele estaria sentado naquele mesmo salão, de luto, com o chapéu apoiado sobre os joelhos. As cortinas estariam fechadas e tia Kate estaria sentada ao seu lado, chorando e assoando o nariz e contando como Julia morrera. Ele procuraria palavras de consolo, e encontraria somente frases banais e inúteis. Sim, sim: isso aconteceria em breve.

O ar dentro do quarto gelou seus ombros. Ele se esticou cuidadosamente embaixo dos lençóis e ficou deitado ao lado da esposa. Um por um estavam todos transformando-se em espectros. Seria preferível passar para o outro mundo de maneira corajosa, na glória de uma paixão, que murchar e secar lentamente na velhice. Ele pensou no fato de que aquela que estava deitada ao seu lado ocultara no coração durante tantos anos aquela imagem dos olhos do amado dizendo a ela que não queria viver.

Lágrimas abundantes encheram-lhe os olhos. Ele próprio jamais tivera esse tipo de sentimento em relação a uma mulher, mas sabia que aquilo era amor. Mais lágrimas vieram-lhe aos olhos e na penumbra ele imaginou ver a figura de um rapaz parado embaixo de uma árvore pingando. Havia outras figuras em volta. A alma dele se acercara da região habitada pela vasta legião dos mortos. Ele pressentia a existência errática e perambulante dos mortos, embora fosse incapaz de apreendê-la. Sua própria identidade desaparecia num mundo cinzento e incorpóreo: o mundo sólido, antes construído e habitado por esses mortos, dissolvia-se e se esvaía.

Leves batidas na vidraça fizeram-no virar-se para a janela. Recomeçava a nevar. Sonolento, ele observou os flocos prateados e escuros precipitando-se obliquamente contra a luz do lampião. Chegara o momento de iniciar a viagem para o oeste. Sim, os jornais tinham acertado: a neve cobria toda a Irlanda. Precipitava-se por toda a sombria planície central, nas montanhas sem árvores, precipitava-se suavemente sobre o Bog de Allen e, mais para o oeste, suavemente se precipitava sobre as ondas escuras e traiçoeiras do Shannon. Precipitava-se também no cemitério solitário da colina onde jazia Michael Furey. Acumulava-se sobre as cruzes inclinadas e sobre as lápides, sobre as pontas do gradil do pequeno portão, sobre os espinhos toscos. Sua alma desfalecia lentamente enquanto ele ouvia a neve precipitando-se placidamente no universo e placidamente se precipitando, descendo como a hora final sobre todos os vivos e os mortos.

POETRY

Affreca and the Rooks

Kathleen McCracken

In a thicket of question marks, where can a noblewoman turn to speak?

When you prayed for landfall and unwrecked
the ship streamed into salvation, through the storm's teeth
whose voice did you hear incanting – *Mainistir Liath, Mainistir Liath*?

Did you promise Grey Abbey to God, a gesture of thanksgiving
or take the chance to stake a place of your own, bolt-hole half way between
Dundrum and Carrickfergus, one castellated stronghold and the next?

Affreca – Gaelic, Saxon, Scottish. *Affreca* – small hill of reproach.
Godred's daughter, de Courcy's wife. What did the locals, the blow-ins
the holy men make of your outlandish name?

What did it mean to marry a Norman knight, maverick mercenary, the Earl of Ulster
who ate and slept in his armour, the most devout
warrior in Christendom? What price to you his kingdoms?

Where was he warring while you praised the yew trees and welcomed
the white monks from Cumberland
all that singing, all that silence?

When they raised the crossing tower, paved the cloisters
appointed the chancel's lancet windows
did you fear erasure?

Restless on moon nights did your green skirt's hemline
dust and polish the garden's limit, gathering the medicinal
signatures of pennyroyal, feverfew, foxglove?

What disturbance made you ask yourself whose idea were the rooks
their round the clock canticles cherishing oak groves
like you cherished saltmarsh, samphire, otters, egrets?

Did you write, plant, sketch, embroider alone or in company
saunter solo or flanked by greyhounds
a silver merle, a sable, a brindle blue?

What colour were your eyes when you scanned the lough
for your Viking father, your Irish mother, the brothers and sisters
you wouldn't see again?

Was it your wish to be buried here, French barley in your left hand
rosemary in your right, a white shell under
your multi-lingual tongue

the rooks relentlessly questioning what the gods gave back to you?

Afterword

In December 2018, I was invited by Katy Radford of the Belfast-based Institute for Conflict Resolution to contribute to a public art project entitled "Art at the Heart of the Peninsula". I knew something of the reach of the ICR, how across nearly twenty years the organization had worked in partnership with a diverse range of community, voluntary, academic and statutory bodies in Northern Ireland and internationally on issues relating to conflict transformation. Intrigued and honoured, I agreed to take part in this new venture.

An initiative of the ICR in conjunction with Ards and North Down District Council as part of the Peace IV Building Positive Relations Programme 2019, the "Art at the Heart of the Peninsula" project was designed to raise awareness of the history, migration and diversity of those people who have come to and from the Ards Peninsula in County Down, Northern Ireland. The ICR's role was to engage with forty self-selected participants from

the peninsula's villages and townlands on site visits and in arts and heritage workshops. These activities exposed those taking part to the diverse and shared culture of the peninsula and offered opportunities to collaborate with organizations including the National Trust, Northern Ireland Opera and the Royal Ulster Academy.

In addition to increased connection and understanding between groups and individuals, a key legacy of the programme was to be a public art commission, and the realization of that objective is now situated permanently on Council land at six locations on the peninsula – Portaferry, Kircubbin, Ballywalter, Millisle, Donaghadee, and Greyabbey. Feeding into the Council's wider aims of community planning, tourism, arts and heritage within the context of shared spaces, this expansive work comprises of six permanent stand-alone benches created by architectural and sculptural ceramicist Eleanor Wheeler, and six bronze plaques made by artist, designer and engineer Alan Cargo, along with writing commissioned from Northern Ireland-based poets Maureen Boyle, Siobhán Campbell, Paul Maddern, Frank Ormsby and myself, and novelist Jan Carson.

Informed by themes of social, historical and cultural significance identified by programme participants as unique to the Ards peninsula, the subjects depicted on the benches correspond to the images woven into the poems and prose. Eleanor designed and carved six curved benches, four cast in York granite, two in yellow sandstone, with each shaped as a sixth of a circle. Viewed individually, the benches are reminiscent of waves, drumlins, bending wheat and wings. She then fashioned ceramic mosaic seat panels whose colours draw on the blues and greens and glinting lights of sea, sand and sky. Both the bench designs and the mosaic panels respond visually to the written pieces, incorporating images – Brent geese and swallows, lifeboats and Spitfires, greyhounds and rooks – that figure prominently in the poetry and prose.

Positioned adjacent to the benches, the poems and prose are inscribed on bronze plaques and feature QR codes that activate audio recordings of the authors reading their work. Siobhán Campbell's "Longboat at Portaferry" sings of how "At the mouth of the Lough, I approach by the narrows/from fast-running tides to the place of strong currents" (Campbell, 2019, p. 8), while Jan Carson's "Kircubbin" reminds "Nothing leaves here which is not drawn back. … It is only a matter of time and tides" (Carson, 2019, p. 9). Maureen Boyle's "Swallows" chronicles the welcoming of the children of the Kindertransport to Millisle, "the Island of the Mill" (Boyle, 2019, p. 14-15); Paul Maddern's "Donaghadee" vitalizes memories of generations of seafaring migrants and immigrants, making place and poem a "space reserved for you" (Maddern, 2019, p.16). Paeans to

Ballyhalbert and Ballywalter, Frank Ormsby's "The Pole", "The Lovers", and "The Birds" offer a triptych of meditations on migration – the "stubborn otherness" of the newcomer to belong, "the strange becoming familiar", departures made "in a stamina of white wings" (Ormsby, 2019, 2017-19). And through a series of questions, my own poem, "Affreca and the Rooks" (McCracken, 2019, p. 12-13), pays homage to the twelfth-century founder of Grey Abbey, Affreca de Courcy. Citing Seamus Heaney's poem "The Peninsula" as a precursor text, Edna Longley in her introduction to the ICR's limited edition pamphlet publication of the six poems writes of how they carry "history with them as they respond to the physical and metaphysical qualities of Strangford Lough in the context of peace-making. It is right", she says, "that these poems should originate in the flow of communal memory and find their ultimate shape in bronze. It is right that they have become part of the Peninsula's shifting fabric" (Longley, 2019, p. 4-5).

When Katy asked if I would write about Greyabbey I was delighted but daunted. I had never visited the ruins of its gothic monastery and apart from having seen an effigy of Affreca at Carrickfergus Castle I knew next to nothing about her; at best, I had admired the antique shops and cottages as I passed through the village enroute to the aquarium at Portaferry. Before long though, conversations with local historians alongside online and library research broadened my knowledge of the natural environment and the human settlement of the townland. The workshop participants had put together lists of attributes associated with each of the six sites as points of departure for the writers. Located seven miles south of Newtownards on the eastern shore of Strangford Lough, Greyabbey, they had noted, had links with Norman France; it was known for Affreca de Courcy and the Abbey, kelp kilns, rooks, wheat and barley, egrets and oak trees. While the Abbey itself, with its history of construction, dissolution, destruction and reconstruction, like "The Green Boys o' Greba", who took part in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, or the fabulous stories of monks shapeshifting by night into rooks to fly over the monastery walls and visit local women, all fascinated, I was most drawn to the figure of Affreca de Courcy. I wanted to know the meaning of her name and her family history, how she came to found the Abbey; I was curious about her daily life as a twelfth-century woman, her responses to the wildlife and landscapes of Strangford Lough, the nature of her spiritual beliefs.

While the exploits of Affreca's husband, the Anglo-Norman knight-mercenary John de Courcy of Somerset, who invaded the north of Ireland in 1177 and seized much of the kingdom of Ulaid (eastern Ulster), is reasonably well documented, the historical record on Affreca is sparser. The daughter of Godred II Olafsson, Norse King of Man

and the Isles, and an Irish step-mother, Finnguala Nic Lochlainn, she was born on the Isle of Man and had three brothers and one sister. Her marriage in 1180 to de Courcy appears to have been politically strategic, engineered to bolster an alliance between her father's Gaelic-Scandinavian Crovan dynasty and the increasingly powerful position of the English in Ireland; more specifically, Affreca's maternal west Ulster family were enemies of the Ulaid. The marriage ensured de Courcy prestige, military might and allies who would both assist in his seizing of east Ulster and protect his newly acquired territories from Viking raids. de Courcy's conquest led to the construction of military castles at Dundrum and Carrickfergus, while his generosity to the church enabled the establishment of Nendrum Monastery, Inch Abbey and Black Abbey for Benedictine and Cistercian orders from England and France – Irish monks were not permitted to enter de Courcy's religious establishments. Accounts differ as to whether or not Affreca and her husband had any children, but what is certain is that thirteen years after their marriage it was Affreca who in 1193 founded a Cistercian monastery dedicated to St Mary of *Iugum Dei* (meaning Yoke of God) which came to be known as Grey Abbey (Irish *Mainistir Liath*). Legend has it that the Abbey was Affreca's "gesture of thanksgiving" for safe passage during a storm while crossing the Irish Sea from the Isle of Man to Ireland. With its pointed window and door arches, it is considered to be the first structure in Ulster to incorporate gothic architecture. The original community of monks came from Holm Cultram Abbey in Cumberland; both de Courcy and Godred had ties with that part of north-west England. Apart from an inheritance of land from de Courcy, little more is known about Affreca, although it is likely she lived at Grey Abbey and was buried there when she died circa 1219.

This skeleton biography gave me a starting point. Clearly, Affreca had been an immigrant to Ireland, and to the Ards peninsula in particular. Caught up in familial and cultural tides of invasion, colonization and settlement, she carried with her knowledge of diverse languages and traditions, political positions and religious orientations. However sketchy the details, Affreca's experience was a vital part of the history of the peninsula, and I wanted to find a way to make her story the lens through which readers of my poem might access that broader context.

New Year's Day 2019 was ice-bitten blue, frost hanging in sheets in the static morning air. The sky was overcast, the light filtered and partial. I'd come to the Abbey early in the day to avoid the distraction of other visitors, to experience the place as Affreca herself might have one winter morning eight hundred years before. As I wandered the grounds, listening to the crackle of the ravens and the low pulse of river run, it wasn't hard to

imagine Affreca there overseeing the construction of the original buildings, welcoming the monks, making prayers, tending to the herb garden. At the same time, I had an overwhelming sense of how little anyone could ever know – about her character, her fears and her desires, her inner life. It was there, while resting on one of the remaining walls of the Chapter House, that I wrote the opening line of the poem: "In a thicket of question marks, where can a noblewoman turn to speak?" I didn't want to put words in Affreca's mouth; it seemed more appropriate to ask, via a series of questions, how she might have thought or acted or felt. In that way, I hoped that readers of the poem might be drawn, as I had been, to encounter her absent presence. As it turned out, there was one other visitor to the Abbey that day – a woman exercising two greyhounds, one black, one fawn. I live with two greyhounds myself, one black, one brindle, and though they weren't with me that day, the unexpected appearance of those sleek, fleet creatures and the woman walking with them seemed a link with Affreca. In the poem those greyhounds became the "silver merle", the "sable" and the "brindle blue" flanking her woodland meanders, one of which, along with a pair of rooks, graces the mosaic seat panel Eleanor created for the Greyabbey bench.

The next two weeks were spent drafting and redrafting the poem. Before the end of January the written pieces and bench designs were reviewed and approved by the workshop participants at a residential in Donegal. Readings of the poems and prose piece by the authors were next recorded at Queen's University Belfast, and a preliminary fold-out pamphlet containing an overview of the programme and the text of the poems and prose piece was printed. At the same time, construction of the benches and the bronze plaques was under way, and they were installed on the sites by the end of March. In June, the poets, visual artists and representatives from the IRC collectively visited each of the locations, where interviews with them about the project were filmed by Northern Visions TV for a program entitled *Art at the Heart of the Peninsula*. With the interviews, pre-recorded readings of the poems and footage of the art works edited together, the film was broadcast by NVTV the following September.[1] Later in the year, a limited edition pamphlet which reproduced the text of each poem and the prose piece alongside QR codes linking to the audio recordings and featuring an introduction by Edna Longley was published by the ICR.[2] The pamphlet was launched and the film screened at an event celebrating the completion of the project at Orange Tree House, Greyabbey, on December 2, 2019. "Affreca and the Rooks" was subsequently published in *New Hibernia*

[1] *Art at the Heart of the Peninsula*, Northern Visions TV, broadcast September 17,19, 21 and 22, 2019. Online at http://www.nvtv.co.uk/shows/art-at-the-heart-of-the-peninsula/

[2] *Art at the Heart of the Peninsula*, Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019.

Review v. 24, n. 3 (Autumn 2020) as part of a selection of my work under the heading "Filíocht Nua: New Poetry" (McCracken, 2020, p. 58-67). [3]

Figures 1-4: Photographs of the permanent on-site installation "Affreca and the Rooks"



Source: Kathleen McCracken

[3] Kathleen McCracken, "The Gauntlet Road", "The Fulminologist", "Affreca and the Rooks", "The Pineries, Hillsborough Castle", "High Fidelity", "Bob Dylan's Paintings", "Burying the Raven", "Will It Fly?", *New Hibernia Review* 24:3 (Autumn 2020): 58-67.



Source: Kathleen McCracken



Source: Kathleen McCracken



Source: Kathleen McCracken

References

BOYLE, Maureen. Swallows. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula**. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019.

CAMPBELL, Siobhan. Longboat at Portaferry. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula**. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019.

CARSON, Jan. Kircubbin. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula**. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019.

LONGLEY, Edna. Introduction. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula** Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019, p. 4-5.

MADDERN, Paul. Donaghadee. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula**. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019.

MCCRACKEN, Kathleen. Affreca and the Rooks**. Art at the Heart of the Peninsula** Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019, p. 12-13.

ORMSBY, Frank. The Pole, The Lovers, The Birds. **Art at the Heart of the Peninsula.** Belfast: Institute for Conflict Resolution Peace IV Programme, 2019, p. 17-19.

MEMOIR

The other side of Palestrina in the darkness: queer Dublin in the 1980s

Lance Pettitt

1 Introduction

I was waiting on Platform 10 at Clapham Junction, one of London's busiest train stations, when I heard the news that Éibhear Walshe (1962-2024) had died suddenly in Dublin. I'd just spent a leisurely day watching cricket at the Oval ground, and now I was rooted to the spot re-reading the brief details in the text from a former student. Commuters milled around me, beyond the platform the train tracks stretched out in all directions, a numb ganglion of communication.

Beside me, above a bench, was a wall-plaque marking the spot on which in November 1895 Oscar Wilde, sentenced to two years in prison, had waited in irons while being transferred from Wandsworth Prison to Reading Gaol. He was recognised and roundly abused by a crowd. The irony of hearing about Éibhear at a site of Wildean commemoration will not be lost on scholars who recognise the incisive contribution that he made to Irish queer studies in general and on Wilde in particular. He leaves behind him an important body of Irish literary criticism, a generation of younger scholars who he taught at UCD and then through a devoted career at the Department of English, University College, Cork, and in a clutch of novels and a memoir.

This is a personal piece, not a critical summary of his academic and creative work, and it's tightly focused on my memories from 1985-1990.[1] It's a partial memoir of the man I met in Belfield, UCD, with whom I remained friends up until his untimely death in the

[1] I have written about the period after the 1993 decriminalisation and equal rights legalisation in Ireland in Ga(y)uiness is good for you, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95:1 (Winter 1996), 205-212.

summer of 2024. Inevitably perhaps, in this kind of life writing mode, what I write about Éibhear says as much about me – or me then – as it does about him.

Éibhear used to tell an anecdote about Micheál MacLíammóir and Hilton Edwards, or the "Boys" as they were known; two of Dublin theatre's homosexual men who were accepted as a celebrity gay couple as much as they could be in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. It was one of my favourite moments of Éibhear's repertoire. He used it in the introduction to his *Sex, Nation and Dissent* (1997), a collection that he conceived and edited for Cork University Press. I recall that he first told it to me in the lino-floored kitchen of his student house-share in Rathmines sometime around 1986. I had cycled over from my gaff on Rathgar Road for impromptu tea and toast mid-morning. I won't retell the joke here, but it involved MacLíammóir falling into the lake in Stephen's Green. Suffice it to say, the payoff line relied on a delicious pun on "buoy/boy", and Éibhear delivered it with much relish and what he called "divilment".

2 Early days in Belfield

During my first couple of years as a student in Ireland, I lived in a shared house in a place called Goatstown (Baile na nGabhar), one of Dublin city's Southside outer suburbs. It was not far from UCD's grey concrete campus known as Belfield. I'd got the room details from a postcard I'd seen pinned on a noticeboard. Along with coin-box telephone kiosks, small ads and notes stuck on boards, this was how people communicated in 1980s times. The landlord, Danny McNelis, was a bearded, affable, one-legged headmaster of Gonzaga College, a posh Jesuit school. At "Anach Cuain", he housed lodgers who were either teachers or nurses, or students like me. At that time, I biked everywhere: into classes, to the shops and central Dublin itself. I immediately took to the inner city's streets, the smoke-ridden pubs with creamy Guinness; the second-hand bookshops, theatre spaces (the Project), cheap cafes and parks. Ostensibly, I'd chosen Ireland for the full-on Joyce scholar trip: his exile passage (via Holyhead in reverse) was an escape route for me too, for I was a fugitive on the run from myself.

Now Ireland at that time might seem a strange place for a young Englishman to discover his (homo) sexuality, but Britain under Margaret Thatcher was not known for progressive social politics. Whilst I was away, the Conservative government introduced the infamous Section 28 of the Local Authorities (Act) that proscribed the promotion of homosexuality in UK schools, particularly its acceptability as "part of pretended family relationship"

(Hansard, 1988, n.p.). Ireland in the 1980s saw two massive wins for conservative, Catholic social values in the referenda results of 1983 and 1986, stitching abortion and divorce into the constitutional social fabric of the country. "The North" – and by that, I mean the state of Northern Ireland, that bit of Ireland that remained legally part of the United Kingdom (UK) – was associated with political conflict along national fault lines and moral dogmatism. Memorably, Ian Paisley headed up a "Save Ulster from Sodomy" campaign. This was a reactionary response to challenge and change, for in 1981 Jeffery Dudgeon had successfully brought a case in the European Court of Human Rights, forcing Northern Ireland to fall in line with the UK on same-sex laws (Lacey, 2008, p. 249). This signalled a decisive shift of the legal tectonic plates that tremored southward.

To most of the people I hung around with in Dublin, "the North" was a foreign country. It was forgotten in a failing Republic whose economy was in a mess and its political class in shambles. Unemployment was a social blight, and emigration was rising to 1950s proportions, especially amongst 17-26-year-olds. Allied to this there was an urban drugs and crime wave, and a public health crisis was developing over HIV/AIDS.

Amid this, between 1985-86, I completed an MA in Anglo-Irish literature at UCD, care of a generous grant as part of an Irish-British Government Exchange Scholarship. I didn't know it at the time, but I was a small cog in the diplomatic wheel of inter-governmental cultural relations that political history will record as the "Anglo-Irish Agreement", signed by Mrs Thatcher and Garret FitzGerald in November 1985. I wonder which civil servant committee selected my application as deserving, but I must have written what they wanted to hear. In an otherwise international (for that, read North American) MA class, I was the only person from England. "Gus" (Augustine) Martin, who was the Prof and headed up English in UCD, liked to quip I was the "Anglo" in his Anglo-Irish course. Whilst the US, Canadians, Germans and others were great, I cleaved towards the few Irish people on the course.

I set about absorbing myself in Dublin's cultural and pub life. But I also joined the squash club, found a girlfriend (Siobhan) who played in the women's team, and travelled around the country playing intervarsity matches. I also tried out the windsurfing club. I learned the rudiments on UCD lake and went on a trip to Clew Bay, Mayo, where the wind blew at force nine so that we couldn't sail at all. So far, so heterosexual. This lasted for about two years of my studies at UCD, by which time I had embarked on a PhD programme. But one summer, Siobhan went off to the USA, and we mutually agreed to let our relationship end. The truth is, when I had visited her family back in Westport, I realised

that I fancied one of her several brothers, and back in Dublin, I faced up to the fact that I was attracted to a guy I played squash with. However, it was a new acquaintance from amongst my doctoral cohort that became the catalyst for my coming out.

From memory, Éibhear hadn't done my MA and how I met him was as part of a band of doctoral student tutors who hung our coats in a shared office in the Arts Block in Belfield: Sean Ryder, Kathy McArdle, John McCourt, amongst many others. Collectively, we did the seminar teaching for the English BA and First Arts undergrad. My students included Tina O'Toole, Emma Donoghue and Rónan McDonald. This was a time when humanities recruitment was high, core lectures were in Belfield's vast, deep lecture amphitheatres of dark brick. Our job as tutors was to run weekly seminars taking students through lit crits of the canonical texts, advising on essay preparation and the like. It was grunt work, but the money was survival.

Using a system of Post-it notes or scrap paper Bluetacked to the office door, Éibhear and I arranged to go for tea breaks together, or we had lunch in the clattering canteen. We began to socialise off campus, in town and going to see theatre or just hanging out. Talking about our weekly teaching, Éibhear always amazed me with how well he grasped the plot and key scenes of some of the doorstep novels we had to coax our students through. He explained to me that he pretty much had a photographic memory of the written page. Some classes we co-taught, and I also watched him present his research at graduate seminars. I envied his poise and ease with which he delivered his material. He was a good mimic too, and I don't know why, but I loved it when he impersonated an elderly radio presenter that fronted a classical music programme on RTE.

As I went on to learn, Éibhear was steeped in the provincial, middle-class culture of his youth in Waterford. His father worked in a mental health hospital, and an aunt (a Hamm, of German descent) owned one of the town's abattoirs. His class of people believed in education for social mobility, light opera and self-betterment, but naturally, the observance of the Catholic faith. He absorbed the way small town, bourgeois Catholicism coexisted with Waterford's Ascendancy set, and this, I think, gave him the basis for his analyses of Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen and more contemporary writers like Colm Toibin.[2] He captured all of his early years and getting to university in the hugely enjoyable *Cissie's Abattoir* (2009). If you want to get a sense of Éibhear's voice, his manner and way of being, read this book. Of course, much of this ordinary decency he carried

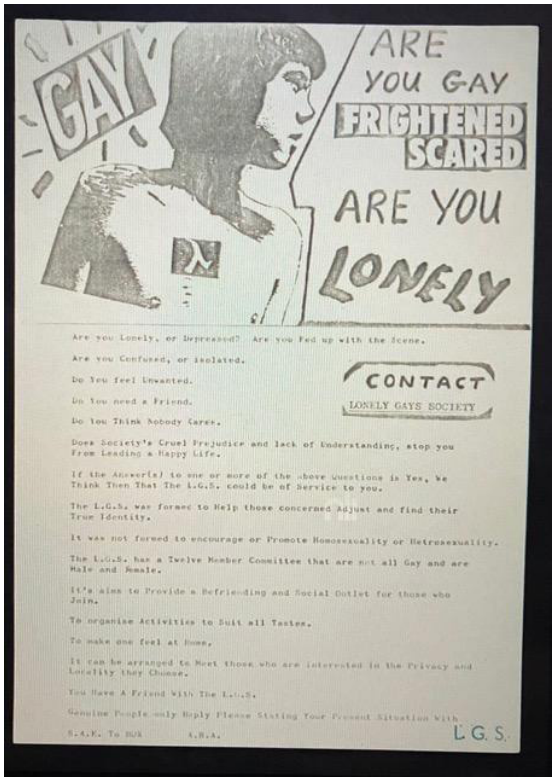
[2] See in particular, O'BRIEN, Kate. **A Writer's Life**. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008.

with him "coming up" to Dublin. He too was desperate to escape his prison. Waterford's cultural formation tried to contain the kind of feelings that defined his sexuality in late-twentieth-century Ireland.

Outside of the Belfield campus, over tea or beers (though he was never a great drinker), picking at meals or at his student house-share, Éibhear and I became close friends. Tentatively, we opened up to each other about our feelings, about being attracted towards men. We did the whole retelling of "when did you first know?", if we had told our families (no), if anyone else knew (one or two), who our boyhood crushes had been, if we thought any of our fellow students were gay (probably not), and so on.

But then, one day when we met up, Éibhear handed me a leaflet and told me that the previous Sunday he had been to a thing called "Ice Breakers". This was a monthly befriending group for gay men and women, a successor to an earlier group formed in the late-1970s called the "Lonely Gay Society".[3]

Figure 1: "Lonely Gays Society" flier



Source: IQA/NLI, Dublin

[3] Key primary materials from this period are collected in the Irish Queer Archive at the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, and example of which is this flier for the "Lonely Gay Society", IQA/NLI, MS45.949/8/1, n.d.

"Ice Breakers" was run by people connected to Hirschfield Centre on Fownes Street, a run-down building that was a venue for lesbian and gay support groups, a Tel-a-Friend (TAF) telephone advice and information, a disco, café bar and an office for what became the GCN (*Gay Community News*) newspaper. Its significance is now being captured in an ongoing oral history project (Kerrigan and Pramaggiore, n.d.) The "Ice Breakers" group was a monthly, "non scene" social meeting for "first timers", held on a Sunday afternoon – a day and time thought easier for closeted men to slip along to. The group met discreetly in a room on the first floor of the Clarence Hotel, down on one of the quays along the Liffey. Boosted by Éibhear's example, I resolved to go to the next meeting. But when the next Sunday came around, and I headed into town, I had the bad luck to bump into a chap from the squash club on the way. Dublin was a small town. He asked me where I was going. I couldn't tell him where, so I went to another pub with him instead. This was the definition of being in the closet. I was at this time still living at Danny's house share living as a straight guy.

I had to wait for another month before I took a very circuitous bike route to the Clarence and snuck in, extremely nervous. The next two hours flew by. The session was expertly facilitated by two guys, one of whom it turned out was in architecture at UCD. A dozen guys were there, from late teens to middle-aged, some who'd travelled up secretly from beyond Dublin, others who worked in shops and offices of the city. It was the first time that I had done such a thing. After coffee, chat, discussion and some games, we were taken to the Parliament pub to be introduced to "the scene". At that stage, the commercial gay scene consisted of two gay pubs (the Parliament and the George), one lesbian establishment, J.J.'s (J.J. Smyth's) on Camden Street, and a men's sauna down an alley that came out by the entrance to Dublin Castle.[4] Other venues, like "Sides" were "one-nighters" known to be "gay-friendly", and they tended to attract a younger student crowd. So, from this, I began to shift from a closeted, internalised double-life to a transitional identity where I had both a straight and emergent gay social life. I shared this process with Éibhear: it was part of what made our friendship special. It was about individual growth and self-awareness but also, of course, a profoundly social and ultimately a political activity. You sensed you were testing the boundaries of what was becoming acceptable. We were living through a period of change that was taking place in Dublin and a wider Ireland at the end of the 1980s. This became all the more palpable in what happened next.

[4] Hana Flamm explores earlier histories of gay pubs in Dublin in the 1970s and early 1980s in Discovering the history of The Viking, https://gcn.ie/history-the-viking-inn-dublin-gay-bar/ **Gay Community News**, n. 389, June 6, 2025. Accessed on: 1 Aug. 2025.

3 Lesbian and Gay Awareness Week comes to UCD

Within a few weeks of attending "Ice Breakers", Éibhear and I were going to the Parliament on a regular basis. Reeking of Fahrenheit, we drank, cruised, danced, and began to build up a circle of friends. I'd had one or two sexual encounters, but I certainly wasn't looking for a boyfriend. "Hooray Henry's" was a club in the Powerscourt Building, but Éibhear and I also explored pubs or hotel bars that were said to be frequented by people like us. One of these, I recall, like Bartley Dunnes, was not far from the Olympia Theatre.

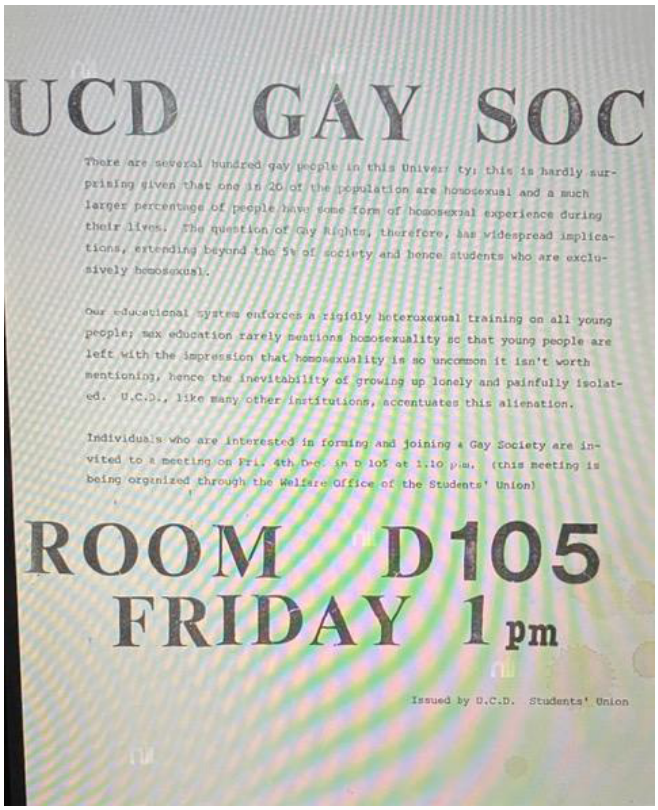
One club, trying to be a bit more upmarket, was a dimly lit basement dive in Ely Place, just round the corner from Daíl Éireann. Here you would find discreet civil servants, businessmen, accountants, even the occasional RTÉ television presenter or priest in mufti. Mixed in with those from the Parliament with enough money to pay the late licence prices were solitary working-class lads from the northside, happy to work a trick with a suit. I was there once when the Gardai raided it. Suddenly the cavernous dark became a glaring light, the music shut off, and people blinked at each other, spell broken. Then you could see how grubby and cramped it was, drips of sweaty condensation had formed on the low nicotine ceiling. The manager protested that there were no drugs in his establishment as eight pairs of Garda boots clumped down the stairs; some of the suited clientele ducked into alcoves. Standing about, passive and mute, the rest of us turned out our pockets as ordered. But as the uniformed culchies moved through the place, they were mercilessly ribbed by a bar stool punter: "Are youse fellas the strip act?" "Is that your truncheon, Guard, or are you just pleased to see me?" It was Dublin camp's response to the intimidation and threat of exposure. Luckily, I didn't get my name taken, and no drugs were discovered that night.

At around this time, I decided that I would have to move out of my shared house. This was partly precipitated by the fact that we had a new lodger at Anach Cuain who'd moved into the box room next door to me. A week later, I bumped into him at the Parliament. This made me jumpy, too close to home. I gave my notice to Danny and moved out to an anonymous bedsit on the Rathgar Road in Rathmines. At that time, it was a run-down "studentville" area. Rent was cheap, UCD was still an easy bike ride, and town was much closer. It also meant, of course, that I could spread my wings and bring guys back to my bedsit for sex.

On an occasional trip back to England, I'd started to explore London's gay scene. I still wasn't out at home. I was buying but hiding *Gay Times* and *The Pink Paper* when I stayed

with my parents. I even went on a protest march in central London against Section 28, and when I went back to Dublin, I took to wearing a black badge with an inverted pink triangle on my lapel. I realised that I had done most of my TV archive research and needed to start writing up my thesis. Meanwhile, gay folk that I knew in Dublin and Belfast were also getting organised. I went on my first Gay Pride march with Éibhear ("We're here, we're queer, and we're not going shopping!") and we were beginning to enjoy the confidence that collective public visibility engenders. I had gone along to UCD's very low-profile Lesbian and Gay Society, which had only recently been formed.[5]

Figure 2: Leaflet of UCD Lesbian and Gay Society



Source: IQA/NLI

It was difficult to find out about them and, to be honest, they weren't very exciting events. But it was a start. One immediate outcome was that at the first meeting I met two of my own undergraduate students, Joan and Tina: lesbians, lively and bright.

Apparently, unlike the L+H (the Literary and Historical Society), other official societies and the sports clubs, UCD's Lesbian and Gay Society had no funds. This was because the UCD authorities didn't recognise the "LG Soc" as a bona fide group due to the legal and

[5] "Notice issued by UCD SU of its intention to form a Gay Society", IQA, MS 46,002/5/1, Dublin, NLI, n.d.

moral status of homosexuality in Ireland. Again, you have to appreciate the context at this time. The pressure of Catholic social teaching on contraception was such that it was illegal for condoms to be sold publicly in Ireland.[6] Out at the UCD campus, the Student Union (SU) Welfare Office installed a condom vending machine for students seeking contraception and protection from STIs, including HIV, which was now reaching epidemic levels in some communities. The college authorities objected. The Gardaí were called to campus to "arrest" the condom machine. At the "LG Soc" we hatched a "recognition" campaign to lobby for equal rights and gain the right to access SU finances.[7] This grew into the idea of a "Gay Awareness" week across the Belfield campus. We were tapping into a growing national campaign, led by the NGF (National Gay Federation) and GLEN (Glen and Lesbian Equality Now), to decriminalise homosexuality and secure equal legal rights within the Republic (MacDonagh, 2021). Through student activism, Éibhear, me and others began to transform ourselves.

The organising group that we were part of set about putting together a programme that would aim to force a positive vote by the UCD Academic Council to recognise the L+G soc and present the "Gay Awareness Week". We planned to screen a series of gay themed films (I remember *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and *I've heard the Mermaids Singing* and *Maurice*). We wanted to have literary readings, to stage a major debate and to have a desk with information on a public concourse in the Arts Building. It was staffed by those with gumption enough to stand by a table and give out leaflets at break times. You soon learned to face down the stares and abuse. There were logistical problems in booking rooms for the week. Some college porters didn't want to play ball; we had to pay for badges, posters and T-shirts. Some posters that we put up were ripped down or set alight and then our publicity was deemed a "fire hazard". The L+H Society agreed to co-host the set-piece debate as part of their regular slot. I forget the wording of the motion that we settled on, but I wrote to ask the journalist Fintan O'Toole to speak, and he agreed. We got the bête noir of liberalism, Máire Kirrane from Family Solidarity, a right wing lay-Catholic organisation to lead the side opposing the motion. Members of the Law Soc and L+H also spoke. Emma Donoghue, as well as doing readings, spoke eloquently and sanely at the debate that night too. Lecture Theatre M was packed. The motion was carried. We'd had a petition going all week and made sure that we delivered this to the Academic Board its

[6] Feminists in the Irish Women's Liberation Group had challenged this in 1971 with the infamous "condom train" stunt, importing legally available prophylactics from across the border in Northern Ireland. A decade later, English businessman Richard Branon opened a Virgin Megastore in Dublin and caused a public furore by selling his branded Virgin condoms alongside vinyl and audio cassettes.

[7] There is a file, detailing aspects of this correspondence between UCD SU and the National Gay Federation in IQA papers 1988/89 MS45,944/5, Dublin, NLI, n.d.

next meeting. I remember chasing Gus Martin along a link tunnel over to the university's council chamber, saying "yes, yes Gus, but are you voting for us?!"

The more humdrum stuff of doing an hour on the stand, fitted in between classes and so on, was tough. As soon as you make yourself visible, you become a target for homophobic abuse. But we gave out leaflets, pointed to our programme and tried to stay positive. It wasn't all worthy stuff. We took the idea of awareness right into the heart of student life: the SU Bar. We hired it to host a gay "date night" competition, based on the format of the then popular British TV show called *Blind Date*, starring Cilla Black. Fair play to the SU for backing and booking us. They even let us use their microphone, PA system, and a CD player to play the theme music. The SU Bar was heavily populated by the university's BA Comm students, the male dominated GAA, rugby and other sports teams, the "Ags" (Agriculture) and Law. It really was going into the lion's den of hetero-culture.

We invited students in from all the other Dublin university gay socs, Maynooth, NCAD and so on, so that we had a rowdy, friendly crowd to play to. Dressed in a tuxedo for the night, I was the master of ceremonies, setting the evening up, cajoling contests and so on. But the real star of the show, dragged up to the nines was Éibhear playing his version of Cilla, the hostess with the most-ess. For the life of me, I can't remember what drag stag name he adopted that night, but he was brilliant. It was an ideal platform for his wit and repartee and the put down humour at which he excelled. Somewhere, I have a photo of Éibhear and me from that evening, before he got in drag. It's one of my most treasured photos of us.

There's one more event from this period that I was involved with Éibhear and that was a UCD Dram Soc production of Martin's Sherman's *Bent*. He had chosen it, cast it and directed it. Although it clearly fitted with the "Awareness" week, for some reason – theatre availability probably or we all had too much to do, or – anyway – it wasn't put on that week. But we did stage it in the studio space in Belfield, and my role was as Assistant Stage Management (ASM). A lad called Paul (an art student in NCAD who went on to do theatre design professionally) did a magnificent backcloth painting, we had strong student actors in the two leads. I think we played two or three nights. I can't recall how we got funds to produce it. In rehearsal, Éibhear was really astute as a director: he knew what he wanted. I had a walk-on as a German guard: he gave me notes on menace and movement, I recall. As ASM, I had to go down to Kevin Street Garda station on the afternoon of each performance and sign a form to pick up the rifle and two blank cartridges, one of which was fired each evening in the show. It got reviewed favourably

in the *Irish Times* too. It's tucked as a newspaper clipping into a book that I have on one of my shelves.

4 The other side of Palestrina in the darkness

Like many of my cohort in UCD at this time, I had notions of becoming an academic or at least trying to write professionally in some way. Back then, there were enough students in the university humanities sector to give postgraduates a sense that they might get a job. In the meantime, I had to make ends meet. Although I'd had a generous exchange scholarship, it only lasted for a year. As well as my seminar teaching, I earned money coaching cricket and rugby at Gonzaga College, courtesy of my landlord, Danny McNelis, who was the Prefect of Studies there. Éibhear soaked up classical music, opera and always played it in his room at his house-share. Unlike me, he was astute at getting literary experience whilst doing his research. Moreover, his desk was tidy, his books were neatly shelved. While I had had my MA typed up for me, Éibhear had his own electric typewriter that emitted a satisfyingly rapid k-thunk sound as he typed. One day, over at his place, he looked up from his work and declared to me that he was going to be a writer. I was never in any doubt that's what he would become. He was focused and active in networking and was already co-editing a literary critical journal called *Graph*.[8] Generously, he asked if I'd do a piece for it, and I ended up writing a review article on two plays we'd been to see. Both were revivals of early, lesser-known plays by Brian Friel and Thomas Kilroy that addressed the issue of homosexuality in Ireland[9] and was my first published criticism, all thanks to him. A decade later, he commissioned me to contribute an essay for his Sex, *Nation and Dissent* book. He was kind to include me, particularly as I'd submitted my doctorate and was heading back to England, we hadn't actually parted on the best of terms.

Before I come to that, I have to explain how our friendship progressed and intensified through the experience of the awareness week and the *Bent* production. Éibhear was not out to his parents, but he did invite me to spend a weekend in Waterford to meet his parents and siblings at the family home. Nothing was said of course, I knew how to play it straight. I was just his English friend, and I was put in the spare room. His family was lovely. His mother was warm; his father garrulous if a bit awkward towards me. To

[8] Lance Pettitt, Two Plays. *Graph*, (Dublin, 1988/89), 18-19.

[9] The plays were Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* (1971) and Thomas Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche* (1968), both published by in Dublin by The Gallery Press, in 1993 and 2002 respectively.

them, I just played my role as inquisitive English man, glad to be seeing a bit of Ireland outside of Dublin. Éibhear showed me the town that he'd grown up in and he took me to walk Tramore beach. It was all part of getting to know him better, more deeply. Was something more than innocent friendship developing between us? Although I now socialised in gay venues, had explored sex on the scene, and was increasingly "out" gay in Dublin, I certainly wasn't to my family back in England. I still had a lot of stuff going on in my head and I wasn't entirely comfortable with myself. The last thing I was contemplating was having a boyfriend.

And yet, back in Dublin, I was spending increasing amounts of time in Éibhear's company. For in what happened next, Palestrina has a lot to answer for. Éibhear had invited me over for a meal at his place. He wasn't a very accomplished cook, I can't recall what he prepared, but I took a bottle of red wine. Unlike before, his other house mates were all away; we had the place to ourselves. We ate our meal, drank the wine he'd bought for the meal and moved from the living room to his room. Here he put some heat on, I opened my bottle of Italian red and Éibhear slid in an audio cassette into his player and the "Kyrie" of Palestrina's "Missa Papae Marcelli" filled the room. We talked about us: each other's good points, annoying habits, personality quirks. We recalled how we had first met in the postgraduate office and all the notes we had to leave each other to arrange meets. Then he said quietly:

"Open that draw there. The top one, on the right".

I slid it open and looked in. I recognised a yellow Post-it note with my handwriting on top of a pile of scraps of paper and other notes. I leafed through one or two. "Tea after class. 4.30?" "Fancy a sandwich –just throw a slice of ham or an' thing in it" – private jokes, mimicking – my signing off "L". with a '☺'. He'd kept each one, in this draw, carefully treasured over the two years.

"Oh".

"*That's* what I think of you".

The sound of "Agnes Dei" hung in the air between us, and I realised what was happening. We finished our wine and, listening to the other side of Palestrina in the darkness, I shared his bed that night.

Looking back at my twenty-four-year-old self, I'm embarrassed by my monumental emotional ineptness. I'm sorry to say that I reacted badly to our night of sexual intimacy, and I couldn't face the consequences of allowing myself to fall in love with him. I harboured a deep-seated, self-hating teenage shame about my sexuality that has taken forty years to acknowledge. At that time, I lacked the emotional maturity to handle a relationship. For days and weeks afterwards, I distanced Éibhear, threw myself into my thesis work, avoided him if I saw him out on the scene and generally treated him horribly. I did meet another guy called Sean, originally from Mayo but studying in Maynooth. He'd been a seminarian in Cork but got out because of the leery priests. We were together for the last eighteen months or so of my time in Ireland. I think it was difficult for Éibhear to see me with another guy at that time.

I remember exactly the final time I saw Éibhear before I left Dublin. It would have been at the end of 1990: my thesis was in, I'd passed the viva, and the graduation ceremony was set for March 1991. My last bit of teaching was wrapped up, the marking handed back. I was in the lobby area on the English Department corridor, outside Gus Martin's office. There, suddenly, was Éibhear handing in some paperwork. We had a brief, awkward conversation at the end of which, I leant into him to kiss his cheek. He pulled away saying, "I don't want your kisses". He said it in a burst of anger, hurt and sadness, then he took off up the corridor. It was a pretty messy parting, but his reaction was perfectly understandable. However, with distance and time, we found our own ways in academic careers and lasting personal relationships. After a hiatus of a couple of years, we reconnected and began again our friendship: me in London and him in Cork.

I read most of his critical work and we talked about each other's writing projects as our careers developed. I'll leave it to others to review his critical legacy and I have already mentioned his memoir, *Cissie's Abattoir*. When he turned to fiction, I read his novels and attended the London launch of *The Trumpet Shall Sound* (2019). But it was his final novel *The Last Day in Bowen's Court* (2020) which I enjoyed the most.[10] It's a creative treatment of a literary figure whose life and fiction he'd researched and written about, and the novel is a peach. It is beautifully written, poised and poignant. I'd bought it in Dublin and the last texts I exchanged on our mobiles in January 2024 were about it. He said it was

[10] Readers interested in hearing about Éibhear's research for this novel can listen to him giving a talk on the topic in Paris. Elizabeth Bowen, Espionage and the Second World War. Talk to the Centre Culturel Institute, Paris. [2018] https://www.centreculturelirlandais.com/en-ce-moment/expositions-evenements/Éibhear-walshe Access on September 28, 2025.

the novel he'd most enjoyed writing and given him the most pleasure to finish. Sadly, we never got to discuss it in person over a lunch.

5 Parting online

On hearing of Éibhear's death from Tina O'Toole, John Bergin and I exchanged texts. He sent me the links to some obituaries and details of the funeral director's website. Using this, I attended Éibhear's funeral vicariously. Post-Covid, I know such web-streamed services have become quite a normal feature of life, or death so to speak. When I logged on, I could see it was a full-on Catholic requiem mass. Éibhear was not as far as I knew him a practising Catholic but that was the world and the family that he came from. His brother and sister both spoke. It felt deeply estranging to be standing in my kitchen in London, looking in at such a poignant ritual taking place across the Irish Sea in Waterford. Realising the loss of this person that I had known, began to take its effect. As the ceremony came to its close, a male solo voice began to sing a Capello "The Parting Glass". I crumpled under my emotion and quietly bawled my eyes out in the kitchen.

Here's to Éibhear!

> "But since it fell into my lot
> That I should rise and you should not
> I'll gently rise and softly call
> Good night and joy be to you all".

References

HANSARD. Clause 28, Local Authorities Bill. **HANSARD**, v. 129, 9 March 1988. London: HMSO, 1988. Available on: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1988-03-09/debates/c1497c91-8046-4966-9217-ec9ca52fcab1/Clause28. Accessed on: 28 Sep. 2025.

KERRIGAN, Padraic and PRAMAGGIORE, Marie. '**Waking the Hirschfeld: An Oral History and Archival Study of the Hirschfeld Centre.** Available on: https://wakingthehirschfeld.com. Accessed on: 14 Jan. 2025.

LACEY, Brian. **Terrible Queer Creatures: Homosexuality in Irish History**. Dublin: Wordwell, 2008.

MACDONAGH, Patrick. **Gay and Lesbian Activism in Ireland, 1979-1993**. London: Bloomsbury, 2021.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND, **Irish Queer Archive, Papers 1974-2005**. Available on: https://catalogue.nli.ie/Collection/vtls000276865. Accessed on: 24 Oct. 2025.

PETTITT, Lance. Two Plays. **Graph**, Dublin, p. 18-19, 1988/89.

PETTITT, Lance . G(ay)uinness is Good For You. **The South Atlantic Quarterly**, v. 95, n.1, p. 205-212, Winter 1996.

WALSHE, Éibhear (ed.). **Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing**. Cork: Cork University Press, 1997.

WALSHE, Éibhear . Sodom and Begorrah, or Game to the Last: Inventing Michael MacLiammoir. *In:* **Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing**, 1997, p. 150-169.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **Kate O'Brien: A Writing Life**. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **Cissie's Abattoir**. Cork: The Collins Press, 2009.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **Oscar's Shadow: Wilde, Homosexuality and Modern Ireland**. Cork: Cork University Press, 2011.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **The Trumpet Shall Sound**. Dromore: Somerville Press, 2019.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **The Last Day at Bowen's Court**. Dromore: Somerville Press, 2020.

WALSHE, Éibhear . **Elizabeth Bowen, Espionage and the Second World War**. Talk to the Centre Culturel Institute, Paris, 2018. Available on: https://www.centreculturelirlandais.com/en-ce-moment/expositions-evenements/Éibhear-walshe. Accessed on: 28 Sep. 2025.

VISUAL ARTS AND DANCE

Horrible Creature

Áine Stapleton

In 1915, James Joyce and Nora Barnacle traveled with their young children, Giorgio and Lucia, to Switzerland during World War I. Lucia later trained as a dancer and performed throughout Europe until her career abruptly ended in the early 1930s. She was forced into psychiatric care and underwent experimental treatments at various hospitals across Europe. *Horrible Creature* is the second film in a trilogy by the director and is shot at locations in Switzerland where Lucia spent time. The films challenge the accepted biography of Lucia's life and explore the complexities of her mental health. In *Horrible Creature*, Lucia's own writings are interpreted by a cast of international dance artists, conjuring her world between 1915 and 1950.



Writer, Director, Producer: Áine Stapleton
Performers: Michelle Boulé, Céline Larrère
Director of Photography: Will Humphris



Writer, Director, Producer: Áine Stapleton
Performer: Michelle Boulé
Director of Photography: Will Humphris



Writer, Director, Producer: Áine Stapleton
Performer: Michelle Boulé
Director of Photography: Will Humphris

ESSAYS

FILM

The body in the bog, *Crá*, and historical memory

Ruth Barton

1 Introduction

This essay offers an analysis of the BBC NI/TG4 co-production, *Crá* (Torment), a thriller set in a remote Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) area of County Donegal, in north-west Ireland. As I discuss below, I am interested in this as a production that appropriates a popular television genre, the police procedural, to reflect on issues of trauma and historical memory. In doing so, I argue, it faces in two directions, one outwards to an international audience looking for new variations on the genre, and in particular one that is highly invested in the exoticism of peripherality, and the other inwards to a local audience for whom a myriad of references offer meanings unavailable to those unfamiliar with the specifics of Irish, Gaeltacht, culture.

The plot of *Crá* is unashamedly generic. The mystery centres around a woman's body found in a bog. Very soon it will turn out to be that of lead detective, Conall Ó Súilleabháin's's (Dónall Ó Héalai) long missing mother, Sabine. Forbidden from joining the investigation, Garda Ó Súilleabháin is forced to eke out information regarding the investigation from a friend on the force, Barry (Alex Murphy), and through his own notorious strongarm tactics. Conall and his father, Art (Barry McGovern), will both come under suspicion until a re-staging of the crime for television will shift the investigators' attention to another suspect. Also intent on solving the murder is feisty young journalist, Ciara-Kate (Hannah Brady), who plans to make her name with a true crime podcast from the village. The ensuing drama will throw up long held secrets from amongst this small community. The series aired firstly on TG4 and BBC Northern Ireland starting in

November 2024 before moving to BBC 4 and BBC iPlayer in January 2025. It is available for viewing on the TG4 Player. [1] The series was written by Doireann Ní Chorragáin and Richie Conroy, and directed by Philip Doherty.

Crá might have been a standard police procedural were it not for a number of factors:

- It was shot in the Irish language;
- It is set in Donegal;
- It is a co-production between BBC NI and TG4, the (minority) Irish-language broadcaster, rather than with RTÉ, Ireland's national TV broadcaster. In Northern Ireland, Irish language broadcasting is funded through Northern Ireland Screen's Irish Language Broadcast Fund, who part-funded *Crá*, along with (from the Republic of Ireland) Screen Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán, and Gréasán na Meán Skillnet.

2 Critical background to European television crime dramas

Before analysing the series in more detail, I will briefly outline some of the scholarship around European detective noir, or crime drama, as quality television, with a focus on arguments around setting as meaning-making. To do so, we need to turn to the progenitor of much of the subsequent series, Nordic Noir. Its television successes include the original Danish drama, *The Killing* (2007- 2012), the Swedish-Danish co-production, *The Bridge* (2011-2018) and many others, including productions from Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. Nordic Noir has attracted some considerable critical attention. To quote from one of the leading critical analysts of the genre:

> [L]andscapes indicate mood and emotions, sometimes as an underscore of the characters' emotional state and sometimes as a distinct feature and style in the series without any particular connection to the characters or the story. The emotional expression of the contemplative landscape panoramas is often emphasised in the soundtrack. (Waade, 2017, p. 388).

Central to the detective/crime drama is the use of place. As Hansen and Waade write:

> The entire genre revolves around crime scene investigations, which means that the basic narrative catalyst in crime fiction is a spatial one; generally, in its literary development, the genre has focused on and benefited from places in a significant way. There would be no Dupin or Maigret without

[1] Available at: https://www.tg4.ie/en/player/categories/online-boxsets/?series=CRÁ&genre=Drama. TG4 is not geo-blocked. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

> Paris; there would be no Sherlock Holmes without London; there would be no Philip Marlowe without Los Angeles; and there would be no Martin Beck without Stockholm (2024, p. 8-9)

Crucial to the use of place is the idea of local colour:

> [L]ocal colour as an analytical concept includes three distinct and very basic semiotic levels: the physical place (object), the mediation of the place (setting, cinematic landscapes, literary space etc.) (representamen) and the imagination of the place (the producer's/viewer's expectations and imaginations) (interpretant) (ibid., p.41).
> Furthermore, local colour in television drama series is not only about selling points; it actually constitutes imagined communities and cultural encounters that help people and nations to create and develop identities (ibid., p. 210).

Whereas older film dramas, notably film noir, were usually if not exclusively city-set, the current trend is to utilise rural, increasingly peripheral settings. Crime dramas draw their meaning from their context, and the remote rural community provides an opportunity to throw together a diverse set of characters, some of whom may be fleeing the metropolitan centre for a "new start". Others may have generational ties to the region, and so secrets accumulate across families. Local inhabitants may distrust the arrival of an outsider, whether detective or victim (or both). Peripheral locations, with their sense of abandonment, their dark landscapes, sometimes extreme weather, and their lurking secrets thus become characters in themselves. Using peripheral locations is, however, as much a commercial strategy as to do with authenticity of narrative:

> [U]sing peripheral places as locations in television series is not a recent invention in television production, but regional and localisation policies as well as a saturated market situation have, respectively, both enhanced the opportunities for using peripheral locations in television series, and tweaked location placement strategies towards using lesser known locations outside the traditional production hubs as means of differentiation. (Toft Hansen and Re, 2023, p. 4)

As these authors further argue, a tension exists between the need to appeal to audiences through an emphasis on the now familiar markers of the thriller, namely peripherality, and the constant search for new locations that will excite those same viewers through their unfamiliarity:

> The interest in reaching levels of authenticity and local recognisability through peripheral location placement, on the one hand, rests within a transcultural visual aesthetics that, on the other, indicate levels of

> mainstream and international influence alongside attempts to stand out as original serial TV drama. (ibid., p. 12)

Crime dramas must look recognisable. This fundamentally means following the Nordic Noir model. They also need to attract viewers by offering something new, which feels authentic. This formula can result in bland, lookalike TV, or, as I argue now in the case of *Crá*, it offers programme makers an opportunity to explore specifically local interests and histories while satisfying the exigencies of commercial programming.

3 *Crá* as Gaelic Noir:

According to Ciarán Charles, one of the producers of the series (*apud* O'Carroll, 2024): "Everyone was interested in Scandi noir, but we have created a genre of our own right here: Gaelic noir with different elements." In fact, unbeknownst to Charles, the term "Gaelic Noir" was already in use (Hansen and Re, 2023). Since then, the BBC has made its own Scots-Gaelic crime drama *An t-Eilean* (The Island) which has been cited as the UK's "first-ever-high-end Gaelic drama series." Further, the same writer argued that:

> The Oscar nomination for *The Quiet Girl* (An Cailín Ciúin) last year, the first for an Irish-language production; the ratings triumphs for the Welsh-language series *Keeping Faith* (Un Bore Mercher) and *Hinterland* (Y Gwyll); and the breakthrough Faroese thriller *Trom* have all prepared the ground. *An t-Eilean*'s director is Tomás Ó Súilleabháin, who made the Irish-language film *Arracht* (Carrell, 2024).

This is not the place to analyse *An t-Eilean*, which was much closer to the kind of "cosy crime" dramas routinely propping up mainstream television schedules and far less invested in location than *Crá*. What is interesting to note, however, is that the Scottish and Irish series cross over in terms of personnel, and are using one to promote the other. These series, alongside the Welsh-language dramas mentioned above, play to an unquenchable appetite for new (romantic) peripheralities as locations for crime dramas. Added to this is the exoticism of a minority language which also conveniently satisfies cultural remits around minority language production (received wisdom has it that breakthrough hits such as *Squid Game* [2021-25] have demonstrated a much higher audience tolerance for subtitles than had been previously assumed). Grouping these productions together as "Gaelic Noir" establishes the potential for collective marketing and a greater recognisability factor (the exoticism of Celtic languages, peripheral locations, small communities).

4 Location, setting and *Crá*

Taking the above theoretical considerations into account, I return now to the specificities of *Crá*. That its peripherality is central to its narrative is evident. As with many western seaboard communities, the population is comprised of "blow-ins" (Sabine was German) and locals. The guards (police) are not all from the area, and one, Inspector Conlon (Caoimhe Farren), is from Northern Ireland. At the same time, the community shares common and limited spaces – the shop, the pub, the ruined hotel. The cross-border references, while not essential to the plot, may well be designed to satisfy the coproduction requirements of a Northern Irish (BBCNI) and Southern Irish (TG4) co-fund. Equally, the production will have benefited from the (now abolished) supports for filming in peripheral locations.[2] The choice of Donegal as a setting is particularly germane to discussions of peripherality.

Donegal is not a common setting for Irish dramas, either on TV or in cinema, nor is it as familiar as a tourist destination (except for visitors from Northern Ireland) to most people, for whom it is too remote, the roads are too bad, and the high-end tourist offerings of restaurants and upmarket cafés are notable for their scarcity. During the Troubles (1968-98), holiday-makers avoided a journey that entailed either crossing the border or taking a long way round (via Sligo) to reach the county, and this assumption of inconvenience lingers on. For these and other reasons, such as a sense of having not benefited from the Republic's new-found wealth, it is often referred to as "the forgotten county". At the same time, it has a reputation for stunning beaches and coastal scenery, particularly in areas such as the Bloody Foreland, Glenveigh, and Sliabh League. It is home to an extensive Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) region, although Donegal Irish is widely viewed in Ireland as "different". That is, it sounds unlike the widely taught Munster dialect, or Belfast Irish with which those who have seen *Kneecap* (Peppiatt, 2024) will now be familiar. Regarding the use of language, this in itself raised a number of issues, not least the fact that Donegal Irish as a very specific regional dialect was not one that most of the actors could speak. Some sound more comfortable than others even speaking in Irish, though the fluency of the lead, Dónall Ó Héalai, himself a native Irish speaker, very

[2] All Irish production companies can apply for Section 481tax credits and Coimisiún na Meán (The Media Commission) funding. In the past, Section 481 offered an additional tax credit, the Regional Production Fund, for producers shooting in "assisted regions". This was initially provided at 5% but tapered off gradually until it ended in January 2024. At 5%, combined with the base tax credit of 32%, the credit was worth up to €8m (depending on budget) for companies availing of it. However, its usefulness was limited by being restricted to regions of Ireland included in the Regional Aid Map (of economically disadvantaged areas). At the time of writing, a lobby group is urging the government to provide aid specifically for production companies operating in Gaeltacht regions.

much added to the sense of authenticity which the programme makers were striving to attain. Alan Esslemont (*apud* O'Carroll, 2024), then Director General of TG4, said of the use of the Irish language: "This TV series, '*Crá*', where the austere and rugged scenery of the Donegal Gaeltacht is itself a character, deepens and widens our ambition to let the whole world enter into the secret and unique world of Ireland's hidden language." The Irish Times critic not only praised the series, but noted that it was better than most of the dramas coming out of the national broadcaster, RTÉ:

Donegal is utilised wonderfully in the script by Doireann Ní Chorragáin and Richie Conroy. The flat, ominous countryside looks like Tolkien's Mordor as brought to you by Fáilte Ireland. The Irish is quite understandable, too, even if you aren't fluent – though maybe that was just my Cork ears pricking up at [Alex] Murphy's Munster dialect (Power, 2024).

The decision to locate *Crá* in Donegal was, therefore, doubly peripheral – a location on the periphery of Europe and one that is peripheral to indigenous Irish cultural identity. However, as I discuss here, its setting was central to understanding how it spoke to certain very specific Irish cultural concerns, that "imagined community" cited above.

5 *Crá* and historical memory

Right from the start, *Crá*'s plotting is much more focused on the boglands where it was filmed and set than on the surrounding coast. Although certain repeated shots capture magnificent views of breaking waves and return regularly to a fishing boat listing on the sands, none of the narrative events depend on these locations for their exposition. Instead, it is to the bog that the plot turns to reveal its secrets. This is where Sabine's body has lain buried since her murder, and the site to which her son, Conall, must return in order to uncover the events of her final hours. An early sequence (episode one), establishes the bog as a locus of death and violence. Before the discovery of Sabine's body, Conall and local guard, Barry, meet with a game warden who has reported the poisoning of a golden eagle. The next sequence sees Conall's father, Art, who is succumbing to dementia, driving along the narrow bog road known locally as the Falcarragh road. When two village lads try to overtake him, he refuses to pull over. Eventually they rear-end his car before making off at speed, delighted with themselves. At the same time, the podcaster/journalist, Ciara-Kate, arrives to cover the poisoning of the eagle and, as she drives through the bogscape, her electric car battery dies, leaving her stranded. When Conall is summoned to witness the discovery of a body in the bog, he will identify

it as that of his mother because of the stopped wrist watch, which he recognises as hers. These establishing incidents serve to evoke a topography that is at once remote, beautiful, out of step with modern times, and deadly. This is the space that lends the series its name, *Crá*, or Torment. Another set of historical references is introduced when one of the detectives explains to the other (episode two) why Conall is known as "Balor". The name refers, she says, to the one-eyed God of Irish mythology. Conall acquired it when he was playing Gaelic football for the Minor team and punched the referee so hard that the man was blinded in one eye. She might have also explained that legend routinely placed Balor as living on Tory Island, just off the Donegal coast where *Crá* is set. At the time of the assault, Conall's family held such authority in the village that he was never prosecuted. It remains unexplained, perhaps because it seemed self-evident, that Conall's father derives his name, Art, from the High Kings of Ireland. In episode three, Conall follows a lead that brings him to the fictional University of Connaught, where Ronan (Seán T. Ó Meallaigh) is teaching a class on the structures of early Irish society. In those times, he explains, if a king murdered one of his own family, his punishment was to lose his status. He would be set adrift with just some oats, and his fate would be left in the hands of God. At the conclusion of the series, Conall understands that if Art did not literally murder Sabine he was still the cause of her death. He drives his father into the boglands and, in a reprise of Ronan's lecture, leaves him there to his fate.

6 *Crá*, the art of the bog and other associations

A further set of meanings arise out of *Crá*'s use of the Donegal boglands. Sabine was an artist and we glimpse certain of her paintings of the bogscape. As part of her own investigation, Ciara-Kate visits the gallery where Sabine exhibited and interviews its owner, Felim (Charlie Bonner). Just in view, we see the current exhibition, "Cré Believing Earth" ("Cré" translates as "earth"), which encompasses a number of bog-inspired artworks. The turn to the bog for artistic inspiration was the subject of a 2025 exhibition in the RHA Gallery, Dublin, titled "Bogskin".[3] The topics include, in no particular order:

- The poetry of Seamus Heaney.
- The plays of Marina Carr, especially *By the Bog of Cats* (1998).
- The history of the bogs as guardians of memory, including that of the great Irish elk.
- The bog as traditional fuel source and site of labour.

[3] See: https://rhagallery.ie/events/exhibitions/bogskin/. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

- The bogs as the new ecological frontier.

As Colm Tóbin wrote in the introduction to the *Bogskin* catalogue:

> Who tells the story of the earth's past? The answer is: the bog does. What is held in the bog does not decay. It does not haunt us because it is not dead. Irish bogland is like an archive, then, like a sponge. It is a great history lesson. It stores essential information about what has been happening in the world (2025, p. 7).

These words might have easily been written about *Crá*, where the bog is at once essential to the narrative but also suggestive of so much more. For a local audience, one might add the associations between the burial of murder victims from the Troubles, notably the Disappeared, those victims who were buried by their killers and whose bodies have gradually been located in the post-Troubles era. Some of these remain missing, with tip-offs and searches returning their story periodically to the news. This became something of a talking point following the release on television of the series *Say Nothing* (2024) based on the book of the same name (of 2018) by Patrick Radden Keefe. In episode 4 Dolours Price (Lola Petticrew) drives two alleged informants to the border to their execution and eventual burial in the bog. The execution and burial are presided over by a priest and shot in near darkness, emphasising the finality of the events and the role of the bog in covering over secrets. Another association might well be the murder of French film director, Sophie Toscan du Plantier, herself like the fictional Sabine, a blow-in to the area. This unsolved murder has attracted considerable news attention since it happened in 1996.[4] None of this is specifically referenced in the storyline of *Crá*, which in terms of narrative is focused on satisfying the requirements of the crime drama. On the surface, these are absolutely conventional: Conall is forced to withdraw from the investigation; he must face his own demons; reluctantly working with the young podcaster, he brings his own outsider's perspective on the investigation; various characters who confuse the investigation are introduced; false leads pop up. In the end, recreating his own past will eventually lead him to a traumatic truth. It is by looking under the surface text that we can see how it references a myriad of Irish cultural touch points.

Crá was overall a critical success. As I argue here, this success can be accounted for by a combination of the use of the generic format of the European crime drama with a new peripheral setting, and the use of a little-known European language. At the same

[4] See for instance: *West Cork* podcast, 2018-2021(https://www.westcorkpodcast.com. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025); *Sophie: A Murder in West Cork*, television mini-series, 2021; *Murder at the Cottage: The Search for Justice for Sophie*, television mini-series, 2021.

time, through its use of landscape, specifically the bog, it contains very identifiable local historical and contemporary references. Aesthetically, the remoteness of its location provides a showcase of the Irish landscape, both of the coast and of the boglands. A repeated shot of a snowclad Mount Errigal, Donegal's highest mountain, adds a further sense of majesty to these vistas. The soundtrack, by Breton composer Krismen, provides a haunting, ethereal accompaniment to the action. Achieved by mixing Uileann pipes and the fiddle with synths, it also acts as a sonic echo of the soundscape of the Nordic Noir genre. To return to the critical background cited above, the emotional expression of the contemplative landscape panoramas is thus enhanced by the soundtrack.

The remoteness of the area is not just panacea for the tourist gaze, rather it is suggestive of the alienation experienced by the characters. The inhabitants of this part of North West Donegal live in extreme isolation, more a scattering of houses than a village. The hotel that made Art and Sabine two of the most successful local entrepreneurs is now a ruin, and there is little to no sense of any kind of indigenous economy other than that centring around the small shop and the pub. Criminality of various kinds festers here and the denouement will hinge on historical sexual abuse. One of the key characters, Annemarie (Róisín Murphy) has emigrated illegally to the United States and is deported back to the area on foot of Conall's investigation. She is insistent that she will leave again as soon as she can. Characters communicate with difficulty, often leaving long pauses between exchanges. In a further reference to life in remote rural Ireland, one of the producers of the crime reconstruction (episode 4), asks whether Sabine might have died by suicide, which, she adds, is common in this area.

7 Conclusion

Crá fits into a new wave of Irish-language drama, best represented by the two very different feature films, *An Cailín Ciúin* (Bairéad, 2022) and *Kneecap*. In production terms, much of the success of this wave can be ascribed to new policies at TG4 (Barton, 2026; Crosson, 2024) and BBC Northern Ireland. Culturally, these works, particularly the music and feature film by the band Kneecap, resonate with a new generation for whom use of the Irish language is an expression of a national identity unencumbered by historical links to colonialism (the English language). In research conducted into the Cine4 feature film scheme, which included interviewing many of the key personnel involved both in Cine4 management and in the production teams behind the films, Sadbh McCannon (2023) notes that: "75% of interviewees believe that Irish language drama

is more authentic than English language drama." *Crá*, in turn, benefitted both locally and internationally from a contemporary yearning for "authenticity" (itself a nebulous concept). Very astutely, its producers positioned it as global product within the widely accepted parameters of the peripheral crime drama.

Equally successfully, the series speaks in the many different ways outlined in this essay to Irish culture both historically and in terms of the challenges of living in contemporary rural Ireland. The series benefitted from a well-developed script and strong performances, particularly from Dónall Ó Héalai and veteran actor, Barry McGovern. Commercially, according to one of its producers, TG4 garnered an average of 26,500 viewers per episode, and it sat in the top three on the TG4 player for five weeks. On a combination of BBC's terrestrial channels and the BBC iPlayer, it had over four million views. It was the most watched programme on the BBC iPlayer for a week when first released. Lastly, it has sold to 68 countries/territories internationally and, renamed *Boglands*, has been shown on Acorn TV in the USA.[5] *Crá* has since been renewed for a second season.

References

BAIRÉAD, Colm (Dir.). **An Cailín Ciúin** [Film]. Ireland: Inscéal, 2022.

BARTON, Ruth. TG4, Irish Language Broadcasting and the Impact of Location. In: SPICER, A., BARTON, R., GENDERS, A. (eds) **The Politics of Place**: Space and Locality in the European Screen Industries. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026, p. 135-157. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-06780-7_6. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

The Bridge. (2011-2018). Sweden/Denmark: SVT/DR.

CARRELL, Severin. An t-Eilean: £1m-an-episode drama to bring Outer Hebrides to global audience. **Guardian,** Apr. 13, 2024, Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/13/an-t-eilean-outer-hebrides-drama-scots-gaelic. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

Crá. (2024): Ireland/UK: Fibín Media.

CROSSON, Seán. Irish language film policy in Ireland. **Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy**,10.2, p. 38-51, 2024. Available at: https://www.culturalpolicy.ie/index.php/ijamcp/article/view/2764/799. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

An t-Eilean. (2025). Scotland: Black Camel Pictures.

HANSEN, Kim Toft; WAADE, Anne Marit. **Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to The Bridge**. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

HANSEN, Kim Toft; RE, Valentina. **Peripheral Locations in European TV Crime Series.** Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

The Killing (2007-2012). Denmark: DR/ZDF Enterprises.

MCCANNON, Sadbh. The Forces Driving Irish Language Cinema. **Laidlaw Scholars Network**,

[5] Email correspondence with Darach O Tuairisg, Jun. 19, 2025.

2023. Available at: https://laidlawscholars.network/documents/the-forces-driving-irish-language-cinema. (Accessed on Jun. 14, 2024).

O'CARROLL, Lisa. Wild Landscapes, Dark Comedy, and the Irish Language: the rise of Gaelic Noir. **Guardian**, p. 29. Dec. 7, 2024.

PEPPIATT, Rich (dir.). **Kneecap** [Film]. Ireland/United Kingdom: Fine Point Films, Mother Tongues Films, 2024.

POWER, Ed. *Crá* review: Quality noir thriller puts both Donegal and the Irish language to beautiful use. **Irish Times**, Nov 11 2024. Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio/2024/11/11/cra-review-quality-noir-thriller-puts-both-donegal-and-the-irish-language-to-beautiful-use/. Accessed on: Dec. 26, 2025.

Say Nothing (2024). Ireland/United Kingdom: Color Force, FX Productions, Slingerland,. Ludwig, and Rogers.

Squid Game (2012-2025). South Korea: Firstman Studio, Siren Pictures.

TÓBIN, Colm. Bogs. **Bogskin,** Dublin, Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, 2025. p. 23-7.

WAADE, Anne Marit. Melancholy in Nordic noir: Characters, landscapes, light and music, **Critical Studies in Television**, 12.4, 2017, p. 380-394.

THEATRE

Irish Greek tragedy: re-tuning or adapting

Nicholas Grene

Ancient Greek tragedy belongs to all of us; those plays created in fifth century Athens represent some of the foundational texts of Western European culture. Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is the archetypal tragedy of blood revenge. John Kerrigan's study of the form of revenge tragedy is subtitled *From Aeschylus to Armageddon*.[1] George Steiner devoted a whole monograph to versions of *Antigone*, that stark drama of the clash between different orders of conscience and law (Steiner, 1984). And of course the myth of Oedipus provided Freud with his most fundamental matrix of the male psyche: Jocasta herself in Sophocles' play says that in dreams "many a man has lain with his own mother" (Sophocles, 1959, l. 982). There was a particular vogue for versions of Greek tragedy in the twentieth century. Eugene O'Neill re-cast the *Oresteia* as *Mourning Becomes Electra*, T.S. Eliot as *The Family Reunion*. In occupied France, in the Second World War, there was Sartre's existentialist version of the Orestes story in *Les Mouches* and Anouilh's *Antigone*, which came to be so fashionable in the post-war period. There have also been landmark films such as the *Elektra* of Cacoyannis, or Pasolini's *Oedipus the King*. Each writer, dramatist or film-maker re-imagines Greek tragedy in their own style, for their own period.

In Ireland, the impetus for producing classical drama came from the dual remit of the national theatre movement. When the Abbey Theatre was given its patent from the crown in 1904, it had a double mission: to produce "Plays in the Irish or English language written by Irish writers or on Irish subjects and such dramatic works of foreign authors as would tend to educate and interest the Irish public in the higher works of dramatic art" (Kavanagh, 1950, p. 214). The main purpose of the National Theatre was to foster new Irish plays, but they also planned to mount productions of European masterpieces by way of offering models to potential Irish playwrights. This was the principle behind Lady Gregory's version of Goldoni's *Mirandolina* and of her versions of Molière translated into

[1] KERRIGAN, John. **Revenge Tragedy: From Aeschylus to Armageddon**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Irish English. The original notion of staging Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, however, had an added incentive from the point of view of Yeats, one of the theatre's founders. In 1904, at the time of the opening of the Abbey, *Oedipus* was still banned in Britain, presumably because of the subject of incest. By a legal quirk, the laws of censorship did not apply to Ireland, and Yeats had the idea that "if we could play [*Oedipus the King*] at the Abbey Theatre […] we might make the audience proud of its liberty, and take a noble view of the stage and its mission" (*apud* Clark and McGuire, 1989, p. 4). Initially, he looked for someone else to translate the play, and only in 1912 set about producing a version himself. But by then the ban on *Oedipus* had been lifted and a spectacular production of the play had been mounted in London directed by Max Reinhardt, and Yeats lost interest in the project. It was not until 1926 that he returned to it again.

Yeats knew little or no Greek but worked from an existing English translation. The same is true of the later Irish writers whose versions of Greek tragedy I consider here, raising a question of the nature of these "versions". There is a standard distinction in translation theory between foreignization and domestication, that is, between the effort to render the distinctive otherness of the original text or to assimilate it into forms familiar in the target language[2]. If you do not know any Greek, you cannot go for foreignization. I propose, therefore, a different opposition between what I am calling "re-tuning" and a fuller adaptation. Yeats's *Oedipus the King* is an example of re-tuning, in that there is no effort to use a specifically Irish form of English nor yet to relate the play to Irish concerns of the time. Instead, Yeats writes in a style that is characteristically his own and brings out elements in the play that are expressive of his imaginative vision. The same is largely true of Derek Mahon's version of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, another of my examples of re-tuning. By contrast with that, Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*, his version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, is written in a strongly colloquial idiom of Irish English and very obviously relates to the political situation in 1980s Northern Ireland. This is even more the case with Marina Carr's original play *By the Bog of Cats…*, which moves quite far from Euripides' *Medea* on which it is loosely based.

1 W.B. Yeats, *Oedipus the King* (1926)

When in 1926 Yeats took up work again on *Oedipus the King*, abandoned in 1912, he was at the height of his powers. He had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in

[2] The distinction was popularised in VENUTI, Lawrence. **The Translator's Invisibility**. London: Routledge, 1995.

1923; he was writing some of his finest poetry at this time, to be collected in *The Tower* in 1928. But he had not achieved comparable success in drama. He had devoted much of his time and creative energy to writing and producing plays, managing the Abbey which he had helped to found. He devoted his Nobel address to the subject of the Irish dramatic movement, giving due credit to Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge, his partners in the initiation of the Abbey. However, the poetic drama that he favoured based on Irish mythological subjects had never been popular with audiences. Latterly, influenced by the aristocratic Noh theatre of Japan, he had come to write in a highly stylised mode that was even less likely to appeal widely. Indeed, in a bitterly ironic essay called "A People's Theatre" in 1919, he said that he wanted "to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many" (Yeats, 1962, p. 254). Still, in spite of this deliberate rejection of dramatic forms with a wider appeal, he was at some level perhaps chagrined that so few of his plays had achieved more than coterie approval. This was one of the attractions of the Oedipus project for him. After the successful production of *Oedipus the King* at the Abbey in December 1926, he immediately set about translating Sophocles' other two Theban plays, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. He told Lady Gregory at the time: "I feel that these three closely united plays put into simple speakable prose may be my contribution to the Abbey Repertory" (*apud* Clark and McGuire, 1989, p. 36). The Abbey depended on quite short runs of a stock of often revived popular plays, and Yeats hoped that his Theban plays after Sophocles would be among them.

The "simple speakable prose" was crucial to this hope. He felt that he was creating what he later called a "plain man's Oedipus". Enlisting Lady Gregory's help, he "went through it all, altering every sentence that might not be intelligible on the Blasket Islands" – the Blaskets, the remote islands off the far south-west corner of Ireland (Yeats, 1955, p. 537). Though unacknowledged at the time, Lady Gregory had been his collaborator in the early one-act play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* which had inspired so many nationalists with its allegory of Ireland, personified as an old woman, calling her sons to rebellion against Britain. Gregory had contributed the colloquial prose dialogue there, Yeats the high prophetic poetry of the visionary Cathleen. In *Oedipus*, however, there was no effort to make the "speakable prose" sound Irish; it was to be intelligible on the Blasket Islands (where Irish would still have been the first language) just by virtue of the simplicity of its English.

Yeats indeed had his work cut out to achieve such simplicity, given that the translation he was working from was that of Sir Richard Jebb, one of the great British classical scholars of the nineteenth century. Jebb's *Oedipus* was, as Yeats described it, "half Latin,

half Victorian dignity" (*apud* Clark and McGuire, 1989, p. 5). For a specimen, here is the opening address of the Priest to Oedipus in Jebb:

> Now, Oedipus, ruler of my land, thou seest of what years we are who beset thy altars, – some nestlings, still too tender for far flights, – some, bowed with age, priests, as I of Zeus, – and these, the chosen youth; while the rest of the folk sit with wreathed branches in the market-place. (*apud* Grab, 1972, p. 343-344)

And this is Yeats:

> Oedipus, King of my country, we who stand before your door are of all ages, some too young to have walked so many miles, some – priests of Zeus such as I – too old. Among us stand the pick of the young men, and behind in the market-places the people throng, carrying suppliant branches. (Yeats, 1963, p. 475)

There is nothing very remarkable in Yeats's re-casting here. He takes out the archaic "thee"s and "thou"s; he simplifies the syntax; he literalises fanciful metaphors. So the "nestlings, still too tender for far flights" becomes "too young to have walked so many miles", deftly implying the desperation of the assembled company, where even children have travelled long distances to reach the city. Throughout his version, Yeats never drops into the colloquial, never uses non-standard English or deviates from a tone of dignity consistent with the seriousness of the subject. He frequently makes cuts in the original, reducing the detailed descriptions of the plague in Thebes, or the full evocation of the gods and their attributes, but all in the interest of creating a play that will hold a modern audience with its clear, readily apprehensible prose dialogue.

Yeats, however, certainly did not invest in his version of *Oedipus the King* just to achieve an accessible play for the repertory of the Abbey Theatre. Something of what the play meant to him comes across in a letter he wrote on the very day of its production: "In rehearsal I had but one overwhelming emotion, a sense as of the actual presence in a terrible sacrament of the god. But I have got that always, though never before so strongly, from Greek Drama" (Yeats, 1955, p. 720). The role of the gods in Greek tragedy tends to be a problem for secular modern playwrights – a problem to which I will return. For Yeats, however, who was no sort of orthodox Christian but a strong believer in supernatural forces, the tragedy of Oedipus was above all a terrible manifestation of the divine. This is apparent in his version of the choral odes, which he renders in a poetry that is distinctively his own, as against the prose dialogue that surrounds them.

Yeats did not try to follow anything like the form of the Greek originals with their antiphonal principle of strophe and antistrophe sung in turn by the two halves of the chorus. Instead, he devised for each of the choruses a different verse form, often with long lines and a distinctive rhyming pattern for each one. So, for instance, the opening stanza of the first chorus reads:

> What message comes to famous Thebes from the Golden House?
> What message of disaster from that sweet-throated Zeus?
> What monstrous thing our fathers saw do the seasons bring?
> Or what that no man ever saw, what new monstrous thing?
> Trembling in every limb I raise my loud importunate cry,
> And in a sacred terror wait the Delian God's reply. (Yeats, 1963, p. 479)

In the play's action, the audience has already heard the news from the Delphic oracle, but the chorus who have just entered, have not shared that news; they are still waiting in anxiety. But it is Yeats who introduces the repeated note that it is a "message of disaster" that they can expect, that what is to come is a "monstrous thing" old or new. Yeats had at this point developed his cyclical concept of human history by which every two thousand years there is a reversal of culture, signalled by a violent annunciation. His most famous expression of this in his poetry is "The Second Coming" which ends with the vision of the bestial antichrist:

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last
> Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born? (Yeats, 1994, p. 235)

It is a comparable horror that the Chorus await with dread in *Oedipus the King*.

Yeats's other best-known poem of divine annunciation – scandalous in its time – was "Leda and the Swan". The birth of Helen, with all its consequences in the Trojan War, was for Yeats one of his imagined key turning points in human history. In his poem, the rape of Leda by Zeus in his disguise as a swan is realised with appalling vividness:

> A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
> Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
> By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
> He holds her helpless breast upon his breast. (Yeats, 1994, p. 261)

Yeats contrives to suggest a comparable sexual encounter of god with mortal when, in *Oedipus the King*, the Chorus speculates on the circumstances of Oedipus's birth, when all that is as yet known is that he was found on Mount Cithaeron:

> Who met in the secret glen? Who let his fancy run
> Upon nymph of Helicon?
> Lord Pan or Lord Apollo or the mountain Lord
> By the Bacchantes adored? (Yeats, 1963, p. 507)

It is a terrible vision of the gods' way with men that Yeats creates in his *Oedipus*, ending with the simple but sombre final Chorus:

> Make way for Oedipus. All people said,
> 'That is a fortunate man';
> And now what storms are beating on his head!
> Call no man fortunate that is not dead.
> The dead are free from pain. (Yeats, 1963, p. 517)

Yeats went on to translate *Oedipus at Colonus*, staged at the Abbey in 1927, but he never managed more than a few choruses of *Antigone*. So there never was a Yeatsian Theban trilogy to become part of the Abbey's long-term repertory, though his *Oedipus the King* was regularly revived at home and on tour into the 1930s. However, he did achieve, as he wanted, a style "bare, hard and natural like a saga". And while remaining relatively faithful to the original, he did manage to create a version of the play true to his own imaginative world, as expressed also in his greatest poetry of this time.

2 Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act* (1984)

The Riot Act was a commission by the actor Stephen Rea for the Field Day Theatre Company, which he had co-founded with the playwright Brian Friel. Tom Paulin, when in 1983 he was asked to provide a version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, had had no active experience of theatre, though he had been one of the Directors of Field Day since 1980, the year it was established. He was a quite well-known poet from Ulster of that extraordinary generation that included Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon. In *Liberty Tree* in 1983, he had shown his attraction to dialect words, which was the subject also of his pamphlet for Field Day, *A New Look at the Language Question*, published in the same year as *Liberty Tree*. Paulin argued that a distinctively Ulster form of English had to be the key to the province's own regional identity. This belief in the literary use of dialect and a strong anti-Unionist politics informed his version of Sophocles' *Antigone* related as it was to the situation in Northern Ireland at the time.

The title is derived from the British legal process for dispersing potentially violent crowds: a magistrate would read out the Riot Act and if the crowd did not disperse within an hour, they were liable to imprisonment. Coded into Paulin's title were memories of the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland in the 1960s. It was the attack by police on Civil Rights protesters in 1968 which was the starting point for the terrible period of political and sectarian violence that followed for thirty years after. One of the outstanding figures in that Civil Rights movement was the socialist Bernadette Devlin, elected to the Westminster parliament in 1969 at the age of 21, at the time the youngest ever MP. Paulin saw her as an Antigone figure ranged against Creon, the representative of the dictatorial Unionist regime. He enforced the association of Creon's Theban rule with Northern Irish Protestant authority by his choice of set inspired by a "disused Presbyterian church" in Derry where the play was being staged (McDonald and Walton, 2002, p. 168). This came across, according to the stage direction, as an effect of "Triangles, masonic symbols, neo-classical architraves" (Paulin, 1985, p. 9), the repressive remains of eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

For Creon's opening speech, Paulin chose a style of vapid politician's language which he associated with successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, the British ministers sent to govern the province in the absence of a devolved parliament:

> Mr Chairman, loyal citizens of Thebes, these recent months have indeed been a most distressing time for us all. It therefore gives me great pleasure to report that public confidence and order are now fully restored, and, if I may, I would further like to take this opportunity of thanking each and every one of you for your steadfastness and your most exceptional loyalty. (p. 15)

But this cliché-laden rhetoric turns into something very different when he finds his will thwarted. From "English public school voice", Paulin said, he wanted Creon to change to "a deep menacing Ulster growl" (McDonald; Walton, 2002, p. 167). The Guard who comes to tell him that someone has broken his decree that Polyneices should not be buried is dismissed with violent threats:

> go you, dead quick,
> and find who done it,
> else I'll tear the skin
> off the whole pack o' ye
> and roast you real slow. (Paulin, 1985, p. 22)

This has all the hallmarks of demotic Northern Irish speech: the solecism "done" for "did", the preference for adjectival rather than adverbial forms – "dead quick", "real slow", and "ye" for standard English "you".

But it is not only Creon in his anger who is given an audibly Ulster language. This is Ismene trying to dissuade Antigone from her plan of breaking the law by burying their dead brother with a horrified imagination of their being stoned to death:

> Can you imagine, but,
> What way we'll die? –
> some screggy, smelly crowd,
> us dragged before them –
> oh they'll spit,
> they'll sleg us then,
> shout all the dirt
> till the first stones go *whap*! (Paulin, 1985, p. 12)

"Screggy" seems to be an alternative pronunciation of "scraggy", "sleg" for "slag" to abuse or insult someone. One can see the effect Paulin wants, the alliteration, the hard clotted consonants, the assault of the words. The distinctive language, however, is also used in the Chorus's reflection on love:

> You've seen the air tremble on a hot day – a clemmed shimmer, like chains?
> You've seen a wide snowy field when it's dayligone and the sky violet?
> You've seen a dead light on the sea of astronomers? A bruised peach, blood-orange – a padded cell, a frazzled moth? – aye, well you've known love.
> (Paulin, 1985, p. 44)

This is quite far from the original, more Paulin than Sophocles, and at times he seems to have coined his own words: "dayligone" for twilight – "daylight gone". But the lyrical effect here is achieved by the appearance of local speech, "clemmed" meaning "constricted" or "perished" and the colloquialism "aye, well you've known love".

I am calling Paulin's *Riot Act* an adaptation rather than a re-tuning like Yeats's *Oedipus* because it gave specific local application to Sophocles's play. Performed under the auspices of Field Day, a company formed to address the vexed issues of national identity of the time, its political significance would have been obvious to its first audiences in 1984. Creon's oppressive law stood for the Unionist administration in Northern Ireland which had for so long discriminated against the Catholic minority in the province. The revolt of Antigone on behalf of what she claims as a higher law represented the just

grievance of that minority. But in the language of the play, also, in its use of colloquial demotic forms, there was another kind of politics. A speech that would have been stigmatised as merely a regional dialect was being given literary status. It was, to use the title of that very influential book on post-colonial literature, a case of the empire writing back (Ascroft; Griffiths; Tiffin, 2002).

3 Derek Mahon, *The Bacchae* (1991)

The Riot Act was staged by Field Day in a double act with *High Time*, a commissioned adaptation by the poet Derek Mahon of Molière's comedy *L'École des maris*, *The School for Husbands*. It was in many ways a clever pairing. *L'École des maris* tells the moral lesson of two brothers Sganarelle and Ariste, guardians of two sisters Isabelle and Léonor, whose opposite views on their guardianship produces contrary results: Léonor is finally happy to marry Ariste, who has allowed her liberty and freedom of choice, while Isabelle contrives to cheat her dictatorial guardian and marry Valère against his wishes. Mahon adapted the play to a modern Irish setting and made Tom, equivalent of the repressive Sganarelle, a stuffy and straitlaced man who resists the permissiveness of the easygoing young things. Stephen Rea, who played the tyrannical and repressive Creon in Paulin's tragedy, also starred as Tom, his comic counterpoint. Mahon, like Paulin, had had little experience of the theatre at this stage, though he had written screenplays for television. He was a very distinguished lyric poet, who did know French and had a particular gift for rhyming. He was able, therefore, to render Molière's rhymed alexandrines into witty English heroic couplets.

Euripides's *Bacchae*, which Mahon undertook to translate in 1990, was a very different matter. The *Bacchae* is a strange play that has elicited conflicting interpretations. Written at the very end of Euripides' life, when he was no longer living in Athens but in Macedon, it appears quite different from any of his other works. Euripides had a reputation in his own lifetime as an iconoclast, a rationalist unlike the devout Aeschylus and Sophocles, ridiculing, or at least taking a fairly cynical view of the gods and their actions. Yet the *Bacchae* seems to celebrate the god Dionysus and show the horrific consequences of trying to oppose him and his cult. The Chorus consists of his followers, the bacchantes, the women from Asia who sing his praises; his opponent, Pentheus, King of Thebes, who seeks to repress what he regards as the alien and licentious Dionysian cult is torn apart by a group of women possessed by the god, led by Agave, Pentheus's own mother.

It's a terrifying subject, which might make it seem all the more perverse of Mahon to declare that his aim in the translation was "to put the fun back into Greek tragedy" (*apud* Perris, 2008). Yet another of the oddities of Euripides's play is the fact that there are what appear to be comic moments. So, for example, in an early scene, we see the aged Tiresias, who appears in so many Greek tragedies as the wise blind prophet, dressed up as a Dionysian celebrant, setting out for a Bacchic dance on the mountains with his still more ancient friend Cadmus. It is hard to stage this in solemn tragic mode, and Mahon plays it up for pure comedy. Even more daring, though, is the way he introduces Dionysus in his opening monologue:

> My name is Dionysus, son of Zeus
> and Semele, Cadmus's eldest daughter. Whoosh!
> I was delivered by a lightning flash
> and here I am, back home in Thebes again
> pretending to be a mortal among men
> although, as we all know, I am one of the gods. (Mahon, 2013, p. 61)

The jaunty, flippant tone here might seem wildly inappropriate for the language of the god: how outrageous it is to rhyme "Zeus" with "Whoosh!". Yet throughout Euripides' play, Dionysus does play the joker, pretending to be a decadent Lydian follower of the god, allowing Pentheus to imprison him, only spectacularly to break free. His subtlest manoeuvre is to lure Pentheus into dressing up as a woman to spy upon the dancing maenads in the mountain, leading to his terrible death. Mahon imaginatively brings out this playacting element in Dionysus while never disguising the dangerous force that he represents.

I have said that one of the problems for secular modern playwrights in adapting Greek tragedy is the role of the gods. Mahon, in the *Bacchae*, has a god centre stage and contrives to find a role for him that in some ways chimes with the equivocal Euripidean original. The other difficulty in modern adaptations of Greek tragedy tends to be the choruses. The only hint Stephen Rea gave Tom Paulin when commissioning his *Antigone* was to "Go easy on the choruses […] they can be a bit of a bore". He duly complied, "slashed away at the choruses to make the play run for fifty minutes and no more" (McDonald and Walton, 2002, p. 165; 167). Very unlike this, Mahon gives his chorus full-throated voice, alternating music and dance with unabridged versions of the choral odes in alternating stanzas. He stipulates that the music "should vary greatly, from a reflective mode to hard rock, according to the mood of the moment", and the same could be said to be true of the language of the chorus as well (Mahon, 2013, p. 63).

There is a pure lyricism of praise, as in the opening of Act II:

> Oh, for Dionysian night
> and the white ghosts of feet
> dancing in the bright
> dew, magical and sweet!
> Oh, for the fun of a fawn
> in the clear meadow-light
> who breaks cover to run
> without fear, without fright,
> to river and forest where
> no man has ever gone
> and crouches there alone! (p. 85)

But this is then followed with something rather different:

> What pleases best, what grand
> gift can the gods bestow
> more than the conquering hand
> over the fallen foe?
> It's still the same old story,
> a fight for love and glory,
> and every heart admits that it is so. (p. 85)

Mahon here echoes "As Time Goes By", the featured song in Humphrey Bogart's *Casablanca*. By borrowing lines from this humalong Hollywood classic for his Euripidean chorus, Mahon twists the "fight for love and glory" into the triumphalism of a competitive god. And he makes this one stanza sound out as the play's refrain, repeating it as the last words we hear.

Mahon does not hesitate to use Irish English in his *Bacchae*, even on occasions Irish words. Tiresias tells the audience that he and his old friend Cadmus, "agreed to get ourselves some Bacchic gear / and go to the famous *céilí*, like half the women here" (p. 65). A *céilí* is a traditional Irish dance to which all the community goes. But Mahon's *Bacchae* is not a self-consciously Irish version of Greek tragedy, like Paulin's *Riot Act*. It has been argued that it is "a parable suitable for Ireland. Dionysus can be regarded as a force of nature, the force of a people who are fighting to reclaim their rights" (McDonald, 2002, p. 74). But in my view there is little to validate this reading; Dionysus is an anarchic force in the play, not the leader of a principled freedom struggle. That is why I place his *Bacchae* as another example of re-tuning rather than adaptation. It is Mahon finding his own stylistic means of re-imagining this strange, haunting and tonally ambiguous tragedy.

4 *By the Bog of Cats…* (1998)

Marina Carr came to prominence in Irish theatre in the 1990s with a set of plays that became known as the Midlands trilogy. She grew up in Offaly, one of the few counties in Ireland without a sea coast, part of the central plain often thought of as the least interesting part of the country, all flat fields and bogs. It has none of the picturesque reputation of the west coast, so attractive to writers and tourists alike. The Midlands accent also has generally been considered as flat and unattractive as the landscape. So, there was a certain local patriotism in Carr's setting of her plays in her native territory and using the supposedly unlovely local dialect for her writing. It was a claim for regional linguistic dignity a bit like Paulin's choice of Ulster dialect in *The Riot Act*. *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) like *The Mai* (1994) and *Portia Coughlan* (1996) before it, is an original play, not a formal adaptation of *Medea*. But it is sufficiently obviously based on Euripides that it may serve as a second example of adaptation here.

The Medea figure is Hester Swane, a Traveller woman who lives by the Bog of Cats, and is about to be discarded by her lover Carthage Kilbride, the father of her seven-year-old daughter Josie. Carthage, the Jason of the story, is marrying the daughter of a prosperous local farmer, while Hester is to be sent away to the town dispossessed of the caravan, which was her childhood home, and the house where she currently lives. Carr sets up an equivalence between Medea's position as an alien figure in Greece and the marginal status of a Traveller in the settled Irish farming community. Hester is regarded with hostility and distrust by Carthage's father-in-law to be, Xavier Cassidy, which Creon, King of Corinth, would have had for the Asian sorceress Medea. It transpires that Hester, long before the action, had killed her brother Joseph and money taken from him helped to set Carthage up with a farm of his own. This recalls the most horrific of Medea's past deeds, when she killed and cut up her brother, scattering his body parts on the sea, to aid the escape of Jason and the Argonauts, confident that her pursuing father will stop to pick up the pieces. Hester does not kill Caroline Cassidy with a poisoned robe on her wedding day as Medea does with Jason's bride, but she does burn down Carthage's farm, livestock and house, and in the final moments of the play, cuts her daughter Josie's throat before killing herself.

The differences between Carr's play and Euripides, however, seem to me as significant as the parallels. There is no chorus, though a sympathetic neighbour acts a part rather like the Nurse in *Medea*, and there is the strange blind prophetic Catwoman who acts rather like Tiresias wandered in from another Greek tragedy. In a more or less naturalistic play,

there can be no role for a chorus. Carr psychologises Hester's situation by giving her a backstory in which she was deserted by her mother at the age of seven, and has been waiting for the mother's return by the Bog of Cats ever since. Rather than the money she stole from him, it was resentment at her mother's devotion to her brother as against herself that led her to kill Joseph. And when she kills Josie at the end it is only partly in revenge for what Carthage has done to her, as in the killing of Medea's children. It is also to save her daughter Josie from the fate that she has undergone, permanently missing a lost mother. Above all, Hester has to kill herself at the end; there can be no equivalent for her of the safe haven offered to Medea by the Athenian Aegeus, much less her miraculous escape in a chariot drawn by dragons out of the machine above. For this Carr substitutes the Ghost Fancier, a strange figure who arrives at the very beginning of the play thinking that it is time for Hester's death, and who returns to claim her at the end. Carr draws upon folkloric motifs in this and throughout the play to build up the sense of her protagonist's fate, but her Hester must remain a recognisable human figure caught up in a psychologically understandable situation. The mythological dimensions of the semi-divine Medea cannot be reproduced in a modern Irish play such as this.

5 Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy* (1990)

Just four plays have been considered here so far to illustrate the distinction between re-tuning and adaptation but there have been many more Irish Greek tragedies – two other versions of *The Bacchae* besides Mahon's, two renderings of *Oedipus* other than that of Yeats.[3] There were three *Antigone*s in 1984 alone, and Sophocles' play has continued to be outstandingly popular, from Conall Morrison's version (2003) and Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) through to *X'ntigone* by Darren Murphy (2022) and Colin Murphy's radio adaptation *#Antigone* (2023).[4] However, I want to end with Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990) which can be seen as a combination of re-tuning with adaptation.

In creating his version of *Philoctetes*, Heaney stayed close to Sophocles' narrative. Philoctetes, marooned on Lemnos by the Greeks on their way to Troy because of the wound in his foot, must now be persuaded to return because the miraculous bow of Hercules which he owns is needed for the capture of the city. The arch-contriver Odysseus

[3] Colin Teevan, *The Bacchai* (Royal National Theatre, 2002), Conall Morrison, *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (Abbey, 2016), Derek Mahon, *Oedipus* (published 2005), Frank McGuinness, *Oedipus* (Royal National Theatre, 2008).

[4] For the details of all play productions see the Irish Playography: https://irishplayography.com/

persuades the young Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, to deceive Philoctetes into giving up the bow, but, after he has done so, he is conscience-stricken and gives the bow back. Philoctetes only agrees to go with the Greeks after a miraculous appearance of the now divine Hercules himself, who reveals that it is the will of the gods. Heaney faithfully follows the twists and turns of the plot, dealing with the difficult *deus ex machina* entry of Hercules by the suggestion of a volcano eruption, and the Chorus speaking the lines "[r]itually clamant as Hercules" (Heaney, 1990, p. 78). The text is re-tuned by the use of regional words and expressions – "Is he head away?" [Is he mad?], "Wheesht!" [for "Hush"], "throughouther" [confused] – but Heaney's language is not a systematic dialect as in Paulin or Carr (p. 12, 14, 48).

There are just two speeches by the Chorus, wholly invented by Heaney, that move the play in the direction of adaptation. The opening commentary includes an oblique reference to the standoff in Northern Ireland between the oppressed Catholic minority and the hegemonic Protestant Unionists:

> People so deep into
> Their own self-pity self-pity buoys them up.
> People so staunch and true, they're fixated,
> Shining with self-regard like polished stones. (p. 1)

That parity of condemnation is matched by a sympathy for both sides in the conflict, voiced by the Chorus, late in the play:

> The innocent in gaols
> Beat on their bars together.
> A hunger-striker's father
> Stands in the graveyard dumb.
> The police widow in veils
> Faints in the funeral home.

This leads on to the famous lines, the belief that

> once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up,
> And hope and history rhyme. (p. 77)

That last phrase has been so often quoted as almost to become cliché. In the 1990 context of the play's production, it looked forward to the end of the Troubles, the peace process that led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. But what *The Cure of Troy*

illustrates is the need of Irish writers to create versions of Greek adapted to resonate with contemporary audiences, while also re-imagining in their own aesthetic terms the universal significance of these great plays of the past.

This is a revised version of a conference paper at the University of Pavia in 2016. I am grateful to Elena Cotto Ramusino for inviting me to speak there.

References

ASCROFT, Bill; GRIFFITHS, Gareth; TIFFIN, Helen. **The Empire Writes Back**. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002.

CLARK, David R.; MCGUIRE, James B. (eds.). **W.B. Yeats: The Writing of Sofocles' King Oedipus**. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989.

GRAB, Frederic D., 'Yeats's "King Oedipus"', **Journal of English and Germanic Philology**, 71.3 (1972), 343-4.

HEANEY, Seamus. **The Cure at Troy**. London: Faber, 1990.

KERRIGAN, John. **Revenge Tragedy: From Aeschylus to Armageddon**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

MAHON, Derek. **Theatre**. Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2013.

MCDONALD, Marianne. The Irish and Greek Tragedy. *In*: MCDONALD, Marianne and J. Michael Walton (eds.), **Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy**. London: Methuen, 2002.

MCDONALD, Marianne and J. Michael Walton (eds.), **Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy**. London: Methuen, 2002, p. 168.

PAULIN, Tom. **The Riot Act**. London: Faber, 1985.

PERRIS, Simon. Dionysus the Leprechaun: Genre, Identity, and Parody in Derek Mahon's "Bacchae", **Arion**, v. 16, n. 1, 2008, p. 53-82

STEINER, George, **Antigones**. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

SOPHOCLES. Oedipus the King. Translated by David Grene. *In:* GRENE, David; LATTIMORE, Richmond (ed.). **The Complete Greek Tragedies**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959. v. 2.

KAVANAGH, Peter. **The Story of the Abbey Theatre**. New York: Devin-Adair, 1950.

VENUTI, Lawrence. **The Translator's Invisibility**. London: Routledge, 1995.

YEATS, W.B. **Collected Plays**. London: Macmillan, 1963.

YEATS, W.B. **Explorations**. London: Macmillan, 1962.

YEATS, W.B. **Letters**. WADE, Allan (ed.). New York: Macmillan, 1955.

YEATS, W.B. **The Poems**. ALBRIGHT, Daniel (ed.). London: De.

"We are still a nation of storytellers" – but at what cost? Art, value and public funding for theatre on the island of Ireland

Miriam Haughton
Tricia O'Beirne
Finian O'Gorman

In 2024, independent theatre company Rough Magic celebrated their 40-year anniversary. Not many theatre companies on the island of Ireland – largely dependent on annual applications for public funding to keep their operations afloat – have managed to remain operational for more than four decades. In a recent interview, co-founder and Artistic Director Lynne Parker reviewed the challenges for economic sustainability for independent Irish theatre in the twenty-first century, concluding, "COVID-19 was not the existential crisis for the theatre sector, it was the 2008 economic crash" (Parker 2024). Yet despite both the "existential crisis" of the 2008 global economic crash in addition to the recent global pandemic which forbade collective gathering, the island of Ireland remains a nation characterised by stories and storytelling, according to the Rough Magic leadership team of Parker, Gemma Reeves (Executive Director) and Sara Cregan (Producer). While this cultural consistency may be warmly acknowledged, how stories move from concept to full production has experienced significant challenges in the twenty-first century, challenges which shape the very texture, aesthetic and concerns of those stories and their staging. In this essay, we consider the "existential crisis" of the 2008 global economic crash for theatre and performance on the island of Ireland by contextualising and assessing the financial structures in place before and after the crash which significantly frame how theatre and performance is produced. Beginning with the dramaturgical consequences of major funding cuts post 2008, this essay returns to the establishment of Arts Councils on both sides of the border to reflect on the initial

rationale for public arts funding, concluding with analysis of neoliberal policies and politics that frame arts funding in the twenty-first century.

1 Austerity and art: the thinning out of Irish theatre and performance

For theatre and performance, and indeed many other areas of the public sphere, the economic crisis beginning in 2008 marked a profound shift in the material and psychological relations that prescribe everyday environments. This splinter in everyday experience led to two distinct realities existing within public consciousness and expectations, that of "before 2008" and "after 2008", particularly for the EU countries included in the derisive acronym "PIIGS", referring to Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain (Britannica). At the precipice of this reckoning, questions of fairness in resource allocation could not overcome the harsh economic realities that there were too many mouths to feed when the cupboards had been raided. In *Doughnut Economics*, Kate Raworth summarises the intense inequality since that moment,

> The 2008 financial crash sent shock waves through the global economy, robbing many millions of people of their jobs, homes, savings and security. Meanwhile, the world has become extraordinarily unequal: as of 2015 the world's richest 1% now own more wealth than all the other 99% put together. (Raworth, 2017, p. 5)

In a stark reality such as this, the utility value of theatre and performance, which resists easy definition in economic terms (Stigler, 1950), would not provide immunity for the public subsidy cuts affecting all government portfolios post-2008, ushering in a generation of austerity with multi-generational legacies. In this era of financial crisis – and for some national bankruptcy – the question of inherent value, whether financial, social, artistic, cultural, or political, of any product, service or encounter transformed into a heightened competitive *valuing* to access the crumbs remaining in the years of post-austerity budgets.

Crudely put, yet mirroring debates that dominated public funding post-2008, how does one advocate for sustained levels of public funding in theatre when hospitals were being closed down and a housing crisis loomed? Such a fundamentally awkward comparison shuts down meaningful public discourse concerning the distinct challenges faced by distinct sectors, whether health, housing or the arts – which are rarely comparable in their function, costs, contributions and value to society – as fear and panic overwhelmed

public debate. In the end, cuts were faced by all. For some, the cuts resulted in a reduction in quality and quantity of public services, while for others, cuts resulted in suspension of activities and/or closure of organisations. If a cut of 10% is applied to all services, and re-applied in consecutive years, does this result in an equality of disadvantage to those services due to penalisation by the same numerical percentage? A 10% cut for one sector that had been financially stable prior to the 2008 crash will pose a problem, and the severity of this is not to be underestimated. However, for another sector struggling to survive financially prior to 2008, a 10% cut is likely the straw that breaks the camel's back. If a sector is historically underfunded and operating from a low economic base, as is the case with many arts economies in northern Europe, any cut becomes fatal.

Since the economic crash, theatre and performance on the island of Ireland has observed a proliferation of the "show in a bag" model of production, an initiative established in 2010 by Fishamble with Irish Theatre Institute and programmed in the Dublin Fringe Festival to "facilitate the creation of new small scale, tourable shows which would highlight the talents and skills of performers making work for the Dublin Fringe Festival" (Irish Theatre Institute). The "show in a bag" convention can be summarised as an approximate 60-minute play featuring one or two performers, with minimal set, lights, costume and sound design. Tickets are modestly-priced, likely 10-20 euro, and they often play at 1pm/6pm to catch audiences during the workday, but not necessarily the typical "night out at the theatre" which plays to large audiences. A "night out at the theatre" costs more per ticket – typically 30-60 euro – but the production will much more likely be large in scale, playing for over two hours including an interval, with a larger cast. In addition, many audiences will avail of a "pre-theatre" evening meal, generating significant spillover monies for the local economy and nurturing social and community engagement. The "show in a bag" model is not to be dismissed in any way, but it is important to remember the context in which it was developed – during austerity. As such, it offered a lifeline for many artists during the worst years of the global economic crash, ensuring participating artists could develop their craft and access community and mentoring at a time when no one knew if the Irish economy would recover. The "show in a bag" model has continued through (uneven) economic recovery, as it offers many advantages for artist development. Ideally, however, it constitutes a milestone in the overall lifecycle of production, which begins with artistic conception, moves to a development phase before reaching full production and touring, where demand, resources and wider factors align. A "show in a bag" production was conceived of in relation to national austerity measures and has since formed a meaningful stage of creative process. However, it was not conceived of as a replacement for full production.

This production model as an end in itself is arguably akin to theatre on a diet. Fine temporarily when circumstances require it, but as a permanent state of play can cause long-term adverse effects.

At the time of the interview in 2024, Rough Magic confirmed that there has not been any reduction in script submission or fresh ideas despite the reduction in resources for production. Indeed, recent struggles in funding have provoked many performers to start writing their own work, creating new performance conventions and career pathways as the playwright/performer combination, particularly among female writers such as Clare Dunne, Sonya Kelly, Róisín Stack, Emma O'Grady and Sarah Jane Scott, among many more. This model cuts costs but also offers greater artistic agency at times, perhaps suggesting a growing confidence in the development of theatre artists in telling their own stories on their own terms, particularly following the *Gender Counts* (2017) report by WakingTheFeminists grassroots activist campaign during 2015-16. However, the sector is not immune to economic realities and public subsidy is essential to its operation, though not the only form of economic revenue it relies on. Rough Magic has found that emerging playwrights no longer have ambition to create plays with large casts as they suspect there's no funding to produce them or tour them. If they have ambition for writing a story with a large cast, they move into TV and screenwriting instead, as observed recently with writers Clare Dunne, Stacey Gregg, Nancy Harris, Sonya Kelly, Lisa McGee, Ursula Rani Sarma, Sarah Jane Scott and many more. If this trend continues where public funding is no longer sufficient to produce theatre at scale, are we thus in danger of losing our creative capacity to imagine at scale? At what point will this lead to an existential shift in creativity that becomes internalised, leading to potentially irreversible changes in theatre conventions, programming and audience expectations that do not reflect general evolutionary shifts in social or artistic patterns, but frankly, represent a decline in artistry and access to artistic opportunities. As artist Lian Bell questions, with grave concern, "What is happening to art?" (Bell, 2023). To unpack Bell's provocation, we outline first a brief history of public funding for the arts on the island of Ireland, primarily through the establishment of the arts councils in both regions, before examining the impact of neoliberal government policy in the twenty-first century.

2 Art, value and democracy: the politics of arts and cultural policy

The fundamental question of who decides what role that theatre, performance, and the arts should play in Irish life and how they should be supported is rarely addressed

in public discourse. In the absence of meaningful democratic deliberation, successive government administrations and state institutions have unilaterally determined not only the level of arts funding, but the very form and nature of the art forms themselves. There is general acceptance that the arts in Ireland have a positive societal impact, but the precise expectations that people have for the role of the arts and the extent to which they are willing to support them remains opaque. Arguably, this represents democratic failure rather than representative democracy in action, as fundamental decisions about cultural policy have profound consequences that are not immediately apparent. This can be seen in the relatively short history of the Arts Councils of Ireland, north and south, where decisions made by individuals in positions of power affected not only the provisions made for theatre, but the nature and shape of theatre itself.

When An Comhairle Ealaíon/the Arts Council of Ireland was established in 1951, it marked a pivotal moment in the history of Irish cultural policy. In an essay analysing Seán Ó Faoláin's tenure as the Council's second director from 1956 to 1959, Brian McKenzie identifies two fundamentally different philosophies on arts funding that underpinned the organisation in its first decade. There was the "democratization of culture" model favoured by Ó Faoláin (McKenzie, 2018, p. 255), whereby elites determine the standards and conventions of arts distributed to passive audiences. Conversely, there was the approach favoured by Ó Faoláin's predecessor Patrick J. Little, which instead prioritised "local, grassroots efforts" in producing art (McKenzie, 2018, p. 259).[1] Elite preference for the former philosophy systematically excluded democratic input into cultural policy formation, with lasting consequences for the development of theatre as an artform. When it was established in 1943, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, or CEMA Northern Ireland, decided that its funding policy would be guided by the maxim of providing the "best for the most" (Alexander, 2007, p. 186), prefiguring the democratization of culture approach later adopted by Ó Faoláin. Established during the Second World War to improve national *esprit de corps*, CEMA later evolved into the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1962, and its stated objective was to "maintain the standard of the Arts and to afford opportunities to the people of Northern Ireland of becoming familiar with what is best in painting, sculpture, architecture, drama and music" (*apud* McIntosh, 2001, p. 23).

[1] For a comparative account of community-driven vs elite cultural models across Europe, see Rius-Ulldemolins & Pizzi's (2022) analysis of "longue durée" factors including religion and systems of rule in cultural policy formation (p.17-20).

CEMA's strategy for providing the best theatre to the most amount of people involved the hiring of professional theatre companies for tours of regional towns in Northern Ireland. This approach was not always successful. At first, it attempted to book companies from Northern Ireland for the tours. However, the two main professional outfits, the Ulster Group Theatre and the Belfast Arts Theatre, did not have the resources to divide their attention between touring and mounting productions at home. As a result, in the 1950s CEMA was repeatedly forced to hire companies from outside Northern Ireland, such as the Gate Theatre Dublin and the Colchester Repertory Theatre. In addition to the challenges CEMA encountered with booking native artists, it found it difficult to secure venues in regional towns and, to compound this, several of the tours were in the end met with poor ticket sales having overcome the various administrative hurdles involved in producing them.

What is curious about CEMA's strategy for providing the "best for the most" in theatre is that an alternative funding strategy had previously been put in train in Northern Ireland and was proving to be successful in developing theatre across the state. In 1931, the Rural Development Council (RDC) was established in Northern Ireland with funding from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust.[2] The aim of the RDC was to regenerate rural communities, and it administered funding for youth hostels, women's institutes, adult education programmes, poultry clubs and "the development of rural drama by means of festivals, lectures, courses, and visits by advisers on production" ("The Carnegie Trust", p. 10). The RDC provided funding for the establishment of amateur drama festivals in regional towns; it introduced an advisory service for budding producers on dramaturgy and choice of plays; and it negotiated with playwrights for a reduction in performing fees for amateur groups (Gibson, 1935, p. 5). Prior to the establishment of the RDC, the only amateur drama festivals in the north were the Northern Dramatic Feis and the Catholic Drama Festival, both of which were based in Belfast. Over the next seven years, the funding that it provided created a state-wide network of drama festivals in Dungannon, Larne, Ballymoney, Ballymena, Portadown, and Derry.

In 1939, the RDC organised an Ulster finals competition in Ballymoney featuring winning groups from regional festivals, with the overall winner promised the opportunity of competing at the British Drama League finals in London ("Drama Festival in Ballymoney", 1939, p. 11). In the following years, Ballymoney became a hive of theatre activity.

[2] The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was founded in 1913 with a $10 million endowment from Andrew Carnegie. Its purpose was "the improvement of the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland by such means as are embraced within the meaning of the word 'charitable'…" ("History and Investment").

The nightly attendance at the Ballymoney Drama Festival in 1948 was 490 and the total attendance for the festival was close to 5,000. All of this took place in a town of approximately 3,000 people (Blair, 1989, p. 7). Meanwhile, the CEMA Annual Report for the same year, 1948, noted that, "as in previous years the organisation of drama tours of provincial towns presented a number of problems. […] At the most suitable times of the year for a drama tour, halls in larger towns are frequently booked – sometimes for two or three weeks – for drama and music festivals" (*CEMA Northern Ireland Sixth Annual Report* 9). The contrasting fortunes of the Ballymoney festival and the CEMA regional tours echo a tension that emerged in the policies of the Arts Council of Great Britain during this period, between amateur participation that successfully engaged communities and professional-focused policies that failed to reach intended audiences (Storey, 2017). At a time when CEMA was trying (and failing) to bring the best of theatre to the most people possible in Northern Ireland, the amateur theatre movement was already making provision for the arts in a way that steadily grew a state-wide theatre network. Whether it was theatre of the highest quality is open to debate, but the trade-off was that it created a theatre culture grounded in participation rather than consumption.

While CEMA had a record of providing funding to both amateur and professional theatre, it adopted a firm stance on exclusively supporting professionals after it evolved into the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1962. This was most likely intended to halt the gradual creep of successful funding applications from amateurs, which represented a growing financial burden. In its Annual Report of 1973, it stated that:

> On the whole, state agencies like Arts Councils have concluded that more was to be achieved for the general good by acknowledging professional priorities despite feelings of unease about policies that depend on distinctions as arbitrary as those between the professional and the amateur. […] It is not difficult to be flexible about the occasional deserving claim, particularly where creative artists are concerned, but this is not the same thing as evolving a positive policy towards amateur movements. (Arts Council Northern Ireland, *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland 1972-1973,* p. 10)

Even while acknowledging how arbitrary the assignation of amateur or professional status could be, the Arts Council clearly signalled that professional status was a prerequisite for seeking funding, thus placing the onus on applicants to state and prove their professional credentials. In response to this mandate, a market began to grow around formal qualifications, affiliations, and accolades. Where in reality there was considerable crossover between the amateur and professional spheres in people's lives

and careers, on paper in Arts Council applications, theatre makers began to distance themselves from any association with amateurism. Under this new bureaucratic regime, sorting professionals from amateurs was not just a simple matter of sorting good practice from bad, but was itself an occupational sphere that gave rise to new career opportunities in arts administration, and courses of training and certification for artists. This pattern of gatekeeping reflects what Anna Upchurch identifies in *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement* as an alliance between politicians, philanthropists, and elite intellectuals that shaped Arts Council formation (2016, p. 107). Thus, the decision to confine funding to professional artists was as much a boon for the growth of professions in arts administration and education as it was for the performing arts themselves.

There was no equivalent to the RDC in the Irish Free State, and, with few resources, amateur theatre struggled to develop in the 1930s. Things began to change during the Second World War when a regional population with few outlets for entertainment and a renewed sense of civic-minded cooperation formed drama societies and held amateur festival competitions. When An Comhairle Ealaíon was established, Patrick J. Little became its first director and he saw the primary function of the Council as the cultivation of as wide an interest in the arts as possible. Decentralisation and entrepreneurship were cornerstones of his philosophy. For Little, "it would not do to confine the Council's activities to the urban centres" (*apud* Kennedy, 2014, p. 69), and the way of achieving this with the meagre funds available was to "stir the spirit of independent enterprise and to encourage people to take a pride in patronising artistic functions" (*apud* Kennedy, 2014, p. 69). Inevitably, the influence of neoliberalism, particularly emanating from the Reagan and Thatcher era in the seventies and eighties, began to change funding policies in many ways in Ireland, culminating in boom, bust and austerity in the twenty-first century.

3 Negotiating neoliberalism in 21st century arts and cultural policy

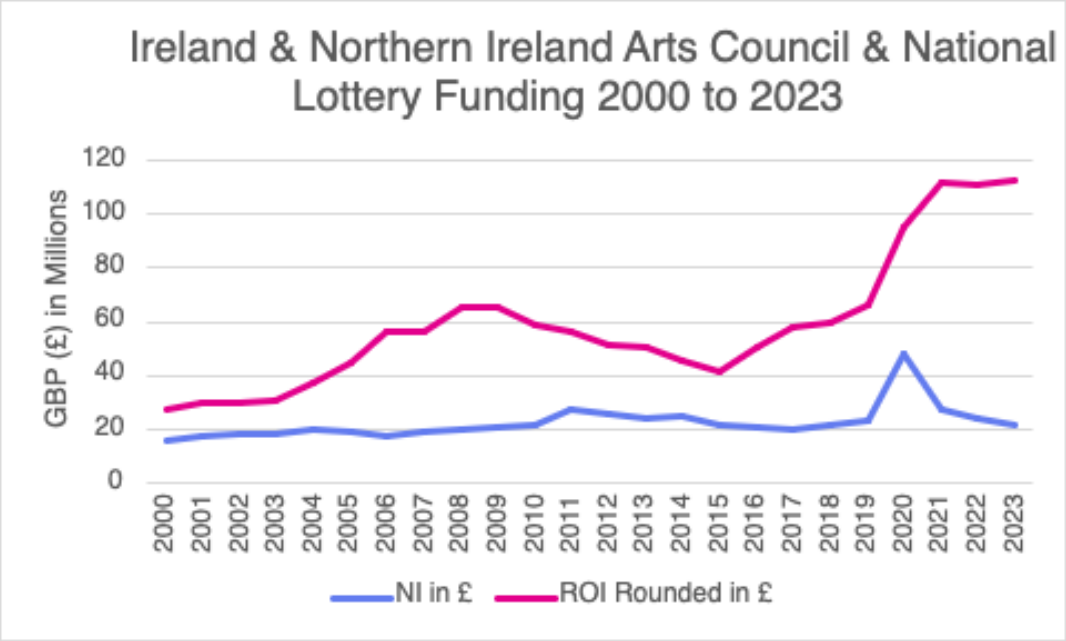
Economist David Throsby writes "where the neoliberal economic agenda of smaller governments has taken hold, public budgets for support of culture are shrinking, without there necessarily being an expansion of private funding to compensate" (2010, p. 5). Jen Harvie reflects on David Cameron's UK government's 2010 cuts to arts funding "as symptomatic of its violently destructive approach to apparatuses of shared social resource, welfare, art and sociability" (Harvie, 2013, p. 24), stating that the

> cuts risk playing into the hands of neoliberalism by legitimating the diminution of both state support for the arts and, therefore, the welfare state itself, and by contributing to the increased marketization of the arts which threatens democratic access to and participation in them. (p. 153)

Eleonora Belfiore critiques "evidence-based" policy-making for the arts – where the sector is consistently required to produce proof of socio-economic impact – as sitting within a Neoliberal "all-embracing frame that led to the institutionalization of economic impact as a dominating idea in cultural policy" (2021, p. 305). While Harvie and Belfiore are writing from a British, UK-based perspective, Ireland is a member of the European Union, itself arguably a neoliberal institution identified as such by analysts, according to Quinn Slobodian, for its "efforts to insulate market actors from democratic pressures" (2020, p. 4). Or, as Susan George summarises the central tenets of the ideology: "the whole point of neo-liberalism is that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings. The economy should dictate its rules to society, not the other way around. And [...] this doctrine is leading us directly towards the 'demolition of society'" (George, 1999).

A look at some graphical representation of the public funding figures, that is awards from Arts Councils to theatre-makers in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the last twenty-five years illustrates some basic trends and some surprising patterns over the period. Figure One details how the respective arts councils' government grants and national lottery funding reflect a picture of the specific financial environments they work from and the government responses to these economic upheavals. Key points to consider are the peaks in Ireland's (ROI) funding between 2006 to 2008, particularly reflecting the rise of the Celtic Tiger. The Ireland/ROI nadir of 2015 is a direct result of post-Celtic Tiger austerity, a period that impacted strongly on many independent theatre companies in Ireland and NoI/NI.

Figure 1: Comparison of Arts Councils Government Grants 2000-24 with Ireland's Euro converted to GBPs. Graph by Dr. Tricia O'Beirne.

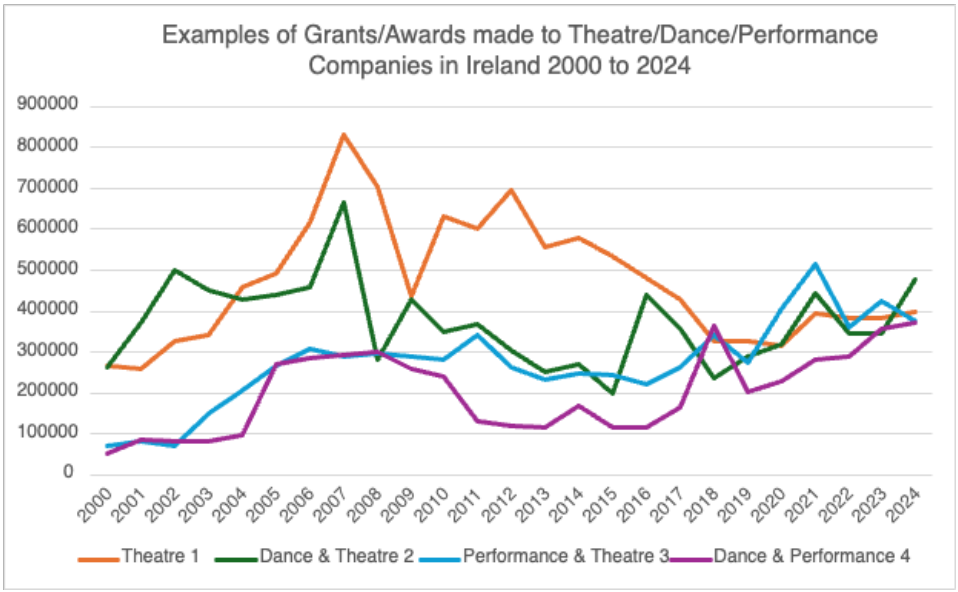


NoI/NI Theatre Company Kabosh experienced a 44% cut in 2015, reflecting the downward trend in the graph for NoI/NI. The news was communicated to them by letter in March of the funding year in which they were currently working, with existing commitments to employees and various projects, demonstrating how the arts sector differs from the average private/public sector employment experience where workplace regulations would prevent such an abrupt reduction in operational capacity. Kabosh have never had their pre-2015 level of support re-instated. There was a noted sense of shock and an outcry by the artistic community, many of whom were affected by the cuts at the time (Black, 2015). The Covid-19 emergency funding is reflected in all regions while lastly of note is that NoI/NI's Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) funding has scarcely changed since 2000.

Looking at the funding received by the arts councils begs the question, how did that funding flow down in annual awards for theatre companies over the same twenty-five-year period? Using publicly available information on awards granted in Ireland, Figure Two demonstrates some examples of how financial policies impact on reality on the ground for four sample independent theatre/performance/dance companies. It does not attempt to present a complete picture of the funding environments nor are the graphs statistically significant as their sample sizes reflect the small number of companies in existence from 2000 to 2024. Rather, the graph is a snapshot of individual companies in a funding environment defined by financial crises and austerity policies

who have defied the odds and remained in existence over the twenty-five years from 2000. It also illustrates one key trend which is common to all sample theatre companies: at no point has any annual award met or exceeded the peak funding of the early twenty-first century financial boom. When Parker names the 2008 economic crash an existential crisis for the theatre sector, the numbers support that statement. A second observation is the obvious lack of consistency in funding, as is evident in the peaks and troughs over time depicted in the graph. Ireland's Arts Council has not re-instated multi-annual funding since the years of austerity budgets which might allow for a reasonable level of financial security, and there is no convincing evidence to suggest this will change in Ireland, despite recent policy shifts in NoI/NI and Scotland.

Figure 2: Awards from Arts Council Ireland to Four Sample Independent Theatre Companies. Graph by Dr. Tricia O'Beirne.



It should be acknowledged here that these graphs only look at arts council funding, they do not consider any other support which was availed of by the companies. Research indicates that financial input from arts councils depends on many variables, including the category of theatrical output – children's theatre for example finds it difficult to access commercial subsidisation – or whether the production is a collaboration, plans to tour internationally, and indeed, a history of positive reviews in leading publications such as the *Irish Times* (TPOP, 2023-2025). Alternative support may come from county councils, charitable or business trusts, issue-specific private or public organisations. However, income from venue guarantees and box-office are not usually sufficient to cover the costs of production in art-led independent theatre and performance. Furthermore, certain venues (also operating on tight margins) are less

likely to take responsibility for marketing and a risk-sharing approach. An example of cost price index (CPI) impact on artistic income in Ireland since the start of the twenty-first century is shown in Figure Three, demonstrating that for this particular theatre company (name withheld for confidentiality reasons), their income from the Arts Council of Ireland, adjusted for CPI, is at the same level or even slightly lower in 2024 than it was in 2000 (CSO, 2025).

Figure 3: CPI adjusted grants Arts Council Ireland to Irish Theatre Company. Graph prepared by Dr Tricia O'Beirne.

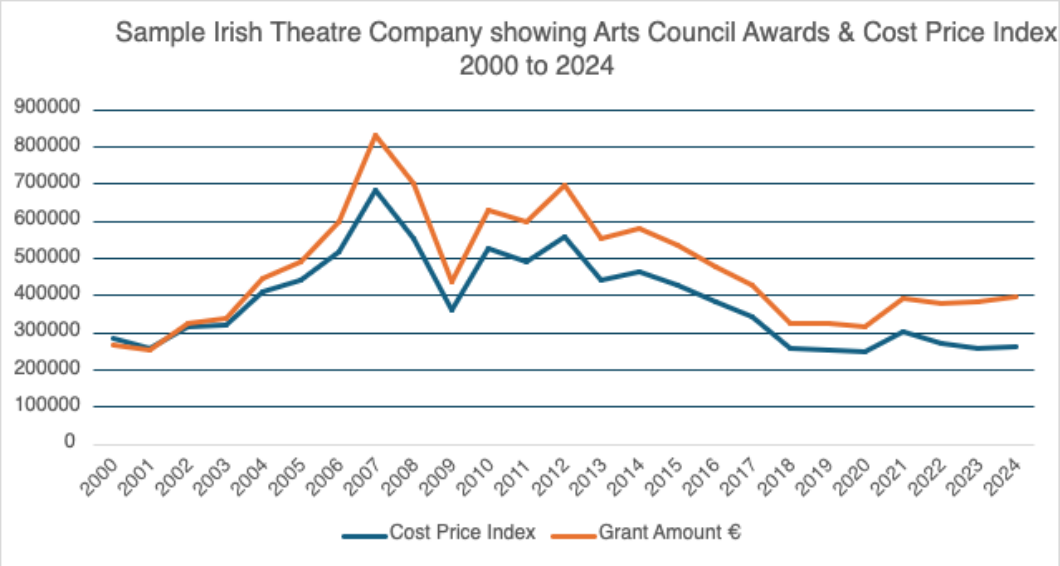
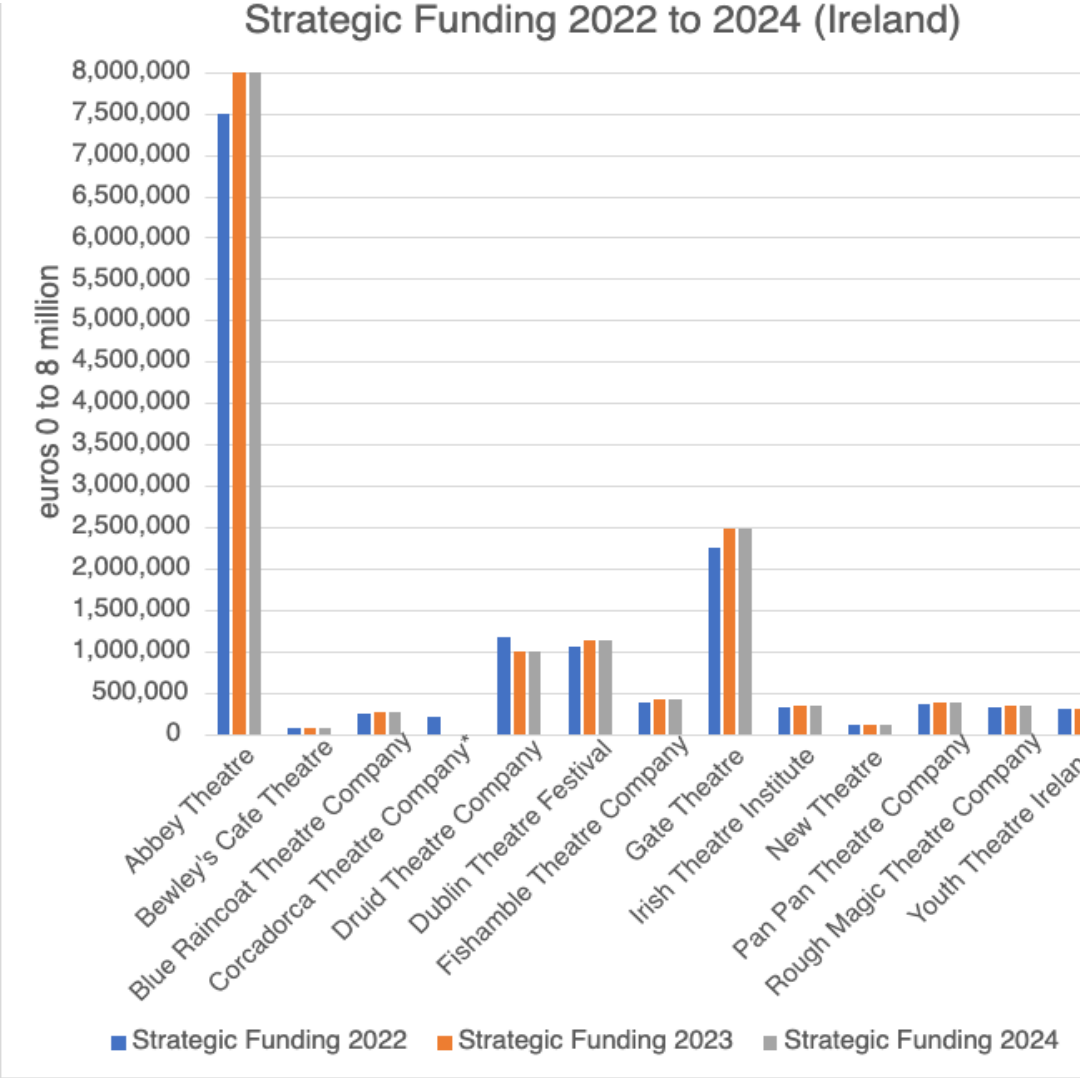


Figure Four clearly details that the Abbey accounts for a sizable amount of the Arts Council spend on theatre. Parker argues that while some may regard the Abbey's funding as disproportionate, the responsibilities it has been asked to shoulder are equally so, as she calls on the Irish government to "free up funding for the Arts Council to channel towards the creative artists and ensembles (including producers and technicians) who make possible the one experience left that cannot – cannot – be replicated by artificial intelligence" (Parker, 2025).

Figure 4: Strategic Funding in Ireland & the Abbey Theatre's Arts Council Funding. Graph by Dr. Tricia O'Beirne.



These graphs depicting government funding and arts council awards offer factual depictions of the background to the escalating precarity of work in the theatre and performance sector. The analysis is indicative of a financial climate in the arts in general, whereby short-term funding policies prevent future-focused artistic planning and inhibit investment in the R & D stage of production. Increased instrumentalism of the arts and artists requires more administrative input to perform national policy aims and ambitions as well as artistic output. Pat Kiernan, artistic director of Corcadorca speaking of their closure in 2022 states "Simply we did not have the resources to meet the demand to implement the strategies and policies of funding requirements" (Leland, 2022). Clearly the current funding climate is not optimal for those working in the industry. This fact makes critical the need to integrate art and culture-led economic sustainability as a metric by which countries are measured when analysing or interrogating artists' well-being and financial support.

4 Conclusion: a hunger for more, or The Hunger Games?

The real story of any production, as theatre producer Marianne Kennedy has argued, is in the budget (Kennedy, 2014). One can study thousands of productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, but each production budget will tell you a different story, including: where the seed funding came from, what kind of further investments/sponsorship was attained, what level of artistic vision could be achieved as a result of the finance in place, what was the quality of production materials and aesthetics as a result of the funding available, what salaries reveal about the relationship between company members, and what constitute the varying costs in running a theatre venue or producing work offsite. The final part of the budget is the impact of box office sales, and how the live event of performance generates both social and commercial capital to develop new networks, patronage and cultural currency. From this, one can start to assess the intergenerational impact of productions – if box office returns are strong, the excess is usually invested in new voices or experimental ideas. In theatre and performance scholarship, this is a story that is largely unexamined.

Prior to the 2008 economic crash, independent theatre companies in RoI could apply for a three-year grant known as Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) from the Arts Council Ireland, however, the RFO funding pathway was retired in the years of national austerity budgets. This was not a perfect system, but it was the most effective form of AC funding to date. It was not available in NoI/NI at that time, but is under consideration by ACNI at this time of writing. To maintain a healthy theatre sector, a company has to commission writers and artists, programme, book venues, cast, and draw up contracts for 2-3 years in advance to ensure plays, performances and spaces are available and ready. Since the austerity budgets in RoI, companies can apply for a one-year grant known as Annual Grant Funding, but there is no guarantee that they will be awarded it in two or three consecutive years. So, a company may be funded on this for 10 consecutive years and then receive an email one morning saying "no". One hopes this is unlikely, but it is possible. Furthermore, with competitive public funding streams like these, there is no redundancy, and thus, no soft landing if a funding application is unsuccessful. The three-year or one-year funding only applies/has applied to companies, organisations and venues. As a freelance/independent artist, one can apply for a Project Award or other once-off funding schemes, but the grant application is something they invest in often without the support of a company manager or producer, with no guarantee of the outcome. This leads to tensions between companies and freelance artists. Companies have barely enough to keep going, and many folded since 2008, but freelance artists

still have less. There is an obvious dynamic here whereby each entity observes how the pie is being divided, taking attention away from the key structural issue of insufficient funding. Of course, no one wants to be seen to be complaining about a funding body when their arts practice and economic livelihoods are dependent on that funding body.

Making these points is intended to illuminate the gravity of the situation but not lay blame at the door of Arts Councils, who are also reliant on annual government funding to operate and also not in receipt of multi-annual commitments either. If there was a simple answer as to how funding should be distributed equitably, the Arts Councils would have found it by now. With such insufficient arts funding annually on both sides of the border, all the Arts Councils can negotiate are difficult decisions. For example, if funding is cut to an established company who have been making work for 10-20 years to ensure funding can reach new artists and companies, is that by default penalising companies for being established? Is it ageist? However, if Arts Councils do not ensure new voices can be funded, is that a penalty for being new, or being young? Are they essentially telling the next generation they must emigrate to have a career in the arts? How can funding structures be designed and implemented to prevent pitting artists against each other?

Knowledge is power and an understanding and aligning of economics with theatre studies in a multidisciplinary approach allows overt discussion of the "F" word, finance. Molly Mullen, speaking of applied theatre, makes the general point that "theatre cannot ignore its own materiality: the need to find the resources, financial or otherwise, to create and sustain projects and programmes, companies and people" (Mullen, 2020, p. 49); nothing tangible will be created without a foundation of financial support. Essential for making the case for the arts is an ability to both understand and compare national and international arts funding figures. In a hypervigilant world there are plenty of records, surveys and studies that can provide such data. However, any researcher looking for international or EU arts funding statistics quickly realises that while Eurostat, Statistica and so on compile and analyse data from all relevant countries, the data means next to nothing because there is no common agreement on what criteria to apply or even what definitions comprise arts or culture sectors. This is generally accepted by economists and government departments engaged with cultural studies (TPOP, 2023-2025). In addition, national government departments include different sectors in overall arts spend: some include sport, some do not. Some place film under the arts council's management whereas others fund film as a separate entity. National lottery figures are sometimes included and other times omitted

from comparisons of arts council grant-in-aid, seriously exaggerating discrepancies between countries.

The general unreliability of information in mainstream sources highlights the difficulty with conducting comparative analysis, which does not help the arts sector in understanding and presenting its case. Resisting narratives based on misinformation and mistruths is not easy and requires vigilance, fact-checkers, reputable news outlets and money. With the rise of right-wing governments in Europe and the US, from Trump's America to Slovakia to Hungary, independent arts bodies are being replaced by direct government control. Hence the criticality of organisations who conduct independent research and surveys such as Performing Arts Forum, Irish Theatre Institute, Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland and the National Campaign for the Arts to name but a few, to demystify the operations of arts and cultural policy and funding decisions. Integrating economic theory and policy with analysis of the performing arts is a vital research strategy, necessary at a time when challenging authoritarian government and neoliberal policies is critical for survival of an independent arts sector.

References

ALEXANDER, Victoria D. State Support of Artists: The Case of the United Kingdom in a New Labour Environment and Beyond. **The Journal of arts management, law, and society**, v. 37, n .3, p. 185, 2007.

ARTS COUNCIL IRELAND. Annual Reports. Available on: https://artscouncil.ie/about/governance/

ARTS COUNCIL (NORTHERN IRELAND) Northern Ireland. Annual Reports. Available ont: https://artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/annual-reports

BELL, Lian. **Unpublished Interview with Miriam Haughton and Patricia O'Beirne**. Dublin: 24 Oct. 2023.

BELFIORE, Elenora. Is it really about the evidence? Argument, persuasion, and the power of ideas in cultural policy. **Cultural Trends**, v. 31, n. 4, p. 293-310, 2021.

BLACK, Rebecca. Arts community shocked as Northern Ireland budget cuts bombshell is revealed. **Belfast Telegraph**, 21 Mar. 2015. Available on: https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/arts-community-shocked-as-northern-ireland-budget-cuts-bombshell-is-revealed/31083592.html

BLAIR, Alexander. **The Golden Years: The Story of Ballymoney Drama Festival**. The Committee of Ballymoney Drama Festival, 1989.

CARNEGIE UK. **History & Investment**. Available on: https://carnegieuk.org/who-we-are/history-and-investment/. Accessed on: 6 Oct. 2025.

CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (CSO). **CPA01-Consumer Price Index**. Available on: https://data.cso.ie/ Accessed on: 16 Jan. 2025.

DRAMA FESTIVAL IN BALLYMONEY. *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 May 1939, p. 11. **Irish Newspaper Archive**, Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.

GEORGE, Susan. A Short History of Neoliberalism. *In*: CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY IN A GLOBALISING WORLD, Bangkok, 24-26 March 1999. Available on: https://www.tni.org/en/article/a-short-history-of-neoliberalism. Accessed on: 3 May 2025.

GIBSON, Harry. Virility of the Amateur Dramatic Movement in the North. *Sunday Independent*, 24 Mar. 1935, p. 5. **Irish Newspaper Archive**, Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.

HARVIE, Jen. **Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

IRELAND. **Rough Magic Theatre Company**. Dublin, Ireland: https://www.roughmagic.ie/

IRELAND. **Show in a Bag**. Irish Theatre Institute. Dublin, Ireland: https://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/artist-supports/show-in-a-bag/

IRELAND: **The Price of Performance: A Question of Economic Sustainability for Independent Theatre in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland 2000-2020 (TPOP).** Available on: https://mooreinstitute.ie/projects/the-price-of-performance-a-question-of-economic-sustainability-for-independent-theatre-production-in-ireland-northern-ireland-and-scotland-2000-2020/

IRELAND. **Gender Counts**. WakingTheFeminists, sponsored by the Arts Council, 2017.

KENNEDY, Marianne. **Unpublished Interview with Miriam Haughton**. Galway: 2014.

LELAND, Mary. Corcadorca, a pioneer of Irish theatre, loses its uphill struggle. **The Irish Times** 23 Nov. 2022. Available on: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/2022/11/23/corcadorca-a-pioneer-of-irish-theatre-loses-its-uphill-struggle/.

MCINTOSH, Gillian. CEMA and the National Anthem: The Arts and the State in Postwar Northern Ireland. **New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua**, v. 5, n. 3, p. 22-31, 2001. *JSTOR*, Accessed 20 Apr. 2023.

MCKENZIE, Brian. Public intellectuals as policy makers: the democratization of culture and Sean O'Faoláin's Arts Council, 1956–1959. **International Journal of Cultural Policy**, v. 26, n. 2, p. 255-265, 2018.

MULLEN, Molly. **Applied Theatre: Economics**. London: Methuen Drama, 2020.

PARKER, Lynne. Lynne Parker: The Abbey does so much. But Ireland needs a national theatre for the 21st century. **The Irish Times**, 24 Feb. 2025. Available on: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/2025/02/24/lynne-parker-the-abbey-does-so-much-but-ireland-needs-a-national-theatre-for-the-21st-century/.

PARKER, Lynne; REEVES, Gemma; CREGAN, Sara. **Unpublished Interview with Miriam Haughton and Patricia O'Beirne**. Rough Magic Offices Dublin: 16 May 2024.

RAWORTH, Kate. **Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist**. London: Penguin, 2017.

RIUS-ULLDEMOLINS, Joaquim; PIZZI, Alejandro. Cultural Policy Regimes and Arts Councils. The Longue Durée Perspective, Birth of the State, Religious Trajectories and National Cultural Policies. **International journal of cultural policy**, v. 28, n.1, p. 17-33, 2022.

SAMUELSON, Paul. The Pure Theory of Public Expenditures. **The Review of Economics and Statistics**, v. 36, n. 4, p. 387-389, 1954.

SLOBODIAN, Quinn. **Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism.** Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018.

STIGLER, G. J. The Development of Utility Theory. **Journal of Political Economy**, v. 58, n. 4, p. 307-327, 1950.

STOREY, Taryn. Village Hall Work Can Never Be "Theatre": Amateur Theatre and the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1945-56. **Contemporary Theatre Review**, v. 27, n. 1, p. 76-91, 2017.

THIRTIETH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND 1972-1973. The Arts Council Northern Ireland, 1973. Linen Hall Library, Belfast. AC-0023THROSBY, David. **Economics and Culture**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

THROSBY, David. **The Economics of Cultural Policy**. 1st ed. Cambridge, University Press, 2010.

UPCHURCH, Anna. **The Origins of the Arts Council Movement : Philanthropy and Policy**. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

US. Euro-Zone Debt Crisis: PIIGS. **Britannica**. Chicago. Available on: https://www.britannica.com/money/euro-zone-debt-crisis

Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*'s centenary production at the Gielgud Theatre London: a performance perspective

Performance Dates: 29 & 30 October 2024

Eamonn Jordan

1 Take your seat

To the live event each spectator brings their unique life and career histories, conscious and unconscious awarenesses, plus their beliefs, contradictions and ideological values that will have evolved over time. To this list one could add cultural experiences, curiosity and attentiveness, and the specific energy and focus that may alter from when the spectator sits down. That mindset and sense of being present in the moment fluctuates across every micro instance of the entire performance event, and levels of distractedness and concentration, and what responses are triggered are unique to all concerned. In addition to commitments of time, effort and money, a spectator possesses different expectations around what they will experience during performance; sometimes they are influenced by word of mouth about a particular production, sometimes by having read feature pieces, interviews they have come across or positive newspaper reviews, and sometimes by the social media content they have consumed. On many occasions anticipations are based on knowledge of or a liking for the work of a playwright, the draw and reputation of a renowned director, or by the casting of acclaimed actors in lead roles. (Traditionally, but not always, other contributors on a production's creative team are less of an immediate draw, unless one has perhaps specific experiences of or appreciation for particular production design elements.)

Almost nobody attends a performance for the same reasons and purposes, and not everyone will have the same expectations about or investment in any one theatrical event. Others, whether accompanying someone on the visit, sitting relatively close beside you or those across the larger auditorium can impact on another's reception and responses, as they can cue or trigger a variety of responses from laughter and fear to disengagement and disgust.

Indeed, for many spectators entertainment is at the top of their agenda, perhaps their only agenda, much to the chagrin of those who give cultural events a more political/intellectual weighting and social import. That is not to undermine the possibility of something close to a shared or collective enjoyment, detachment or frustration with a production, to name but a few amongst the many ways one might summarise the overall response of any once-off audience.

2 Setting the scene

I had to travel from Ireland to London to see the centenary anniversary production of Seán O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, directed by multiple award winning and the current artistic director of the Old Vic, Matthew Warchus, who is also a playwright and a director of film and opera. One of the production's selling points was that it featured in the leading roles the acclaimed J. Smith-Cameron, best known for her performances as Gerri Kellman in the HBO series *Succession* playing Juno Boyle, which she had also previously played in the Irish Repertory Theatre's 2014 New York production, directed by Charlotte Moore, and the widely admired Mark Rylance, often seen as a generation leading actor, slated to play Captain Jack Boyle. Casting as such could not be simply labelled celebrity casting, but these renowned actors would draw audiences to the production.

To the performance event I bring my own very distinct particularities, which invariably inform my expectations and responses. (It is not as if I was a regular at West End shows or a tourist who had picked up a ticket in advance or at a half price booth on Leicester Square, or someone dropping in to see the play after a day's work or using it as an occasion to meet up with friends.)

My attendance is more than partially work related. I had taught the play regularly over the years, wrote briefly about the play very recently in terms of social class,[1] and had also written about those who were influenced by this particular play.[2] I had also seen a number of previous productions of this O'Casey play over the years.[3]

Further, not only that, it is also essential to acknowledge my own positive disposition towards O'Casey's writing, which is in alignment with some of the more constructive recent scholarship, and my own thinking has benefitted from the insights provided by Christopher Murray's earlier scholarship, who was also a mentor of mine.[4] My affirmative analytical disposition is very much at odds with some of the Irish academic criticism that was very influential during the 1980s and 1990s.

As a spectator, I would not be alone in having seen other productions of this play, and I would not be alone in attending a production with multiple questions in advance. While it would be futile to attempt to trace the range and types of questions or anticipations other spectators might have in relation to any one production, it is necessary to outline some of my own. In terms of anticipative questions, given the specific biographies and backgrounds of the actors, some from Ireland, some from England and one from America, I wondered would there be a degree of coherence to the accents used? How might the specificities of the Irish Civil War (1922-23) raging in the diegetic space be signalled and received in a London production in 2024? How would the specificities of poverty play out? Might such harrowing socio/political circumstances be downplayed or even erased with a West-End audience in mind? Would Jack Boyle's views be seen as a form of contemporary toxic masculinity, would Juno's decisiveness be staged as heroic?

---

[1] JORDAN, Eamonn. Enunciations and Avoidances of Capital and Class in Evolving Irish Theatre. *In*: MCMILLAN, Gloria L. (ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Literature and Class**. New York: Routledge, 2022, p. 233–246 and JORDAN, Eamonn. **Irish Theatre: Interrogating Intersecting Inequalities**. London: Routledge, 2023.

[2] I reflected on how this landmark play influenced the dramaturgy of others, including two plays by Irish writers, namely *Mrs Sweeney* (1997) by Paula Meehan and *Carthaginians* (1988) by Frank McGuinness, before focusing on the influence on Korean writer Chi-Jin Yoo's play *The Mud Hut* (1932) and American playwright Lorraine Hansberry's classic work *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). See JORDAN, Eamonn. "Emulators". *In:* MORAN, James (ed.). **Sean O'Casey in Context**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025, p. 243-253.

[3] My viewing history would include Joe Dowling's 1986 renowned Gate Theatre, Dublin production, which featured Donal McCann and Geraldine Plunkett in the lead roles and this production toured internationally. I had also witnessed some productions at the Abbey Theatre including the Ben Barnes directed one in 1997, featuring Ger Ryan and Vincent McCabe in the lead roles, and another more recently again at the Abbey Theatre in 2011, directed by Howard Davies that starred Ciaran Hinds and Sinéad Cusack, before its transfer to the National Theatre London.

[4] For Christopher Murray, Juno Boyle espouses "practicality over ideology". See MURRAY, Christopher. **Seán O'Casey**. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

How would the carnivalesque reversals key to Act Two be realised? What might be made of class differences? And might those who are poor and marginalised be signalled and seen as a range of more hostile scholars has proposed; as caricatures, eccentric, de-substantiated trauma,[5] or might there be an attempt to avoid their "disposability",[6] or to foreground their "abjection".[7] I did wonder what challenges might the play's tragi-comic genre pose to the overall mise-en-scène, and how might the tragi-comic beats of the play be accordingly regulated? I was fundamentally curious how the casting of the lead star actors would work out, in a sense because it is the tragic outcomes that befall both that are differently distressing. (That is not to ignore the arcs of other characters or the ensemble nature of the play itself, which I hope my analysis confirms.)

I had regarded J. Smith-Cameron's performances in *Succession* to be exceptional, based on my engagement with that series across its long run, so I really wanted to see her in this very different role. I also have a particular fascination with Rylance, as film, screen and stage actor.[8] (In addition, some of the other members of the cast I had seen in previous performances and hold them in high regard, including Ingrid Craigie, Anna Healy, Aisling Kearns and Chris Walley.)

And of course, to what extent did having as renowned a director as Warchus, and actors with the reputations of Rylance and Smith-Cameron, who were willing to be cast in this specific play, shape the overall commercial decision by Sonia Friedman productions to stage the play in 2024?[9] After all, this is not subsidised theatre like one experiences at most theatres in Ireland or across Britain; this is commercially driven programming. Finally,

---

[5] Two examples: Declan Kiberd accuses O'Casey of undermining the poor, ignoring ideas and sentimentalizing victimhood and of creating characters that are like "jabbering leprechauns". See KIBERD, Declan. **Inventing Ireland.** London: Jonathan Cape, 1995. Paul Murphy would suggest that O'Casey was guilty of advancing eccentricities and subordinating pain. See MURPHY, Paul. **Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama, 1899-1949**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 69.

[6] See PIERSE, Michael. "An sinne a bhí sa chónra"? Writing Death on the Margins of Twentieth–Century Irish Working–Class Writing. *In:* PIERSE, Michael (ed.). **A History of Irish Working-Class Writing**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 168–194.

[7] See MORAN, James. Class during the Irish Revolution: British Soldiers, 1916 and the Abject Body. *In*: PIERSE, Michael (ed.). **A History of Irish Working-Class Writing**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 153–167.

[8] While I have seen him in numerous films and on television and in recordings of Shakespeare's work, I had missed him with great regret both in the premiere and later in his revisiting of his landmark role as Johnny "Rooster" Byron in Jezz Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009; 2022). I had seen him live for the first time very recently in *Dr Semmelweis* (2023) – the play's original idea was Rylance's and it was written by him with Stephen Brown – and in this production I had found his on stage presence to be absolutely fascinating.

[9] Sonia Friedman productions had decided to stage this tragicomic play in the context of the other offerings on the West-End itself. It is not so much that this production was competing with all other options available, but its dark reality differentiated itself from the more upbeat stage offerings programmed elsewhere.

might the decision to produce the play not only be because of its historic significance but because of its potential capacity to resonate with contemporary worldwide political conflicts?

Important as it is to acknowledge that all criticism has its blind spots, I hope I am as self-aware as possible in accounting for the performance and my engagements with it. My response to the production could well be a form of self-justification of my own previous evaluations of the play itself.[10] (Indeed, more theoretical questions about spectatorship more broadly or the various approaches of scholarly criticism, will not be pursued in this short piece.) Reception always has a context and I outline the above to give a sense to the dynamics that shape my responses to the production.

3 Location, location, location

The Dublin location of the play is clearly established by the stage space of the Boyle family's tenement accommodation, stage lighting and costumes, character interactions, and accents of the performers. Spectators are informed early as to what is happening outside in the wider community. While it might be the case that audiences do not understand all references to the particular distinctions between the two parties – namely "diehards" (Anti-Treaty) and "free staters" (Pro-Treaty) – to the Irish Civil War that emerged in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), which accepted the division of the island, we learn immediately that a neighbour of the Boyles, Robbie Tancred, has been executed. (Dublin audiences when it was premiered would have been fundamentally aware of the distinctions between the different sides to the Civil War conflict, and much could go unsaid in terms of the script.) Shots are heard at the opening of the play, something that does not appear in the playtext itself but the decision to do so is by way of reinforcing the danger associated with the conflict external to the space.

Within the play's environment it is not just a civil war that rages, but almost all of the characters are living hand to mouth. For the Boyle family, Juno has been getting groceries

[10] Methodologically, to aid better with recall and to enhance my experience of the performance, I decided to see the production twice, with a commitment to take some notes on both occasions, often these notes were responses to my initial considerations, and on the second occasion, they were more supplementary, adding to what I had not closely observed or fully taken account of on the first-time viewing. I did not aim to write up my responses to the event immediately, and nor did I intend to as I am starting to do so now, 6 months later. In advance of writing this response, I decided to read newspaper reviews and feature pieces only after I had established a very significant draft of this analysis, more by way of aiding recollection further and less by informing or shaping my own response by way of the critical considerations of others.

on credit and does not know where the money to pay for the next meal will come from. Mary (Aisling Kearns) is on strike and has no wages coming in, Johnny (Eimhin Fitzgerald Doherty) has a disability and cannot work, and Juno's husband, Captain Jack (Peacock or the "Paycock" of the play's title), is long-term unemployed, even if he still finds the money to take himself to the pub, early in the morning. The particulars of poverty are essential to the dramaturgy of O'Casey, and the play's setting by Rob Howell is determined by lack. A large silver crucifix hangs over the space and a curtain backstage left serves as a rudimentary division of the space, signifying where Johnny sleeps.[11] What is unique about the design is that an impression of the external façade of the derelict tenement building is captured within the interior space, suggesting not just the blending of public and private, interior and exterior, but that boundaries will not be maintained.[12] Indeed, the space is invaded/trespassed in different ways across the span of the play.

The materiality of poverty is there to signal destitution, but not there to repulse an audience. The set signals how the tenements of those times were overcrowded, rudimentary and unhygienic, to say the least. Poor sanitary conditions led to sickness, infection and high levels of infant mortality, etc. Neighbours and associates of the Boyles will variously reaffirm the hand to mouth existence under which most operate. The most precarious figure is the Captain's friend, Joxer Daly (Paul Hilton). When Boyle has his sausage breakfast, Joxer consumes, with gratitude, the leftover/scraps or "gravy", a combination of the grease in which the sausages are cooked plus the fat that expels from the meat product upon cooking. Hilton makes clear his need for such residual scraps. Costumes, also by Howell, are shabby, drab, well-worn in the main, with some exceptions, namely those of Jerry (Leo Hanna), Mary's former boyfriend and a rising star of the trade union movement. While Mary's new beau, Bentham (Chris Walley) is costumed to appear stylish and sophisticated, he belongs to a different social class to all of them.

The Boyle family space is marked by a complex intersection of gender and class dynamics. O'Casey's descriptions of Juno and Mary are telling: he regards Juno as

[11] Arifa Akbar notes how "Rob Howell's set, which looks as if a strip has been torn out of it, and has a blood-soaked red light above a sketched house below". See AKBAR, Arifa. Review. **Guardian**, 7 October 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/oct/07/juno-and-the-paycock-review-mark-rylance-j-smith-cameron-gielgud-theatre. Accessed on: 19 Aug. 2025.

[12] In a way also the design could be read as an intended response to criticism of O'Casey who is accused of overly distinguishing between public and private, by way of not paying enough attention to the wider politics. Seamus Deane accuses the work of O'Casey more broadly of prioritising humane and familial considerations at the expense of politics. See DEANE, Seamus. **Celtic Revivals**. London: Faber & Faber, 1985, p. 108. And Lionel Pilkington would hold the view that O'Casey discredits "militancy". See PILKINGTON, Lionel. **Theatre and the State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People**. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 94.

formidable, creative, if resigned, shaped by "a mechanical resistance" (O'Casey, 1998, p. 6), and in Smith-Cameron's performance, we do get a sense of power that is somewhat more defiant than resigned, and as the play progresses, the strengths of this character shine through, not because of a strong sense of agential choice and measured decision making, more because of a necessary response to the calamities that befall the family.

As a younger woman, Kearns's Mary Boyle is very much aware of her straightened economic circumstances. If she is challenged by her mother as to the nature of workplace solidarity, as she is striking on behalf of a colleague for whom Mary has little time, and against an employer that holds most of the cards, Mary shows confidence and determination to do the right thing. In her belief in collective action there are historic echoes of the 1913 Dublin lockout; the landmark trade union protest led by Jim Larkin that saw city-wide strikes but which eventually left the unions broken. Again, current audiences might not be aware of such specific echoes, unlike the play's original audience who would have had greater and immediate understanding of that reality. However, there are significant contemporary implications around labour and capital relationships, clearly signalled by production choices. On stage are two placards, one of which was not entirely visible to me from the two different seats I had in the stalls. The one that I could read clearly stated: "Fight for a Living Wage", and on the other, all I could see was "Worker's Rights". Both placards have historic and contemporary relevance. Today's public discussions of zero-hour contracts, the workplace precarity experienced by many citizens, particularly the inability to make work pay for many in the context of global riches more broadly, demonstrate the continued conflict between labour and capital. These placards would prove not to be the only suggestions of contemporary immediacy and relevance.

Johnny Boyle is all too keen to articulate his contributions to the causes of Irish freedom, having sustained life changing injuries, a bullet to the hip, after he engaged with British forces, during 1916's Easter Rising and later a bomb shattered his arm, during the War of Independence. If he holds that his sacrifice has merit and significance, and is self-defining, Juno claims that her son lost his most important "principle" when he lost his arm (p. 9). For her the inability to work, pay his way and self-support himself are his determining features, not his delusional take on patriotic sacrifice/heroism. Smith-Cameron's Juno places such a challenge to Fitzgerald's Johnny in a forceful manner, despising the conventional romanticisation of military insurrection, but it is worth remembering how her disapproval is often read as O'Casey's own, allegedly biased anti-Republicanism more broadly. The wider implications of Juno's prioritisation of

practical economics over romanticised politics may or may not resonate as relevant in the immediacy of that performative moment for most spectators, in contrast to those more attuned to such political or critical debates.

In addition, Mary's determination to evolve by self-education is mocked by her father. Indeed, her sense of self-progression is seen as a form of self-indulgence if we follow and succumb to O'Casey's character description of her.[13] (Productions, of course, often ignore such stage directions.) Mary has cruelly set aside the advances of Jerry for the affections of Bentham (Chris Walley), who is a teacher and apprentice solicitor, played with assured arrogance and sophistication by Walley. Later her pregnancy will wreak additional havoc on herself and the family, particularly when Bentham deserts her, and his true colours are revealed.

Jack Boyle is keen on alcohol, does not care how the household provides for itself, and when Jerry brings word of a job opportunity, which is facilitated by a local priest, the Captain, uses complaints about pains in his legs, and an inability to dress himself in moleskins (work overalls) by way of delay tactics. Here is a character who not just wants but knows how to miss out on opportunities. His complaints about the obligations to work are utterly uninformed by economic necessity, consequently appearing almost self-pitying, infantile, dysregulated and squeamish in many respects. Rylance goes all out to show this work-phobic mindset.

Here, Rylance's is an extraordinary scene-stealing stage presence; his is a whitened, toothbrush moustached face, affording his appearance more of a clown-like, vaudevillian, Chaplinesque characterisation, which most newspaper reviewers noted. His vocal delivery has an ethereal aloofness, divorced from or ungrounded in much of the material facts of his character's existence. He is distant, almost disengaged from himself, while also self-indulgent.

His is a character on whom one could not rely, without him ever being a loveable roguish sort. His unheroic contrivances, deceptions and schemes to evade work and larger familial responsibilities are so rudimentary at one level that they are all too easily uncovered, evident in his early claim that he had not been drinking in the public house, only to be exposed by Jerry's revelation that he spoke with a staff member in Foleys who said he had just left there. Rylance delivers a remarkably convincing performance,

[13] O'Casey notes "Two forces are working in her mind – one, through the circumstances of her life, pulling her back; the other, through the influence of books she has read, pushing her forward" (p. 5).

brilliant in its detail and nuance, seen in a moment when he burns himself with a frying pan while trying to hide hot food down his trousers because he does not want Juno to know that he has breached his defiant oath not to eat the food she provided for him, or in his groaning about the stiffness and pains in his legs in an exaggerated fashion while later moving with great dexterity to do something fast by way of deceit, without hint of injury or muscular constraint. (In the text, he hides the food under the bed.)

The revelation that Jack Boyle is suddenly in line to inherit enough money to change the lives of his family suggests that Boyle can now become the man of wealth and leisure he never knew he longed to be. Money will also bring responsibilities and require a new found maturity. With great abandon, Boyle announces his intention to go into mourning immediately to mark the death of the relative William Ellison, who has left him money, the same person a short while previously he had described in negative terms. This seeming release from poverty appears to set the trajectory of the play in a novel direction. Boyle and his family can transform themselves, exist in a bubble of sorts, that not just gives the illusion of richness, but also that they can somehow become immune from the horrors of war that are surrounding them.

4 Reversals of misfortune

Collectively, with some enthusiasm the Boyles transform their home space by incorporating objects associated with the middle-classes but are conspicuously incompatible with the working-class environment within which they reside. The Captain is in his performative element, so to speak, delighting in signing documents, showboating in his reflections about the markets in consols (a financial instrument), and pretending to have some knowledge about the business world about which he knows very little. Notably now a man of affluence, he accordingly feels compelled to change his attitude towards the Catholic Church, which he earlier had discredited for its opposition to the cause of political independence. He also acquires the swanky new clothing that is in line with his new identity. Rylance's Boyle takes a bath, wearing a bowler hat and having a cane on the ground, and he seems to be in his element. Class is being performed and transgressed in a taboo, abject like manner. He is not alone in the composition of this alternative world, Juno and Mary, one assumes, add the furniture, cheap pictures, and ornaments, buy new clothing and acquire a gramophone; they are thinking big, manifesting a new world order, seeking out opportunities to illustrate their

new found aspirations and taste. There is much to suspect that the happy ever after ending so long associated with melodrama by way of the will with financial benefits befalling those most worthy might have come just a little too soon.

A party for friends and neighbours that includes Bentham, Joxer, and neighbour Maisie Madigan (Anna Healy) convened to celebrate their new status is marked by strange and unnerving conversations and by boisterous singing that is increasingly grotesque in many respects. Healy's Madigan is full of mischief, and is a combination of the maudlin and subversive, exploitatively consuming the party provisions, but knows all too well the social game to be played. Madigan's singing is easier on the ear than Joxer's, and Healy milks all her lines and interactions with aplomb.

Characters are on their best behaviour to impress Bentham, and he enjoys that deference. However, the intrusion by Mrs Tancred (Ingrid Craigie) and other neighbours, while she is on her way to bury her son, brings an air of ruptured surreality to proceedings. As grief intrudes on the celebration, it serves as both a reminder of the mesalliance that O'Casey wants but also forewarns that the larger conflictual reality of civil war violence will invariably intrude. Warchus realises this scene especially well, as the timing, rhythm and flamboyance of the contributions all dovetail well and proceed with enough intensity but also lightness. There is a moment when Craigie's Tancred embraces Fitzgerald's Johnny, unintentionally exacerbating his sense of guilt.

Convincingly, the act ends with the presence of the Irregular Mobiliser (Bryan Moriarty) on stage, who is intent on having Johnny interrogated to see whether he had any hand or part in the ambushing of his neighbour and once cherished comrade, and Warchus reaffirms a heightened sense of foreboding to bookend the Act overall. Johnny has been appearing less and less safe, and all his anxieties suggest that he is implicated in Tancred's demise. The haunted will now be the hunted.

5 Repossession and the dispossessed

Bentham flees to England, ghosting Mary, leaving her most likely pregnant and in the lurch and there is now an urgency for her to see a doctor. With communal rumours circulating that the will has been inaccurately drafted there is a rush to reclaim monies loaned or items of furnishing and clothing given to the Boyles without security, and characters like Madigan take delight in that misfortune. Multiple characters trespass the

family space to reclaim items, including Madigan, furniture shop representatives and Needle Nugent, a tailor.

The fact that the will was not prepared correctly calls attention to both the incompetence of Bentham as draftee but also the failures of his legal seniors not to oversee the work of an apprentice solicitor. The wider symbolic significance of the will, in the form of political independence not delivering for the wider Irish public as had been hoped, is not evident as part of this production's sensibility and in reality such a reading is perhaps harder to articulate or insinuate outside of an Irish production context. Bentham's error, but not criminal negligence, impacts hugely on the Boyle family's circumstances. Captain Boyle knows this before anyone else and his response is to keep on spending, preserve the facade, bury his head in the sand. Rylance does this with panicked glee and abandon.

Boyle's outraged response when finding out about the pregnancy is such that it prompts Mary and Juno to leave their home and to go to live with Juno's sister in the suburbs. At least they have options. The other motive for the women to leave is the discovery of a dead body out near Finglas in the Dublin suburbs, assumed to be Johnny's. Now no one feels safe. Warchus's mise-en-scène, shaped through the contributions of sound and lighting designers (Claire Van Kampen and Hugh Vanstone, respectively) is very effective in establishing that terror.

With Jack and Joxer returning home from the pub drunk while reflecting on the "chassis" (chaos) that surrounds them, both are unaware of Johnny's execution or that Juno and Mary have fled. Their reflections are marked by both naivety and a form of maudlin self-indulgence that reinforces the play's tragi-comic mode. Their exchange occurs in a space that has been stripped bare of all significant possessions and Boyle remains unaware of the dispossession/repossession that has befallen them.

I had signalled that Warchus adds the sound of gunshots to the opening moments of the play, and I had not signalled the addition of religious music, and now he adds two significant touches. Boyle has come across a gun beneath the floorboards and he accidentally shoots Joxer dead. Here is a man with a gun that he cannot account for, and what becomes a consequence of that weapon is fatality. This inclusion in some ways becomes the point of the play's staging – carnage and the chaotic losses of life as a consequence of warfare.

This production had used a patched together red curtain to close off the stage from the spectator before the play begins and it closes during the interval at the end of act two, by way of establishing layers of separation and genre. Towards the play's end, the already stripped backstage space opens back to reveal a huge, elevated marble-looking pietà statute that is then brought upstage. With such an inclusion, the play is now speaking to grief and loss, to mothers and dead sons, predominantly sons, lost in wars and civil wars, well beyond the usual religious association of the pietà.

With this object's visual inclusion Juno's loss has additional huge symbolic significance, as are the earlier grieving, perilous words of Mrs Tancred. Simultaneously, through the performance addition of Joxer's shooting, and iconic inclusion of the pietá, the work speaks to contemporary conflict situations globally in places, of which there are unfortunately too many examples to list. Such inclusions also tilt the play's tragi-comic sensibility towards the fundamentally tragic and indeed purposefully obfuscates the vaudevillian sensibility that has been ongoing especially through Boyle and Joxer and Madigan's performances. The wasteful loss of working-class life strikes home; such figures are not disposable, their loss is given symbolic significance, and there is nothing nostalgic or sentimental about such existences.

6 Extinction event

Each actor works terribly hard to convince us about the era of the play and the overall mise-en-scène did cohere to reinforce that reality. While accents were uneven as might be expected with an international cast despite the work of the voice and dialect coach (Martin McKellan). Indeed, there were some inconsistencies in terms of Dublin accents amongst the actors with Irish backgrounds. Accent is something I tend not to dwell on sufficiently in terms of shaping my response to most theatre engagements. I am more interested in how clear lines of dialogue are communicated, and how actors carry meaning when terms are unfamiliar or obsolete. In almost all instances the actors did very well to bring clarity to the lines and to give a sense of meaning to what was said.

Across the play Jack's comic inducing comments invariably land and gain a response, Smith-Cameron's seething ironies and occasional bitter remarks do not to the same extent. The grotesque, melodramatic, vaudevillian, even expressionistic aspects to Rylance's character are apparent, Juno's defiance, while laced with causticness and callousness, is difficult to divorce from her agitation, and perhaps it easier not to hear the humorous

intent of her remarks. In contrast, the audience laughter in response to the comments and disposition of Healy's Maddigan suggest she hit home far more on the two occasions I saw the production. Hers is a narrower role, with less of a need to cover a gamut of emotions, and her singing was greeted by applause on the two occasions I saw it.

Hilton's Joxer was more childlike savant, swift to echo back a viewpoint by way of social ingratiation but lost in some ethereal world of popular cultural citation and historic referencing, and less in something more visceral, shaped by the horrors of degradation and poverty and the rawness of such an existence. In other productions I have seen, Joxer is as slimy as he is inventive. One moment when fleeing the arriving Juno, Joxer jumps out the window, an exit more in keeping with the farcical exuberances of Richard Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors* (2011), and less in keeping with the script which suggests he simply exits out a window to avoid Juno's wrath. As scripted Joxer is afraid of Juno knowing that he has been in her house, as he is barred from it, but as performed this exit's elaborate staging incites laughter and signals a different type of performative sensibility. The unnerving aspects of Joxer's marginalised chameleon-like qualities did not strike home in the way I had expected.

In some ways, the play is a battle between the realism/pragmatism of Juno and that of the dreamer, fantasist, opposer or denier of reality that is her partner. If Smith-Cameron's Juno is grounded in one reality, and her acting style is more conventionally realistic in the main and more consistent with the stylistic approach of the ensemble overall, Rylance's performance sensibility is entrenched in another dimension.

As Jack, Rylance's comments and reactions are effusively directed not only at the characters surrounding him but pitched towards the spectator as well, especially during the moment when he complains that his life is not worth living, that it would be "betther for a man to be dead" (O'Casey, 1998, p. 18), almost pleading for a response from those in the auditorium. Rylance draws attention to his performance as a performance. It is not just that he is stylistically different, it is as if Rylance's Jack declines to confine himself to the ensemble's onstage reality. And if the above seems to suggest that such incoherence was a failing that would not be my viewpoint.[14] Performance-wise, there is

[14] Andrzej Lukowski notes "Just when you think Mark Rylance had Mark Rylance-d all he can, the man finds whole new ways to Mark Rylance […] I found it brilliantly, bizarrely funny, the sort of auteur performance that no other actor alive would so much as think of giving […]But you know, if somebody offered me a Picasso I wouldn't fret that it didn't go with the furniture". See LUKOWSKI, Andrzej. Review. **Time Out**, 6 October 2024, https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/juno-and-the-paycock-2-review. Accessed on: 18 Aug. 2025

a place for such intended inconsistencies by way of unnerving simplistic viewpoints, or when a spectator's genre-knowledge generates complacency by way of overfamiliarity and having a self-scripted disposition towards a particular genre-type.

O'Casey titled his play a tragedy, but most scholars would view it as a tragicomedy. Warchus sees it more as a melodrama,[15] and Rosemary Waugh's programme note enhances such a claim. And in some ways Warchus's understanding of genre explains the licence he affords to Rylance and the liberties the director takes with the play.

I am glad to have seen this O'Casey play again and happy to see an accomplished cast work with a decisive creative team. While the additions amplified a specific reading of the work, banners, pietà, gunshots, the accidental shooting of Joxer with a stray gun, this production struck at the heart of those who romanticise war and conflict, as it is not just combatants, but families and bystanders that also fall victim to the violence. To think otherwise is to perpetuate a delusion of not just grandeur but a naivety about the fundamental dangers of bloodshed and its romanticisation, and that is just as O'Casey would have wanted.

References

ADAMS, Tim. Review. **Observer**, 13 October 2024. Available on: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/oct/13/the-week-in-theatre-juno-and-the-paycock-sean-ocasey-gielgud-theatre-matthew-warchus-mark-rylance-j-smith-cameron-review-the-other-place-alexander-zeldin-lyttelton-national-theatre. Accessed on: 21 Aug. 2024.

AKBAR, Arifa. Review. **The Guardian**, 7 October 2024. Available on: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/oct/07/juno-and-the-paycock-review-mark-rylance-j-smith-cameron-gielgud-theatre. Accessed on: 19 Aug. 2025

DEANE, Seamus. **Celtic Revivals**. London: Faber & Faber, 1985.

JORDAN, Eamonn. Theatrical Emulators. *In:* **Sean O'Casey in Context**, MORAN, James (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025, p. 243-253.

KIBERD, Declan. **Inventing Ireland**. London: Jonathan Cape, 1995.

LUKOWSKI, Andrzej, Review. **Time Out**, 6 Oct. 2024. Available on: https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/juno-and-the-paycock-2-review. Accessed on: 18 Jul. 2025

[15] The Sonia Friedman homepage carries Warchus's statement, "I have long been in love with this staggeringly great melodrama—a play which collides an Irish working-class domestic tragedy with some of the comedic bravura of the 1920s Music Hall in an unforgettable indictment of the chaos of civil war. I'm very excited to be embarking on my seventh collaboration with Mark Rylance, and my first with the brilliant American actress J. Smith-Cameron, on the 100-year anniversary production of this internationally acclaimed, strikingly relevant, Irish classic". See Sonia Friedman productions, Homepage, https://www.soniafriedman.com/news/sonia-friedman-productions-announces-new-production-of-se%C3%A1n-o'casey's-juno-and-the-paycock-starring-j.-smith-cameron-and-mark-rylance%2C-directed-by-matthew-warchus Accessed on: 21 August 2025

MORAN, James. Class during the Irish Revolution: British Soldiers, 1916 and the Abject Body. *In:* **A History of Irish Working-Class Writing**, PIERSE, Michael (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 153–167.

MURPHY, Paul. **Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama, 1899-1949**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

MURRAY, Christopher. **Seán O'Casey**. London: Faber & Faber, 2000.

O'CASEY, Sean. **Juno and the Paycock**, vol. 1. London: Faber & Faber, 1998.

PIERSE, Michael, 'An sinne a bhí sa chónra?' Writing Death on the Margins of Twentieth-Century Irish Working-Class Writing. *In:* Michael Pierse (ed.), **A History of Irish Working-Class Writing**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 168–194.

PILKINGTON, Lionel. **Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People**. London: Routledge, 2001.

SONIA FRIEDMAN PRODUCTIONS, **Homepage**. https://www.soniafriedman.com/news/sonia-friedman-productions-announces-new-production-of-se%C3%A1n-o'casey's-juno-and-the-paycock-starring-j.-smith-cameron-and-mark-rylance%2C-directed-by-matthew-warchus Accessed on: 21 Aug. 2025.

Becoming a playwright

Colin Murphy

The following is adapted from an introductory essay written for the volume *Colin Murphy's Political Plays* (Bloomsbury Methuen, 2026).

In September 2008, I had a one-year-old child, a precarious foothold in Irish journalism and an unfinished play in a drawer. And then the Irish government guaranteed the banks.

If that period is hazy in memory, the reason is not just sleep deprivation. The news came in blizzards; it was bewildering. Even though I was a journalist – or perhaps all the more so because I was a journalist – I felt myself steadily more alienated from the national conversation, as politics (about which I believed I knew something) was stealthily taken over by economics (about which I knew nothing).

Still, I did immediately realise *something* about the bank guarantee. A group of men locked in a room overnight trying to solve a life-or-death problem... It sounded like a play. I assumed somebody would soon write it. But nobody did.

Then an email came in from Fishamble, Ireland's premiere new play theatre company. They were looking for "tiny plays for Ireland". This proffered the two things that, for a journalist, the play in the drawer had lacked: a deadline and a word count. To be precise: six hundred words. What can you dramatise in six hundred words? One moment of decision. Might there be a moment of decision worth dramatising in recent Irish politics?

My tiny play, *Guaranteed Irish*, was duly staged by Fishamble alongside 24 others (*Tiny Plays for Ireland*, New Island, 2013); together, they made for a moving, often comic, portrait of a country under stress, but resilient. But there was, I thought, a different quality to the laughter at my tiny satire. There was a grim recognition in it.

I suggested a full-length, serious treatment of the issue to Fishamble. I proposed to research the bank guarantee, as a journalist, and bring them a dossier; we would workshop the material with a director and cast and find a play in it. I submitted freedom of information requests, discretely contacted as many of the protagonists as I could, and started working my way through the official inquiries and the multiplying books by journalists and economists.

In the meantime, Fishamble got back in touch: they couldn't fund a week-long workshop, as I had suggested; we would just have two days. I ploughed on, starting to draft rough scenes based on the research material. Then Fishamble got in touch again: actually, the two days would just be one day.

We can't workshop a "dossier" in one day, I thought, all we can do is read it: I'm going to have to write the thing. That was the moment I became a playwright.

Fishamble hired director Conall Morrison; he recruited a crack cast, the reading went well, and Fishamble started to approach theatres offering a rehearsed reading of something that was so untypical of Irish theatre, we didn't know quite what to call it: we went with the ungainly strapline, "a dramatisation based on documentary sources".

This first cast – Peter Hanly, Darragh Kelly, Peter Daly, Caitríona Ní Mhurchú, Mark Lambert – were seminal in my training as a playwright. I would arrive for rehearsals sharp, early, laptop at the ready, primed to interrogate my script; Conall and the cast would amble in, make coffee, and chat. We had just *eight days* – how could they afford to spend so much of it so idly, even if the idle chat was often about bankers and politics?

But there was method in their indolence. What Conall was pursuing was an absolute understanding. He talked about theatre of *argument* – something he had learned from his work on Greek drama – and about the almost cathartic satisfaction an audience gets when something formerly opaque becomes suddenly clear. He and the cast were using rehearsals to do what I had used the research process to do: overcome the profoundly alienating experience of being an Irish citizen during the financial crisis. Accountant-turned-actor Peter Daly was a particular asset. "Wait!", Conall would cry, his face crumpling in pain, mid-scene. "Explain how 'shorting' works *again*".

And then, on the morning of our first performance, I awoke to hear the voice of David Drumm, the former boss of Anglo Irish Bank, on the radio. The Irish Independent

newspaper had obtained leaked recordings from the Anglo internal phone system; these "Anglo tapes" captured Drumm and senior colleagues joking about their efforts to save the bank. One of them gloated that a request to the Central Bank for an emergency loan of seven billion euro had been picked "out of my arse".

Five years after the bank guarantee, as I worried that my play might be too after-the-fact, the guarantee was front-page news again. Our rehearsed reading was suddenly a hit. I tweaked a scene that featured David Drumm asking the Central Bank for seven billion euro, to now include the question to him: "Is that a precise figure David... where did you get it from?".

*

Guaranteed! finished with Brian Lenihan's line that the bank guarantee had been "the cheapest bailout in the world so far". As we by then knew, it hadn't. So the line begged the question, and Fishamble, with Pavilion Theatre, duly commissioned the sequel.

Bailed Out! was, I thought, a better play. Not merely had I learned from experience, but the material had an innate tragic momentum. A party steeped in the mythology of the fight for independence was fighting to avoid the loss of that independence, even as its two leading figures, Brian Cowen and Brian Lenihan, were themselves stalked by tragedy. Cowen's was the more prosaic: the self-harm of alleged excess drinking – an allegation vindicated, for many, by one catastrophic, apparently hung-over, early-morning interview. Lenihan, meanwhile, discovered he was fighting terminal cancer even as he was fighting the bond markets – something that, though it was initially revealed to the public with unseemly haste by TV3, was then almost entirely ignored by the media.

These personal tragedies posed a dramaturgical challenge, however. These were plays about public decisions, not private lives. They were about the argument. The cast sought to embody the characters with merely a hint of the real person behind them. Nobody in the Irish audience was in any doubt who these characters were, but I wanted to signal we were commenting on their lives in politics, in the public realm. The point was not that they were uniquely flawed; rather, they were everymen, in unique circumstances. What I was really trying to dramatise, to embody, was the systems around them.

*

By the time *Bailed Out!* came to the stage, it was seven years on from the bank guarantee, and almost two years since Ireland had exited the bailout. If *Guaranteed!* had played like a current affairs documentary, *Bailed Out!* – better play or no – played as a period piece. I decided to write a proper history play.

By then the country had entered what was being branded as the "decade of centenaries", with the looming centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916 the most pivotal. Pauric Dempsey, a historian then working at the Royal Irish Academy, facilitated an introduction to An Post, which runs the GPO as a corporate headquarters and working post office. We suggested a play about the Rising, to be staged inside the GPO on the centenary. To our surprise – and, I think, theirs – they said yes.

But being in the cathedral of revolution on the centenary of that revolution creates a particular pressure. I worried that the occasion would overwhelm the play, turning it into pageantry. I thought of the astonishing precedent of Seán O'Casey, who – just *ten* years after the Rising – mocked it on the Abbey stage. I spoke to Catriona Crowe of the National Archives. "Our job is to complicate the narrative", she said. Gavin Kostick, dramaturg for Fishamble, asked how I wanted the play to make people feel. I answered: whatever your certainties coming into the play, I want you to leave uncomfortable about them. Perhaps I was echoing a line I had read by David Hare: if journalism is about certainty, drama is about ambiguity.

I had long been skeptical of the Rising. I thought it madness – and not glorious madness, as the O'Rahilly had it. A century on, its malign influence was still felt. Three years further on, in 2019, dissident republicans would shoot the journalist Lyra McKee dead at a riot in Derry. They drew their mandate from the Rising.

But reading, thinking, writing about these men and women made me less comfortable in whatever certainty I had possessed. On the final night, as the audience dispersed, I noticed an elderly woman still sitting, upset. I approached her. "My father was here", she said. Her name was Mary Finlay; her father, Patrick J Hughes, had been a Volunteer in the GPO. I brought her backstage. She approached Daniel McDermott, still in his Volunteer uniform, who had led the singing of The Soldier's Song (later to become the national anthem) as they left the stage at the end of the play, replaying the evacuation. "My father told me about you", she said, "about how you sang". She turned to Aidan Kelly, who played James Connolly, still with his leg wrapped in a bloodied bandage. "And my father was shot with you", Mary said to him. "He told me how brave you were".

*

In the meantime, I had received a surprising email. A number of years earlier, I had taken my seat at a Billy Roche play in the Project Arts Centre's studio space, and struck up conversation with the woman in the seat beside me. At the time, I was a theatre critic (and only subconsciously an aspiring playwright). I was curious to meet a Brazilian at a Billy Roche play on the Dublin fringe; we exchanged email addresses, and brief emails, and there it lay. And here she was again, Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, explaining that she was running a festival of Irish documentary theatre in São Paulo, and that *Guaranteed!* had been recommended to her.

I duly consulted on the translation of the play into Portuguese, and then flew to São Paulo for the rehearsed reading by Cia Ludens. I was intrigued, and nervous, at the prospect of a Brazilian cast, and a Brazilian audience, wrestling with a play that I thought of as hyper-specific. If there were some delightful incongruities – the Finance Minister clad in skin-tight leather pants being one – it quickly transpired that the play was less parochial than I had feared. Apparently, jokes about bankers are universal. Who knew?

Beatriz and her colleagues and students have become one of the constants in my career, supporting and interrogating my work. It has been a joy to work with them.

*

In February 1982, a young, socialist, working-class teacher, Tony Gregory, was elected to represent Dublin Central and found himself with the deciding vote in the contest for taoiseach. The two bourgeois party leaders, Garret FitzGerald of Fine Gael and Charles Haughey of Fianna Fáil, duly came courting, and (spoiler alert – but then, this is a history play) Haughey won out. The Gregory Deal, as the agreement between Gregory and Haughey became known, was either overdue social justice or outrageous clientelism, depending on your perspective. (Where I grew up, in the leafy suburbs of the Southside, it was more often seen as the latter).

My friend Des Gunning had been a member of the Gregory group, the wider circle of activists around Gregory, and suggested I might find the deal fruitful material for a play. I was wary: there was an obvious dramaturgical problem. Plays are about disagreement, not agreement. From early on Haughey and Gregory had each wanted the same thing – a deal. But as I dug deeper, and came to know the people around

Gregory – in particular Mick Rafferty and Fergus McCabe – I realised the drama lay in the disagreement within each side.

There was another problem: men. *Again* a play about *men* making decisions. Again, I used the device of fictionalising a female character to act as the chorus for the play. I had decided that the character of Gregory's secretary would fill this role, and hoped I could get away with the character being a bit flimsy. And then Janet Moran was cast, and I thought, *Janet's too good for such a flimsy role*. And so I went back to Pauline Kane, the woman who had been the secretary in the community project from which Gregory launched his political career. This time, I asked her more about her life and work, rather than about her memories of Gregory and his team in 1982. Thirty-five years on from when, as a teenager, without a Leaving Cert, she had joined the project as secretary, Pauline was now running the project descended from it; she was the defender of the legacy; she was the one still fighting the fight. Though the character is fictionalised in the play, as Eileen, much of Eileen's story belongs to Pauline, even as the story of the play belongs to Eileen.

*

The Treaty was another play that belonged to the secretaries. It was inspired by the Whitehall Diaries of Tom Jones, secretary to the British prime minister, David Lloyd George; when I discovered the memoir by one of the Irish secretariat, Kathleen McKenna, I found myself with joint narrators.

It was a centenary, again, that was the catalyst for the play. But I had learned that history plays are never just about the history, and as I researched and wrote *The Treaty*, it was a contemporary negotiation that was very much on my mind. In Brexit, there was a curious mirror image of the Irish separation from Britain, a hundred years earlier. In each case, an island was trying to take back control from the empire to its east – an empire, saddened, that believed they were stronger together. Tory diehards holding the government's feet to the fire; debate over customs areas and free trade agreements; Canada being held out as an exemplar; dispute over whether the Irish border should be on the island or in the sea. Most intriguing, though, was the resonance between Brexiteer aspirations and that of the Irish republicans of a century earlier. Again, I felt this should make its audience less comfortable with their prior certainties. British conservatives might be surprised to hear such "remainer" arguments from conservative icons like Winston Churchill and FE Smith; Irish nationalists, hostile to Brexit, might be surprised to hear their republican forebears anticipating the Brexiteers' arguments.

Again a play about men making decisions. Kathleen McKenna gave me a vital female voice, but (unlike Jones) she was not in the room where it happened. So we started to think about gender-neutral casting. Conall and I went through lists of actors, male and female, with a key question: could this person play this part? What would this cast look like if we simply cast the best actors, irrespective of gender? We duly cast the play half and half, male/female. The performances were vindication enough; still, it was nice that the Guardian's veteran critic, Michael Billington, judged it "some of the best gender-blind casting I have seen".

But the most daunting challenge facing a play in 2021 was less dramaturgical than epidemiological. Pandemic public health measures were still in place in Ireland: our audience capacity was tiny; everybody had to wear masks. After our run in Dublin, we were due to travel to London, to play a week at the Irish Embassy (with their ballroom standing in for the Downing Street cabinet room), to conclude on the centenary of the signing of the Treaty, December 6. Just as we were finishing in Dublin, we started to hear about a new variant of the virus coming from South Africa: Omicron.

Countries started to close their borders – we worried what Boris Johnson would do. On our final Saturday night in Dublin, with the crew due to travel the following morning, and our first London show on the Thursday, Johnson announced new public health measures: all arrivals into the country were to be tested at a centre and then self-isolate till receiving the all-clear – which could take up to 48 hours. Our short London run was suddenly in jeopardy. It was 1.30am that night when we got confirmation, via a tweet from the British Embassy in Dublin, that the new testing requirements would not apply to Ireland.

Safely in Britain, we found a different world: public and political opinion had turned against public health measures, which were still very much in vogue at home. In Ireland, masks were still being worn inside pubs; in London, when I wore a mask into a pub, I was told brusquely to take it off. (I was the only one who could be so adventurous: cast and crew couldn't run the risk of getting sick, and sloped off home after the show each night, in cars booked by Fishamble, to avoid the dangers of the Tube.)

Meanwhile, Ireland was getting nervous. The government announced that all arrivals into the country would have to have a certified negative test before departure. On the second last night of the London run, one of the crew happened to take one of these tests shortly before the show was due to go up. They tested positive.

PANIC! We had a case of Covid in the house; a crew and cast any one of whom might also have it; and an audience due to start walking in the doors any moment. The distraught crew member was bundled into makeshift quarantine in a commandeered embassy office, while the producer scoured the building for Covid tests. By 7.15, with the curtain due up at 7.30, and many of the audience already in their seats, crew and cast had all done their tests and were waiting nervously for those pregnancy-test-like lines to appear. One by one, people got the all-clear. And then two tests came back uncertain. PANIC! Producer scoured the building again; two fresh tests were unearthed; another 15-minute wait ensued.

I was sitting in the audience, oblivious to any of this but for the rather unavoidable fact that the show had not begun. Eventually, the lights went down and the cast entered, and I realised something had gone badly wrong: they looked frazzled; there were noticeable fluffs; everybody was on edge. And then something happened, and that energy became a part of the play, and the jeopardy, that night – as they argued about the "ensanguined hue" of the relationship between these islands – felt never greater.

*

These were the first words of mine spoken from the stage in a full-length play, in *Guaranteed!*:

"This play is based on a true story. Some of it is literally true. When you see us speaking at public events, our words are based closely on verbatim records, though sometimes different speeches and events have been combined. And some of it is invented. When you see us speaking in private – behind closed doors, as it were – those conversations are imagined, but based on some documentary record: internal documents, media reports, the official inquiries, or conversations with people involved in these events".

I can't quite believe I felt that level of caveat necessary, or tolerable (though on opening night we received a hand-delivered letter from the Director of Public Prosecutions warning us of the danger of prejudicing any ongoing legal proceedings). Each of these plays traces its own fault line along the seam between fact and fiction; each time, for different reasons, I have been nervous about whether that fault line would crack open.

With *Guaranteed!* and *Bailed Out!,* there was the danger of compromising prosecutions, of being sued and, fearing these, of going too soft. With *Haughey/Gregory*, the danger

was of doing hurt to people who had not lived lives in public, but whose lives I was putting on stage. But with each play, I grew more confident in the sophistication of the audience: they do not expect literal truth; they appreciate creative licence; they do not need the distinction spelled out.

By *Haughey/Gregory*, the unwieldy declaration at the start of *Guaranteed!* had been replaced with the line "based on a true story", projected onto the rear wall from an overhead projector. As the play started, the character Eileen approached this and added the word, "loosely".

In *Inside the GPO* and *The Treaty*, I took more liberties. These are simply history plays, rather than some form of documentary.

Three of these plays were first staged script-in-hand, as rehearsed readings, or "workshop" or "semi-staged" productions (another term we were never quite sure about). Making a virtue of necessity, the presence of the scripts served as an acknowledgement that these stories were not made up; the spiral-bound scripts were reminiscent of the documents the characters might have been carrying; as a journalist by trade, they were also, for me, reminiscent of newspapers. Like news reporting, these plays were a first draft of history, subject to change (and they did change), only as good as their sources. Looking over them now, though, I see that all five plays are "documentary" in a more literal sense; each is about a foundational document: the Proclamation; the Treaty; the Gregory Deal; the Guarantee; the Bailout.

*

I find, to my astonishment, that it is over 20 years since the very first piece of work I did with Fishamble, an earlier short play, *Dublin Noir*, for a theatre "trail" they produced in Dublin's Temple Bar, called *Whereabouts*. In that time, the company has consolidated its position as the country's leading and most inventive producer of new writing. Their playwriting courses, and initiatives like their *Tiny Plays for Ireland* and the Show in a Bag and New Play Clinic supports for theatre makers, have provided the opportunity and the means for many a writer to convert their aspirations into practice. Their collaborations with other companies and organisations – such as our ongoing work with Larkin Community College in inner-city Dublin – have brought new plays into nooks and crannies of the city that theatre rarely penetrates. (A personal highlight was bringing *Haughey/Gregory* into Mountjoy Prison, where the audience consisted largely of men

who had grown up on the streets outside, where the play was set). Under the leadership of Jim Culleton and producers Marketa Puzman, first, and then Eva Scanlan, and with the deft guidance, always, of literary manager Gavin Kostick, they have been the backbone of my playwriting career.

Fishamble paired me with Conall Morrison for *Guaranteed!*; he has since directed another three of the plays recounted above (the exception is *Inside the GPO*, which was directed by Jim Culleton) and, more recently, *The United States vs Ulysses* (*The United States vs Ulysses*, Bloomsbury Methuen, 2025), which is a separate story. I find it difficult to separate out his role as director from his contribution to the plays' authorship. Conall runs a collaborative, questioning rehearsal room: the plays benefitted immeasurably from the insights and suggestions of their original casts. But not only have the plays been refined under his guidance in the room, we have spent countless hours, often over late-night takeaways, discussing, editing and reworking them.

*

Months after that theatre trail in 2006 – a visceral celebration of live theatre in the streets of Dublin – the iPhone came out. As Fishamble were working on *Tiny Plays for Ireland*, Snapchat launched. As we were producing *Guaranteed!*, Vine created the culture of vertical short-form video that TikTok would later perfect. As Bloomsbury has been working on this volume, I learned that some of my plays had been included in the dataset used to train Meta's AI model. AI can now write bad plays, credible essays and excellent blurbs. It will get better at essays; why should it not get better at plays also?

So playwriting – let alone history plays, let alone documentary theatre – can seem increasingly anachronistic. Certainly, our purchase on both the wider culture and the funding infrastructure feels increasingly precarious. So why do we do it?

When we first produced *Guaranteed!*, we followed it each night with a post-show discussion. One woman in the audience bravely told her own, grim story of her family's struggle with debt and the banks, and finished with a question: "What should we do?" I had no answer. But I think doing *this* is part of an answer. We – the writers and theatre makers – can and should do what journalists and the media also do: we should tell urgent political stories; we should hold a mirror up. But our mirror is different to that of the media. They speak truth to power; they hold their mirror up to the powerful. We hold our mirror up to the audience. In a culture ever more angry, ever more polarised, ever

more judgmental, we invite the audience into an act of empathy with the characters on stage, in all their flaws. It's that David Hare line again: if journalism aspires to certainty, drama embraces ambiguity.

Something similar is at work in a history play. History, as we learn it in school – and as we often intuitively absorb it – appears fixed in aspic. Things happened because they happened; they can hardly have been different. The job of the history play is to undo that certainty and take us back to a point when what we know will become fixed is still contingent; when actors who will become defined by their decisions have not yet made those decisions, and may yet make other ones, and be judged differently by history. The history play raises the question of the counterfactual: it allows us to imagine what the alternatives might have been.

Fundamentally, this is all about empathy. This is why we do it – and this is why, in a world growing ever more digital, theatre grows perhaps more necessary. To sit amongst an audience in a theatre at a play is the opposite of scrolling on a phone or talking to a chatbot. It is not an anachronism – it is an antidote. The paradox of the pandemic was that it both reminded us of this and, for many, it broke the habit.

The unfinished play is still in the drawer. The one-year-old, though, has made more progress. He is now 18. He is as digitally-native and as shaped by the pandemic as any other of his generation. And he is also writing plays.

Stewart Parker's contacts with the epic theatre

Domingos Nunez

A careful reading and attentive analysis of the seven major plays written by Stewart Parker (1941-1988) published by Methuen Drama will lead researchers to an evident conclusion that to some extent all of them somehow engage in a dialogue with the known epic elements as imagined by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) to create what he called epic theatre. It is easy to realize that Parker, since the very beginning of his short career as a dramatist, tried different definitions to describe the forms he used to frame his plays. And these forms are not only related to the literary field but also to other areas of artistic expression. In his first play *Spokesong* (1975) he suggested that realism should be "only one mode among several adopted during the action" and that the setting "should consist only of bare essentials, but the essentials should all be real" (Parker vol. 1, 2000, p. 3). His second play *Catchpenny Twist* (1977) was defined as "a charade". If the focus is on the plot the designation might be seen as the solution Parker found to play with extremes: how the characters imagine their environments should be in the real world and what they actually are; but when the formal aspects of the play are considered, charade could be understood as the term used instead of musical. Discussing the strategies he used to write his last three plays, the well-known "Three Plays for Ireland", Parker says that he employed "pastiche" to write *Northern Star* (1984), "a kind of collage" in *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), and *Pentecost* (1987) was "written in a form of heightened realism" (Parker vol. 2, 2000, p. xiv). But although Parker's definitions for these plays are very meaningful from the perspective of his artistic expression, from a theatrical point of view of the plays in performance and the way that they should be seen, these options to define them insert all of them in the context and grammar of the epic forms.

In any case, it cannot be denied, broadly speaking, that Parker's plays lie upon the bases of the realistic theatre as demonstrated by the author's own terms above. Thus, even

though epic elements can be detected in practically all his works for the theatre, he did not write strictly epic plays. His works for the theatre are rooted on and seek inspiration in multiple sources, including epic theatre. It is possible to say that Parker borrowed at least some of the Aristotelian principles in the construction of his plots. Aristotle, arguing about the art of writing a good tragedy, pointed out that a well-constructed plot "must neither begin nor end in a haphazard way", and that playwrights should pursue "the representation of an action that is complete and whole and of certain amplitude […]. Now a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (1979, p. 41). Parker did not make any effort to hide the fact that he intended to tell stories to his audience with definite beginnings and closed endings. And in all cases the evolution of such stories tends to develop towards a possible solution for the conflict, occasionally an optimistic one and not without a certain dose of surprise. But even Brecht, according to Parker, "sustained the Aristotelian view of the story as the heart of the drama – and conceived his finest plays as narratives of spiritual journey" (Parker, 1986, p.12). Besides, the clear option the Irish dramatist made to present characters who are neither good nor bad is an appeal to the spectators' capacity for empathy. Such empathy, once established, eventually results in a form of Aristotelian catharsis, purging the emotions through identification with the destiny that governs the heroes' lives. However, what perhaps more strongly distances Parker from the epic narrative theatre is that his plays can be described as "analytical dramas" (Szondi, 1985, p. 87). Rather than presenting characters as mere products of social and political circumstances susceptible to all kinds of changes, Parker approached them in a more psychological perspective. His characters are individuals who reflect on their private situations at a particular moment of their lives and who are also capable of intervening, as individuals, in the historical process.

Social and political issues in Parker's plays, much like in Brecht's works, are treated in a didactic mode. Moreover, some of the scenic devices developed by Brecht also resonate in Parker's writings. Brecht gives the generic name of "V-Effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect) to a series of formal procedures or dramatic techniques developed to distance the audience from emotional involvement with the scenes being staged and encourage viewers to assume a critical posture in face of them. The didactic nature of this procedure aims at stimulating social transformations in a rational way, taking the word and the intelligent and creative *gestus* (which is the attitude the characters share among themselves) as effective means to obtain such results. It is not by chance that Stephen Rea defends that

> Stewart found within that Anglo-Irish tradition examples of the ways in which the application of intelligence to a political situation could be

> both liberating and revelatory. The dramatist and novelist Thomas Kilroy has summarised this capacity of the Anglo-Irish drama by what he calls its 'creative distancing', […] and its celebration of the 'intelligence of the playwrights themselves, usually in the form of wit and verbal elegance, but in the dramatising of ideas. (Rea, 2000, p. x)

Nevertheless, if Parker did not write epic plays in a strictly Brechtian sense, he at least incorporated to his dramas some of the epic forms and established a dialogue with epic elements in such a way that the final result of his work for the theatre combines the realistic mode of stage acting as the most dominant trait with epic tints in the process of its development. It is even legitimate to say that the use Parker made of epic forms is much more in contact with the purposes underlying the epic theatre rather than with its final practical execution. Only when Parker's plays are read under the lights of the core points which define epic theatre that it becomes evident that the author's insertion of epic elements in his dramas was primarily due to his "historical imagination". Parker's rewriting of some Irish writers – as in *Northern Star* and *Heavenly Bodies* – were experiments in whether a historical event and its literary treatment might be made to turn out differently or at least be viewed differently, if the historical processes were revaluated. Parker through his plays was also asking the spectators to ponder the possibility that history might have been different and depending on their attitude, history may now be different; it was in their hands, even though the means at their disposal were slight and the qualities required of them were perhaps undramatic, unromantic. Parker as well, like any other epic dramatist tended to emphasize not the great decisions which lie along the main line of history but he otherwise pointed out the incommensurable and the singular. In the foreword he wrote for "Three Plays for Ireland" he said that "so far as the 'real' characters are concerned, they have been drawn from the marginalia of the historical record rather than its main plot". Going further he explained his statement in details. He revealed that

> Henry Joy McCracken was a minor figure in the '98 Rising in Ireland […]. Dion Boucicault was unarguably a major force in the Victorian theatre, but then that is a period of drama which is in itself considered marginal nowadays […]; [and] Harold Wilson, whose recorded voice is briefly heard in the third play, was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the years 1964-70 and 1974-76. (*Idem*, p. xiv).

Thus, it seems that one of the central targets an epic dramatist must pursue is to make what is shown on the stage appear unsensational. Hence, like in the Greek theatre, an old familiar context would often be of more use to epic theatre than a new one. Brecht even considered the argument whether the events shown in the epic theatre ought not to be already known. Maybe it could be said that Parker's plays lack this total

unsensational approach, since one of the strongest guidelines of his work for the various medias focuses on the characters' private conflicts whose romantic affairs occupy a prominent position in the action and should be hopefully accompanied with increasing curiosity by the spectators. But so far as political and social matters are concerned, Irish theatre audiences are very much familiarised with many of the stories that are in the background of Parker's dramas. He, of course, in an epic attitude, took advantage of all these already known past events to discuss the present as well as to arouse astonishment in the audience who he expected would become aware of their role in the never-ending historical process. He believed that the ways people experience the world depend on certain shared forms of social consciousness and systems of signification. What meanings are available depend on what beliefs or, as in *Pratt's Fall* (1983), what "map" is shared. Beliefs, like maps, are constructed out of "merely conventional signs": absolute truth would be a "perfect and absolute blank". Godfrey still adds that "a completely accurate map of the world is impossible" (Parker vol. 1, 2000 p. 251). And this maxim in *Pratt's Fall* reveals Parker's utter belief in the people's power of transforming Reality. For him Reality was not something "out there", a fixed order of things which social institutions merely reflect. For him, there was no natural bond between image and thing, word and world, belief and truth. Reality was not reflected in a given sign-system but was produced by it. Hence sign-systems, being the ideological products of history able to legitimise the exercise of power of certain social groups over others, were susceptible to be constantly transformed in new ones. And the "thinking hero" through many successive "interrupted actions", per se epic concepts, would represent the potential bearer of this revolutionary message responsible to make the spectators not only conscious of their present role but also of their future participation in the historical process.

Brecht once wrote that "the actor must show an event, and he must show himself. He naturally shows the event by showing himself; and he shows himself by showing the event. Although these coincide, they must not coincide in such a way that "the difference between the two tasks is lost" (1975, p. 47). In other words, for Brecht the actor must reserve the right to act skillfully out of character. He must be free, at the right moment, to act himself thinking (about his part). In Parker's plays this actors' attitude towards their parts, the "alienation effect", was only suggested but maybe not concretely executed. Parker did not give any indication in which particular way the cast should approach their parts, and even when the texts imply a direct communication between performers and their audience, this a possible way they have available for distancing from their parts, it cannot be said for sure if such a procedure was eventually carried out in the transposition of the text to an actual performance. For instance, when the Trick Cyclist,

the narrator in *Spokesong*, declares that he "will just say a word or two to those of you who have come here for the first time. We're all present for the purpose of an enquiry into matters of great importance affecting every one of us" (Parker vol. 1, 2000, p. 5), the complete absence of any Parker's stage directions makes it quite problematic to be certain if he is addressing the audience or simply an invisible court where an inquiry is being held. And the examples are abundant throughout the plays. In *Nightshade* (1980) Quinn can be either addressing his employees or the audience (maybe both) when he cries out: "You don't need me to tell you people… miracles can be made to happen. The impossible takes a little time, that's all" (*Ibid*., p. 164). Godfrey in *Pratt's Fall* comments looking himself at the mirror: "But then all beliefs are cuckoo, if you are looking in from the outside. Though some of you here today are very deft in that regard. You can shuffle through the whole pack without dropping a card" (*Ibid*., p. 264); and finally, MacCracken in *Northern Star* utters: "[…] Citizens of Belfast, the story so far. I stand here before the gallows tree, condemned to die for your sake. I stand guilty of nurturing a brotherhood of affection between Catholics of this town and my fellow Protestants" (Parker vol. 2, 2000, p. 4). There are evidences then that the so called "fourth wall" separating characters in the limelight from the viewers on their seats might occasionally be broken, but this is in the final analysis a question to be considered in the transpositions of the plays to the stage rather than exactly an option taken by Parker when the texts were written.

However, if on one hand the actors do not need to achieve this epic manner of representation to perform Parker's plays, if they do not need to show, by their acting, that they are keeping a cool head, on the other hand this does not mean that Parker's heroes do not possess this strong epic characteristic of thinking over the events shown on the stage. They simply are not going to be as impartial and undramatic as some of Brechtian characters at certain moments of his plays, in particular the didactic ones written in the beginning of his career as a dramatist. They are not necessarily going to act out of their characters to show how much concerned they are about political and social issues. And if Parker does not intend with his plays to nullify completely the audience's readiness for empathy, destroying the illusion inherent to dramatic plots, at the same time those watching his plays are not at all stripped off from their basic epic critical attitude towards what has been represented on the stage. Far from that. The audience is neither asked to be dissociated from present issues nor to be indifferent to their actual reality when Marie in *Catchpenny Twist*, for instance, talking to Martin and Roy, vociferates: "[…] The country's been at war, you know, a lot of chums are in prison. A lot of friends of mine have given their lives. […] On eight hundred years of history, eight hundred years of repression, exploitation and attempted genocide… I… and you're

involved as much as any other Irishman which is right up over your ears whether you want to be or not" (Parker vol. 1, 2000, p. 132). Or when Boucicault argues with Patterson in *Heavenly Bodies*:

> You think to be poor and to suffer is a superior state of being, mouldering away in some boghole in Connacht, but there is no shred of virtue in being a victim – history disables all of us, in whatever fashion, it's the use to which we put our disabilities, that's virtue – not how much we suffer them – it's how we act upon them! (Parker vol. 2, 2000, p. 116).

What did not interest Parker in Brecht's formulation for the epic theatre was the excessive emphasis this latter gave, at least in his beginning as a playwright, to the gestural and didactic aspects of the performance. Brecht understood that epic theatre was always intended for the actors quite as much as for the spectators. Therefore, the ultimate goal to be achieved with such a theatre was a didactic one, in the sense that, through an exceptional and austere gestural apparatus, it would facilitate and encourage the interchangeability of actors and audience and vice-versa. Every spectator could become potentially one of the actors in the same extent that every actor could perform all the characters in a play. This should be part of their apprenticeship in experiencing the manifold sides of a same situation. Parker's didactic ambitions did not go that far. The didactic element is no doubt present is his work, as attested by Stephen Rea: "it has an element that is didactic in its effect although it does not have in its tone or its texture any sermonising or wisely avuncular address" (*Idem*, p. ix), and if it is true that in his plays the same actor is expected to perform distinct roles, this has much more to do with the practical demanding of not having a big cast to perform small parts than with a definite aesthetic project as in Brecht. The didactic element in Parker's plays is revealed in his intentions of contributing to encourage the spectators to take an active part in the social and political process. Parker "was self-conscious not only of the burden of Irish history, but of the weight of Irish dramatic self-expression" (Grene, 1999, p. 167) and of his position in the attempt to achieve the engagement of his audience. The dramatist expected that the viewers somehow mirrored their emotional situations in those of the characters on the stage, at the same time as they engaged in a rational and distancing analysis of the aspects underlying the mere level of the fable being narrated. Lynne Parker, niece of the playwright, says that "Stewart wanted to seduce audiences with an entertaining brew of complex questions and [...] he had the ability to combine difficult intellectual ideas with a good night out" (Parker vol. 1, 2000, p. xi). So, there is no doubt that Parker and Brecht are not in disagreement in the particular that the didactic impulse present in the oeuvre of both of them can be subsumed within a ludic,

liberating, intelligent and revelatory frame. Brecht only had a very particular way of treating the gestures to obtain the so-called "alienation effect".

Now it could be questioned what kind of gestures were these? Brecht has the answer. He says they are those ones found in reality (Brecht, 1974, p. 36) and even more precisely, those ones found only in the reality of today. Brecht always had in mind to write historical plays. But he believed he would succeed in his task only to the extent that he would be able to coordinate past events, in a meaningful and intelligible way, with gestures a man might make today. Likewise, Parker definitely did not intend to disconnect the past historical events depicted in his plays from the gestures the men of today would use to illustrate these same events. In *Heavenly Bodies*, for example, he transports to the present values he believes inherent to the XIX century and the Victorian Era (plunder, greed, hypocrisy, cynicism and pious self-righteousness) so that they can be reevaluated and hopefully transformed. Marilynn Richterik writes that in "a program note for the Birmingham Repertory production of [the play], Parker called attention to the parallel he perceived between the materialism, sentimentality, and brutality of his own age and that of the age of Boucicault, 'which continues to haunt and meddle with our own world, having enjoyed a whole new resurgence of its values in the course of the Thatcherite eighties'" (2000, p. 411). The social message is clear and precise throughout Parker's works. One has to believe in the transformation of the present, challenge the existing order to make possible a distinct and better reality for the future. The final result, according to the analysis of Christopher Morash (2002, p. 261) could be the end of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics since "[...] it becomes clear that the barricades on the streets outside are less of an obstacle to the future than the characters' own past".

The distinction between the two playwrights in this particular is that Brecht was much more interested in gestures that represent conditions and Parker in developing actions. Brecht wanted to put in evidence his characters' social condition by making continuous interruptions in their gestures in a way that they could be systematically judged. He believed that the more frequently someone engaged in an action is interrupted, the more gestures are possible to be obtained. Hence, the interrupting of action was one of the principal concerns of epic theatre. There are interruptions in Parker's works as well. The innumerous songs present in his plays, the use he made of those techniques he called "pastiche" and "collage", as well as some other devices such as tricks of the circus, cabaret dances and music hall numbers could also be seen as mechanisms that favor this action interruptions. But if it can be said that the action in his plays is fragmented and discontinuous it cannot be said that it is open-ended or internally contradictory,

therefore these breaks eventually neither interfere in the progression of the narrative nor in the characters' initiatives. Parker's plays are lacking this general educational contour of Marxism that is determined by the dialectic at work between the attitude of teaching and that of learning. And this is precisely what Brecht had in mind when he formulated his theory of epic theatre. He was always putting in evidence the constant dialectic between the action that was shown on the stage and the attitude of showing this action on the stage. But if the interruptions found in Parker's plays do not have this Marxist approach, at least they are not totally destitute of one of the epic functions for this kind of procedure, that is to impede the complete identification with what has been presented on the stage. And Parker knew, although he did not use it systematically, how to take advantage of this expedient.

All these reflections will lead to the conclusion that if Parker does not share common grounds with all technical premises as imagined by Brecht in the achievement of his epic theatre, at least the ultimate purposes of both playwrights coincide. Both are aware of how people tend to acquiesce in a man-made world, which unless they remain alert and critical, they will perceive as natural and inevitable. The transformation of the historically conditioned subject depends on their not taking it for granted. Likewise, they both depict the frustration and destruction of the human subject. The difference is that in Brecht, individual actions are explained in terms of social "base" and Parker is not so rigorously objectivist as the German dramatist. For him, the self is not merely a prison-house, an intolerable and persistent anguish: it is also where renewal must begin. It does not therefore have to try to become, to identify itself consistently with, an objectively critical consciousness. But Parker, like Brecht, even through his more psychological perspective, is particularly concerned about the controversial situations that emerge from certain contexts in specific historical moments. And although the action in his plays is not internally contradictory, it is strong enough to demonstrate how people are inherently dialectic and so are all historical events and beliefs, political regimes and the capitalist mode of production. And above all, both dramatists believe that Man might not be simply propelled by his own free will, but he is also the result of his social milieu and that he and his values can be transformed because he is essentially good.

References

ARISTOTLE, HORACE, LONGINUS. **Classical Literary Criticism**. London: Penguin Classics, 1979.

BRECHT, Bertold. **An Organon for the Theatre**. London: Oxford Books, 1975.

GRENE, Nicholas. **The Politics of Irish Drama – Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel**.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

MORASH, Christopher. **A History of Irish Theatre, 1601–2000**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

PARKER, Stewart. **Plays 1**. London: Methuen Drama, 2000.

PARKER, Stewart. **Plays 2**. London: Methuen Drama, 2000.

PARKER, Stewart. **Dramatis Personae: Lecture delivered in memory of John Malone**. Belfast: The Queen's University of Belfast, 1986.

REA, Stephen. Introduction. *In*: PARKER, Stewart. **Plays 2**. London: Methuen Drama, 2000, p. ix-xii.

RICHTARIK, Marilynn. **Stewart Parker's Heavenly Bodies: Dion Boucicault, Show Business and Ireland**. Rioja Universidad: Modern Drama, v. 43, n. 3, 2000.

SZONDI, Peter. **The Modern Drama**. London: Macmillan, 1985.

Negotiating modernity: Irish language pantomimes at the Abbey Theatre

Ian R. Walsh

1 Introduction

This article examines the much-maligned Irish language pantomimes staged at the Abbey from 1945-1966. These pantomimes intended to aid the state's revival of the Irish language took the form of popular Christmas family entertainments to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. They were popular with patrons but despised by critics and denounced by subsequent scholarship as a low point in the history of Irish theatre.

It is the contention of this article that these pantomimes ran counter to the narrowly nationalistic and realistic drama of the 1940s and 1950s in their theatricality as well as their fusion of the traditions of Irish folklore with the popular culture of modernity. They stand in contrast to many of the assumptions made about this era in their theatricality, fluid staging and collaborative devising process. Some of the pantomimes are even found to create a playful utopian space in which the conflicting positions of the Irish revival and the modernizing independent state are brought to a resolution. Such negotiation of modernization is also evident in how changing gender roles are explored through the vibrant heroic roles for women in some of these pantomimes contrasting to the long-suffering mothers and dutiful daughters that female members of the Abbey Company were used to playing. Furthermore, the primary director tasked to stage these entertainments was Tomás Mac Anna, who would go on to become the first artistic director of the Abbey, win a Broadway Tony award and is credited as bringing a new international experimentalism to the Irish theatre. It is argued here that the pantomimes schooled Mac Anna and a new generation of Abbey Players in a type of staging that was in direct contrast to the naturalistic style employed in the production of the Abbey's

signature realist dramas of Irish life leading to profound change in the development of Irish theatre practice.

The Irish-language pantomimes at the Abbey Theatre were a product of a Gaelic Policy that was instituted by the Managing Director Ernest Blythe that dictated that the national theatre would commit to produce plays in Irish as a core part of its programming. The policy came about after Blythe had been asked by the Government in 1942 if the Abbey would take over the work of *An Comhar Dramaíochta*, the Irish-language Drama Co-Operative, a body which for some years had been receiving a small subsidy from the Exchequer to aid in the production of plays in Irish. Thus the Gaelic policy was a means to gain further government subsidy for the Abbey. Blythe, a former Minister of State was the first Managing Director of the theatre that was not a writer or artist and his implementation of this policy shortly after his appointment was viewed by many as opportunistic and indicative of a new direction for the theatre that would stress financial rather than artistic concerns, with the theatre now considered an established conservative institution of the new Irish state rather than an independent artistic endeavour. In 1945 it was decided to try to stage a pantomime in the Irish language during the Christmas season with a short run to avoid too many losses. The show, *Muireann agus an Prionnsa*, was based on a fantastical mythic play by Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Golden Apple*. Catherine Rynne writes: "Forty-three performances were given, although it had been billed for only six nights. Since the cost of mounting such a production was considerable, financial considerations finally put an end to the fun with public demand unsatiated" (McCann, 1967, p. 92). After such success it was decided that *Geamaireacht Nollag* (the Pantomime at Christmas), as it had been called, would be an annual event, and it was for the next twenty-one years.

For some critics the Irish-language pantomimes were to be treated with disdain and represent a low-point for the Abbey theatre. The view is that such performances betrayed the ideals of the founders of the theatre in their unabashed presentation of "buffoonery and easy sentiment" and their popular appeal. Christopher Morash writes in this vein in his *History of Irish Theatre*:

> For many, the image of the Abbey in the late 1940s was summed up in the annual Irish – Christmas pantomime, in which Abbey actors did comic turns and sang Irish versions of popular songs like "Chatanooga Choo Choo". It was a long way from "a theatre where beautiful emotion and profound thought might have their three hours" [quote from W.B Yeats] traffic. (Morash, 2002, p.198)

However, little or no substantive analysis of the pantomimes has been conducted. Most of the histories of Irish theatre until more recently have documented the work of playwrights exclusively and such a collaborative and performative event as a pantomime does not fit these criteria. Also, to be fair, the materials relating to the pantomimes are only now easily accessible through the digitisation of the Abbey Theatre Archive at University of Galway. Before exploring the Irish-language pantomimes in detail, it is necessary to first give a brief history and overview of the British pantomime form which the Irish version builds upon.

2 Origins and practice of the British pantomime

The British pantomime consists of a mix of theatrical styles, and the pantomime form itself has evolved over the centuries. As such aspects of the pantomime could be dated back to ancient Greek and Roman comedies but it is more common to see the British form as originating with the arrival to London of exiled *Commedia dell'arte* troupes who were banned from performing in Paris in 1697. These groups of players were employed by Drury Lane Theatre and performed in shows billed as "Italian Night Scenes" under the stewardship of the dancing master John Weaver in 1715 (Trussler, 2000, p. 156). A rival theatre, Lincoln's Inn Fields then staged a similar performance that mixed aspects of commedia with classical tragedy entitled *Harlequin Executed* starring the renowned actor John Rich playing the title role. The first production described as a pantomime was *The Loves of Mars and Venus* in 1717 in Drury Lane and this was again mounted by John Weaver (Trussler, 2000, p. 156). The conventions of the contemporary pantomime show their origins in commedia dell'arte in their romantic plot, stock characters, parody of contemporary figures, interaction with the audience and its general embrace of the chaotic and the ridiculous in its comedy. The romantic plot of young Italian lovers who are kept apart by patriarchal figures is replaced with recognizable fairytale plots such as Charles Perrault's *Cinderella* or the Brothers Grimm's *Little Red Riding Hood* or Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights*. The stock characters of the commedia were then adapted to these fairytales with some of the behaviors and traits of the patriarchal *vecchi* commedia masks such as Pantelone, Pulcinella and Il Dottore given to the villains of the fairytales and aspects of the anarchic comic servants or *zanni* masks of the commedia such as Arlecchino (Harlequin), Brighella and Columbina contributing to the stock character of Buttons or Wishy-washy in the pantomimes.

The *commedia* tradition of cross-dressing common to the *commedia* as a comic plot-device to hide identities also found its way into the pantomime with the Dame figure. However, this figure draws more directly on the folk traditions of both Britain and Ireland, of men dressing as "unruly women" types during religious festivals (Davis, 1978, p. 147) and the mayhem of the Lord of Misrule character from Medieval pageantry. The Pantomime Dame is a staple of all pantomimes and the most coveted role as they get all the best lines, the most comic set-pieces; they talk directly to the audience and of course they get the most colorful and outlandish costumes to wear. The Dame functions as a comic trickster figure that is part clown, part satirist, part narrator who must be adept at singing, dancing and physical slapstick comedy. The other major convention of the pantomime is that it promises large casts dancing and singing, spectacular sets and costumes, jokes concerning famous people or current events, reference to local placenames and performing animals (largely played by actors in costumes – the "pantomime horse" being again an iconic part of this performance).

Pantomimes are also only performed during the Christmas season from November to early January and they are presented as a family entertainment bringing young and old to theatres. Pantomimes in Britain and Ireland are a major part of the theatre ecology with many theatres' business model dependent on the guaranteed income generation from the pantomime to keep them afloat for the rest of the year. For many the pantomime was and remains their first introduction to live theatre performance in Britain and Ireland.

3 Irish pantomimes

When pantomimes began to be performed in Ireland is unclear. Some date a performance at the Dublin's Theatre Royal in 1736 *Harlequin's Spaniard* as the first pantomime. However, the conception of an *Irish* pantomime only dates back to the late 1930s with the impresario Louis Elliman taking over management of the Gaiety and the Theatre Royal where he commissioned famed Irish comedian and actor Jimmy O'Dea and his writing partner Harry O'Donovan in the Gaiety Theatre and comedian and lyricist Cecil Sheridan in the Theatre Royal to write and perform home grown pantomimes with Irish talent including themselves, Maureen Potter and Noel Purcell. These took the British formula and made it more Irish in terms of characterization; they referenced Irish traditions, local places and well-known Irish people. They also toned down the bawdier elements which would have been frowned upon in what was a very conservatively Catholic era (Ryan, 1990).

It was in these pantomimes that the enduring figure of the Dublin dame largely through popular comedian and actor Jimmy O'Dea's characterization rose to prominence. This comic figure was a put upon but plucky and resilient working-class woman modelled on the Dame figure developed by the British music hall actor Dan Leno. However, O'Dea transformed Leno's figure into his own character of Biddy Mulligan who was a character from a song that was first sung in a pantomime about a widowed market-seller of sweets, clothes and fish from the Coombe in Dublin – in the original song she was "Biddy Mulligan the Queen of the Coombe" but then became in O'Dea's version "Biddy Mulligan the Pride of the Coombe" (Ryan, 1990). This Dublin dame was sharp-tongued poking fun at middle class politeness and decorum. She was mannish, uncouth and anarchic but also sympathetic – never cruel or nasty. She was never sexually overt indulging in *double entendre* or showing her bloomers as became common in the British pantomime with dame figures created by Arthur Askey or Frankie Howerd in this period. She was more of a disruptor and agent of chaos. The Dublin dame character is still to be found in the annual pantomimes in Ireland's capital city to this day and in Brendan O'Carroll's popular Mrs Brown character in the BBC/RTE television series *Mrs Brown's Boys* and touring stage shows. Although O'Carroll's contemporary creation does rely on bawdy humor for much of its laughter (Walsh, 2014)

The Abbey's Irish language pantomimes while no doubt inspired by the Louis Elliman commissioned work at the Gaiety and Theatre Royal wished to go further in distancing themselves from the success of the British form and present as a more distinctively Irish offering worthy of a national theatre. There were no men dressed up as pantomime dames and no women playing britches roles. Tomás Mac Anna writes that they were "more akin to revue than pantomime and with a touch of Harlequinade added here and there" (*Irish Times*, January 4, 1983, p. 8). Here he is keen to restate the origin of the form in continental Europe rather than Britain. He goes on to tell us how they were devised collaboratively with the company of actors:

> Every Christmas presentation had to be built up from scratch, a mad rush of ideas and improvisations… put together in a frenzy of anarchical fervor that left us all in a sort of technicoloured haze over Christmas. (Mikhail, 1988, p.170)

The plots were not taken from fairytales as in the British and Elliman model but were instead based loosely on the stories and characters of Irish and occasionally Greek myth and legend. The plot usually followed a quest narrative wherein a character must leave a mythic land, usually *Tír na nÓg* (the Land of Eternal Youth) to seek out a particular magical item that will help defeat a villain that is threatening their situation. This hero's

journey allowed for the protagonist to visit a variety of different locations and meet an assortment of interesting characters before they inevitably defeated the villain. These rapid scene changes functioned almost as a series of variety sketches or routines loosely connected to the overall narrative.

4 Navigating modernity and performing a postnational utopia

Most of the fun in these pantomimes came from the "fish out of water" set up which derived its humour from the incongruity of a mythic figure placed in a modern material Ireland or conversely the modern figure in a mythic Ireland. The period in which the pantomimes were performed marked an era of enormous change in Ireland. It saw economic policy shift from disastrous self-sufficiency to more prosperous global trade. The cultural nationalism that had been a key factor in galvanizing the people toward revolution in the early part of the twentieth century had now become for many suspect or scornful. The failure to revive the Irish language and its institutionalization through the schooling system coupled with the economic stagnation brought by nationalist-led self-sufficiency meant that the language and its legends seemed out of place in a more outward looking Ireland of free trade, television and motor cars. In *An Claoímh Soluis* (1962) Niall of the Nine Hostages leaves "I Breasil" (Hi-Brazil) "to learn about the common market" (Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, 3851_MPG_03, 1962, P.4) In the same pantomime we find that the Giant's cave is "near to the Radió Éireann [Radio Ireland] transmitter" (Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, 3851_MPG_03, 1962, P.4).

Interestingly these two seemingly incongruous positions had to be reconciled in the pantomimes according to the demands of comic convention. This largely took the form of the mythic world taking some new knowledge from the modern or the modern learning from the mythic land. Often extreme positions were lampooned as we read in the synopsis of the action in the programme for *Diarmuid agus Balor* in 1961:

> Both Diarmuid O' Dhuibhne and Balor, who has disguised himself as an American compete for a post in Bord Failte [The Tourist Board], but Diarmaid with his hatred of foreigners and inclination to boast of the numbers he has slain, makes a poor impression on the Selection Board, whereas Balor who wants to bring so many foreigners into Ireland that the last remnant of the Irish race will be crowded out, produces a line of talk which gets him the post. (Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, 3800_MPG_01, 1961, p.5)

Another key feature of the pantomime was its borrowings from popular culture transmitted via radio and film. As already mentioned in the earlier quote from Morash, there were translations of hit songs from Hollywood movies such as the *Chattanooga Choo Choo* and *You Ain't my Baby*, and some characters were based on popular figures from the silver screen. In the 1964 pantomime *Aisling as Tír na nÓg* for instance Séamus Bond appeared with his sidekick Poísin which was a direct reference to James Bond and Pussy Galore. Again, this mixing and translating of global popular culture into the old mother tongue replicated the utopianism of the plots that sought to marry the modern to the ancient.

A consequence of this juxtaposing of the ancient and modern for comic effect was that women's roles in the pantomime would often be full of agency, self-determination and adventure to contrast the passivity and reverence given to the women of myth and legend. One such striking example was the 1955 Pantomime *Ulyssés agus Penelopé* where Penelope, the Greek mythic paragon of female loyalty and passivity who faithfully waits for the return of her husband Ulysses despite being beset by suitors and Helen of Troy, the most famous classical figure of female objectification valued only for her beauty, are radically reimagined as is evident in the plot summary in the programme for the show:

> The story of the Pantomime is based somewhat uncertainly on that the Greek hero Ulyssés who, when he set out for his home in Ithaca after the siege of Troy, was driven far off his course and endured many trials and adventures before he reached his own house and found the faithful Penelopé beset by suitors. In the Pantomime, however, Penelopé is not Ulyssés' wife but his fianceé. Impatient for his return, she has set out disguised as a boy to seek him and has for a time gone through adventures of her own being obliged to become a guide to Polyphemus whom Ulyssés had blinded. Helen of Troy, like Penelopé, plays a bigger part in the Pantomime than in the classical story, and Ulyssés' wanderings take him as far as Ireland. (Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, 3583_MPG_01, 1955, p. 4)

This is not to say that these pantomimes were deliberately feminist in outlook, but they did highlight the performativity of gender roles and as such allow a space for them to be challenged as fixed and determined. They also afforded actresses on stage a freedom of expression in their dress and movement which were far from the limited behaviours they often had to portray in the realist dramas common to the Abbey Stage at this time that reflected the severely restricted and policed comportment of women in an Ireland dominated by the narrow conservativism of the Catholic Church.

Indeed, the pantomimes seem to consciously perform Ireland as cosmopolitan and cultured. In *Aisling as Tír na nÓg* (1964) the protagonist Conall's travels take him "to the

Film Festival in Cork, Opera Festival in Wexford, to the the Fleadh Cheoil [Folk Music Festival] and to the International football match in Belfast" (Abbey Digital Archive, 3900_MPG_01, 1964, p. 4).

In contrast to the dominant forms of "kitchen comedies" and "parlour tragedies" (Walsh, 2012, p. 14) at the Abbey in this era that offered drab repetitive realistic settings the pantomimes derived "some spectacular effects worthy of Busby Berkeley as for instance having the Prince… descend by parachute to rescue the princess from a fire spewing dragon" (*Irish Times*, January 4, 1983, p. 8).

One element that was taken from the British pantomime was the "hordes of dancing animals" (*Irish Times*, January 4, 1983, p. 8) played by actors dressed in costumes, presented onstage. These included horses, camels, goats, kangaroos and an enormous dog. But this borrowed element from the British stage was not without controversy for some of the staunch nationalists that attended these pantomimes in their native language. The enormous dog is recorded as causing "something of a controversy when fed a foreign brand of dog food, several angry letters were written insisting that a Gaelic speaking canine should be fed a home-grown product" (*Irish Times*, January 4, 1983, p. 8). Although the pantomimes often lampooned the extremity of such essentialism of national identity that had been often promoted by government and educators, they were resolute in their support for a united Ireland. The call to action for the hero in many of the pantomimes is to unite their homeland of Tír na nÓg after it has been partitioned by a mythic villain. In one such pantomime *Aisling as Tír na Óg* (1964) the synopsis in the programme goes so far as to speak of Northern Irish Unionism as an infection: "the descendent of the old Kings of Ulster had been infected with the political views prevalent in the Northeast" (Abbey Digital Archive, 3900_MPG_01, 1964, p. 4).

Despite some limiting representations, the non-mimetic playing style of the piece with its zany plot, rapid scene changes, over-the-top costuming and singing out to the audience, the pantomime would have been full of theatricality. As such the piece ceases to function as a model of reality (mimetic representation) and instead functions as a model of a theatrical reality. In such a theatre, reality is no longer presented to the spectator as fixed and objective but rather as a construct that they create. In such theatricality and in its hybridization of form and political positions these pantomimes performed on the national stage opened up a playful space in which to re-imagine the nation. As Richard Kearney suggests:

> Every nation is a hybrid construct, an "imagined" community which can be reimagined again in alternative versions. The ultimate challenge is to acknowledge this process of Hybridisation from which we derive and to which we are constantly subject. (Kearney, 1997, p. 88)

Kearney's idea of hybridisation is a reimagining of the "nation" as something different from Anderson's nation, something that is both sovereign and limited. Both concepts do not entirely reject the concept of "nation" as "imagined community" but develop it as a "reimagined community": subject to a political process that is not fixed but evolving, that is without boundaries, inclusive and open to change. It draws on the collective memory of Ireland's past but also experiments and plays with creating a potentially different present and future in the liminal space of the performance. As such the pantomimes are found to counter the limiting self-enclosing realism of the dramas of the Blythe years.

5 Legacy of the Irish language pantomimes

Free from the realism that dominated at other times of the year, these Christmas entertainments also trained the company and the main director of the pantomimes Tomás Mac Anna in new staging methods that would eventually lead the theatre away from the staging of tired naturalistic work. Surprisingly, Mac Anna tells in a short anecdote of how the distrusted Managing Director of the time in his own manner helped this revolution. He writes:

> Blythe insisted on supervising the script as it came together in bits and pieces, especially the songs which were translated from current popular hits. He was most insistent that the Irish should be grammatical and that not one single word of English appeared in the show, even by way of explanation. This led to many clashes and as far as I remember, I resigned at least twice. On the second occasion I sent him up a hasty note telling him that all was over between us, and was improvising a dramatic farewell to the bewildered cast on the stage when suddenly the iron door to the foyer banged open and there he was, a formidable and angry figure standing towards me, my note in his hand. The cast which had been expressing life-and-death support for me a moment before, melted mysteriously away, leaving me face to face with what looked like a doomsday situation. He handed me my note and for once spoke in English. "Never resign" he said, "Too many people want you to and then abandon you. Besides, if you want to change this theatre, you can only do it from the inside". I found myself with my note in my hand, and there he was walking away from me back up to his little office, humming a tune, a sure sign that had got something off his mind. He was allowing me to develop my own style in a way unique from the staid and tradition-bound

> Abbey, so that when Brecht and Lorca came into our repertory in the later days at the Queen's, He simply handed me the scripts and gave me my head, without interference. (Mikhail, 1988, p. 170)

In his first of three tenures as Artistic Director of the Abbey, (first entitled Artistic Advisor), Mac Anna revolutionized the output of the national theatre through his design and staging of European modernists as well as his encouragement of a new generation of playwrights. He first came to the Abbey as a designer but with his fluency in the Irish language he was soon promoted to producer of Gaelic plays. As part of this role Mac Anna had to pen, direct, and design the annual pantomime in the Irish language. The demands of the pantomime meant that he had to learn how to stage scenes with a large cast and become expert at transitions to several locations whilst also incorporating choreography and song into his productions. Thus, the role of director of Irish language pantomimes schooled Mac Anna in a type of staging that was in direct contrast to the naturalistic style employed in the production of the Abbey's, by this time, signature realist dramas of peasant life. As he put it himself:

> I produced all the plays in Irish, mostly one-acts presented after, not before, the main attraction; and of course, the Christmas pantomimes, eighteen in all between the Abbey and the Queens. My work was completely in contrast to that of Ria Mooney [another prominent Irish director of the time], where she found herself producing play after play in the same naturalistic style. (Mikhail, 1988, p. 170)

With such a background, it is not surprising that his later productions would be characterized as Brechtian. He visited the Berliner Ensemble in 1967 and helped design and advised on their production of O'Casey's *Purple Dust*. But he denied Brecht as an influence. When his production of Máiréad Ní Ghráda's *An Triail* (1962), which employed placards and had actors double up in roles, was praised for being Brechtian he claimed it was not intentionally so but was "exactly the thing I was doing in the Gaelic plays for years and years". He did however go on to direct and design influential productions of Brecht's *The Life of Galileo* for the Abbey at the Queens Theatre in 1966 and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* at the Abbey and the Lyric in Belfast in 1974. His greatest success with a new play was Frank McMahon's adaptation of Brendan Behan's biographical *Borstal Boy*. Mac Anna's staging again had all the hallmarks of epic theatre or as Mac Anna would correct – the Irish language pantomimes: the performance took place on an unadorned open stage stripped back to the back wall, the changing spaces of the different scenes were mapped out by an elaborate lighting design and the dramaturgy relied on the use of a narrator figure (Brendan Behan played by Niall Tobin to much acclaim) who

introduced and linked the scenes. The production went on to Broadway winning the Tony award for best play in 1970.

6 Conclusion

In 1966, the company returned to Abbey Street to a new theatre building after being exiled to the Queen's Theatre since 1951 when the original theatre building had burnt down. Blythe was no longer in control with Walter Macken briefly holding the position as director of the theatre and then Mac Anna taking over. Blythe's Gaelic policy was abandoned and the annual pantomime discontinued with this change in management and the opening of the new building. A commitment to the Irish language continued with new plays in Irish being staged throughout the 1970s (McIvor and Walsh, 2024, p. 42) and the pantomime even made a brief return with Eoghan O Tuairisc penning *Oisín* in 1978 and *Táinbócó* in 1979. However, the 1980s and the subsequent decades would show a sharp decline in work produced in Irish at the national theatre.

It is hoped that this examination of the Irish-language pantomimes at the Abbey Theatre shows the great value that the study of popular entertainment can offer Irish theatre historiography. It forces a questioning of the assumptions of the past promoting a reassessment of dismissed forms such as the Christmas pantomimes at the Abbey which forces a rewriting of dominant narratives regarding the nature of Irish theatre from the 1940s to the early 1960s that have been based on the obscurantism of received wisdom rather than archival exploration. Through examination of the career of Tomás Mac Anna and his attitude to the pantomimes this article also seeks to break down divisions between popular/low and avant-garde/high theatrical endeavors showing that artists learn and develop regardless of such classifications and that it is important that contemporary academics continue to explore the overlooked and neglected works of the past.

References

ABBEY THEATRE. **Ulysses Agus Penelope, 26 Dec. 1955 (Programme)**. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, Galway, 3583_MPG_01.

ABBEY THEATRE. **Diarmuid Agus Balor, 26 Dec 1961 (Programme)**. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, Galway, 3800_MPG_01.

ABBEY THEATRE. **An Claoimh Soluis, 26 Dec 1962 (Programme).** Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, Galway, 3851_MPG_03.

ABBEY THEATRE. **An Claoimh Soluis, 26 Dec 1964 (Programme).** Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, Galway, 390_MPG_01.

DAVIS, Natalie Zemon. Women on Top: Symbolic sexual inversion and political disorder in early modern Europe. *In*: BABCOCK, Barbara (ed.). **The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society**. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 147-190.

MAC ANNA, Tomás. When the Abbey did Panto. **Irish Times**, Dublin, 4 Jan. 1983, p. 8.

MAC ANNA, Tomás. Ernest Blythe and the Abbey**.** *In:* **The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections.** MIKHAIL, E.H. (ed.). Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 167-172.

MCCANN, Sean (ed.). **The Story of the Abbey Theatre**. London: New English Library, 1967, p.92

MCIVOR, Charlotte and WALSH, Ian R. **Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories**. Cham: Palgrave/Springer, 2024.

MORASH, Christopher. **A History of Irish Theatre**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

RYAN, Philip. **Jimmy O'Dea: The Pride of the Coombe**. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1990.

TOMÁS MAC ANNA IN CONVERSATION WITH KAREN CARLETON. *In:* **Theatre Talk**. JORDAN, Eamonn *et al* (eds.). Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001, p. 277-289.

TRUSSLER, Simon. **The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

WALSH, Ian R. Dublin Dames: From Jimmy O'Dea to Brendan O'Carroll. *In:* WEITZ, Eric (ed.). **For the Sake of Sanity: Doing things with Humour in Irish Performance**. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2014, p. 63-75.

WALSH, Ian R. **Experimental Irish Theatre**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

PROSE FICTION

James Joyce and the senses of disability[1]

Vitor Alevato do Amaral

1 Introduction

James Joyce's works are replete with the most varied kinds of human characters. He demonstrates a unique aptness to represent people, as types or more elaborate characters, in the proper rhythm of life. Leopold Bloom, for instance, was conceived a complete man, more than Hamlet or Faust, said Joyce. In the present text, I approach only Joyce's characters whose bodies and minds are non-normative. They inhabit a fictional Dublin and were built at a great removal from today's social awareness of people with disabilities, who then used to attract sympathy, but more often piety or prejudice. The hemiplegic Dublin itself, though not human, is a central character in this discussion. I hope to show, with examples from *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922),[2] that Joyce started as a writer who treated disability as a metaphor for the city's moral flaws and became conscious of people's bodily and mental differences in themselves. This paper draws on the relation between Disability Studies and Joyce Studies – and more generally literary criticism and theory. It benefits from some of the most recent publications in Joyce Studies that concern disability.

In 2019, I interviewed Fritz Senn, the director of the Zurich James Joyce Foundation. One of the questions that I asked him was why we continued to study Joyce. He replied that everything was in Joyce and that each new theory found in his work something of interest. Then he mentioned Disability Studies among other "studies".

It seems indeed that everything is in Joyce, which explains why Hugh Kenner called Joyce the "comedian of the inventory"; everything that once entered his list would leave

[1] This is a revised version of the plenary delivered at the Federal University of Santa Catarina in the Jornada de Estudos Irlandeses, organized by the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses, on 8 November 2023.

[2] In this essay, following the tradition in Joyce Studies, we use this notation for referring to Joyce's works: (*D* page) for *Dubliners*; (*P* page) for *A Portrait*; and (*U* episode.line) for the Gabler edition of *Ulysses*.

it only to find a place in his books. So, Joyce wrote his work, from the early poems to *Finnegans Wake*, attentive to all from his universe that he was able to catalogue and use, whether it was related to the body or the mind.

While talking with his friend Frank Budgen about *Ulysses*, in Zurich, Joyce said that he was writing "the epic of the human body". This is a much-quoted phrase, but what follows in the conversation is seldom quoted. No sooner had Budgen begun to speak of "the minds, the thoughts of the characters" than Joyce responded that "If they had no body they would have no mind […] It's all one" (Budgen, 1972, p. 21). It is noteworthy that among Leopold Bloom's books was *Thoughts from Spinoza* (*U* 17.1372), a mysterious, unlocated book, but probably, the 1880 Frederick Pollock's *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (Slote *et al.*, 2022, p. 1203). In that book, Pollock explains that

> the body and the mind are not treated as two separate entities working upon one another, much less is the one allowed to be the product of the other. Mind and body are in truth one and the same. That which is mind to the inner sense is (or if accessible would be) body to the outer sense. There is no mind without body; but also there is no body without mind. (Pollock, 1880, p. 85)

Pollock is referring to one of the propositions of Spinoza's *Ethics* (Part II, Prop. XIII): "The object of the idea which constitutes the human mind is the body […]".

Eventually, Joyce scholars began reading Joyce's works in the light of Disability Studies, in the mode of a still nascent partnership that has already proved beneficial for Joyce Studies. In the following five sections, I discuss passages from *Dubliners*, *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*.

2 The human, the social, and the aesthetic

In "Aesthetics and Multiculturalism", Mikel Iriondo (2009, p. 108), from the University of Basque Country, affirms that art seems to be "so elevated and exquisite that it does not allow our aesthetic sensitivity to derive an identical social sensitivity". Changing this thought into a direct question: does the appreciation of Islamic art necessarily lead to any sympathy for the Islamic people? Or, in terms more suitable to the present reflection: does the enjoyment of the blind stripling scene in *Ulysses* create any connection with the people that in real life face the same challenges as he?

By the same token, George Steiner reminds us in his *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* that

> obvious qualities of literate response, of aesthetic feeling, can coexist with barbaric, politically sadistic behaviour in the same individual. Men such as Hans Frank who administered the "final solution" in eastern Europe were avid connoisseurs and, in some instances, performers of Bach and Mozart. We know of personnel in the bureaucracy of the torturers and of the ovens who cultivated a knowledge of Goethe, a love of Rilke. The facile evasion; "such men did not understand the poems they read or the music they knew and seemed to play so well," will not do. There simply is no evidence that they were more obtuse than anyone else to the humane genius, to the enacted moral energies of great literature and of art. (Steiner, 1971, p. 77–78)

Judging from Iriondo's and Steiner's points of view, art does not necessarily make people socially sensitive. The aesthetic may touch even the most socially insensitive of all people.

Nevertheless, we advocate for art as a force against destruction; as a way of making us more human. Nowadays, facing the unstoppable development of artificial intelligence, the question "what is human?" is all the more pressing.

I begin by problematizing the relation between aesthetic sensitivity and social sensitivity to avoid delving into a strictly literary analysis of characters from Joyce's works that represent human beings with disabilities. The question that I would like to ask and that should be kept in mind through my reading and after it is whether we become more socially sensitive towards a blind person crossing a street after reading *Ulysses*. The question is simplistic, for it is not the experience of connecting with one work of art, but with a series of them, that can change the way we connect with people. Nonetheless, for the sake of the present discussion, it is a valid question.

In short, I propose to think of Joyce's characters not only in terms of the writer's very sophisticated narrative technique, but in terms of how that same technique, which builds the characters' bodies and minds, can generate an equally sophisticated social sensitivity.

3 Disability Studies and Joyce's works

As a young man, Joyce used to browse the Walter Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* to learn new words. I looked up the word "disability" in the 1888

edition of Skeat's dictionary, probably the edition that Joyce knew, and found that it only appears as a derivation from the verb "disable", defined as "make unable, disqualify". This is very different from the definition of "disability" in the current edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where it is defined as "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities" accompanied by an observation explaining that "disabled" has replaced offensive terms such as *crippled*, *handicapped*, etc. Things have changed, a little at least.

But what is Disability Studies and how does it relate with literature and Joyce's works specifically?

The editors of the *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* explain that it is "at a crossroads. From its political foundations and early theoretical formulations in the late 1960s and early 1970s it has now become recognized as an academic discipline in its own right" (Roulstone *et al.*, 2012, p. 3). In *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, Dan Goodley (2011, p. 11) defines it as "a broad area of theory, research and practice that are antagonistic to the popular view that disability equates with personal tragedy. While we may identify people as having physical, sensory, cognitive or mental health impairments, disability studies place the problems of disability in society".

As regards the relation between this new area of study and Literature, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls attention to the traditional approach of characters with disabilities by the literary critics, who "often interpret them metaphorically or aesthetically, reading them without political awareness as conventional elements of the sentimental, romantic, Gothic, or grotesque traditions" (*apud* Colangelo, 2019, p. 112).

"Textual criticism and disability studies [are] two vibrant fields that have so far conversed little", notices Daniel Ryan Morse (2018, p. 460) in his interesting "Sounding Dismodernism in James Joyce's *Ulysses*". Morse sustains that a dialogue between literary criticism and Disability Studies can exist and that "insights of disability studies" can be applied to "textual criticism" and vice-versa (p. 461).

Morse contradicts the notion that audiobooks are an inferior form of literature that serves mainly or only the blind readers. He understands instead that all of us, and not only people with disabilities, depend on some kind of human or inanimate aid (p. 460). He denounces the "ocularcentrism of our conception of reading" and how it "has eclipsed other significant modes of textual consumption and production" (p.

461). Following Lennard J. Davis (2013), the author tries to re-examine the modernist narrative removed from a space marked by the myth of autonomy and suggests that we enter a "dismodernist mode", where the new normal should be the dependency or interdependency, instead of the independency or autonomy, of our bodies. His point is that vis à vis the literature of the 19th century, which used to attract listeners because it was read out loud in public events, modernism privileged silent reading, and that is why we ought to think literature out of the modernist mode, that is, as dismodernism.

In Joyce's characters we find several characteristics that we can call disabilities, such as blindness, or non-normativities, such as alcoholism. As Maren Linett (2022, p. viii) reminds us in the foreword she wrote to *Joyce Writing Disability*, "Joyce was the great manipulator, and his representations of disabled characters are among the most varied and complex of modernist literature". To the editor of the volume, Jeremy Colangelo:

> His [Joyce's] bodies (which, following Nietzsche, we could take to include the mind) are varied and complex; Leopold Bloom himself is, physically, no everyman, but is typical only insofar as he like all of Joyce's characters is unique in appearance and psychology. (Colangelo, 2022a, p. 1)

Colangelo (p. 2) mentions the "old sunken paps" (*U* 1.398) of the milkwoman in *Ulysses* and the "big hands" of Nasty Roche in *A Portrait* (*P* 6). There are several other cases of non-normativity, as we will see. It surprises Colangelo that it had taken so long for Joyce criticism to turn to Disability Studies, for, he argues, disability had long been present in it but was seldom treated from that perspective. So, I argue, we must include in Joyce Studies another way of reading, so that part of its critical and theoretical papers can read those non-normative bodies and minds from a different angle, that is, engaged in Disability Studies.

4 Sight

First, sight.

Joyce had hypermetropia, which means that he was far-sighted, and his other eye problems, such as glaucoma, forced him to undergo several surgeries. Stephen, Joyce's *alter ego* in *A Portrait*, like his creator, cannot see well, which causes him pain coming from both the physical problem itself and the moral judgement. His suffering is reinforced by religion, as will be clear.

But should Stephen's eye problems be discussed in a paper about disabilities and literature? After all, Stephen was not blind. In this regard, Karen Beauchamp-Pryor (2012, p. 178) in "Visual Impairment and Disability" underlines that the people whose sight is impaired from a certain degree become disabled not by the lack of sight but by the lack of conditions to function in society, a problem caused by prejudice as much as by uneven pavements.

> I understood that external causes could en-able or dis-able me, but at the same time I questioned the exclusion of individualized factors. For instance, my sister who was blind and used a guide dog seemed more confident in travelling and finding her way from 'A' to 'B' than I was. My lack of confidence and ability became particularly evident when my vision deteriorated further during my thirties. (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2012, p. 179)

This kind of opinion justifies the presence of Stephen's moderate visual impairment in this paper. Besides, Disability Studies has strategically tried to avoid medical or legal definitions as a way not to follow them but, instead, to inform them. So, definitions of disability from Disability Studies are ampler than the legal and medical ones.

In the first episode of *Ulysses*, we find Stephen with a walking stick. Rafael Hernandez (2022, p. 126) claims that "although Stephen takes up his ashplant for reasons other than want of mobility, it nevertheless connects him with the blind stripling, who also uses a cane". The blind young man to whom Hernandez refers appears in the eighth episode of the novel:

> A blind stripling stood tapping the curbstone with his slender cane. No tram in sight. Wants to cross.
>
> —Do you want to cross? Mr Bloom asked.
>
> The blind stripling did not answer. His wallface frowned weakly. He moved his head uncertainly.
>
> —You're in Dawson street, Mr Bloom said. Molesworth street is opposite. Do you want to cross? There's nothing in the way.
>
> The cane moved out trembling to the left. [….]
>
> —There's a van there, Mr Bloom said, but it's not moving. I'll see you across. Do you want to go to Molesworth street?
>
> —Yes, the stripling answered. South Frederick street.
>
> —Come, Mr Bloom said.
>
> He touched the thin elbow gently: then took the limp seeing hand to guide it forward.
>
> Say something to him. Better not do the condescending. They mistrust what you tell them. Pass a common remark.
>
> —The rain kept off.
>
> […]

> —Thanks, sir.
>
> Knows I'm a man. Voice.
>
> —Right now? First turn to the left.
>
> The blind stripling tapped the curbstone and went on his way, drawing his cane back, feeling again.
>
> Mr Bloom walked behind the eyeless feet, a flatcut suit of herringbone tweed. Poor young fellow! How on earth did he know that van was there? Must have felt it. See things in their forehead perhaps: kind of sense of volume. Weight or size of it, something blacker than the dark. Wonder would he feel it if something was removed. Feel a gap. Queer idea of Dublin he must have, tapping his way round by the stones. Could he walk in a beeline if he hadn't that cane? Bloodless pious face like a fellow going in to be a priest.
>
> […]
>
> Look at all the things they can learn to do. Read with their fingers. Tune pianos. Or we are surprised they have any brains. Why we think a deformed person or a hunchback clever if he says something we might say. (*U* 8.1075–1117)

In the passage above, one of the most beautiful and deeply invested with the feeling of sympathy in *Ulysses*, Bloom helps the young man cross the street not moved by any sense of guilt or fear of divine punishment but by his sense of moral duty. He pays attention to the young stripling when nobody else seemed to bother to. That act reveals a lot about Bloom, but also about Dublin. That young man was not unable to cross the street because of his own disability but because the city disabled him, and he was afraid to move on because he did not trust the city's streets.

The idea of piano tuning as a possible activity for the stripling crosses Bloom's mind. Indeed, in the eleventh episode, the most musical of all, Joyce brings to the scene a blind piano tuner who must return to the Ormond bar for the tuning fork he left there.

> —The tuner was in today, miss Douce replied, tuning it for the smoking concert and I never heard such an exquisite player.
>
> —Is that a fact? [asked Mr. Dedalus.]
>
> —Didn't he, miss Kennedy? The real classical, you know. And blind too, poor fellow. Not twenty I'm sure he was. (*U* 11.277–281; the information in the square brackets is ours)

Let us return to Stephen to try to understand the complex relation between lack of sight, unjust punishment and catholic guilt. Below is the first epiphany collected by Joyce:

> [Bray: in the parlour of the house
> in Martello Terrace]

> Mr Vance — (*comes in with a stick)* … O, you know, he'll have to apologise, Mrs Joyce.
> Mrs Joyce — O yes … Do you hear that, Jim?
> Mr Vance — Or else — if he doesn't — the eagles'll come and pull out his eyes.
> Mrs Joyce — O, but I'm sure he will apologise.
> Joyce — (*under the table, to himself)*
> —Pull out his eyes,
> Apologise,
> Apologise,
> Pull out his eyes.
>
> Apologise,
> Pull out his eyes,
> Pull out his eyes,
> Apologise. (Joyce, 1991a, p. 161)

As an epiphany, we know it encompasses triviality and importance. The theatricalized reproof of the mother and the neighbour was trivial for the adults, but important for the six-year-old boy. Later, Joyce would rewrite this recollection and insert it in *A Portrait* as part of Stephen's life.

Readers can only imagine how painful that memory was for Joyce, who, as an adult, probably associated the possibility of having his eyes pulled out by the eagles – certainly real enough for a six-year-old – with his gradual loss of sight.

At the Jesuit school, his eyeglasses broken, Stephen is unjustly and violently punished by Father Dolan with pandybat strokes for not writing his lesson. When his father meets the former school rector, both laugh at what happened. Once again, the painful episode from the childhood turns into a triviality among the adults.

> —Lazy idle little loafer! cried the prefect of studies. Broke my glasses! An old schoolboy trick! Out with your hand this moment!
>
> Stephen closed his eyes and held out in the air his trembling hand with the palm upwards. He felt the prefect of studies touch it for a moment at the fingers to straighten it and then the swish of the sleeve of the soutane as the pandybat was lifted to strike. A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air. A cry sprang to his lips, a prayer to be let off. But though the tears scalded his eyes and his limbs quivered with pain and fright he held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat. […]
>
> —Other hand! shouted the prefect of studies. (p. 50)

So pervasive in his life is that moment of humiliation and injustice that the threatening figure of Father Dolan with his pandybat comes back to haunt Stephen in the fifteenth episode of *Ulysses*.

As if the sight impairment were not enough, Stephen had to stand the priest's accusation of sloth: a moral flaw resulting from a physical problem; the pain of moral judgment added to the pain of disability.

The feeling of guilt involved in that childhood memory has a source in the biblical punishment by the loss of the eyes, first detected by Edmund Epstein (1973, p. 34) in *Proverbs* 30: 17, which reads: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (*King James Bible*).

As for the eagles, Hugh Kenner (1956, p. 116) associates them with the "eagles of Rome", "emissaries of the God with the hairy face: the punisher. They evoke Prometheus and the gnawing guilt: again-bite". The "gnawing guilt" corroborates the view that the threat received by Stephen represents the earliest of his memories related to religious guilt. The Middle English word "*agenbite*", which appears in Stephen's thoughts in *Ulysses* (*U.* 1.481 *et passim*), more accurately in the phrase "agenbite of inwit", or "remorse of conscience", refers to a mind that never stops biting itself in guilt: remorse comes from the Latin *remorsus* (supine of *remordere*).

Later in Zurich, Joyce would open his autobiographical poem "Bahnhofstrasse" with the line "The eyes that mock me sign the way", where the same biblical verb is used.

> The eyes that mock me sign the way
> Whereto I pass at eve of day.
>
> Grey way whose violet signals are
> The trysting and the twining star.
>
> Ah star of evil! star of pain!
> Highhearted youth comes not again
>
> Nor old heart's wisdom yet to know
> The signs that mock me as I go.
> (Joyce, 1991b, p. 62)

During what probably was a glaucoma crisis, Joyce felt his sick eyes mocked by the healthy, oppressive eyes of the passers-by.

5 The hemiplegic Dublin of *Dubliners*

Joyce wrote to his friend Constantine Curran, in 1904: "I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (Joyce, 1966a, p. 55). In another letter, two years later, now addressed to Grant Richards, he declared to be writing "a chapter of the moral history of my country" and treated Dublin as "the centre of paralysis" (Joyce, 1966b, p. 134). Those who suffer from hemiplegia have only one side of their bodies paralyzed, and Joyce might have learned this term from a famous physical therapist during his short term as a medical student in Paris (Colangelo, 2022b, p. 27). Joyce most likely added "or paralysis" thinking that Curran might not know the specialized term "hemiplegia". According to Hélène Cixous, with the "rhetorical and a little pompous emphasis of a young medical student",

> in *Dubliners* Joyce intended to make a clinical study of the Disease of Dublin that he had diagnosed as an adolescent: Dublin would have been suffering from syphilis. That was the word used by Jim repeatedly in his conversations with [his brother] Stannie in 1904. The name of the disease disappears in the book to be replaced by an etiological picture of its manifestations, the two main symptoms of which are paralysis and a certain form of mental insanity. (Cixous, 1968, p. 415; our translation)

The negative moral aspects of Ireland are described by Joyce in terms of a physical impairment. The writer clearly associates a physical and a moral problem. He metaphorizes a disability by transferring it from the body to the soul of Ireland. Casey Lawrence sheds light on this by demonstrating that, in doing so, Joyce was placing himself in the literary tradition discussed by Henri-Jacques Stiker in *A History of Disability* (1982):

> in Western literature, disability is used as a shorthand for the moral failings of a population, rather than as a condition in which individuals experience unique and varied public and private lives. Joyce diagnoses the stagnation of Irish political and social life using the medicalized language popular at the turn of the century. (Lawrence, 2022, p. 45)

In *Dubliners*, hemiplegia turns the city into a half-functional body mirrored by its characters' partially functional minds. In point of that, alcoholism stands out as a major problem. In "The Sisters", Mr Cotter is an alcoholic; in "Counterparts", Farrington; in

"Eveline", the protagonist's father; in "Grace", Mr Kearnan; in "The Dead", Freddy Malins. In "The Boarding House", Bob Doran finds the reason to become one in *Ulysses*. In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", all wait for the beer. In "Clay", the "gentleman" Maria talks with on the tram "has a drop taken" (*D* 103). And so on. Of all cases, Farrington's is perhaps the most exemplary, since alcohol consumption stopped him from performing his duties as an amanuensis.

Despite legal and medical controversy as to alcoholism being a disability, it is considered a disease by the World Health Organization, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the United States law that protects people with disabilities from being discriminated, considers it a disability.

However, high consumption of alcohol, like any other addiction, is stigmatized in societies as a behaviour problem owing to a flaw in the addicted person's character. So, Farrington is regarded by his boss as a lazy employee who drinks only because he wants to, and his non-normative behaviour moves him to the fringes of society. He is a literary example of how easily the Irish Society of the beginning of the 20th century, as much as many societies of the present, take a mental disability as the product of a weak personality.

According to Lennard Davis (2013, p. 6-7) in *The Disability Studies Reader*, eugenicists would consider the criminals, the insane, the tramps, the alcoholics, the hereditary deaf or blind, people with hereditary malformation etc. as forming the group of the "undesired" whom society should avoid by means of sterilization. Farrington, the drunk, and several other characters from Joyce's works would certainly fit that category.

The short stories of *Dubliners* provide us with other examples that could be discussed here. I focus on the first narrative, "The Sisters", before concluding this paper. The protagonist of the story is a boy of uncertain age and unrevealed name. When he suspects that Father Flyn is dead, three words come to his mind: paralysis, gnomon, and simony. They mean, respectively, privation of movement, an incomplete parallelogram in the Euclidean geometry, and the exchange of the atonement of the sins for money. In this series are three elements that, enchained, convey the image of Ireland as a country marked by want: want of movement, want of integrity, want of moral. In other words: of creative movement, given the delayed state of its artistic life, of political integrity, given its colonial condition, of shame, given the religious hypocrisy.

"The Sisters" is known by its incomplete sentences and by a doubt: what caused the priest's strokes that led him to a "queer" death? The priests trembling hands, Mr Cotter's red nose, indicating that he drank too much, Nannie's near-deafness, as well as her "boots […] trodden down all to one side" (*D* 14), revealing a gait problem, are all non-normative characteristics used as metaphors for moral flaws, not so much of the characters as of the whole country, which finally is unified, with both its good and bad halves, when "the snow was general all over" it (*D* 223). Joyce's "nicely polished looking glass" (Joyce, 1966a, p. 64) was meant to allow people to see themselves as inhabitants of a city physically and mentally disabled.

The very reason why until recently even Joyce scholars believed Joyce/Stephen was a myope, when there were so many clues, even photographic ones, that he was a hypermetrope, is that if one wears glasses, they must be short-sighted. A preconceived idea that leads to a real prejudice, for a myope is also someone suffering from "lack of imagination, foresight, or intellectual insight" (*OED*). That is how our societies use a disability to disqualify people, to disable them. If Dublin was not advancing politically and artistically, then it was paralytic.

6 Final remarks

So many other cases could have been analysed, such as Eveline's aphasia ("unspeakably"); the egg-shaped head of Mr Aleynne, in "Counterparts"; Maria's nose and chin, in "Clay"; Mr Holohan's limp in "A mother"; Little Keogh the cripple in "Eveline"; Gerty McDowel in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses*; and Pat, the deaf waiter of the Ormond in *Ulysses*.

Gerty's case is of special importance inasmuch as she, being lame and a woman, constitutes a case of intersectionality. "No. She's lame! O!", Bloom laments. "Poor girl! [...] A defect is ten times worse in a woman" (*U* 15.771, 772, 774–775).

As Beauchamp-Pryor (2012, p. 178) states, we must take into consideration "experiences of disablism based on gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age and class". By the same token, the Society for Disability Studies has as one of its principles that "the disability experience and process are multiple and fluid. Not one aspect of disability is universal as it intersects with multiple identities, including race and ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexuality, language, citizenship status, religion, and other markers of difference".

However brief this discussion about Disability Studies and Joyce Studies may have been, it was possible to observe that Joyce treated non-normativity in two different ways: as metaphors until *Dubliners* and as characters' bodily and mental traits that deserve to be studied for what they are in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*.

In the short stories, especially if we read them in relation to the paratext created by Joyce himself, we recognize a language charged with the influence of early studies in the field of medicine, which Joyce undertook for some time until early 1903. In *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, disabilities are no longer metaphors for moral failures, but features of the characters that play a role in humanizing them and criticizing the social hindrances that they have to overcome.

The most carefully discussed case, that of visual impairment, demonstrates that it is possible to associate the elaborate Joycean narrative technique with an equally sophisticated social sensibility. The case reveals how a physical pain is burdened with a pain of conscience caused by social prejudice and religious morality.

Finally, to be critical about the connection between aesthetic sensitivity and social sensitivity, in Joyce or any other author, goodwill and political activism do not suffice. It is necessary to read fiction as fiction, so that its artistic complexity may create social engagement. Historical sense is also paramount, or we will opt for the easiest way of being politically engaged readers: not to read at all whatever does not correspond to our views.

Reading Joyce in the light of the theory of Disability Studies is a way to make us human beings more socially sensitive, or, simply, more human.

References

BEAUCHAMP-PRYOR, Karen. Visual Impairment and Disability: A Dual Approach Towards Equality and Inclusion in UK Policy and Provision. *In*: ROULSTONE, Alan; THOMAS, Carol; WATSON, Nick (eds.). **Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies.** New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 178–192.

BUDGEN, Frank. **James Joyce and the Making of *Ulysses*.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

CIXOUS, Hélène. **L'Éxil de James Joyce; ou l'art du remplacement.** Paris: Grasset, 1968.

COLANGELO, Jeremy. Punctuations of the Virtual: Spectating Sex and Disability in Joyce's "Nausicaa". **MFS Modern Fiction Studies,** v. 65, n. 1, p. 111–131, 2019.

COLANGELO, Jeremy. Introduction. *In*: COLANGELO, Jeremy (ed.). **Joyce Writing Disability**. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, p. 1–24.

COLANGELO, Jeremy. Two Sides of Hemiplegia: On the Affect of Paralysis in *Dubliners*. *In*: COLANGELO, Jeremy (ed.). **Joyce Writing Disability**. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022b, p. 25–44.

DAVIS, Lennard J. "Introduction: Normality, Power, and Culture". DAVIS, Lennard J. (ed.). **The Disability Studies Reader.** 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2013, p. 1–14.

EPSTEIN, Edmund. **The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus.** S.l.: Arcturus Books, 1973.

GOODLEY, Dan. **Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction.** London: Sage, 2011.

HERNANDEZ, Rafael. "Dark Men in Mien and Movement": Blindness and the Body in *Ulysses*. *In*: COLANGELO, Jeremy (ed.). **Joyce Writing Disability**. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022, p. 106–130.

IRIONDO, Mikel. Aesthetics and Multiculturalism. *In*: ERZEN, Jaje N. (ed.). **XVII International Congress of Aesthetics.** V. 2. S. l.: SANART, 2009, p. 107–113.

JOYCE, James. **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.** New York: The Viking Press, 1964.

JOYCE, James. **Dubliners.** New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

JOYCE, James. **Epiphanies.** *In*: ELLMANN, Richard *et al.* (eds.). **Poems and Shorter Writings.** London: Faber and Faber, 1991a, p. 155–200.

JOYCE, James. **Pomes Penyeach.** *In*: ELLMANN, Richard *et al.* (eds.). **Poems and Shorter Writings.** London: Faber and Faber, 1991b, p. 49–63.

JOYCE, James. **Ulysses.** New York: Vintage, 1993.

JOYCE, James. **Letters.** Vol. 1. GILBERT, Stuart; ELLMANN, Richard (eds.). New York: The Viking Press, 1966a.

JOYCE, James . **Letters.** Vol. 2. ELLMANN, Richard (ed.). New York: The Viking Press, 1966b.

KENNER, Hugh. **Dublin's Joyce.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956.

KING JAMES BIBLE. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/

LAWRENCE, Casey. "Limping and Devious": The Disabled Male Body in "A Mother". *In*: COLANGELO, Jeremy (ed.). **Joyce Writing Disability**. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022, p. 45–65.

LINETT, Maren. Foreword. *In*: COLANGELO, Jeremy (ed.). **Joyce Writing Disability**. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022, p. vii–xii.

MORSE, Daniel Ryan. Sounding Dismodernism in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. **Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability,** v. 12, n. 4, 2018, p. 459–475.

OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. Oxford University Press, 2023. www.oed.com

POLLOCK, Frederick. **Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy.** London: C. Kegan Paul and Co., 1880. Available at www.archive.org.

ROULSTONE, Alan; THOMAS, Carol; WATSON, Nick. The Changing Terrain of Disability Studies. *In*: ROULSTONE, Alan; THOMAS, Carol; WATSON, Nick (eds.). **Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies.** New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 3–11.

SENN, Fritz; AMARAL, Vitor Alevato do. An Interview with Fritz Senn. **Qorpus**, v. 9, n. 3, p. 171–176, Dec. 2019.

SKEAT, Walter. **Etymological Dictionary of the English Language**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888. Available at www.archive.org.

SLOTE, Sam; MAMIGONIAN Marc A.; TURNER, John. **Annotations to James Joyce's *Ulysses*.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

SOCIETY FOR DISABILITY STUDIES. www.disstudies.org/index.php/sds-principles/

SPINOZA, Baruch. **Ethics**. CARLISLE, Clare; GARTENBERG, Zachary; MONACO, David (eds.). Translated by George Eliot. Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2020.

STEINER, George. **In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

On writing *Openings*

Lucy Caldwell

I retype everything. It's my most consistent, most abiding editorial practice – and it has good literary provenance; I got the idea from Joan Didion, who, in turn, got it from Hemingway.

I edit as I'm writing, of course, within drafts, and my last few passes over a story take the form of obsessive reading, attuned to the difference removing a comma might make. But the real magic happens with retyping. For each new draft, I'll print out what I've written so far and type it all back into a fresh blank Word document. It's essential to me because, on screen, in an elegant font, even first draft dross can look deceptively polished. Retyping forces you to consider, defend, allow, every word, every sentence anew – especially those passages that you sort of know are no good, but sort of have to be there… they stick in your craw. Retyping is a good way of tightening things. It also allows you to experience the story in a useful way – it helps to blend, to harmonise, the various states and moods in which a story might have been drafted; the day you wrote steadily (or wildly) for several hours, the passage you tapped out with one thumb on your phone in the playground, wielding schoolbags and snacks, the sentences that came to you in a bright sharp burst in bed at midnight…

But most of all, retyping allows the story to stay provisional, alive, right up until the very final moment. The better you know your characters, their world, the more likely they are to say or do surprising things – things you couldn't have predicted half a dozen drafts ago. An overworked story gets leaden; ossifies. It's very hard to lever open fresh space between the bars of text on a screen. As I'm retyping, I'm allowing room for new things to happen, updrafts I can catch, impulses I can follow – and if they don't yield anything useful, I can just delete them and go back to the sheaf of printed pages on my left. And the corollary of that: sometimes a paragraph, a sentence, is there right up until the

penultimate draft, when you suddenly realise that it was scaffolding, and has played its part, and the story doesn't need it any more.

All this is crucial to the way I see the short story at a more metaphysical level – as not the product of thought, but its process. I learned this from Chekhov – the great speeches of his plays, done badly, like carpets unrolled with a flourish to be admired, are dead on stage. But when an actor speaks them as the attempt to articulate something in the moment – they're bewitching. Alice Munro often says something similar, telling *Brick* magazine in 1991 that "I want the story to exist somewhere so that in a way it's still happening, or happening over and over again. I don't want it to be shut up in the book and put away – oh well, that's what happened".

It took me more than a decade of trying to write short stories before any of them worked. It was a long and gruelling and often despairing apprenticeship. I'd have a good idea, a decent plot, and the resultant story would occasionally flicker, but it would be lifeless on the page – as Sylvia Plath says of her failed poems in the chilling poem "Stillborn", "They smile and smile and smile at me. / And still the lungs won't fill and the heart won't start". I think now it's because I was presenting something as a fait accompli, as an anecdote, something packaged-up, already over. I was writing stories, at the time, about Belfast girlhood, and when I started concentrating not on plot, not on what "happened", but on atmosphere, when I stared to see the stories as spells – words and rhythms in a precise order for the purpose of conjuring something up – they started to live.

I don't yet know, entirely, what my collection *Openings* is about. When you're writing a collection, it doesn't do to look too closely – you need to keep something of it at bay, or you'll become too self-conscious, or too schematic. Part of the beauty of a collection is the way you can explore the same thing from different angles, so that the stories can overlap, contradict, amplify each other. I could feel what I was trying to do as I was writing, and that was all that mattered. There were some stories written over the same time period – about five years – that just didn't fit, occasionally in subject matter, or style, but most importantly in tone, in *feel*. Now that it's finished, and about to be public, now that I have distance from it, a new work begins, that of trying to articulate and explain what it's about. People will soon tell me. Readers will see things that seem so obvious, it will be a shock I wasn't consciously aware of them – or needed not to be, in order to write the stories well. There's always a tension, too, between continuity and variance. Reviewers often like to précis the themes and subject matter a writer returns to, delineate their territory and techniques, confirm the ways in which a writer tells the

same stories. From the inside, it's infinitely more interesting to think of how a book is written in opposition to its predecessors – of the ways you seek to do something different, something new.

But what I do know is this. *Openings* is part of the same, ongoing psychic project that *Multitudes* came from, and *Intimacies* – but where the stories of *Multitudes* were tightly focussed on Belfast girlhood, and *Intimacies* on motherhood, with those of *Openings* I found I had more range. There are stories set in Marrakech, in Berlin, during the London Blitz, in the world of dark matter particle physicists, and, in the title story, a complicated solace of Islam. Years of devotion to this trickiest, most demanding of forms has given me more technical range, too – the stories are more complex, longer.

Edna O'Brien says of Chekhov that his mysterious genius is that he "makes dramatic something that is desultory". Some of my favourite stories are those in which nothing and everything happens – stories that seem to operate on this material and human plane, and yet have another, palpable spiritual dimension. *Openings* takes its epigraph from Chekhov – from one of my favourite speeches by Masha in *Three Sisters,* where she says (in this translation, by Elizaveta Fen) that "I think a human being has got to have some faith, or at least he's got to seek faith. Otherwise his life will be empty, empty… How can you live and not know why the cranes fly, why children are born, why the stars shine in the sky!... You must either know why you live, or else… nothing matters… everything's just wild grass…".

I think the stories in *Openings* are about the ways that our lives can ossify, can shut down, close in on themselves, under the weight of the roles we play, the expectations we have of others, and they of us – and about the ways they can open up. The ways in which, up until the last minute, we can rewrite the script. The ways in which, to be fully in the world, we must stay provisional, alive, uncertain, open to wonder, to possibility, to change. The ways in which no life is "ordinary", ever, and that even in the midst of the most mundane and repetitive and, yes, desultory of circumstances, the numinous is possible. To remain attentive to that possibility is its own sort of faith, just as attention is a form of prayer.

A poem by Frank O'Hara comes to mind, which would also have made for a beautiful epigraph – "I want my feet to be bare", he writes in "My Heart", "I want my face to be shaven, and my heart – / you can't plan on the heart, but / the better part of it, my

poetry, is open". I think of Emily Dickinson, too, and her poem "I dwell in possibility", which ends: "The spreading wide of narrow Hands / To gather Paradise –".

All of the ways that we can, even momentarily, slip the bounds of time, and the grooves of our quotidian lives – I want my life, like my stories, to be as open as possible, and right till the last possible moment, open to it all. I hope these stories feel that way, too.

Short stories, novels, and the fluidity of form

Paul Delaney

In his foundational study, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (1901), the American critic Brander Matthews sought to distinguish between the supposedly new form of "the Short-story" (denoted as a hyphenated compound noun, with a capital "S") and the more established genre of the novel. The distinction is not simply one of length, he observed. Rather, it stems from the perceived limitations of form and the ways that short-story writers think about the design, content, and impact of their work. "It cannot be said too emphatically that the genuine Short-story abhors the idea of the Novel", Matthews explained:

> It neither can be conceived as part of a Novel, nor can it be elaborated and expanded so as to form a Novel. A good Short-story is no more the synopsis of a Novel than it is an episode from a Novel. A slight Novel, or a Novel cut down, is a Novelet [sic]; it is not a Short-story. (Matthews, 1901, p. 26-27)

In an attempt to assert the distinctiveness of the short story, and to see it as an independent form "not inferior to the Novel", Matthews devised a set of principles which he suggested were unique to this newly emergent genre (Matthews, 1901, p. 50). Matthews's principles were impressionistic and often imprecise, but they were presented as if they were self-evident. (What exactly is "a good Short-story", one might ask, and what makes it "genuine"?) As Adrian Hunter has shown, these ideas were to prove hugely influential to the developing school of short-story criticism, with Matthews's comments on the elusiveness of the short form and its amenability to interpretation "widely, if not always uncritically, reproduced" by leading scholars of the day (Hunter, 2019, p. 28). They were also recycled, and repurposed, by subsequent generations of writers and critics on both sides of the Atlantic.

Foremost amongst Matthews's principles was the idea that the short story differs from the novel because of the demands that it makes of its audience. Matthews illustrated this distinction by noting the ways that short-story writers compress action and concentrate attention. "The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus, the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of 'totality' […], the unity of impression" (Matthews, 1901, p. 17). In addition, and connected to this, Matthews stressed the importance of concision for practitioners of the short form. "The novelist may take his time; he has abundant room to turn about", he remarked, with a characteristically assured gendered bias; "the writer of Short-stories must be concise, and compression, a vigorous compression, is essential. For him, more than for anyone else, the half is more than the whole" (Matthews, 1901, p. 22-23).

As critics have long noted, Matthews's argument was indebted to Edgar Allan Poe, and in particular to Poe's celebrated essay of 1846, "The Philosophy of Composition", which discussed issues of authorial, and especially poetic, technique. In that essay, Poe outlined a process of literary production in which all aspects of a text are planned in advance of the commencement of writing, and where every detail contributes to an alignment of effect, intent, and impression. "Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen", Poe famously stated. "It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention" (Poe, 2003, p. 430). If Matthews acknowledged something of this debt in the opening paragraph of *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*, his use of Poe was more subtle than is often supposed. As Hunter has shrewdly discerned, this engagement was founded upon an act of strategic revision, whereby elements of Poe's thesis – including his ideas relating to "totality" and "unity of impression" – were reframed and understood as "aspects of reception rather than production" (Hunter, 2019, p. 29). That is to say, Poe's essay was primarily considered in relation to the practice of reading rather than writing. Matthews consequently foregrounded the ways that the short-story writer "impresses the reader with the belief that [a story] would be spoiled if it were made larger, or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work" (Matthews, 1901, p. 17). Such a claim recalls another of Poe's much-referenced essays, his 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (which Matthews, curiously, chose not to discuss); and, more specifically, it remembers Poe's representation of the "*totality*" of experience which arises from the reading of a story "at one sitting" – something which Poe believed distinguishes the

affective power of short stories from longer forms of prose narratives (Poe, 2003, p. 395, author's emphasis).[1]

Matthews continued to push this idea in subsequent years, perhaps most notably when he oversaw the production of the educational textbook, *The Short-Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development*, for the American Book Company in 1907. In his introduction to that primer, Matthews again stressed the importance of "restraint" for the development of "the short-story" (Matthews, 1907, p. 23) (represented in this instance with a lower case "s"), and identified "brevity" as "the one essential" which distinguishes short stories from longer types of prose fiction (Matthews, 1907, p. 12). He also repeated his point that brevity is an integral element of both the aesthetics and the immersive experience of the short form, and was careful to ensure that his discussion of these two issues was forcefully intertwined. "This is definite and precise beyond all misunderstanding", Matthews contended:

> The short-story must do one thing only, and it must do this completely and perfectly; it must not loiter or digress; it must have unity of action, unity of temper, unity of tone, unity of color [sic], unity of effect; and it must vigilantly exclude everything that might interfere with its singleness of intention. (Matthews, 1907, p. 26-27)

The influence of Poe was again apparent, with Matthews quietly rehearsing the primary command of "The Philosophy of Composition", that "if any literary work" – by which, Poe meant any poem – "is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from the unity of impression" (Poe, 2003, p. 432). To press the point, Matthews alluded to a second distinguished short-story writer of the nineteenth century, Robert Louis Stevenson, and to the indignation that Stevenson once expressed at the thought of having to change the conclusion to one of his stories. "Make another end to it?", Stevenson wrote to his friend, Sidney Colvin in September 1891, "but that's not the way I write; the whole tale is implied […] To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong" (Stevenson, 1995, p. 155). "Any alteration of that kind was absolutely impossible", Matthews proceeded to explain, "since it would violate the law of the short-story", which holds that everything is relevant and that nothing, therefore, can be extracted

[1]Excerpts from Poe's essay on Hawthorne are included as an appendix to *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*. However, these are not mentioned in the actual text of Matthews's thesis, and they are prefaced with the suggestion that despite Poe's retrospective importance for the development of the short story as a form, he himself did not recognise it as "in reality a *genre*, a separate kind, a genus by itself" (Matthews, 1901, p. 77, author's emphasis).

or amended without irreparable damage being done to the fabric of the entire text (Matthews, 1907, p. 27).

Such arguments will be familiar to readers of short fiction, regardless as to whether they have happened upon the works – or, indeed, the name – of Brander Matthews. At the most basic level, for instance, it is commonplace to claim that the short story is an exacting prose form, which encompasses works of crystallised perfection, where every detail is carefully selected, and where there is no room for the inclusion of material that is extraneous or unnecessary. Perhaps the most famous articulation of this belief was posited by Poe himself, when he pronounced that "in the whole composition" of what is now called the short story "there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preestablished design" (Poe, 2003, p. 396). Flannery O'Connor's brilliantly succinct suggestion that "a story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is", is another classic formulation of this way of thinking (O'Connor, 1969, p. 96), as is H.E. Bates's seductive proposition that "a story must, so to speak, be weighed in the hands […] Its balance will collapse under a superfluous sentence, even a superfluous word" (Bates, 1941, p. 220). Elizabeth Bowen was of a similar opinion that the structural economy of the form meant that short stories are defined by obliquity and concision, and that this distinguishes stories from longer types of fiction, such as the novel. "The short story is at an advantage over the novel", she announced in her preface to an American selection of her stories in 1959, "and can claim a nearer kinship to poetry, because it must be more concentrated, can be more visionary, and is not weighed down (as the novel is bound to be) by facts, explanation, or analysis" (Bowen, 1962, p. 77-78).

Comments such as these have exerted an enormous influence on the ways that short fiction is talked about and practised in Irish literature. While this is clearly for good reason, it should nonetheless be remarked that categorical distinctions between novels and short stories are seldom as absolute as commentators have claimed. Stories have often provided an impetus for longer works of prose fiction, after all, with individual tales frequently serving as sketch pads for ideas which have been explored in greater detail on larger canvases. Sections of what would become Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1997) were first published as standalone texts in *Granta* magazine between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, for instance, and could easily have been received – and could still be interpreted – as discrete stories. Similarly, a few chapters from Aingeala Flannery's *The Amusements* (2022) appeared as short stories before they were revised to form part of her evocative debut novel: "Kamikaze" was broadcast on RTÉ Radio One as

part of the Francis MacManus Short Story Competition in 2018; and "St Otteran's" was published under the title "Visiting Hours" in *Harpar's Bazaar* in 2019. Other examples of stories being reworked into novels include Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's "Blood and Water" (1988), which provided the groundwork for her playful, coming-of-age novel, *The Dancers Dancing* (1999), and Mary O'Donnell's elusive "Storm over Belfast" (2008), which was revised to become the first chapter of her novel about the legacy of the Disappeared, *Where They Lie* (2014). The stimulus behind Alan Monaghan's Hennessy Award-winning "The Soldier's Song" (2002), which counterpoints the execution of an unnamed soldier for cowardice during the First World War with the killing of Erskine Childers during the Irish Civil War, was extended to comprise the germ for his historical trilogy, *The Soldier's Song* (2010), *The Soldier's Return* (2011), and *The Soldier's Farewell* (2012). Maria Hoey's "Reading Brother Boniface" (shortlisted for the Michael McLaverty Short Story Award in 2010, but not published until 2018), is one of many other instances which could be cited, and also seeded a debut novel – in this case, *The Last Lost Girl* (2017) – which dramatises the impact of an unexplained disappearance on a family, and asks whether that family can ever be reconciled to such a traumatic loss.

Other examples can be provided where categorical distinctions between novels and short stories are blurred. In several instances, books which have been produced and marketed as novels have also been interpreted as volumes of short stories. Donal Ryan's sensitive portrayal of a rural community reeling from the aftershocks of the Celtic Tiger, *The Spinning Heart* (2012), is one such case, with Elke D'hoker and Marie Mianowski each suggesting that this episodic novel of 21 chapters – told from 21 perspectives – can be read as a cycle or as a sequence of stories (D'hoker, 2018, p. 26; Mianowski, 2017, p. 60). Moreover, short stories have sometimes imagined the afterlives of characters, or the consequences of events, which have subsequently been fleshed out in novel form. Sally Rooney's early story of dependency and vulnerability, "At the Clinic" (2016), for example, can be read as a backdated sequel to *Normal People* (2018), since it introduces readers to the fictional characters of Marianne and Connell a few years after the events that are recounted in Rooney's phenomenally successful novel have already transpired. In addition, ideas which were intended to take form as short stories have sometimes found utterance through longer works of fiction. Evelyn Conlon and Mary Costello have each commented upon this process, with their respective novels *Skin of Dreams* (2003) and *Academy Street* (2014) initially conceived – but never realised – as short stories (Gallego, 2017, p. 213; Costello, 2021, np.). Lucy Caldwell has similarly remarked upon this with respect to her novel of the Belfast Blitz, *These Days* (2022) (Morales-Ladrón, 2025, p. 175). The research which informs a story is also sometimes so rich that it refuses to be

contained within the one text. Caldwell has also spoken of this, drawing a link between the evolution of *These Days* and the completion of an earlier text, the complexly arranged and fluidly organised story, "Daylight Raids".

"I wrote my story 'Daylight Raids' (published in *Openings* [2024]), which is set during the London Blitz, in the autumn of 2019", Caldwell has explained:

> and almost immediately began researching the Belfast Blitz – thinking, at the time, that I might get another short story out of it. The wealth of research material grew, as did my surprise that the Belfast Blitz barely exists in fiction, and I began to think that the story could be a novel. By then, we were in the early months of 2020 and, as Covid swept through Europe, taking, first of all, our eldest and most vulnerable, it became more important than I had ever imagined trying to preserve the stories. (Morales-Ladrón, 2025, p. 175)

"Daylight Raids" and *These Days* are two distinct but interrelated texts, with traces of the former story discernible in the latter novel. Consider, for instance, Caldwell's description of one of her protagonists discovering a house in a bombed-out area of Belfast in *These Days*, "which had had its front blown off completely […] It was like a doll's house with the hinged door swung wide – or an elaborate stage set" (Caldwell, 2022, p. 144-45). Readers might recall an equivalent passage in "Daylight Raids", where two lovers meet in what remains of "a half-ruined house" near Regent's Park in London (Caldwell, 2024, p. 105): "a doll's house with the hinged front removed, a stage set held together for barely much longer, and only for them" (Caldwell, 2024, p. 107). Less obviously, attention might be drawn to a late scene in *These Days*, where the same character, Emma, tries to make sense of the love she shared with another character, the now-deceased Sylvia, while contemplating John Lavery's vast painting "Daylight Raid from my Studio Windows, 7th July 1917" in the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery (now the Ulster Museum). As she does this, Emma is prompted to think about loss, fate, and the act of "watching, waiting" (Caldwell, 2022, p. 268), while reflecting on "the sheer inconsequence of all that we are and all that we do" (Caldwell, 2022, p. 267). Similar concerns are raised in the not-dissimilarly-titled "Daylight Raids", where the conventions of artistic form, received expectations, and established codes of conduct (the context of Caldwell's story is another illicit – in this instance, an adulterous heterosexual – relationship) are also shattered by the experience of war.

The point here is not to make some vulgar claim for repetition in two discrete texts. Nor is it to claim a crude hierarchy of value, whereby ideas that are explored in a story (in

this instance, "Daylight Raids") are presumed to gain full expression through the genre of the novel (*These Days*). Rather, it is to suggest the need for a fluid understanding of form which is attentive to points of correlation as well as variance. Such thinking runs counter to traditional definitions of the short story, which set the form in oppositional or purely relational terms. "The Short-story is not […] a chapter out of a Novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale", Matthews insisted in *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*:

> but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger, or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. The difference in spirit and in form between the Lyric and the Epic is scarcely greater than the difference between the Short-story and the Novel. (Matthews, 1901, p. 17-18)

It is likely that such arguments were born out of the need for generic definitions to be formulated at the turn of the twentieth century, as writers and critics sought to validate the importance of the short story as an emergent form. However, as Mary Louise Pratt noted a couple of decades ago, "shortness" is a relative concept without any inherent or intrinsic worth, and there is no census on what it encompasses or how it should be measured (Pratt, 1994, p. 98). If some have continued to argue that the short story occupies a specific place in the literary continuum, somewhere between the prose poem and the novel, others have contended that the wordcounts that are traditionally ascribed short fiction (classically, between 2,500 or 3,000 and 10,000 words) are arbitrary, and that they are a product of material needs rather than aesthetic concerns. By this logic, the necessity for wordcounts is traceable to editorial pressures to fill magazines and newspaper columns in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to the timeslots that subsequently became available for radio broadcasts.

In recent years, critical attention has consequently begun to shift from a restrictive preoccupation with short-story length towards an analysis of "the uncertain status of the form", as commentators have looked towards short fiction's interdisciplinary base, its fluidity of practice, and its multiple venues for publication (Delaney and Hunter, 2019, p. 2). From this perspective, the focus has become less on what a short story "is" and rather on what it "does", as the form of short fiction is understood to provide a variety of shapes for writers to experiment with, and conventions for publishers, critics, and readers to work through. The short story is and remains "a resistant form" for definition, Eric Henderson and Geoff Hancock have argued, and its long history is marked by continuous acts of evolution, revision, and adaptation (Henderson and Hancock, 2010,

p. xi). One way that this is manifest is in the frequency of interplay between – rather than the supposedly endless dialectical relationship which distinguishes – short fiction and the novel. Or, to put it another way, it is evident in texts which exist both as standalone stories and in longer form as parts of novels, texts which complicate – or at the very least, which test – traditional definitions of form.

Stuart Neville's "Followers" is a case in point. This story was written in 2007 only to be revised and republished as the opening two chapters of Neville's acclaimed post-Troubles thriller of sectarianism and retribution, *The Ghosts of Belfast* (2009; published in London as *The Twelve*). The premise of this novel is simple: Gerry Fegan, a former member of the IRA, is haunted by the ghosts of a dozen people whom he killed during the Troubles. The dead include British soldiers, members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, a police officer, loyalist paramilitaries, and several civilians, including a mother and a baby, "whose memories screamed the loudest", and who were murdered merely because they happened to find themselves "in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Neville, 2009, p. 4). In an attempt to placate each of these unquiet spirits, Fegan tracks down the people who ordered the murders and kills them. "It's a credit to Neville's skill as a writer", John Connolly has noted, "that this set-up, which could have come across as contrived, retains its potency throughout. This is thanks to the ambiguity that pervades the book: the question of whether these ghosts are real or manifestations of Fegan's guilt" (Connolly, 2021, p. 896). In many respects, this question is held in check in *The Ghosts of Belfast*, as Neville chose to prioritise Fegan's anguish, his struggles with addiction, and his revulsion at the thought that some people consider him "a Republican hero" for what he did in the past (Neville, 2009, p. 8). If questions regarding the "reality" of the ghosts are left hanging in Neville's novel, though, one thing that is clear is the author's views on violence and its consequences for perpetrators as much as victims. "Death clings to the men who've wielded it", the narrative unequivocally states, "like the stench of the abattoir" (Neville, 2009, p. 143).

The first of Fegan's retaliatory murders provides the basis of "Followers". In this story, the protagonist is driven to avenge the death of an unnamed teenage boy by killing an ex-comrade, Michael McGinty – renamed Michael McKenna in *The Ghosts of Belfast*.[2] McGinty, it is said, took pleasure in torturing the teenager two decades before because it was suspected that he might have disclosed something of importance to the police;

[2] The surname "McGinty" is retained in *The Ghosts of Belfast*, and is given to another ex-paramilitary, Paul McGinty. McGinty is one of the highest profile people that Fegan murders in Neville's novel, and his death occurs suitably late in *The Ghosts of Belfast*.

Fegan was then directed to "finish" the interrogation by shooting dead the terrified youth (Neville, 2020, p. 134). In "Followers", the boy's ghost returns, inducing Fegan to use a gun that is secreted beneath his bed to assassinate McGinty. This scene is repeated in *The Ghosts of Belfast*, where the ghost is also represented stalking his prey, prompting Fegan into action, and delighting in the killing of the man who mercilessly attacked him with a hammer years earlier:

> Fegan reached in and lifted the Walther P99 from its nest.
>
> A grin blossomed on the boy's face, his teeth glinting. He mimed the act of pulling back the slide assembly to chamber the first round.
>
> Fegan looked from the boy to the pistol and back again. The boy nodded. Fegan drew back the slide, released it, hearing the snick-snick of oiled parts moving together. The gun was solid in his grasp, like the shake of an old friend's hand.
>
> The boy smiled, stood, and walked towards the landing. (Neville, 2009, p. 11)

As Neville's 2,000-word story was redrawn to become the entry point into his 326-page debut novel, numerous changes were incorporated into the text, with more descriptive material introduced and several overwritten passages discreetly erased. (The florid noirish reflection "One day he might taste the gun's cold, hard snout before a fiery sun bloomed in his skull. Maybe tonight. Maybe not. The whiskey would decide" was wisely deleted, for instance [Neville, 2020, p. 131].) Additional content was also developed, including the suggestion that Fegan risked being branded "a tout" for having recently spoken to the boy's still-grieving mother (Neville, 2009, p. 9). Fegan's interactions with the dead teenager, and with the other ghosts, were also extended, with greater attention shown to the impact of their murders on the man who was responsible for their killings. Significant space was likewise given to local politics in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, with McKenna depicted as having reinvented himself as a slick politician in the Stormont Assembly, keen to protect his new-found respectability and the privileges that it affords. Interestingly, the setting of the action also became more expansive. The entirety of "Followers" takes place in enclosed locations, as the story moves from an undistinguished pub to the interior of McGinty's car to the inside of Fegan's house. By contrast, *The Ghosts of Belfast* steps outside this claustrophobic world to incorporate the cityscape of Belfast: if the first chapter follows the same trajectory as "Followers" (pub-car-house), the second chapter shifts back to McKenna's car before proceeding to the docks, and to a part of the city (the Titanic Quarter) that was then in the early stages of redevelopment. In the novel, this is where McKenna is executed; in the story, McGinty never makes it out of Fegan's house.

Most of these revisions can be explained through reference to form, as Neville adjusted to the demands of writing long, picking up on details that had been glimpsed in "Followers", and giving them the space to develop in the opening chapters of his novel. As the narrative was extended, more explanatory content was also added. This, in turn, impacted upon – even if it did not quite flatten or fill in – the ambiguity that Connolly claims to have detected in *The Ghosts of Belfast*. In "Followers", for instance, the relationship between the living and the dead is presented in a particularly strange light, as the syntax of the story suggests that it is the boy's ghost who retrieves Fegan's weapon and who hands it to the protagonist:

> The boy was there, on the landing, Fegan's gun in his hand. He had taken the Walther P99 from under the bed and brought it out here. Fegan knew it was loaded.
>
> The boy held it out to him, grip first. Fegan didn't understand. He shook his head. The boy stepped closer, lifted Fegan's right hand, and placed the pistol in it. He mimed the act of pulling back the slide assembly to chamber the first round.
>
> Fegan looked from the boy to the pistol and back again. The boy nodded. Fegan drew back the slide, released it, hearing the *snick-snick* of oiled parts moving together.
>
> The boy smiled and descended the stairs. (Neville, 2020, p. 137)

The haunting of Fegan is invested with weird energy in this scene, as the dead boy appears to physically interact with the material world – not only does he touch Fegan's hand, he also recovers a solid object (the gun), carries that object across a measurable space (from the bedroom to the landing), and passes that object to the man who is charged with avenging an earlier atrocity. This is at odds with Neville's representation of the same scene in *The Ghosts of Belfast* (where Fegan collects the gun), and violates the generic conventions of realist and non-realist literature. An inference is that the narrative of "Followers" refuses to be accounted for by standard references to internalised trauma, stricken conscience, or ethereal presences.

"Neville is unusual in his willingness to introduce elements of the supernatural into his crime stories", Connolly has observed, and the above scene is an exemplary instance of this (Connolly, 2021, p. 898). However, the oddness of this encounter also undoes – or perhaps rather, it compounds – the textual ambiguity that Connolly identified in *The Ghosts of Belfast*, since "Followers" presents a world in which a ghost's interactions with the living are both possible and tangible. This sense of weirdness is not unique to "Followers", with similar contortions of rationality evident in some of Neville's other

short fiction: in the wonderfully sinister "The Green Lady", for instance, which feeds off fears about lost children; in the unsettling "Echo", which follows a 12-year-old boy with dissociative tendencies who has been brought up to believe that he is the reincarnation of his deceased sister; and in the darkly erotic "Queen of the Hill", which reworks elements of the *Táin* saga into the landscape of contemporary Armagh.[3] Nor is this strangeness unique to Neville's stories, with other commentators seeing it as a distinguishing feature of certain types – or certain forms – of short fiction.

Elizabeth Bowen remarked as much in 1960, when she prepared to teach a course on short fiction at Vassar College. Bowen drafted a few ideas for that course in two notebooks which are now housed at the Harry Ransom Center, in the University of Texas at Austin. In a loosely sketched, three-page entry (dated Tuesday 19 April), Bowen confirmed her belief in the radical potential of short stories; she also recorded her conviction that the short story – in particular, what she termed "the magical story" or "the ghost story" – is especially attuned to writing the uncanny. By uncanny, she meant "the unknowable, something beyond the bounds of *rational* knowledge" (Bowen, 1960, np., author's emphasis). Such fiction has the capacity to make strange, she noted, because "the short story of this kind must absorb 'everyday' detail into a peculiar atmosphere of its own" (Bowen, 1960, np.). "This atmosphere necessary for magic would be difficult to sustain throughout a novel", she mused. "Hence, suitability – for magic – of the s.s. [short story]" (Bowen, 1960, np.).

Bowen's comments could easily be misread as a rehearsal of a prescriptive dialectic which has underpinned much thinking on the subject since, at least, Brander Matthews. This dialectic has ensured that short fiction has often been talked about – sympathetically as well as disparagingly – with reference to the novel, with short stories routinely thought to exist in a dependent, apophatic, or supplementary relationship to longer forms of fiction. Bowen's remarks challenge the basis of such thinking by underscoring the unique promise of short fiction. In addition, though, they gesture, however briefly, towards the deconstruction of that binary, since Bowen stated that the eeriness that is characteristic of certain forms of short fiction "would be difficult" (which is to say, not impossible) "to sustain throughout a novel". It is a liberating thought, which opens up new ways of thinking about the relationships between – as well as the particularities of – these distinct, variegated literary forms. It also prompts consideration of texts which transgress the customary boundaries of long and short fiction, texts which exist in

[3] All four stories – "Followers", "The Green Lady", "Echo", and "Queen of the Hill" – are included in Stuart Neville's debut collection, *The Traveller and other stories* (2020).

different iterations in both forms, and which challenge Matthews's dictum that the two forms are rigidly defined and structurally discordant.

References

BATES, H.E. **The Modern Short Story:** A Critical Survey. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1941.

BOWEN, Elizabeth. **Notebooks for Vassar College short story course**. 1960. Elizabeth Bowen Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, box 7, folder 3.

BOWEN, Elizabeth. . Preface to *Stories by Elizabeth Bowen* (1959). *In*: BOWEN, Elizabeth. **Afterthought: Pieces about Writing**. London: Longmans, 1962, p. 75-81.

CALDWELL, Lucy. **These Days**. London: Faber & Faber, 2022.

CALDWELL, Lucy. . Daylight Raids. *In*: CALDWELL, Lucy. **Openings**. London: Faber & Faber, 2024, p. 105-132.

CONNOLLY, John. Stuart Neville: 'Followers' (2007). *In*: CONNOLLY, John (ed.). **Shadow Voices: 300 Years of Irish Genre Fiction: A History in Stories**. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021, p. 896-903.

COSTELLO, Mary. Unpublished interview with Paul Delaney. 17 November 2021.

DELANEY, Paul and HUNTER, Adrian. Introduction. *In*: DELANEY, Paul and HUNTER, Adrian (eds.). **The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 1-6.

D'HOKER, Elke. A Continuum of Fragmentation: Distinguishing the Short Story Cycle from the Composite Novel. *In*: GILL, Patrick and KLÄGER, Florian (eds.). **Constructing Coherence in the British Short Story Cycle**. London: Routledge, 2018, p. 17-31.

GALLEGO, Melania Terrazas. 'I Have Always Been a Writer': An Interview with Evelyn Conlon. **Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies**, v. 39, n. 1, p. 207-219, June 2017.

HENDERSON, Eric and HANCOCK, Geoff. Introduction: A Story of Subversion. *In*:

HENDERSON, Eric and HANCOCK, Geoff (eds.). **Short Fiction & Critical Contexts**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xi-xx.

HUNTER, Adrian. The Short Story and the Professionalisation of English Studies. *In*: DELANEY, Paul and HUNTER, Adrian (eds.). **The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 24-39.

MATTHEWS, Brander. **The Philosophy of the Short-Story**. New York and London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901.

MATTHEWS, Brander. **The Short-Story:** Specimens Illustrating Its Development. New York: American Book Company, 1907.

MIANOWSKI, Marie. **Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction**. London: Routledge, 2017.

MORALES-LADRÓN, Marisol. 'Celebrating plurality and multiplicity, … being both/and rather than either/or': Interview with Lucy Caldwell. **Estudios Irlandeses**, v. 20, p. 170-179, 2025.

NEVILLE, Stuart. **The Ghosts of Belfast**. New York: Soho Press, 2009.

NEVILLE, Stuart. Followers. In: NEVILLE, Stuart. **The Traveller and other stories**. London: Zaffre, 2020, p. 131-139.

O'CONNOR, Flannery. Writing Short Stories. *In*: FITZGERALD, Sally and FITZGERALD Robert (eds.). **Mystery and Manners:** Occasional Prose. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969, p. 87-106.

POE, Edgar Allan. **The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings:** Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews. GALLOWAY, David (ed.). London: Penguin, 2003.

PRATT, Mary Louise. The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It. In: MAY, Charles, E. (ed.). **The New Short Story Theories**. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 91-113.

STEVENSON, Robert Louis. **The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson:** Volume VII, September 1890 – December 1892. BOOTH, Bradford A.; MEHEW, Ernest (eds.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Post-Celtic Tiger pastoral: looking to landscapes in Sara Baume's *A Line Made By Walking* and Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*

Deirdre Flynn

1 Introduction

In an interview in the *New Statesman* Mike McCormack said that he needs to be familiar with the landscape in his writing in order to feel a sense of stability in his narrative worlds. "Once I have that area under my feet, once I'm sure and certain of that area, I have no problem writing about ghosts, or about spaceships, aliens, robots – anything becomes possible. It's familiar in the sense of knowledge, and of certainty" (Boland, 2016). Like Marcus Conway, the protagonist of *Solar Bones*, McCormack seeks reassurance from the landscape. For Marcus the rural landscape is vital in his coming to terms with Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. It is the familiarity of the pastoral that allows him to explore the uncertain, the unstable, the chaos. In Sara Baume's *A Line Made By Walking*, the protagonist Frankie also returns to the rural during her time of instability. Similar to the Bell that calls Marcus, a falling tree signals the death of her grandmother and calls Frankie back to survey the changing landscape. And while she wants to go home, it no longer feels like home. "Whenever I visit, there is always some new structure flattening what used to be a patch of pleasant green" (Baume, 2017, p. 12). In the wake of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger these novels return to the rural looking for stability in the image of Ireland. Frankie and Marcus are hoping that the landscape can offer what Derek Hand would call "a bedrock of stability and continuity" when "the discourses that surround it tell a story of dislocation and fragmentation" (Hand, 2011, p. 277). They return to the pastoral in order to make sense of contemporary life, and the chaos of the collapse. However, the markers of change are everywhere, even on the Irish rural landscape. Now both Marcus and Frankie must

document how rural Ireland has changed and was impacted by the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. The economic chaos is not just documented in graphs, and numbers, but expanded out into the topography of the landscape, leaving a lasting mark on rural Ireland.

2 Celtic Tiger and collapse

Ireland's Celtic Tiger had a major impact on Irish identity. As Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin point out, there was a shift in dominant social values from the earlier priorities of "national development, national identity, family, self-sacrifice, self-sufficiency and nationalism" to the neo-liberal discourse of "individualism, entrepreneurship, mobility, flexibility, innovation, competitiveness" (Kirby *et al.*, 2002, p. 13). The economic bubble that began in the mid-1990s ended in 2008 with a huge global financial crash. The Celtic Tiger period coincided with a desire to move away from the traditional narratives and images of Ireland to a more globalised, urbanised cosmopolitan nation state, on the edge of Europe. The myth of the West or the romanticised visions of Ireland were debunked in favour of "more up-to-date representations of Ireland, images of urban life, industrialisation and consumer culture" (Kirby *et al.*, 2002, p. 10). The romantic west was replaced by the urban east, and the rural was commodified for tourist-driven profit.

In 2008 however, the collapse brought the unprecedented growth to a halt, and as Gerry Smyth explains, it was a "watershed moment" for Irish identity (Smyth, 2012, p. 136). The crisis brought the economy, and the excess of the previous years, to an abrupt stop and once again the Irish were faced with an "opportunity to rethink the meaning of Irishness" (Smyth, 2012, p. 136). When the tools of capitalism collapsed, the austerity policies that followed were designed to "protect the interests of late capitalism" through the "prioritization of individual responsibility" leading to what Bracken and Harney-Mahajan call "a suspicion towards neoliberalism" (Bracken; Harney-Mahajan, 2017, p. 2). As a result, Bracken and Harney-Mahajan suggest "contemporary Irish writing in the recessionary and post-recessionary periods is a powerful site of such neoliberal critique" (Bracken; Harney-Mahajan, 2017, p. 3).

Post-Celtic Tiger literature has flourished, with a range of texts critiquing and reflecting on that period in different ways, like Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* (2012) Tana French's *The Likeness* (2008) and *Broken Harbour* (2012), Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2012), Paul Murray's *The Mark and the Void* (2015). These texts are marked with a reflective darkness that Molly Slavin calls a "lens of melancholia" because of a "public, shared, but

unnamed, unconscious, and unspecified grief at the loss of what was perceived to be, in the height of the Celtic Tiger, a glorious neoliberal future" (Slavin, 2017, p. 25). In many of these works the landscape is scarred by "ghost" estates, residential building projects that stopped and remain unfinished once the money ran out. They act like built, ghostly reminders of the excessive and badly regulated spending and building of the Tiger period, monuments to the country's failure.

The return to the rural can be seen as a response to the romanticisation of urban space during the Celtic Tiger, and a reminder of the real implications of excessive capitalism on the rural space. The anthropocenic damage to the landscape means that these rural returns highlight the dark pastoral future caused by neo-liberal excesses and an amnesic attitude to the climate crisis. These dark pastoral visions of the landscape "are not simply reducible to metaphors for the financial crash" but highlight the dual "crises of both capitalism and anthropogenic climate change" (Ward Sell, 2024, p. 136). Both these novels reflect on these dual crises by returning to the pastoral, and in turn showcasing how these crises are connected and intertwined.

3 The pastoral turn

In both McCormack's *Solar Bones* and Baume's *A Line Made By Walking* the protagonists return to the pastoral in order to make sense of their present. They revisit the landscape of their youth and move through the terrain expecting to see an untouched nostalgic romanticised rural space. However, even here, there are reminders of the chaos, and the trauma they wish to escape. Both Marcus and Frankie return to the countryside in the hope of finding the "steady and unaltered realm beyond the reaches of the fluctuating culture" described by Oona Frawley (Frawley, 2005, p. 270). Frawley highlights how Irish literature so often turns to "the natural world as a site for nostalgia" especially "in the face of a changing or threatened social structure" (2005, p. 270). Place and nature, and Irish rurality suggest an inalterability in response to change and progress:

> The idea of Irish Rurality thus persists, and seems to contribute to the nation's ability to absorb change …. The pace of change in modern-day Ireland seems to have forced a continued reliance on the idea of the rural nation. (Frawley, 2005, p. 137)

This is exactly what Marcus and Frankie are depending on, this stability of place. And it is exactly what both McCormack and Baume aim to challenge through their character's

journeys. These portraits of the landscape then offer an opportunity to critique the trauma of both the tiger and its subsequent demise, while also addressing the climate crisis. They offer ways to critique the lack of concern about the pastoral futures in the face of environmental disaster, by reevaluating the "green" realities of Ireland:

> Its fields are not only green but brown with emissions, its fishing stocks dwindling, its biodiversity diminishing, and its dependence on fossil fuels unabated. How can we move beyond myths of Ireland as an 'emerald isle' to discussion of its slurry-filled rivers and roofless factory farms, its strip-mined peatlands and turf-burning reactors, its crumbling ghost estates and decaying water infrastructure, its flood zones and eroding cliffs? (Deckard, 2019, p. 3-4)

Sharae Deckard argues that new ways of reading are needed "in order to challenge dominant myths of "green" Ireland, and to reveal alternative narratives of Ireland's environmental history and place in the capitalist world-ecology" (Deckard, 2019, p. 4). By reading these novels through a dual lens of climate and economic collapse it highlights how these systems are connected and intertwined. As Darragh, Marcus' son, declares in *Solar Bones*: "there's nothing as tiresome as the apocalypse but take it from me, there's something worrying going on here" (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 125).

Frawley explains that "in literature [...] nature and landscape become signifiers, lenses through which it is possible to examine cultural and historical developments" (Frawley, 2005, p. 1). In their retreat to the landscape, Marcus and Frankie follow a tradition of returning to nostalgia, depending on the image of the pastoral idyll so intrinsic to Irish cultural memory. It is what Frawley would call a "defensive manoeuvre", offering McCormack and Baume the space to express the extent of the cultural upheaval of the era (Frawley, 2005, p. 157). It is this navigation through the expectations of nostalgia, and the reality of the present that allows McCormack and Baume's protagonists to come to terms with their trauma:

> In allowing the past, by way of memory and longing, to filter into the present, nostalgia serves to bridge the two effectively; allowing an individual, or even an entire generation, to adapt to change. (Frawley, 2005, p. 270)

The return to the pastoral has always been, as Frawley and others attest, as a result of nostalgia for a simpler life and traditional virtues (2005, p. 4). Marcus and Frankie are both looking for stability, and simplicity. They are depending on the land to do this but must first see and accept the magnitude and reach of the neo-liberal excesses of the Tiger on the pastoral and avoid the idealisation of the rural. The environmental impact

creates a fissure in the pastoral and requires a new way of seeing and understanding. Acknowledging this effect will help both Frankie and Marcus to come to terms with their own trauma.

4 Dark pastoral

The pastoral can often provide "an alternative space in contrast to the urban technological practices of modern and postmodern fossil-fuelled capitalism" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 49). During the heyday of the Celtic Tiger the urban encroached on the rural, as ribbon development spread out into the landscape. The pastoral can no longer "conceal power behind nostalgic views of an imagined utopian past" as the landscape is forever changed (Sullivan, 2016, p. 49). Using a "dark pastoral frame" highlights how "we can no longer think of ecological and economic cycles independently: the water; carbon; nitrogen; weather; and economic cycles of production, exchange, and waste are interconnected" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 49). Frankie and Marcus cannot retreat to the rural in the hope of escaping the chaos, as the landscape has been reshaped the landscape into a "new nature". The stability of the natural environment is no longer stable, and as Sullivan posits, 'we need a means to imagine and understand this vast scale of impact and to represent it so that we can respond to it.' (Sullivan, 2016, p. 47). The dark pastoral is ideal here to aid understanding of the shadow that the neo-liberal policies of the Tiger cast over the rural landscape through unsustainable and unsympathetic development. It offers "a bridging of incompatible contrasts that must actually be thought together, at least in the capitalist Anthropocene" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 48).

> The dark pastoral can describe texts […] that […] point towards a sense of impending change - both threatening and promising - and that thus try to escape into the green fields, or texts that directly grapple with environmental pollution and the impacts of capitalism. (Sullivan, 2016, p. 48)

The rural Irish landscape has not remained unscathed by the Celtic Tiger, and collapse. Marcus and Frankie come to realise it is not "the static place of simplicity" they had hoped for in their search for stability. Their documentation of the countryside, a key tenet of the pastoral, in this case serves to highlight "absent machinations of urban power [and] politics" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 49). The Anthropocene is "coemergent" with consumerism (Morton, 2016, p. 120), and as a result the interconnection between the environment and the economic boom and bust must be realised by the protagonists. This documentation acknowledges the economic, political, social, and environmental failures of the Celtic Tiger.

There is a dark pastoral turn as Morton asserts in *Dark Ecology*, "Place now has nothing to do with good old reliable constancy" (Morton, 2016, p. 10). This instability that Frankie and Marcus encounter in their pastoral turn leads to what Morton would call a "dark-depressing" "ecological awareness" that becomes "dark-uncanny" as their idealised memories merge with the material reality of the rural in the post-Celtic Tiger world (Morton, 2016, p. 5).

5 *Solar Bones*

As Treasa de Loughry posits, *Solar Bones* is a novel that discusses "how bodies and environments are reshaped by the political, by forms of maldevelopment" (Loughry; McCormack, 2019). From the very start of *Solar Bones* the Celtic Tiger and subsequent collapse are at the very forefront of Marcus Conways' stream of consciousness. In the moments directly after his death, two things come to mind, the landscape of rural Ireland and the banking bailout of September 2008. The two remain intertwined and Marcus sees the graphs of collapse as connected with the lines of the land of rural Ireland:

> how outsized the nation's financial folly was in the years leading up to the collapse, debt piling up till it ran to tens of billions, incredible figures for a small island economy, awe-inspiring magnitudes which shifted forever the horizons of what we thought ourselves liable for and which now, stacked on top of each other like this – all those zeroes, glossy and hard, so given to viral increase – appear like the indices and magnitudes of a new cosmology, the forces and velocities of some barren, inverse world. (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 4)

Returning to his home, in between this life and the next, he wanders through the country town where he has lived all his life. He cannot avoid seeing the connection between the topography of the landscape and the "figures and projections" as he tries to "map out the real contours of the calamity" (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 14). The rise and fall of the economy is represented in the hills and valleys of rural Mayo, as the "failure runs deep into the contours of the country" (Flynn, 2018, p. 39). Marcus describes the new Ireland represented in graphs and figures as "some barren, inverse world" which he sees as "a negative realm that over time, will suck the life out of us" (McCormack, 2016, p. 4). The collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent bank bailout was what Peadar Kirby describes as a "rude awakening" for the people of Ireland (2010, p. 1). Kirby argues that the collapse saw "Ireland's economy contract by around 14 per cent between 2008 and 2010" (Kirby, 2010, p. 1). The impact of this economic collapse is still felt today.

Malcolm Sen has suggested that the novel "acts as a witness to the webwork of ecology where the failed promises of neoliberal capital and the welfare state, evident in Ireland at the turn of the century" calling for a self-reflection as Marcus asks how we "were so blind to the world teetering on the edge" (Sen, 2019, p. 28). It is not until Marcus is dead does he make this reflection and realisation, unlike his father who refuses in his old age "was incapable of seeing who or what was good for him" (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 153). Both of Marcus' children are very engaged with the anthropocenic reality, with Agnes using her creative practice to protest, and Darragh arguing over Skype that the water crisis is more than just "incompetence" and "this is different, this is a disturbance of a different order entirely" (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 125). Darragh has already connected the ecological and economic to the corruption and mismanagement of the Celtic Tiger, something his father struggles with until death.

It is only through Marcus' own mediation on the landscape post-death that he can see the connection between the ecological and economic. However, as Heather Sullivan points out "we can no longer think of ecological and economic cycles independently: the water; carbon; nitrogen; weather; and economic cycles of production, exchange, and waste are interconnected" (Sullivan, 2016a, p. 49). When Marcus looks over his life, and tries to find solace in "the articles of faith which verify [him] and upon which I have built a life in this parish with all its work and rituals for the best part of five decades" he is left wanting (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 6). As an Engineer for the County Council decisions he made, projects he managed, the politicians he worked with were all complicit in causes of the crash; and yet he still cannot understand:

> I sometimes allow myself the belief that I have given my life to something which has been on the side of human betterment, an idea which takes hold of me with such insistence that the part of me which needs to have faith in things starts seeing it as a religious vocation with its own rituals and articles of faith not to mention a reckoning in some vaulted and girdered hereafter where engineer's souls are weighed and evaluated after a lifetime's wear and tear in the friction of this world, standing before some tribunal where you point to your works and say these are the things I have signed my name to… (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 174)

The country that he helped to build is now a landscape filled with reminders of the financial folly of the Celtic Tiger years. Marcus' job as a civil engineer is the ideal position from which to critique the policies of the economic bubble. For Asier Altuna García de Salazar Marcus is seeking "coherence and organisation as part of his professional praxis, which contrasts with tensions and representations of collapse, corrupt practices and

environmental disregard during the Celtic Tiger" (Altuna-García de Salazar, 2021, p. 93). The inflated growth followed by the huge collapse is of a magnitude that Marcus cannot comprehend as he felt he was on the "side of human betterment". The crash has caused him to question everything he knows, because the life he knew, the country he has lived in, the relationships he made are no longer built on solid foundations; the crash has damaged all he has taken for granted. As Orlaith Darling has argued he must contemplate "his own role in the ensuing national crisis" (Darling, 2021, p. 336). And he does so by revisiting the locality before his final passing and reconsidering how it has been shaped by both development policies and environmental crisis. Only then can he return home and accept his own death.

6 *A Line Made By Walking*

In an article in the *New Statesman* about her Goldsmith nominated novel, Sara Baume told Anna Leszkiewicz that "place is everything" and

> I'm devotedly interested in the idea of rural Ireland – with something John McGahern once said, that "the quality of feeling that's brought to the landscape is actually more important than the landscape itself…" (Leszkiewicz, 2017)

In *A Line Made By Walking*, Frankie is someone drawn back to the rural because of that "feeling". In the aftermath of her grandmother's death, Frankie leaves the city, and moves back to the country in the hope of finding stability to help her through the grief and her own mental health issues. Yet when she comes back, it refuses to be unchanged and fixed. The landscape must and will change. "Whenever I visit, there is always some new structure flattening what used to be a patch of pleasant green" (Baume, 2017, p. 12). Frankie's observations are reminiscent of Anthony Haughey's survey of Post-Celtic Tiger ghost estates. Haughey travelled around Ireland photographing the remains of these unfinished housing developments on the landscape and the "effects of development on the natural environment" and that the environmental cost is "incalculable" (Haughey, 2017, p. 60). Haughey explains

> These abandoned building sites could be described as places of collective mourning, where memory is inextricably bound with these violated landscapes. They are a constant and painful reminder of economic failure, indebtedness, and the environmental cost of rezoning and building in inappropriate areas, such as flood plains and remote rural regions with little or no access to transport, schools, and services. (Haughey, 2017, p. 61)

For Frankie her grandmother's house is a place of collective memory, where she can mourn her loss, both that of her grandmother, and also her own hopes for her life. She uses the house, in the rural location, to come to terms with her own sense of personal failure, but as the house is no longer inhabited, it lacks that link anymore. It is only a house of memories, of the ghost of her grandmother. One more ghost house, to join the thousands that have scared the landscape due to the unregulated overdevelopment of the Celtic Tiger.

Frankie's search for home, highlighted through a repeated refrain "I want to go home" seems only to highlight how she can no longer find that sense of place that would allow her some stability. Malcolm Sen describes her "exilic imagination" as something that is not just associated with an "emotional longing" but also "by an incremental realization of the risk (not necessarily the intellectual complexity) that underwrites concepts of home, homeliness, and homesickness" (Sen, 2019, p. 16). The economic crash, and the impending environmental crisis threaten those concepts of home, and the refuge that the rural has provided to Frankie previously.

The impact of man on the environment is central to the text, and to much of Baume's work as Ondrej Pilny has pointed out (Pilný, 2024), specifically here through her incorporation of specific works of art. The title of the book refers to Richard Long's art piece, where a continuous line was forged on the grass by Long repeatedly walking over a field of grass to create the line, something impermanent, but showing the impact of man on the landscape. Anya Gallaccio's *preserve "beauty"* also features, and as Sen argues this installation showcases how "the hybrid flowers are not symbolic of "Nature" but of humanity's production and unchecked consumption of nature" (Sen, 2019, p. 18). Frankie describes how "so many people covet their cut stems" that "the Earth can't keep up" (Baume, 2017, p. 64). The consumption of capitalism is anthropocenic, as consumer demand for the perfect material object from nature is causing the demise of the environmental origin of that object. The dark ecology of the anthropocene, accentuated by the crash highlights how despite escaping Dublin, which Aran Ward Sell argues "has no appeal for Frankie as it represents the money-world which she associates intimately with her depression" there is no escape from the climate reality (Ward Sell, 2023, p. 21). Her nostalgia for the pastoral is interrupted by the realisation that it too has been impacted by the neo-liberal excess of the Celtic Tiger. She turns to art, and art practice to try and make sense of this new reality while grieving for multiple losses.

This "underlying sense that the world is dying" is also highlighted through Frankie's obsession in *A Line Made By Walking* with the dead animals that she photographs" (Pilný,

2024, p. 197). Frankie's fascination with roadkill and dead animals features throughout the book through photographs where she documents "the immense poignancy of how, in the course of ordinary life, we only get to look closely at the sublime once it has dropped to the ditch, once the maggots have already arrived at work" (Baume, 2017). Death has "blend[ed] into the tinctures and textures of the countryside" (Baume, 2017). Camille Pinettes points out that many of the dead animals that feature in her pictures "were directly caused by humans" and as these images appear throughout the novel "narrator and reader alike are haunted by the presence of these images, which act as evidence of the impact human activity has had on the environment" (Pinettes, 2022, p. 24).

Frankie is surrounded by death, that of her grandmother, and that of the natural world. Having failed to idealise her career goals, impossible within the economic conditions of the Celtic Tiger and subsequent collapse, her return to the rural brings her an ecological awareness that she tries to vocalise through the visual medium of photography. Within the dark pastoral moment, Timothy Morton posits that "ecological awareness is dark, insofar as its essence is unspeakable. It is dark, insofar as illumination leads to a greater sense of entrapment. It is dark, because it compels us to recognize the melancholic wounds that make us up" (Morton, 2016, p. 110). Frankie becomes aware of this darkness, and her understanding of the ecological crisis makes her feel trapped, while also addressing her own mental unease.

7 The novels and the pastoral

In both these novels, the protagonists are drawn to a landscape that they know, in order to deal with a trauma that occurs in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger collapse. They turn to the pastoral looking for a nostalgic stability that it ultimately fails to provide. The landscape has been scarred and marked by the excessive and unsympathetic development of the Celtic Tiger, and the growing climate crisis. They are both in what Frawley would call a "reverie-like state of remembrance for experiences which, as past, are unrecoverable" (Frawley, 2005, p. 270).

Existing in that liminal space between life and death Marcus embarks on a journey of nostalgia and memory on the day of the dead. The sound of the church bell helps to situate him after his heart attack, as he tries to ground himself in the familiarity of his locality where "all its doors and shop-fronts are familiar" and "every pole and kerbstone along its length recognisable to me" (Mike McCormack, 2016, p. 11). Frankie does exactly

the same in *A Line Made By Walking*, detailing the things she knows and recognises, allowing locations to trigger memory and nostalgia.

Both texts are haunted by death, Marcus's own, and Frankie's grandmother, but the mourning here extends beyond the corporeal loss, to the environmental collapse, and the broken promises of the Celtic Tiger. There is hope that Marcus' children Agnes and Darragh are aware and outspoken about these dark ecological changes. They are willing to question and challenge the status quo. Frankie in *A Line Made by Walking* must leave her grandmother's home in order to come to terms with the loss. Her time of meditation in the rural gave her the space to contemplate the new ecological reality and see the connection between all her losses. The pastoral did not provide stability and it is interesting that it is on the unsteady surface of Irish sea that she comes to terms with her grief. Her final words to her mother "Please stop all the worrying and just enjoy the slow stars, the leaf noises" (Baume, 2017, p. 315) sound an eerie warning.

References

ALTUNA-GARCÍA DE SALAZAR, A. Spectral Streams of Post-Consciousness in Mike McCormack's Solar Bones (2016). **ES Review**, n. 42, p. 81–103, 2021.

BAUME, S. **A line made by walking**. Cornerstone Digital, 2017.

BOLAND, S. Mike McCormack: British fiction is dominated by an intellectual conservatism. *In*: **New Statesman**, 7 Nov. 2016. Available on: https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2016/11/mike-mccormack-british-fiction-dominated-intellectual-conservatism. Accessed on: 24 Oct. 2025.

BRACKEN, C.; HARNEY-MAHAJAN, T. A Continuum of Irish Women's Writing: Reflections on the Post-Celtic Tiger Era. **Literature, interpretation, theory**, v. 28, n. 1, p. 1–12, 2017.

DARLING, O. "[The] immediate heft of bodily and civic catastrophe": the body (politic) in crisis in Mike McCormack's Solar Bones. **Irish Studies Review**, v. 29, n. 3, p. 334–347, 2021.

DECKARD, S. Introduction: Reading Ireland's Food, Energy, and Climate. **Irish University Review**, v. 49, n. 1, p. 1–12, 2019.

FLYNN, D. Holding on to 'Rites, Rhythms and Rituals': Mike McCormack's Homage to Small Town Irish Life and Death. *In*: FLYNN, Deirdre; O'BRIEN, Eugene (org.). **Representations of Loss in Irish Literature**. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. p. 37–52. Available on: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78550-9_3.

FRAWLEY, O. **Irish pastoral: nostalgia and twentieth-century Irish literature**. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005.

HAND, D. **A history of the Irish novel**. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

HAUGHEY, A. A Landscape of Crisis: Photographing Post–Celtic Tiger Ghost Estates. **Canadian Journal of Irish Studies**, v. 40, p. 53–71, 2017.

KIRBY, P. **Celtic tiger in collapse: Explaining the weaknesses of the Irish model**. 2nd rev. ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

KIRBY, P.; GIBBONS, L.; CRONIN, M. **Reinventing Ireland: culture, society and the global economy**. London: Pluto, 2002. Available on: https://go.exlibris.link/1D3QJsn6.

LESZKIEWICZ, A. Sara Baume: "The only right way of writing is to follow your interests with conviction". *In*: **New Statesman**, 10 Nov. 2017. Available on: https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/goldsmiths-prize/2017/11/sara-baume-only-right-way-writing-follow-your-interests-conviction. Accessed on: 31 Oct. 2025.

LOUGHRY, T. D.; MCCORMACK, M. '…a tiny part of that greater circum-terrestrial grid': A Conversation with Mike McCormack. **Irish University Review**, v. 49, n. 1, p. 105–116, 2019.

MIKE MCCORMACK. **Solar Bones**. Dublin: Tramp Press, 2016.

MORTON, T. **Dark ecology: for a logic of future coexistence**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Available on: https://go.exlibris.link/GRHBYvNL.

PILNÝ, O. Art and sustenance in the work of Sara Baume. **Irish Studies Review**, v. 32, n. 2, p. 193–205, 2024.

PINETTES, C. Inextricably Entangled: The Porosity of Human and Non-Human Bodies in Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking*. **Études Irlandaises**, n. 47–2, p. 23–39, 2022.

SEN, M. Risk and Refuge: Contemplating Precarity in Irish Fiction. **Irish University Review**, v. 49, n. 1, p. 13–31, 2019.

SLAVIN, M. Ghost Stories, Ghost Estates: Melancholia in Irish Recession Literature. **C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings**, Cambridge, v. 5, n. 1, 2017. Available on: http://libraryproxy.mic.ul.ie/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ghost-stories-estates-melancholia-irish-recession/docview/2318674516/se-2?accountid=55804.

SMYTH, G. Irish National Identity after the Celtic Tiger. **Estudios Irlandeses**, v. 7, n. 7, p. 132–137, 2012.

SULLIVAN, H. I. The dark pastoral: Goethe and Atwood. **Green Letters**, v. 20, n. 1, p. 47–59, 2016.

WARD SELL, A. Hardly working: eliding remunerative labour in recent Irish women's fiction. **Irish Studies Review**, v. 31, n. 1, p. 16–33, 2023.

WARD SELL, A. Post-catastrophic Irelands in contemporary fiction. **Irish Studies Review**, v. 32, n. 1, p. 136–155, 2024.

Anxious intimacy: Gothic afterlives and online dating under Covid in Eva Kenny's "Christmas Story"[1]

Paige Reynolds

1 Introduction

This is a cultural moment when we are subject to the steady beat of alerts and pings from smartphones and laptops drawing our attention to the ever-shifting headlines and posts found online. As is commonly acknowledged, such interruptions erode our capacity for sustained attention. But the seductive beat of the digital "always new" also invites us to forget the past, to get distracted from history and its larger patterns. The ubiquity of digital devices, and their strategies that so effectively lock our attention on the immediate, might help to explain why so many scholars in recent years have focused on literary "afterlives", to critical approaches that consider how the literary movements and texts of the past surface in contemporary writing.

These studies that examine the traction of historical literary movements on contemporary writing ask readers to sit with the forms, themes, and contexts of the past. In them, critics elucidate the features of certain origin movements, underscoring their obduracy in recent works across genres and considering why seemingly "old fashioned" formal tactics and themes continue to appear in writing today. Among those who study Irish literature, the insistence on "afterlives" is particularly salient because it reflects a larger cultural investment in commemorating and celebrating the past, in keeping history alive and visible, as seen in large-scale public projects such as

[1] This paper was initially presented in April 2023 for an NEH Symposium at University of Notre Dame on the work of Katie Mishler entitled "Ruins and Cultural Memory in Literary Representations of Ireland, 1916-1945".

Ireland's "Decade of Centenaries", which drew attention to the events between 1912-1923 that shaped the modern Irish state.

I am one of many who has written on modernist afterlives in contemporary literature, arguing for modernism as a "stubborn mode" that travels into the present to remind us of the stubborn problems that plague our culture (Reynolds, 2023). But modernism is not the only literary tradition that critics have tracked into the present day. In recent accounts, scholars also have noted the continued and continuing invocation of the Gothic in Irish contemporary writing. Like modernism, an international movement deeply informed by the innovations of Irish writers such as Joyce and Beckett, the Gothic is a literary movement from the past whose foundations were laid by Irish writers. The English writer Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) generally is considered the genre's origin text, but Irish writers including Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Maturin, Regina Maria Roche, and Bram Stoker are counted among the movement's early and influential authors.

Studies of the Gothic in Irish literature persuasively have demonstrated that the supernatural aspects of this aesthetic have provided a valuable means to represent the contours of historical conditions across centuries from the Act of Union to the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. The wealth of Irish folklore populated by supernatural figures and events, the island's traumatic colonial history, the boggy landscape dotted with deserted castles: even a superficial gloss of traits such as this exposes the viability of the Gothic representation of Irish experience. More generally, certain of its generic tropes – high emotion, predation, secrets, irrationality – have proven an apt means to represent sexual desire, sexual health, and sexual acts. As George Haggerty observes, "Transgressive social-sexual relations are the most basic common denominator of Gothic" (Haggerty, 2006, p. 33). Here, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) provides a salient example through its encoded representation of queer desire. More recently, the Gothic tropes of terror, incarceration, and victimhood have, as Sylvie Mikowski (2017) demonstrates, provided contemporary Irish and Northern Irish writers a means to capture the widescale terror and anxiety of the sexual abuse scandals.

Eva Kenny's "Christmas Story" (2022), set in Dublin during the Covid-19 pandemic, employs highly recognizable and recurrent themes and forms drawn from the Gothic to represent the intensity and anxiety of romantic intimacy in the digital present. As Jarleth Killeen and Christina Morin (2023) note,[2] the Gothic itself is undead, surfacing and

[2] See also FOGARTY, Anne. Uncanny Families: Neo-Gothic Motifs and the Theme of Social Change in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction, **Irish University Review,** vol 1, n. 1, p. 59-81, Spring/Summer 2000).

resurfacing in Irish culture as a creative response to rapid cultural shifts. In its depiction of online dating under quarantine, Kenny's story not only dramatically reflects its unique historical moment but also bears the traces of the long Irish Gothic tradition through its implicit correspondences with works such as Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Watcher" (1847) and Elizabeth Bowen's "The Demon Lover" (1945), as well as through its explicit engagement with James Joyce's "The Dead" (1914). Read together, these short stories, which span across centuries, demonstrate how the genre's durable traits productively refract concerns about human connection in their moment and beyond.

As an aesthetic strategy that seeks to arouse as well as assuage personal and social anxieties, the Gothic is particularly suitable for representing twenty-first century romance. In "Christmas Story", Gothic conventions underscore the threats posed by contemporary circumstances, among them a global health crisis and the farming out of emotional life to machines. Yet even amid these scarifying conditions, the story productively undermines the intensity and terror that might be attached to casual sexuality though its knowing irony and lack of tragic outcome: the female protagonist Eva experiences irritation and upset after failed romance rather than suffering a gruesome death or finding herself eternally consigned to the undead. In its depiction of dating under quarantine, "Christmas Story" sanctions the quest for meaningful connection and refuses sexual shaming, even as it employs the Gothic to consider the age-old individual distress of an unsatisfying intimate encounter.

2 Intimacy and the Irish Gothic

As a wealth of critical work confirms, Gothic fiction is characterized by an environment of fear, the threat of supernatural events like hauntings, the intrusion of the past upon the present – and it often serves as a metaphorical expression of psychological or social conflicts.[3] It also powerfully can communicate the pleasures and perils of intimacy. In the Irish Gothic tradition, novels as various as Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Dorothy Macardle's *The Uninvited* (1942) provide an imaginative framework capturing the intense and irrational aspects

[3] For studies of the Irish Gothic that also valuably introduce the history and conventions of the Gothic more generally, see KILLEEN, Jarleth. **The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theory**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014; MORIN, Christina. **The Gothic Novel in Ireland, c. 1760-1829**. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018; MORIN, Christina; SCHIEBLE, Ellen (eds.). Irish Gothic Studies Today. **Irish University Review** v. 53 n. 1 (May 2023).

of romantic love and erotic attraction. In such novels, some – but importantly, not all – of the encounters and relationships between and among lovers or potential lovers are characterized as transgressive, threatening, and perhaps even fatal.

Redolent with intense emotion, supernatural elements, and spooky urban settings, two precedents in the tradition of the Irish Gothic demonstrate how the mode adeptly depicts the murky and intense nature of romantic intimacy. Set in London and Dublin, Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Watcher" (1847) depicts its protagonist Captain Barton being haunted to his death by an "odd-looking person", a supernatural figure who "looked like a foreigner" (Le Fanu, 2022, p. 15). Soon after he becomes engaged to Miss Montague, Captain Barton is stalked and terrorized by a malformed specter. At the story's conclusion, the narrator suggests that this "DEMON" (p. 27, p. 43) was seeking retribution for a past romantic transgression. As a younger man, Captain Barton had taken up with "the daughter of one of his ship's crew under his command" (p. 50). Following this "guilty attachment", the girl's father "visited the frailty of his unhappy child with extreme harshness, and even brutality, and it was said that she had died heart-broken" (p. 50). To avenge her death, Barton retaliated by punishing the father with "a systematic exercise of those terrible and arbitrary severities which the regulations of the navy placed at the command of those who are responsible for its discipline" (p. 51) and the father later retaliated in turn by driving Barton out of his mind.

A century later, Bowen's "The Demon Lover" (1945) unfurls in London during the Blitz. It captures post-war anxieties through its narrative of a woman whose lover dies in battle during the first World War but returns years later, after his death and in a demonic form, to reclaim her. In "The Demon Lover", romantic intimacy again provokes spectral haunting. In her middle age and after the death of her husband, Mrs. Drover returns to her shut-up London home, to pack up and escape the Blitz, where she discovers a letter signed "K" warning her that "today is our anniversary" and therefore, "You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged". The story then provides a flashback focused on romance, but one redolent with mystery. As a younger unmarried woman, Mrs. Drover is never fully certain of her lover who is bound for war but courts her nonetheless. As the narrator informs readers, "The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face" (Bowen, 1989, p. 663). Unmarried in her thirties, she finally weds a different man though she felt throughout the marriage that "her movements were circumscribed" (p. 664). The story ends with Mrs. Drover in a taxi – one whose "knowing movement" (p. 666) to her destination mildly surprises her. It is revealed that the taxi is driven by the demon lover, who meets her at their appointed time of 7pm, and

they drive "into the hinterlands of deserted streets" (p. 666) with her trapped, screaming as her gloved hands beat against the car's window.

Both stories tick off a series of Gothic tropes in their depictions of romance. They include letters that announce nefarious ghostly intentions: The Watcher writes threatening missives to Barton after he becomes engaged; K writes to Mrs. Drover on their anniversary. Both characters burdened by their romantic relationships confuse externalized and psychic distress: Barton is diagnosed and quarantined for his various symptoms, while the birth of Mrs. Drover's third child is "attended by a quite serious illness" (p. 663) that produces an ongoing, intermittent muscular flicker on the left of her mouth. Both works have an atmospheric urban setting in which decaying buildings are key and in which the characters, human and demonic, move around the city on foot or by car. Both stage vulnerable women in peril and hinge on romantic betrayal, on figures who return in some spectral form to avenge the one who chose a different lover. They also center ghostly surveillance and demonstrate its dramatic emotional costs, which suggests another reason these Gothic tales are fascinating precursors for fictional depictions of the digital present.

Unlike "The Watcher" and "The Demon Lover", where the emotional injuries of the past powerfully intrude into the present day, "Christmas Story" lacks vengeful demons who seek retribution for past injuries. Nonetheless, highly recognizable Gothic themes and traits surface in Kenny's story to communicate that, even with the passage of time, romantic intimacy remains threatening and even terrifying. Written in the first person, the narrative follows the female protagonist named Eva, who is haunted by a past relationship but seeks a new romantic connection. On Christmas Eve 2020, Eva meets in person, for the first and only time, a man with whom she has matched on Tinder. For months before this encounter, while under quarantine, the couple sext on WhatsApp, developing a pattern of communication, which Eva describes as "still mechanical, but something affectionate" (Kenny, 2022).[4] Their intense online flirtation (her screen time reports their contact runs over six hours a day) culminates in their meeting on Christmas Eve outside of Grogan's pub for a walk around the city. They end the evening by having sex and when she awakens, he has vanished, leaving her "two fifties" and no contact information. Eva exits the rental and texts him, but observes her message has "No two tick, no blue tick" and she concludes, "Happy Christmas, I never saw you again". She has been ghosted, the colloquial term for ending all communication and contact

[4] Because this story is unpaginated online, there are no page numbers included for reference.

with another person without any apparent warning or justification and ignoring any subsequent attempts to communicate.

The characters in these Gothic stories pulled from across centuries have been shaped by contemporary crises: Captain Barton served in the British Navy during the American Revolutionary War, Mrs. Drover lost her lover to the first World War and seeks to escape London during the second, Eva navigates the threats of the Covid-19 pandemic. Set amid global catastrophes and widespread human suffering, each narrative draws acute attention to particular individuals and their feelings, showing the tension between intimate personal matters and the unfolding social crises that malform them. But while Le Fanu and Bowen offer readers the reverse of romance fiction's "happily ever after" when their lovers succumb to terrifying and tragic ends, Kenny suggests that failed romance is frustrating but not fatal.

3 Quarantine and connection

Focused on a potential relationship, "Christmas Story" captures the realities of daily life under Covid-19, employing Gothic traits to depict the anxiety and isolation stoked by the crisis. There is a long history of Gothic texts that tangle with the impact of pandemics. As Julia M. Wright notes, these include Edgar Allan Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" (1842), as well novels with passing mentions of fever or plagues including Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), the latter of which describes its vampire as a "plague" (Wright, 2025). In her account of the "gothic origins of global health", Sari Altschuler contends the malleability of the Gothic form can aptly reflect disease as it morphs, as during the cholera epidemics of the early nineteenth century, and allows authors to depict the infiltration of unseen and frightening elements into familiar spaces (Altschuler, 2017). More recently, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Gil Cuadros's *City of God* (1994) have used the Gothic to depict the trauma of the AIDS crisis, employing the genre's tropes to illustrate the bodily ravages, social stigmas, and cultural anxieties that can accompany the disease (Westengard, 2015).

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Gothic has provided an imaginative framework to capture the paranoia and isolation of the global lockdown, as well as

the confusion and fear stoked by the misinformation surrounding the epidemic.[5] In particular, "Christmas Story" notes the ways in which the pandemic warped human intimacy. As Eva acknowledges: "In lockdown, conversations got really deep really fast. All the middle-ground, half-acquaintance, half-drunk, breezy floating pub chat had disappeared. Neighbours became suddenly intimate; stuck at home, old people cleaned out their drawers again and found photos from the past". She is acutely aware that surprisingly intense connections with people in the present, as well as with ghosts of the past, have been triggered by the unexpected conditions of this global health crisis. Nonetheless, she self-consciously seeks to impose guardrails on her emotional vulnerability. As she notes when she meets her date in person, "It was the season for talking about exes; at the same time this was a first date and I should be keeping it light".

Even as Kenny's characters seek romance online and in person, the free-floating apprehension of the pandemic undermines and distorts familiar understandings of human connection. Voices emanate not from bodies but from machines; celebratory gatherings become death traps; intimate touch must be self-administered. As Eva explains, each day begins in isolation with a disembodied voice from her radio reciting the current Covid death count, followed by cautions about house parties. And each day, she alone "rubs moisturizer into my cool, full breasts" and notices the strong contours beneath her smooth skin; she dons silky, satiny, and lacy undergarments and observes her "long dark hair curled and coiled over my shoulders and down my back". These sensual pleasures for Eva alone, as are the pleasing sensations of romantic interludes. In her account of "consoling consoles", Claire Lynch notes, "the ubiquity of handheld or portable computers has brought with it an increased physical connection with 'mundane' technologies, a sensual as well as intellectual bond" (Lynch, 2023, p. 254). In Lynch's reading, these machines can connect people and provide comfort, but Kenny doubles down on the dislocation and unease borne of the imbrication of quarantine and online dating. Thinking of her online relationship, Eva remembers the "deafening" noise as she drags her laptop across her bedsheets, changing camera angles in response to her interlocutor's text directives. She recalls texting him pictures of her shrimp taco dinner or his asking for pictures of her dressed to go out. The familiar stages of dating and their various sensual pleasures are disembodied or secluded, with the machine a poor substitute for a lover in the flesh.

[5] See Wright and ZLOSNIK, Sue. Pandemic Paranoia: Gothic Narratives of Lockdown. *In:* WHATLEY *et al* (eds.). **The Gothic in Times of Crisis.** Manchester: Manchester UP, 2025. and SMITH, Cassi. The Psychology of Contagion: Representations of Historic Pandemics in Gothic Literature. **Mountaineer Undergraduate Research Review**, v. 8, 2023, p. 27-34

4 Digital intimacies

The centuries-old Gothic tradition further might seem a surprising invocation given that "Christmas Story" delineates in detail the contours of the relatively new practice of online dating. Since the launch of match.com in 1995, the use of dating apps has become widespread, with the platform Tinder (described by Reddit users as "the most popular app in Ireland, best for volume and casual dating") reportedly clocking over a billion swipes globally each day (Robbins, 2022). As promised, these apps foster interpersonal connection: they gather a large pool of individuals seeking to date, including those who might be geographically distant, and help to identify compatible partners interested in further communication, online or in person. Yet anxieties swirl around these platforms stoking fears, as delineated by Lisa Portolan, that "dating apps have colonised love, created a virtual emotional marketplace, fostered a hook-up culture and devalued traditional institutions such as marriage, monogamy and long-term partnerships" (Portolan, 2022, p. 3).

Such commentary often emphasizes the personal emotional threats of online dating. As merely one example, an article in the Irish Times, published in this newspaper one month before Kenny's story appeared, employed Gothic tropes to describe the challenges of dating in the age of Covid. The article's sub-heading asserted, "Some think the traditional hookup is dead. Others say romance has never moved faster" – with the "dead" hookup and swiftly moving "romance" sounding much like a character summary of Stoker's Dracula. The article's histrionic language seeks to convey the alarming effects of the pandemic on modern courtship: "The dating scene was completely decimated as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. The threat of contracting and spreading a potentially lethal virus has impacted dating behaviours across the globe, and fluctuating social distancing measures over the last nine months in Ireland have plagued the romantic lives of single people" (Kaguako, 2020).

The intensity of the language in this article reflects a general understanding that the affective contours of dating had changed under Covid, an impression heightened by the increased use of dating apps. With the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the use of online digital platforms dramatically accelerated for those seeking romantic connections. Drawing from Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love", Lisa Portolan and Jodi McAlister have coined the term "jagged love" to describe the anxiety, stress, and intense emotions experienced by those who engaged in online dating during the pandemic. Amid global uncertainty, they argue, dating apps were alluring in part

because they provided users the security of predictable "romantic masterplots". In their research, they found that those on dating apps were eager to find a romantic partner; however, individuals on these platforms often withheld intimacy as a means of self-protection, a strategy that did not offset emotional hurt. Further, without opportunities for physical meetings, participants became "bored and exhausted with the dating app process and the behaviours that app architecture engenders, such as multiple matches and low-level investment" and thus would drift off the apps, only to return in pursuit of a romantic partner or partners (Portolan & McAlister, 2022, p. 369). This account of "jagged love", which describes how digital daters often embrace and reject these apps repeatedly and with intense emotion, chimes with the turbulent affective contours of Gothic narratives.

"Christmas Story" focuses on how dating rapidly shifted into the online space and the technology sector reshaped intimacy. It opens with the unnamed male protagonist replying to Eva with "a horny devil emoji" after she sends all of her many Tinder matches an emoji blowing a kiss. That night, he is the first to respond to her. Described in spectral terms, the male protagonist remains nameless throughout the story, his background mysterious due in part to the digital mediations necessitated by quarantine. When they meet in person, for example, she notes his "Western accent", and observes, "I hadn't heard his voice the whole time we'd been texting".

The disembodied nature of digital dating under quarantine, as represented here, normalizes such "ghostly" communication. Kenny has observed that "one of the many ghosts in this story is the 'before' of dating, before the pandemic, and the 'before' of life pre-big tech, pre-AI, pre-being extremely online" (Kenny, 2024). The history of insidious communication in Gothic fiction, one triggered by her story's overt Gothic references, reminds readers of the vexed nature of such exchanges. In the stories previously mentioned by Le Fanu and Bowen, for instance, the letters – and particularly letters between lovers – are ominous. When Le Fanu's Captain Baron begins to court Miss Montague, "The Watcher" leaves him a letter that concludes, "let him take warning, once for all, for he has good reason to dread" (Le Fanu, 2022, p. 11). In the Bowen story, Mrs. Drover and "The Demon Lover" communicate via letters of a "few lines" (Bowen, 1989, p. 662), signed only by "K" – the identity of Mrs. Drover's correspondent as mysterious as that of Eva's online paramour.

The romantic communication between Eva and her date is mediated by machines, which infects their dialogue even when they meet in person. Eva and her Tinder match spend

enormous amounts of time online, exchanging flirtatious videos and texts on WhatsApp, but upon meeting, their conversation sounds canned, their responses to each other read as flat and scripted. When he arrives, her date first asks, "Well Eva, what's the craic?" and "Do you, eh…do you come here often?" After months of online exchanges, their emotional intimacy evidently has not evolved, or it cannot translate into shared space. Upon arriving in Dublin, her date also reveals his consumerist mentality. When Eva asks if he has travelled strictly to meet her, he replies, "No, it was for shopping and prostitution as well". His joke suggests that intimacy is about the marketplace, the consumption of goods and experience, with Tinder providing a romantic Amazon Prime in which objects and people can be confused. Further, the couple jokingly regard themselves as not people but automatons. At one point, when they casually reference marriage and previous partners, and the conversation swerves near vulnerable personal revelations, Eva blames this on a "Bants fail", and he responds "Mal-function" in a "robot voice".

In the story, the male character becomes a foil for the transformations in dating wrought by digital life, a kind of "tech bro". And in fact, Kenny crafted the dialogue for this character using early iterations of generative AI, seeking to capture the prefabricated nature of masculinity under an economy built on finance and technology. To convey how Eva's date, this "internet stranger" in his thirties working in the technology, would understand intimacy, Kenny

> used a beta (2021) version of ChatGPT as my interlocutor and used it to produce some of the dialogue and the general perspective of my male protagonist. I asked it all about ghosting, why men ghost, what this has to do with online dating and lots of related problems with finding true intimacy. When the bot started repeating itself on this point – intimacy – I knew I had found its Achilles' heel. Real love and real intimacy are sort of the hiccup that AI can't process.

5 Ghostly relationships

"Christmas Story" seems to shake off its Gothic qualities when it turns to Eva's rhapsodic relationship with Dublin. As she recalls moving through the city during lockdown, she notes, "I cycled down the middle of the street, practicing taking my hands off the handlebars. All the places I used to go with you were closed now anyway. Little by little, vertebra by vertebra, I unfurled, opening the front of my body towards the sun. So much need, adrenaline coursing through me, skin prickling at the thought of human touch". Her relationship with "you", her partner before the pandemic, recedes and is replaced

by her affection for Dublin, whose "streets were so beautiful". Her most powerful and pleasurable connection is not with a lover past or present but with the city, which she walks throughout lockdown, "getting to know it again". She recalls, "Sometimes as I walked during lockdown, the constant, intense anxiety would break and something ecstatic would emerge. 'Marry me world!' I thought in those moments".

While mutually desired, Eva's Dublin meeting with her online match fails to elicit such uncomplicated joy. The hum of anxiety and looming peril that characterizes Gothic fiction, and particularly threatens its vulnerable female characters, haunts their first date. Eva worries it might be "dangerous to be meeting up" and flirtatiously asks, when they grab a taxi, if he plans to murder her. But her date is not exempt from anxiety and admits to being "a bit nervous" to meet her. Written by a woman and centered on female experience, "Christmas Story" might be categorized as female Gothic for its deployment of the subgenre's hallmarks, among them isolating environments, sexual terror, and predatory males. But the apprehensions generated by dating during the pandemic infect both the female and male characters, suggesting that the threats before them are not neatly bound by gender and sexuality.

As the story unfolds, the couple's stroll through Dublin is shaped by a fear of human intimacy, projected onto and through a series of ghostly figures and urban ruins. Like Daniel Defoe's descriptions in A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), in which denizens fled London in fear of contagion, the Dublin of "Christmas Story" has been abandoned. As Eva notes, "Grogan's had been closed for almost nine months now and the town was dead without it". The atmospheric city is understood as uncanny, its typical holiday bustle of tourism and commerce nowhere to be seen, "the city centre empty like the 1980s". As the couple walks the city, Eva observes the "dead white faces" of the unhoused, with a sixteen-year-old girl pursuing them, begging for two euro, and crying, "I'm scared. I'm scared". Covid is not the only terrifying physical and social problem: like economic insecurity or rampant addiction, it is merely another manifestation of the destructive forces that separate people from each other.

As they tour the city, the couple stops for a moment at Usher's Island, where Eva points out the home where the annual holiday celebration depicted in Joyce's short story "The Dead" is set. His lack of familiarity with this monument, and even with the story itself, provides one of many details signaling their different backgrounds as well as their lack of shared interests. Eva begins to explain to him the significance of the building, and in her hands "The Dead" becomes simultaneously a Gothic tale of isolation and spectrality as

well as a lesson in modernist interiority. Initially, she describes the story as being "about a man who is very 'in his head.' Then women do things to interrupt his fantasies and that annoys them, so he calls them old". While she is not wrong, she immediately recalibrates her reading, shifting her voice into "professional mode" and explaining the story as about "a brief encounter, only really knowing someone for second, understanding their lived reality. Even if you're married to him. Or her. Then it's gone". The overlap of the Gothic and modernism here underscores that the feeling of disconnection that marks their courtship under quarantine is merely the newest iteration of a familiar problem.

The concluding pages of "The Dead" famously feature the protagonist Gabriel Conroy learning about the death of a young man named Michael Furey, the first love of his wife Gretta. Gabriel's new awareness of his wife's personal history triggers feelings of envy and insecurity, and her secret shocks him into confronting his own mortality. As any pat summary will proclaim, the dead haunt the living in Joyce's story. In her reading, Eva underscores this message, as well as suggesting that love more generally is fragile and fleeting. In the subtext of her summary rests the knowledge that an insidious disease killed Michael Furey; while unmentioned by Eva, in the story Gabriel assumes that the young man died of "consumption", while Gretta insists, "I think he died for me" (Joyce, 1996, p. 220). Joyce's characters confuse contagious disease and romantic affection, suggesting not only life is precarious, but also that love kills. In her astute reading of "The Dead" as an Irish female Gothic text, Katie Mishler asserts that Gretta's sexuality allows her "to rewrite and reframe her own unique personal and erotic history outside of the confines of patriarchal relationships, thus creating disruptive feminist critiques of the dominant culture…female desire destabilizes the institution of marriage and patriarchal power, granting the supernatural entrance into the home and ultimately spawning the wayward spaces of the female gothic" (Mishler, 2020, p. 87). However, even as Eva's revisionist reading of "The Dead" demonstrates that the female Gothic does undermine patriarchal readings, in part by inviting attention to how the trauma of death heightens Gabriel's emotional sensitivity, her date refuses this reading and observes, "Doesn't sound like something a man would do, if you ask me".

6 Hooking up and houses

Another common feature of Gothic literature is its focus on the home and interior spaces as a symbol of danger and confinement, whether the medieval castle plagued with supernatural events triggered by a contested marriage in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

(1764) or the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), where Mr. Rochester locks away his first wife. The settings of ruined or neglected buildings, as in these examples, are rarely beneficial for female characters who are often entrapped in them. More generally, such buildings frequently serve as a physical and external reminder of the past – as seen when Eva roams Dublin, thinks of her former lover, and notes the Covid closures of "the places I used to go with you".

In the Gothic tradition, the domestic interior frequently represents a site of oppressive confinement or a collective space charged with dangerous threat. In Irish literary history, this charged symbolic pattern, as scholars have noted, is exacerbated by a long history of colonial and ecclesiastical abuse[6]. In "Christmas Story", when the couple leave the streets of Dublin behind to enter an interior domestic space, it is not a haunted castle or penal attic but a different type of ruin: he has rented an AirBnb for their assignation, a space that transforms the home into a speculative investment, a consumable product. Even in the new domestic concatenation of an Airbnb apartment, the past inheres. Like Gothic ruins, the rental building on the city's northside is historic, decaying, and a manifestation of cultural rot. Their unit in this large Georgian building smells terrible and features padded wallpaper, a "once magnificent" stucco ceiling, and a "white Ikea cube". He has rented "the worst Airbnb in Éire".

The horrors that unfold in this corrupted space are, however, not terrifying supernatural acts performed by ghosts, demons, or monsters. Instead, they are the recognizable markers of a bad match, a bad date. As Eva and her date settle into the flat, she begins to open up, and in response he mimics the accent of Chef, a character from the American television series South Park, to mock her vulnerability. His vocal appropriation of this Black cartoon character offends Eva "on numerous levels, intersecting with issues of race, keen awareness of our age, his lack of originality and cosmopolitanism". This prompts the articulation of a cascade of class, gender, and political differences between the two as they listen to the "progress reports from the Deliveroo app on my phone" and await their pizza. During the wait, he confesses that he has been in relationships that were physical and others that were emotional, and acknowledges that the "thought of finding both in the same person is scary". She responds, "I know…I'm not scared of anything except for intimacy".

[6] On Irish domestic confinement and its consequences see BACKUS, Margot. **The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order**. Durham: Duke UP, 1999; and CONRAD, Kathryn. **Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse**. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

Such vulnerability, demonstrated through the articulation of shared emotional fears, seems to presage a meaningful connection. Following this confession, Eva touches her date and looks in his eyes, and they have sex; she has an orgasm and falls asleep, with "his hand on my ass". Yet in the morning, she wakes to discover that he is gone and has left her one hundred euro, placed on top of her discarded jeans. The money suggests that he regarded their encounter not as an expression of physical and emotional intimacy, but instead as financially remunerated sex work. Here perhaps is the most powerful renovation of Gothic tropes in the story: Eva sends him an outraged text asking, "what the fuck? where did you go??!!" to which he does not respond. The story does not culminate in the tragic death of a lover, but the timid emotional revelations and intimate touch that mark the story's final scene evaporate, and their relationship returns to the ether of the internet. The story concludes, "Happy Christmas, I never saw you again". The redemption promised by the ghosts of Christmas, as famously portrayed in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), fails to materialize in this ironic conclusion: are her final words a register of self-care or self-abnegation, does the fact that Christmas comes every year suggest that Eva is trapped in a cycle of unfulfilling relationships or is it the mark of a new beginning as suggested in Christianity by the birth of Christ?

Regardless, it matters that in the final moments of this story, the Gothic is rendered utterly mundane – the apparitions are merely the "little white puffs" of air from her breath and the "steam rising" when she urinates on Christmas morning in the cold Airbnb flat; the ruins are garbage strewn by seagulls and a parked vintage Volvo Estate; the predatory male is merely an insensitive guy from the west. The terror of romantic intimacy is no longer filtered through monsters or otherworldly ruins, the lover's injury is merely his physical and digital disappearance, the retribution for that romantic betrayal is neither horrific nor fatal. It becomes starkly evident through the friction between the Gothic and its mundane afterlives, in a way that renders their in-person date and erotic encounter likewise less intense and thrilling, that romance is safer but unsatisfying. The permission of the present means that the catastrophic conclusion that often haunts representations of female sexuality outside the confines of marriage or even a loving relationship is missing, just like the story's male protagonist.

As individual needs and unique tastes are flattened by large-scale algorithms, and AI encourages us to confuse machines with people, "Christmas Story" deploys the Gothic and its afterlives to remind us not only of the risks that attend our search for intimate human connection, but also of the enduring importance of that pursuit. The consequences of Eva's hookup are not dire: unlike the vulnerable female in a Gothic

tale, she is under no real physical threat, her physical confinement is elective and temporary, her exodus simple and completely under her control. Nonetheless, the story underlines the potential emotional costs and challenges of seeking intimacy in a world mediated by technologies that endeavor to colonize the language and experience of human connection. Heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic, Eva's feelings of isolation and alienation, as well as the systemic social ills that abet them, are vividly on view, which suggests that the age-old concerns about intimacy threaded through the Gothic fiction of the past continue to haunt the present, even as they are mediated by radical new technological forms. Though charged with hope and possibility, it remains unclear if Eva's dating experience is an exercise of exploration, empowerment, or exploitation – a question at the heart not just of online hookups but of digital life more generally.

References

ALTSCHULER, Sari. The Gothic Origins of Global Health. **American Literature**, v. 89, n. 3, 2017, p. 557-590.

BOWEN, Elizabeth. The Demon Lover. *In*: **The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen**. (New York: Ecco Press, 1989): 661-666, 662.

HAGGERTY, George E. The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction. *In:* GALLAGHER, L. (ed.). **Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives**. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

JOYCE, James. The Dead. *In:* SCHOLES, Robert and LITZ, A. Walton (eds.). **Dubliners: Text and Criticism**. New York: Penguin, 1996.

KAGUAKO, Filomena. Dating in the Age of Covid. **Irish Times***,* 21 November 2020. https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/dating-in-the-age-of-covid-the-minute-we-saw-each-other-we-kissed-1.4407744?

KILLEEN, Jarleth and MORIN, Christina. Introduction: Exorcising the Dead, Summoning the Living. *In:* KILLEEN, Jarleth and MORIN, Christina (eds.). **Irish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2023, p. 1-26.

KENNY, Eva. Christmas Story. **Irish Times**, 27 December 2022. https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/2022/12/27/christmas-story-a-new-story-by-eva-kenny/.

KENNY, Eva. **Email message to Paige Reynolds**. 22 February 2024.

LYNCH, Claire. "Consoling Machines in Contemporary Irish Fiction", **Technology in Irish Literature and Culture**, eds. Margaret Kelleher and James Sullivan (Cambridge UP, 2023), 253-266, 254.

LE FANU, J. Sheridan. "The Watcher", **Reminiscences of a Bachelor** (Dublin: Swan River Press, 2022): 1-53, 15.

MIKOWSKI, Sylvie. Gothic and Noir: The Genres of the Irish Contemporary Fiction of "Containment". **Études Irlandaises**, v. 2 n. 2, 2017, p. 93-104.

MISHLER, Katie. Reclaiming the Matrilineal: Marital Disinheritance and the Irish Female Gothic in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' and James Joyce's "The Dead". **New Hibernia Review**, v. 24, n. 2, Summer 2020, p. 71-87.

PORTOLAN, Lisa**. Love, Intimacy, and Online Dating: How a Global Pandemic Redefined Romantic Relationships**. London: Routledge, 2022.

PORTOLAN, Lisa**,** and MCALISTER, Jodi. Jagged Love: Narratives of Romance on Dating Apps during Covid-19. **Sexuality and Culture** v. 26, 2022, p. 354-372.

REYNOLDS, Paige. **Modernism in Irish Women's Contemporary Writing: The Stubborn Mode** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

ROBBINS, Peter. As Tinder Turns 10, What's The Future of Online Dating?. **RTÉ** 8 September 2022: https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2022/0908/1321250-tinder-online-dating-apps-future-fragmentation-new-formats-micro-segments-additional-services/#:~:text=According%20to%20Pew%20Research%2C%2030%25%20of%20Americans,year%20old%20Tinder%20has%20200%2C000%20active%20users.

SMITH, Cassi. The Psychology of Contagion: Representations of Historic Pandemics in Gothic Literature. **Mountaineer Undergraduate Research Review**, v. 8, 2023, p. 27-34

WESTENGARD, Laura. "Conquering Immortality": Gothic AIDS Literature as Queer Futurity in Gil Cuadros's *City of God*. **Journal of Narrative Theory**, v. 45, n. 2, 2015, p. 274-300.

WRIGHT, Julia M. Pandemics and the Gothic, Then and Now: A Hum in the Background. **Medical Humanities**, v. 51, n. 4, December 2025, p. 424-427.

ZLOSNIK, Sue. Pandemic Paranoia: Gothic Narratives of Lockdown. *In:* WHATLEY *et al* (eds.. **The Gothic in Times of Crisis.** Manchester: Manchester UP, 2025.

READING AND EDITING

What reading means when reading is not allowed: "literacy events" in the Magdalene Oral History Archive

James Little

1 Introduction

Coercively confined inmates are determined readers in both senses of the word: they are often driven by an inquisitiveness to learn while also being over-determined by those of us who view and discuss them from the outside. Recently, I had an encounter at the US border which encompassed both senses. Arriving landside at a pre-clearance border security screening, I informed the official that I was on my way to do archival research in the United States. "It's amazing what you can find in a library", he responded. "That's why the prisoners are so educated!", came his closing remark. Wondering whether my research profile had been so thoroughly combed that the Department of Homeland Security even knew the topic of the book I was researching – *Ireland's Carceral Memory* – I passed through the border security area and continued on my way as a researcher of prison literature.

Now back home, I have started to wonder how this border official imagined those prison readers. Perhaps he pictured them at a desk, or in their cell, maybe strolling up and down with a barred window in the background like a lead actor in a prison film. How do you picture them yourself? How do they appear in your mind's eye? As this process of picturing has been going on, my guess is that you have imagined each reader by themself. For, the dominant image of reading in incarceration – reflecting trends in how reading in society is conceptualised more broadly – is that of the silent, solitary reader. We can see this in many canonical accounts of prison life, as when Malcolm X expresses his preference for reading "in the total isolation of my own room" while incarcerated in the Norfolk Prison Colony for robbery (1984, p. 173).

In the context of Irish history and culture, there are many such examples of solitary reading, from the isolated Dorothy Macardle in Kilmainham Gaol during the Irish Civil War (Lane, 2019) to the self-educating Brendan Behan devouring books while in Borstal in England (Behan, 1990) to individual study in the "Jailtacht" universities of the Maze/Long Kesh during the Troubles in Northern Ireland (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2012, p. 32-33). Notwithstanding instances of communal readings within exceptional circumstances such as the H-Blocks in the 1970s (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2012, p. 95), the predominant image of the reading Irish inmate is, like that of prisoners elsewhere, that of a single, solitary reader.

We can see reading framed as just such a solitary activity in an account by one of the 645 women imprisoned during the Irish Civil War in Dublin.[1] On Wednesday 29 November 1922, Dorothy Macardle reflected on possible reading material in her jail cell in Dublin's Mountjoy Prison:

> When I decide to read, & to write out for exactly the books to be read here it becomes a most difficult & exciting question – of the myriad books in the world that I have never had time & never hoped to have to have time to read – & have leisure for now, which are to be chosen? (DMJJ1, 29 November 1922)[2]

What is notable here is that, firstly, Macardle chooses her own books. Moreover, she has an environment in which she can read – her jail diaries speak of being left in "solitude & silence", ideal conditions for focussed reading (DMJJ2, 17 Dec. 1922), and she complains about any "distraction" from this reading (DMJJ1, 26 Nov. 1922). So far, so much in keeping with the model of the solitary, silent reader we can find throughout carceral writing and scholarship.

Such resources and conditions were available due to Macardle's status as a political prisoner (see Murphy, 2016; Kenney, 2017), arrested for opposing the Free State government through journalism and propaganda writing during the Civil War. Because of this political status, Macardle and her fellow inmates refused to do manual labour in

[1] "Detailed lists of women prisoners imprisoned during the Civil War can be found in Matthews (2012, p. 257-286) and McCoole (2023, p. 244-265). This figure does not include women interned in Northern Ireland, a topic on which further research is needed (see Aiken, 2022, p. 262 n. 19). Nor does it include the many women imprisoned in smaller barracks and jails outside Dublin. This latter cohort is currently the subject of research by Mary McAuliffe" (Little, 2025, p. 11 n. 4).

[2] I follow the foliation of Macardle's prison writings in University College Dublin Archives. References are dated using the closest preceding date in the notebook.

prison, which was carried out instead by so-called "ordinary convicts", allowing Macardle to spend many of her days in jail reading and writing.[3] Macardle's political prisoner status gave her a place on the emerging hierarchy of "coercive confinement" in early-twentieth century Ireland: while nationalist ex-inmates gained social capital, those incarcerated for other reasons were stigmatised rather than rewarded for their time behind bars. When she encounters one of the "convict women" assigned to serve her food in Mountjoy Prison, Macardle exclaims: "It's more scandalous to imprison people for poverty than to imprison them for being Republicans" (DMJJ2, 12 November 1922). Macardle would later write journalism showing a concern with inmates incarcerated for their poverty, such as the incarceration of children as reported by the Cussen Commission's report on industrial and reformatory schools in 1936 (Home, 1934).[4] However, it is clear that in her prison diaries she follows many nationalist prisoners in looking down on those confined for what were deemed "non-political" offences at the birth of the Free State.

As we now know, Ireland's high rates of coercive confinement in the twentieth century was in large part a response to the poverty of many of its citizens; we also know that the majority of Irish prisoners were held in places other than the prison (O'Donnell; O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 261, p. 6-7). Ian O'Donnell and Eoin O'Sullivan have coined the term "coercive confinement" to conceptualise incarceration beyond the prison cell, including a range of carceral institutions such as psychiatric hospitals, Magdalene laundries, mother-and-child institutions,[5] reformatory and industrial schools, and centres of direct provision (O'Donnell; O'Sullivan, 2020). Conditions across this range of institutions varied widely, and they were usually very different to those experienced by a "political prisoner" in jail. Because of this, there are inmates of other Irish carceral institutions who have never had the time, the conditions or the available resources for the mode of solitary reading that many of us associate with coercive confinement. In this article, therefore, I will not focus on prisoners sitting in their own cells, reading silently. Instead, I want to explore what reading means to inmates of carceral institutions who do not have the leisure to read in their own rooms. What forms does reading take in carceral institutions where forced

[3] See also Hanna O'Connor's account of objecting to "ordinary" convicts cooking for her and her fellow anti-Treatyites in Mountjoy Prison in 1922: "we told them we would prefer to do that and know what we were eating would be clean" (O'Connor, 1966, f. 11). For more on the tradition of Irish political prisoners looking down on "ordinary" convicts, see McConville (2005, p. 292).

[4] Though this article is anonymous, it was likely written by Macardle as it follows the opinion of her earlier journalism in the same newspaper on the same topic (see Macardle, 1931).

[5] This article follows McGregor, Devaney and Buckley (2023) in referring to what have been historically termed "mother-and-baby homes" as "mother-and-child institutions", based on the expressed wishes of the vast majority of participants in their research who were formerly incarcerated in these buildings (see Appendix 1, p. 118).

labour denies inmates access to reading materials? And what can these forms teach us about the way we conceptualise reading in confinement? As my title puts it, what does reading mean when reading is not allowed?

1.2 Reading in the Magdalene Laundries

To explore these questions, I will draw on case studies from the Magdalene Oral History Project, led by Katherine O'Donnell as part of the Justice for Magdalenes Research group, supplemented by evidence from a report entitled *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922-1990* (McCormick *et al*., 2021), which includes oral histories on three Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, and from Mary Raftery and Eoin O'Sullivan's book *Suffer the Little Children: The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools* (Raftery; O'Sullivan, 1999), which accompanied the television documentary series Raftery made about Ireland's industrial schools, *States of Fear* (Raftery, 1999).[6]

As has been well-documented, the Magdalene Laundries were a network of carceral institutions, originally established in England in the 18th century, and soon developed in other parts of the English-speaking world and beyond. Ireland was an early founder of these Laundries – the earliest, on Lower Leeson Street, Dublin opened in 1758 – and continued incarcerating women in Ireland long after many other countries had phased them out, the last closing on the capital's Seán McDermott Street, in 1996. In the nineteenth century, these institutions were ostensibly set up to offer refuge to female sex workers (Finnegan, 2001, p. 6-20; Luddy, 2007, p. 76-123), but in Ireland of the twentieth century, they were used to coercively confine those committed by the criminal justice system, to confine women who were transferred from other carceral institutions such as industrial schools or mother-and-child institutions, to confine women who had been subject to sexual abuse and were hidden away in laundries because of the stigma associated with this and also to confine those who were seen as simply breaking Ireland's strict social mores in some way (see Smith, 2008; Haughton; McAuliffe; Pine, 2023; McGettrick *et al*., 2023; Brangan, 2026).

While confined, these women were put to work washing laundry, for which they were not paid. Their names were changed and often their hair was shorn. Many of the accounts I will draw on refer to carceral conditions such as locked doors and barred windows; those

[6] All interviews from the Magdalene Oral History Archive are freely available online (see O'Donnell; Pembroke; McGettrick, 2013). References are made using page numbers of individual accounts, which are findable using the name of each survivor.

women who escaped were often captured and returned by the Irish police (Brangan, 2024, p. 403). With their unpaid labour force, the laundries were able to secure contracts with prominent Irish cultural institutions, including Áras an Uachtaráin – the residence of the President of Ireland (Coen, 2023, p. 78). By exploiting their inmates' liberty and labour, the Magdalene Laundries reached deeply and widely into the fabric of Irish life.

In using oral histories from the Magdalene Laundries as the principal source of my case studies, I will make the broader argument that we should not impose our dominant model of reading – that of a single, solitary reader – on inmates who may have carried out or experienced other forms of reading. David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanič use the term "literacy events" to describe socially situated uses of written language arising from literacy practices, "the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives" (Barton; Hamilton, 2005, p. 7-8), that are "positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them" (Barton; Hamilton; Ivanič, 2005, p. 1). Enmeshing this framework with scholarship on coercive confinement, my primary institutions are the laundries themselves; the second is the prison, which often provides the model of reading in confinement as a silent, solitary activity; the third is the university, which mirrors its own forms of ideal reading in the descriptions we researchers create of inmates reading. This mirroring process is one example of what Christina Lupton calls our "incapacity", as literary critics, "to recognize reading except in […] bourgeois terms" (2018, p. 14; see also Garrett, 2015). Just as historians of reading have argued that we should not impose a teleological movement from *viva voce* reading to silent reading on the history of reading itself (McCutcheon, 2015; Burnyeat, 1997), so too I will argue that we should not impose such teleological models of reading on incarcerated inmates.

Using the notion of "discipline" as one that further binds (and divides) histories of coercive confinement and of various literacy events and their underlying practices, I will start by looking at some case studies that describe forms of "reading as discipline", before moving on to consider more "undisciplined" forms of reading.[7]

2 Reading as discipline

My first two case studies are examples of "reading as discipline", focussing on literacy events where reading was used to impose order on laundry inmates. The first comes

[7] My framing is indebted to the genesis of this article as a paper presented at the "Un/Disciplining Reading" symposium, organised by Sarah Comyn and Porscha Fermanis on 15-16 September 2023 in Dublin.

from Kathleen, the pseudonym used by a survivor of the High Park Laundry in Dublin's Drumcondra.

> And you went from the laundry where the sinks were into where the machines were, the big washing machines and then in the afternoon you went into a room where you done all the hand ironing. Now you couldn't speak and there was a nun would sit at the top of the Ironing Room as it was called and she was either sewing and she was telling you holy things or she was reading a book, there was something religious going on. And if the nun wasn't giving you religion stuff, she was sewing and it was coming out through amplifiers in the room. It was all these prayers and you have to keep answering the prayers as they were going on. (p. 2)

There are three aspects of this testimony I would like to focus on: firstly, the rule of silence to which all inmates were subjected (of which more will be said below); secondly, the disciplinary function of the supervising nun, for whom reading aloud is an important tool of imposing and maintaining silence among the inmates; thirdly, the use of technology to transmit amplified prayers (which had presumably been read into the microphone to be recorded) and the compulsion upon the silenced inmates to respond to these prayers. Here we have a detailed instance of reading as a disciplinary mechanism for inmates of the Magdalene Laundries.[8]

Kathleen describes a similar mode of reading as discipline during mealtime:

> And then it would be time for dinner, which was bad food, it was… you know not good food, but you were hungry, you ate it. You returned to the laund…oh you had somebody in the…it was called the Refectory, you had an elderly lady would be there while you were eating as she read from the Bible. Now you were not allowed to speak, she read from the Bible and then you went back to your laundry duties and you really, really worked hard. (p. 2)

Again, we see the use of reading aloud to maintain silence among the inmates, this time as a means of enforcing subservience before Kathleen and her fellow inmates returned to extremely hard, unpaid work in the laundry.

The form of reading that Kathleen describes has a long history. Reading as a form of discipline, specifically the silence of those listening to *viva voce* reading, goes back at least as far as *The Rule of St Benedict*, drawn up in the sixth century to organise monastic

[8] See the similar account of a nun reading during work at the laundry in Sunday's Well, Cork (Brangan, 2026, p. 96-7).

life, and a strong influence on the religious orders and congregations who ran the Magdalene Laundries.[9] As Diarmaid McCulloch outlines in *Silence: A Christian History*, the *Rule*'s emphasis on silence formed an important part of monastic discipline for the early Benedictines (2013, p. 92-93), and with the order a shaping influence on the emerging Western monastic tradition, *The Rule of St Benedict* established "the basis of much Western monastic life for both men and women to the present day" (MacCulloch, 2009, p. 318). In Chapter 38 of the *Rule*, it is stated: "Reading will always accompany the meals of the brothers", before going on to outline just how much this reading practice is part of a structured monastic discipline: "The reader should not be the one who just happens to pick up the book, but someone who will read for a whole week, beginning on Sunday" (Fry, 1982, p. 60). The text goes on to reference the rule of silence which was also enforced in the Magdalene Laundries fourteen centuries later: "Let there be complete silence. No whispering, no speaking – only the reader's voice should be heard there" (Fry, 1982, p. 60). Setting the stage for monastic (including conventual) discipline for centuries to come, the *Rule of Benedict* used silence as a form of discipline: "Speaking and teaching are the master's task; the disciple is to be silent and listen" (Fry, 1982, p. 31). The Magdalene Laundries of twentieth-century Ireland would impose this discipline with a force and a severity that we are still trying to come to terms with.

A similar form of disciplinary reading to that experienced by Kathleen is referenced by a religious sister in the St Mary's Home, Newry, run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd: "She remembered that the Good Shepherd Sisters imposed silence at meal times, which was only interrupted by one of the nuns reading aloud from a chosen text. This practice continued until the late 1960s" (McCormick *et al.*, 2021, p. 285),[10] at which point it was relaxed as part of the Roman Catholic social and ecclesiastical reforms that emerged from the Second Vatican Council (McCormick *et al.*, 2021, p. 37). As is clear from the above, this first form of disciplinary reading provides us with examples of literacy practices which involve silence as an expression of obedience to hierarchy. Rather than being that of the single individual reading in their cell, the silence here is of the group who are read to, and who consequently have very limited agency to respond.

[9] The Roman Catholic orders and congregations who ran ten Magdalene Laundries in the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland) were the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, the Religious Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (Inter-departmental Committee, 2013, p. 18). The Sisters of the Good Shepherd also ran three Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, where the state report lists a Protestant "Industrial/Rescue Home" operated by the Salvation Army under "Magdalene Laundries" (McCormick *et al.*, 2021, p. 21).

[10] Other accounts have the lay inmates doing the reading, as in this one from the laundry in Sunday's Well, Cork: "One of the penitents was made to read from the Bible while the others ate" (Brangan, 2026, p. 100).

Another form of reading as discipline that is mentioned in the Magdalene Oral History Archive is the censorship of letters, an acute version of the general censorship of written material in twentieth-century Ireland (see Carlson, 1990). This practice is much more familiar to accounts of coercive confinement, as it is a regular feature of prison life, as well as in industrial schools and other carceral institutions. Indeed, it is explicitly discussed in the rules for Irish carceral institutions. Rule 11 of the Mater Dei mother-and-child institution in Belfast reads: "We reserve the right to censor letters when we deem it necessary" (McCormick *et al*., 2021, p. 159), and this practice was also reported in many Magdalene Laundries and other carceral institutions on the island.[11]

Sara W (a pseudonym for another survivor who wishes to remain anonymous) recalls her incoming and outgoing correspondence being blocked when she was in the St Mary Magdalen's Laundry in Donnybrook, Dublin and the St Vincent's Laundry in Peacock Lane, Cork, both of which were managed by the Religious Sisters of Charity. Referring to both laundries, Sara W states:

> if I got a letter from my aunt, they would read it first.
> CMcG And would they censor anything out of it, if there was anything they didn't like?
> SW If there was something they didn't like you wouldn't get the letter.
> CMcG You just wouldn't get the whole letter at all?
> SW No, and if I wrote a letter to my aunt, that would be read as well, that would be read before it went out. (p. 16)

Sara W makes it clear, backing up other contemporary accounts, that the reading lives of those confined in the laundries were severely constrained by the censorship of both incoming and outgoing correspondence.[12]

This practice of censoring correspondence is given a darkly ironic perspective by an account of the punishment of a girl in another institution run by the same congregation of nuns, the Religious Sisters of Charity. Anne, who was an inmate in St Joseph's Orphanage on Dublin's Mountjoy Street, recalls another girl getting "battered around the place by the nuns" for singing Elvis Presley's "Return to Sender" at the weekly Sunday concert there (Raftery; O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 48). "Return to Sender" features lyrics lamenting the

[11] See the similar conditions described in Tuam mother-and-child institution by an unnamed survivor: "Any letters that were written were censored" (Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, 2021, p. 51). See also the 1933 rules for the management of industrial schools: "The Manager is authorised to read all Letters which pass to or from the Children in the School, and to withhold any which are objectionable" (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009, p. 53).

[12] Brangan writes regarding a survivor from the Donnybrook laundry: "No post went out uncensored [...]; she knew that" (2026, p. 106).

inability of the singer to get in touch with his loved one by mail, and from the first four-line stanza – followed by the four-line refrain that gives the song its title – it is easy to see how the lyrics would have been a red rag to those imposing censorship on inmates of the industrial school:

> I gave a letter to the postman
> He put it in his sack
> Bright and early next morning
> He brought my letter back (She wrote upon it)
>
> Return to sender
> Address unknown
> No such number
> No such zone (Presley, 1962)

"How dare she sing a song by a vulgar person like that! They really gave her an awful hammering", recalls Anne, shedding light on what she believed was the congregation's justification for this violent attack (Raftery; O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 48). Even if one did not follow Elvis's music, the whole world knew about his overt sexuality – signalled in the very title of the movie from which this song was taken, *Girls! Girls! Girls!* – and this is the reason provided for the girl who sang his song being beaten.[13] Given that the nuns who beat her up were, at this time, preventing their inmates' letters from reaching their loved ones, her performance could also be seen as a "subversive reading" of his lyrics, performed in front of nuns who interpreted this performance as a challenge to their authority (Rose, 2020). More broadly, the examples discussed in this section emphasise that the withholding of texts can play as important a role as the act of reading itself when we consider literacy events and practices in coercive confinement.

3 Undisciplined reading

As well as letters they were not allowed to receive, other texts withheld from laundry inmates were educational books. Those women who entered the laundries at school-going age lost their opportunity to a school education (see McGettrick *et al.*, 2021, p. 49, p. 87, p. 142). With this in mind, it is not surprising to read of the liberating effects of self-taught literacy in some accounts in the Magdalene Oral History Archive. However, it is important to acknowledge that such stories are a very small minority in the archive as a whole.

[13] The fact that "Return to Sender" reached number one in the Irish charts in December 1962 demonstrates how well-known the song was in Ireland at the time (Curran, 2023).

One survivor – identified by the pseudonym Margaret Burke – describes learning to read magazines as "coming into another world […] beginning to open up" (p. 71) – this is recounted just after she talks about not being able to read her own payslip and having to hide it from her inquisitive husband. Margaret learned to read in spite of the laundry, making out words on the leftover newspapers that the nuns used as tablecloths, trying to read cartoon strips of *Rupert Bear* in yet another act of subversive reading (p. 72-73). More broadly, she describes the effect of not having an education as meaning she was always "somebody's servant", a very telling description of the domestic service roles that laundry inmates were often trained for, and one which also suggests the loss of agency in having been denied access to an education (p. 70). This loss of agency is illustrated in the account of another survivor of the Magdalene Laundries, Pearl (a pseudonym), who tells of not being able to read a story to a child she is babysitting, and being told off by the child when she tries to make the story up (p. 33). As outlined in these stories, not being able to read a text is as much a literacy event as reading a story out loud, and the archive holds many more stories of inmates drawing attention to their lack of reading skills than those rarer, uplifting accounts of overcoming educational disadvantage.

4 Conclusion

"[T]o understand the Magdalene laundries requires patient reading (and re-reading)" (Brangan, 2024, p. 411). In this comment, Louise Brangan already hints at the various reading strategies required to come to terms with Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and their legacies.[14] To conclude, I will contend that researchers restricting themselves (and others) to bourgeois, solitary forms of reading inhibits a fuller understanding of the laundries before analysing how the Magdalene Oral History Archive suggests alternatives in its orientation towards its future readers.

4.1 Reading researchers

Restricting reading practices to solitary reading inhibits knowledge production, reinforces hierarchies between different categories of prisoners and erases valuable knowledge about "social institutions and power relations which sustain them" (Barton; Hamilton, 2005, p. 1). So much is evident in the outcry against the way in which oral testimony was disregarded by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes (see Crowe, 2021; Oral History Network Ireland, 2021). There is also evidence of

[14] For more on Brangan's own reading strategies, see Brangan (2024, p. 411).

oral testimony being discounted by the Inter-departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries (McGettrick *et al.*, 2023, p. 87). With further reports on Ireland's cultures of institutional abuse in progress, it is crucial that oral history methodologies are properly and sensitively deployed in gathering important testimony from living witnesses of such institutions.

Much can be learned by assessing the wide variety of reading forms, strategies and styles evident in the Magdalene Oral History Archive. As we have seen, subversive acts of reading are outnumbered by instances of reading as discipline. The inmates were read to, in order to enforce discipline; their writing was read to decide if it should be circulated outside; and their reading material was checked to decide if they should be allowed to read it. This censorial mode of reading continues in the difficulties survivors have in accessing their own personal documents from congregational archives. In the rare cases that documents are made available, they do not always contain full information. Phyllis Morgan, an activist on behalf of fellow survivors, has reported expressions of extreme distress from survivors upon receiving archival documents about their own lives that are very heavily redacted (p. 54-57). Those who control access to the archives control what is read – by survivors as well as researchers – and since the archives of the religious orders and congregations who ran the laundries are still not open for research, this creates distress for those who want to read details about their own lives, and prevents other potential future readers from learning more about conditions there.[15]

4.2 Future readers

The Magdalene Oral History Project is not just a record of literacy events and practices in confinement – it has also created these transcripts as part of an attempt to educate "the general public" about the laundries ("About JFMR", 2025). The interviewees are well aware of this aim, and many of them reflect upon the effect their stories may have on future readers. "The stories should never be forgotten", says Maureen Sullivan, a survivor of the laundries (p. 52); "I would like it to go into the history books", says Martha (a pseudonym) (p. 2). Mary Currington even highlights the lack of storytelling as a reason the abuse continued: "the nuns knew they could do it to us because we had no one to tell our stories to" (p. 115-116). These witnesses, and those who recorded their stories, are thinking actively about their readership, and about what these future readers will do with their reading.

[15] To date, only one researcher has been granted limited access to the archives of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity (see Prunty, 2017).

Elsewhere in the same account, Currington tells of the effect her written narrative had on her husband, Stuart. Currington here speaks of applying for compensation from the Irish government's Residential Institutions Redress Board, which involved submitting a statement about the sexual abuse she suffered in the Good Shepherd Laundry in New Ross, Co. Wexford:

> So fifty-nine years later it came out through the solicitor. And I said to Stuart, I said – because they sent me a copy of my statement – and I said to Stuart, I said, "my statement is here – to the Irish government," I said, "I'll leave it on the table, you're welcome to read it. It might upset you a little bit 'cause there's things you never knew." So, he read it, I said, "would you like a cup of tea?" And he did cry after he read that bit. (p. 55)

In a list of uncritical reading strategies used by his students, Michael Warner mentions crying as one of ways they quote "aren't supposed to" respond to reading, but which many do anyway (2004, p. 13). Certainly, crying seems a perfectly legitimate response to reading many of these stories from the Magdalene Oral History Project, as Mary acknowledges in her words to Stuart. Crucially, Mary Currington's account outlines modes of reading (and of writing) that are aware of and connected to other people around the reader. Based on this and the other stories I have gathered in this article, I would suggest that we need to go beyond the model of the single, solitary reader, alone in their cell, that has up to now dominated carceral scholarship in order to develop the new knowledge that is necessary to overcome our shared heritage of institutional abuse in Ireland.

References

AIKEN, Síobhra. **Spiritual Wounds**: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War. Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2022.

BARTON, David; HAMILTON, Mary; IVANIČ, Roz. Introduction: Exploring Situated Literacies. *In*: BARTON, David; HAMILTON, Mary; IVANIČ, Roz (eds.). **Situated Literacies**: Reading and Writing in Context. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 1-6.

BARTON, David; HAMILTON, Mary. Literacy Practices. In: BARTON, David; HAMILTON, Mary; IVANIČ, Roz (eds.). **Situated Literacies**: Reading and Writing in Context. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 7-14.

BEHAN, Brendan. **Borstal Boy**. London: Arrow, 1990.

BRANGAN, Louise. States of Denial: Magdalene Laundries in Twentieth-century Ireland. **Punishment & Society**, n. 26, v. 2, p. 394-413, 2024.

BRANGAN, Louise. **The Fallen**: The Lost Girls of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and a Legacy of Silence. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2026.

BURNYEAT, M. F. Postscript on Silent Reading. **Classical Quarterly**, n. 47, v. 1, p. 74-76, 1997.

COEN, Mark. "Cheap in the End": A History of Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry. *In*: COEN, Mark; O'DONNELL, Katherine; O'ROURKE, Maeve (eds.). **A Dublin Magdalene Laundry**: Donnybrook and Church-State Power in Ireland. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, p. 65-100.

COMMISSION TO INQUIRE INTO CHILD ABUSE. **Final Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse**. Volume I. Dublin: Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009.

COMMISSION OF INVESTIGATION INTO MOTHER AND BABY HOMES. **Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes**. s.l.: s.n.: 2021.

CROWE, Catriona. The Commission and the Survivors. **The Dublin Review**, 2021. Available at: https://thedublinreview.com/article/the-commission-and-the-survivors/. Accessed on: 30 Aug. 2025.

CURRAN, Aiden. Elvis Presley – "Return to Sender". *In*: **Irish Number Ones**, 2023. Available at: irishnumberones.com/2023/06/14/elvis-presley-return-to-sender/. Accessed on: 28 Aug. 2025.

FINNEGAN, Frances. **Do Penance or Perish**: A Study of Magdalen Asylums in Ireland. Pilltown: Congrave Press, 2001.

FRY, Timothy *et al.* (eds.). **The Rule of St. Benedict in English**. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982.

GARRETT, Matthew. Subterranean Gratification: Reading after the Picaro. **Critical Inquiry**, n. 42, v.1, p. 97-123, 2015.

HAUGHTON, Miriam; MCAULIFFE, Mary; PINE, Emilie (eds.). **Legacies of the Magdalen Laundries**: Commemoration, Gender, and the Postcolonial Carceral State. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

HOME, THOUGH POOR, BEST FOR CHILDREN. **The Irish Press**. 23 Oct. 1934, p. 3.

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE TO ESTABLISH THE FACTS OF STATE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MAGDALEN LAUNDRIES. **Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries**. s.l.: s.n., 2013.

JUSTICE FOR MAGDALENES RESEARCH. About JFMR. **Justice for Magdalenes Research**. Available at: http://jfmresearch.com/aboutjfmr/. Accessed on: 30 Aug. 2025.

KENNEY, Padraic. **Dance in Chains**: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

LANE, Leeann. **Dorothy Macardle**. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2019.

LITTLE, James. Agents of National Memory Revisited: Women Writing Prison in the Irish Civil War. **Memory Studies**, n. 18, v. 6, p. 1-15, 2025. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980251335275. Accessed on: 29 Aug. 2025.

LUDDY, Maria. **Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800-1940**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

LUPTON, Christina. **Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

MACARDLE Dorothy. **Jail Journals of Dorothy Macardle**. University College Dublin Archives, papers of Eamon de Valera, P150/1658, 1922. Referenced as DMJJ throughout: "Vigil: A Journal of Mountjoy" (DMJJ1), "Mountjoy" (DMJJ2).

MACARDLE Dorothy. Some Irish Mothers and Their Children. **The Irish Press**. 14 Sep. 1931, p. 6.

MAC GIOLLA CHRÍOST, Diarmait. **Jailtacht**: The Irish Language, Symbolic Power and Political Violence in Northern Ireland, 1972-2008. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012.

MATTHEWS, Ann. **Dissidents**: Irish Republican Women, 1922-1941. Cork: Mercier Press, 2012.

MCCONVILLE Seán. **Irish Political Prisoners, 1848-1922**: Theatres of War. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

MCCOOLE, Sinéad. **No Ordinary Women**: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900-1923. 2nd ed. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2023.

MCCORMICK, Leanne *et al.* **Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland**: Report Prepared for the Inter-departmental Working Group. s.l.: s.n., 2021.

MACCULLOCH, Diarmaid. **A History of Christianity**: The First Three Thousand Years. London: Allen Lane, 2013.

MACCULLOCH, Diarmaid. **Silence**: A Christian History. New York: Viking, 2013.

MCCUTCHEON, R. W. Silent Reading in Antiquity and the Future History of the Book. **Book History**, n. 18, p. 1-32, 2015.

MCGETTRICK, Claire *et al*. **Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries**: A Campaign for Justice. London: I. B. Tauris, 2021.

MCGREGOR, Caroline; DEVANEY, Carmel; BUCKLEY, Sarah-Anne. **Language, Terminology and Representation Considering Ireland's Institutions Historically Known as 'Mother and Baby Homes', 'County Homes' and Related Institutions**. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, 2023.

MURPHY, William. **Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

O'CONNOR, Hanna. **Hanna O'Connor's Account Written in 1966**. Private Collection, Kerry. Access provided by Kilmainham Gaol Museum.

O'DONNELL, Ian; O'SULLIVAN, Eoin. "Coercive Confinement": An Idea Whose Time Has Come? **Incarceration**, n. 1, v. 1, p. 1-20, 2020.

O'DONNELL, Katherine; PEMBROKE, Sinéad; MCGETTRICK, Claire. **Magdalene Institutions**: Recording an Oral and Archival History. Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council, 2013. Available at: https://jfmresearch.com/home/oralhistoryproject/transcripts/survivors/. Accessed on: 1 Sept. 2025.

THE ORAL HISTORY NETWORK OF IRELAND. Statement by the Oral History Network of Ireland on the Role of Oral Testimony in the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. **Oral History Network Ireland**, 5 June 2021. Available at: https://oralhistorynetworkireland.ie/statement-re-mother-and-baby-homes-commission-june-2021. Accessed on 30 Aug. 2025.

O'SULLIVAN, Eoin; O'DONNELL, Ian (eds.). **Coercive Confinement in Ireland**: Patients, Prisoners and Penitents. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012.

PRESLEY, Elvis. Return to Sender (From, "Girls! Girls! Girls!"). *In*: **Girls! Girls! Girls!** (Original Soundtrack). s.l.: RCA Victor, 1962.

PRUNTY, Jacinta. **The Monasteries, Magdalen Asylums and Reformatory Schools of Our Lady of Charity in Ireland, 1853-1973**. Dublin: Columba, 2017.

RAFTERY, Mary (dir.). **States of Fear**. Dublin: Raidió Teilifís Éireann, 1999.

RAFTERY, Mary; O'SULLIVAN, Eoin. **Suffer the Little Children**: The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools. Dublin: New Island Books, 1999.

ROSE, Jonathan (ed.). **The Edinburgh History of Reading**: Subversive Readers. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

SMITH, James M. **Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment**. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.

WARNER, Michael. Uncritical Reading. *In*: GALLOP, Jane (ed.). **Polemic**: Critical Or Uncritical. New York and London: Routledge, 2004, p. 13-38.

X, Malcolm; HALEY, Alex. **The Autobiography of Malcolm X**. New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.

From national canon to feminist archive: central writers in the *Field Day Anthology*, vols. I-V

Vinicius Garcia Valim

1 Introduction

Published in 1991, the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* constituted one of the most notable projects for a national anthology within the English-speaking world in recent history. Edited by Seamus Deane and a team of 20 male contributing editors, the volumes sought to present a picture of Irish writing throughout the island's history. The anthology, while highly regarded for its scope, was controversial on several grounds; in addition to the usual furore anthologies often raise over inclusions and exclusions, there was also the resolutely postcolonial – and, for some commentators, nationalist – perspective taken by Field Day, especially discernible in Deane's introductions. Even stronger than ideological questioning on that basis, however, was the fierce backlash against the under-representation of women's writing and feminist issues in the volumes. Critics like Edna Longley (1992) and Siobhán Kilfeather (1992), among many others, questioned the absence of women from the pages, whether in literary and political writing, and also from the Field Day board or from the list of contributing editors.

Responding to these objections, Field Day commissioned a further volume to redress the omissions. Dedicated to women's writing, the volume would be edited by a team of Irish women scholars – Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney and Clair Wills, with Maria Luddy, Máirín ní Dhonnchadha and Mary O'Dowd being incorporated later (Crowe, 2003). Throughout the 1990s, the project was expanded to two volumes and was completed in 2002, with the volumes appearing as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vols. IV-V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*.

Unlike other national anthologies, this was a national *women's* anthology. The focus on women was not the sole innovation proposed by the editors; the 2002 instalments stretch the traditional format of the anthology and, in the choices regarding genres and writers, also reflect a different attitude toward the idea of creating a canon.

In this article, I aim to discuss how the two sets of volumes approach what I call the "central figures", that is, those Irish writers most accepted in traditional conceptions of the canon, in different ways and to different effects. Whereas in the 1991 volumes making use of such writers is an essential part of Deane's argument for Irish cultural independence – defined against the colonising pull of that "tradition of English or British literature" (Deane, 1991a, p. xxi), the decision taken by the editors of volumes IV and V of not including the few widely acclaimed women writers at the time, far from a mere oversight or trivial decision, has repercussions for the canon-making enterprise itself, reflecting the wider debates about the "canon" that were prevalent in the late 20th century and keeping in line with feminist suspicion of canonical hierarchies.

2 The anthology's origins

Field Day came into existence in 1980 as a theatre company. Arising out of a partnership between playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea to produce Friel's *Translations* in Derry, the company sought to engage artistically with the tensions of a divided Ireland, exploring issues of identity, language and colonisation against the background of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Touring Ireland outside the established theatrical centres, Field Day quickly expanded and, as the 1980s went on, the company was joined by other high-profile artistic and academic figures in Ireland, mostly from Northern Ireland: Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, David Hammond and, in 1988, Thomas Kilroy. Together with Friel and Rea, they formed the Field Day board of directors.

As part of the company's plan to intervene in Irish cultural debate, Field Day branched out into cultural and literary criticism, under a mostly postcolonial perspective, especially through a famed series of pamphlets. The other course of action announced by Field Day in the mid-1980s was the production of an anthology that would present writing in Ireland across the centuries, examining the literary, cultural and social development of the island. After years of production, the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was finally published in October 1991. The general editor was Seamus Deane, writer and university professor, like most of the other contributing editors. The anthology sought to provide,

in Deane's words, not a canon per se but "an example of the way in which canons are established and the degree to which they operate as systems of ratification and authority" (1991, p. xix). Despite the extended discussion of the anthology's envisioned relationship to the material it presents – with Deane frequently stressing that the organisation and presentation of the subject are not natural, but that "the selection […] ordains the tradition(s)" (p. xx), thus recognising that the arrangement presented is not neutral, the fact remains that the anthology suggests at least a version of the canon – in this case, a canon of "Irish writing".

Anthologies, indeed, are a somewhat special case in that editing is rendered more visible as a layer of mediation between text and reader. In addition to the author of a text, the reader must also acknowledge another presence, that of the editor, as someone who has selected and arranged the materials presented in a particular order.[1] In recent times, that editor's agency has been the subject of greater scrutiny, especially through the understanding that editors play an active role in producing and circulating texts (Cullen, 2012, p. 4). Likewise, attention has been given to the political repercussions of editing; as Laurie Maguire writes, editing is currently viewed as "subjective in part and political in total" (Maguire, 2016, p. 78). In the case of the *Field Day Anthology*, such repercussions were widely noted, raising debate over concepts of nation, identity and, ultimately, gender, as it did, especially due to the swift feminist reaction to the anthology's omissions.

Even if anthologies' more direct impact lies within literary culture, those concepts and political ramifications are still there. We may look specifically at the case of Ireland, which has long been recognised for the literary achievements of its authors. W. B. Yeats, one of the leading voices of English-language poetry in the early 20th century, was awarded the Nobel prize in 1923 – just like Samuel Beckett in 1969 and Seamus Heaney (one of the Field Day directors) in 1995, a few years after the first volumes of the anthology. Moreover, other Irish writers have achieved an international reputation, from the nineteenth century to the overseas success enjoyed by authors such as Sally Rooney and Claire Keegan in the 2020s. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Irish distinction in the literary arts became, too, a tool to assert national pride and soft power, and part of this has been due to the prominence of these "household" names circulating in the international world of letters. The question of tagging writers as "Irish", then, acquires more weight in the context of a nation with such a complex relation to identity and colonialism.

[1] Of course, the editorial presence is always there, but the hand of the anthologist is much more difficult to overlook than that of the editor of a novel, for instance.

3 Volumes I-III: reclaiming Ireland

Deane's general introduction outlines many of the anthology's central aims while also reflecting on its implications. Rather than present the anthology as a neutral repository of texts, he displays a clear awareness of the relationship between anthologies and canon formation, highlighting that any anthology is necessarily selective and therefore shaped by the historical, cultural and political circumstances of its production (Deane, 1991a, p. xx).

He also somewhat ambiguously rejects the notion that the anthology aims to establish a canon, instead describing the project as an illustration of how canons come into being and their operation as "systems of ratification and authority" (p. xix). At the same time, however, he recognises that anthologies inevitably participate in those very processes. By selecting, organising and contextualising texts, they construct an image of literary history that confers visibility and legitimacy on particular writers and traditions.

This awareness that the anthology is a particular intervention is especially evident when it comes to nationality. One of the most prevalent concerns of Field Day and Deane's was presenting Irish writers as *Irish writers*, that is, dislocating them from the British tradition in which they had sometimes been placed. Deane outlines part of the situation against which the anthology sought to react:

> Most of the 'major' Irish writers have for decades been accommodated within the tradition of English or British literature. Sometimes they are loaned out for exhibitions of International Modernism or are reclaimed for study within the discipline called 'Anglo-Irish Literature'. (p. xxi)

It is against this sort of cultural annexation that the selections are made, with the reclaiming of writers for Ireland an integral part of Deane's project in order to "attempt to assert cultural authority and confidence" (p. xix).

It is no surprise that anthologies exert significant influence on writers' reputations; an author's frequent appearance in anthologies or other similar collections signals recognition not necessarily from the broader reading public but from editors, publishers and academic institutions that mediate literary value. They are not limited to reflecting previously existing reputations, but are important tools in consolidating and circulating them, contributing to the processes through which certain writers acquire canonical status.

Beyond simple inclusion, other criteria contribute to anthologies establishing a writer's reputation and place in the canon. It seems almost self-evident that more pages and more critical examination equal greater recognition. Most of the traditionally canonical Irish writers appear in volumes I-III through several pages, and for good reason – it would be odd indeed not to encounter Joyce, Yeats or Wilde in an anthology whose scope, very broadly defined, is "Irish writing". Perhaps even more than the number of pages, however, the critical treatment and the organisation imposed by anthologists are also tools in accentuating the relevance of an author. That relevance might be lessened if the work of the writer in question appears piecemeal, at various points in the book – rather than, for example, in a section dedicated only to them. The latter case is what happens in volumes I-III. There are eight such sections across the volumes: Volume I highlights Edmund Spenser, Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, Maria Edgeworth and Thomas Moore, while volume II hosts Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw in a joint section and W. B. Yeats. Volume III, dedicated to the 20th century, includes sections for Joyce and Beckett.

But what is the effect of presenting these "central figures" in individual sections? Such a decision keeps the elevated status these writers enjoyed within traditional conceptions of the canon – though, as Deane had remarked in the introduction, this was a sometimes English/British and not Irish one. Thus, there is a reproduction of a pre-established hierarchy of writers – Yeats, Joyce and others at the top, an intermediate set of writers receiving significant attention and minor writers appearing throughout.

Furthermore, these central figures work, to a certain extent, as signposts to organise the anthology's narrative. The story woven by Deane and the section editors, while claiming not to reproduce the dichotomy between major and minor writers, uses those more recognised writers as anchors around which to construct the anthology's narrative. Thus, Edmund Spenser appears as an example of the sixteenth-century planters' point of view, while Swift, Burke, and Goldsmith are the anthology's checkpoints in the seventeenth century. It is telling, for instance, that in his section devoted to Maria Edgeworth – the only woman to get a section of her own across all five volumes – editor W. J. McCormack calls her "the central figure in Irish literary history between Swift and the modernist generation of Shaw and Yeats" (McCormack, 1991, p. 1011). With this, he places Edgeworth as the leading figure of what would otherwise be one hundred and fifty years seemingly devoid of any major literary writers.

An innocent view of anthologies might suggest that these central sections are merely a straightforward recognition of these writers' achievements. That Edgeworth's section, for instance, promotes her relevance in Irish literature is clear; nevertheless, it is also possible to connect Field Day's choice of figures to their particular emphasis on the Irish colonial experience. This is what explains Englishman Spenser having part of a section titled "The Early Planters: Spenser and his Contemporaries", edited by Nicholas Canny and Andrew Carpenter. The editors argue that the reasons for his inclusion are "less obvious" than his place in English writing but nevertheless "compelling" (Canny, Carpenter, 1991, p. 171); for them, the influence of Ireland on his writing and, most of all, his political role in advancing the rationale for the English colonisation of Ireland qualify him for a place in the story. This is further reinforced by the editors' discussion of him, which centres on Spenser as colonial administrator, as "Spenser's writings on Ireland are of central importance to his age" (p. 171).

Such choices regarding section-worthy authors also evidence Deane's goal of repossessing writers for Ireland. One of the most emblematic of such cases is Jonathan Swift. Even though Swift has long been categorised as a major writer, he has been a controversial figure within Irish writing at various points throughout history, mainly due to his Anglo-Irish background and sometimes contemptuous attitude toward Ireland. For some, Swift was not Irish enough to qualify as an Irish writer – for instance, Justin McCarthy, editor of one of the largest predecessors to the *Field Day Anthology*, the 1904 *Irish Literature*, did not consider him so (Stewart, 1998, p. 113).

Field Day, however, inserts itself in a movement toward reclaiming him. In the section dedicated to Swift, editor Andrew Carpenter qualifies him as "the most potent and recurrent symbolic presence in modern Irish writing" (Carpenter, 1991, p. 327) and goes on to argue for Swift's fundamental Irishness. For the editor, despite Swift's Anglo-Irish origins, his work is profoundly influenced by Ireland not only in content, but also in tone and mood; Carpenter finds proximities with the Irish comic tradition, while in Swift "the English limit of reason, good sense and decorum is entirely missing" (p. 327). Swift's presence and treatment are reinforced in Bryan Coleborne's "Anglo-Irish Verse 1675-1825", in which a sub-section is dedicated to him. Coleborne, like Carpenter, points to a difference between the traditional English tone and the one found in Swift and others, with "a peculiar flavour, full of energy and ambivalence, quite unlike that of eighteenth-century England or Scotland" (Coleborne, 1991, p. 396) and which he connects to a sense of cultural insecurity for the Anglo-Irish, poised between cultures.

With the separate section and the critical exploration in the introductions, the anthology ultimately presents Swift as a major writer and an Irish one. Nevertheless, it may seem cynical to analyse Swift's prominence within the anthology only as a retaking of a gifted writer for Ireland; a more generous view will find, in Swift and those other inclusions, traces of the anthology's stated attempt at plurality, by accommodating the Anglo-Irish strain in the history of Irish writing.

Wilde and Shaw, in a section edited by Declan Kiberd in the second volume, are also repossessed. Reasons for grouping them together may comprise their distinction mainly as playwrights, their having lived during the same period, or the fact that they both enjoyed leaving Ireland and found success in the metropolitan centre, London. Throughout his introduction, Kiberd underlines more similarities between the two artists and claims that both "challenged, by personal behaviour as well as by artistic skill, the prevailing stereotypes of the Irish in Britain" (Coleborne, 1991, p. 371), thus combating negative representations of the Irish and fostering something close to Deane's assertion of "cultural authority and confidence" (1991, p. xix). The editor also stresses their influence on the Literary Revival and playwrights like Synge or O'Casey, furthering their placement within an Irish canon.

The section dedicated to Yeats, edited by Seamus Heaney, features an introduction less centred on questions of politics and Irishness than others. Throughout the essay, Heaney approaches a myriad aspects of Yeats's work, not only as artist per se but also as a hugely influential figure in the Irish literary field of his day. He touches on the political component to Yeats (and many of the political poems make it into the section) but explores it in terms of his creative endeavour, claiming, for instance, that Yeats's attitude to nationality was transformed by "the workings of his own psyche and the drama of his own spiritual quest" (Heaney, 1991, p. 795). He also stresses how Yeats's Irish nationalism was a complex one, drawing simultaneously from the Gaelic inheritance and the Anglo-Irish tradition, again underscoring the plurality sought by the anthology.

Joyce, another inescapable figure, also gets a section and is discussed by Deane in volume III mostly in terms of colonialism/nationalism. This could be explained, perhaps, by Joyce's frequent placement in what Deane calls "exhibitions of International Modernism" in the general introduction (1991a, p. xxi), occluding his national origin. It may also derive from a wish to present Joyce not only as a major Irish writer, but a major Irish writer whose work encapsulates an opposition to English colonialism and imperialism – for Deane, something discernible even in Joyce's very experimentation

with language (Deane, 1991d, p. 3-4), as he twists the English language to make it foreign to the imperial power. By doing so, Deane both reclaims Joyce and stresses the pervasiveness of the Irish colonial experience.

The last writer to have a dedicated section is Samuel Beckett. Beckett was a more recent writer (he died less than two years before the anthology was published) and, in spite of his ambiguous relationship with Ireland, was firmly established internationally as an *Irish* writer. Perhaps this explains why J. C. C. Mays's section introduction, unlike many of the others about specific writers, does not dwell much on Beckett's attitudes towards nation and nationality. Beckett was already within most conceptions of the Irish canon; there was no need for Field Day to repossess him.

All in all, more than simply bestow prominence and acknowledgment to a set of writers, Deane and Field Day use the "central figures" to question traditional arrangements of the canon, especially the absorption of Irish writers into the English tradition, in line with their declared objectives. Nevertheless, they do not question the canonical structure. The reader might accept the points Deane discusses in the introduction – that the anthology is not proposing a canon, rather "an example of the way in which canons are established" (Deane, 1991a, p. xix), but the end result is that Field Day's selection still looks like a canon, even if it frequently acknowledges its own artificiality.

4 Volumes IV and V: questioning the canon

Volumes IV and V, by contrast, take a completely different approach in relation to renowned writers, whether men or women. This derives, above all, from the anthology's scope and editorial project. The initial volumes had responded to the situation around them – the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the perceived appropriation of Irish writers by English traditions and canons. The newer volumes more immediately responded to the omissions of the first three volumes, as well as to a climate of rapid social change in Ireland, social movements and protests against gender oppression. In their preface, indeed, the editors see a "perceived flowering" (Bourke *et al,* 2002, p. xxxii) of feminism in Ireland creating the conditions for the anthology – in a space that had previously been all too concerned with the national question, to the detriment of proper attention to gender and to women's work. Thus, they write,

> In the 1970s and 1980s [...] the project of defining and redefining Ireland did not accommodate the re-evaluation and recovery of women's words and history. Had gender been considered then as an element in the making of national and political identity, literary canons and historical priorities might not have been framed as they were. (p. xxxiv)

An example of the pervasiveness of this primacy taken by national issues over gender ones is the first set of the *Field Day Anthology* itself – for all the hospitality Deane sought in the introduction, the work of Irish women was still unsatisfactorily addressed. Even so, while questioning the 1991 instalments, the editors indicate a continuity between the old project and the new one, especially in their dedication to recovering texts of limited currency and making them available (p. xxxiii). The difference is that, if a concern with nationality and the colonial experience had set the tone for much of the first volumes, womanhood is the main element of volumes IV and V.

The newer instalments' main goals are encapsulated in the editors' statement that they wish to "provide a set of contexts for understanding how women have lived in Ireland" (Bourke *et al.*, 2002, p. xxxiii), beyond an emphasis on the purely literary. Rather than simply assembling a supplementary canon of female writers as a parallel to the largely male tradition constructed in the earlier volumes, the editors aim to deal with the cultural and historical conditions that shaped women's writing and its reception. In doing so, the point being driven home is that women's writing in Ireland cannot be understood only through literary production in the narrow sense, but must also take into account other forms of discourse through which women articulated their experiences and participated in public life.

This is one of the reasons why, like its predecessors, the new volumes opened their pages to writing outside "literature", but this time including even more genres. Many sections (especially within larger sections such as "Religion, Science, Theology and Ethics 1500-2000" or "Politics 1500-2000") are specifically dedicated to non-literary genres. Nevertheless, one of the objectives was giving due attention to writing most conventionally understood as literature by Irish women. In that regard, however, one of the main anthology-wide decisions taken by the general editors was that those authors who had appeared in the 1991 volumes would, for the most part, be out:

> authors well represented in volumes I-III are not usually represented again here, and exceptions are intended to propose either a re-evaluation of authors whose reputation previously rested on an unrepresentative or restricted sample of their work, or a repositioning of well-known texts. (Bourke *et al*, 2002, p. xxxvi)

Here the editors are referring to the 39 female authors that appeared before, but presumably more so to the few women writers who had been deemed worthy of occupying a position – however marginal – in traditional Irish canons and in the canon implied by the 1991 volumes, names like Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Lavin, and others.

There is, of course, the fact that those women writers had been included in the first volumes, which allowed the editors of volumes IV-V to omit them (had the first volumes magically been erased, it is likely that Bowen or O'Brien, for example, would have been included in the sections devoted to literary writing). Nevertheless, the opposite choice was also open: the editors could equally have repeated these authors while bringing different texts of theirs.

This would probably entail fewer negative repercussions, as the editors' choice was not without its detractors: literary critics Eileen Battersby and Aisling Foster, writing for *The Irish Times* and *The Guardian* respectively, questioned the exclusion of those writers, as part of a wider critique of the anthology's quality when dealing with literature. Battersby defined the absences as "wrong" and "a serious own goal" (2002); for her, the volumes were a missed opportunity to explore major and minor women writers, and she finds a "sociological agenda stalking these ambitious, new volumes" in place of "exploration and textual analysis". Other critics nevertheless welcomed the different emphasis; commentators like Anne Fogarty, in a review for the *Irish Literary Supplement*, perceived a "historicist and sociological rather than aesthetic" (2003, p. 3) driving force behind selection; for her, this is positive because it calls attention to the extra-literariness of women's writing, leading to "a densely realized account of women where most traditional cultural histories would not even have discerned their presence" (p. 3).

Some editors of "literary" sections in the anthology raise the question of space to justify the absences of those writers. Gerardine Meaney, introducing the "Women and Writing, 1700-1960" section, points to "the volume of little-known work which was identified for possible inclusion" and the "sheer volume and diversity" (Meaney, 2002a, p. 771) of women's writing as reasons not to present more of Somerville and Ross, Mary Lavin or others. Similarly, Siobhán Kilfeather in "The Profession of Letters, 1700-1810", while conceding that Maria Edgeworth is "clearly a dominant figure" (Kilfeather, 2002, p. 774) in the period, blames lack of space as a motive. She contrasts the wide availability of Edgeworth with the lack of renown of other writers she does represent again, like Mary Barber, Frances Sheridan, Charlotte Brooke and others. These absences, thus, may be partly explained by a desire to make room for different

voices, echoing the aspect of retrieval and recovery found in much feminist work and claimed by the editors (p. xxxiv).

The decision to omit the most canonical writers went hand in hand with the absence of sections dedicated to particular writers like those in the first volumes. One possible reason for that could be a perceived limited canonicity of those women writers: even the most famous of them were not as valued among (male-dominated) literary and academic circles, so they were not canonical in the same sense as Yeats or Joyce, for instance. But this is a less obvious decision than it might seem. It would have been just as easy for the eight editors to decide on a handful of these more celebrated Irish women writers and sprinkle separate sections for them across the volumes – actively contributing, like anthologies do, to altering writers' status within the complex systems of canonisation and consecration in the literary field. Charlotte Brooke, for example, whose importance in translating between the Gaelic and English cultures was hailed in both sets of volumes, could alternatively have received a section of her own. So could Elizabeth Bowen, perhaps as a representative of the Anglo-Irish perspective in the first half of the 20th century.

Instead of making these slightly more celebrated writers salient by giving them a section, or proposing this higher status for other, lesser-renowned writers, the editors chose not to include such sections at all. Thus, the "big" names (at least the ones that are included) appear side by side with the others, in sections defined by theme or period. Even within these sections, prominence is not necessarily given to them. For instance, Gerardine Meaney, one of the eight main editors, claims that in "Identity and Opposition: Women's Writing, 1890-1960", her goal is "not to present the work of the most eminent women writers of the period, but to set them (and their male contemporaries) in a new context" (Meaney, 2002, p. 976). All of this results mainly in a flattening of hierarchies, if not completely dissolving then at least subverting the major/minor distinction present in many anthologies, including the 1991 version of the *Field Day Anthology*.

This approach is backed by a feminist intent not to leave the form of the canon untouched. Later, in 2007, Meaney would examine the consequences of doing otherwise:

> Including again all women writers previously represented would have consolidated a separate canon of women's writing, neatly divided from a male canon which would then assume an originary status as the (national) canon. Hence writers from Morgan and Edgeworth to Boland and O'Brien were included again in Volumes IV and V, but thematically, not as the

> canonical monuments around which the less familiar work could be organized and recuperated into a recognizable version of Irish literary history. To differentiate the canon, one must combine rereading the known with rendering visible the unknown. (Meaney, 2007, p. 20)

Her comment indicates the editors' perception that limiting the attention given to those writers would avoid the risk of creating a "parallel" canon, which would paradoxically continue to marginalise women's writing while drawing attention to it – thus running counter to the feminist orientation of the project.

5 Conclusion

Both sets of volumes, in their sophisticated editorial apparatus, highlight the fact that they are artificial constructions, in line with a growing awareness in the late 20th century of the canon as something that is built instead of a self-evident entity. One of the ways in which selection is made differently – and thus canons are proposed differently – lies in the differing emphases of the two projects, reflected in their contrasting approach to the "major" writers.

The 1991 volumes interrogate arrangements in the canons that were still dominant at the time, especially questioning the annexation of Irish writers into English literature. Given Deane's comments on recognising "the power of the English canonical tradition to absorb a great deal of writing that, from a different point of view, could be reclaimed for the Irish tradition" (Deane, 1991a, p. iv), it is easy to see how granting such space for writers like Swift, Wilde, or Joyce might be connected to an anxiety over nationality. With the choices, the editor is returning them to their rightful place in an Irish canon as opposed to an English or British one. Asserting that these highly distinguished writers are actually Irish, thus, has a twofold effect: it reclaims them, contributing to an increase in Irish literary achievement and, considering that Field Day's selection includes writers from both the Anglo-Irish tradition and a more nationalist tradition, it contributes to the plurality Deane claims to seek in the general introduction.

Whereas the first instalments delineated (even with all the caveats raised by Deane and the other section editors) an Irish canon against an English one, the editors of volumes IV and V could be expected to define a women's canon against a male one. This does not, however, materialise; the editorial project was concerned with properly recognising and presenting women's achievements in literature and writing, but instead of making

this the chief force driving selection, the editors opted instead for inclusivity toward other voices, and for not responding to volumes I-III with the same proposition of a hierarchically differentiated canon.

By not assigning "special treatment" to those women writers more widely considered to be aesthetically accomplished, the anthology does indeed miss an opportunity, as Battersby claimed in her review, of doing them a sort of justice – finally granting them the critical attention frequently reserved to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, with such a move the editors manage to reflect feminist principles and sidestep a traditional, arborescent, vertical format for the canon which is often implied by anthologies. There are distinctions between writers, but smaller ones; some of them still get more pages than others, some receive greater attention throughout the section introductions, but the more renowned writers – the "known", in Meaney's terms – are on much more equal footing with other authors, and thus the overt hierarchical aspect is not reproduced. Rather, the volumes are revolutionary in ultimately suggesting that a hierarchy might not be that important after all, and so they come closer to fulfilling the "sampler of texts" (Bourke *et al,* 2002, p. xxxvi) shape the editors wish to present, distancing the anthology from a traditional male approach to canon-making.

With all their differences, looking back from the vantage point of the 2020s, both projects still stand as testaments to the complexity of the anthological enterprise, especially when it involves conceptions of a national literature at a key moment of challenge and re-evaluation of traditional canons. Volumes IV and V, in turn, remain as an alternative model for anthologies seeking to provide a feminist challenge to the notion of a canon itself.

References

BATTERSBY, Eileen. Stalked by an Agenda. **The Irish Times**, Dublin, 5 Oct. 2002.

BOURKE, Angela *et al.* (ed.). **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, vol. 4 and 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions**. Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2002.

BOURKE, Angela *et al.* Preface. *In:* BOURKE, Angela *et al* (ed.) **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, vol. 4 and 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions**. Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2002, p. xxxii-xxxvi.

CARPENTER, Andrew. Jonathan Swift. *In*: DEANE, Seamus. **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing**. Derry and New York: Field Day and Norton, 1991. p. 327-394.

COLEBORNE, Bryan. Anglo-Irish Verse 1675-1825. *In*: DEANE, Seamus (ed.). **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing**. Derry and New York: Field Day and Norton, 1991. p. 395-499.

CROWE, Catriona. Testimony to a Flowering. **The Dublin Review**, Dublin, n. 10, Spring 2003.

CULLEN, Darcy. Introduction: The Social Dynamics of Scholarly Editing. *In*: CULLEN, Darcy (ed.). **Editors, Scholars, and the Social Text**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, p. 3-32.

DEANE, Seamus (ed.). **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, vol. 1-3**. Derry and New York: Field Day and Norton, 1991.

DEANE, Seamus. General Introduction. *In*: DEANE, Seamus (ed.). **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing**, volume 1. Derry and New York: Field Day and Norton, 1991a, p. xxi-xxvi.

DEANE, Seamus. James Joyce. *In*: DEANE, Seamus (ed.). **The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing**, volume 3. Derry and New York: Field Day and Norton, 1991e, p. 1-88.

FOSTER, Aisling. Too Much, but Still not Enough. **The Guardian**, London, 4 Jan. 2003.

FOSTER, Aisling. The *Field Day Anthology* and Irish Women's Literary Studies. **Irish Review**, n. 30, p. 82-94, 2003b.

KILFEATHER, Siobhán. The Whole Bustle. **London Review of Books**, London, v. 14, n. 1, 9 Jan. 1992. Available on: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v14/n01/siobhan-kilfeather/the-whole-bustle. Accessed on: 09 Apr. 2025.

LONGLEY, Edna. Belfast Diary. **London Review of Books**, London, v. 14, n. 1, 9 Jan. 1992. Available on: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v14/n01/edna-longley/belfast-diary. Access on: 09 Apr. 2025.

MAGUIRE, Laurie. Feminist Editing and the Body of the Text. *In*: CALLAGHAN, Dympna (ed.). **A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare**. Blackwell, 2016, p. 77-97.

MEANEY, Gerardine. Engendering the Postmodern Canon? The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volumes IV & V: Women's Writing and Traditions. *In*: HABERSTROH, Patricia B.; ST PETER, Christine (ed.). **Opening the Field: Irish Women: Texts and Contexts**. Cork: Cork University Press, p. 15-30, 2007.

STEWART, Bruce. Anthologising Ireland: "Irish Literature" (1904) and Its Contexts. **The Irish Review**, n. 23, p. 105-126, 1998.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Alinne Balduino Pires Fernandes is Associate Professor at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Head of the Postgraduate Programme in English (PPGI, 2025-2028), and co-founder and Chair of the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses (NEI) at UFSC. She holds a PhD in Theatre Translation and Dramaturgy from Queen's University Belfast (QUB). She has been a visiting researcher at University College Dublin, University of Galway, and Universidade de Brasília. She is an elected executive member of both the Irish Society for Theatre Research (ISTR, 2023-2026) and the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL, 2025-2028). Her books include *Theatre, Performance, and Commemoration* (co-edited, Bloomsbury, 2023) and *Quando minha avó morreu* (short story collection, Patuá, 2024). She has published widely in the fields of theatre translation, radio drama, and Irish and Northern Irish women's writing. She is also a theatre translator, artistic director, dramaturge, and writer. Her research has been funded by Brazil's national research council, CNPq (Bolsa de Produtividade em Pesquisa), since 2023.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/3537071010216972
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0979-6036
E-mail: alinne.fernandes@ufsc.br



Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos is a faculty member of the Postgraduate Programme in English (PPGI) and co-founder and Vice-Chair of the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses (NEI) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). She holds a PhD in Linguistic and Literary Studies in English from the University of São Paulo (USP) and an MA in English from Northwestern University. She has been a visiting researcher at University College Dublin (UCD), the University of Galway, and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Her most recent research projects focus on contemporary Irish documentary theatre and Irish theatre and disability. Her publications include *Contemporary Irish Documentary Theatre* (Bloomsbury, 2020), co-edited with Shaun Richards, as well as the organization of a series of Irish plays in translation focusing on characters with disabilities (Iluminuras, 2023–2026). She was a producer with Cia Ludens theatre company until 2026. In 2023, she was a co-recipient of Ireland's Presidential Distinguished Service Award in the Arts, Culture and Sports category.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/5528793477981441
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7367-0510
E-mail: beatrizkxb@gmail.com



Vinicius Garcia Valim is a lecturer and pedagogical coordinator at Universidade do Vale do Itajaí (UNIVALI), and has been a member of the Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses (NEI) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) since 2017. He holds a PhD and an MA in English: Linguistic and Literary Studies from UFSC. His research currently focuses primarily on the areas of Irish Studies and Editing Studies. Other areas of interest include 20th-century poetry, comparative literature, literature and film, and the history of the book.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/7025219357767346
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7596-0856
E-mail: vinicius.garcia.valim@gmail.com



Margaret Kelleher is Professor and Chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College Dublin (research profile: https://people.ucd.ie/margaret.o.kelleher). She is a board member of the Museum of Literature Ireland (https://moli.ie/) and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her most recent book is the collection *Technology in Irish Literature and Culture*, co-edited with James O'Sullivan, and published by Cambridge University Press (2022). Her monograph *Maamtrasna Murders: Language, Life and Death in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (UCD Press, 2018) was awarded the Michael J. Durkan Prize for Books in Language and Culture by the American Conference for Irish Studies in 2019, and in 2020 was shortlisted for the Michel Déon Prize. Other publications include *The Feminization of Famine* (Duke UP and Cork UP, 1997), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (2006), and a special issue of the journal *Éire-Ireland* on the topic of "Ireland and the Contemporary" (2017). Her latest book, *Mary and Padraic Colum: Lives and the Dream*, was published by UCD Press in 2026. She was Cullman Center Fellow at New York Public Library from 2022-2023 and Parnell Fellow in Irish Studies at Magdalene College, Cambridge from 2023-2024.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5457-1392
E-mail: margaret.o.kelleher@ucd.ie



Alan Gilsenan is an award-winning Irish writer, film-maker and theatre director. His widely diverse and extensive body of film work extends across cinema documentary, feature films and more poetic and experimental work. His latest films include *The Days of Trees*, a reflection on trauma and memory, which won the 2024 IFTA award for best feature documentary; *Ghosts of Baggotonia*, a film-poem that combines personal memory and the literary ghosts of bohemian Dublin; and *The Irish Question*, a mediation on the Northern Ireland "Troubles" and the possibilities for a united Ireland. Alongside his

recent film about the poet Paul Muldoon, *A Life in Lyrics*, Gilsenan has recently directed an opera with a libretto from Muldoon – and composed by Kamala Sankaram – entitled *Custom of the Coast*. Gilsenan has just finished a new experimental feature in Japan, The *Journey of Weather-Exposed Bones*, inspired by the work of Matsuo Bashō, and is currently completing a feature documentary on the life of President Michael D. Higgins. He is a former Chairperson of the Irish Film Institute and was a member of the boards of both Screen Ireland and Ireland's national broadcaster RTÉ. He is currently the Chairperson of Fighting Words, a national organisation that facilitates creative writing for children and young people. Alan Gilsenan is also a member of Aosdána, the Irish academy of artists.

E-mail: alanjgilsenan@gmail.com



(Photo: Tom Honan)

Marina Carr is an award-winning Irish playwright based in Dublin and one of the most significant contemporary voices in theatre. Her recent plays include *Audrey or Sorrow* (2024), *The Map of Argentina* (2024), *The Boy* (2025), *The God and His Daughter* (2025), and *Mirandolina* (2026). Her earlier acclaimed works include *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats…*, *Woman and Scarecrow*, and *Hecuba*. Carr's work has been translated into numerous languages and produced internationally by companies including the Abbey Theatre, the Gate Theatre, Druid, Landmark Productions, the Royal Court, the RSC, and the Almeida Theatre. Her honours include the Windham-Campbell Prize, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the E.M. Forster Award. She is a member of Aosdána and an Associate Professor at Dublin City University.

E-mail: ukadam@theagency.co.uk



Deirdre Kinahan is an award-winning playwright and a member of Aosdána, Ireland's elected affiliation of outstanding artists. She collaborates with artists and theatres all over the world, is literary associate to Meath County Council and has a large canon of regularly produced plays to her credit. Deirdre is published by Nick Hern Books. Recent works include: *The Saviour* for Landmark Productions & Irish Repertory Theatre NYC 2023, *An Old Song, Half Forgotten* for the Abbey Theatre & SoFFt productions 2023, *Tempesta* for Glassmask Theatre/Cork Midsummer Festival 2024, *In the Middle of the Fields* for Solas Nua Washington DC 2021, *The Visit* for Draiocht & Dublin Theatre Festival 2021/22, *Rathmines Road* for the Abbey Theatre & Fishamble and her Revolutionary Trilology – *OUTRAGE/EMBARGO/WILD SKY.* Deirdre has a number of new theatre and screen projects in development, currently under commission to Staatstheatre Mainz Germany, Fishamble Dublin, Nomad touring group and Landmark Productions. She also has years of experience as a producer and enjoys curating or participating in multi-genre artistic projects.

E-mail: ukadam@theagency.com.uk



Maria Rita Drumond Viana is a lecturer in the Department of Literary Theory at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (DTL/Unicamp) and she supervises postgraduates at both Unicamp and UFSC, where she started her career and co-founded NEI. She wrote her doctoral thesis on the public letters of W. B. Yeats, at the Universidade de São Paulo, with a research period at the University of Oxford. She is a member of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literature (IASIL), of the Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses (ABEI), and of the International Yeats Society (IYS). As part of the IYS executive board, she has served one term as vice-president of the IYS (2022-25), two terms as secretary and has organised an IYS Conference in Brazil (2024).

She is also part of the academic board of the International Yeats Summer School in Sligo and of the editorial board of the Yeats Annual. Her current research project is funded by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico and focuses on the translations into Portuguese of life writing by Virginia Woolf.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/5599396027783335
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1985-3375
E-mail: mrviana@unicamp.br



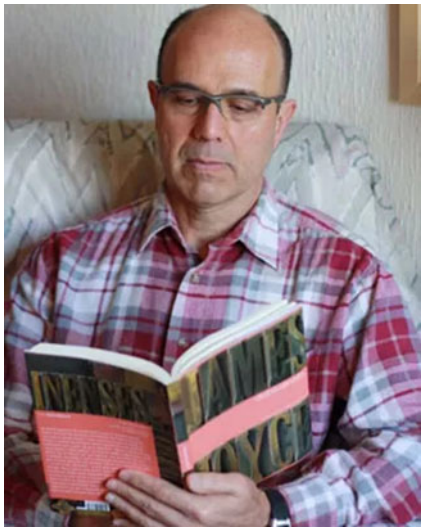
Vincent Woods, writer and broadcaster, was born in Leitrim in the north west of Ireland and lives in Dublin. His plays include *At the Black Pig's Dyke* and *A Cry from Heaven*; and poetry collections are *The Colour of Language*, *Lives and Miracles* and *Borderlines* (with Henry Glassie). With Eva Bourke he co-edited *Fermata: Writings Inspired by Music*, and with Australian poet Colleen Burke co-edited *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia*. He edited *Leaves of Hungry Grass: Poetry and Ireland's Great Hunger* as part of the Quinnipiac University Famine Folios. Plays for radio include *The Gospels of Aughamore*, *Broken Moon* and *Last Supper at the Imperial Hotel*. His work with music and musicians includes the stage shows "The Leitrim Equation", "Open Room" and "Portal". He wrote the libretto for Gavin Bryars' composition *Wittgenstein Fragments* which was commissioned by Louth Contemporary Music Society. Vincent resented the landmark series *The County Measure* on RTE Radio 1; co-directed the film *Bealach an Fhéir Ghortaigh/Hunger's Way* with Edwina Guckian and wrote a short drama and epilogue for the dance and music performance *The Devil's in the Dancehall*. He is a member of Aosdána, the Academy of distinguished Irish artists.

E-mail: woodsvin@gmail.com



Bruno Ricardo Gessner is a translator and translator researcher. He holds a Masters's degree from the Post-graduate Programme in Translation Studies (PGET) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina and is currently pursuing a PhD from the same programme. His research focuses on literary and poetry translation.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/9514724305882260
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6456-3299
Email: brunoricardogessner@gmail.com



José Roberto O'Shea holds a BA from the University of Texas-El Paso, an MA from American University-DC and a PhD in English and North American Literature from University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He did post-doctoral internships at the Shakespeare Institute-University of Birmingham, the University of Exeter and Folger Shakespeare Library. He joined Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina in 1990 and was a Professor from 1993 to 2016, when he retired. He further collaborated with the Post-graduate Programme in English at UFSC as a volunteer Professor from 2017 to 2024. He was a CNPq researcher from 1992 to 2022, with a project encompassing annotated translations of Shakespearian plays, having concluded the following works: *Antônio e Cleópatra; Cimbeline, Rei da Britânia; O Conto do Inverno; Péricles, Príncipe de Tiro; Hamlet, Primeiro In-Quarto; Os Dois Primos Nobres; Troilo e Créssida; Tímon de Atenas*; e *As Alegres Esposas de Windsor*. He has published over eighty other translations, spanning several literary genres.

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/9433188468108586
E-mail: oshea@cce.ufsc.br



Kathleen McCracken, a Belfast-based Canadian poet, is the author of eight collections of poetry including *Blue Light, Bay and College*, shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Poetry, a bilingual English/Portuguese edition entitled *Double Self Portrait with Mirror: New and Selected Poems*, and in collaboration with John T. Davis the filmpoem *Mustangs, or The Ballad of Gideon Light*. She was a finalist for the WB Yeats Society of New York Poetry Competition, the Montreal International Prize for Poetry, The Walrus Poetry Prize, and the CBC Poetry Prize. In 2019 she won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing. From 1992-2022 Kathleen

was Lecturer in Creative Writing and Contemporary Literature at Ulster University, Northern Ireland, and she currently serves on the editorial board of Macha Press.

E-mail: ravenwolf@btinternet.com



Lance Pettitt is an Emeritus Professor, commercial ghost writer, independent scholar and local gardener. He taught at Birkbeck, University of London (2016-2021) and was an Irish government-funded visiting professor in Irish Studies at Bergische University, Wuppertal (2021-22). Recent academic publications include *Maeve* (2022, UFSC), co-edited with Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos in the Ireland on Film series, *The Last Bohemian* (Syracuse UP, 2023) and co-editorship of a *RISE* special issue on the Irish Border (2024). Currently an undergraduate student of creative writing at the University of Oxford, an extract titled 'Coffee at the Ganymede,' from his novel-in-progress, *The German's Wife*, is published in *Mittleitslungsblatt* (Spring, 2026).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4068-6097
E-mail: lance.pettitt@conted.ox.ac.uk



Áine Stapleton is a dance artist and filmmaker from Ireland, with a focus on the biographies of female artists. She has created several films about dancer Lucia Joyce, including *Medicated Milk* and *Horrible Creature*. *Medicated Milk* was described by Film Ireland as "a must-see", and *Horrible Creature* as "a stunning visual experience". Her film installation *Somewhere in the Body* explores Lucia Joyce's presence in *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce. Áine's work has been screened internationally, including at the Irish Film Institute, Riffraff Kino in Zurich, the Yugoslav Kinoteka and UK Parobrod as part of the Belgrade Irish Festival, and the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg. Her film *When Life is Silent* investigates the dance history of Monte Verità in Switzerland,

focusing on European modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman, and is supported by The Arts Council.

E-mail: stapleton.aine@gmail.com



Ruth Barton is Professor Emeritus in Film Studies at Trinity College Dublin. She has published widely on Irish cinema and her works include *Irish National Cinema* (2004) and *Acting Irish in Hollywood* (2006). She has also written critical biographies of the Hollywood star, Hedy Lamarr – *Hedy Lamarr, The Most Beautiful Woman in Film* (2010) –and the Irish silent era director, Rex Ingram – *Rex Ingram, Visionary Director of the Silent Screen* (2014). Her latest monograph, *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, was published in 2019 by Manchester University Press. She is currently writing a critical biography of Maureen O'Sullivan.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1336-3965
E-mail: bartonr@tcd.ie



Nicholas Grene is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at Trinity College Dublin, a former Senior Fellow of the College where he served three terms as Head of the English Department. He has been an invited lecturer in many countries and visiting professor at the University of New South Wales, Dartmouth and the Sorbonne. His books include *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination* (1992), *The Politics of Irish Drama* (1999), *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (2002) *Yeats's Poetic Codes* (2008), *Home on the Stage* (2014), *The Theatre of Tom Murphy* (2017) and *Farming in Modern Irish Literature* (2021). His most recent books are *Irish Theatre in the Twenty-first Century* and *Derek Mahon: A Retrospective*, co-edited with Tom Walker.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4275-5538
E-mail: ngrene@tcd.ie



Miriam Haughton is an Associate Professor in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Galway, and President of the Irish Society for Theatre Research (2023-2027). Miriam is PI of the Research Ireland Laureate award "The Price of Performance" assessing economic sustainability for independent theatre and performance companies on the island of Ireland and Scotland between 2000-2020. Miriam's books include *The Theatre of Louise Lowe* (Cambridge UP 2025), and *Staging Trauma* (Palgrave 2018). Her co-edited collections include *Theatre, Performance and Commemoration* (Methuen 2023), *Legacies of the Magdalen Laundries* (Manchester 2021) and *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (Carysfort 2015).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2054-995X
E-mail: miriam.haughton@universityofgalway.ie



Finian O'Gorman is a lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Galway. He is currently working on a book on the amateur theatre movement in Ireland, titled A *History of Amateur Theatre in Ireland, 1930-1980: Communtiy, Identity, and Modernisation* (Palgrave Macmillan). Finian was previously an Irish Research Council (IRC) Postdoctoral Fellow at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin (2023) and an IRC Postgraduate Scholar at the University of Galway. His published work has featured in *Irish University Review* (2024), *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* (2021), *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* (Bloomsbury, 2019), *The Theatre of Enda Walsh* (Carysfort, 2015), the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (2015), *New Hibernia Review* (2013), and *Irish Theatre Magazine* (2013). He is the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Support Officer for the Irish Society for Theatre Research (ISTR).

E-mail: fogorman@gmail.com



Patricia O'Beirne is a postdoctoral researcher working on "The Price of Performance" (TPOP), a Research Ireland Laureate 2023-2025 project which asks if and how economic sustainability arises for independent theatre production, despite the varying challenges the sector confronts. Patricia completed her doctoral thesis as an Abbey Theatre Digital Archive Research Fellow in the University of Galway, collaborating on the digitisation of the Abbey Theatre Minute Books 1906 – 1939 and contributing to the subsequent publication *Navigating Ireland's Theatre Archive: Theatre, Practice, Performance* (2019). Her work focuses on Irish feminist, political and working-class theatre and on Irish theatre in the 1980s. Patricia's publications include chapters in volumes including *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, Volume 1 (1716-2016)* (2021) and *Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre: Populating the Stage* (2017) along with articles *in the New Hibernia Review* and *The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies*.

E-mail: triciamob@gmail.com



Eamonn Jordan is Professor in Drama Studies at the School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin. He has edited/co-edited a number of collections of essays. His books include: *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (1997), *Dissident Dramaturgies: Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2010), *From Leenane to LA: The Theatre and Cinema of Martin McDonagh* (2014), *The Theatre and Films of Conor McPherson: Conspicuous Communities* (2019), *Justice in the Plays and Films of Martin McDonagh* (2019), and *Irish Theatre: Interrogating Intersecting Inequalities* (2023).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3446-5231
E-mail: eamonn.jordan@ucd.ie



Colin Murphy is a playwright, screenwriter, and journalist from Dublin, best known for his series of plays about Irish political history. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Methuen, who recently published a collected volume of his plays for Fishamble: The New Play Company, titled *Colin Murphy's Political Plays*. In 2025, the Irish Arts Center in New York presented his play *The United States vs Ulysses*, in a production by Once Off Productions. Other plays include *The Asylum Workshop* (for TU Dublin Conservatoire), *Miasma* (Verdant Productions and UCD Centre for Cultural Analytics) and *A Day in May* (produced by Pat Moylan). Radio plays include *#Antigone* (for Newstalk) and the award-winning *Hamlet, Prince of Derry* (for RTÉ Drama on One). He writes a weekly column for *The Sunday Independent*.

E-mail: colinmurphy@me.com



Domingos Nunez graduated in *Letras* from UFSC (1988); has an MA in Portuguese Drama at USP (1999); a PhD in Irish Studies from USP and NUI/Maynooth (2005); and a post-doctorate in creative writing at UNESP/São José do Rio Preto (2017). He is a translator, a playwright and the Artistic Director of Cia Ludens, based in São Paulo. Author and director of *The Two Deaths of Roger Casement* (2016), Nunez has also translated and directed several plays of Irish dramatists for Cia Ludens, among them Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (2004 and 2013) and *Faith Healer* (2009); Bernard Shaw's *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (2008) and Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (2011/2021). He has been the organizer, since 2004, with Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, of the five Cycles of readings for Cia Ludens. He has published articles and his translations in various academic and commercial publishers. Friel's collection was shortlisted as "Best Translation" by the Jabuti Prize of 2014.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7067-1817
E-mail: domingosnunez@gmail.com



Ian R. Walsh is Associate Professor in Drama and Theatre Studies at University of Galway. He has published widely in peer-reviewed journals and edited collections. Books include *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories* (Palgrave, 2024 Open Access) co-written with Charlotte McIvor and *Experimental Irish Theatre: After W.B. Yeats* (Palgrave, 2012) and edited collections: *Cultural Convergence: The Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928-1960*, co-edited with Ondrej Pilny and Ruud van den Beuken, and *The Theatre of Enda Walsh* (Peter Lang, 2019), co-edited with Mary Caulfield. In 2021 he edited a special journal for *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* (RISE 4.1) on the Gate Theatre Dublin with Elaine Sisson and Siobhán O'Gorman. He has also led international research projects funded by Creative Europe and Erasmus + on circus pedagogy and performance.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9607-5442
E-mail: ian.walsh@universityofgalway.ie



Vitor Alevato do Amaral is from Rio de Janeiro, teaches Anglophone literatures at the Fluminense Federal University, and coordinates the research group Joyce Studies in Brazil. He edited and translated *Outra poesia* (Syrinx, 2022), a volume of James Joyce's early and occasional poems. He also participated in the translation of *Finnegans Wake* (*Finnegans Rivolta*, Iluminuras, 2022).

Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/7623858176791352
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7838-5965
E-mail: vitoramaral@id.uff.br



Lucy Caldwell was born in Belfast in 1981 and is the author of four novels, several stage plays and radio dramas, and four collections of short stories: *Multitudes*, *Intimacies*, *Openings*, and most recently *Devotions* (Faber, 2026). Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2018, she was the editor of *Being Various: New Irish Short Stories* in 2019. She won the BBC National Short Story Award in 2021 for "All the People Were Mean and Bad". Other awards include the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, the George Devine Award, the Dylan Thomas Prize, the Walter Scott Prize and the 2022 E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts & Letters.



Paul Delaney is Associate Professor in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. He is the author of *Anthologisation and Irish Short Fiction: Magnitudes of Telling* (2025) and *Seán O'Faoláin: Literature, Inheritance and the 1930s* (2014). He is also editor of *David Marcus: Editing Ireland*, with Deirdre Madden (2024), *Dublin Tales*, with Eve Patten (2023), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Short Story in English*, with Adrian Hunter (2019), *William Trevor: Revaluations*, with Michael Parker (2013), and *Reading Colm Tóibín* (2008).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1989-3745
E-mail: DELANEP@tcd.ie



Deirdre Flynn is an Associate Professor in 21st-century literature at MIC Limerick. She is a member of the inaugural Young Academy of Ireland at the Royal Irish Academy. She has published widely on Precarity, Contemporary literature, Irish Studies, Migration, Campus Fiction, and Literary Urban Studies. Her newest co-edited collection, *Irish Digital Cultures:*

Identity Contexts and Space with Dr Mary McGill was published by Routledge in 2026. She has also published *The Routledge Handbook of Motherhood on Screen* (2025) with Dr Susan Liddy, and *Austerity and Irish Women's Writing and Culture 1980 - 2020* (2023) with Dr Ciara Murphy. Deirdre is the secretary of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) and edits the blog, www.irishwomenswritingnetwork.com. She has worked at the University of Galway, UL and UCD.

E-mail: deirdre.flynn@mic.ul.ie



Paige Reynolds is Stephen J. Prior Professor of Humanities at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts. She is author of *Modernism in Irish Women's Contemporary Writing: The Stubborn Mode* (Oxford UP, 2023) and *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle* (Cambridge UP, 2007), and editor of collections including *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture* (Anthem Press, 2016) and *Irish Literature in Transition, Volume 6, 1980-2020* (co-edited with Eric Falci) and *The New Irish Studies*, both published in 2020 with Cambridge University Press. In 2025, she curated the exhibition "Happy Ever After: Falling in Love with Irish Romance Fiction" for the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) in Dublin.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6325-5444
E-mail: preynold@holycross.edu



James Little is Assistant Professor of Drama, Theatre and Performance at the Department of English Studies, University of Cyprus. His publications include *Samuel Beckett in Confinement: The Politics of Closed Space* (2020), *The Making of Samuel Beckett's* Not I / Pas moi, That Time / Cette fois *and* Footfalls / Pas (2021) – for which he edited the online genetic edition (2022; see www.beckettarchive.org) – and the edited collection *Ireland: Interfaces and Dialogues* (2022; with Ondřej Pilný, Radvan Markus and

Daniela Theinová). Together with Christina Morin and Cóilín Parsons, he is founding co-editor of the Bloomsbury Academic book series Global Perspectives in Irish Literary Studies. He is also founding director of the UCY Irish Studies Collective.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5555-7998
E-mail: little.james@ucy.ac.cy

Volume 16 of *ARES* celebrates the 10th anniversary of Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses (NEI) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). It opens with a foreword by the Irish diplomats currently serving in Brazil, a foreword by Professor Margaret Kelleher of UCD, an introductory essay by filmmaker Alan Gilsenan, and an introduction by the organizers.

The volume brings together articles by former speakers at NEI's in-person and online events, as well as contributions by translators and creative writers who have also participated in NEI's activities. *Exercise in Memory: Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses at UFSC – 10 Years* invites readers to look back at the seeds from which NEI grew, tracing the encounters, friendships, and circumstances that allowed them to take root and flourish.

ISBN: 978-6-55805-145-9

Núcleo de Estudos Irlandeses CCE • UFSC
PPGI
Government of Ireland Emigrant Support Programme
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs
Ambasáid na hÉireann Embassy of Ireland
Ard-Chonsalacht na hÉireann | São Paulo
Consulate General of Ireland | São Paulo
Consulado-Geral da Irlanda | São Paulo