

Melania Terrazas Gallego (ed)

TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH CULTURE



'Reading the eye-opening essays in this collection, one is struck by the many different ways through which recollections of troubling experiences have been creatively reconfigured as traumas that pervade Irish literature, cinema, music, historical writing and digital media. The extent of this unsettling realisation is revelatory'

Guy Beiner, author of *Forgetful Remembrance* and
Remembering the Year of the French

'This volume proposes essential insights into how trauma and memory studies cast light on Irish identities, both historically and in the present moment. It effectively and ethically considers the role of gender and cultural production in terms of investigating traumatic experience in postcolonial and postmodern contexts. *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* is a rich and timely addition to the interdisciplinary fields of Irish studies, cultural studies and trauma studies'

Dr Miriam Haughton, NUI Galway, author of *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (2018)

Trauma and Identity
in Contemporary
Irish Culture

Reimagining Ireland

Volume 94

Edited by Dr Eamon Maher,
Technological University Dublin – Tallaght Campus



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Preface

As Ireland commemorates the centennial anniversary of the foundation of the Free State, scholars, artists and commentators are asking a range of new questions about trauma and memory in a range of spheres. A violent, and invariably traumatic, internal civil war cast a long shadow after the state was established in 1922. Yet public analysis and acknowledgement of several aspects of the trauma experienced in such a divisive conflict were met with silence for decades. The impact of the Civil War on women, for example, was essentially ignored or dismissed as insignificant until very recently. The outbreak of “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, followed by thirty years of violence, likewise marked an episode of protracted trauma in Irish society. Since the 1990s, emerging evidence of physical, sexual and human rights abuses perpetrated historically in religious institutions has also opened up a dynamic field of analysis in the domain of trauma and memory (Pine; Smith). A post-revisionist interpretation of Irish history is therefore often presented as a history of trauma.

Trauma is a much-used term in interdisciplinary Irish studies. But, in reality, it is a complex vehicle both for social commentary and academic analysis that is often riddled with ethical challenges. How does one narrate, record, represent or *remember* a trauma? As I have observed in my research on sexual trauma and the violence women experienced in the Irish Revolution, telling the stories of “victims” of traumatic events, in particular those who chose *not* to “tell” or report past crimes and did not give open consent for or *want* their trauma ever to be publicized, must be carefully considered in violence studies (Connolly 2019a, 2019b, forthcoming). Few victims of rape, in particular, ever consent to their stories being inscribed in a public archive or forum. The study of trauma is therefore in itself rife with moral ambiguity and those who do choose to narrate traumas, especially as an observer and *not* a survivor, have to resolve serious ethical questions. This potential for harm places a considerable onus on researchers of sexual

violence to ensure that our projects are designed with care and rigour. Moreover, as David Fitzpatrick reminds us, trauma is multifaceted and not just about *victims*: “Historians’ . . . primary function is to explain what occurred by assessing events from the perspectives of victim, perpetrator and onlooker alike” (7). In addition to the issue of consent, intergenerational hurt can also underline the cyclical potential for re-traumatization of victims, families and secondary victims. According to Cheung: “Visual art is an especially tricky breeding ground for polymorphous representation, misinterpretation, and insensitivities . . . There is the challenge of combining honesty with dispassion, and at the very least, of avoiding exploitation” (n. pag.).

In this volume, Melania Terrazas and the other authors address these sensitive questions as they relate to Ireland in a deeply ethical and multifaceted way. A new comprehensive text that seeks to interrogate further the concept and ethics of trauma research is a timely intervention in Irish studies. *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* achieves a strong balance between conducting ethical research and providing a detailed exploration of silenced traumas in a number of domains. Terrazas, in the Introduction, provides an essential review of key theoretical debates in the field of trauma and memory studies, thereby laying out a framework for the chapters that follow on substantive questions (covering gender, war, revolution, music, film and literature). Internationally, a body of psychological research into the effects of various traumatic events (such as assault, rape, war, famine, incarceration) was developed in the 1980s and led to the official recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder. Since the 1990s, an interdisciplinary field of study involving literature, psychology, history and philosophy has consolidated and concentrated on questions of memory, forgetting and narrative. A number of subsequent critical writings applied trauma theory to the memoirs of Holocaust survivors and war veterans and to other topics such as sexual violence in women’s fiction (see Whitehead). Terrazas’s integrated Introduction will be an indispensable reference point both in this field and for future studies of trauma and memory in the interdisciplinary arena of Irish studies.

Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture interrogates the meaning of Irish identity through the lens of trauma and memory, in a

number of contemporary Irish literary and visual works and other cultural practices. A sustained interdisciplinary approach provides a groundbreaking reassessment of received constructions of Irish identity by centralizing the place of trauma and memory studies in Irish society. Each chapter provides detailed and sustained analysis of how trauma is/was both experienced and remembered. The common connection between silence and trauma in numerous literary works by John Boyne, Edna O'Brien, Sebastian Barry, Colm Tóibín and Kevin Barry is explored in the opening chapters. An exploration of trauma and memory in the genre of film- and documentary-making, including in the context of prisons, highlights the potential for activism and empowerment in cultural production. The potential for state archives to illustrate the trauma experienced by men and women in the Irish Revolution is also demonstrated in chapters that document the psychological and gendered impact of the violence. The last two parts of the volume also contribute to our understanding of how trauma has influenced the thematic direction of Irish popular music and explores the consequences of addiction in Irish culture, including in the work of Emer Martin and Pat Boran. The application of the body of work classified as the trauma paradigm to Irish history, culture and society in this collection represents an important contribution to knowledge that will be of relevance to scholars in Irish studies, history, sociology, psychology, medical humanities, cultural studies, gender studies and literary criticism.

Linda Connolly

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Melania Terrazas

Introduction

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). The study of cultural identity, for its part, emerges out of a sense of belonging to a group and, at the same time, because of all the aspects that make that group different from others. It is also possible to examine identity as an effect of social dynamics in which other determining factors, such as class, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and religion, play an important role. Identity is at stake in questions and problematics to do with all these issues. Thus, the study of cultural identity is “multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, with roots in social/personality psychology, microsociology, and anthropology” (Grayman-Simpson 2).

The analysis of culture from a combined aesthetic-ethical perspective is intrinsic to various critical approaches that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century, “the ethical turn” that took place “in the related fields of literary theory and moral philosophy, the most relevant of which are Trauma Studies, Memory Studies and the Theory of Affects” (Onega et al. 1). The multiple nature of trauma and memory studies, which combines aspects of history, anthropology and sociology, among other disciplines, is also extremely valuable as a means of casting new light on the notion of identity, because it is dynamic, located in time and subject to continuous renegotiation, and it implies a process.

Identity – especially national identity – is a social and historical construct. Identity, or the image of who one is, “may be either a self-composed image” or “imposed from the outside” (Buchanan 242). In the particular

case of Irish women's identity, for example, the personal and the social were closely linked and it is widely acknowledged that "women in the post-famine period were offered the role said to be the most important in society – bringing up children in the Catholic faith" (Horgan n. pag.). The Church's social role was crucial. As O'Toole (n. pag.) argues: "the church that became such a dominant force in the State and which was largely constructed after the Famine, gave order to a traumatised society". It is also widely accepted that literature has had a significant role in this relegation of women to invisibility in the domestic sphere since the last decades of the nineteenth century, "as the various familiar Irish Writers' posters" show, with their lack of "even a token woman among their 12 featured writers" (Doyle n. pag.).¹ Yet, since "the famous Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing affair in 1990, which was so bereft of female writers that an extra volume had to be commissioned to atone" (Doyle n. pag.), with recent decades' increasing "confidence in female voices" (Enright, qtd in Lavan n. pag.) and the last few years' referendums to legalize divorce, contraception, same-sex marriage and to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, we have witnessed "the death of 19th-century Irish Catholicism" (O'Toole n. pag.) – Ireland is becoming more culturally liberal in many respects, and Irish women's lives have attracted great attention.

The idea of "cultural memory" in Ireland has been investigated in great detail by Frawley in the second volume of *Memory Ireland*: "cultural memory can be analyzed not only [...] through groups of people – like those in the diaspora [...] – but also through particular forms: organizations of individuals, cultural mediums such as photography, architecture, music, literature" (*Diaspora* xxii). As far as "memory practices" are concerned, Frawley argues:

Many of these cultural forms embody materially – through, for instance, language, music, photography – and, because of their distinctive expressions of culture, give rise to distinctive memory practices. There are other cultural forms that develop their own

1 To mark International Women's Day, *The Irish Times* "created an antidote to the all-male Irish Writers poster of bars and student bedrooms" (Doyle n. pag.). Readers can download the poster at: <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/portraits-of-the-artists-as-women-1.2129106>>.

memory practices through the rehearsal of an identity. That is often the case among particular subsets of the population: minority groups, those who speak a particular language or dialect [...] there is an almost endless possibility for identifying oneself not only as Irish, but also as something else, with that “something else” often providing a distinctive way into a wider body of what I have been calling Irish cultural memory through a memory practice. Each of these memory practices embodies a particular memory discourse, and, perhaps more important, transmits a particular memory discourse. (*Diaspora* 129)

These concerns drive this book too. The last two centuries of Irish history have seen great traumas that continue to affect Irish society. Through constructing cultural trauma, Irish society can recognize human pain and its source/s and become receptive to the idea of taking significant and responsible measures to remedy it. The intention of this volume is to show the mediating role of the literature and film scholar, the archivist, the social media professional, the historian, the musician, the artist and the poet in identifying Irish cultural trauma past and present, in illuminating Irish national identity (which is shifting so much today), in paying tribute to the memory and suffering of others, in showing how to do things with words and, thus, how concrete action might be taken.

Identity transformations are certainly marked by activism and gender shifts,² yet many are triggered by conflict, traumatic episodes and much debate. Regarding activism and trauma, Emer Martin,³ a contributor to

2 In a recent and thought-provoking oral history of long-term feminist work and activism for social change, Irish academic, feminist and activist Ailbhe Smyth wrote that: “Ireland was a country where women could not be young”, where they could not show themselves to be “energetic and enthusiastic”, as young women are, because they “had to be wives and caring mothers from a very early age”. Smyth is right to argue that “Irish young girls now are being listened to like they have never been listened to before” (2019 n. pag.) and their activism is visible locally and globally. Three very significant and recent examples of such activism are: “RepealEight”, a coalition to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution; “Extinction Rebellion Ireland”, a direct action group rebelling for climate action; and the “Homeless Ireland action collective”, a group that fundraises, lobbies and protests to help the homeless across Ireland.

3 The book cover of this publication, a painting titled *Crossing Borders* by Emer Martin, was part of an exhibition in Kerry. It depicts a face shadowed with barbed wire, yet undefeated, resilient like Irish identity.

this volume and an Irish writer who has done much to drive the debate over Ireland's history of shame and pain through her work in the press and her recent epic novel *The Cruelty Men*, argues that Ireland has had a peculiarly lengthy and brutal colonial story: the controlling presence of Great Britain, a civil war, extreme repression at the hands of church and state and an ongoing conflict in the north (p. 305).

Thus, trauma has, or has had, an important role in the construction of Irish identities, and trauma studies has greatly advanced our understanding of cultural memory and contemporary Irish culture both north and south. Ideology has been a key part of these changes and transformations in gender and identity are marked in literature and other cultural and memory practices. In this regard, Emer Martin's chapter in the present volume reflects upon how her novels trace the repercussions of such traumas in modern Ireland across generations, while the other contributions show the ways in which trauma and identity studies illuminate the analysis of various forms of representation as cultural constructs.

The last decade, during which a number of trends have utterly transformed the economy, social attitudes and technology, is particularly relevant in helping us understand the Ireland of 2019. If we add to this picture "the introduction of digital media, publicly available networks and the development of the Information Society, identity" becomes "a pressing contemporary issue" (Halperin 533) in Ireland today, as Mahoney shows in Chapter 5. In fact, identity-related issues are so pervasive today that identity has become a new field of study "with implications right across the board, ranging from the individual through to the organisational, the national and international" (Halperin 533).

Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture makes a case for the value of trauma and memory studies as a means of casting new light on the meaning of Irish identity in a number of contemporary Irish cultural practices, and of illuminating present-day attitudes to the past. This interdisciplinary project not only emphasizes positive aspects within the trauma paradigm, but also incorporates concepts of diverse theoretical provenance as ways of challenging trauma studies orthodoxy and counteracting trauma's pernicious effects on Irish identity. The focus is thus on the particular social components and cultural contexts of traumatic experience,

and the interdisciplinary perspective given by the following chapters has a strong ethical content and wide-ranging implications.

The aim of this volume is both to offer a reassessment of historical ideas of Irish identity and to explore the place of trauma and memory in Irish society. The book is also intended to contribute to the ongoing critical debate on identity and trauma issues in contemporary Irish cultural studies, since they have become extremely relevant recently. The critical approaches herein are of a very interdisciplinary nature, since they combine aspects of sociology, philosophy and anthropology, among other fields. In this regard, the volume offers an innovative, interdisciplinary and up-to-date collection of essays on trauma, identity and memory studies' function in literature, film, culture and society that uses alternative frameworks for theorization and analysis, and thus as a basis for action.

The collection consists of a preface and twelve contributions by academics from nine universities on two continents and two renowned contemporary Irish writers representing different perspectives of the function played by the trauma narrative in contemporary Irish culture and identity. The book also includes an index of subjects, writers, historical figures, directors and films for readers' reference.

The essays are organized thematically into five sections, each focusing on a topic relating to trauma and identity, a historical period, a text or a specific cultural practice. The collection also seeks to offer an interdisciplinary inquiry into how innovation in form and themes are cultivated in selected works in order to question, deconstruct and reconstruct the notion of identity. In doing so, the contributions bring to the fore the traumatic histories of religious, political, sexual and ethnic minorities who have been forced into silence or forgotten. Regarding the notion of identity, these essays also enable us to move beyond contemporary trauma and memory. In this sense, the focus of this book is a future-oriented one.

The contributors approach the relationship between trauma and identity from complementary perspectives. These approaches explore the function of trauma in, for instance, the repression and expression of emotions or the representation of many instances of discomfort and mental distress that lie at the heart of trauma. This is an investigation of the secular function of literature, film, historical testimonies, culture, music and art in

contemporary Ireland. The collection also focuses on the processes of decolonization and globalization. Regarding the study of cultural contexts, the essays explore postmodernism, but also postcolonialism. In sum, *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* provides a view of trauma as multiply configured with diverse representations in Irish culture.

Opening the collection, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar's "From Undoing: Silence and the Challenge of Individual Trauma in John Boyne's *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017)" focuses on trauma and silence and draws out how they are related. He considers how Boyne plays with these ideas and the interpretive difficulties posed by the novel because it manipulates and plays with fictional techniques. Altuna-García de Salazar provides a detailed, meticulous and nuanced account of Boyne's novel and his artistic approach. The essay shows how silences operate in Boyne's text; considers why he orders his text the way he does, moving location from Ireland to wider global contexts; and reflects on whether Boyne is justified in seeing the referendum on gay marriage as a marker of social change.

In "Trauma and Irish Female Migration through Literature and Ethnography", María Amor Barros-del Río shows that ethnography and literature are complementary disciplines that can broaden our understanding of the complex phenomenon of Irish female migration. Four novels, Edna O'Brien's *The Light of Evening*, Sebastian Barry's *On Canaan's Side*, Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* and Mary Costello's *Academy Street*, serve as illustrations.

The last essay in the literature and film section, Ruth Barton's "Avenging the Famine: Lance Daly's *Black '47*, Genre and History", analyses Daly's film from various points of view in order to elicit the elements that contributed to its popularity at the Irish box office. Barton discusses Daly's repurposing of the modern Western as a historical narrative without parallel and his cinematic treatment of the social dimensions of the Famine. She examines the effectiveness of Daly's narrative strategy with reference to arguments around the place of genre in minor national cinemas and as an intervention in Irish historical cinema. Barton's essay interprets *Black '47* as springing from Daly's desire to style the study of Famine historiography in a new way, replacing victimhood with agency.

Part II, "Memory and Digital Archives", opens with Lorraine Dennis's essay, "Reflection of Trauma in the Prisons Memory Archive: How

Information Literacy, Human Experience and Place Are Impacted by Conflict”. As an academic personally involved in the Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) project, she discusses the process of making the documentary films *Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol* (2015), directed by Cahal McLaughlin, and *We Were There* (2014), directed by McLaughlin with Laura Aguiar, two important contributions to Troubles studies. Dennis’s essay elaborates a rationale for the whole film-making process, from the initial exposition of the historical context of the Troubles to description of the material and the way in which the production team dealt with the interviews. Her piece constitutes an invaluable document on one of the most praiseworthy initiatives aiming to heal the wounds caused by three decades of conflict. Dennis’s discussion of the shortcomings of the PMA project and her predictions of its future give her essay added relevance.

Patrick J. Mahoney’s chapter, “From the Maze to Social Media: Articulating the Trauma of ‘the Blanket Protest’ in the Digital Space”, offers an original and contemporary look at the role of social media as a coping mechanism for former blanket protestors in post-Troubles Northern Ireland. Thirty-five years after the conclusion of the Blanket Protest in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, its participants are still dealing with its lingering effects. Drawing from interviews, quantitative and qualitative social media data, and the findings of Brandon Hamber’s 2005 study, *Blocks to the Future*, this chapter addresses the ongoing issues facing ex-prisoners and the use of “social media therapy”. This allows Mahoney to lay the foundations for his convincing claim that digital spaces offer a means of re-establishing and maintaining a sense of group cohesion amongst ex-prisoners. The two essays in this section on trauma, memory and digital archives provide a complementary view of the Troubles and researchers’ concern with ethics.

In the first chapter of Part III, “‘The Women Who Had Been Straining Every Nerve’: Gender-Specific Medical Management of Trauma in the Irish Revolution (1916–1923)”, Stóbhra Aiken discusses the medical treatment of female revolutionaries in the 1920s and 1930s. She examines how women suffered from a range of diverse ordeals during Ireland’s revolutionary period. Medical diagnosis and treatment of “exhausted nerves” was often strongly informed by gender ideologies. As a result, medical treatment for

female revolutionaries tended to emphasize re-domestication and promote re-feminization, while men's trauma treatment was intended to quickly return the patient to the conflict zone. Aiken's investigation of the Military Service Pensions Collection gives some insight into the often questionable treatments prescribed to women and highlights how, throughout the 1930s, women's mental welfare continued to be connected to the female reproductive system. Aiken's conclusion constitutes a very sensitive response to unconventional forms of cultural memory.

Eunan O'Halpin's "Personal Loss and the 'Trauma of Internal War': The Cases of W. T. Cosgrave and Seán Lemass" is a reflective essay on how the experience of political struggle and personal loss influenced two key male political figures in independent Ireland: W. T. Cosgrave, who headed the first Irish government from 1922 to 1932, and Seán Lemass, who was Taoiseach from 1959 to 1966 and is considered a great economic and social modernizer.⁴ O'Halpin's chapter rigorously examines significant new historical sources, such as the archive of the Bureau of Military Service Pensions and Medals Collection, and uses Charles Townshend's concept of "the trauma of internal war" to show that the two founding fathers of independent Ireland served as heads of government without ever making public reference to personal loss or trauma. O'Halpin's conclusion draws the reader's attention to the contrast between the suppression of traumatic memory of the Irish Revolution at a personal level by these two men and the public commemoration of the war. It also examines how those personal experiences of revolution influenced their lives and mentalities. The chapter concludes by considering the difficulty of determining the impact of trauma upon group consciousness. O'Halpin's essay on accounts of men's painful memories complements Aiken's contribution on the medical treatment of female revolutionaries.

Next come two essays which demonstrate the richness and variety of traditional and modern Irish music. The first, "Di-rum-ditherum-dandee: Trauma and Prejudice, Conflict and Change as Reflections of Societal Transformation in the Modern-Day Consolidation of Irish Traditional Music" by musician, writer and lecturer Fintan Vallely, is a look at how in

4 For more on Lemass's family losses, see O'Halpin's article "Seán Lemass's Silent Anguish".

the 1980s music took the place of literature as a hallmark of Irish identity, invested most prominently in men, as a consequence of both the rise to fame of Irish rock musicians and the international promotion of traditional Irish music. Valley identifies The Chieftains as central to this until 1996, and notes that since then *Riverdance* has been most the prominent element. His point is that this visibility represents the rise of a onetime music of the underclass to international prominence and national representativeness, effectively a successful postcolonial struggle for formal recognition of both Irish music's Irishness and its inherent artistic sophistication. Ideology is shown to be crucial to this, and these transformations are said to have been marked by gender shifts and debate. Taste and fashion are identified as key drivers, too, as are aesthetic innovation and education, all of them conditioned by funding and patronage. Valley's contribution to the book reflects upon societal transformation relating to gender in the traditional music community and multiple representations in Irish music.

The second essay on music, "Traumatic Childhood Memories and the Adult Political Visions of Sinéad O'Connor, Bono and Phil Lynott" by David Clare, discusses how three of Ireland's most prominent popular musicians have processed personal childhood traumas in their work. Clare asserts that while Lynott's music was not used for political activism in the same way – or degree – as that of O'Connor and U2, there is a highly significant political agenda in his work. His experiences of racism during his Dublin childhood led him to repeatedly assert that a black Irish identity is possible. Clare's analysis of these three artists' music highlights common lyrical tropes and themes in their work. Valley's essay as a musicologist and Clare's as an academic specializing in the intersection of music and performance, contribute to our understanding of how trauma and gender have influenced the thematic direction of Irish popular music.

The fifth section, on creative writing, closes the volume with a reflective piece by Emer Martin; a previously unpublished poem by Irish poet, editor and broadcaster Pat Boran; and an interview conducted with Boran by Melania Terrazas. In "Hungry Ghosts: Trauma and Addiction in Irish Literature", Martin offers a compelling previously unpublished reflection on trauma and addiction in her own writing by using the metaphor of hungry ghosts, which are familiar figures in Buddhism. She dwells upon

this idea because she sees her books as full of hungry ghosts. Martin's piece is a fascinating and original meditation on how unresolved trauma manifests. She considers History a traumatic, violent, unsettled place for most nations, and especially for Ireland, and discusses how the consequences of all this turmoil play out through the characters in her books *Breakfast in Babylon*, *The Cruelty Men* and its sequel *Headwreck*. What is more, the latter two works trace the repercussions of traumas in modern Ireland, where she often sees her hungry ghosts manifesting in addiction. The dependence on alcohol and drugs in postcolonial Ireland, for example, is thus discussed as a self-medicating and symptom of a festering unresolved wound. Martin's reflection on Ireland's history of trauma and remorse in her two most recent books aims to show that victims must be listened to.

Pat Boran's "Fellow Travellers" is a very evocative poem on relations between Irish Travellers and the settled community that presents a fortuitous encounter three decades ago between the poetic persona, a member of the settled community, and a group of Traveller women of different generations from whom he hitched a lift. The poetic voice calls for greater tolerance and addresses the trauma narrative in Traveller identity, describing certain social issues affecting Irish Travellers today that need consideration: social inclusion, tolerance, equality of education and opportunity, decent accommodation and sanitary conditions.⁵ Boran's poem presents the stoic suffering⁶ (a "patch of resistance" (310)) of younger generations of Irish Travellers in the face of the settled community's indifference to their "local traveller camp" (310), which must be addressed in Ireland today.⁷ Boran's hope seems to be that these issues are addressed by wider society. Ultimately, the poet's reflections on Irish Traveller women draw attention to important cultural questions while situating his poem as a means of returning Irish

5 "The Traveller Movement", a national network of organizations and individuals comprising both Travellers and settled people, is committed to seeking full equality for Travellers in Irish society.

6 I am very grateful to the poet for this observation.

7 Especially since former Taoiseach Enda Kenny's announcement of the formal recognition of Irish Travellers' unique heritage, culture and identity by the state on 1 March 2017, which is also a recognition that they are an important part of contemporary Irish culture and identity, yet also of its past and present trauma narrative.

Travellers – “Fellow Travellers” here – to their rightful place in history, and of asserting the social value of poetry.

Finally, Melania Terrazas’s contribution, “Trauma and Identity Issues in Pat Boran’s Work”, consists of an interview conducted with Boran during Irish Itinerary 2018 (EFACIS) conference at the Centre of Irish Studies Banna/Bond (University of La Rioja (Spain)). The conversation focuses on Boran’s poetry, fiction and broadcasting, and his passionate discussion of trauma and identity issues in his work, which covers a broad range of issues from interpersonal and family relations to formal innovation, and what he loves about Ireland. Boran also offers a number of insights into creative writing and shares his thoughts on identity, gender, conflict, memory, aesthetics and his compulsion to write. Boran’s poems explore the trauma and dislocations of Irish contemporary life, and although they acknowledge neglect and failure, he considers the work they do as a prerequisite to a kind of progress, in part a healing, but also a containment of that trauma. In sum, the interview alludes to a type of indirect, suggestive poetry that emerges from a space where imagination, memory and experience collide through the interaction of different forms and points of ethnic, geographic or social origin.

To conclude, this collection is intended to lead readers to reconsider the connections between trauma, Irish cultural memory, identity, famine, diaspora, gender, history, revolution, the Troubles, digital media, literature, film, music and art. *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* reflects on and highlights important cultural questions around Irish identity, while each of the essays offers a means of exploring different ways to remember culture that are the outcome of, and are moulded by, specific forms of cultural discourse.

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PART I

Literature and Film

I From Undoing: Silence and the Challenge of Individual Trauma in John Boyne's *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017)¹

ABSTRACT

John Boyne's *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017) represents the tensions and challenges between the "individual" traumas of Cyril Avery, an adopted gay man in Ireland born out of wedlock in 1945, and the power structures that have been "silencing" and "affecting" his life up to 2015. With this novel Boyne advocates the necessity of reading against the grain of so-called "smaller" or "individual" traumas and the ability to listen to the "silencing" power structures containing them. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of silence, the unsayable and trauma, this essay contends that *The Heart's Invisible Furies* represents an approach to power issues in the analysis of individual trauma within Irish social and historical discourses of the twentieth century and how these are closely linked to the concept of "silence". In Boyne's novel, these power structures constitute a challenge for those who try to undo overbearing influences on their lives.

This essay approaches the novel *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017) by the bestselling Irish writer John Boyne, read both as social history and as fiction. Boyne's novel describes the tensions and challenges between the "individual" traumas of Cyril Avery, an adopted gay man in Ireland born out of wedlock in 1945, and the power structures that have been "silencing" and "affecting" his life, and those of others closely related to him, up to 2015. The latter represents a time of social and individual undoing and challenge for the protagonist and for Ireland, and also

1 The research carried out for the writing of this article was financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) within the research project Inconvenient Truths: Cultural Practices of Silence in Contemporary Irish Fiction (FFI2017-84619-P) AEI/FEDER, UE.

represents this man's temporal point of perspective in the novel. As this essay shows, in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* traumatic individual silences are undone but this does not mean that the violence they bespeak can be easily resolved or erased. In the novel Boyne is concerned with the representation of recent social history in Ireland but he also plays with fictional devices such as flashbacks, suspense, brisk dialogues, the recourse to memory, cameos by historical figures and references to important moments of recent Irish history in order to concentrate primarily on tropes of silence and individual trauma. With this novel Boyne advocates the necessity of reading against the grain of so-called "smaller" or "individual" traumas and the ability to listen to the "silencing" power structures that contain them.² As this essay contends, this may provide a more thorough and comprehensive representation and understanding of any individual and/or society at any given time. On the one hand, harrowing though they may be, individual narratives turn out to be more specific and expose smaller cases of traumatic dimensions (rape, domestic violence, drinking issues, child abuse). On the other hand, many power structures that differ from major traumatic situations or "shocks" (persecutions, famines, genocides, ethnic cleansing) tend to be lost in the overall analysis of such individual narratives. Hence, patriarchal identity formation, heteronormative structurings, national(ist) and religious conservatism, gender identity construction, the education system, postcolonialism, economic capitalism and Marxism are amongst those "silencing" power structures that are the cause of a number of individual and societal traumas. These trauma events, as Greg Forster states in his study on trauma and the literary form, are "chronic and cumulative" and, more importantly, tend to be "woven into the fabric of our societies" (260). Drawing on theoretical frameworks of silence, the unsayable and trauma, this essay ultimately contends that *The Heart's*

2 Roger Luckhurst's seminal study *The Trauma Question* delineates the many different contexts that have been attached to trauma which do not refer to major-scale traumatic events only. Thus, he lists domestic abuse, traumatic childhoods, histories of gender, sexual and racial violence among those histories that "have indubitable reasons for finding explanatory power in ideas of trauma" (1-2).

Invisible Furies represents an approach to power issues in the analysis of individual trauma within Irish social and historical discourses of the twentieth century and that these are closely linked to the concept of “silence”. As Boyne shows in the novel, these power structures constitute a challenge for those who face and try to undo their lasting and overbearing influence on their lives.

As an author, John Boyne has already published eleven novels for adults and five for a younger audience, including the well-known international bestseller *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006). He is also the author of a short story collection and regularly serves as a book reviewer for prestigious journals and magazines. He has won three Irish Book Awards, the Hennessy Literary “Hall of Fame” Award and a number of international literary awards. His body of work has been published in over fifty languages.³ His writing style shares an inquisitive eye for detail in dialogue and character description with insightful references to historical events both in Ireland and worldwide.

The Heart’s Invisible Furies is Boyne’s second novel for adults after *A History of Loneliness* (2014), which is also set in Ireland. Both novels are narrated through the voice of an ageing male character who has suffered from and is a victims of different types of individual trauma in Ireland. Their traumatic experiences are the direct consequences of oppressive and silencing abuses of power by institutions and societal frameworks over a long period of time. Boyne applies brisk narrative devices that encapsulate swift dialogues and flashbacks, the central role of memory in the representation of traumatic events of the past, a passion for character detail, a mastery of language and tinges of humour, even though the events described are harrowing. In *The Heart’s Invisible Furies*, Boyne also addresses the concept of masculinity together with trauma and silence. In this vein, both novels appear at a time, as Tracy and Holohan argue with regard to the representation of the male in recent Irish fiction, of “an extensive and ongoing period of soul-searching on the present and the future character and values of their [Irish] postcolonial, post-Catholic, postmodern, neoliberal island nation” (2). In both novels, Boyne advocates the necessity of the dialectics

3 For more information, see <<http://www.johnboyne.com>>.

between past and present when silence, memory and individual traumas are at stake. This is more obviously the case in *The Heart's Invisible Furies*, as the time span in which the whole re-enactment of the main male character's memory is framed – between the year of the protagonist's birth, 1945, and 2015 – also represents a period of overall change in Ireland. This seventy-year span poses challenges with regard to identity for the main characters because, as Jeannine Woods explains,

Patriarchal, heteronormative structurings of Irish identity were bolstered and complicated by the central role of the Catholic Church in nationalist discourse and in post-independence Irish political and cultural life; discourses on national purity were closely bound up with sexuality and with Catholic morality. (29)

Stylistically, *The Heart's Invisible Furies* presents Boyne's thematic and narrative concerns with what can be represented through language. The main character, Cyril, grows out of what cannot be said – as it reflects an oppressive outside reality – and has to address the notion of unsayability. In his recent study on the philosophy of the unsayable, Franke contends that “the unsayable is what repels language, yet it requires language of some kind in order to be described, so as to register at all” (3). Cyril has to overcome and undo discourses of silence and oppression that have conditioned his subjectivity and identity over the last seventy years in Ireland. He faces these discourses both directly and indirectly, when what happens to other characters in the novel also conditions him. Boyne blends the individual with the communal in order to address traumatic events in Ireland that have affected society as a whole. The overall silence of the unsayable permeates all layers of the social spectrum and conditions the permanence of trauma. This is also in line with Franke's contention that “the unsayable cannot be made manifest at all, except in terms of this trace that it leaves in the speech that fails to say it” (3). In *The Heart's Invisible Furies* Boyne presents discourses of the unsayable in Irish society which, for Franke, “typically emphasize that what is not and even cannot be said is actually the basis for all that is said” (7).

The novel explores a likely and much-expected rupture in the continuity of the influence of power structures in Ireland, especially that of the Catholic Church, and advances challenges which offer political,

economic and social change, eventual individual understanding and the undoing of silence. As Epinoux has contended in her volume on new themes in recent Irish fiction, the overall exploration of culture, society, history and politics in today's post-Celtic Tiger writing "implies the notion of wandering through an unknown country in order to examine and observe its transformations and stigmas" (4). In the same vein, Constanza Del Río contends that in the contemporary Irish novel, "individual or family traumas easily veer to the collective or historical if read allegorically" (8). But *The Heart's Invisible Furies* presents plain facts, direct dialogues and cameos by Irish politicians and artists which leave no space for allegory. Rather, they are easily recognizable parts of Irish history. Boyne's intention is clear in his representation of individual and collective traumas in Ireland, implying a link between the traumatic past and the challenging present with a view to a new future, yet to be imagined. *The Heart's Invisible Furies* shares with much recent Irish fiction what Epinoux contends is the advocacy of the "task of imagining a post-Celtic Tiger space, of exploring new sustainable political, economic and social forms, and cultural identity" (3).

The three parts and epilogue of *The Heart's Invisible Furies* thus address individual and social traumas caused by power structures during key periods of Irish history. These traumas have been silenced and placed a heavy burden on the male protagonist's identity. Bringing the historical past back to the present of the main character's memory allows for the undoing of the silence of this Irishman and those around him, and, as a consequence, also allows for the reparation of the failures of Irish history and society. In this vein, Boyne's narrative strategy aligns with Gibbons's and LaCapra's belief that the fictional move that inscribes trauma in recent Irish storytelling exorcizes the ghostly events of the past and the silenced voices and, therefore, makes room for critical and ethical judgement.⁴ Part I, subtitled "Shame", extends from 1945 to 1973. It depicts de Valera's Ireland, the overpowering presence of the Church, and significantly ends with the accession of Ireland to the then EEC, the death of the influential Primate of Ireland, John Charles McQuaid, and de Valera's retirement in 1973. Part II, "Exile", covers the 1980s which, though a time of recession, emigration

4 See Gibbons (97) and LaCapra (43–85).

and political corruption – epitomized by Charles Haughey’s time in office – also witnessed the rise in the globalization of the Irish arts with U2’s *Joshua Tree* and Roddy Doyle’s *The Commitments*. Part III, “Peace”, features Celtic Tiger Ireland, two female presidents of Ireland, Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese, but ends with Fianna Fáil’s leader Bertie Ahern’s corrupt government and the banking crisis of 2008. The epilogue of the novel finishes on 22 May 2015, when Ireland legalized same-sex marriage by popular vote. This historic decision meant the reconfiguration of what was acceptable with regard to sexual mores in Ireland, a country, as McDonagh writes, “once renowned for its so-called strict adherence to Catholic social teaching” (66). Boyne addresses the slow but progressive changes of Irish society over these seventy years. In doing so, he also renegotiates the concept of masculinity in Ireland in the novel and advocates a more inclusive understanding of the Irish male. Boyne’s choice of an Irish gay man as the main character evinces a need to reassess heteronormative identity in Irish writing today. In his study on Colm Tóibín’s fiction, Guillermo Severiche contends that “the image of the gay male became ... a space to re-define Irishness. Novels that represent gay men also participate in the creation of new perspectives on Irish national identity” (118). Ultimately, *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* not only bears out Severiche’s claim, but also represents and aligns with McDonagh assertion regarding gay and lesbian activism and revolution between 1970 and 1990 in Ireland: that “to be Irish and homosexual was not mutually exclusive” (77).

Boyne’s recurrent use of Irish history as a backdrop of individual and family traumas throughout the novel also represents an attitude towards the past. For Constanza Del Río, this use of history in many contemporary Irish novels underlines the “unremitting effects of the past on the present, these being two features that turn [novels] into fitting vehicles for the articulation of historical tensions that may not be settled yet, at least for certain sectors of the Irish people” (13). However, *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* should not be strictly regarded as historical fiction even if it includes cameos by renowned Irish political, religious and artistic figures during specific periods of Irish history. Leszek Drong, who has approached post-traumatic realism and the representations of history in recent Irish novels, contends that “it has become a tired cliché of the current

episteme to identify historical writing with fiction” (19). But the present essay claims that Boyne’s narrative style in the novel fictionalizes theme, topics and the lives of the main protagonist and other characters in such a way that it challenges mainstream history. As an author of fiction, Boyne is an example of Drong’s idea that, “although not necessarily committed to solid historical facts, many writers contribute unique insights related to the individual experiences of their characters, which makes their works much more engaging than the sweeping generalizations commonly offered by historians or sociologists” (19).

The first and longest part of *The Heart’s Invisible Furies*, “Shame”, introduces the main action and characters and is a clear reflection on the concept of shame and all its “silenced” traumatic ramifications: individual shame, community shame, institutional shame and national shame. Set between the years 1945 and 1973, “Shame” deals with undesired pregnancies, illegal adoption, single motherhood and hidden sexual orientation against the backdrop of religious, educational and institutional power structures. The latter seek to silence all dysfunction and forcefully maintain the ideals of the new “Irish-Ireland” in the young Republic. Boyne uses humour, brisk dialogues and swift changes of scene but introduces individual trauma and silence from the start. In the opening scene Boyne scrutinizes the wound of trauma from the very womb. He approaches shame through Cyril’s mother, Catherine Goggin, in 1945. Her pregnancy is made public at mass by the parish priest in the small village of Goleen in West Cork, a priest who will later be known to have “fathered two children by two different women” (Boyne 13). Public shame is attended by lack of love and support as Catherine is rejected by her own family. She has to leave for Dublin, where she ends up sharing a flat with two young men, who are later revealed to be a couple. She has to lie about her condition to obtain a position as a waitress at the Dáil Éireann, but is asked to leave in her last month of pregnancy as the elected members of the Dáil, the TDs, complain that “seeing a woman so far along in her pregnancy puts them off their custard slices” (Boyne 48). When Cyril’s mother asks her supervisor, Mrs Hennessy, about the possibility of returning to the Dáil after the birth, she reveals she has arranged not to keep the baby, as “a little hunchbacked Redemptorist nun ... is going to come to the hospital and

take the child away” (Boyne 49) for adoption. Mrs Hennessy cries at such a prospect and later confesses she had been raped by her own father, who had drowned her baby girl in a bucket of water and “threw her in a grave” (Boyne 51). The year 1945 ends more tragically with the murder of one of Catherine’s flatmates, Séan MacIntyre, by his own father, who cannot stand the idea that his son is homosexual. Seán’s father forces Catherine to open the door of the flat she shares with the “queer fellas” (Boyne 53), as he wants to “beat some decency” (Boyne 54) into his son. That very day Cyril, the protagonist of the novel, is born. Cyril’s childhood and his life as a teenager and a young adult within his adoptive family comprise the rest of this long first part of the novel.

The discourses of silence and unsayability feature heavily in “Shame” in Boyne’s attempt to encapsulate the individual traumas of Cyril and those around him within the power structures that cause and contain them. His rejection by the Averys, his adoptive parents, as he was not a “real” family member and had apparently been bought after the Averys signed “a sizeable cheque to the Redemptorist convent for all their help in the matter of finding a suitable child” (Boyne 61), and his education as a boarder at the Jesuit Belvedere College in Dublin lead Cyril to reflect upon the power of religious institutions in Ireland. Then his unrequited attraction to his best friend Julian Woodbead, his first hidden “encounters” and cruising in Dublin make him question his sexuality. Having found no solace in confession, Cyril gets a girlfriend. In one of Boyne’s many combinations of comedy and drama, Cyril, unsure about his sexuality, even visits a doctor, who retorts “there are no homosexuals in Ireland” (Boyne 219) and decides to inject Cyril in his scrotum. Cyril eventually surrenders to an unwanted marriage, from which he escapes on his very wedding day. In the first part of the novel Boyne extends the idea of shame beyond individuals, Cyril’s mother, her gay flatmate and Cyril, to the overpowering Catholic Church, the Dáil and Ireland’s domineering patriarchal society. Boyne makes all these heteronormative structures responsible for these individual traumas. He not only addresses what is not said but also what is. Beville and McQuaid write in their study of the presence of silence in the Irish discourse, that the binary of silence/speech “negotiates a relationship to silence that can be fearful and defined by hierarchy and ideology”

and represents an “oppressive aspect of silencing” (2). In the novel Boyne extends this oppression to power structures in Ireland and represents what Dauncey asserts in her study of the use of silence in fiction: “silence is not a fixed category ... and it is inextricably related to the issue of silencing” (1). In the same vein, for Olsson, silence in modern literature becomes an “acute social problem ... which demands that every subject expresses her or his submission to and inclusion in disciplinary relations of power” (3).

The power structures in Ireland represented in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* remind any critic of the Foucauldian concept of “elements of the apparatus”. These comprise a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (Foucault 194). Drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s hypothesis that in the Western world the apparatus works towards “desubjectification”, Olsson contends that, “every process in which a living being becomes a subject involves a moment of desubjectification, or erasing earlier or competing forms of subjectivity” (24). Boyne makes the male protagonist of his novel a representative of the “subaltern”⁵ who is subjugated and made to suffer by the Church and its priests and nuns, the (largely religious) education system, the civil service (including doctors, teachers and civil servants in ministries), the Gardaí and heteronormative structurings. Conscious of the fact that the “subaltern” male protagonist occupies the site of an aporia, Boyne makes Cyril undo silence and find a voice with which to speak. It is no coincidence that Boyne chooses the silencing of the first life events of the characters in his novel around the sites of religious and political power in Ireland. For Woods, in Ireland “visibility vis-à-vis marginality and marginal sexuality (or indeed any expression of sexuality) has a particular resonance and significance” (31). Cyril’s mother’s unwanted extramarital pregnancy, her male flatmates’ relationship and Cyril’s awakening to his own homosexuality attest to this. The title of the novel, *The Heart's Invisible Furies*, already hints at the way to represent marginality and render it more visible through storytelling.

5 See Spivak (28–37).

Boyne's blend of history and fiction introduces real-life figures such as Irish President Éamon de Valera, Taoiseach Jack Lynch, Charles Haughey, the writer Brendan Behan and Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. State and Church moulded individual and public minds in Ireland between 1945 and 1973. In *The Heart's Invisible Furies* Boyne represents the influential participation of the Catholic Church in the writing of the Irish Constitution, with all its references to the role of women and family; the passing of the Adoption Bill in the 1950s "only after foreign newspapers drew attention to what some termed the 'black market' in Irish babies" and the malign conspiracy theory "against Catholic adoption societies", as Irish historian Diarmaid Ferriter shows (*Occasions* 330–1). The 1952 Adoption Bill provided for the adoption of orphans born outside of wedlock. Boyne also addresses work restrictions for pregnant and married women – in the 1956 Civil Service Regulation Act – and the many restrictions on homosexuals, who, according to Ferriter, underwent "humiliating treatment ... with the aversion therapy" (*Occasions* 489). These are some instances of the "silencing" power structures that started to change from 1973 onwards. In the 1970s, as Ferriter contends, "whatever the degree of social liberalization there was in some areas, there was nothing approximating free love and tolerance of sexual diversity, but instead the persistence of homophobia that was 'tangible and frightening'" (*Ambiguous* 583). The 1980s, the point where the second part of Boyne's novel starts, were no better: "both tolerance and prejudice were on display in the limited public debate about homosexuality" (Ferriter *Occasions* 495). Boyne chooses transnational discourses to present Cyril's life in different contexts as a way to globally approach individual trauma, silence and oppressive structures outside Ireland too. In *The Heart's Invisible Furies* Boyne utilizes fictional devices, such as international settings, to reflect change and challenge outside the influence of Irish institutions.

The much shorter second part, "Exile", features Cyril away from Ireland, first in Amsterdam and later in New York. However, Boyne's fictional strategy to move his main character abroad does not hide the influence of power structures that, for Boyne, are not only predominant in Ireland but are, rather, transnational in scope. Besides, he presents scenes which make explicit references to major and minor traumatic events: the Holocaust, the AIDS epidemic and individual traumas. Although Boyne wants *The Heart's*

Invisible Furies to be read within discourses of trauma and power structures that are significant in the construction of the identity of individuals, his cross-connection of different types of trauma is problematic. Boyne is provocative in equating the incommensurate trauma of the Holocaust with the oppression of the gay community globally. Though perhaps erroneous in his comparison, Boyne wants to address the importance of individual traumas. In her approach to how trauma is articulated in recent Irish fiction, Anne Goarzin states that trauma theory has placed itself “in the rather exclusive field of major-scale traumatic events” where “collective traumas dominate” (8), as Caruth and LaCapra, among others, have shown. For Boyne, *The Heart's Invisible Furies* must be read against the grain. He represents smaller and individual traumas caused and silenced by Irish power structures that tend to be obliterated in many analyses of recent fiction.

In “Exile” Cyril encounters his true love in Amsterdam, Bastiaan Van den Bergh, a doctor. There Cyril compares what he has left behind in Ireland to the liberal values of the Netherlands. Though still unaware of all the people formerly connected to his life, who appear in the first part of the novel, Cyril meets characters from a past that has a clear bearing on his present existence. Readers are reintroduced to Jack Smoot, Seán MacIntyre’s boyfriend from the first part of the novel, who had shared a flat with Cyril’s biological mother, Catherine. Jack had left for Amsterdam after Seán’s murder on the day of Cyril’s birth. In a chapter entitled “The Anger of the Exile”, Jack talks about the stagnation of Ireland. For Jack, the country is still enmeshed in “silencing” and oppressive power structures – the Church and the state, mainly:

Nothing will ever change in that fucking place. Ireland is a backward hole of a country run by vicious, evil-minded, sadistic priests and a government so in thrall to the collar that it’s practically led around on a leash. The Taoiseach does what the Archbishop of Dublin says and for his obeisance he’s given a treat, like a good puppy. The best thing that could happen to Ireland would be for a tsunami to rise up in the Atlantic Ocean and drown the place with all the vengeance of a biblical flood and for every man, woman and child to disappear for ever. (Boyne 336)

As noted above, Boyne sets major and minor traumas at individual and community levels against the backdrop of the remembrance of Nazism in

the Netherlands and the oppressive power structures in Ireland that affect Cyril. Bastiaan's family and Cyril engage in conversation about happiness, oppression in Ireland, sexuality and trauma. Bastiaan's parents are survivors of the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam and he recalls their separation on their wedding day and their internment in Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz, respectively, during the Second World War. Their major-scale trauma is remembered when Cyril finds a job as a junior curator at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. Bastiaan's parents had met Anne Frank's relatives before the Second World War in Amsterdam. The comparison Boyne makes between the traumatic Nazi past and that of homosexuals globally, with his reference to the major epidemic of AIDS, occupies much of "Exile". In Amsterdam Boyne introduces the reader to a young Slovenian immigrant, Ignac, who lost his mother at an early age and whose father, "Ignac's pimp" (Boyne 357), is using him as a "hustler". Ignac's father wants his son back working in the streets, as he has discovered that Cyril and Bastiaan are helping him to escape it. As with the end of the first part of the novel, Ignac's father wants to kill his son, because he does not obey. But Jack Smoot, owner of the pub where the meeting of Ignac's father, Cyril and Bastiaan occurs, "couldn't let it happen again" (Boyne 361). Cyril does not understand what Jack means by this, but has to leave Amsterdam for good after seeing that "Smoot's accomplice in the disposal of the body was a woman" (Boyne 362). Although they come close to meeting on many occasions in the novel, Boyne ensures that Cyril does not coincide with his real mother, Catherine Goggin, thus adding suspense to the narration.

Cyril and Bastiaan migrate then to the USA, as Bastiaan is offered a position at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York, as the head of the Communicable Diseases Department. Their newly "adopted" son, the Slovenian Ignac, goes with them. It is not coincidental that Cyril experiences negative reactions to homosexuals in the USA, as these are the years in which AIDS was first recognized.⁶ Fleeing from Amsterdam, where Cyril witnessed male prostitution, illegal migration and a murder, he arrives in the USA at a time in which gay people were considered "AIDS carriers" (Boyne 370) and when attacks on homosexuals were frequent. The discourse of

6 AIDS was first recognized in the USA in 1981.

Irish history with regard to AIDS in the 1980s – “the first four cases of AIDS in Ireland were identified in 1983” (Ferriter *Occasions* 504) – is also referenced in the novel. Boyne reproduces judgemental attitudes towards gays in the USA, who were not the only ones carrying AIDS, and compares them to attitudes in Ireland. Shame, guilt, marginalization, frustration and lack of governmental information on the disease have been recorded by Irish historians and also by writers, such as Colm Tóibín in his 1999 novel *The Blackwater Lightship*. Boyne extends the “silenced” individual traumas within the discourse of AIDS and the responses to homosexuality to power structures that are not exclusive to Ireland but rather expressions of conservative, religious and patriarchal attitudes globally. He introduces his own take on the discourses of AIDS and masculinity. The greatest challenge Cyril faces comes the very day his unrequited first love, Julian Woodbead, dies of AIDS in Mount Sinai and Bastiaan is killed after he and Cyril are attacked in Central Park by three men who have seen them embrace. Boyne treats AIDS as a major trauma that is forcefully silenced and attached to homosexuality exclusively. As stated above, his narrative strategy cross-connects AIDS to other collective traumas in history. It is not a coincidence that on the fatal night of Julian’s death and Bastiaan’s murder, Cyril is first seen reading an “article in the *New York Times* on Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyon, whose trial had just begun in Europe” (Boyne 416). Ignac’s girlfriend, a historian, wonders “why anyone is interested in that stuff any more” (Boyne 416), to which Cyril retorts, “that’s no reason why he shouldn’t be held accountable for the things he did in the past” (Boyne 416). Boyne thus engages with accountability and memory as elements that undo silence and power. Through Cyril’s story Boyne represents the renegotiation of individual trauma through memory and the undoing of silence regarding the overpowering structures of all kinds that dominated Ireland between 1945 and 2015. The author does this with a view to accountability and remembrance as necessary conditions for the ultimate reassessment of trauma in Ireland and also elsewhere at the individual and community level.

During the fatal night in New York, power structures have a twofold effect at individual and community levels. First, they result in Julian – who contracted AIDS through heterosexual sex – dying alone, ashamed, because

his reputation as a womanizer will be gossiped about in Ireland. People will mistake him for something he is not – a homosexual – and hence question his gender identity. On the other hand, the gang attacks Bastiaan and Cyril as they see in them repulsive members of a community they have the right to do away with. These men resort to homophobic violence as a consequence of the presence of an illness that could pollute society, and as such has to be eradicated. Boyne's twist on the discourses of AIDS and homosexuality is, however, present with Julian's death, which can be read as Boyne's allegorical approach to the challenges and the changes of perspective needed in Ireland to accept a more inclusive notion of masculinity. In a recent study on the political embodiment of AIDS in Colm Tóibín's *The Story of the Night* (1996) and *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), Guillermo Severiche contends that "the development of narrative devices to showcase the body's internal dimension, its pain and decay, [must be seen] as a political statement" (125). Boyne has Julian die of AIDS and not his gay friend, Cyril. Julian, the epitome of heteronormative masculinity in the novel, succumbs to an individual trauma resulting from the silencing of the tragedy of AIDS, wrongly attached to gays only. Through Julian's death Boyne provides an allegory of the tragedy of the (ultra)masculine Irish body, which is also subject to the social and political power structures of society in Ireland. Boyne presents the need for a more inclusive conception of masculinity and also, in turn, of Irish identity. However, in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* Boyne's representation of a heterosexual man's death from AIDS acquires another dimension. As Severiche states, "what affects the personal body, what hurts and kills it painfully, has an equal impact in a broader perspective" (116).

With Julian's death from AIDS Boyne advocates the reconfiguration of masculinity. Against the backdrop of the 1970s and 1980s the Ireland depicted in the novel still "viewed sexual acts between males as criminal activity and homosexuals as sick and perverted" (McDonagh 66). Boyne breaks with the idea that only gay males died of AIDS. He wants to leave AIDS outside the debate about homosexuality in Ireland, as the illness can affect any Irish male, or female, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Instead, Boyne centres his denunciation on the "silencing" power structures and the individual and social traumas they have caused during the periods

represented in the novel. With the characters of Cyril and Julian, Boyne portrays Irish males, gay and hetero, as they are conditioned by inadequacy. In his research on forms of resistance undertaken by lesbian and gay activism in Ireland between 1970 and 1990, Patrick McDonagh has collected accounts of the social damage suffered by Irish gay men. For McDonagh, the inadequacy felt by these people also impacted on their closest family circle. This oppression “does the damage” as it leads “to self-oppression and a sense of alienation” which, ultimately, influences how gay people relate to and “build up emotional connections or strong bonds with other individuals” (79). This is caused by silencing discourses that do damage to the subjectivity and identity of individuals such as Cyril and Julian. Ultimately, Boyne presents the oppressive silence of Irish society in the 1980s as the main cause for loneliness in the individual. For him, loneliness, which was also the main motif in his previous novel in the Irish setting, *A History of Loneliness*, is even more acute when Irish society as a whole does not feel responsible for it. McDonagh believes that:

Most of Irish society at the time did not consider the treatment of Irish homosexuals to be in fact oppressive. Homosexuals were considered deviant individuals. If homosexuals felt insecure or like second-class citizens, then that was the result of their own actions, rather than society’s. (80)

Boyne ends “Exile” with Julian’s revelation that Cyril has a son back in Ireland. Cyril was unaware of this, but recalls the only time he had sex with Alice, his former fiancée an Julian’s sister, whom he abandoned on their wedding day before leaving for Amsterdam.

The third part of *The Heart’s Invisible Furies*, “Peace”, presents a process of acceptance, reassessment and undoing of different kinds of “silenced” traumas experienced by Cyril and those around him. It also presents Boyne’s idea that individual agency in this process of undoing has been more powerful than religious and political discourses in Ireland, which are still enmeshed within power structures. Cyril becomes a recognized member of his former fiancée’s family, now that he knows he has fathered a son. Cyril’s adoptive father, Charles Avery, also dies after admitting to Cyril that he should have behaved differently towards him. Boyne depicts new concepts of family, fresh reconfigurations and

understanding of sexuality in Ireland. The action of “Peace” takes place when the Celtic Tiger is in full expansion and questions about Ireland’s past and the influence of power structures are starting to come to the surface. The representation of Celtic Tiger Ireland – a time of globalization – allows Boyne to refer to more traumatic global settings when 9/11 finds Cyril in Dublin. The narrative structure of *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* uses coincidence, brisk changes of setting and recourse to memory by many of the characters so that the protagonist, Cyril, reconciles with the present and the past. He becomes a grandfather and lives with his former fiancée’s family, in Boyne’s representation of new family structures. Eventually, Cyril reunites with his real mother, Catherine Goggin, and travels with her to Goleen to find that his father had been his mother’s married uncle, with whom she had had an affair. Cyril’s life story unfolds and he understands the importance of reassessing one’s story truthfully by undoing the imposed silencing structures that dominate the lives of the characters in the novel.

The epilogue, entitled “Beyond the harbour on the high seas” includes a final section, “The New Ireland”, and takes Cyril to the year 2015, once all his individual traumas have been retold and the silence has been undone. Boyne’s final depiction of Ireland is that of a country starting to wake up to a new reality after the referendum on same-sex marriage. Cyril regrets that change had not come long before: “why couldn’t Ireland have been like this when I was a boy?” (Boyne 584). The “new” Ireland Cyril is living in brings change and challenges the understanding of freedom of choice at all levels, including relationships, marriage and sexuality. On seeing Ireland’s new situation, Cyril retorts, “Sure everyone can get married now ... It’s the new Ireland. Did you not hear?” (Boyne 587). Boyne advocates the reassessment of power structures in Ireland and the need for accountability and reconciliation as part of this healing process. Undoing silences concerns both individuals and Irish society. Boyne ends *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* in a positive tone with respect to the characters and Ireland. In the final scenes, Cyril’s mother, aged 86, gets married for the first time to a man she has met on the social network Tinder. Cyril’s grandson has a male partner and their open kisses in public make Cyril regret his past reality, as a victim, but see Ireland’s new ethos in a promising way:

It was something that never could have happened when I was that age. And yet for all my happiness at seeing my grandson happy and secure in who he was, there was something terribly painful about it too. What I would not have given to be that young at this time and to be able to experience such unashamed honesty. (Boyne 582)

In the final lines, when Cyril walks his biological mother down the aisle of the registry office on her wedding day, he “realized that [he] was finally happy” (Boyne 588).

This essay has shown that the power structures depicted in Boyne’s *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* (2017), such as patriarchal identity formation, national(ist) and religious conservatism, gender identity construction and heteronormative structurings, were the cause of much trauma and imposed silences over decades in recent Irish history. As shown in the novel, these structures tend to be “cumulative” and “interwoven” in the Irish case. For Boyne, a process of remembrance – of retelling – is required before the undoing of silence and accountability are recognized in the new Ireland. In *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* Boyne advocates that any approach to the rapid changes that have swept over national and individual identity in Ireland should also consider the way in which power structures in Ireland have diminished or augmented their influence. For Beville and McQuaid, today’s perspective on the silence imposed by all these power structures in Ireland depicted in recent Irish fiction should be taken into account, “especially when the social and political structures, which framed the damaging events, are still in existence in some shape or form” (13). The same critics go on to examine the inquiries and reports that have brought to light some of the major examples of structural power in Ireland. These have shown the consequences for the whole of society because “silence was maintained for the sake of community” (Beville and McQuaid 13). But, as Boyne contends in *The Heart’s Invisible Furies*, this silence needs undoing and reassessment, and, accordingly, finds representation in his fiction. In her study on voice and silence in contemporary fiction, Vanessa Guignery writes that “silence is not necessarily the opposite of speech, and needs not be equated to absence, lack, block, withdrawal or blank (as is often the case in Western tradition)” (2). Indeed, in Irish literature silence has traditionally carried a myriad of meanings and *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* is another important example. Whether rendering historical suppression

or loss, social and structural oppression, expressions of desire or a testimony to the unspeakable, silence has proved to be a marker of individual and social meanings in Ireland (see McAteer). Beville and McQuaid believe that the analysis of socio-historical discourses under the framework of the binary speech/silence produces a move “toward a deconstruction of hierarchy and privilege” (3) in Irish studies. Quoting Cheryl Glenn, critics Beville and McQuaid add that “the ‘rhetoric of silence’ has always relied upon notions of power, authorship and agency” (3):

A key point is the way in which power can operate through silence and silencings, glossing over some positions and shouting down others. In such a context, silence is manipulation: an instrument to establish dominant discourses, to trivialize dissent, to discriminate and to disenfranchise. In its negative, oppressive form, silence can be a means of exclusion and marginalization from which emerges a hegemonic discourse. (Beville and McQuaid 7)

Thus, the concept of silence can also be a suitable paradigm to approach power structures that have to be listened to, examined and considered when a series of societal and individual traumas are represented in Irish literature today. Accordingly, the concept of silence that is represented in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* constitutes what Dauncey contends is a “sign of the historically repressed and disarticulated” (1).

In *The Heart's Invisible Furies* the concepts of silence and individual trauma are used to analyse one Irishman's story and the re-enactment of his memory which are symbolic of traumatic events in Ireland during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first. For Guignery, many narratives of major and minor-scale traumas “confront the aporia of speaking the unspeakable, voicing the unvoicable” (3). The experience of the Irishman analysed here is not only an individual one. It is also representative of the experiences of many Irish people who suffered the oppressive discourses of silencing power structures. Through past and present storytelling, the main protagonist negotiates between what has been “left unsaid” and the power structures that exerted a deliberate will to “silence” certain events in several social, political, economic, cultural and official discourses in Ireland over the last seventy years. In *The Heart's Invisible Furies* Boyne aligns with Beville and McQuaid's idea that “that

which is 'left unsaid' ... presents a challenging task for those who inscribe these events in official and cultural narratives" (14). Through writing, the dichotomy of silence and speech becomes complex, as "in literature, silence, as well as speech, is always already written" (Olsson 4). When victims of any type of trauma are given the chance to share, express and externalize their plights, "'Storytelling' has become the less problematic alternative to 'truth'" (Olsson 14). A story provides the victim with a more individual focus within a "safe" fictional frame that does not elide the events that were silenced in the past, and in which "what can be unearthed and voiced carries few consequences for agents and institutions of power" (Olsson 14). Therefore, the narrative of individual trauma dealt with here represents not only the challenges of one Irishman who must negotiate his identity with regard to his sexual and love life – those "heart's furies" of the title – over seventy years, but also what Guignery contends are "the difficulties involved in the process of anamnesis, in the exhumation of the past, be it private or public, and in any attempt to reveal, expose or explore the realm of the intimate and the traumatic" (3). Accordingly, Boyne's narrative of individual male traumas in Ireland represented in *The Heart's Invisible Furies* addresses the negotiation of subjectivity and identity. The author's choice of history, a quasi-biographical style and the dichotomy of silence/speech also conditions the type of language used to represent individual and communal traumas.

All the silencing power structures, which have caused communal and individual traumas, are seen in Boyne's novel over time and in the light of successive generations. In a recent review in *The Irish Times*, Elizabeth Day describes *The Heart's Invisible Furies* as "epic in scope" (n. pag.). As this essay has shown, Boyne's novel addresses a male character's challenge to negotiate birth outside of marriage, adoption and homosexuality within his "individual and smaller" life against a "silencing" discourse of power and institutional issues, such as intolerance, education and religious prejudice in Ireland between 1945 and 2015. Also, by presenting a male gay character who remembers and re-enacts the past seventy years in Ireland, Boyne presents challenge in the way in which the past can be accountable for as a way to establish a solid consolidation of the prospects of the future. *The Heart's Invisible Furies* belongs to those recent Irish narratives which

participate, as Severiche has contended, “in the construction of a modern, more cosmopolitan, and more connected Ireland through the inclusion and active appearance of gay characters” (118). It is an exemplar of the need to engage in the representation of individual “traumas” and “challenges” within the discourses of silence and power relations in Ireland. Ultimately, as reviewer Elizabeth Day states in *The Irish Times*, “Boyne seems to be saying that the individual is more powerful than the institutional” (n. pag.). In the same vein, Helen Dunmore contends in the *Guardian* that for Cyril it “will take decades to unlearn a history of crippling guilt and shame, while at the same time truly weighing his own weaknesses. The book blazes with anger, as it commemorates lives wrecked by social contempt and self-loathing” (n. pag.).

As this essay has shown, approaches to power issues in the analysis of individual trauma within Irish discourses of power are closely related to the concept of “silence”. For many, “silence opens up a challenging forum for discussing both narrative and discourse in Ireland, politically and artistically” (Beville and McQuaid 17). In the context of queer studies in Ireland, silence, speech and trauma have clear social, religious and political implications; all the more so when the analysis of the impact of overwhelming power structures on the individual is made clear. As shown above, adapting Gayatri Spivak’s theoretical and methodological approaches to the subaltern to the gay man in Ireland, the latter “has no history and cannot speak ... [and] is more deeply in shadow” (32). *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* lends a voice to oppressed minorities in Ireland: single mothers, the separated and divorced, immigrants and gay people, among others. With the character of Cyril Avery, Boyne foregrounds gay men, who have traditionally been deprived of speech in Ireland. The question remains open as to whether and how Irish society has met these challenges at a collective level and consolidates a new beginning after 2015.

In sum, with *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* Boyne acknowledges the importance of storytelling in recalling communal and individual traumas in Ireland. Cyril’s fictional memoir proves apt for Boyne’s aim. By adopting a historically fictionalized memoir, Boyne aligns with Roger Luckhurst’s idea that “for post-traumatic culture, the appeal of the memoir seemed to be its ability to outstrip the narrative conventionality of fiction in responding to what might be called the pressure of the real” (118). For Boyne, storytelling

acts not only as a repository of the events and experiences of the various characters of the novel, it provides a fictional frame that allows for remembrance and accountability. For Caruth, “trauma . . . does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (151). Boyne’s novel registers and represents the need to take ownership of past moments in the lives of individuals in Ireland who have been the victims of traumatic silencing power structures. By doing so, Boyne’s novel represents and corresponds to Caruth’s contention that trauma “requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure . . . [it needs] the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others” (153).

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2 Trauma and Irish Female Migration through Literature and Ethnography¹

ABSTRACT

Irish migration has been predominantly female, despite its underrepresentation in popular imagery and reports. Although this phenomenon has been documented in manuscript material, interviews and audio records, the study and interpretation of this massive and extended experience has been neglected for long. This oblivion contrasts with the success of contemporary works of fiction that re-create past experiences of female migration. This chapter delves into ethnographic and literary life narratives of diaspora. Using theories of trauma associated with mobility, the strategies displayed by their protagonists and society are analysed, and results indicate that Irish female migration has been a traumatic experience that still needs to find closure in the Irish psyche.

Ethnography and Literature to Understand Irish Female Migration

Irish migration dates back to even before the Great Famine, between 1845 and 1851 when almost 1 million people died of starvation and disease and more than 1 million others emigrated (Magray 5). Although this haemorrhage abated slightly in the following decades, by 1870 more than half of the Irish native population already lived outside of Ireland, divided between the United States, Great Britain, Australia and Canada (in order of importance) (Fitzpatrick 213). Between then and 1961, Ireland experienced continuous population decline (Barrett

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1), confirming Irish migration as a persistent trend. As Irish migration has been a chain process, it has become “embedded in folk memory” (Duffy 22) and become a form of “inherited migration” (Barros-del Rio “Translocational” 1500).

The gendered nature of these migratory flows has not gone unnoticed and, in recent decades, several studies have analysed through a gender lens the patterns of origin, preferred destinations and labour opportunities of those who emigrated (Martin; Walter “Irish Women”). The enormity of this phenomenon became more evident in the period between the Act of Union of 1800 and the independence of southern Ireland in 1922, during which about 4 million women, most of them young and unmarried, left the island (Akenson 159). The USA was the preferred destination during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, particularly between the 1940s and the 1950s (Almeida 23), although in general terms, Britain took over especially between the 1950s and the 1980s, as a destination that offered female employment, mainly in domestic services (Walter “Irish Women”).

To this day, Irish society has shown a marked ambivalence between encouragement to go and encouragement to return (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 66). On the one hand, for an island unable to retain large families within its households, emigration acted as a social safety valve by reducing poverty, unemployment and class conflict, particularly between 1870 and 1914. On the other hand, emigration, and especially women’s exodus, was felt as a betrayal to the country (Nash) and entailed some sort of personal and collective failure. This veiled feeling has its roots in the resurgence of the cult of the Virgin Mary that had begun in the nineteenth century. As religion gradually became a fundamental pillar of nationalist distinction against the Protestant invader, the characterization of women with Marian ideals of passivity and purity was reinforced. From the 1920s, this complex imagery was echoed from the pulpit and by the press which, together with legal, political and economic structures (the 1937 Constitution and particularly Article 41 being well-known examples), ensured that Irish women were given a prominent role in the Irish nationalist discourse, but always in a subordinate position. As a result, the mass emigration of Irish women reached its peak between 1926 and 1936 (Daly “Women” 111).

The deep contradictions between the large number of women leaving Ireland and the discourse of ideological identification with the land in an attempt to secure a national project suggest that this migratory phenomenon was not the result of free choice. More importantly, the conflict between staying and leaving may have had a traumatic essence associated with its process and different stages. Also, the emotional and ideological factors inherent to mobility may have played a key role in perpetuating its problematic nature.

Given that emigration is so common in Ireland, it is not surprising that the topic has been the object of attention in literature. Its relevance for this study is not only warranted by its abundance in the work of authors such as Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty, Seán Ó Faoláin, Brian Friel, J. B. Keane, Colum McCann and Patrick Kavanagh, but also by its critical insights and emotional implications that go beyond statistics and census, as Patrick Duffy has rightly noted: "Because the process of emigration is such an emotional experience for most people, creative literature often captures and expresses the critical elements in what might be called a crisis for many individuals and families" (21).

Recently, the topic has gained momentum with a particular focus on the female experience. Authors such as Edna O'Brien in her novel *The Light of Evening* (2006), Mary Costello in *Academy Street* (2014), Sebastian Barry in *On Canaan's Side* (2011) and Colm Tóibín in *Brooklyn* (2009), have explored the diasporic experiences of women who left Ireland and emigrated to America in the early twentieth century. This thematic novelty, "largely under-explored in literature" (Sheridan 193), has rapidly attracted the interest of scholars (Barros-del Rio "On Both Sides"; Harte; Ingman; McWilliams; Morales Ladrón "Demistifying" and "(M)Others"; Stoddard) whose academic approaches have not ventured beyond the limits of literary analysis and criticism. The relationship between literature and other disciplines, however, such as anthropology and ethnography, has been the object of scholarly attention (De Angelis; Poyatos). These studies consider literature as a cultural artefact situated within a social and cultural milieu. Thus, in quest to better understand the traumatic process that migration entailed and its representation in the aforementioned contemporary Irish novels, the use of relevant ethnographic material can provide

insightful information and support a broader analysis. To illuminate the literary analysis of the selected novels, I have turned to the Questionnaire on Emigration to America (QEA), conducted in 1955, and the Audio and Video Collection (T for “tape”), recorded in the 1990s, both of which can be found at the National Folklore Collection (NFC) in Dublin, revealing sources where informants give accounts of their first-hand experiences.² In addition to these sources, other published collections of oral histories are used to understand the migratory process from the point of view of the protagonists. Undoubtedly, they all make a substantial contribution to our understanding of the stories that Irish literature has recently produced.

Considering that migration is at the core of the appropriate theoretical framework to tackle the issue at hand, it cannot be reduced simply to “the physical process of moving from one geographical area to another” (Ventriglio and Bhugra 70). In most cases, migration is a life event that comprises three stages: pre-migration, the actual process of migration and settlement or post-migration (Ventriglio and Bhugra 69).³ Complementarily, transnational perspectives emphasize the agency of individuals and groups from a bottom-up perspective (Gray “Thinking” 36), and aim to understand the relations that migrants establish between their experience of mobility and their concept of home both in their places of origin and in the places to which they move. But in the particular context of Ireland, first as a former British colony, and later as an independent nation, the intimate relation between the land and a constructed sense of identity was undoubtedly disrupted by migratory flows. Furthermore, in the case of women emigrants, migration offered an opportunity to obtain the independence and autonomy that they lacked in their homeland (Gray “Gendering”). As a consequence, the problematic nature of this phenomenon, which entailed a certain amount of distress in each of its different stages, is detectable both

- 2 Part of this collection of audio records on emigration is known as the Holyoke Collection because many of the informants were Irish men and women who went to live in Holyoke, Massachusetts, a long-standing Irish community in the USA.
- 3 This division of migration into three main stages can be broken down into more detailed phases that would comprise leaving, the journey, entrance, settlement, return, and remigration and onward migration (Erdal and Oeppen). However, for the scope of this study, the simpler version is more suitable.

in the life narratives of émigrés and in the above literary recreations to the point that Irish female migration may be considered a traumatic experience.

If we understand trauma not as a disorder but “a reaction to a kind of wound, ... a reaction to profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world and, indeed, to a world in which people are routinely wounded” (Burstow), the three-stage process of the journey, namely leaving, crossing and arriving (Fitzgerald and Lambkin), and the conditioning factors that make it a traumatic life event, can be scrutinized with the aim of shedding light upon the gendered reality of this phenomenon, and its causes and effects.⁴ Thus, in accordance with theories of trauma (Pedersen), the main stressors, coping mechanisms and sources of resilience that explain the relative success of many migratory experiences will be highlighted at each stage of the process. With the aid of ethnographic and literary examples, the following dissection of the phenomenon will set out the thin line that separates facts and fiction in the history of Irish female migration.

“There Was Nothing Here”: A Simple Reason to Leave Ireland

The ways individuals express and deal with distress is very much determined by the culture they live in (Ventriglio and Bhugra). In the Irish context, the social, moral and religious pressure placed upon women to identify with the land they inhabited, together with the gendered discourse of marriage and motherhood directed towards them and the economic depression that substantively invalidated that ideological project, can be considered as contradictory forces that affected the emotional and psychological state of Irish women and drove them to emigrate.

Despite the evident normalization of emigration across generations in Ireland (Gray “Gendering”; Martin; Walter “Irish Women”), the testimonies

4 Due to space restrictions, a more extended study of pre-migration and post-migration factors has been left aside for consideration elsewhere.

consulted at the NFC indicate that the major reasons for leaving were the lack of economic and social prospects. However, the main cause of migration seems to vary according to the sex of the informant, which indicates a gender-biased perception. Male informants tend to address the issue of marriage as the main cause of female migration, as the following testimony explains: “Many young women finding themselves without prospects of marriage in this country, arriving to their getting beyond the matrimonial state, girls without a dowry or having other problems militating against marriage, sought a new life and career beyond the wave” (QEA vol. 1410: 114). Another male informant insists on the ideal of marriage for young Irish women. When that didn’t occur, migration would become an option: “A girl who was approaching thirty years of age and who did not see any prospect of getting married at home might decide to go to America. That sometimes happened” (QEA vol. 1409: 216). In contrast, female informants tend to identify the depressed economic context and the lack of opportunities for them as the main reasons for leaving. For instance, Nora Murphy recalls her hard life before emigrating:

I went out before 1900 at the age of 16 ... Before that I was working at home with my mother like any young girl, and doing some work on the farm, weeding, etc. ... I was employed for a while at a mental asylum, doing kitchen work, and later at general housework. (QEA vol. 1409: 72–3)

Indeed, the prospect of a life of domestic work was not appealing to young women, as an interviewee’s recount of her mother’s life attests:

During the day, she kept the fire going constantly, baked bread, prepared meals, washed and mended clothes, drew water from the well, cleaned the house, fed and milked the cows twice daily, churned milk to make butter, raised fowl, bore and raised children, helped at harvest time with hay and turf, and so forth. (O’Carroll 26–7)

Other sources confirm the absence of employment options for most Irish girls. Emigrant Bridget Kenney recalls her hopelessness in Ireland due to the lack of prospects: “I was 19. There was nothing here. What would you do with yourself?” (T 196). Helen Flatley, a nanny who migrated to America in 1928, admitted: “I came out here because there was really nothing to do” in Ireland (qtd in Lynch-Brennan 31). These divergent

though complementary points of view on the matter indicate that a gender-biased perception remained in force in the recollections of émigrés long after their journey has taken place. They also suggest a qualitative difference between the type of stressors men and women had to endure at the time, the former pointing to poor economic performance at a structural level, a measurable and fluctuating factor, and the latter referring to cultural and ideological expectations, which are much more stable and inapprehensible.

All these aspects of the pre-migration stage are reflected in the contemporary novels of migration. In *The Light of Evening*, for example, migration is unavoidable for Dilly, the young protagonist who exemplifies how normal migration had become with the following words: “Maybe I decided then, maybe not. There was always so much talk about America, every young person with the itch to go” (O’Brien 29). It is only logical to conclude that such a generalized practice required the use of normalizing devices to lessen the trauma and make emigration a silenced gendered phenomenon. To prevent an open debate surrounding this inconsistency, several strategies were set in motion to cover for the legal, cultural and emotional domains.

Ireland’s economic failure in the nineteenth century had affected both industrial and agricultural employment. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the socioeconomic vision of Irish nationalism stressed the ideal of the Irish peasant as “the true Irishman” (Daly *Industrial* 9) and favoured rural society and its values in opposition to industrial development, which was rooted in ideas of materialism and sin. Since the 1870s, Irish families had tended to pass their holdings to the eldest son, which meant that all other siblings had to find an alternative means of subsistence. This transformation of a land tenure system into one of peasant proprietorship did not result in an improvement of economic production (Giblin, Kennedy and McHugh). In any case, the inheritance laws should be highlighted as a structural hindrance for the female half of the population, who were forced to play a secondary role in the farming system, when they were not excluded altogether. As Erdal and Oeppen have noted, “the decision to leave might be more or less forced depending on how we interpret available alternatives” (989). In light of the legal system of land ownership, it is evident that Irish women stood little or no chance of pursuing a living in

agriculture. This situation is firmly supported by the ethnographic questionnaires held by the NFC, as the following record illustrates:

It often happened too that the oldest of a big family went to America and as the rest of the family grew up they went away, one after the other. Then when they were all gone, the father and mother would write for the eldest boy to come home again and take over the place and look after them in their old age. (QEA vol. 1411: 256)

It is relevant here to note that behind women's decision to leave lay the certainty of a predetermined future in Ireland. Tess, the protagonist of *Academy Street*, could only have imagined herself as a nun had she not emigrated to America: "In another life she might have been a nun. A bride of Christ, her whole being turned over to praying and reflection, a dissolution of her corporeal self" (Costello 117). The problematization of the female body is intimately related with its reproductive capacity because in Irish society at that time, the inability to become a wife and a mother reduced the woman's performativity to a religious vocation and reclusion. In this situation, emigration was the only way out. This feeling of entrapment is quite graphically portrayed by Sebastian Barry. Lilly, the protagonist of *On Canaan's Side*, voices the emotional wounds in the feminine psyche that can be articulated only after emigration: "Ireland nearly devoured me, but she was my devotion, at least in the foggy present, when the past is less distinct and threatening. When the terrors associated with being Irish have been endured and outlived" (Barry 127).

Although women were legally barred from the farm business, that did not mean that they were uninterested. No ethnographic records have been found on the matter, but contemporary literature has filled this void. In *Academy Street*, Mary Costello portrays little Tess as a girl for whom the farm means the world:

She is amazed at how happy she is. In her bed, in this house. With the lawn and the barn and the fields around her. There is nowhere else she wants to be. In her most secret heart she knows there is nowhere she loves more. (32)

Together with the girl's yearning for the farm, the author suggests that her emotional attachment to the land is somehow inappropriate, a secret she must keep for herself, because despite her love for the family farm, she cannot earn her living there, as the following conversation with her Latin

teacher, Mr Brown, attests: “And your father farms the land? Livestock?” “Yes, sir.” “And you have brothers and sisters? A brother, who will inherit the place perhaps?” “Yes, sir. Denis, my older brother” (43). Similarly, Colm Tóibín, in *Brooklyn*, explores the female bond with the familiar environment: “She would prefer to stay at home, sleep in this room, live in this house, do without the clothes and shoes” (29). But in both cases, these feelings are confined to the inner world of the protagonists and, thus, the trauma of lacking a future on the island is silenced. In the absence of contestation, migration became a natural process which was, in Colm Tóibín’s words, “part of the life of the town” (25). Indeed, the legal apparatus and the moral code can be highlighted as two stressors that conditioned women’s decision to emigrate, for which the connivance of the population was also needed. As Mikowski has pointed out quite accurately, Eilis’s departure in *Brooklyn* could only happen thanks to the scheme her mother and sister engineered with the help of Father Flood, a metaphor of “the only plan the nationalist state was able to elaborate to meet its people’s needs” (240).

Apart from personal perception, traumatic events have been reported to be influenced by the broader collective meaning and social response (Pedersen 9). So, once the decision was taken, rituals and traditions, particularly the so-called “American wakes” or farewell parties for the departing, were displayed as social practices of normalization of the migratory exodus. Pedersen and Rytter reformulate Inger Sjørlev’s definition of ritual performances as “condensed forms of sociality that provide us with an insight into ... norms, ideals and conflicts” (3). In this regard, the role of these coping mechanisms may be interpreted as a way to soften the unvoiced trauma of leaving by means of celebration. Ethnographic sources talk very naturally about this tradition in festive terms: “The ‘American Wake’ started about 10 o’clock at night, with dancing, singing and feasting and also liquor (mostly whiskey) which cost only two pence a glass in the year 1884” (QEA vol. 1408: 2). This celebratory event served to transfer a private decision to the public domain, with the blessing of neighbours and acquaintances, so that the choice was sealed. The ritual also provided the normalization of a collective failure, namely the lack of future opportunities, and it softened the shock of the traumatic separation. This ritual is also present in Edna O’Brien’s work:

The night before I left home, there was a wake in the kitchen, as was the custom for anyone going so far away. The kitchen was full of people ... Boys danced with me, said they'd miss me, boys that had never thrown two words to me before over a ditch. The older men sat on the settle bed with their bottles of porter and the one bottle of whiskey that they passed around, and when they got up to dance, they staggered and had to sit down again. The women were by the fire consoling my mother, consoling themselves, fearing that I would never come back. (30)

In the realm of feelings, the emotional bonds to relatives and friends overseas should not be overlooked. This source of resilience served as an emotional anchor for those who had to leave Ireland, a vital resource for the newcomers. According to the brothers Patrick and Michael Silke, these transatlantic connections were essential both in providing the economic means to purchase the fare: "Elder brothers and sisters already there would bring out younger members of the family, pay their passage and send them money for clothes and travelling expenses. Sometimes they paid the passage money in America and sent home a voucher" (QEA vol. 1409: 214). They also welcomed and housed newcomers: "Emigrants from the same village or district usually settled in the same city or town in the States where their relatives or friends or neighbours had preceded them, thus forming little colonies" (QEA vol. 1409: 61-2). This recurrent pattern is also present in literature. For example, in both *Academy Street* and *Brooklyn* older relatives act as connectors between Ireland and America. Among them, priests and landladies played an important role in the transnational connections between the United States and Ireland (Clark *Irish*), and their literary representations (Barros-del Rio "On Both Sides").

Alone on the Boat

Even though it may have been the shortest stage in the migratory process, the journey to America involved a high level of stress and fear for the young women who tended to emigrate on their own. Most were young and single, a profile quite unusual when considering other migratory groups in

Europe. These characteristics paint a picture of the journey to America as a strongly gender-biased performance that must have caused the travellers much distress, as oral records confirm. In the protagonists' narration, loneliness and fear seem to be the most common feelings émigrés recall about this stage: "I was very lonesome in the beginning. Everyone here. You'd be thinking of home. I landed in New York. The other girl too" (T 1393). These testimonies are mirrored by contemporary literature. Edna O'Brien writes: "Again she recalls setting out lonesome for America, the ship ploughing the main, waves high as a house, crashing in" (22). Both ethnographic and literary materials identify the odyssey across the Atlantic as a definitive stressing phase of the process of migration, particularly since Irish women tended to travel alone. Nora Joyce, who arrived at Ellis Island in 1929, described it as follows: "On the ships you'd be sick, you know, with the waves. I was travelling alone. Of course there was other people on [board], but I didn't know anybody" (O'Carroll 41). This peculiarity frequently compelled them to join other travelling women, which must be considered a coping mechanism to overcome the ordeal, as Bridget Kenney recalls: "I met a girl there, on the boat. We kept together" (T 196).

But this strategy, also fictionalized by Tóibín in his novel *Brooklyn*, hides a much less explored issue: sexual intimidation during the crossing. As Walter has noted, trouble-free movement during the migratory process has been taken for granted ("Old Mobilities" 57). However, Maguire (339) points to molestation and violence as the most recurrent types of assault committed against single young women during their journey. In fact, they happened so often that the Act of 1860 was passed to prevent them with quite ineffectual results.⁵ Yet no reference to this felony can be found in the ethnographic materials consulted. This void in oral testimonies can

5 Maguire refers to an Act to repeal the third section of an Act entitled "An Act to Regulate the Carriage of Passengers in Steamships and Other Vessels", approved 3 March 1855, for the better protection of female passengers and other purposes, and more particularly to the following lines: "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That every master or other officer, seaman or other person employed on board of any ship or vessel of the United States, who shall, during the voyage of such ship or vessel, under promise of marriage, or by threats, or by the exercise of his authority, or by

only be attributed to shame and an earnest desire to forget. If trauma is a reaction to a kind of wound (Burstow), silence and oblivion seem to be the only healing strategies to be found among the sources consulted. The literary works discussed here similarly avoid the subject. Although literature is usually a medium which digs into the psychological aspects of shame, none of the selected authors mentions any sign of abuse of female travellers on board. Apart from Tóibín's display of a strategic alliance between Eilis and Georgina on the boat in *Brooklyn*, only Edna O'Brien ventures to tackle the subject of abuse, in the harsh fate of young single women who arrived in the USA with no connections:

When Annie'd got off the boat aged sixteen there was no one to meet her; ... a well-dressed woman came across to her and offered to give her shelter ... So she went with her, thinking she was going to a convent. Instead she was brought to a big house with a madam where she was made a prisoner and groomed to be a prostitute. (2006: 46)

This passage suggests that sexual abuse was present throughout the migratory process and hints at a permanent need of self-protection. Equally, it can also be surmised that female alliances on the boat might have lessened the vulnerability of the individual travelling on her own.

Arrival in the USA: "Everything Was Set Up for Us"

Undoubtedly, arrival in the USA entailed a great deal of personal stress caused by detachment from the familiar realm and adjustment to the new environment. Among the different stressors identified in the sources

solicitation, or the making of gifts or presents, seduce and have illicit connection with any female passenger, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars: *Provided*, That the subsequent intermarriage of the parties seducing and seduced may be pleaded in bar of a conviction" (1860, p. 3). This amendment was passed in 1860 and can be consulted at the Library of Congress web page (Library of Congress).

consulted, two stand out: passing through the doors of the immigration station and the initial settling in the new land.

Until the early 1900s, immigrants at Ellis Island had to wait to have a physical examination, a procedure that sometimes took hours or even days, during which they remained on board ship. By 1921, immigrants also had to pass a literacy test. Although these conditions were softened in the middle of the twentieth century, immigrants still had to queue, frequently for hours, at the immigrant inspection station. After the expense and ordeal of the journey, fear of detention or deportation must have been a source of great anxiety. Nora Joyce remembered this moment: “There was one girl coming with me . . . She didn’t pass the council [US consulate’s health test]. In six months time [*sic*] she tried it again and she passed” (O’Carroll 41). The uncertainty of this moment is also reflected in Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*. Before entering the new country, Georgina, a fellow traveller, warns Éilis: “The only thing they can stop you for is if they think you have TB, so don’t cough whatever you do, or if they think you have some funny eye disease, I can’t remember the name of it” (50). As time passed, all these operations were simplified and, according to emigrant Bridget Kenney, after 1926 most procedures could be arranged in Ireland before departure (T 196).

Once immigrants were allowed into the United States, an adjustment period began. Although most testimonies show positive memories of this stage, the first months in the new land must have been tough, with a high level of stress and uncertainty, as one informant recalls:

They all spoke of the terrible loneliness they felt during their first year away, say that they would have come home again they could have afforded it, but after a twelve-month they began to feel at home and like the place. (QEA vol. 1409: 56)

The deep sense of loneliness these women must have felt during the first months of their arrival in America has received a more critical treatment in the literary accounts. Mary Costello identifies America with “a feeling of exile and eternal loneliness” (50), and Edna O’Brien’s characters declare dramatically: “Mary Kate was crying buckets, for Annie, for herself. Seeing that she had softened a bit, I said, ‘Mary Kate, I want to go home.’ ‘You can’t go home,’ she said solemnly, and it was like a death sentence” (47). For his part, Colm Tóibín delves further into the feeling of detachment: “All this

came to her like a terrible weight and she felt for a second she was going to cry ... She was nobody here ... Nothing meant anything ... Nothing here was part of her. It was false, empty, she thought" (67). Similarly, references to unsuccessful settlement can only be found in fiction, as illustrated by Edna O'Brien's tale of Annie, who ended up in a brothel, and Mary Costello's narration of motherhood outside of wedlock. This asymmetry between first-hand memories and fiction has also been noted by trauma studies. It has been observed that memories of traumatic experiences are sometimes reclassified or outlined (Pedersen 16). According to Creet and Kitsmann, who affirm that "memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left" (6), memory is conditioned by migration, more particularly by the post-migration stage which seems to be very influential in the subjective perception of the whole process. Furthermore, McDowell affirms that memories "are also constructed within dominant discourses and official hegemonic histories" (156). In this case, selective memory may have been displayed, as the exclusion of inappropriate events contributes to build a positive image of the self and to reconstruct the retelling of the migratory experience in accordance with personal and social expectations (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh).

To overcome these and other stressful circumstances that surrounded migration, two main coping mechanisms were set in motion. The first was the important role of networks of settled Irish immigrants. These social and familial networks were a solid and effective resource, helping to ease newcomers' transition, as several studies confirm (Fitzgerald and Lambkin; Nolan; Ryan), and oral records testify: "When we came we had someone at the stations. There were piles of Kerry people here. I lived with my aunt, Mrs Joyce. When I first arrived here I got a job right away. And a pay per meal" (T 1393).

Furthermore, relatives and acquaintances would not only welcome the newcomers and provide them with initial lodgings,⁶ they also passed on useful information and gave references for jobs (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 30):

6 They would reunite at the "Kissing Post", so named for the frequent greetings between newcomers and their relatives witnessed there.

We arrived in New York city and my sister in law, my cousin and an uncle of mine met me and we came by car to Holyoke. Everything was set up for us. My wife found a job on the second day because she was a dress maker. It took me 2 weeks. (T 1437)

As scholar Louise Ryan affirms, kinship connections were a major asset the Irish counted on in the USA. Neighbourhoods played an important role in keeping alive an Irish identity through education, faith and recreation (Almeida 6). For example, Waters recalls from her own experience as a daughter of Irish immigrants in the USA that family and friends were essential in the Irish community overseas: “They were usually quick to find their way around the Irish-American network, acquiring jobs and apartments and a host of irrefutable opinions ... they were frequent and welcome visitors; our parents had few friends outside the family” (37–8). In other cases, these networks effectively acted as an extended family and relationships and marriages among the members of these communities were frequent. These informal relationships sustained and perpetuated the transnational nature of Irish migration (Delaney 431).

America was a land in need of a large labour force and that provided pathways to resilience for those women not constrained by family duties on arrival. The belief in and aspiration for a better future were definitely an internal process of coping that can be equated as a coping mechanism according to Goodman et al. (312). Domestic service and the management of boarding houses were the most frequent occupations for these young Irish girls (Clark). To earn a living in their new land, single women were mostly employed as “living-out girls” –servants, maids and cooks in the houses of well-to-do families (Clark *Erin's* 14), as was the case of Bridget Kenny: “I was cook at Mr. Walker’s. He was a banker. I got up early, breakfast, lunch, house chores ... They were great people to work for. They were so friendly and nice to you” (T 196). Others sought better positions as governesses or salespeople, which were more respectable (Kelly 41–57). As employment trends changed over time, single Irish women tended to join stores and factories. This option would ultimately allow them to achieve economic independence along with the opportunity to work in a public domain, extend their circle of friends and connections, and offered the eventual chance of promotion. Despite these good prospects, this context may not always have resulted in emancipation, as the selected Irish

novels highlight. In *Brooklyn*, Tóibín has young Eilis working in a store and obtaining a degree in accounting just before she gets married and foreseeing her future as the housewife of an Italian entrepreneur. Conversely, Tess, the protagonist of *Academy Street*, remains single and independent and orientates her motivation towards the upbringing of her son. In *The Light of Evening*, Edna O'Brien expresses some negative reflections on the real lives the immigrants were leading:

I could not write back and tell her how strange and false everything was ... My cousin pretending she was a nurse when it turned out that she washed patients and dressed them, her hands pink and raw-looking from all the washing. (49)

Mary Costello also refers to a forced normalization of American life in the following passage of *Academy Street*: “They looked at each other now. In the look there was an acknowledgement, a declaration, an affirmation that everything was finally settled, and the lives being lived here were the right ones, the ideal lives” (59). All in all, an asymmetric perception of the post-migration adjustment stage is notable between personal testimonies and literary works. However, it remains uncertain whether émigrés tended to soften their remembrance of bad experiences in view of the unspoken desire to achieve a successful migratory experience and live the American dream.

Conclusions

Irish migration has been a constant for centuries with a higher incidence amongst the female population. However, the sources and the testimonies consulted indicate that in the case of Irish women emigration was, to some degree, an involuntary decision, a “reluctant exile” (Duffy 22). The analysis carried out here sheds light on the different elements that made female migration to America a generalized option for young single women in the nineteenth century and more particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. Amongst other contributory factors, the absence of opportunities, a restricted model of womanhood orientated

to motherhood and supported by religious beliefs, a familiarity with the phenomenon of emigration and the existence of solid networks of Irish emigrants overseas can be underlined.

The contradictory nature of Irish female emigration suggests an association of traumatic experience with mobility that demands further study. For this purpose, both literary and ethnographic sources have been examined here. The most recent literary recreations of Irish migration can be interpreted as a way of dealing with the traumatic aspects that the Irish can begin to deal with now. Authors such as Edna O'Brien, Sebastian Barry, Colm Tóibín and Mary Costello have fictionalized the lives of Irish women travelling to America in the first decades of the twentieth century, bringing to the fore the multiple and complex stressors inherent in the migratory experience, as a means to heal a national wound that is still felt in Ireland today. Furthermore, oral and written ethnographic materials, particularly those held at the NFC, bring to light conflictive aspects of female migration that ultimately make sense of this personal and collective traumatic experience.

Following theories of migration and trauma (Goodman et al.; Pedersen; Ventriglio and Bhugra), and applying a cross-cutting gender lens, I have analysed the three main stages of the migratory experience and identified a set of stressors and processes of coping (Goodman et al.). In light of this analysis, the complex nature of human mobility becomes clearer, as do the intersections of the stages of the migration process and the overlapping experiences of supports and barriers. Stressors and coping mechanisms sometimes function simultaneously and give way to both similar and divergent outcomes in female migration.

Firstly, during the pre-migration stage, inheritance laws have been classified as a structural hindrance that deprived young women of access to property, and this fact might have encouraged them to emigrate. In this respect, the analysis shows that contemporary literature has filled the void found in ethnographic records and some novels have explored the female bond with Ireland's familiar environment and their grief at their emotional detachment from the land. Another example can be found in marriage and motherhood. As the sole destiny for women in Ireland, they must be considered as a motivation for leaving. But, at the same time, during the

pre-migration stage, rituals and traditions such as the American wakes can be classified as coping mechanisms thanks to their socializing function, an issue well documented in both ethnography and literature. The social nature of these meetings, even their mixed essence, somewhere in between sorrow and joy, played an important role in normalizing an undesired departure.

Secondly, the journey on the boat to America has also been identified as a stressor, especially due to its gendered nature, which in the Irish context was largely performed by young single women. The perils they faced had to be counteracted by a coping mechanism in the form of temporary alliances among travelling girls, a means to lessen their vulnerability seen in both ethnographic records and the selected novels. Nonetheless, only the literary sources dare address sexual intimidation and abuse to which women travelling alone were exposed, an issue to which legal records bear witness. As noted in the analysis, while direct testimonies avoid this subject, literature digs into the psychological aspects of shame.

Finally, a major source of resilience, both in the pre-migration and settlement or post-migration stages were the emotional bonds established between the prospective migrant and those who had already emigrated. These transnational links have been clearly identified in the form of Irish immigrant networks that welcomed new immigrants and provide them with food, lodgings, connections and emotional support. Concurrently, they would also play a relevant role in the perpetuation of the island's morals and customs, thus hindering young women's chances of emancipation. Notably, the inconsistent approaches of ethnographic sources and literary works to the post-migration stage indicate that adjustment to the new land may have entailed a kind of conflict between the American dream and the actual lives of the female immigrants. While the oral materials tend to minimize the loneliness suffered by those newly arrived in America, O'Brien and Costello openly refer to failed examples in the post-migration stage, an asymmetry that trauma studies attributes to unconscious memory selection. Ultimately, this calls into question the validity of both memory and literary work as unbiased sources for analysis.

In conclusion, Irish female migration can be identified as a form of chain migration that entails a certain degree of unwanted mobility and encompasses a conflict between the emotional and ideological spheres.

According to trauma theories, Irish female migration presents stressors and coping mechanisms in the distinct stages of the process. As this study demonstrates, the intersection of literature and ethnography as complementary disciplines for the study of this phenomenon sheds light on crucial aspects that would otherwise have gone unnoticed and offers a broader horizon for the understanding of Irish female migration.

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RUTH BARTON

3 Avenging the Famine: Lance Daly's *Black '47*, Genre and History

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses Lance Daly's Famine-set film, *Black '47* (2018), as a revenge Western. I look at the critical background to visual representations of the Famine and discuss this historical event as a traumatic narrative. I then question how Daly positions his film within a culture of neoliberal hostility to victims. His solution, I argue, is to deploy the genre of the Western with its singular action hero. The central hero, Feeney (James Frecheville), thus becomes a fantasy avenger of his country's wrongs, slaying those who have caused the deaths in his family and community.

In September 2018, a new film stormed the Irish box office, attracting such substantial attendances in its first weekend that, due to the peculiar system of counting the Republic of Ireland's viewing figures in with those of the UK's, it appeared at number ten in the UK box office, despite not yet being released there. Lance Daly's *Black '47* took €392,000 in its opening weekend, the highest opening for an Irish film since John Crowley's *Brooklyn* in 2015 (IFTN n. pag.). It went on to become the most successful Irish film of the year, making a total of €1,440,398 in Ireland and in doing so joining a small club of local productions, including *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan, 1996), *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (Ken Loach, 2006) and *The Guard* (John Michael McDonagh, 2011), to exceed the 1 million euro mark (Abbatescianni n. pag.). Like Jordan's and Loach's releases, *Black '47* is a historical film, but the resemblances end there. In fact, a comparison with McDonagh's violent and profane oeuvre might more productively account for the popularity of *Black '47*. It is, as its title makes clear, a film set during the Irish famine. It is also a revenge Western powered by a singular white male hero, the fictional Martin Feeney (James Frecheville), a former Irish ranger who deserts from the British army in

India to return to his family in Connemara. It is 1847 and Feeney arrives to learn that his mother has died of fever (as would many of the 1 million Irish Famine victims), and his brother has been hung for resisting eviction. Feeney's attempt to save his now homeless family members – his sister-in-law Ellie (Sarah Greene) and her children – brings about his first brutal encounter with the authorities, which concludes with his nephew being shot for resisting the family's eviction and his own arrest. On escaping, he finds Ellie huddled in a corner of the ruined cottage with her daughter, frozen to death. Thereafter, Feeney sets off on a mission of retribution, trekking ever deeper into the Connemara wilds, followed by an old comrade from his regiment in Afghanistan, Hannah (Hugo Weaving). Hannah may be a member of the British forces in Ireland but he shares Feeney's violent interpretation of justice and is presented with this task as a last chance to rehabilitate himself following the death of a prisoner at his hands. Thus, in classic Western fashion, hunter and hunted enjoy a bond of understanding. The remainder of the characters include the British landlord, Lord Kilmichael (Jim Broadbent); the informer, Conneely (Stephen Rea); and the young British private Hobson (Barry Keoghan).

The purpose of this chapter is to tease out the strands of *Black '47* that contributed to its success in Ireland. That this was a very local hit is underlined by dismal box office figures in the United States, where it took just \$33,471 in three weeks (O'Shea n. pag.). It is more difficult to gauge the UK figures, given that, as already mentioned, they are calculated together with the Irish figures. However, the total Irish/UK box office was listed as \$1,984,454 or approximately €1,746,117, which suggests it took around €305,719 in the UK, a not insignificant figure but hardly that of a major release.¹ It seems, rather, that embedded in *Black '47* was a particular set of signifiers that had specific resonances for local Irish audiences. These were evident not so much in the choice of its historical setting but in its aesthetic and narrative treatment of that period. In particular, as I will argue, its storyline allowed for a victorious restaging of a period in Irish history more commonly associated with loss. This in turn, I propose, spoke to a

1 Box office figures taken from Box Office Mojo, 3 January 2019. The estimated UK take is arrived at by subtracting the Irish take from the UK take.

new neoliberal turn in Irish culture that saw little value in celebrating victimhood. At the same time, its West of Ireland setting was one that bore intense local resonances, as the “real” Ireland and cradle of Gaelic culture. The decision to stage much of the dialogue in the Irish language with subtitles is just one of the film’s cultural anchors. Thus, I will suggest that *Black ’47* allowed its audiences both to mourn the Irish past and welcome a new heroic remasculinization of its own historical figures.

Black ’47: The Background

Black ’47 is the sixth film by director Lance Daly, whose previous productions, including *Kisses* (2008) and *Life’s a Breeze* (2013), were small-scale relationship films set in and around contemporary Dublin. Nothing in his oeuvre pointed to a director who might make a historical, narrative-driven, high-action drama. Indeed, very little in Irish film-making of the first two decades of the twenty-first century suggested that a historical film was on anyone’s agenda. In what might be seen as a rebuff to an older generation of political film-makers active in the 1980s and 1990s whose discursive framework was determined by a need to question the origins of contemporary nationalism, the film-makers of the 2000s have favoured romcoms, low-budget horrors and gangster movies, films set firmly in the present. *Black ’47* had its genesis in a short Irish-language film, *An Ranger*, made in 2008 and directed by P. J. Dillon from a script by Dillon and Pierce Ryan. In the film, the Ranger (Owen McDonnell) returns home to Connemara on horseback still dressed in his British army uniform. The setting is 1854 and the Famine is over. Stopping in at a cottage and speaking in Irish, he tells its owner, his cousin Ignatius (Máirtín Jaimsie), about his time in the army. Ignatius in turn tells him of his mother’s eviction and her death in poverty, blaming the landlord’s agents and the Crown representatives for these events, and mourning the dead of the Famine. On closer questioning, Ignatius confesses that he has taken over the Ranger’s old home and is using it to house his pigs, to keep the

property in the family as he claims. In the final sequences, his daughter Máire (Michelle Forbes) returns to the cottage to find her father tied to the chair, a pig's head strapped to his dead body in the place of his own. The Ranger rides on his journey of revenge.²

Black '47 was the first feature-length cinematic treatment of the Famine (following the BBC/RTÉ television miniseries *The Hanging Gale* of 1995). Its best-known literary precursor is probably Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine*, published in 1937 and still highly regarded for its fictionalization of the events of 1845–51. It is also the Irish film that John Ford never made. O'Flaherty, who was born in 1896 on Inishmore, the largest of the Aran islands, was a distant cousin of Ford. In 1935, Ford released his award-winning adaptation of O'Flaherty's *The Informer*, relocating it from the Irish Civil War (1922–3) to the immediate aftermath of the War of Independence (1919–21), and substantially changing its politics. Inspired by the success of this adaptation, and with an eye on a film career of his own, O'Flaherty moved to Hollywood, where he and Ford became close friends. *Famine* is dedicated to Ford and its author entertained justifiable expectations that it would follow *The Informer* to the big screen. Ford shared that hope, but the project remained on the back burner throughout his life, right up to the 1950s when Lord Killanin formed Four Provinces Productions with Ford on the board. However, as Thomas Flanagan (25) has argued, and Ford scholars agree, Ford did make an Irish Famine film, if one with an all-American setting. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Flanagan wrote: “the ravaged landscape of Tom Joad's Oklahoma bears uncanny echoes of the abandoned famine villages of Connaught and Munster. So too does the migration to California resonate against memories of the coffin ships headed across the Atlantic” (25). John Ford was born John Martin Feeney, only later changing his name or Gaelicizing Feeney to O'Feeney (or variations such as O'Fearná). Thus, we can see a nod to the film's historic antecedents in the naming of the central character in *Black '47*.³

2 *An Ranger* can be viewed on YouTube: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWv2d-v96DY>>. Accessed 4 January 2019.

3 For more on the relationship between Ford and O'Flaherty, see Evans (2017) and McBride (2011). Jim Sheridan quotes from *The Grapes of Wrath* in *In America*

Black '47: The Critical Reception

Black '47 premiered at the Berlinale of 2018. Trade reviews were positive, with *Variety* taking some care to explain the historical background to the film, and in particular the absence of prior filmic representations of the Famine. Recognizing it as an “Irish Western”, the reviewer commented approvingly on “the exotic sound of Irish Gaelic spoken as a living language, and the brackish majesty of cinematographer Declan Quinn’s wide vistas” (Kiang n. pag.). In a final line that surely must have made the film’s distributors anticipate a strong US release, she concludes that *Black '47* quickens “the Celtic blood you perhaps didn’t even know was flowing through your veins” (Kiang n. pag.). Stephen Rea’s willingness to promote the production, at the Berlinale and subsequently, went a long way towards establishing a preferred reading of the film: “It is the most significant moment in Irish history”, he explained:

We all live with it. We feel a sense of shame about it. It led to an increased demand for independence on behalf of the Irish. The resonances of it still exist. They are in the film. It was a no-brainer. I wanted to do it. It’s a huge film in a way. It’s strange that it hasn’t been done before. (Qtd in Clarke 11)

Rea’s star persona as a left-leaning public figure, and his association with Neil Jordan’s early political cinema, notably *Angel* (1982) and *The Crying Game* (1992), lent statements such as this a resonance that went beyond the usual promotional interview.⁴ Although his part in *Black '47* is one of the film’s more conventional if satisfying roles – Conneely is the classic shifty, garrulous Paddy – an exchange of his with Lord Kilmichael that underlined the film’s postcolonial message was widely used in promotional clips. Responding to the latter’s praise of the beauties of the Irish

(2003). For the relationship between Sheridan’s film and Ford’s “disguised” Famine film, see Crosson (2008).

4 With Clare Dwyer Hogg, Rea more recently made the well-received short film *Brexit, A Cry from the Irish Border* (2018) critiquing the Brexit negotiations for the *Financial Times*. See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cZc2ihEZO8>>. Accessed 9 June 2019.

landscape, Conneely says: “Beauty would be held in much higher regard, sir, if it could be eaten”. The Irish media was uniformly positive about Daly’s film, praising it for tackling the taboo subject of the famine and equally for framing it as an Irish Western. In the UK press, there was an air of caution. Aware of their own part in the story, they were careful to acknowledge the traumatic history on display. *The Times*, for instance, drew attention to the Holocaust-style imagery deployed by the film. The same review, however, dismissed *Black ’47*’s treatment of its topic as “deeply silly stuff” (Maher 9). The caricatural depiction of the British (English) characters was noted as an indicator of the film’s simplistic historicism. Critical responses in the United States were respectful, if slightly baffled. Why, most asked, depict a weighty historical event in the language of popular genre?

An Authentic Reproduction

The period production has always been torn between reproducing the past as daguerreotype or as it actually would have been. As theorists of the historical film have suggested, the look of a film is crucial to audiences’ belief in its authenticity. Thus, Michele Pierson argues that

through the highly visible artifice of their own production design, many popular films create past worlds in which it is not so much the likeness of these worlds to historical actuality that is calculated to appeal to audiences, but the conventionality, familiarity and accessibility of their historical references. (148)

In the case of a work such as *Black ’47*, with its implausible central hero, and anachronistic narrative, it was particularly important that the film should look right, or at least, that it should look like audiences’ visual reference points to the Famine. The *Black ’47* production team went to great lengths to achieve this, filling in the Connemara landscape with digitally reconstructed ruined cottages shot to look almost chiaroscuro, or like contemporary illustrations. Rather evidently, the Connemara landscape of Famine times was not actually black-and-white; it is rather that

sepia “has come to function as the colour of history in all sorts of popular cultural contexts” (Pierson 145). Accompanying publicity insisted on the historical veracity of the film’s imagery (including details such as Daly’s use of original firearms from the period, with real gunpowder). Interviews with Daly regularly reported on his research at the Quinnipiac Famine Museum in Canada. In an *Irish Times* piece on the creation of a “Famine aesthetic”, historical advisor Professor Niamh O’Sullivan discussed how she and the production team had consulted the iconic illustrations of the Famine from the *Pictorial Times* and the *Illustrated London News* to create the film’s look (Brady 13). This was indeed all the production team had at their disposal, as there are no contemporary photographs of the Famine. In their place, these period black-and-white illustrations have assumed the status of official representations. Equally, as Gail Baylis and Sarah Edge have demonstrated, photography from the post-Famine era, notably of evictions from the 1880s and 1890s, is commonly deployed as illustrations in accounts of the Famine. As they note, such accounts do not actually state that the photographs date back to the Famine; however, their placing in the text often invites the reader to assume that they do (Baylis and Edge). In her useful analysis of visual representations of the Famine, Emily Mark-Fitzgerald has argued that more contemporary sources exist than had previously been recognized, this lacuna being explained by the exclusion from academic accounts of less accomplished paintings, such as Daniel MacDonald’s *The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland* (1847) (Mark-Fitzgerald 11–56). She further discusses the tensions in such works between the romanticizing of rural life and recognition of the Victorian era’s burgeoning social concern for the poor. Evocations of the plight of the Irish did not necessarily encourage reform, rather they were offered up for contemplation of “the ethical picturesque” (Mark-Fitzgerald 19). That this is a practice that continues up to the present is borne out by Luke Gibbons’ analysis of the works on display at the Great Hunger Museum at Quinnipiac University, such as Michael Farrell’s etching *Black ’47* (1997–8), “which cultivate a sympathetic engagement with the harrowing experiences of the Great Famine and its aftermath”. “But”, Gibbons continues,

these aesthetic strategies have also to contend with one of the indictments of the image as an ethical resource, namely, that its sensual or personal appeal is limited to

the exercise of sympathy or compassion, and it is not capable of addressing wider issues of justice, duty or obligation. ("Limits" n. pag.)

By naturalizing the suffering of the Irish peasantry, who were conventionally pictured within a darkened, glowering landscape, such paintings supported the dominant colonial view of the Famine as inescapable, and natural, rather than treatable, even as the fault of the people's popish beliefs.

Black '47 reproduces this aesthetic, foregrounding a bleak, washed out Connemara. Feeney's arrival on horseback is accompanied by a plangent score (by Brian Byrne) and computer-generated imagery of a greyed-out landscape of abandoned houses. One of the earliest shots is of a skull lying in a pool of water, spotted with falling rain; shortly thereafter the audience will come upon a burial, the mourners made up of weeping women. Even when the screen returns to full colour, it is still comprised of muted boglands and occasional intrusions of green. Everything here is intended to evoke empathy and concern; equally, it is presented to the historical gaze as an object of curiosity, an artefact from the distant past.

The film supplies some limited historical information. Ellie and her children, we learn, "took the soup", though what that means is explained much later on and must have confused audiences unfamiliar with Famine history. Feeney's mother refused to do so and died. With the introduction of the Poor Tax (also unexplained), the Feeneys, alongside many others, were evicted by the landlord. A cousin of the family, foreshadowing the new merchant class that would rise out of the Famine, capitalized on their misfortunes, taking over their house to keep his animals. With Feeney's return, however, he will not have long to live before meeting the same grisly fate as Ignatius in *The Ranger*. In a train through Connemara, Capt. Pope (Freddie Fox) exchanges words with a journalist from the *Wexford Independent* who is compiling a report on the economics of Famine in the west. Pope insists on his own Scripture-inspired interpretation of the mass deaths – that it was Irish drunkenness and fecklessness, combined with a primitive reliance on the potato, that was the cause of these events. By now, the narrative has established Pope as the mouthpiece of colonialism, so that his analysis is signalled by association as unreliable. The landlord, Kilmichael, is a cut-and-paste villain: lecherous, prejudiced and without scruples. More than

that, Daly places in his mouth a sentiment that has since become widely (and apocryphally) associated with a report in *The Times* on the Famine. “There are those”, he tells Conneely, “who look forward to the day when a Celtic Irishman is as rare as a red Indian in Manhattan.”⁵ Other than these details, however, very little of the political background is made available to the audience and one might imagine how different *Black '47* would have been had it been the work of, for instance, Ken Loach.

In the place of specific political analysis, Daly relies on triggering an emotional response in his audiences. The rural setting, and most particularly Connemara, was crucial to this creation of an “ethical picturesque”. This region has conventionally been imagined as the “real Ireland”, a landscape of peasant cottages and sweeping vistas. In the decades following the Famine, the West was to become the bedrock of the cultural nationalists’ idealized nation, the untrammelled Other to the colonial city. The fact that it remained Irish-speaking was equally significant. Yet, as Martin McLoone amongst others has argued, the emptiness of the region was a consequence of its depopulation during the Famine, and thus its appeal was founded on tragedy. It is, in his words, a “haunted space” (McLoone 79). In its turn, cinema adopted the same aesthetics, rendering the Irish countryside alternately as sun-filled landscapes of brilliant green and as dark, menacing spaces wracked by nature’s ire.⁶ *Black '47*’s colour palette might as well have been a lowering Jack Yeats’s landscape. Against this, the Irish peasantry are as ghosts – pale, starving and indistinguishable one from the other; in other words, the landscape speaks for them, as will, in a way, Feeney.

- 5 For a detailed examination of the origins of this remark and its place in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, see Simpson, “Vengeance and the Shores of Manhattan.” *James Joyce Online Notes*, <<http://www.jjon.org/joyce-s-allusions/vengeance>>. Accessed 11 June 2019.
- 6 In his foundational discussion of cinematic images of the Irish West, Luke Gibbons adapts Erwin Panofsky’s distinction between “soft” and “hard” primitivism to account for the two contrasting modes of Romantic depictions of the countryside. Thus, images of the desolation of the west conform as much to the kind of pastoralism that insists on aesthetic engagement over political analysis as do images of the countryside as the locus of plenitude. See Gibbons (“Romanticism” 194–257).

Politics, Blame and Victimhood: “It’s about someone saying: well, I’m not a fucking victim”

The Famine is generally understood to be one of the foundational traumatic narratives of Irish identity. It remains a highly contested one, however. Even the popular notion that it was long treated with silence only to be recuperated by the 150th anniversary commemorations in the mid-1990s, is disputed by a number of contemporary historians. Cormac Ó Gráda (1999) has influentially argued for the inclusion in the historical account of folkloric artefacts, including poetry, of the Famine collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. These, he acknowledges, do not constitute documentary evidence but rather illustrate how the Famine was remembered. Yet these too contain their own silences, omitting the more graphic detail of contemporary journalism – half-buried children’s bodies being eaten by dogs, for instance – omissions Ó Gráda attributes to the shame of victimhood.

From a different perspective, in *The Feminization of Famine* Margaret Kelleher (1997) has drawn attention to the hitherto overlooked legacy of women writers, of both fiction and non-fiction, in the years of the Famine and immediately following it. As she points out, they were in general more attentive to the causes of the Famine than were their better-known male counterparts. Her overriding critique is contained in the monograph’s title, that single emblematic figures, most often women, or women and children, have been used to represent a vast catastrophe, a practice as evident today as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. Famine scenes, as she demonstrates, are often rendered as a crisis of the maternal – “extending from the mother’s inability to feed her child, to cases of abandonment, desertion, even infanticide” (Kelleher 7). The tableaux that emerge from the travel writers and journalists who documented the famine is repeatedly one of passivity, where the emaciated mother, rag-clad or near-naked, lies in her dank hovel unable to move or care for her dying or dead offspring. The mother who cannot feed her children, or cover her body, or who must choose to let her newborn baby die so that she can breastfeed her teenage son so that he in turn can be employed in the public works schemes, is an

image that evokes horror as much as compassion.⁷ We can see just how indebted *Black '47* is to this aesthetic tradition in scenes such as the gatherings of silent peasants mentioned above, often configured around a suffering mother. In the film's early moments, Feeney shares the hearth with his sister-in-law and her three children. Ellie is the classic Irish Madonna, pale-faced with long dark hair, the flames giving her skin its only warmth. Speaking Irish together, they sing traditional songs into the night. Later, Feeney finds her frozen to death in the now roofless cottage. She has died attempting to keep her children warm, and in death she is posed as a Pietà, bringing to the scene very specific Catholic religious resonances and connotations of maternal suffering.

There is a further important dimension to this focus on suffering Irish womanhood. Where then is the family patriarch? Conveniently, and with little evidence to back it up, the Famine narrative insisted that women through their nature outlived men, hence their over-representation. But the absent male is surely a deliberate elision. Starving men evoke less pity, but they also confront the male spectator with a discomfiting mirror image of himself or what, if circumstances were a little different, he might become.

It is this uncomfortable mirror image that *Black '47* is at such pains to disavow. In its insistence on (male) agency, it not only harks back to the Western hero but also to more recent rewritings of the historical record, such as Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* of 2009. Although Daly's work is not as phantasmagorical as Tarantino's, it springs from the same desire to refashion victimhood as agency. In this, both films are very much in tune with neoliberal discourses on the politics of agency and victimhood. To put it crudely, to be a victim is to be a loser, the ultimate shame. Victims, in neoliberal discourse, are those who fail to take responsibility for their own betterment, or those who blame society for their circumstances. As Rebecca Stringer has noted:

Since the 1980s, across a wide array of discourses in media, academia, official politics and movement politics, there has been a concerted movement away from the

7 The same argument could be very easily transposed to contemporary images of Famine in developing countries, where starving children and emaciated, helpless mothers are deployed to elicit sympathy and donations.

language of victimhood, prompted by the emergence of a surprisingly widely shared critique of the very notion of “victim”. This movement away from the language of victimhood has not meant talk of victimhood has ceased. Rather it has meant that talk of victimhood primarily assumes the form of negative critique of the notion of “victim”: the proliferation of discourses in which the notion of victim arises in order to be critiqued, and is generally unseated by “agency” as the trope of legitimacy and preferred analytical choice. (2)

This ontological shift has profound implications for the narrating of Irish history generally and of the Famine specifically. Colonialism has, of course, always availed itself of the twin narratives of victimhood and agency. Within this configuration, the Irish are at once the casualties and the avengers of British imperialism, that small put-upon nation that took its fate into its own hands to achieve independence. Yet, intertwined into that story are the celebration of blood sacrifice and Christian martyrdom, positions that are now inimical to anti-victimism. Further, one has to ask how the celebration of agency fits with the theories of cultural trauma and the construction of identity to which this collection of essays responds. The traumatic narrative is most often focused on giving voice to the victim or acknowledging their silences. To what extent this should allow for the working through and overcoming of trauma is another question. Must trauma always return (as the repressed) or can it be overcome through the recognition processes of narration? Or did this film neatly sidestep any real investigation of Famine trauma by allowing that narrative to fade into the background as it refocused its audiences’ attention to its hypermasculine hero? By relying on a visual aesthetic that posed the suffering victims of the famine as figures from a daguerreotype, *Black ’47* retrieves the traumatic past only to pronounce its break with the present. Irish audiences are invited not so much to make connections with the past but to look at it as a curiosity, as something over and done with, as a set of events from a different time and populated by different people. This means disidentifying with the existing historical narrative of Irish victimhood.

The interpretation of the Famine’s terrible events as being the consequence of British neglect (at best) or as an Irish Holocaust (at worst) is widely accepted within popular history. The British government’s refusal to intervene, the Irish landlords’ abnegation of their responsibilities, the

economic factors that dictated that the grain harvest be shipped for export rather than being fed to the starving peasantry are all fundamental to how the events of the day are understood. In Ó Gráda's nuanced analysis, this was less a deliberate policy of extermination than a confluence of disastrous ideology and mismanagement:

The Irish famine relief effort was constrained less by poverty than by ideology and public opinion. Too much was expected of the Irish themselves, including Irish landlords. Too much was blamed on their dishonesty and laziness. Too much time was lost on the public works as the main vehicle of relief. By the time food was reaching the starving through food kitchens, they were already vulnerable to infectious disease, against which the medical science of the day was virtually helpless. (82)

The makers of *Black '47* were thus faced with an array of competing discourses. The historical legacy of the Famine insisted, on the one hand, on its silence and, on the other, on its importance as a foundational narrative of the new Irish state. Not only did it act as a rallying cry for independence, it was also seen as directly leading to the establishment of the Irish diaspora. It was a vital part of history yet circulated in a representational void. Until the commemorative events of the mid-1990s onwards, it was widely understood to have been too traumatic to acknowledge as a public, national commemoration. Moreover, it positioned the Irish as feminized victims. As Emily Mark-Fitzgerald writes,

the widespread contemporary recourse to colonially inscribed and problematic framings of the Famine's effects suggests that troubling questions – of how an unimaginable Famine may be made visible, and how its latter-day representations may transcend the limits of its visual record – remain profoundly unresolved. (34)

The solution to the testing question of how to represent a historical moment characteristically associated with victimhood in an era that regarded victims as losers was, as Stephen Rea explained (qtd in Brady 13), to insist on an alternative narrative of agency: "It's a guy wanting to have revenge. That's crucial. It isn't just about victims. It's about someone saying: well, I'm not a fucking victim. That's why it works".

The Remasculinization of the Famine

The decision to frame the narrative of *Black '47* as a Western constituted a break from the usual run of Irish genre films. In recent years, as already noted, Irish cinema has dipped into genre film-making with some consistency. The Dublin-set gangster film, for instance, has become something of a staple, as have the romcom, the low-budget horror and even the musical. Historical films have maintained a presence within the Irish cinematic canon, even if few have commanded the popularity of the War of Independence narratives of *Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. Yet the potential for making an Irish Western has always run up against the smallness of the island, which has conventionally been perceived as inimical to reproducing the iconography of the genre, notably its vast landscapes and endless journeying. Those few films that have sought to create associations between the west of Ireland and the American West have tended to do so ironically, as did Mike Newell in the Jim Sheridan-scripted *Into the West* (1992). The latter film has attracted some considerable scholarship as a revised or transnational Western that appropriates the *dramatis personae* of the conventional Western to question Irish (post-) modernity and power structures, particularly in relation to Traveller identities (Barton; Cleary; Cullingford; González). In the meantime, too, the Western has evolved from the classic cycle of Hollywood productions which foregrounded male agency, celebrated the lone hero, endorsed violent action and drew strict divisions between “civilization” and “savagery”. Marking a break somewhere around Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* (1990), although one could look back to John Ford’s revisionist *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) to the origins of this ontological shift, the genre has moved into a new introspective mode, questioning those tropes on which it was founded, or so exaggerating them as to draw audience attention to their excessive staging.

Crucial to the project of devictimizing the Famine is *Black '47*’s construction of its central male characters, Feeney and Hannah, and the casting of James Frecheville and Hugo Weaving in the two parts. Both actors are Australian (though the latter is generally identified as Anglo-Australian)

and both had previous histories in action-adventure and fantasy roles. Frecheville was best known for his performance as the teenager Joshua “J” Cody in the violent Australian gangster drama *Animal Kingdom* (David Michôd, 2010). Weaving had a longer screen history, with his first major role as Agent Smith in *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999) and later roles in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and as V in *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2005). In a casting environment where male Irish actors with star quality are freely available, one has to ask why choose two Australians? The answer, one might imagine, is the heightened masculinity to which white Australian identities can lay claim. The iconic figure of the Australian “larrikin”, a boisterous, heavy-drinking, foul-mouthed lawbreaker who thumbs his nose at authority enjoys a lengthy cinematic history, from the foundational *The Man from Snowy River* (George T. Miller, 1982) through Paul Hogan in *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1987) and its sequels, to the various Ned Kelly releases. It re-emerges only to be highly problematized in *The Proposition* (John Hillcoat, 2005), a film to which *Black ’47* may be usefully compared, and which, one could easily imagine, served as an inspiration for Daly’s film. With a screenplay by Nick Cave, the eponymous “proposition” is made by English settler Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone) to Irish outlaw Charlie Burns (Guy Pearce). If he wants to save his younger brother from the gallows, he must hunt down and turn in his violent older brother Arthur (Danny Huston). Hillcoat’s film successfully deterritorializes the American Western and repurposes it to question the relationship between white settlers, Irish outlaws and Aboriginal natives. In particular, it is insistent on deconstructing the myth, embodied by Captain Stanley, of the “civilizing mission” of colonization. It is the aptly named Stanley’s response to the film’s violent opening massacre that sets in train its narrative of retributive violence; yet by its conclusion, it is as if this violence has been exhausted. When Charlie Burns raises his gun in Stanley’s home as he steps through the wreckage of their lonely Christmas dinner, it is not to kill this flawed, beaten figure of authority but to let him and his wife live. At the heart of *The Proposition* lies the close-knit Irish family of the Burns; their opposites, the Stanleys, are, the film suggests, grieving their own childlessness. Colonial power is thus symbolically impotent, while the destructive power of the Irish male grouping derives from

its clan structure. Just as *Into the West* questioned whether the Traveller family were the cowboys or the Indians of the Irish West, so one of *The Proposition*'s characters demands of the Burns, "What is an Irishman but a nigger turned inside out?"

Black '47, I would argue, occupies a complicated space in relation to whiteness, colonial authority and the Western, particularly given its subliminal address to the history of white and colonial Australian masculinities – in one scene, the judge sentences a man, Pádraig Ó Sé (Ciaran Grace), to six months' hard labour followed by penal servitude in Van Diemen's Land in Tasmania for stealing a sheep from the landlord to feed his family; this man could in turn have become the ancestor of *The Proposition*'s Burns. Daly's film too is fundamentally about avenging the family.

Yet, as much as it pays homage to the visual referents of the Famine, so it is also indebted to a different history, that of the fighting Irish. When Hannah comes upon the grotesque pose in which Feeney has placed the bailiff's severed head, he recognizes immediately that this was something the Irishman learnt from the natives when he was serving in Afghanistan. Later, in a moment familiar from countless Westerns, Hannah recounts how a man, evidently Feeney, rescued him from an ambush outside of Kabul. He was, he tells Hobson, "the best soldier I ever met. Never fought for the Queen though, just for his mates. Fucking Irish".

By retrieving this character from both real and cinematic history (where he had a particularly long life as a minor character in John Ford's Westerns), Daly repositions the fighting Irishman as a new hero for Irish genre film-making. Feeney is at once disciplined and anarchic, choosing his own battles rather than fighting for the state oppressor (the British Crown). Borrowing the silent avenger of the Sergio Leone/Clint Eastwood cycle while acknowledging its transnational reworking in newer iterations such as *The Proposition* allows *Black '47* to achieve its sense of historicity, which is established as much through its iconic figures and its generic referencing as via its narrative. This configuration, however, also enables a secondary set of cinematic-historical signifiers – that of the feminized community. Traditionally, the Western hero rode into the small town that was too weak to defend itself, dispatched the villains and, turning his back

on domesticity, rode off into the sunset at the film's end. By relegating the Famine Irish to background personae, and the family to a weakened matriarchy, Daly marks a clear distinction between the fantasy avenger, Feeney, and the starving tenantry as an undifferentiated, emasculated horde. *Black '47's* concluding shoot-out abandons all pretence of caring about those whom Feeney is ostensibly defending (they are left to loot the grain), and instead relishes a truly predictable stand-off between the competing male characters. In this manner, it ends on an oddly conventional note, with little investment in questioning masculinity or the dynamics of the Irish clan, or the social origins of the Famine.

In conclusion, it is little surprise that *Black '47* should have succeeded so well locally. Anyone who switches on the Irish-language television channel TG4 will know just how reliant its scheduling is on reruns of old Hollywood Westerns. Similarly, the Irish West, as I have discussed above, has offered itself up to thematic analogies between the two frontiers, Connemara and the American Pacific, and particularly their cast of characters. By reviving the classic Western's illusion of mastery, the film offers itself up to a process of remasculinization that speaks to Irish society in the language of agency and anti-victimism. At the same time, Daly is surprisingly conventional in terms of his depiction of the local Irish, who remain weakened and feminized. So singular is Feeney that the film concludes with no sense that anything has actually changed other than the immediate removal of the landlord (whose heir will presumably step into his place). Nor does it propose any particular vision for a restructuring of the social order. On the other hand, the film's denial of the Western's current mode of critical self-awareness surely lessened its appeal to other audiences, so that it failed as a contemporary genre piece. Given just how little time went into exploring the social dimensions of the Famine, and its early dispatch of the family in favour of a hero-driven sequence of increasingly incredible exploits, it must have seemed baffling and just too weird for exogenous viewers. Ultimately, *Black '47* is at its most potent as a fantasy; in completing this legerdemain, it relegates the lived trauma of the Famine to an unknowable past, accessible only as computer-generated image. This may well be where the film's audiences agreed it belonged.

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PART II

Memory and Digital Archives

LORRAINE DENNIS

4 Reflection of Trauma in the Prisons Memory Archive: How Information Literacy, Human Experience and Place Are Impacted by Conflict

ABSTRACT

The Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) provides an insight into two key prisons of the Anglo-Irish “Troubles”, a period of thirty years of armed political conflict stretching approximately from 1968 to 1998. Based on an ethical framework of co-ownership, inclusivity and life storytelling, participants were filmed inside the empty Armagh Gaol and the Maze/Long Kesh Prison during 2006 and 2007. Participants from a diverse range of backgrounds offered their own narratives, helping us to understand everyday experiences during a period of intense violence, societal division and military containment. The aim of this chapter is to explore the interaction between memory and place in both the past and present. The development of trauma bias is analysed against seminal works on oral history to demonstrate how its rigorous methodology, shaped by some of the discipline’s formative elements, adds to the value of the PMA as a narrative of a traumatic past.

Introduction

This chapter will explore some of the audiovisual recordings of the Prisons Memory Archive (PMA), which give an insight into two key prisons of the Anglo-Irish “Troubles”, a three-year period of armed political conflict stretching approximately from 1968 to 1998. Participants were filmed inside the empty Armagh Gaol and the Maze and Long Kesh Prison during 2006 and 2007; prison staff, prisoners, probation officers, teachers, family visitors and chaplains recalled their experiences during a period of intense violence, societal division and military containment.

When the recordings were made, we set out to provide information on the human experience of conflict, relative to specific sites. The impact

of traumatic experience on this broad aim will be analysed utilizing seminal works on oral history to demonstrate how the rigorous methodology, shaped by some of the discipline's formative elements, adds significantly to the value of the PMA as a narrative of a traumatic past.

Since its initiation the PMA has been contributing to the debate on a shared history in Northern Ireland. The value of the collection to build empathy and understanding in a divided society is widely acknowledged locally and internationally as an example of best practice in storytelling from conflict and participatory documentary film-making.

History of the Conflict: Creating In-Groups and Out-Groups

The origins of the violent conflict in and about the north of Ireland has dominated academic enquiry since it began in the late 1960s. In the seminal publication *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, written in 1990, Whyte notes, "Relative to its size, Northern Ireland is the most heavily researched area on earth; hundreds of books and articles have been published since the current troubles began there in 1968" (2).

Of course, many thousands more have been added to those volumes since then. Analysis has spanned disciplines and is captured in such volumes as Seamus Dunn's *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, which offers analysis on a broad range of themes including government policy, institutions and mediation. The book represents a view that there is not so much a single north of Ireland problem, easily characterized and classified, as a set of interlocked and complex problems (Darby 15).

The origins and protraction of the Northern Irish conflict provide content for the many works examining the complex relationship between Britain and Ireland stretching back over hundreds of years. What is more broadly agreed is that the partition of the north-eastern area in 1921, where the majority of people identified with the British state, brought an unsatisfactory solution to the rise in Irish nationalism in the southern counties.

The new Northern Ireland, established as it was by northern politicians and businessmen keen to maintain the union with England, imbibed the new jurisdiction with British theatricality and rich symbolism. In the quest for an identity for the new statelet, “unionists drew on an exclusively Protestant ethos” (McIntosh 1).

Over the decades which followed, discrimination in different areas including housing, employment and policing rose as individuals and communities who did not subscribe to the strongly held Unionist values were marginalized. In the south the special status given to the Catholic Church brought reiteration of Protestantism as the dominant religion in the north, fuelling perceptions of who was “in” and who was “out”. Protestants were widely perceived to be the “in” group, although studies into the results of economic inequalities such as the Outdoor Relief Riots of the 1930s illustrate that the everyday lives of many working-class Protestants in the north were no better than their Catholics neighbours (Devlin 6).

By the late 1960s peaceful protest was met with some attempts at change but local violent conflicts escalated, including police brutality on civil rights marchers, and the arrival of the British Army in the summer of 1969 saw the intensification of violence often referred to as “the Troubles”; this insipid axiom is used as a marker of identity with “the War” and “the Conflict” utilized to refer to the same period. Over 3,500 people were killed and hundreds of others maimed with life-changing injuries. Alongside the strengthening of state security forces, paramilitary groups sprung up, with sixteen different Loyalist groups and eight republican paramilitary groups identified (Melaugh 6). The intrinsic dehumanization which moves society from peaceful protest to violent conflict is more usually an area of study reserved for psychologists (Tajifel; Bernard et al.). In-groups and out-groups develop by stripping individuals of the positive qualities of humanity and allow people to be seen as legitimate targets because of their job or religious background as they become part of the out-group and somehow less than fully human. The impact of conflict, on mental health, on the children of parents who have suffered trauma, emotional security and family models, has been widely explored within the discipline, which has noted that “Resilience is a complex construct, and definitions about

what makes an individual or community resilient remain the subject of debate” (Fitzgerald et al. 7).

Post-Conflict Ethno-Nationalism

The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998 put in place transitional justice mechanisms for a new era of peace, although some sporadic violence did and does continue. The economic boom which followed the cessation of violence saw Belfast, the region’s capital city, named a must-see visitor destination by renowned travel guide *Lonely Planet*. The fragility of peace has been defined by the legacy of a violent past, where societal trauma sits uncomfortably with the new vision of prosperity. Journalist Susan McKay interviewed many of those who lost loved ones, as well as some of those who narrowly survived. McKay notes that “A terrible legacy of hurt remains, of suicide and broken hearts, and injuries to mind and body that have not healed. One person’s hero is another’s murderer. Some victims say others have no right to that title” (10).

The difficulty of dealing with the legacy of the past has been compounded by some of the mechanisms of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement which have “(inadvertently) widened rather than limited community divides” (Wilford and Wilson 11). A narrow ethnocentric view of all majority individuals where religious background, ethnicity and political opinion align and all other identities are ignored has led to the two communities’ paradigm of Catholic, Nationalist, Republican against Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist. Billions of pounds have been pumped into the cross-community peace process with discussions across the fault line a common place:

Accordingly, two discussion groups were convened – one representing a range of political and grassroots opinion within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community, the other representing a similar range within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community. These two groups were, separately, engaged in a process of analysis, to determine whether, as a result of that analysis, they could begin to view the generations-old Northern Ireland conflict as a “shared problem”. (Hall 3)

When fault lines are drawn vertically, ethno-nationalism takes hold – “what you are ... I am not” – and this is the current frame for discussion on our shared past. Initiatives such as “shared” housing remain challenging:

Segregation in Northern Ireland has created a segmented housing market, especially within social housing. Research has found that the most segregated communities are in the urban areas of Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Craigavon. Over 90% of social housing areas remain segregated into predominantly single communities, with this rising to 94% in Belfast. The demographics of today’s society are changing, with growing levels of new communities coming into Northern Ireland. These new communities need to be given opportunities to find their place within society without being constrained on one or other side of the existing divide. However, despite this reality of physical separation, the majority (80%) of people aspire to live in mixed neighbourhoods, but are unaware of how to go about creating a shared atmosphere. (Northern Ireland Housing Executive, p. 12)

Similar patterns are found across service provision, with 93 per cent of children still educated along religious lines. Some children from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths, or none, are schooled together in what is known as “integrated education” which “aims to provide children with a caring and enhanced educational experience. Empowering them as individuals is a priority for staff so that as they grow and mature, they’ll be able to affect positive change in the shared society we live in” (Department of Education).

Prisons Memory Archive: The Ethics of Collection

Writing in *The Irish Times* in 2016, Cahal McLaughlin, Professor of Film at Queen’s University Belfast and Director of the Prisons Memory Archive, gave valuable insight into how the past can be addressed in a contested present:

With the North of Ireland emerging out of violence, there is a general, but not yet officially recognised, consensus that storytelling, in the sense of giving voice to experiences, can be one of the ways of addressing the legacy of a conflicted past in a

contested present. The Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner's *We Will Remember Them* (1998), the *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past*, and the Hass-O'Sullivan report (2014) each called for storytelling as part of a range of recommendations requiring government support, yet none have been implemented to date and the Stormont House Agreement's promise of addressing the legacy of the past has yet to reach resolution. (n. pag.)

The "storytelling" to which McLaughlin refers in this instance is the PMA, although his work includes studies in Haiti and South Africa. The PMA was initiated in 2003 to address the question of participation in peace building: in essence, whose voice is heard and whose is included in the historical record. In *Recording Memories from Political Violence*, McLaughlin provides the backdrop to the PMA through "Inside Stories: Memories from the Maze and Long Kesh Prison" (81). The methodology of the walk-and-talk recordings was maintained in the PMA; however, the scale varied, with plans to include other prison sites and much greater number of recordings.

I met McLaughlin in 2004 whilst co-convening the "Politics of Design" Conference in Belfast, which aimed to bring together a range of disciplines to discuss topics including identity politics, politics of the everyday and eco-design (University of Ulster iv). The clash of disciplines, with McLaughlin a film-maker and myself a historian, soon began. For me, relatively newly trained in the historical method, I sought to locate truth or purpose in the new project, at that stage called the "Prisons Audio Visual Archive". McLaughlin sought to situate the cultural practice of film-making as a methodology which gives narrative to those previously unheard, and image to those often unseen. Somehow the debate led to an agreement to work together on the PMA, and the journey which has been made since then. A journey which has seen many detractors and supporters over the past twelve years, with both of us accused of supporting and discriminating against particular groups at different times.

The core principles of the ethical framework evolved from this sometimes uneasy relationship of cultural practice and historical method. Experts in other areas provided important guidance also, in particular I remember talking to Faith Gibson, Emeritus Professor of Social Work and author of *Reminiscence and Life Story Work: A Practice Guide*, explaining how we were seeking to empower the participants to tell their own story back at the prison sites. Faith simply replied, "Oh, you are using the site as a stimulus

for memory”. Human interaction is the basis on which the PMA was developed and within which the recordings were made.

Further information on the PMA is available at <<http://www.prisonmemoryarchive.com>>, where the ethical framework is outlined. There are three core principles:

Co-ownership

The PMA shares ownership of the recordings with the participants. This means that participants are involved at all stages of production and exhibition: they ultimately have the power of veto over material. This co-ownership approach generally contrasts with mainstream models of documentary film-making where the subjects relinquish ownership of recorded material to the production company or broadcaster. This ethical protocol is primarily intended to establish trust between participants and the PMA in a society emerging from violence where political and personal sensitivities remain tender.

Inclusivity

Where contestation over narratives from the past remains, it is important to hear and see the story from many perspectives. The PMA includes stories from as wide a range of constituencies as possible during filming: prison staff, prisoners, visitors, educators, probation officers, artists and chaplains. This encourages viewers to regard others as “ourselves in other circumstances” and to witness not only contrasts, but also parallels, in the participants’ experiences. While the material offers validation of each story and participant, at the same time it also challenges our assumptions about the past.

Life Storytelling

Drawing on the oral history tradition of life storytelling, with its open-ended approach as opposed to leading questions, the PMA attempts to minimize the levels of mediation between participant and film-maker and viewer. Participants were brought back to the empty sites of the Maze and Long Kesh Prison and Armagh Gaol, where a fifteen-minute briefing before the recording discussed the process and what issues they wished to cover and, as importantly, what they did not. The sites' architecture and artefacts influenced the participants' structuring of their remembering and helped trigger their memories according to what they encountered.

The PMA Collection is comprised of 140 recordings from Maze and Long Kesh Prison and thirty-five recordings from Armagh Gaol, and is one of many bottom-up initiatives that have attempted to fill the gap of addressing the contested legacy of the past. Along with participants' recordings, the collection includes extensive site footage and hundreds of photographs, films and historical records. The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported production at both prison sites.

It was not until 2014 and a chance conversation at the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) that the direction of the PMA Collection began to change and the Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive: Preservation, Access and Engagement project was initiated. The project is delivered through a partnership with Queen's University Belfast, PRONI (which is part of the governmental Department of Communities) and the PMA Management Group (of which all participants are members).

Presenting the Prisons Memory Archive

When the participant recordings were made, in 2006 and 2007, the plan was to make them available as an archival collection at venues in Britain and Ireland. With funding readily available, we were approached by a number

of institutions keen to explore the possibility of partnerships. Significant numbers of meetings were held and applications submitted with few positive outcomes. Exceptions include the Community Relations Council and the Department of Education, who provided funding for several films, the website and PhD scholarships. Global acclaim for the ethical approach preceded more local acknowledgement. Films were edited from the participants' recordings and produced through a careful process in which the participation of the individuals who had given their life stories was the key to success. Public events were held with a short introduction preceding the screening of the film. Immediately afterwards, a panel of key stakeholders, including crew and participants was brought together to answer questions from the audience, introducing an element of interactivity. A review of one of the PMA films captured the need for access to the recordings: "there were so many layers of history and emotion underlying the film *We Were There* that it was impossible to immediately digest – and certainly impossible to dismiss – this One hour film ... more time and skill is needed for healing and remembering" (Gadd 14).

The film *We Were There* was edited from the PMA Collection and captures memories of women who worked in the Maze and Long Kesh, and those who visited family and friends in the prisons. It was through PMA events where the films were screened followed by discussion that we started to identify how the human interaction, which was the basis on which the PMA was developed, could make a real contribution to a future framework for understanding the past in the present. The time and skill required to facilitate difficult conversations in a society recovering from a traumatic past cannot be underestimated.

Trauma Bias

At the public events we used the term "readiness" of the audience to hear and listen to the story of "the Other", taking into account the scale of the community relations work which had been undertaken. The

understanding being that for some, listening to an individual who held a political opinion which was republican may trigger confirmation bias as the groups held prejudice towards all republicans. Similarly, a film participant who was a prison officer drew emotive responses and was quickly dismissed as a “screw”, a derogatory term for a prison officer, and similar patterns of bias was sometimes evident. The two communities paradigm was often in evidence within the fault lines of CNR (Catholic/Nationalist/Republican) and PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist).

Skilful facilitation of the post-screening dialogue allowed for interactions between the audiences. Comments such as “I just didn’t know that” have led to debate on the role of the media in conflict resolution. The theme of perpetrators and victims is a common thread throughout many discussions, with one audience member asking, in relation to a prisoner, “But how can they have done that to another human being?”, leading to heated debate on the extent of inequalities and what circumstances can lead to violent conflict. In some audience discussions, members self-regulated through reminders that “We are all human beings at the end of the day”.

In the informal debrief which followed public events, often on the journey home, we spoke about how some audiences simply did not hear or see what was presented. We reflected on the “do no harm” principle of conflict interventions and were reassured by event evaluations which continually demonstrated the need for projects such as the PMA. On some occasions we questioned the “readiness” of the audience to actually hear and see the material presented and it was at these events that the societal nature of trauma became evident. In reality this was of little surprise since reports document the world’s highest recorded rate of post-traumatic stress disorder in Northern Ireland, with nearly 40 per cent of the population having suffered a conflict-related traumatic incident (Ferry et al.). The films have been shown at many locations across the north of Ireland and this “trauma bias” where groups identify and support the stories of some individuals, whilst denigrating those of others, is evident at some events. The majority of interactions, however, bring positive results, with audiences acknowledging the PMA’s relevance in understanding our shared, and contested, heritage.

Whose Voice Is Heard?

Renowned oral historian Paul Thompson writes in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* that “History survives as social activity only because it has a meaning for people today. The voice of the past matters to the present. But whose voice – or voices – can be heard?” (vi). If we consider Thompson’s construct by questioning whose voice is most (or least) dominant in society it becomes clear, as a part of the learning outcome, that the absence of a story does not mean that there is not one to be told. Particularly in a society emerging from conflict, it is important to hear all voices, including those which have been marginalized previously.

In seeking to identify whose voices are being heard, this study returns to the perceptions of “in” and “out” groups in an attempt to understand the history of the conflict and the persistent ethno-nationalist conflicts since the cessation of violence. Máiréad Nic Craith, in her examination *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, analyses how culture wars have replaced the bomb and the bullet. The validity and visibility of Irishness once thwarted by Unionists in the north is now common, with Gaelic sports covered by mainstream media and Irish-language schools thriving. Nic Craith’s insights into the political affirmation of nationalism, combined with the rise of Sinn Féin, provides context for the legitimacy of the voice of former Republican prisoners. Has cultural nationalism created a trauma bias of imagined communities of Irishness, where those who do not identify are the “out” group? If so, and the PUL community are the out-group, this sweeping tide of Irish nationalism has left them adrift clinging to remnants of their own imagined past.

Cultural nationalism and trauma bias have effectively led to complete deadlock in achieving a shared future, the power-sharing executive of Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party having collapsed in January 2017, with legacy issues remaining central to political instability. The perpetual myth of two communities living in Northern Ireland continues to dominate, with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland promoting the apologue in October 2018. As Brexit looms in 2019 the question of the border between north and south adds to the political vacuum with

advertisements warning of paramilitary control appearing on our streets and television for the first time in over a decade.

Visual Voices of the Prisons Memory Archive: Protecting Ethics of Collection and Developing Ethics of Presenting

What then of storytelling in a society recovering from a violent past, can dialogue provides a counter-narrative to ethno-nationalism where the identity of individuals is eradicated? The value of storytelling as intangible heritage has been acknowledged by the Heritage Lottery Fund through £500,500 of grant aid for the Visual Voices project. Visual Voices is a collaboration between the Prison Memory Archive Management Group, Queen's University Belfast and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, which is part of the Department for Communities. Speaking at the project launch, Michael Willis, Director of PRONI, commented:

This project gives PRONI an opportunity to include, in a very real sense, the voices of those individuals who may be under-represented in our archive. The recordings are unique memories and experiences which provide a commentary on recent events. They are voices that may not appear in other records and so bring an additional perspective to the records that we already hold. We hope this project will enhance awareness and understanding of our recent past. As part of the Department for Communities, we look forward to engaging with new audiences and ensuring this archive is preserved for future generations. (Prisons Memory Archive n. pag.)

The Visual Voices project is running from 2016 until December 2019 and in exploring preservation, access and engagement collaboratively we aim to interrogate the ethics of collecting and extend the approach to the ethics of presenting. Since the recordings were made over a decade ago, we knew that revisiting them would bring challenges due to the ethics of co-ownership, inclusivity and life storytelling. The co-ownership principle has been addressed through a year of consensus building and cataloguing to put in place an agreement which allows for participant restrictions

whilst giving permission for future usage without the need to go back to individuals, as was the case under the original agreement.

The principle of inclusivity had been addressed at the point of production by ring-fencing recording time for under-represented groups. Whilst there were some notable gaps, mainly senior prison personnel and medical staff, the ebb and flow of the last decade has resulted in withdrawals. Most notable are the murders of prison staff, which has seen their occupational representation decrease, and the negative publicity of the Boston College oral history project, which has resulted in Loyalist withdrawals.

Finding individuals from those groups to replace the withdrawn stories is not without challenge, and this is further exacerbated by the time that has passed since the recordings were made and the principle of life storytelling with access to the prison sites proving difficult. So, whilst protecting the ethics of collection and protecting the PMA for the future, the Visual Voices project also aims to give access to and increase engagement with the material. The planned activities include an interactive website and user guide for educators which should deconstruct the hyperlocal, where narratives focus on single communities to one of polyvocality, where there is more than one voice. Creating a shared space for presenting the PMA recordings is key to explore a post-conflict society as one defined by the ability of every individual to hear and listen to others without feeling threatened.

It is from this desire to create a safe space for storytelling that we now need to consider the ethics of presenting and reflect on why the PMA was initiated. We set out to provide information on the human experience of conflict, relative to specific sites. An understanding of these three areas is fundamental to how we present the PMA to different audiences. Below we consider each of these in turn.

Information Literacy

Information is everywhere and available in different forms, from statistics to social media. The recent launch of Fact Check NI, which counters rumours with facts and aims to “promote a political debate that is rooted in

numbers and facts, rather than stereotypes and prejudice”, gives an indication of how information can be misused.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural relations, has placed information literacy right at the centre of the drive for societal change. The Prague Declaration of 2003 defines information literacy as encompassing

knowledge of one’s information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of life-long learning. (UNESCO n. pag.)

The rise of digital information is addressed within the Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning, written two years later:

Information Literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world. (Beacons of the International Society: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions)

One of the negative impacts of conflict on information literacy is that the dominant information is understood as fact by many individuals. This is particularly complex in the north of Ireland, where segregation and deprivation combine to create a situation in which many individuals possess low levels of educational attainment and the inability to critically receive information beyond that presented by their peers, media or politicians. Contestation over information is also subject to the pressures of “taking sides” in a society that remains deeply divided.

Human Experience

When we set out to produce the 175 recordings which now make up the audiovisual component of the PMA Collection we understood from the feedback received from potential participants that there were three key elements of the human experience we had to consider in the making of the PMA: nature and nurture, memory and empathy. These elements shaped how we made the recordings back in 2006 and 2007 and are as relevant now more than a decade later as we begin to shape our activities to engage people with our heritage.

Firstly, I will consider how nature and nurture impact the PMA in how we tell stories and how we listen to them. Nature impacts on the recordings due to characteristics and instincts; every individual is nurtured differently and this impacts on life experience. We are born, we live and we die, and the factors which influence our life are economic, societal, cultural and political. An engagement programme must cater for audiences with different life experiences.

A recent seminar held at the Freud Museum, “The Construction of Memory”, explored how memory is constructed, asking such questions as:

- Is it possible to develop a “memory” for something that was not experienced?
- What is the nature of memory for traumatic events?
- Is there a truth value of human memories?¹

The third and final aspect of human experience which presents both challenges and opportunities relates to empathy. This, in turn, links closely to information literacy, wherein personal knowledge is constructed from opinions and rumours, as opposed to facts. Within an analysis of truth value of human memories the rhetoric of nationalism and the concept of an imagined community has an important role. People who perceive themselves as part of the imagined community can come to see themselves

1 See <<http://www.freud.org.uk/events/75582/the-construction-of-memory/>>.

as a collective whole and others outside that group as different, with labelling of the “other” impacting negatively on effective communication. When we ascribe a label to someone, we are at risk of making assumptions about what they think and feel. Having made that assumption, we may never then consider it necessary to explore whether it is true or not. This can then form the root of prejudice, stereotypes and “fixed” views about different categories of people. In Northern Ireland, where religion, politics and race are intertwined, this has a tenacious grip and presents a barrier to moving forward and acknowledging our similarities as opposed to our differences.

At some screenings the lack of empathy for the “other” – whether it be a prisoner or prison officer – has led to insightful discussion between viewers. The right of a prison officer to tell their story was questioned by one audience member, who in turn was challenged by the person who had come to the screening with her, asking, “How are we ever going to learn if we don’t get the chance to listen?” For other audiences, the information presented around strip searching and who was (and was not) incarcerated were completely new pieces of knowledge they had simply not heard of before the PMA discussion.

Site-Specific Memory

In *The Personality of Ireland: Habitat, Heritage and History*, Estyn Evans persuades the reader of the relationship between geography and history, where the land is the geographic continuum and the institutions which impact upon it are history. Nowhere is this more true than at Maze and Long Kesh Prison. Cultural geographers have increasingly made connections between place and memory, such as Yi-Fu Tuan, who asserts that:

A place comes into existence when humans give meaning to a part of the larger, undifferentiated space. Any time a location is identified or given a name, it is separated from the undefined space that surrounds it. Some places, however, have been given

stronger meanings, names or definitions by society than others. These are the places that are said to have a strong “sense of place”. (89)

The PMA informs the reconstruction of a sense of place of contested sites in the north of Ireland’s history by revealing the hidden memories of the many individuals who passed through the gates. Only by acknowledging the less-heard individual voices on our memory landscape can we begin to move into a democratic future which is influenced, but not defined by, the collective and contested past. “The preservation or construction of a sense of place is then an active moment in the passage from memory to hope, from past to future. And the reconstruction of places can reveal hidden memories that hold out the prospects for different futures” (Harvey 306). Increased access to the contested sites, where space has become place by being personalized, will challenge the notion of the site as being imbued with a limited set of memories. The PMA is made up of participants’ stories in their own words and captures individual narratives as space is used as a stimulus for memory.

A Public Opportunity for Critical Reflection

In presenting this chapter I set out to demonstrate how the PMA adds significantly to a narrative of a traumatic past. As a project with which I have been involved, in both paid and voluntary capacities for well over a decade, I set the learning of those years in context by reflecting on the words of advisor to the PMA and author of *Reminiscence and Life Story Work*, Faith Gibson: “Growing is a lifetime experience ... This means learning to listen to people’s stories, to what is said, and also unsaid” (19).

The construct of identities based on religious background, political opinion or race does not facilitate growth to hear what is said or unsaid. Without human interaction, empathy for the “Other” cannot prosper. A recent study based in the north of Ireland explains how the experience of suffering within one’s own life may result in the motivation to help

others. Participants came from various age groups, genders and religions and were randomly assigned to an in/out-group condition. Based on an analysis of its findings, the study concluded that empathy was a key factor underlying more constructive intergroup relations in a divided society (Hanna 159).

The audiovisual recordings of the PMA provide an invaluable opportunity to see and hear people's stories and offer opportunities for growth and reconciliation in the north of Ireland and beyond. The methodology may find its origins in oral history, but the ethics of both collection and presentation have evolved in our aim to contribute to an understanding of a traumatic past. Without the ethical frame of co-ownership, inclusivity and life storytelling in place at the point of collection, we could not have presented the films at public events which sought to stimulate debate on a shared past. Whilst some may question an assumed naivety that truths were told, the intent of the project at the point of collection was to empower participants to tell their own story, and many participants noted the therapeutic value of doing so.

A 2015 study into the PMA governance model by Sarah Feinstein provides some insights into the reasons why people had participated:

The common drive behind participating for those who were filmed was a sense of obligation to the historical record, particularly to bear witness for future generations. This was expressed by some as an overtly political act (i.e. speaking truth to power) and for others a more personal sense of duty. For example, one participant stated the importance of documentation as contributing to the historical record: "people must tell their stories ... if they don't, it gets lost or misinterpreted over the years ... if we don't tell our story, no one is going to tell it for us". (9)

For many it was an opportunity to tell their past, their way. Feinstein continues:

An aspect of this is the desire to represent the experiential modality of the site, viewing their participation as contributing to a narrative that is multi-vocal and inclusive, as well as a personal and public opportunity for critical reflection. One participant illustrated this by stating, "there have not been many opportunities to put on record what that experience was like." One participant stated explicitly that the PMA's inclusive approach was the reason he participated, specifically that he wanted to be involved in a project that included experiences "across the board."

Another common reason stated for participation was because it was an opportunity to return to see the site. (10)

In presenting the PMA we now need to consider what Feinstein's calls a "public opportunity for critical reflection" or what the journalist reviewing one of the PMA's films calls "time and skill ... for healing and remembering" (14).

This theme of time for listening is picked up by Laney Lennox in her study of the PMA, "Transforming Memorialisation: Expanding Notions of the Past through Diverse Story Archives":

"Dealing with the past" is an ongoing process that should not be restricted by a series of deadlines for moving forward or fixed timelines. Archives like the PMA are important in this process because they create a space for conversation that is left open and help us re-imagine the possibilities of the future by re-structuring the way we think about the past. As a tool for transitional justice, archives provide a space for memorialisation that focuses uniquely on this "transition" aspect and helps us imagine justice not strictly in terms of accountability for what has happened in the past, but as a mechanism for creating a more inclusive future, where space for meaningful societal participation from various communities and individuals is increased. (54)

What the PMA offers is both reflection on the past and space for discussion on its relevance in the present. In a society structured around difference, the discourse is all too often divisive and we need to address the trauma bias where some can dismiss the life stories of others whilst celebrating others' narratives. Only then can we move forward as a society which can actively listen and hear how the conflict impacted everyday life, including suicides of colleagues, family breakdowns and mental and physical abuse, without first seeing the label of that individual and making a biased judgement.

The issue of who does, and does not, construct popular memory is the subject of analysis in Raphael Samuel's "Theatres of Memory". Samuel dissects the re-construction of the past by of the past by historians to create an "esoteric form of knowledge" (3). In order to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland politicians have to agree an approach which allows for questioning, on how that past has impacted on our everyday lives, by people from diverse backgrounds.

Professional historians should not be dismissed, however, as the 1931 presidential address delivered by Carl L. Becker to the American Historical Association explains:

What then of us, historians by profession? What have we to do with Mr. Everyman, or he with us? More, I venture to believe, than we are apt to think. For each of us is Mr. Everyman too. Each of us is subject to our own limitations of time and place; and for each of us, no less than for the Browns and Smiths of the world, the pattern of remembered things said and done will be woven, safeguard the process how we may, at the behest of circumstance and purpose. (122)

An analysis of the language of Becker's address, much like the discipline itself, demonstrates how society evolves. Nonetheless, the message retains its value. Projects such as the PMA and its ethical principles will always seek to safeguard our shared heritage.

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PATRICK J. MAHONEY

5 From the Maze to Social Media: Articulating the Trauma of “the Blanket Protest” in the Digital Space¹

ABSTRACT

The Blanket Protest in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh concluded nearly forty years ago. Yet former participants are still dealing with its effects in the form of a wide array of health issues stemming from severe physical and emotional abuse and the use of industrial-grade cleaning agents by the prison administration. This chapter considers social media as a communicative forum independent of the politics of the physical space in which republican ex-prisoners can negotiate individual traumas and also create their own collective memory archive.

During the Global Irish Civic Forum held in Dublin during the spring of 2017, a representative from Twitter, Emine Etili, relayed to the audience how a chief in a small Kenyan village had set up a twitter account to enable the community to receive information and mobilize. She noted the similar affect that social media has had upon the Irish diaspora, citing the example of the Irish Center in Kansas City, Missouri, which uses social media to build a sense of cohesiveness amongst their membership, and to keep them updated on an ever-changing Irish society. These two different examples convey instances in which social media has operated as a communicative aid and allowed for the breaking down of potential spatial barriers which threaten group identity. Further reflecting this trend, an emerging literature has drawn particular

1 I am grateful to the Administration of the Blanketmen and Women page and in particular the ex-prisoners for their insight, suggestions and support with this research.

attention to the internet's ability to transcend territorial boundaries (Mills 69), nurture nationalist identity through the establishment of group networks (Caiani and Parenti) and serve as a platform of expression for disenfranchised groups (Szulc 68). One such group is the Irish republican ex-prisoner community who participated in the "Blanket" and "No Wash" protests between 1976 and 1981. This group remains marginalized by the lingering mental and physical implications of incarceration, and by continued government denial of the correlating institutional abuses which occurred. Historian Dieter Reinisch notes that "despite the different experiences and interpretations of their time in prison", this community of ex-prisoners has come to form what Barbara Rosenwein deems an "emotional community" that shares "similar interests and values which are connected by the style and assessment of emotions" (Reinisch n. pag.).

Following the death of former IRA prisoner Seány McVeigh from cancer in the summer of 2016, his brother Michael set up a private group chat on Facebook to stay connected with those who had spent time with his late brother during the "Blanket Protest" in the Maze Prison, more commonly referred to as the H-Blocks. Speaking with the official Sinn Féin organ, *An Phoblacht*, McVeigh noted that the idea for the site originally stemmed from a private conversation with ex-prisoner and former hunger striker Dr Laurence McKeown. McKeown put him in touch with another ex-prisoner, John Hunter, who had spent considerable time in H5, the same wing in the prison as his late brother. Surprised that Hunter was unaware of his brother's passing, McVeigh decided to attempt to reach out to other former members of the Blanket Protest who might have known his brother. As word spread, other ex-prisoners began contacting Michael to express their condolences and share memories of his brother. The private messages with his brother's former comrades soon turned into a small social media page in which the stories could be shared amongst the cadre more easily. As McVeigh noted,

In a way it all started because John [Hunter] wasn't aware that Seány had died and he knew that a lot of other blanketmen didn't know either ... I thought if I could hook up with John Hunter then I could reach others who may not be aware of Seány's

death and I decided to open a group page, “Blanketmen”, on [social media] in his memory. (Whelan n. pag.)

The group soon expanded beyond its original aim:

The main aim was maybe to find 20 or 30 people who spent time with him and hope they would share some memories but it just took off and people started to ask for invites into the group. Now there’s 1,300 members and it’s growing. I also opened it up to the women’s struggle in Armagh ... Former Blanketmen, mothers, brothers, sisters and children of former prisoners are in the group, sharing photos, videos, etc. (Whelan n. pag.)

In 2005, clinical psychologist Dr Brandon Hamber of Ulster University carried out a pilot study entitled “Blocks to the Future” for Cúnamh, a community-led mental health and well-being organization for victims and survivors in Derry, founded in 1997. The project sought to “evaluate the psychological impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest” on its participants, as “they felt that the psychological impact of the protest and political imprisonment more broadly was still evident in certain individuals with whom they worked (as well in their extended family and community systems)” (Hamber 1). Historian and journalist Tim Pat Coogan first raised the issue of the potential long-term mental and physical impact of the protest as early as 1980, noting with dismay after visiting the prison, “one shudders to think of what the long-term psychological effects could be” (Coogan 207).

According to Cúnamh project director Cathy Nelis, the study also sought to challenge the post-conflict discourse in which political prisoners are often treated solely as perpetrators. As such, their experiences and those of their families are often ignored in deference to focus on those deemed to be “innocent victims” (Coogan vi). In further consideration of this oversight, the staff at Cúnamh founded a small self-help group for ex-prisoners who had been on the Blanket Protest, after a chance meeting with a former participant who noted with dismay that a number of his former comrades were not coping well. The members of this group were integral in providing the information and interviews which serve as the backbone of Hamber’s study. While this was integral to the study’s success, it was also one of its potential limitations, as the participants were all based in Derry.

In an increasingly digitized world, the platform provided by social media is an ideal means by which ex-prisoners, like the self-help group, might engage with one another, reflect on historical traumas and voice their contemporary concerns. Utilizing the concept of social media therapy, this chapter will build upon Hamber's work and Reinisch's classification of ex-prisoners as an "emotional community" by analysing the effectiveness of the Blanketmen page as a therapeutic avenue for ex-prisoners to discuss their experiences in an increasingly digitized post-conflict society. In this context, social media therapy is a popular term which has emerged to describe:

A form of expressive therapy ... It uses the act of creating and sharing user-generated content as a way of connecting with and understanding people. Social media therapy combines different expressive therapy aspects of talk therapy, art therapy, writing therapy, and drama therapy and applies them to the web domain. Within social media therapy, synchronous or asynchronous dialogue occurs through exchanges of audio, text or visual information. The digital content is published online to serve as a form of therapy. (Tobin n. pag.)

Eva C. Buechel and Jonah Berger have further explored the positive dynamic of this form of interaction, placing a particular emphasis upon short messages such as Tweets or Facebook posts, which they designate "microblogs" (Buechel and Berger 41). They note that for those who, for a variety of reasons, might be apprehensive of engaging in face-to-face interactions, microblogs offer a form of "undirected" communication in which users can post thoughts, memories, feelings or general updates which, unlike other more direct digital communicative forms like email or text, are not necessarily intended for a specific recipient. They conclude that this format alleviates worry on the part of both author and recipients within a particular social network, as "only those who want to interact will respond" (Buechel and Berger 43).

In order to protect the privacy of those involved, I have taken measures to ensure that the individual identities of participants remain anonymous. Personal details, such as names and places of origin, have been altered or omitted. Additionally, in an effort to differentiate between ex-prisoners and their families, friends and others in the group, I will refer to them by the generic designation of "X" or "Blanketman" with an accompanying number.

Aside from such adjustments, all posts have been left exactly as they appear. The primary focus of this paper will be on the first ten months of the site's existence, from September 2016 to July 2017. This restriction comes as a result of the rapid growth in the group's membership after that time. As word of the page spread, its membership rose dramatically from about 200 to over 6,000 as of October 2018. With the influx of new members, posts from family, friends and supporters have become more commonplace and given the site a different function from the form of potential expressive therapy for post-conflict societies focused on within this chapter.

Background of the Protest

The origin of the Blanket Protest can be traced to the summer of 1972. At the time, as a part of an ongoing attempt to negotiate a ceasefire with the Provisional IRA, Secretary of State William Whitelaw ceded "political" standing to those convicted of terrorist-related crimes (Parkinson 172; O'Donnell 22–7). Officially recognized as "special category" status, this change afforded free association, extra visits and food parcels to paramilitaries of all backgrounds, and ensured that they were not required to wear prison uniforms or do prison work (McEvoy 216). By 1975, the Gardiner Committee, assembled with the aim "to deal with terrorism and subversion in Northern Ireland", recommended ending the designation of "special category" status. The following year, Labour MP Merlyn Rees, who had become Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the spring of 1974, announced that the "political" designation for paramilitary prisoners was to be phased out, with anyone convicted after 1 March 1976 treated as ordinary criminals and housed in the newly constructed "H-Blocks".

The first individual to be sentenced after the cut-off date was IRA man Kieran Nugent. After refusing to wear prison clothes, Nugent was placed in a cell with only a blanket to cover himself. Others soon followed his lead in refusing to legitimize their status as ordinary criminals by wearing prison uniforms. Prison rules stipulated that inmates had to wear clothes when leaving

their cells. Therefore, Nugent and the other IRA and INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) men who had followed suit were confined to their cells twenty-four hours a day. In addition, their resistance had an impact upon the length and nature of their sentences, ensuring that they served the maximum terms, with little to no right to either visits or mail. David Beresford notes that in terms of communication, this had the effect of leaving the prisoners “virtually isolated . . . from the outside world” (16). After several months, the IRA leadership adopted the stance of allowing prisoners to briefly wear uniforms for visits, so that they might maintain contact. This development was integral to the flow of messages in and out of the prison, and allowed for the prisoners’ experiences to reach the outside world.

As tensions escalated, the prisoners reacted to physical abuse from guards by smashing all of the furniture in their cells. The authorities promptly removed all furniture, leaving only a Bible, two foam mattresses and three blankets to be shared between two prisoners in a seven-by-eight-foot concrete cell (Bishop and Mallie 350–1). The most enduring image of the protest followed with its next phase, known as the “No Wash” or “Dirty” Protest, as it was called in the press. Having been denied the use of a second towel with which to wash themselves and seeking to draw attention to continued abuses which included regular beatings and mirror searches, prisoners refused to leave their cells.² Unable to “slop out”, they began pouring urine out of the cell doors and smearing their excrement on the walls.

In Armagh Gaol, female republican prisoners, who were on the “no work protest” at the time, would soon join in the “No Wash”. On 7 February, a particularly hostile exchange in which male guards physically assaulted the female prisoners following a paramilitary display in the exercise yard led to a thirteen-month campaign of no-wash resistance which mirrored that taking place in Long Kesh (Wahidin 147–51). The projection of such imagery into the public sphere caused widespread condemnation of the prison system on human rights grounds, as visitors like the Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, sternly concluded that “one would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being” (Stuart

2 During “Mirror Searches”, prisoners were made to squat (often forcefully) over a mirror, while guards searched their anuses for contraband.

Ross 47). However, the Northern Ireland Office was quick to retort that while it didn't deny the conditions described by Ó Fiaich, they were a direct result of the prisoners' own actions. Tim Pat Coogan, visiting the prison a year after the archbishop, grimly speculated that if prisoners were subject to long-term imprisonment in such an environment, "the place would just become a vast, shitty, mental asylum – no matter which side is telling the truth" (207). However, Coogan's investigative work also offers an early insight into the long-term physical effects of the Blanket Protest. In recent years, allegations of high rates of death from cancer as a result of prolonged exposure to cleaning agents and chemicals used during the "No Wash" period have come to light. At the time, Coogan foreshadowed these concerns:

The question of bringing a degree of hygiene to the prisoners is obviously extremely difficult, but some warders allegedly make it even more so if they can. For instance, strong chemicals which one prisoner described to me as "smelling like CS Gas" ... was poured under the doors into the cells. Then water followed which made the chemicals fume and though they probably did succeed in their objective of killing infection, the chemicals made the prisoners retch and cough, and stung their eyes badly. (12)

The protest was brought to an end during the 1981 Hunger Strike, as it was decided by IRA leadership that maximum attention should be focused on the hunger strikers. While the hunger strikes, which served as the pinnacle of the protest, have often overshadowed the earlier stages in literature focusing on the period, there is a renewed urgency in addressing the lingering traumas and impacts of the protest in light of persistent health issues and challenges facing its participants.

"On the air": Online?

During the Blanket Protest, the "disembodied voice" became an overwhelming characteristic of the prisoners' communication with one another. Given the twenty-four-hour lockup to which they were subject, the term refers to the conversations which occurred with "faceless

partners” out the doors or down the pipes of their cells (Feldman 210). Allen Feldman asserts that the centrality of the disembodied voice is particularly evident when considering the slang which emerged amongst the prisoners on the protest, namely the designation of being “on the air”, or active in the passing of communications. He notes that “to be ‘off the air,’ meant much more than to be silent. It was equated with the special silence of the social death of incarceration and with physical death” (Feldman 210).

The increasing presence of social media as an avenue for communication has allowed for a new method by which former blanketmen might once again go “on the air” to re-engage with their pasts, and address the lingering elements of trauma that they deal with on a daily basis. Following McVeigh’s founding of the site, social media became the predominant means by which former political prisoners, spread out across a broad geographical realm, could actively engage with their past experiences, and negotiate the present to help both themselves and their former comrades. McVeigh noted that prior to his death, his brother, like many other former blanketmen, had never spoken of his experiences. With regard to rules, the page is relatively free-flowing. However, there is an active administrative team, which includes McVeigh and several former blanketmen. Their main goals are to keep the group focused on the collective history of the period of the protest (1976–81) and the present issues faced by ex-prisoners, rather than discussions about elements of current republican politics, which have the capacity to become fractionalized at the communal level. This particular stipulation has created the atmosphere of a “safe space” in which participants may share their experiences and opinions without the political complexities that often mar such discussions in physical social spaces. Upon receiving clearance to join the group, members are greeted with a message which outlines these aims and reiterates the original purpose of its founding:

Welcome aboard everyone hope you enjoy the spirit of the group and show the greatest respect to each other. The blanket men and women have plenty of stories to tell so please don't overload the page and allow them to tell their stories which is why Mick Mcveigh set up the group. Please have a good look through the group

posts and familiarise yourself with what's already posted. Posts will be deleted if already posted. No politics please GRMA. Please pop in here and comment who you are and where you are from. Go raibh míle arís ... ADMIN. (Anonymous)

Adherence to the last rule in particular is often referenced at the outset of posts so as to eliminate any possible clannishness that might arise from one's current political affiliation. In one post in which an ex-prisoner provides a link to an article that he has previously submitted to a local publication, he notes such, reflecting McVeigh and the administration team's plea for historically based content:

We have all agreed to leave party politics out of our writings for this site so I hope people see what I have written below is keeping to the spirit of the agreement. I wrote this for [local news outlet] in 2010 during a really bad winter. I know some people may think we exaggerate what we went through but the cold was probably as bad an experience as the beatings and hunger – apart from the actual hunger strikes of course. (Anonymous)

In this sense, Ian Bogost argues that social media networks, namely Facebook, can be seen as a “McLuhan tetrad” by which one might examine its effects on society in terms of what it enhances or makes obsolete, and what it has retrieved which has already been relegated to the past (Bogost 31). He notes that “the sort of tiny messages” that would have been previously relegated to answering machines, voicemail messages or, more recently, emails and text messages were now supplanted by Facebook's ability to facilitate the organization of groups and events, and to document such with texts, images and videos (Bogost 31). He adds that another social avenue that is obsolesced by social media like Facebook is that of the reunion. Whereas in times past such events occurred once every five or ten years, allowing members of a particular group the opportunity to catch up and compare everything from appearances to details and updates about their lives, the ability to access such information from a single source makes the actual event unnecessary. The potency of this aspect of the Blanketmen Facebook page is particularly evident in the words of a former blanketman who has been living in the Canada for over thirty years. When asked what the page meant to him, and how it had helped him reconnect to people and events back home, he noted:

It's like being back in the blocks ... the group has helped me a lot to you know, get back chatting to the boys and to see how everyone is getting on. There's a lot of us having health problems these days from the cleaner and chemicals they used on us in cleaning the cells, so the first question we greet each other with is always "how's your health?" Thank God I've fared a lot better than most, no real major issues and still got a full head of hair on me [laughter]. But for me, the page has let me get back to it you know? (Anonymous)

His assertion that the social interactions on the site are "like being back in the blocks" is particularly interesting when considering the implications of social media for the concepts of space and place. Bogost notes that "physical hang-outs, especially those once frequented by young people, get a new digital life on Facebook. Public spaces in general have been destroyed, privatized, and policed in recent decades ... Facebook recovers these venues, altering them to form digital hang-outs" (30). While the example of Long Kesh differs from the social settings focused upon in Bogost's study, there are a number of similarities. Given that the prison site has been largely destroyed by the state since 2006, the main parallel lies in the digital reclamation of the prisoners' social network in the absence of the original physical space that brought them together ("Demolition" n. pag.). This notion, particularly its social connotation, is also evident in the repeated assertion of former blanketmen in various posts that the storytelling of specific individuals reflects their prior roles as well-known *seanchaithe* [talented storytellers] who, in the evenings, would entertain their comrades by providing stories or songs down the hallways to all those listening. In Feldman's study of political violence during the Troubles, an unnamed INLA member who was on the Blanket Protest describes the centrality of communication and storytelling for the day-to-day morale of the prisoners:

We had taken a fair bit of hassle from the warders. [Bobby] Sands and [Bik] McFarlane immediately organised Gaelic lessons, singsongs, storytelling, and lectures through the doors. Bobby Sands was the man who gave the Irish lessons, sung songs, told stories. He was like an old-time *seanachie* [storyteller]. When he told a story from the old Gaelic times it was very vivid. You could picture it in your mind's eye. (223)

This social dynamic was also essential to the women who were on the Blanket Protest in Armagh Gaol. Communications smuggled out at the time describe similar forms of entertainment that female prisoners enjoyed, which included sing songs, stories told over the course of a few nights, Irish classes, and a makeshift form of bingo which were similarly carried out by shouting out the doors to those on the wing (Coogan 129–30).

Reflecting on Hard Times

Oftentimes, especially in the first weeks of the group's founding, participants' posts were quite humorous and light-hearted in nature. Instead of focusing upon the brutal conditions or abuse endured while on the protest, the majority of participants chose to reflect on pranks played on one another, individual stories that had been told by the *seanchaithe* out the doors and small games and classes, which had dual purpose of serving as coping mechanisms and a means by which to maintain group cohesion. In this sense, the environment of the digital space came to reflect the earlier communicative platform created by Sands and McFarlane in the physical space during the protest. This behaviour can be classified as either deflection or the use of humour and culture as a coping mechanism. Both Hamber and John Brian Campbell assert that this is one of the most essential and long-standing coping strategies of former participants of the Blanket Protest (Campbell et al. 90; Hamber 55). The former recalls that while conducting interviews, participants regaled him "with some more amusing times in the prison" (Hamber 55). Additionally, Reinisch notes the way in which nostalgia can also play a role in suppressing the more negative aspects of the prison experience, with a number of interviewees informing him that the period was the "best time" of their lives (n. pag.).

However, in the months that followed, the group's posts became darker and more stark in nature, bringing the potential therapeutic value of the digital platform into focus. Individual ex-prisoners began relaying intimate

and unpleasant details of the conditions in the prison and, in particular, the harsh beatings that they had received or witnessed. One ex-prisoner stressed that while his posts continued to be typically light-hearted, it wasn't difficult to locate the elements of trauma below the surface:

I think that people who read my comments here must think I am on happy tablets, cos most of what I write is generally lighter than some of the truly horrific memories of the blanket. Different strokes, different folks, and the grim tales are there too. See, in any blanket Armagh memory I don't think you need to scrape too deep to find the pain. (Anonymous)

As is evident in both the above post and McVeigh's interview with *An Phoblacht*, the latter's decision to include female ex-prisoners who participated in the protest while in Armagh Gaol ensures that their stories are also brought to light. In many cases, the digital platform is the first time that these female voices have been recovered and placed within the context of the wider prison struggle.³ This is particularly significant, as the Hamber study cites its inability to "adequately incorporate" the female prison experience into the scope of its research (vi).

As the common thread of recalling traumatic experiences and addressing lingering symptoms began to emerge, the suitability of the social media format for dealing with such delicate topics became abundantly clear. Open comment sections allowed for readers (whether they were other former blanketmen, ex-prisoners or supportive friends and family) to add feedback, reminisces or support to individual posts. However, as will be conveyed, this process also opened up many old wounds amongst participants. Yet, in spite of the high potential for renewed distress which might arise as a result of such revelations, the receptive feedback and reconnections with former comrades have led many to attempt, for the first time, to come to terms with the past.

3 It must be noted that since the publication of the Hamber study in 2005, a number of works have emerged which seek to analyse the historical gap of female experiences, most notably E. Brady's *In the Footsteps of Anne: Stories of Republican Women Ex-Prisoners*, Linda Moore and Phil Scraton's *The Incarceration of Women: Punishing Bodies, Breaking Spirits* and Azrini Wahidin's *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland: Women, Political Protest and the Prison Experience*.

This theme is evident in a post by one former blanketman who at the time of posting was one of the most active group administrators. His post is indicative of both his personal struggle to come to grips with the lingering effects of the prison experience, and the increasing potential of the group to serve as a therapeutic digital space which might lead members to seek real-life support services:

There is a very deep mental trough being opened and explored here which maybe, maybe, needs help. [Blanketman 1]'s plea earlier for help about PTSD is possibly the first public venting of such issues. [X, on the site] is a working councillor for addiction, can he offer advice? ... are we – is the site – more than just a collection of stories and should it start looking deeper? On a personal note, I'd love to say I have opened up to my family after this but I probably haven't, but I will. It was a shit time, and me being the limp yoke probably like to focus on the humour, but I know there are comrades who's every minute is filled with the violence that the screws inflicted. I just like to deflect all that with a funny story ... But there's a lot of hard times that this site is opening, and there will be consequences ... and let all be there to help those who need help, through it ... Blanketman abú.
(Anonymous)

A blanketwoman echoed this sentiment, relaying her own struggle with opening up about particularly harrowing incidents during the protest. Citing one particular instance in which she was both beaten by male prison guards and sexually assaulted by a female guard, she concluded:

when i got into cell i burst out crying and couldnt even tell [my cellmate] what happened and you know something im 60 this yr and for all these yrs ... everything we went through i cant get that out of my head and i dont want to hit the send button to post this but reading the stories of the h blocks i know its important to get it all told. (Anonymous)

Participants' prior inability in many cases to speak about individual experiences face-to-face was again revisited in a post by a former political prisoner who entered Long Kesh after the Blanket Protest had already ended. He acknowledges the coping mechanisms of deflection and humour mentioned earlier, before touching upon the increasingly disturbing nature of the posts as the level of comfortability and trust placed in the page as a "safe space" increased, exclaiming:

I've been reading the articles from the last week or so dealing with the brutality inflicted upon the Blanketmen ... To be blunt, the descriptions are frightening. Wiser people than me have told me in the past that people only recount the funny stories from jail and certainly this was the case with the initial stories on this page. [Blanketman 1] and [Blanketman 2] regaled us with the craic and then suddenly the page is opened up to the chilling descriptions of brutality from [Blanketman 3]. (Anonymous)

Reiterating the importance of the digital space as an ideal medium for revelations of brutality and maltreatment which had occurred within the prison system, he further recalled that during his sentence in Long Kesh, which began in 1986, he shared a cell with four different blanketmen over a number of years. He wrote that during that time, the only time any of them came close to "opening up" about their earlier experiences was in a repeated reflection that "waiting in your cell for your turn to move during wing shifts was worse than the actual beating" (Anonymous). He further recalled an event in a Belfast neighbourhood during which time a former blanketman was scheduled to speak about his experiences:

When he came on to the stage he stood there in silence and was unable to speak. The words wouldn't come out and after two or three minutes he sat down. He got the usual round of applause but every time I read a story on this I think of that man. How the fuck (excuse my language) do you explain to hundreds of people that you were brutalised physically, psychologically, emotionally and sexually? (Anonymous)

The correlating comments to this post, which, save for one, were all written by friends and family of blanketmen rather than individuals who had been on the protest themselves, were particularly potent, and thus are reproduced below in full:

Commenter 1: Most of use men must b suffering from post-trauma after that brutality degusting what these bastards done excuse my French.

Commenter 2: Not a truer word written ... absolutely appalling what went on I like yourself am only hearing the torture meted out in the blocks by these bastard screws I hope the blanket men can rid themselves of these horrible deeds they suffered by talking and hopefully getting professional help RESPECT.

Commenter 3: Im willing to teach any blanketmen or women the Internet as they belong on here x.

Commenter 4: A lot of blanketmen would have talked about the blanket in a light hearted sort of way, but never going into the emotional side of it as they would see that as a weakness. And they would have found it hard to put across except maybe to those who went through it with them.

Commenter 5: At last the genie is out of the bottle I've been bringing issues like this up on my facebook site for years now we have an opportunity to help those still struggling. It is not an easy thing to ask for professional help there are many obstacles and barriers which many find impossible to get over, I don't want to lecture anyone, what we need to do is try to create a process which remove[s] these obstacles and make[s] it easier for our comrades to talk about their difficulties in total confidence. We didn't let the british break us and we should do everything in our power to combat their methods.

Commenter 6: Honest and caring post. Still after all this time thinking of each other. Some not so lucky to have the strength to cope on the outside if something like this had of been available then things might have been different. Society has looked down on, and let you brave people down for too long, and reading the responses to this post shows there's still fight left there yet.

Evident in the responses is an increasing need for these individuals to continue to tell their stories, and the hope that this will lead them to seek more traditional forms of help in the non-digital space. The importance of “speaking out” in this context is twofold. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone note,

The relation between silence and speech is figured as one of liberation, both politically and personally: to reveal truths which have been denied and to remind the world of its responsibilities to those who have suffered, on the one hand; to heal the self by the very act of speaking and being heard, on the other. (90)

This action is supported by the fluid and open dynamic afforded by social media, in which there is a hint of what Lynn Parker deems the “value of the public forum” (118). Speaking in relation to culture circles, sponsorship programmes and advocacy work, she notes that in addressing trauma, the public forum is effective in its ability to integrate support from others, placing them in cooperative roles. This is particularly apt for instances of

historical trauma, in which memory lapses may be present, as the “structural elements afford what clients call a ‘collective memory’” (Parker 118). Fran Lisa Buntman (78) further supports this notion, reflecting that upon their release from Robben Island in South Africa, ex-prisoners tended to prefer forms of group therapy in informal social settings.

Digital forums as informal support spaces are not without their limitations. As one of the above commenters indicates, there is a need for digital fluency and access in order to fully benefit from the sort of forum provided. This is evident in a recurring number of posts by intermediaries, most often spouses or children, who note that they are posting questions or comments for ex-prisoners who are unable to do so themselves. This is comparable to the transmission of information during the protest of itself. As Feldman, Pádraig O’Malley, Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost and Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh make clear, at least a passing knowledge of the Irish language became increasingly essential for prisoners on the Blanket Protest to communication and full engagement with news and other developments on the protesting wings. In one instance, Feldman (216) cites the example of a prisoner who was outspokenly resistant to learning the language, but in spite of himself, developed fluent comprehension of it. In another example recalling the transmission of news during the 1981 Hunger Strike, Thomas Loughlin touches upon the necessity of access to Irish:

A few of the lads were at their doors talking or having a bit of craic. My cellmate was talking to Hugh Rooney (Hugh never spoke English – only Gaelic) and my cellmate couldn’t understand a word he was saying, so there I was translating the Gaelic for my cellmate who answered in English; it was weird. (Campbell et al. 209)

In the same way, for ex-prisoners to gain access to the digital forum and remain “on the air”, they must have a level of technological competency and familiarity with the particular mode of social media, keeping them “online”. At times, physical access can pose similar issues in terms of isolation from the digital community. After going absent from the site for over a month, one blanketman posted that he was delighted to reconnect, as he had had to undergo surgery for a shoulder injury. As he explained, doctors noted that the issue was caused from “older damage, where an

injury led to a reaction and compensations and so on” (Anonymous). He noted that the damage in question had occurred while on the protest, when during a forced wash he was thrown against a stainless steel door by two guards and immediately felt a shooting pain in his shoulder, which lasted for months. At the time of the incident, he didn’t fully register the shoulder pain, as immediately afterwards his hair had been forcefully cut before he was given a bath in scalding water and scoured and beaten with a deck scrubber. This incident exemplifies the lingering bodily traumas of the protest, and the issues that they continue to pose for ex-prisoners’ ability to engage in both the physical and digital spaces.

Yet, despite any such limitations which might bring ex-prisoners offline or “off the air”, the importance, highlighted by both Parker and Buntman, of the digital forum as an informal avenue for addressing trauma in lieu of the sort of face-to-face variants is further evidenced by an interview with an ex-prisoner now living in Canada. When asked how the page has been beneficial to those formerly on the Blanket Protest, he noted:

You know, I think it’s easier to spit it out and put these things out there from behind a screen ... on the page, you get guys putting out their stories for the first time and they’re not afraid to go into these details, and you see that, and you get the [positive] comments from all the talking heads down the bottom, and that’s something, a level of support and a response, that I don’t think a lot of these guys would’ve ever gotten in person before ... if they would have even been able to talk about the stuff in person in the first place. (Anonymous)

The commentary regarding the instant gratification and indirect nature of social media as a buffer when engaging challenging memories is in line with an element of Hamber’s study, in which interviewees articulated the circumstances surrounding their characteristic silence. These included a fear of being overcome with emotion and the culture of secrecy associated with their paramilitary training. The reactions and opinions articulated in the digital space add to our knowledge of the reluctance of ex-prisoners to step forward. A message written in response to the post by the resigning administrator further exemplifies the aforementioned coping mechanisms, and the challenges of recalling traumatic memories. The respondent, one of the more notable storytellers during the protest who seemingly reprised the role in the digital forum, reflected:

Just after reading [X]'s post and totally understand where he's coming from ... I have told a lot of stories on our page some funny and some terrible ones of beatings and personal things like the deaths of my mother and father which I found very hard to write this is the first time I have opened up and told what happened in the Hell-Hole of the H-Blocks. Some of the posts took me ages to write I would start one and then scrub it as I found it getting to me so I would throw a funny one in to try and block the really bad ones that I had started to write. I do feel this page is helping me deal with what happened all those years ago and that I have lots of friends and comrades here to help me if need be. (Anonymous)

Prison Folklore as a Reflection of Trauma

Another potent element intertwined in the areas of trauma, storytelling and revelation is the recollection and archiving of prison folklore in the digital forum. In one recurring instance, ex-prisoners recalled stories associated with the figure of "Harvey the Ghost", a First World War pilot who was killed in the conflict but had previously been stationed at an airfield located on the site which later became Long Kesh Prison. The stories associated with the ghostly pilot had emerged within the republican folklore of the prison since the earlier period of internment in the cages and remained a staple element of it thereafter. A common story told by ex-prisoners details having been woken up by Harvey, clad in his pilot's gear, in the middle of the night, with the apparition attempting to smother them or stand on their chests. One prisoner noted of his experience with the apparition that:

It was a hot night and I was on the top bunk, (we had beds at that time, that was before we smashed the cells) I was dozing when I noticed a form coming through the door it sat on my chest and I couldn't breathe and the more I struggled the harder it pushed until I broke free and at that stage the thing (the form) drifted out the door. The wing was dead quiet and I was sweating and terrified. Never said to anyone except to [X]. (Anonymous)

Over half a dozen stories detailing the same experiences were posted, with numerous individuals responding in the comment sections. While

many of the blanketmen who had originally posted stories, like the prisoner above, admitted feelings of terror and a genuine belief in the supernatural occurrence, a number of commenters sought to offer a rational explanation for the phenomenon. One individual in particular was notably disturbed by what was being described, and in a number of posts spanning a two-week period pointed out that the seemingly supernatural interactions were probably caused by sleep paralysis, brought on by intense stress and abuse:

COMMENTER 1: All kidding aside, that sounds like sleep paralysis, a recognised deep trauma/stress condition, which is very frightening.

COMMENTER 1: This is actually killin me readin this. You were just boys, nowadays kids are at school til they're 18. It's killin me that that tho you u all joke about the ghost, it was terrifying, & you've never been able to talk about it til now. X

COMMENTER 1: Lads google "sleep paralysis" it will help you to understand what was happening.

COMMENTER 1: It's a very real thing, happens to folk under sever[e] emotional stress, terrifying at the time, once its explained tho, its understandable xx. (Anonymous)

In a 2011 study on the symptoms and causes of sleep paralysis, Ryan Hurd outlines the background of the condition described by the commenter, and notes that hallucinations and physical sensations of the kind described by ex-prisoners is not uncommon:

The apparition encounter is one of the least understood and scariest of sleep paralysis nightmares. These realistic visions are hypnagogic hallucinations (HH) and include feeling a presence, seeing someone/something in your bedroom, and being assaulted by a horrible creature ... Sometimes, it's just a feeling that someone is in the room watching us. On other occasions, we may actually feel someone (or something) sitting down on the bed next to us. Finally, some people are touched or even abused by an apparition who holds them down, chokes them. (35)

While the condition is perhaps not unique, the framing of the sensation within the history of the local topography, namely the prison site's prior use as an airfield, is reminiscent of similar phenomena within the Irish folkloric tradition.

A number of scholars, most notably Reidar Christiansen, Susan Schoon Eberly and Joyce Underwood Munro, have addressed possible conscious and subconscious invocations and/or propagations of particular myths in Irish folklore to explain, in veiled language, undesirable or traumatic elements of Irish life which were otherwise difficult to come to terms with. This is particularly evident in considering the possible connections between the myths of fairy “changelings” and a number of natural occurrences, including instances of child abuse, premature death, and mental and physical disabilities. In such studies, long-standing communal myth, framed in local language, is drawn upon to explain the unseen or unexplainable (Munro 227–31). Richard Jenkins has shown that, to an extent, this invocation of folkloric elements to make sense of current events was also present in Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles. As Jenkins relays, in 1973, only a year after what was statistically the most violent year of the conflict, reports of sordid black magic rituals and accompanying supernatural occurrences emerged following the discovery of slain goats on the Copeland Islands in Belfast Lough, and the subsequent but unrelated abduction and murder of 10-year-old Brian McDermott. He notes that the cross-communal impact of fear and suspicion following the reports of these incidents reflects the same sort of process of cultural negotiation described by Christiansen, Eberly and Munro (Jenkins 25).

In this vein, it can be said that while the prisoners’ natural reactions to the trauma they suffered can be medically explained as in line with the effects of sleep paralysis and, in particular, hypnagogic hallucinations, they were also being framed within and informed by a folkloric element of republican prisoner culture, which had begun in the cages during internment and was subsequently rooted in a collective understanding of the prison’s history.

Lingering Impacts

While the trauma associated with the stories of “Harvey the Ghost” is historical in nature, and thus largely relegated to the past, efforts to identify the lingering signs of post-traumatic stress disorder in former blanketmen

are ongoing. In his report, Hamber (11) notes that the majority of the twenty-one blanketmen surveyed and interviewed reported having no mental health issues. He notes that while the study did not inquire as to how they coped with lingering trauma on a daily basis,

it can be assumed that for those coping, it must be a cumulative result of all the coping mechanisms mentioned earlier in the report both in and outside of prison i.e. familial support particularly their wives, the political convictions of many of the interviewees, continued political involvement for some, as well as determination and general senses of resilience. (Hamber 73–4)

The social media page allows us to expand upon such understandings in two ways. Firstly, it provides a voice for the individuals listed as support systems by Hamber (wives and children) to convey what daily coping methods are adopted and to consult with one another. It also allows for a wider range of opinions in terms of its inclusion of former blanketmen now located further afield, including those who have relocated outside of Ireland.

With regard to those considered support systems, a daughter of a blanketman posted a general message to all of those in the group, which enquired:

Just wondering does anyone else that was on the blanket Pace around the house? My daddy wears his floors thin pacing 😊 he will do laps of the living room while being on the phone or even when hes brushing his teeth LOL so was wondering does anyone else do it or is it just him lol. (Anonymous)

In response, a multitude of messages quickly flooded in from blanketmen and family members alike, noting similar rituals as well as other lingering personal coping habits. When one commenter noted that the father would be mortified if he knew his daughter had posted such a message, she retorted that he had actually been quite keen for her to post the question on the site. This example, which further highlights the need for either technological fluency or an intermediary, conveys the willingness to engage of an individual who would previously have been isolated in his attempts to cope.

The issue of PTSD also surfaced in an interview conducted with the ex-prisoner now living in Canada mentioned earlier. In answering a question

about whether he had been in contact with any other blanketmen now located outside of Ireland since the formation of the site, he mentioned the example of one individual now living in continental Europe. They had fallen out of touch decades before, but came into contact after the latter posted on the page, asking what block he had been in and if anyone remembered who he had shared a cell with during his eight-year sentence. Immediately, this individual, who appeared to suffer severe memory gaps, was met with answers from former comrades and offers of help in various forms. Regarding his interaction with his struggling friend whom he hadn't spoken to in over thirty years, the interviewee noted:

I seen that he posted in the group, but he can't remember anything. Was asking what block he was in, who his cellmates were ... I shared a cell with him for a time. He sent me on a private message on the side and said, "I just can't get that image of you out of my head, I can see it clear as day, you beaten [nearly] to death on the floor and pulled away to the boards". (Anonymous)

He continued, noting that although startling, memory gaps after prolonged periods of suppression aren't isolated. Epitomizing the nature and benefit of social media therapy for ex-prisoners in post-conflict societies, he reflected upon the role of the other blanketmen on the site in coming to the aid of their former comrade:

shame about [X], but he's not the only one. Lot of the boys have trouble ... I get messages asking me if I remember this or remember that and half of the time it's stuff I blocked out or never took note of at the time anyhow ... but I'm happy to talk about it and to help anyone out if I can ... You also seen that with [X]. When he posted that message up and the boys caught on, they were all messaging with who he could talk to, the resources available to him, seeing if there was anything they could do, and that'd be typical of their comradery but good to see it anyway. (Anonymous)

Drawing on Freud's definition of dissociation, it can be said that both the memory gaps conveyed by the blanketman living in Europe and the instances of memories which the interviewee noted that he had "blocked out" can be traced to an active repression of the memories of the traumatic experience, in order to protect himself from experiencing the associated painful affects (Bremner and Marmar 11). Conversely, in the second example, the

unfamiliar memories received through messages could potentially be the result of distortions, reinventions or elisions, which are all facets of “traumatic memory” (Hodgkin and Radstone 87).

Conclusion

In his recent poetry collection, *Threads*, blanketman Laurence McKeown outlines many of the themes covered within this chapter, such as the perennial silence that often surrounds personal traumas endured by ex-prisoners:

Grief in others,
you can talk at great lengths about.
why not just one word
about the grief that's mine? (73)

Additionally, in a piece entitled “Old Comrades”, he touches upon the daily challenges still facing many ex-prisoners, and the potential limitations of traditional meeting spaces within the community for keeping up regular communication:

Talk these days
is of health concerns,
levels of medication,
cancer scares,
part-time employment,
no employment,
free bus passes,
the last funeral attended,
or the next commemoration. (McKeown 106)

The case of the blanket men and women is perhaps not unique amidst the corpus of historical narratives of former political prisoners and ex-combatants with regards to PTSD and the lingering physical and mental debilitations incurred during a period of conflict. For example, a suitable parallel is found

in ex-prisoners who served time in South Africa's Robben Island (Buntman). However, the use of social media as a communal platform and potential aid in the healing process is remarkable and may provide a useful model for other post-conflict groups and societies in which the questions of suffering and traumatic memory are concerned. Given the above examples, and the findings of Hamber's case study, I would assert that the precedent is particularly helpful in the consideration of former paramilitaries who might not otherwise be amenable to opening up in a traditional face-to-face setting.

Whereas in the past, individuals who relocated were almost completely cut off from regular contact with their former comrades within the sort of physical spaces described in McKeown's poetry, technology and social media have now allowed the reformation and reclamation of their previous social structure, and thus offered a new and invaluable coping mechanism. The consideration of the blanketmen as a case study offers a new perspective on some of the pivotal questions surrounding trauma in the field of memory studies, namely, the capacity to represent and recall suffering, what needs to occur to bring about healing and, in the long term, what memory does with wounds.

Further, it can be said that in this particular digital space, the carefully calculated extraction of politics from the healing process (by declaration of the admin team) might help in healing intercommunal rivalries at the grass-roots level, thus fostering a mutual respect rooted in a common history which might then translate to the physical space. This is not to diminish the valuable work that continues to be done by community groups and ex-prisoner organizations at the local level. Societal rehabilitation is a multi-layered and complex process. For example, Peter Kellerman notes the way in which when considering the conclusion of the Vietnam War, one must look at the individual experiences of the survivors of the conflict and ask, "What did survivors need immediately at its end in 1973? And what did they need now?" (142). He draws the distinction between the physical and mental needs of US soldiers returning from the conflict and those of the local Vietnamese population, noting that while all participants and observers had been left with "deep emotional scars", the case of the US soldiers differed, in that "much of the soldiers' emotional lives had to be rebuilt as they returned home because their horrible experiences had disenfranchised them from the ordinary lives of family and community"

(Kellermann 142). In the same vein, the scope of this chapter is limited to the ex-prisoner community who spent time on the Blanket Protest. In light of the traumas associated with both the protest itself and their re-matriculation back into society during a continued period of war, it must be remembered that the needs of these individuals differ from those of both the civilian population and other paramilitaries who were either never incarcerated or spent time in prison, but were not on the protest.

Bibliography

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, measures have been taken to maintain the anonymity of the men and women covered here. To this end, specific web links and information pertaining to social media posts and interview subjects are not provided and also altered within the text. Additionally, specific details of the interview described are withheld. The interview was conducted by the author on 26 April 2017.

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PART III

History

6 “The Women Who Had Been Straining Every Nerve”: Gender-Specific Medical Management of Trauma in the Irish Revolution (1916–1923)

ABSTRACT

Female revolutionaries suffered various traumas – including sexual trauma – during Ireland’s revolutionary period (1916–1923). This chapter draws on files from the Military Service Pensions Collection, personal accounts and literary narratives in order to consider the various medical treatments prescribed to women for “exhausted nerves” in the early decades of the Irish Free State. Contemporary understandings of what is now recognized as PTSD were strongly informed by gender ideologies, and women’s mental welfare was routinely connected to the female reproductive system. In contrast to men’s treatment, which aimed to swiftly return the patient to the warzone or workforce, traumatized female revolutionaries were frequently recommended prolonged “rest” treatments which emphasized domestication and re-feminization. These costly therapies reflect the social privilege of many female republicans. Women lacking such familial or financial supports, however, could find themselves committed to the country’s overcrowded mental institutions, while a significant number of female revolutionaries emigrated for medical reasons.

In her memoir *The Hope and the Sadness: Personal Recollections of Troubled Times in Ireland* (1980), Siobhán Lankford, née Creedon, provides a stark insight into the “extreme nervous exhaustion” she endured as an active revolutionary during Ireland’s War of Independence (1919–21) and Civil War (1922–23). After confiding in her Cumann na mBan [The Women’s League] colleague Margaret Mackin that her “health was not good” (Lankford 243), Lankford agreed to consult Mackin’s brother-in-law, Dr Robert Farnan, for treatment of her “exhausted nerves”:

I went to Dublin to consult him. As Margaret had told me, the doctor’s consulting rooms in Merrion Square were crowded. He worked long hours, often past midnight,

to bring back to health the women who had been straining every nerve to assist in the fight for freedom – many of them had worked unceasingly from 1916 to 1923. (Lankford 249–50)

Lankford's rare allusion to such a congregation of women seeking treatment for "nerve troubles" prompts questions regarding contemporary understanding of what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder during and in the aftermath of the revolutionary period. It also the omission of the medicalization of women's trauma from received histories. This chapter draws on personal accounts, as well as recently released files from the Military Service Pension Collection (MSPC), to consider the diverse traumas endured by women and the extent to which the clinical consultations of female revolutionaries during the early years of the Irish Free State were informed by gender ideologies, as much as derived from a complex interaction of political, social and economic forces.

Lankford is just one of a number of female activists who documented their treatment for "nervous breakdowns" during the Irish revolutionary period, and particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. By March 1923, Lankford had endured almost seven years of intense service: she founded a branch of the Gaelic League in her hometown of Mallow, Co. Cork, in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising and was particularly useful to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) given her position as a postal clerk. Throughout the War of Independence (1919–21), she tapped telephones and intercepted cryptic correspondences to gather intelligence about military operations and identify spies. Her duties also consisted of more indecorous, perilous tasks: she records that she "had to deal" with the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) man who was in charge of the party that had shot her own brother dead in order to exchange information and ammunition (Lankford 205–06; Military Service Pension Collection (MSPC), MSP34REF29397). Although women both supported and opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which provided for the establishment of a self-governing Irish Free State in the 26 southern counties, Lankford was one of many female activists to join the anti-Treaty opposition. These women's military roles intensified as the republican side was increasingly forced underground during the Civil War; women were assigned riskier tasks, such as storing and carrying ammunition (for which a man

could be executed), and at least 681 republican women were imprisoned (C. McCarthy 227; Matthews "Dissidents" 257; McCoolle 244–65). Moreover, the intimate nature of the internecine conflict led to a new array of personal traumas: Lankford experienced the death of comrades, was publicly snubbed by the local clergy for taking the republican side and was dismissed from her job in the civil service after her cover was compromised (MSP₃₄REF29397, 4 February 1938).

While psychological distress is now considered a normal consequence of the strained nature of warfare, the highly competitive commemorative culture which emerged in post-independence Ireland offered little scope for the articulation of personal traumas. Although the figure of the shell-shocked man became a metaphor for the collective trauma of the First World War in post-war Britain, the newly conceived Irish Free State largely identified with the image of the heroic male guerrilla fighter whose suffering and discomfort was rendered invisible. Furthermore, consistent with global post-conflict nationalist remembrance, the "actual experiences of women" were converted into symbolic, romantically conceived paradigms; the heterogeneity of women's experiences was replaced by the grieving Mother Ireland trope or occluded by the allegorical figure of the patriotic, ancillary, *Róisín Dubh* [Dark Rosaleen] (Gillis 10).

However, women – both civilians and activists – were key agents during Ireland's revolutionary period, as borders between private and military zones were systematically broken down. Domestic spaces were routinely invaded by Black and Tans, members of the IRA on the run and, later, by soldiers of the newly founded Free State Army. As a result, experienced suffragist Meg Connery reported to the Irish White Cross in 1921 that across Munster "women and children were in a constant state of depression and nervous breakdown" (qtd in Matthews "Renegades" 269). Connery also pointed to the aetiological implications of such domestic, and even sexual, violations, noting that "attempts of a sexual character have been made" and that "it is difficult to appreciate the effect which this continued strain is producing upon the health of women". These remarks on the adverse psychological effects on women are, however, at odds with the hegemonic male-centred discourse of war which foreground the daring exploits and experiences of male combatants. As Judith Herman notes,

it was not until the 1970s that it was recognized that “the most common post-traumatic disorders are not those of men in war, but of women in civilian life” (28).

The discomfiture surrounding the place of female combatants in the still-evolving revolutionary narrative is evident in Lankford’s application for a military pension in 1938. When the first Military Service Pensions Act was introduced in August 1924, neutral and anti-Treaty veterans were excluded. Cumann na mBan was only legislatively recognized as an organization eligible for military service pensions in the Pension Act of 1934 after an appeal through the Senate (Coleman “Compensating” 923). Nevertheless, it proved notoriously difficult for women to prove “active service”, which necessitated the carrying of arms and did not cater for the varied nature of female participation. Even though Lankford furnished a number of testimonies from her IRA commanding officers, such as Florence O’Donoghue’s highly gendered statement that she did “more than one’s man duty” (MSP₃₄REF29397, 29 January 1938), she was unsuccessful in her appeal to have her rank as an intelligence officer recognized. The unease in recognizing male combatants’ reliance on female comrades is further evidenced by Michael J. Bowlen’s confession that “it was for me a cause of blushes that I had to use a lady for that work, but there were no men to rely on and she [Lankford] was there” (MSP₃₄REF29397, 24 May 1937).

Lankford’s pension service application is also a pertinent example of the structural silences which characterize many women’s accounts of the revolution. Unlike the candidness of her memoir written between 1973 and 1975 (É. Lankford), Lankford’s application contains no mention of the medical treatment she received for her “nervous condition”. Nor is this particularly surprising. Even though the totemic image of the mourning republican woman has a special place in the popular imagination, the depictions of female veterans to the Bureau of Military History (BMH), gathered between 1947 and 1957, are ripe with references to the Victorian social convention of concealing distress and repressing emotion, particularly in public. While Kathleen Barry Moloney records that “even in these days, the psychological value of tears after shock was well known” (40), more typical are statements pointing to the composure of women during moments of heightened trauma. Elizabeth Bloxham recalls that after receiving

a message regarding the illness of a young relation, "the tears sprang to my eyes. I quickly remembered that I dare not cry" (26). Ina Heron (née Connolly), daughter of the martyred socialist leader James Connolly, confesses that as a child she was "was always able to dance away my grief and pretend it did not hurt me" (54). Such stoicism was often a cause of pride, as reflected in Máire Fitzpatrick's assertion that her "brave" mother did not shed a tear on hearing of her son's death at the hands of the Black and Tans in Drogheda (9). Yet, paradoxically, such overt claims of self-control functioned as a rhetorical tool with which women could draw attention to the emotional toll they carried. As Kathleen (Cáit) O'Callaghan, who witnessed the death of her husband during a raid on her home in 1921, states: "Women do not cry much in Ireland during this war: the trouble goes too deep" (25).

Given that accounts of personal distress are often clouded by claims of stoicism, the medical diagnosis and treatment of republican women's psychological injuries is even less conspicuous. For this reason, Lankford's description of the medical care she received for "exhausted nerves" by Dr Farnan is highly revealing and provides an insight into the influence of gender ideologies on medical management. Dr Robert Farnan is no stranger to historians of the revolutionary period. Not only was he an eminent gynaecologist and Professor of Midwifery at University College Dublin, he was also a close personal friend of Sinn Féin President Éamon de Valera. His home at 5 Merrion Square was used as a safe house and functioned as governmental headquarters during much of the struggle for independence (De Valera 4). That Dr Farnan was a gynaecologist by profession yet treated individuals for their psychological health is perhaps indicative of contemporary perceptions that "weak nerves" were inherently connected to the female body. Within the medical field during the nineteenth century, in the writings of Dublin-based physician Dr Fleetwood Churchill, psychological conditions were routinely connected to new discoveries about the female reproductive system (Prior 125–26). Etymologically, the word "hysteria" derives from the Greek word for uterus and was believed to be caused by a migratory or "wandering womb". This ancient concept anticipated modern psychoanalytical scientific views which connected mental instability with somatic, biological explanations – including uterine

inflammation – rather than consider their psychological or social causes (see Cayleff 1200).

The conflation of femininity and insanity is also evident in the fact that higher lunacy rates were registered among Irish ex-soldiers after the First World War than in the other British nations, a phenomenon which stemmed from the gendering of the colonized as effeminate and theories of British psychiatrists that psychoneuroses developed in men who were “inherently below the level of civilization” (Bourke 61). On their return, Irish ex-soldiers were given little economic or medical resources in comparison to their British counterparts and were often ostracized from Irish society (Bourke 68). While there was a general understanding of shell-shocked soldiers in Britain, Brendan Kelly notes that there was “limited further remembrance of the psychological suffering of soldiers [in Ireland] until the centenary of the commencement of the war in 2014” (*Hearing* 144). It might not be a coincidence, therefore, that Tim Pat Coogan refers to Dr Farnan as a “distinguished Dublin gynaecologist whose services were highly thought of by the wives of British officers” (197). In the same way that returned shell-shocked soldiers were shunned, evidence that Dr Farnan treated Irish women is overlooked in Coogan’s widely quoted assertion. Indeed, Coogan’s comment is highly suggestive of popular perceptions that such maladies were the province of affluent, educated, bourgeois women, while his reference to the women’s British nationality serves to invert and deflect the colonial stereotype.

It was not just female patients who flocked to Dr Farnan’s practice, however. The gender-specific course of his medical management is brought into sharp relief through a comparison of his treatment of Siobhán Lankford and that described by Colonel Eamon “Ned” Broy. As Lankford details:

Dr. Farnan’s cure for my extreme nervous exhaustion was a complete change of environment. I would have to leave Mallow. Officers of all government departments were being transferred to Dublin to take the places of those retiring because of the Treaty. I very easily got a transfer to the accounts department of the G.P.O. Six weeks’ complete rest in the Mater Hospital, living in Malahide and Sutton, and Dr. Farnan’s care for a whole year settled my exhausted nerves. It took many years to erase the pain of losing gallant friends, men and women who suffered, fought and died for Ireland. (250)

Lankford’s reference to “six weeks’ complete rest” indicates that she was most likely treated with a version of the highly disciplined and gender-specific “rest cure” first developed by Philadelphia neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell in the 1860s and 1870s. Mitchell’s rest cure was devised primarily for well-to-do ladies and was based on the removal of the patient from her usual surroundings which sometimes, as in Lankford’s case, involved a retreat to the countryside or to the seaside (Gosling 37). In its most regimented form, the patient was expected to lie in bed for six weeks to two months and was not allowed to read, write, feed herself or contact anyone. Although Lankford does not reveal her attitude towards her “rest” treatment, Virginia Woolf famously loathed being subjected to such medical care, as hinted at in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*, where the doctor orders a suicidal patient to “rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without books, without messages; six months’ rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve” (73).

On the other hand, Colonel Eamon Broy, who later served as Garda Commissioner, notes in his BMH statement that IRA leader Michael Collins referred his men to Dr Farnan – much to their chagrin at being sent to a “ladies doctor”. It seems, however, that they were attended to in quite a different fashion from that described by Lankford:

A great friend of the movement all the time in Dublin was Dr. Robert Farnan, and anyone who was anyway low in health or injured was sent to him, with a note from Mick. Dr. Farnan was, of course, a ladies’ doctor, but a man of wonderful personality who could cure by merely speaking to the men. Mick gave Austin Stack such a note to go to Dr. Farnan. Somebody, to pull Stack’s leg, told him: “Collins is making a ‘cod’ of you. That is a ladies’ doctor. Don’t go near him”. Stack hesitated for a couple of days before going. (Broy 86)

The indication that Dr Farnan could cure men simply by speaking to them is indicative of the verbal psychotherapies practised on shell-shocked soldiers in Richmond Hospital in Dublin between 1916 and 1919. As Kelly notes, this treatment emphasized “prompt treatment, cognitive restructuring of traumatic experiences (i.e. thinking differently about the past) and collaboration with the therapist in the search for a cure” (*Hearing* 143). Unlike women’s treatment, which precluded them from public life and thus

supported the refeminization and domestication of female combatants, men's treatment was swift with the prime aim of their re-entry into combat.

This gender-specific treatment of nervous disorders also appears to have been endorsed by Collins. Even though he sent his men to Dr Farnan for this proto-cognitive behavioural or narrative therapy, Lily Mernin, who provided the IRA with essential intelligence while working as a short-hand typist in Dublin Castle, notes that Collins exonerated her from her duties after her "nervous breakdown" and arranged for her to take rest at a remove from the stress of the conflict:

The risks I was taking and the strain to which I was subjected had an injurious offset on my nerves and general health. At the end of 1921 I was dismissed from my post by the British – and shortly after had a nervous break down. Collins immediately gave me a sum of money to enable me to go away and take a holiday out of Ireland. (MSP₃₄REF₄₉₄₅, c.1935)

Such a rigid gender dichotomy in medical responses supports Elaine Showalter's influential study *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (1985), in which she contrasts the Darwinian approaches employed by nerve specialists on female "hysterics" to dictate "proper feminine behaviour" to the new therapies quickly developed to treat the thousands of shell-shocked soldiers during the First World War (18). These new therapies were also informed by class and gender determinants, as often illustrated by the diametrically opposed modes promoted by two British-based psychiatrists, Lewis Yealland and W. H. R. Rivers; the former is associated with punitive, disciplinary treatment (including electric shock therapy), while the latter advocated a more liberal, analytic view (Showalter 176–9). Eric Leed contends in his authoritative *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (1979) that treatment was divided into "two different techniques of domination" as medical professionals adopted harsh disciplinary regimes for "hysterical", effeminate lower-class soldiers to prepare them to return to the front, while more humane, Freudian analytic techniques were practised on "neurasthenic" upper-class, chivalrous army officers (Leed 171; Showalter 176). More recent studies rightly question this "discipline/analytic dichotomy" (Leese *Shell-Shock* 74; Loughran 117), which is "atypical and overgeneralized" (Leese "Why

Are They Not Cured?" 206). Nevertheless, these understandings serve as an important point of departure for thinking about how gender and class influenced medical encounters.

In reality, the understaffed and poorly serviced hospitals and asylums in Ireland were not conducive to the development of innovative psychoanalytic methods. As republican activist Gobnait Ní Bhruadair lamented in a letter to the short-lived literary journal *Ireland To-day* in 1937, "Mental hospitals are, it is true, terribly full ... we have, at the moment, not yet surmounted the consequences of the wicked world war, followed by the upheaval of the fight on our own soil" (78). A number of female revolutionaries shared Ní Bhruadair's concern for the mentally ill, to the extent that several public asylums were "focuses of republican sentiment" during the revolutionary period (Kelly *Hearing* 154). Dr Ada English, who was highly active in Cumann na mBan and a Sinn Féin TD (Minister of Parliament), famously tried to induce RIC officers to retire from their positions by offering them employment at her workplace in Ballinasloe Asylum (Kelly *Ada English* 26–7). Meanwhile, Dr Eleanora Fleury, the first female psychiatrist in Ireland and Great Britain, was arrested and imprisoned in 1923 for treating wounded republican prisoners whom she concealed among her mental patients in Portrane Asylum (Kelly *Hearing* 151–3).

Dr Fleury's paper "Clinical Note on Agitated Melancholia in Women", which was delivered to the Irish division of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1895, illustrates the best practices advocated by these pioneering female doctors, which carried through into the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than focusing solely on biological or physical causes, Fleury remarkably links "psychiatric problems with social and life events such as examinations, marital difficulties, separations and bereavements" (Kelly *Hearing* 115). Her observations nevertheless demonstrate contemporary views that patients' "agitated or motor melancholia" could be explained by dysmenorrhoea, pregnancy and "the cessation of menstruation" at the "climacteric" (Fleury 548). Dr Fleury is less than optimistic about her patients' recovery; she notes that a number of women "believed that they were lost body and soul, or that they were changed into the devil" and concludes that if "the physical health is poor ... the patient will probably succumb" (551).

Nevertheless, her recommended treatment is redolent of the medical care prescribed by Dr Farnan to Lankford: while she advocates the administration of sedatives such as ether and opium, she also highlights that “abundant nourishment is required and the patient should be kept much in the open air, and as much away from other patients as possible” (Fleury 551).

But just how many female revolutionaries set out to avail themselves of medical treatment for nerves like Lankford? The medical management of patients in wartime is often difficult to determine given the challenges in accessing records; hospital admissions records were not kept and patients were often registered under false names. As a result, one of the most revealing sources of data is the Military Service Pensions Collection, which holds approximately 300,000 files regarding individual pension, disability and special allowance applications; some of these include supporting medical documentation. While the Irish Grants Committee (IGC), which was founded in London in 1923 to compensate Irish Loyalists, included shock in its definition of “physical injuries” (Clark 140), the Free State was far slower to recognize psychiatric casualties (see MSP34REF1290 Seán Hogan, 1P684 Mary Coakley). For example, when IRA man Patrick O’Reilly claimed he was treated for “shell shock” in the Mater Hospital after being in the Four Courts when it was shelled in June 1922, the Army Pensions Board simply concluded “you are not suffering from any disability” (DP2879, 6 September 1934).

Equally, even though the IGC compensated a woman who endured a “nervous breakdown” due to the “insanity” of “persistent nightly raids” and witnessing “her husband’s murder” (Clark 140), available records suggest that it was as difficult for female revolutionaries to prove mental debilitation as it was to prove “active service”. This was undoubtedly informed by popular perceptions that women’s nervous problems were routine. Advertisements for Cackle’s Pills in Irish newspapers in 1925 and 1936 claimed that “most women are frequent sufferers from those distressing symptoms that make up the complaint commonly called weak nerves” (“Every Woman’s Friend”). Even smoking cigarettes was deemed inimical to women’s nerves to the extent that a correspondent in *The Irish Independent* in 1921 declared that “a smoking woman should be sent to a reformatory” (qtd in Dunbar 27). As a result, it is likely that many women, like Lankford, did not divulge

their emotional distress in pension applications. This omission illustrates what Holocaust scholar Joan Ringelheim calls the “split between gender and genocide” whereby women often consider the gender-specific aspects of their lived experiences to be insignificant in light of the larger narrative of wartime suffering (344). Brigid Noone did not disclose her nervous condition in her first application for a military pension in 1937, but her referee Harold McBrien revealed that “her health brokedown [*sic*] and even yet her recovery is not complete” (MSP34REF56221, 15 February 1941). It was not until five years after her first application that Noone indicated that her “nerve trouble” was caused by constant raids on her home, including an incident in 1920 when her hair was cropped for refusing to disclose the location of IRA dugouts (MSP34REF56221, 17 October 1942).

Admitting nerve trouble and ill health could compromise women’s claim for a military pension based on “active service”. Úna Frances Moriarty disclosed she “took ill” in August 1923 after being tasked with collecting the remains of volunteers blown up by a mine in Ballyseedy, Co. Kerry, in what was one of the most notorious incidents of the Civil War. Moriarty protested that she was only granted a pension for one sixth of the period between April and September 1923, illustrating how such a disclosure proved detrimental to her pension claim (MSP34REF55152, 23 November 1941). Margaret Mary Galvin was similarly dismayed with her award of only three quarters for the final period of the Civil War, which she felt was due to a misunderstanding regarding her disclosed breakdown in health (MSP34REF26639, 15 February 1943).

Neither Moriarty nor Galvin submitted wound or disability claims, but women who did apply struggled to prove that their “neurasthenia”, “nerves”, “nervous breakdown”, “shock” or “neurosis” was related to their military activities. Mai O’Halloran was active in Cumann na mBan from 1918 to 1922 and claimed that she experienced a particular shock after she threw herself in front of her father as a raiding party of Black and Tans threatened to shoot him (DP10285, 9 May 1942). The Medical Report of the Army Pension Board provides a raw insight into O’Halloran’s state:

Applicant complains that she cannot go to Mass regularly as she is afraid of crowds; that she suffers from a sensation of being about to fall; that she is unable to stay alone and that she cannot sleep. She says that when her nerves go out of order her stomach

also goes out of order and she complains that she becomes mentally unstable before the birth of her babies. Has five children from ages of 8 years to 7 months. Menses normal. (DP10285, 11 May 1942)

For all the medical evidence she supplied, O'Halloran's claim for "nerve trouble" was still rejected as her condition was not deemed attributable to her military service (DP10285, 23 May 1942). Margaret Gallagher's claim for rheumatism and neurasthenia, resulting from a breakdown after the arrest of her brother in 1922, was also rejected (MSP34REF46292, 25 October 1939). In addition, Agnes Gallagher, who went on hunger strike and "suffered other injuries" when she was interned in Kilmainham during the Civil War, was unsuccessful in her claim for neurasthenia and a catalogue of other health complications which were not deemed attributable to her service (MSP34REF3344; DP313, 11 January 1935).

Despite such lack of recognition and common perceptions linking women to weak nerves, it appears from the released files that women were still more inclined than men to cite mental anguish. This may be due to the fact that the feminine vocabulary of "nerve trouble" was more readily at their disposal. Supporting medical reports in these oft-unsuccessful claims also demonstrate that Lankford's treatment was not an exception and that the medical world was more inclined to prescribe rest, change and good food than to consider psychological interventions. May Hearne, who was shot during the 1916 Rising, was also told by Dr Farnan "to go home for six months" (DP9341, 18 July 1939). Equally, Mary Ann Nolan, who testified to suffering a nervous breakdown after being "stripped naked and left without any covering" on her arrest in Trinity College in 1916, was prescribed "treatment of a general medical and tonic nature – change to a convalescent home for one month with re-examination at the end of that period" (DP2664, 30 December 1937). Such treatment undoubtedly demanded the exigencies of time and financial resources only available for the educated middle class from which many members of Cumann na mBan hailed (C. McCarthy 175). This proved difficult for women who lacked such familial or financial support. Margaret Mary Galvin was "ignored" by members of her family for her republican stance and notes that she was "ordered" by her doctor to take a rest in Co. Wicklow in June 1924 "at considerable expense" (MSP34REF26639, 12 November 1938). Oonagh

Patterson, originally from Ennis, Co. Clare, regretted that she simply had not the means to go to Dublin for "another treatment for my nerves, as I would have liked" (DP10637, 31 March 1943).

Feminist scholars are largely critical of the misogynistic implications of the rest cure, pointing to the infantile dependency it invoked which aimed to usher women "back to femininity" (Showalter 139). But although the rest cure was conceived with "hysterical women" in mind, it became standard for many male patients in the aftermath of the First World War (Humphries and Kurchinski 104). Nevertheless, it appears from available MSPC files that the treatment for male IRA veterans was less organized around prolonged rest and more focused on the necessity of returning the patient to the work force. James Marron claims that after being involved in the atrocity at the Protestant village of Altnaveigh in South Armagh, "I could not sleep thinking of the woman and the others we shot" (DP3395, 9 December 1940). Suffering from "nervous debility and gastritis", he hints that the prime aim of his medical treatment was his assimilation back into the workforce: "I had been attending Dr. Flood for one year and he fixed me up so as I could get a job which I did on the railways" (DP3395, 30 June 1934). A remarkable report published by Dr Michael Nolan of Down County Mental Hospital in 1940 similarly emphasizes swift recuperation for male patients. Nolan's report details his treatment of a member of the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) who was suffering from "acute systematized hallucinosis" on his entry to the hospital at an uncertain date between 1921 and 1923 (Byrne 115). However, within six days, Dr Nolan contends that the "thermidorian influences of renewed physical energy" enabled "complete restoration" (Nolan 953). Even though the patient was treated for syphilis, Dr Nolan foregrounds psychological, political and social triggers and attributes the disorder to what he coined the "revolutionary triarchy" of "Religio-Sexual-Political" factors (Nolan 953). Nolan also emphasizes the curative properties of work in the hospital which facilitated the patient's speedy return to employment:

He quickly responded to treatment, ate and slept well, and occupied himself usefully at clerical work when not out of doors. His conduct became normal in every respect, and his temperament bright, cheery and optimistic. After his discharge he obtained suitable employment, and continued well. (966)

Although Dr Nolan and Dr Fleury valued the psychogenic roots of their patients' illness, modern psychoanalytic methods had very little resonance overall in Catholic Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century (Kelly *Hearing* 170). Rather than consider the social and personal circumstances underlying a patient's distress, the Irish medical profession was more drawn to new, albeit ethically questionable, one-size-fits-all techniques of short-wave diathermy, hydrotherapy and, increasingly, insulin coma therapy, convulsive therapy and lobotomy (Kelly *Hearing* 170). Primitive electric treatments were practised on female revolutionaries from the 1920s. After Christina Brooks' release from Mountjoy Prison, Áine Ceannt of the Irish White Cross arranged a bed for her in the Mater Hospital where she got "massages" and "four weeks of Electric treatment" for her "bad nerves" which manifested in eye trouble, deafness and acute sciatica (DP828, 22 April 1924). These conditions were likely the result of the conditions of her imprisonment: Brooks claims that her clothes were "torn to shreds" by Free State soldiers on her arrest, that she had to sleep with no bedding or food and that she was later interrogated by a court of nine soldiers under the threat of being shot (DP828, 7 July 1933). Just how effective her treatment proved is hard to determine; faradic and galvanic electric currents were notoriously painful during this period and were practised by French neurologists on shell-shocked soldiers during the First World War in order to "discipline" them back to the battlefield (Bogousslavsky and Tatu). Nevertheless, electric methods were employed widely. Mary Coakley suffered from shock after she cared for eight dying IRA men at the Upton train ambush in February 1921 and was administered "electricity treatment" by Nurse Rice, Grand Parade, Cork (1P684, 12 December 1924; see also Oonagh Patterson, DP10637, 31 March 1943). This method was used until as late as 1957, when Mary Brannelly was given "18 electroplexies" to treat her "involutional melancholia", although her doctor was "not very hopeful" of progress (DP29155, 26 September 1957).

These somatic treatments were sometimes used in tandem with various rest therapies. Bridget Barrett complained of being "a bit nervous". She travelled from Co. Clare to see Dublin consultant Dr McDonnell, who laid her up for three or four months and put her on a diet. In addition, Barrett noted that she was given "injections" and that she "attend[ed] him since

for them” (DP10265, 3 July 1941). Although the nature of these injections is unclear, there was a step towards analeptic drugs and electroconvulsive therapies in the 1930s and 1940s to induce convulsions or epileptic-type seizures (Showalter 205). Insulin shock therapy was also introduced in Ireland in 1938; this involved the dispensing of insulin injections to induce a coma due to its supposed anti-depressant properties (Kelly *Hearing* 173). According to Showalter, insulin treatment offered little improvement on the domesticating practice of the rest cure, as “this prolonged and very controlling treatment seemed to parallel the pseudopregnancy of the rest cure” (205). Indeed, the aforementioned Úna Moriarty, who suffered from shock after the atrocities of Ballyseedy, had a less than positive assessment of the treatment she received. In fact, Moriarty disagreed with medical staff regarding the root cause of her memory impairment: “I had a nervous breakdown and I got epileptic seizures and they say it affected my memory but I really think it was the drugs they gave me to put my nerves in order” (MSP34REF55152, 19 January 1939). In medical terms, insulin therapy is often associated with memory loss, suggesting that Moriarty’s grievance may be well founded.

Medical aetiologies of women’s mental health also remained wedded to the belief that nervous trouble was inherently connected to women’s reproductive functions. In her study of Enniscorthy Asylum between 1916 and 1925, Áine McCarthy notes that one of the first questions asked of women on committal was the pattern of their menstrual cycle (103). During the 1930s, it seems that the Medical Board of the Army Pensions Board routinely sent applicants claiming for neurasthenia for gynaecological tests (see Mary O’Hanrahan DP6266, 6 July 1934; Mollie O’Hanlon DP6261, 1 November 1934). Mary O’Hanrahan complained of “feeling nervous; feeling of a ‘load’ in the head” and was sent to Dublin gynaecologist Séamus Ó Ceallaigh to clarify if her “neurasthenic condition” was “of menopausal origin” (DP6266, 25 May 1934). The gynaecologist responded quite resolutely that O’Hanrahan was 44 years of age and had no “definite signs of symptoms of the change of life” (DP6266, 25 May 1934). Nevertheless, lacking gynaecological evidence to support her claim, O’Hanrahan was unsuccessful in her initial application, as was Mollie O’Hanlon, who was considered “highly hysterical” but whose

“severe nervous debility and epilepsy” was not supported by any gynaecological abnormality (DP6261, 24 August 1934; 16 May 1940). It may not be coincidental, then, that Alice O’Rourke – who was imprisoned in Armagh Gaol until 1924 and considered to be “neurasthenic” – was successful in her claim in December 1934 for “anaemia, lumbago, cardiac irregularity and intermittent amenorrhoea” given that her exam revealed signs of “endometriosis” and “leucorrhoea” considered “to be the result of hardship endured” (DP2894, 25 May 1934).

Despite the prevalence of such intimate medical examinations, there is little evidence to suggest that possible sexual traumas were investigated by the Pension Board. The psychiatric community’s reluctance to address sexual trauma is perhaps epitomized by Freud’s *volte-face* in 1897 when he jettisoned his “seduction theory” which held that “at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience” (qtd in Herman 13). Given the unease this idea provoked, Freud replaced his original analysis of hysteria with his controversial Oedipus complex theory. Lisa Cardyn’s study of turn-of-the-century American mental medicine also illustrates that medical professionals were more concerned with maintaining the socio-sexual status quo than contemplating the often overt manifestations of sexual trauma displayed by their female patients. Although the prevalence of sexual violence and rape during the Irish Revolution is a moot point (see Connolly; Coleman “Violence”), the disability files of “nervous” veterans are replete with euphemistic, coded references to sexual humiliations. These instances were not exclusively characterized by male-on-female violence: Jeremiah Brett claims he attended the doctor for a “nervous attack” after he was captured by Black and Tans, stripped and “tied to a pale for the night”. It is also claimed that Lucy Bartley was “on the verge of a nervous breakdown” owing to the fact that she came under the “special attention” of a lady searcher and “in consequence had a very rough time” (MSP34REF31173, 31 June 1927; 34SP31483, 24 September 1934; MSP34REF64269, 7 December 1955). Furthermore, the reluctance of the Pension Board to delve deeper into possible attacks of a sexual nature is clear from the concluding lines of the transcript of Maureen Cormican’s sworn statement before the Pension Board Advisory Committee in 1940. Cormican attempts, to little avail, to offer further

details of the night she was “taken away”, which she had first disclosed in her application two years previously:

Q: After the “Cease fire” you helped men on the run?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there anything else?

A: In the Tan time we were *taken away*.

Q: How often were you taken away?

A: Several times.

Q: You were taken out and threatened.

A: Yes, tried to extort information from us.

Q: There is nothing else?

A: I had to be treated by a doctor from the effects of shot [shock] and all this. They treated us badly. They stole and *they did everything to us*.

Q: Anything else?

A: I suppose that is all. (MSP₃₄REF₅₆₈₅₁, 18 June 1940; emphasis added)

It is generally understood that while trauma is unrepresentable and essentially defies language, it can be only be mitigated when the seemingly unspeakable traumatic experience is brought to articulation and the survivor can begin to recreate their shattered identity (Caruth). The shame and stigma surrounding sexual trauma in the conservative Irish Free State was certainly not conducive to “working through” such experiences. One of the most poignant cases in the MSPC is that of Cumann na mBan member Margaret Doherty, who died in December 1928 in Castlebar Mental Hospital from pulmonary TB. However, Doherty’s family claim that the decline in her health stemmed from an incident in May 1922 when three Free State Army officers “pulled her out of her bed ... brought [her] a short distant from home and rape[d] [her] in succession” (DP₂₁₀₀, 5 October 1933) (See also Connolly 20–21).

A number of female revolutionaries were committed to mental institutions, which has prompted Linda Connolly to ask, “did Ireland in the 1920s

lock away, conceal and institutionalise the trauma of the revolution suffered by women?” (34). In many cases, committal was more a reflection of the social, financial and familial supports available to the individual rather than the severity of their mental disorder (see Finnane 15). Efforts were in fact made to prevent women revolutionaries’ committal to asylums. For example, civil servant R. Savage pleaded with the Pension’s Board to supply funds to cover treatment for Peg Clancy in a private mental home in Blackrock, Cork, at £5 5s per week to prevent her institutionalization (DP1652, 13 April 1933). Clancy had served as General Liam Lynch’s confidential typist during the Civil War and was first treated for “nervous debility” in August 1922 (DP1652, 9 November 1933). The suffering endured by the wider Clancy family likely meant that they could not afford for her to undertake such treatment: the family’s home in Cush, Co. Limerick, had been burnt down; their brother Patrick had died from bullet and bayonet wounds in August 1920; another sister, Statia, had died “as a result of the strain of active service and jail sentence”; and a brother, David, was severely impaired by a bullet wound (1D10, 7 February 1924; MSP34REF59912, 20 January 1943; IRB1553). Peg relocated to Youghal, Co. Cork, with her older sister Kate, but “had to be taken to the asylum” after a suicide attempt (DP1652, 13 April 1933). As Mark Finnane notes, in the context of post-Famine Ireland, an attempt at one’s life was “taken to be irrefutable evidence of a person’s insanity” (151).

However, there is also evidence to suggest that in this era of redefined gender roles, disapproving family members used committal as a means to control women who transgressed social and political conventions. In her study of the Richmond Asylum 1916 casebooks, Bridget Keown illustrates how one patient, Nora (a pseudonym), was admitted to the asylum by her brother because she was “moody”, “did not care to go out”, “declined walks” and hallucinated. Significantly, Nora’s condition was attributed to her overzealous work in “organizing for [the] Gaelic League, the United Irishwomen, and the Comogie Association [*sic*]”, of which Nora contended her brother did not approve (Keown). It is perhaps not coincidental that explicitly medical language was harnessed by leading political figures to degrade anti-Treaty female revolutionaries as degenerate, hysterical, irrational “furies”. President W. T. Cosgrave famously denounced the “neurotic girls” of the “Irregular” camp, while pro-Treaty author P. S. O’Hegarty claimed that “it is woman . . . with her implacability, her bitterness, her hysteria, that makes a devil of him [man]” (75).

The ostracism of women by their own communities is apparent in the case of Delia Begley, a chemist by trade from Ennis, Co. Clare, who claimed unsuccessfully for "palpations, insomnia, nervous prostrations, vomiting etc." (DP9442, 15 January 1938). During the 1930s and 1940s, Begley clashed with her fellow Mid-Clare Brigade veterans; Peg Barrett even wrote to the Pension Board to protest that Begley's claim that she was appointed Branch Captain was "entirely imaginary" (CMB(Cumann na mBan Nominal Rolls)/72, 2 October 1942). Finding herself "desitute", Begley was brought by "strangers" to the Little Sisters of the Poor Nursing Home in Dundrum, Co. Dublin. On her death, Sister Pascaline noted that "when she became helpless no one wanted her, not even her own relations" (34D1959, 2 February 1948). Locals in Athenry, Co. Galway, also watched on as the emotional baggage carried by Julia Morrissey took its toll and her "eccentricities gradually developed into something more worrying" (McNamara). Morrissey had been an essential accomplice to leading republican Liam Mellows and led fifty women during the 1916 Rising in Galway. She arguably never recovered from the death of many of her comrades and historian Conor McNamara notes that she used a Ouija board in order to make contact with the revolutionary dead (Siggins). By the early 1930s, Morrissey was committed to Ballinasloe Asylum, where she was likely attended to by her Cumann na mBan colleague Dr Ada English. She remained there until her death in 1974.

Morrissey – like many women who were committed – had no immediate family: her only remaining brother, IRA man Mark Morrissey, had emigrated and was untraceable. In fact, emigration arguably masked the traumas of the revolution as much as the institutions. While definite numbers are difficult to gauge, the Cumann na mBan Nominal Rolls provide the names of at least 2,000 female emigrants (see Aiken). Even though the republican movement opposed emigration, exceptions were made for wounded veterans in light of the inadequacies of the Irish health service (Wilk 107). Many of these women were thus medically advised to leave the country for nervous or other medical conditions. Indeed, a key aspect of the rest cure was the belief that a change in environment – often to a warmer climate – could aid recovery. Republican activist and author Dorothy Macardle was told by her doctor that she may "never live in Ireland due to the climate" after her week-long hunger strike in April 1923 (Smith 43). Nora

Douglas also wrote from Australia that she was “ordered by Dr. Dundon to leave Ireland in 1924 as a direct result of a cold caught on active service” (MSP₃₄REF₃₅₉₈₉, 29 April 1939). Active in 1916 and imprisoned during the Civil War, May Gahan O’Carroll was tormented in later life by what she described to her children as the feeling of “waiting for the knock on the door” (O’Carroll 18). She and her husband emigrated to New Zealand in 1925 in the hopes of renewing her health after her imprisonment and hunger strike; she was treated for “acute neurasthenia” for over four years in Sydney. According to Dr W. G. H. Cable, her condition was further aggravated by the emotional and disheartening process of applying for a military pension (MSP₃₄REF₁₀₃₂₆, 21 August 1935; 31 October 1934). However, the president of the Patrick Pearse Council in Sydney wrote to the Pension Board claiming that the application had been made at the instance of O’Carroll’s “adventurous, opportunist” husband, illustrating how women’s mental health was not always taken seriously (1RB1494, 30 November 1933).

This exporting of mental patients has an uncomfortable history. As Pauline Prior notes, “criminal lunatics” released from Irish asylums in the mid-nineteenth century were encouraged to go into “voluntary exile” overseas (220). Some women may have received more efficient treatment abroad, but emigration seldom provided a quick fix for mental distress. Mary Ellen Scullen of Westport, Co. Mayo, was retrospectively cynical about her doctor’s advice: “I was in such a critical state after the Black and Tans my Dr. ordered me to come out here [Ohio], he said the voyage on the ocean & the change may help me but I’m sorry it didn’t help a lot” (MSP₃₄REF₅₂₇₈₈, 27 November 1936). In her published memoir, Annie Crowley Ford also hints at the psychological distress that precipitated her emigration to Boston in 1927 following her brother’s suicide. Like Scullen, her move brought little solace: “I foolishly thought if I went far away from home I would forget, but no matter how many miles you go, you always take your grief with you” (852).

While the plight of these women was certainly hidden behind the tall walls of the institutions and dispatched overseas, it would be wrong to assume that these traumas were totally obliterated from social consciousness. Indeed, recent scholarship on shell shock advocates for a wider consideration of less conventional sources of cultural memory in order to reconstruct traumatic

subjectivities and "challenge hegemonic notions of trauma defined by political and medical authorities" (Crouthamel and Leese 3). As Gemma Clark notes, sole reliance on official state compensation files proves problematic as "the mental trauma" engendered by Ireland's revolutionary period "did not emerge in the neat, linear fashion conducive to the operation of government compensation committees with strict terms and dates of reference" (104).

The taboo topic of mental debilitation generated by war emerges in a number of Annie P. Smithson's bestselling romance novels. As a nurse and Cumann na mBan member, Smithson undoubtedly had first-hand experience in treating traumatized patients and is extremely frank regarding her own depression in her autobiography. In July 1921, she endured a "rather serious break-down in health" and was advised by a Dr Kennedy to leave her nursing position in Waterford "and return if possible to my native air" (*Myself* 248). In the novel *By Shadowed Ways* (1942), Smithson demonstrates an acute understanding of the silencing and concealment of revolutionary trauma. Bride McMahon's mother and baby brother were tragically killed by a "pot shot" fired by a band of Black and Tans outside the family home in 1920. The deep communal rifts caused by the conflict are revealed years later when Bride discovers on her wedding day that her fiancé had been involved in her mother's death. Bride becomes "extremely psychic" and is sent to Dublin for a change of environment. The "medical men" tell her father that her condition is the result of the "nervous shock which she had sustained in her childhood" (253). Confessing that she "never feels safe" and that she could "never trust another man", Bride ultimately joins a convent where the "doctors agree she would be better in body and in mind" (254). Unbeknownst to the other characters in the novel, Mary Desmond also conceals a traumatic revolutionary past; at night she fights back the tears as she surreptitiously peeks at a faded old photo of a young 1916 volunteer before locking it away again in her bureau (252).

Secretary to the Irishwomen's International League and committed pacifist Úna Bean Uí Dhiosca also employed fiction as a vehicle to illustrate the psychological impact of war on women, although her account is less pessimistic than Smithson's about the possibility of recuperation. Uí Dhiosca's highly provocative Irish-language novel *Cailín na Gruaige Duinne* [The Brown-Haired Girl] (1932) – falsely advertised by publishers

An Gúm as a “touching little romance” (qtd in Ní Eaghra 62) – associates the intense stress of the Civil War with heightened levels of domestic violence. Accordingly, the novel’s protagonist, Róisín, leaves her anti-Treaty republican husband and flees to a YMCA in Belfast to deliver her first child. The extent of Róisín’s distress is reflected in a graphic description of postpartum depression, which, like domestic violence, is largely absent from official sources. Drawing on the available paradigm of demonic possession, Róisín initially rejects her newborn:

Nuair a tháinig an bhanaltra chugam agus nuair a d’fhiafruigh sí díom ar mhaith liom an leanbh d’fheiceáil bhagair mé mo cheann, ach nuair a chonnaic mé é baineadh geit ó chroidhe asam. Leanbh ba ghránda níor rugadh riamh is dócha. An clab mór, an croiceann mar chroiceann an fhata ruaidh, agus an smaóis a bhí air! D’iompuigheas uaidh – an tseachtain a chaitheas ina dhiaidh sin, ní maith liom smaoineamh air ... Bhí mo shaoghal ina thromluighe ifreanda. Má cheaduiigheann Dia do dheamhan bheith i gcroidhe duine in aghaidh a thola bhí deamhan ionam. Níor fhéadas féachaint isteach ins na súilibh ar aoinne. Dá labhradh aoinne liom bhrisfínn amach ag gol ... Cuireadh an leanbh ins na trithíbh dubha guil mé. Uair amháin shíl siad go ndéanfainn droch-bheart éicint dá bhfágadh siad an leanbh agam ... An deamhan a bhí istigh ionam thosuigh sé dom’ spocadh – “Tacht é; cuir do dhá láimh fá n-a mhúineál agus bain an anál as, bhéarfaidh sin fuascailt duit.” (*Cailín na Gruaige Duinne* 93–94)

[When the nurse approached me and asked me would I like to see the child, I nodded my head, but when I saw it my heart jumped with fright. A more horrible child was never born. The big mouth, its skin like a red potato peel, and the face of it! I turned away from it. I don’t like to think about the week that followed ... My life was a hellish nightmare. If God allows a devil to take over a person’s heart without permission, there was a devil in me. I couldn’t look anyone in the eye. If anyone spoke to me, I broke out crying ... The baby made me cry deep dark tears. Once I thought I would do something bad if they left me with the baby ... The devil inside me started enticing me, “Choke it; put your hand under its neck and cut off its breathing, that will relieve you”] (My translation)

Entering an institution is not a one-way ticket for Róisín and she gradually sets out on a road to recovery. Her doctor claims the best remedy is an “atharú saoil” (change of life) and arranges a six-month stay for her in the Pyrenean village of Saint Jean de Luz at £10 per month (99–101). Very much reflective of a certain medical culture of the time, Uí Dhiosca’s fictional narrative has parallels with the cases of Mabel FitzGerald, who passed information on government activities to the anti-Treatyites while

her husband Desmond was a minister in the Free State government. Having been in a "fragile state of mind" since at least 1916, Mabel suffered a nervous breakdown after the birth of her son in 1926 and spent three months "resting" in Switzerland and the south of France (Morrissey 303).

Women suffered from diverse emotional, physical and sexual traumas during the Irish Revolution. Oftentimes, medical diagnoses and treatment were strongly informed by gender ideologies, resulting in medical treatment that emphasized domestication and refeminization, in contrast to men's treatment, which aimed to be swift and return the patient to the conflict zone or workforce. The available files in the MSPC give some insight into often questionable analeptic drug and electrical treatments prescribed to female revolutionaries and highlight how, throughout the 1930s, women's mental welfare continued to be connected to the female reproductive system. While various "rest" therapies were most commonly prescribed to those women with the financial resources to benefit from private treatment, the particularly destitute could find themselves committed to the country's overcrowded mental institutions or may have emigrated in an effort to combat their nervous conditions. However, state administrative files may only scratch the surface, meaning that cultural forms of remembrance are as essential as medical files in attempting to further uncover this aspect of Ireland's past. This medicalization of revolutionary women in the post-independence period speaks to the shaming, marginalization and institutionalization of transgressive women which characterizes much of twentieth-century Ireland – and which continues to have ramifications for Irish identity formation into the present.

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7 Personal Loss and the “Trauma of Internal War”: The Cases of W. T. Cosgrave and Seán Lemass

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the paradox that, within a new Irish political system defined by the revolutionary era and the civil war with which it ended, two of the most senior figures to emerge were unwilling to trade on their revolutionary records and experiences, or to revisit them, although those were what first brought them into the public realm as political figures. Cosgrave and Lemass were regarded by colleagues and observers as effective rather than charismatic politicians, disinclined to grand gestures, and rather reserved individuals. Their personal experiences both of inflicting and suffering violence, and of losing close relatives and comrades, left no detectable psychological scars. The only obvious consequence of what they had done, of what they had seen, and of their personal losses was their silence on those matters.

Introduction

This chapter discusses how two of the founding fathers of independent Ireland, W. T. Cosgrave (1880–1965) and Seán Lemass (1899–1971), were personally affected by political violence and personal loss during the Irish Revolution of 1916–23. That span of years can roughly be divided into the events of April and May 1916, during and immediately after the Rising; the War of Independence of 1919–21, when the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fought against the British-controlled police and military until a truce was agreed in July 1921; and the dispiriting civil war of 1922–23, when the separatist movement split on the issue of whether to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921.

The chapter explores the notable and noted unwillingness of both Cosgrave and Lemass to discuss their personal experiences of revolution. It also explores how those experiences influenced their attitude towards former comrades and their families who sought support for injury and trauma arising from involvement in the Irish Revolution. Finally, it raises the question of why personal exposure to violence and loss should produce such varied long-term effects upon individuals.

It is curious that, while recent biographies of these two political giants do note some of their personal experiences during the Irish Revolution in which both men lost siblings, they offer no thoughts on whether these deaths impacted on either man in subsequent years and decades. Michael Laffan's authorized study, *Judging W. T. Cosgrave*, does not even draw on Cosgrave's own account of how a British officer taunted him after the 1916 Rising: "you ... have been found guilty and have been sentenced to death'. Then a pause to see what effect the sentence would have upon me. I remained silent. Then the officer continued, 'the sentence of death has been commuted to penal servitude for life'"¹ If that exchange resonated sufficiently with Cosgrave thirty years afterwards to include it in his characteristically terse account of his part in the 1916 Rising, it surely merits some consideration. Seán Lemass's case is somewhat different, in that key biographies do note his reluctance to discuss the 1916–23 era: Tom Garvin observed that, "like many of his generation, he was part of a conspiracy of silence to smother the hatreds generated ... and ensure that they were not transmitted to the next generation" (187).

This chapter demonstrates that significant new historical sources – the Bureau of Military History (BMH, accessible via <<http://www.militaryarchives.ie>>) records, available since 2003, and the very extensive Military Service Pensions and Medals Collection (MSPC) archive (accessible via <<http://www.militaryarchives.ie>>), which since 2014 has been released in tranches – not only greatly expand the pool of documentary evidence on the Irish Revolution, but also provide deeper insights into the experiences, recollections and emotional responses of people engulfed by what Charles Townshend terms "the trauma of internal war" (110).

1 Military Archives of Ireland (MAI), Bureau of Military History (BMH), WS 208 (W. T. Cosgrave), pp. 18–19.

The BMH was established in 1947 to collect witness statements and related documents from veterans of the independence struggle, the material to be stored with the promise that nothing would be released during the witnesses' lifetimes. The 1,173 statements were finally made available for research in the Military Archives of Ireland in 2003. They were later digitized and placed online, making them accessible across the world. They have since been used very extensively and have formed the basis of hundreds of scholarly and popular works. Yet the crucial "Investigator's Notes", documents which provided a contextual background to each statement, were silently redacted, and the BMH's working papers were also withheld for years. The consequence is a tendency for many readers to treat the statements almost as Holy Writ rather than as subjective works which require interrogation, contextualization and confirmatory research.

Lemass declined to submit a BMH statement, notwithstanding that all statements were to be kept confidential indefinitely although there was a vague understanding that at some distant date historians might be granted access. The MSPC records, by contrast, were created without any expectation that they would ever enter the public domain. When this writer and others began lobbying for the release of the pensions archive, it was believed to consist of about 18,000 files. It transpired that that figure represented only the successful applicants for pensions and dependants' awards; in reality, the archive contains well over 300,000 records relating to over 80,000 claimants. A programme of phased release of this material began in 2014, and a proportion of the records have been digitalized and placed online. Furthermore, the records include well-documented claims for assistance and compensation by dependants of veterans, many of which speak of the psychological damage experienced by families through the loss of a relative through violence, or through the impact of security force harassment (see Crowe).

Contained within this avalanche of new material, to which many further items will periodically be added, are various records showing how both Cosgrave and Lemass wrote about various applicants known to them. In addition, Cosgrave and Lemass themselves applied for and received military service pensions. Their MSPC applications are extremely telling.

Despite the endless stream of commemorative rhetoric heard in Ireland since the centenary of the 1916 Rising, there has been little effort to explore the long-term consequences for Irish communities and society of the seven years of abnormal turmoil which the Rising initiated. Systematic research on the familial and societal ramifications arising from the climate of political violence in revolutionary Ireland has, unfortunately, lagged far behind that undertaken in other countries and among other groups. In recent years the pioneering work of younger scholars such as Gemma Clarke and Brian Hughes, which draws on international developments in historical analysis of violence and its long-term communal consequences, demonstrates the value of such inquiries for uncovering and explaining long-term trauma arising from violence experienced and remembered not only by elites and activists but by the general population (Clarke; Hughes). The BMH and MSPC records at least allow us to explore these questions for the small minority of people actively involved in political violence, whether as activists or as family members.

Bereavement and Male Reticence in the Irish Revolution

W. T. Cosgrave (1880–1965) served as a minister in the underground Dáil Eireann government from 1919 to 1921, and from August 1922 to March 1932 headed the first government of independent Ireland; Seán Lemass (1899–1971) was a government minister from 1932 to 1948, from 1951 to 1954, and from 1957 to 1959, when he finally succeeded the ageing Eamon de Valera as Taoiseach (as the prime minister is termed in the 1937 constitution), holding this office until his sudden retirement in September 1966. Both men were inner-city Dubliners, one the son of a publican in a working-class area, a son of an unsuccessful draper. Both fought in the 1916 rebellion. Thereafter Cosgrave, who had already made a mark in Dublin municipal politics as a competent and scrupulous councillor, developed a significant role on the political side of the separatist movement. Lemass, almost twenty years younger, remained a fighter in the Irish

Volunteers, which from 1919 was better known as the IRA. Both men lost family members as well as close friends and colleagues to political violence during the revolutionary era, and both experienced periods of incarceration. They took opposite sides in the civil war of 1922–23. Cosgrave was a minister in the pro-Treaty government and, following the death of Michael Collins in August 1922, became its resolute leader; Lemass was a significant figure in the anti-Treaty IRA during and in the years immediately following the civil war, before turning his energies to electoral politics in the mid-1920s.

Each man acquired a reputation for a reserved manner. When Cosgrave died, *The Times* of London remarked that he had proved himself to be “a statesman of resource, wisdom and good-will”, “a sound and resourceful administrator” whose quiet demeanour contrasted with “the far more arresting personality” of his principal opponent, Eamon de Valera. In 1964 the British embassy in Dublin described Lemass as “pleasant and courteous to meet although perhaps lacking in much charm and personal magnetism”, and in 1971 *The Times* obituarist wrote that his “uncommon grasp of practical matters” acted “as a counter-balance to the visionary qualities” of de Valera (“W. T. Cosgrave”, *The Times*, 17 November 1965; “Seán Lemass”, 12 May 1971).²

The Times made no reference to the considerable personal losses experienced by both Cosgrave and Lemass during the revolutionary era. Nor did obituarists make much of their religious views: where Cosgrave was a notably devout Catholic throughout his life, by 1922 Lemass was a Catholic by birth rather than by conviction. In prison in 1921 he had antagonized some fellow IRA men because he refused to attend mass or to participate in the communal religious act of recitation of the rosary: “Standing a little apart, he would utter, like a liturgical response at the end of the prayer: ‘Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul’” (Horgan 20). Once married, he did attend mass weekly, most likely because it would have been political suicide not to do so, and also in deference to his wife’s strong religious beliefs. Unlike the pious Cosgrave, therefore, Lemass could not take

2 National Archives, London, PREM13/49, briefing material for Prime Minister Harold Wilson, 4 November 1964.

much comfort from the Catholic faith, its elaborate rituals of forgiveness and of memorialization of the dead, and its promise of eventual redemption.

The Irish Revolution had wrought terrible damage on each man's family, yet Cosgrave never spoke publicly of his dead relatives. This was despite – or perhaps because – of the death of his young half-brother Frank Burke, who was killed fighting alongside him in 1916; of his uncle Patrick (c. 1862–1922), shot dead in a raid on the family business during the civil war; and of his brother Philip (1884–1923), a veteran of the 1916 Rising and of the War of Independence, who died suddenly in 1923. Cosgrave never used this sorry catalogue of loss for political ends, or to justify his outlook and actions. Even in retirement, he disliked discussion of the past, or indeed of anything relating to politics. A former party colleague recalled how “he seemed reluctant even to discuss current affairs privately”: perhaps his memories were too painful to air aloud.³

Lemass was equally reticent about his and his family's experience of political violence both as activists and as victims. Yet immediately after announcing his intention to retire from politics in 1969, he gave a lengthy interview to a trusted journalist. Serialized as “Seán Lemass Looks Back” (*The Irish Press*, 20–25, and 27–29 January 1969), it dealt with various aspects of his revolutionary life, from his participation in the 1916 Rising to the end of the civil war. But even then, there was virtually nothing about his IRA career from 1919 to 1921. He did confirm that he had “quite a number of active engagements. I don't like talking about it because individuals were killed. I dislike talking about it ...” (*Irish Press*, 21 January 1969). He said little about the civil war and its aftermath beyond a few words on his involvement in its outbreak, his escape following the capture of the anti-Treaty IRA's bastion in Dublin's Four Courts, and about seeing his commanding officer killed shortly afterwards during an engagement in County Wexford. According to his most authoritative biographer, Lemass's eyes filled with tears: “terrible things were done by both sides” (Horgan 28). He would never discuss the fate of his elder brother Noel, also a prominent IRA man, who was abducted, tortured and murdered by government forces

3 University College Dublin Archives, P53/325, Hayes papers, undated [November 1965] notes by Michael Hayes on Cosgrave, who had just died.

a few weeks after the civil war had ended with the decisive defeat of the anti-Treatyites, his body buried on a remote mountainside. Lemass did, however, eventually shake hands with the man whose subordinates were most likely responsible for his brother's killing (Horgan 28).

Lemass's disinclination to speak in any detail about his military experiences provoked rumours about his fighting record. As recently as 2010 an iconoclastic biographer maintained that Lemass avoided speaking publicly about his personal experiences because he was embarrassed at the limited nature of his fighting record against the British and in the civil war, as compared with that of his murdered brother Noel, although it was often whispered that he had been "out" (i.e. involved) on "Bloody Sunday" in November 1920, when the Dublin IRA assassinated a dozen suspected British intelligence agents: Lemass "did little to quell rumours of his shady past ... with one very good reason: they greatly increased his political standing" (Evans 14–19). This argument was weak even when first made: if Lemass, supposedly "an active but fringe member of the IRA", had done so little during the fight against the British, why did the die-hard anti-Treaty IRA clique who took the first substantive steps towards civil war by occupying and fortifying Dublin's Four Courts complex in April 1922, give him a significant role there? The proposition that Lemass had seen little action in the Dublin IRA prior to his imprisonment in December 1920 is discredited by evidence in the MSPC records.

Reticence about personal experience and personal loss was, of course, not peculiar to Cosgrave and Lemass. Professor Eoin MacNeill (1879–1945), who served as a minister under W. T. Cosgrave during and after the civil war, never made public reference to the death of his son Brian, who had fought against acceptance of the Treaty his father supported. Brian was murdered, along with five other anti-Treaty IRA men, after capture by troops loyal to the government of which MacNeill was a member. Although heartbroken, MacNeill also avoided that distressing topic in a lengthy private memoir which he drafted for his family in the 1930s and 1940s (Hughes *Eoin MacNeill*). Similarly, the anti-Treaty stalwart Gerry Boland (1885–1973), who during a long and vigorous political career was always willing to trade insults with political opponents, never publicly invoked the memory of his charismatic brother Harry's controversial killing by

former comrades during the civil war (Fitzpatrick). Many men competed in Irish politics on foot of close family links to a dead hero in the fight against British rule or the civil war: generally, however, they did not call up the shades of these dead relatives in order to win votes.

We should note that male reticence about personal loss was the norm in public life in Britain and the wider world as well as in Ireland in the early twentieth century. This was perhaps a product of the extraordinary scale of bereavement experienced by all tiers of society during the Great War, which had a far greater impact upon the ruling elite than previous conflicts: as recalled by one man whose time studying at Oxford ended just before war began, "almost all of my own friends and contemporaries" were killed: "My own survival must be attributed to the fact that I went to India and not to France or Gallipoli [Turkey]."⁴ In 1916 the eldest son of Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith was killed in France; two of the three sons of Bonar Law, the Conservative and Unionist Party leader in successive coalition governments between 1915 and 1922, also died in action (Brock and Brock 286–91, entries for 17 and 20 September 1916). The ubiquity of loss through violence experienced across British and Irish society buttressed "the social expectations that a man should not grieve openly" (Thompson 78).

Such reticence about loss was not confined to figures in the public eye. This writer's grandfather, James Moloney (1896–1981), an IRA officer, was interviewed by the board which considered applications for pensions for service in the revolutionary movement between 1916 and 1923. When asked to explain the anomalous circumstances in which he became adjutant of his battalion on 1 May 1921 while already holding another post, he simply replied, "The adjutant was killed and I took his place". He did not inform the board that the dead man concerned was his brother Paddy.⁵

Jim Moloney's disinclination to discuss his dead brother contrasts with the approach of his wife Kathy (Barry) Moloney (1896–1969), whom he

4 British Library, Sir Olaf Caroe papers, MSS EUR F203/78, undated draft [early 1980] chapter "As a Soldier in India", p. 2.

5 Transcript of James Moloney interview with military service pensions board, 3 March 1936, in this writer's possession (this pension file no. 4413 has not yet been released).

married upon release from prison in 1924, in respect of her own family's bereavement. Her lengthy BMH witness statement is almost exclusively about her brother Kevin (1902–20), the medical student whose execution in November 1920 saw him elevated into the Irish republican pantheon (O'Donoghue). She made only passing reference to her own considerable revolutionary activities, an omission she later regretted: "My part especially after the death of Liam Lynch", the anti-Treaty military leader, towards the end of the civil war in 1923 would read "like a resistance thriller": her anti-Treaty colleague C. S. Andrews recalled her as "an exceptional young woman ... very prominent in Republican circles" (Andrews 281).⁶ Yet when she was sent on anti-Treaty fundraising speaking tours to the United States in 1922, and to Australia in 1924–25, it was explicitly because of her status as Kevin Barry's sister ("Kevin Barry's Sister with Irish Leader", *New York Herald*, 8 April 1922; "Irish Relief Fund", *The Bundaberg Mail* (Queensland, Australia), 23 January 1925). The shade of her dead brother accompanied her wherever she went, overshadowing her own achievements and experiences, and those of her husband Jim and his family. To her grandchildren, she spoke almost exclusively of her executed brother Kevin: for whatever reason, there was never a word about the shooting of their grandfather's brother Paddy.

The contrast between how Jim and Kathy dealt with family bereavement arising from political violence illustrates a wider phenomenon visible during and in the aftermath of the Irish Revolution. This is what has been termed the gendered "emotional division of labour". In the twentieth century this probably varied from one society to another – Jenny Hockey argues that "what we have come to think of as women's universal emotional expressivity is not expected in modern Britain to constitute a highly visible aspect of social behaviours" – but in Ireland, by and large, the public invocation of dead relatives who died fighting for varieties of Irish independence, including during the recent (1969–98) Northern Ireland Troubles, has been almost entirely left to women (Hockey 90–92, 103–06).

6 University College Dublin Archives, Katherine Barry Moloney papers, P94/33, undated [1958] draft letter, Kathy Barry Moloney to Oscar Traynor, who been her commanding officer in Dublin on the outbreak of the civil war. See also Morrison ("One").

This was very clear during the revolutionary era in the bitter debates in Dáil Eireann (the revolutionary legislature) on the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 and January 1922. Of 121 TDs (deputies) elected, just six were women. Of these, one was the mother of two men executed after the 1916 Rising (Mrs Margaret Pearse); a second was the widow of another executed 1916 leader (Mrs Kathleen Clarke); one was a sister of the Lord Mayor of Cork, whose death after a lengthy hunger strike in 1920 had captured world attention (Mary MacSwiney); and one was the widow of a former mayor of Limerick killed by a police murder gang (Mrs Kate O'Callaghan). They had been elected solely because of the dead men whose names they bore. It was considered appropriate for them to act as “guardians of memory” and to invoke their dead menfolk during the debates (Knirck 167–68; McCoole). By contrast, male TDs, including those such as W. T. Cosgrave and this writer's great-grandfather P. J. Moloney, who had lost family members during the struggle for independence, made almost no reference to their own personal suffering, let alone to their dead relatives (O'Halpin and Staines 126–27). To do so would have been considered somehow unmanly: what one psychologist has termed male “grief-related behaviour”, however extreme, was generally known only to their families and close friends (Staudacher 201).

Cosgrave, Lemass and the Travails of Others

Kevin Myers, the distinguished journalist who has campaigned for the proper commemoration of the 35,000 or so Irish men and women who died in British colours during the First World War, has mused on the “poverty and trauma” experienced by Irish families and communities through the loss of so many Irish people in that conflict (8).

The same issues arise for the admittedly far smaller number of people and families directly affected by Irish political violence between 1916 and 1923: the 1916 rebellion, which saw a week-long and relatively intensive phase of combat mainly in Dublin City as a result of which over 480

people died, 52 per cent of whom were civilians caught in crossfire or killed indiscriminately, and widespread destruction in Dublin city centre, which was populated disproportionately by the poorest of the poor, whose experiences were most powerfully captured in Seán O'Casey's 1924 play *Juno and the Paycock*; the War of Independence of 1919–21, where over 1,800 people died, the majority of them between January and July 1921, when an Anglo-Irish truce was agreed, where about 48 per cent of fatalities were civilians, and where the bulk of physical damage to buildings and infrastructure was caused by Crown forces in reprisal for IRA actions; and the civil war of 1922–23, which saw perhaps 2,000 deaths, the great majority of them combatants rather than civilians.

That some people were traumatized by exposure to violence became clear during the fighting. Two examples will suffice. At the height of the War of Independence of 1919–21, Michael Collins, concerned by the mental deterioration of his trusted associate Mick McDonnell, who commanded the hand-picked assassination "Squad" in Dublin, sent him to the United States to recuperate. As civil war loomed sixteen months later, Collins wrote to McDonnell not to rejoin him but instead to remain in California: "keep on at the sun and the fruit until you are all right" (Oireachtas Éireann 168–70, minutes of evidence, 6 June 1925). Cosgrave oversaw similar efforts in 1923 to deal humanely with another member of the "Squad", Frank Teeling (1896–1974), who had become unbalanced after being wounded and captured during the "Bloody Sunday" assassinations, and who had escaped from prison while awaiting execution. In the early months of the civil war of 1922–23, Teeling had killed a fellow soldier, an episode which so alarmed the government that they arranged to pay him from secret funds to emigrate to Canada. But he then shot dead a civilian in a Dublin theatre in an argument about a bag of tomatoes, receiving a short sentence for manslaughter. His MSPC records indicate that he remained unstable throughout his life (O'Halpin "Secret" 349).⁷

It is here that the MSPC records are so important, because they carry evidence of the long-term psychological impact of violence upon

7 MAI, Military Service Pensions Collection (MSPC), W24SP913FrancisTeeling.pdf.

individuals. All claims for discretionary compensation for physical or psychological injury or disablement were subject to medical certification and to exacting review by the pensions authorities, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that those which were successful reflected actuality.

The MSPC records available to date – perhaps 5 per cent of the total archive – disclose, for example, that the renowned IRA leader and writer Ernie O'Malley (1897–1957) received compensation on the basis not only of his “multiple ... bullet wounds” but of “neurasthenia” – the condition which had become popularly known as “shell-shock”, and which is nowadays spoken of as “post-traumatic stress disorder” or PTSD (itself a somewhat problematic “diagnosis du jour of our days”) (Morrison “Witnessing” 124; Alford 1). So too did foot soldiers in the struggle, unknown outside their localities: examples are John Gavan and Thomas Meldon. Gavan was so affected after his imprisonment following the Rising that he was confined to an asylum, and by 1936 was described as “present[ing] the appearance of one whose time on this earth is likely to be short. He is unable to do any kind of work”; Meldon's doctor wrote in 1930 that he had “a form of nervous trouble” which “is incurable” and would inevitably lead to his death. On the other hand, IRA man Patrick Commins's widow failed in her application for a dependant's benefit, although his insanity and subsequent death in a mental hospital arose from brutal treatment he had received in a police barracks in 1921. The pensions board's conclusion was that the offence for which Commins had been arrested – stealing turkeys from a policeman – was unconnected with his IRA role.⁸

The MSPC records also capture the long-term impact of violence upon individual women. For instance, the schizophrenia of Agnes Shortall was accepted as arising directly from her experiences of her home being repeatedly raided by security forces hunting for her brothers. So too was the illness of Lucy Bartley, who suffered a profound nervous breakdown as a result of continuous harassment by the Northern Ireland security forces after partition. Alice O'Rourke, also from Northern Ireland, received disability benefit in respect of “neurasthenia” and related gynaecological difficulties in the years

8 MAI, MSPC, WMSp34REF32029JohnJamesGavan.pdf; MSPWDP30380JOHNMELDON.pdf; DP3795 (Patrick Commins).

following her release after serving two years' imprisonment in Armagh Gaol. The mother of Margaret Doherty, from Mayo, received a dependant's gratuity on foot of the loss of her daughter, who died in a mental hospital in 1928, five years after she was raped by three pro-Treaty army officers during the civil war.⁹

Neither Cosgrave nor Lemass claimed compensation for any physical or psychological damage according to the MSPC records. They are, nevertheless, very much present in the collection, writing in support of people who had emerged damaged physically or psychologically from the revolutionary era. We may wonder if their appreciation of such damage arose partly from their own experiences and losses.

Cosgrave's and Lemass's Own Experiences of Loss

W. T. Cosgrave's first BMH witness statement (WS 208) illustrates the problem caused by the fact that the covering investigator's note has not yet been released. That vital contextual document makes it clear that it was only with difficulty and after repeated requests from an investigator with whom he had served in 1916, and whom he particularly trusted, that Cosgrave could be induced to say anything.¹⁰ The same problem arises with the lengthy witness statement of this writer's grandmother, Kathy Barry Moloney (WS 0731). This explains that she prepared the entire document without any prompting, elicitation or practical assistance whatsoever from Bureau staff (Morrison "Bureau" n. pag.).¹¹

- 9 MAI, MSPC, MSP34REF64269Lucy Bartley.pdf; MSP34REF17007 (Alice O'Rourke); DP2100 (Margaret Doherty).
- 10 In 2000 this writer was informally supplied with copies of witness statements by Cosgrave (WS 208) and by his own grandmother Katherine Barry Moloney (WS 731). These each began with "Investigator's Notes". It was assumed that that material would automatically be released along with the statements themselves. Eve Morrison discovered otherwise.
- 11 Thanks to Dr Morrison's advocacy, the Military Archives are now preparing the Investigators' Notes for release.

Cosgrave's Bureau statement gave a detailed account of the fighting in which he was involved at the South Dublin Union, a public hospital and welfare institution near his home. His initial remarks and recollections were typical of other 1916 witness statements. He referred laconically to how in prison following the Rising, at daybreak he heard the man in the adjoining cell, Séan MacDermott (1883–1916), being marched out: “through a chink in the door I could see the receding figures; silence for a time; then the sharp crack of rifle fire and silence again. I thought my turn would come next and waited for a rap on the door”. He went on to describe how he had been told the verdict in his own case, with the belated addition that his death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment.¹²

Cosgrave's tone changed markedly in discussing the death of one comrade, killed during the fighting at the South Dublin Union while on sentry duty. He was at pains to say that “I believe that the responsibility of posting sentries was undertaken by an officer with some training or experience. My recollection is that I did not post sentries”. He continued, describing how the sentry, Frank Burke, “was particularly keen on his work and duty as a Volunteer”. He went on to tell how a British soldier shot Burke through the throat, and added that “Burke was brother of Joan Burke, the Irish contralto. He was one of the best Volunteers in the battalion, energetic, untiring, and devoted to his comrades with whom he was most popular”.¹³ What is most notable about this poignant portrait is what Cosgrave omitted to say: that the brave young Volunteer involved was his half-brother.

Neither in his Bureau statement nor in any other document did Cosgrave discuss the two other conflict-related bereavements suffered by his family, that is the killing of his uncle Patrick in October 1922 and the death of his brother Philip Cosgrave in October 1923. An English newspaper reported that Cosgrave had had to leave the Imperial Conference in London on news of Philip's illness but “was just too late in arriving ... at the death-bed” (*Daily Express*, 23 October 1923).¹⁴ The anti-Treaty IRA man C. S. Andrews, who respected Philip as much as he despised W. T.,

12 MAI, BMH, WS 208 (W. T. Cosgrave), pp. 18–19.

13 MAI, BMH, WS 268, pp. 7–8, 18 May 1949.

14 Reference supplied by Dr Elspeth Payne of Trinity College Dublin.

wrote of Philip that "the civil war literally broke his heart", and it is said that he took to drink following the summary execution in December 1922 of his close friend, the senior anti-Treaty IRA man Rory O'Connor. That extra-legal killing was ordered by Cosgrave's government as a reprisal for the IRA's assassination of a pro-Treaty TD (Andrews 76–77; Dempsey 880).

Cosgrave left no memoir of the succeeding turbulent years and of his role in them, first as a minister of the underground revolutionary Dáil government (1919–21), then as the minister whose vote was decisive when the Dáil cabinet narrowly accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921 and finally as a minister and from August 1922 to March 1932 as the head of the first independent Irish government which fought and won the civil war and brought unexpected stability to the new state. During these years he lived under real threat: his family home was destroyed in an arson attack in 1923, the IRA plotted to kidnap his two young sons in 1930, and he was the target of a number of republican assassination attempts during and after the civil war. In August 1922, he wrote fatalistically that "none of us are indispensable ... My place will be easily filled", and he forgave his putative anti-Treaty killers in advance (O'Halpin *Defending* 25–26, 68). Whatever stress and long-term damage such danger wrought upon him and his family is unrecorded.

Unlike Cosgrave, Lemass refused to engage with the Bureau. But other veterans who did share their recollections of the Rising, of the War of Independence and of the civil war did discuss Lemass's activities in their Bureau statements. These accounts indicate that while he had been an active and significant IRA officer from 1919 onwards, he somehow stood apart from most of his comrades. One anti-Treaty IRA comrade described him as "reserved in manner, a characteristic which helped him to maintain strict discipline" but which won him few close friends (Andrews 37).

Both Cosgrave and Lemass feature in the MSPC records, both as applicants and as referees. Cosgrave only applied for his 1916 military service pension in 1953, nine years after he had retired from public life. Although his great civil war enemy Eamon de Valera was now in power, he received the appropriate financial award. His application file is rather brief compared with most of the others available. This probably reflects the fact that his involvement and military role in the 1916 Rising was well known and

undisputed; and also the administrative point that by the time Cosgrave applied, the practice of making a transcript of interviews with applicants had been abandoned. In his pension application, Cosgrave mentioned his dead half-brother Frank Burke, not as a relative but simply as one of those of his comrades who had been killed during the fighting.¹⁵ He did not claim to have suffered any injury, physical or psychological, arising from his revolutionary activities.

Unlike Cosgrave, Lemass was still a government minister and a major public figure when he applied for his military service pension in 1942. The transcript of his interview with the pensions board shows that even in that entirely confidential setting he remained very reticent about his IRA career. He was characteristically cryptic when asked about what he had done in the latter half of 1920: "The principal thing ... was 21st November [1920], 'Bloody Sunday'. I was in charge of the Company". When asked, "Could you amplify 'Bloody Sunday'", he declined to do so, simply reiterating, "I was in charge of the Company who were operating". It was left to his battalion commander to state elsewhere that Lemass had taken part in the "execution of [an] enemy intelligence officer". Lemass had very little to say about the civil war beyond confirming the appointments he had held. Asked when he was released from internment, he made only an oblique, almost laconic reference to his murdered brother Noel: "I was released on my brother's death, October/November 1923. I was told I need not come back".¹⁶

Lemass's terse accounts of his own activism contrasts very sharply with what he told the pensions board about another Dublin IRA man. In May 1941 he provided an extraordinarily detailed letter of support to the wife of Charles Dalton (1903–74), whose husband's mental disorder was so severe that he would shortly be confined to a psychiatric hospital for two years, and who was seeking a pension on grounds of disability. Lemass wrote that he and Dalton had shared lodgings in the latter half of 1920 while on full-time IRA service: "he was, I understand, engaged on intelligence work. He was of highly strung disposition, and on more than one

15 MAI, MSPC, WMSP34REF63429LiamTMacCosgair.pdf.

16 MAI, MSPC, WM34SPREF2078SeanLemass.pdf, transcript of Lemass interview with pensions board, 1 October, and Frank Henderson to pensions board, 15 October 1942.

occasion I came to the conclusion that the strain of his work was getting on his nerves". Matters came to a head on the evening of "Bloody Sunday". Dalton returned having guided a party of assassins to "one house occupied by four enemy agents, all of whom were shot". He "had become unnerved by his experience of the morning. So obvious was his condition that I and one of the others took him out for a walk although it was an undesirable and risky thing to do ... I recollect that a tap" somewhere in the lodgings "was leaking and making a gurgling noise", which "apparently reminded" Dalton of a similar noise which the enemy agents had made as they died. Lemass concluded that "your husband was very young and his experience could not but have left a permanent mark on him".¹⁷

This lengthy, fluent hand-written statement is striking not only in its empathic depiction of a youth in crisis, but also in its subject. During the civil war Charles Dalton served in the pro-Treaty army, acquiring the rank of colonel by the age of 20, despite his erratic behaviour. He was generally believed to be responsible for the "Red Cow murders" of three harmless youths, one of them disabled, caught posting up anti-Treaty propaganda sheets. Initially detained in an army barracks, they were taken away by unidentified army officers. Next morning, they were found shot dead in a field. It says a great deal for Lemass that he was willing to write such a powerful letter of support for a man such as Dalton, whose putative victims' deaths bore an eerie similarity to that of Lemass's own brother Noel, whose mutilated body was found buried in the Dublin mountains in October 1923.

Lemass's letter also demonstrates that the rumours about his own involvement in Bloody Sunday were based on fact. His sensitivity to the impact of violence upon individuals who participated in it was, perhaps, accentuated by his own terrible first experience of violent death, a matter which remained a secret of sorts for almost a century. This occurred in January 1916, when Lemass inadvertently shot dead his 2-year-old brother Herbert in their family's sitting room while handling a revolver ("Seán Lemass's Silent Anguish", *The Irish Times*, 21 July 2013). What is remarkable about this tragedy is that, although it was the subject of a public

17 MAI, MSPC, WDPCHARLESFDALTON.pdf, Lemass to Mrs Dalton, undated [May 1941].

inquest and was covered in the national press at the time, it quickly passed from public and, it appears, even from family memory. None of Lemass's biographers mentioned it, and when this writer published an account of the shooting in 2013, based on the coroner's records and contemporary newspaper reports, he was told that Lemass's surviving daughter, Maureen Haughey (1925–2017), had never heard either of the incident or of her lost uncle Herbert. What is more extraordinary is that, even after Lemass followed his civil war leader Eamon de Valera into Dáil Eireann in 1927, and thereafter often engaged in prolonged and rancorous exchanges with his former civil war opponents, no one taunted him about killing his own infant brother. The simplest explanation, suggested to this writer by the late Professor Ronan Fanning, is perhaps the best: that his opponents' silence on this tragedy reflected a fundamental decency in Irish political discourse which was generally obscured by the angry words and hot air of conventional political debate. It is also plausible to suppose that this first appalling exposure to violent death, while it certainly did not turn the youthful Lemass away from armed revolution, had a sobering effect upon him and contributed to the impression of unusual reserve and maturity beyond his years noted by his comrades during the turbulent years from 1916 to 1923.

It is a moot point whether these two political giants' marked reticence about their personal experiences of violence and loss is explained simply by their gender (as the contrasting instances of this writer's grandfather and grandmother suggests). There is a clear contrast with the way in which female relatives of dead heroes were thrust into the political spotlight. But it is also clear that both Cosgrave and Lemass were regarded by contemporaries as particularly unwilling to revisit their revolutionary pasts.

In the dynastic political tradition which rapidly took hold in independent Ireland, it was natural that W. T. Cosgrave's son Liam (1920–2017) would follow him into national politics, being elected to the Dáil in 1948, becoming leader in 1965 of the Fine Gael party which his father had founded, and ultimately serving as Taoiseach of a coalition government from 1973 to 1977. Liam Cosgrave was acutely conscious of his father's legacy, though not overshadowed by it. Unlike most senior figures in his party during the Troubles of 1969–98, he never sought to downplay the significance of the 1916 Rising or, by extension, of the legitimacy of the physical

force tradition in Irish politics up to the Treaty of December 1921. Despite his enduring disdain for his father's political nemesis de Valera – as recently as 2010 he delivered a scintillating, acerbic off-the-cuff public attack on the Fianna Fáil party which de Valera had created – he was always willing to acknowledge the contribution to the independence struggle of people who later became his father's civil war enemies. Even when overburdened as Taoiseach of a beleaguered and fractious coalition, his private secretary had standing instructions always to admit an elderly Fianna Fáil TD who had fought alongside his father in the Dublin Brigade in 1916, and who liked to reminisce about old times despite the fact that he and W. T. Cosgrave had taken opposite sides in the civil war.¹⁸ During the centenary year of 2016, shrunken in body but not in mind or spirit, Liam Cosgrave attended a host of commemorative events. Aged 96, on 8 May 2016, he made an extempore speech outside the building where his father had fought and his uncle had been killed in 1916. Standing beside him was the grandson of his father's 1916 comrade and later civil war opponent Cathal Brugha (1874–1922). The MSPC records show that Liam Cosgrave made various quiet interventions on behalf of the families of people who had fought between 1916 and 1923, including some who had fought against his father in the civil war. Most striking of all, in 1972 he made representations on behalf of the ailing sister of Rory O'Connor, an anti-Treaty IRA leader whose execution without trial W. T. Cosgrave's government had ordered in December 1922 in reprisal for a political assassination.¹⁹ Whether this was an act of quiet atonement, evidence of an attempt to address "intergenerational trauma" or just a routine piece of business for a constituent, only Liam Cosgrave can have known (Alford 63–65).

Seán Lemass's only son, Noel (1929–76), also went into politics. He laboured under the burden of bearing not only his brilliant father's name but also that of his murdered uncle. Whether he also knew of his infant uncle Herbert, whom his father had accidentally shot in January 1916, is

18 Information from the late Frank Murray (1941–2018), who was private secretary to Liam Cosgrave.

19 MAI, MSPC, WDP6664RoryOConnor.pdf, unsigned m.s. note of telephone call from Liam Cosgrave TD, 24 November 1972.

unknown. After his father's death, Noel served briefly as a junior minister (1969–73), gaining a reputation for decency rather than exceptional competence before his own early death. The MSPC records show that, like Liam Cosgrave, he willingly helped elderly veterans whatever their civil war stance.²⁰

Conclusion

W. T. Cosgrave and Seán Lemass present a paradox: neither denied their military histories, nor the hardship, loss and trauma which they and their families endured, yet they never enumerated these in public; neither made anything of their own fighting records for purposes of political advantage; and when in government, neither shirked from the use of extreme force against former comrades in defence of the state. As head of the government during the civil war, Cosgrave, who knew what it was like to receive a death sentence, was an unabashed proponent of the execution of youthful anti-Treaty IRA men caught bearing arms, as a means of bringing the conflict to a rapid end. As an anti-Treaty IRA officer, Lemass presumably defended practices such as the arbitrary execution of alleged informers and the shooting of prominent civilian supporters of the government. As a government minister, he supported the imposition of the death penalty during the Second World War “Emergency” upon six IRA men. These included Paddy McGrath, a Dublin IRA comrade from 1916 and his War of Independence and civil war days, executed in 1940 for killing two policemen.

Neither man published a memoir or encouraged biographers. Bill Kissane agrees with Garvin's assessment that such reticence amongst major political figures was born partly of a reluctance to “open old wounds” (53). There was also, surely, a marked reluctance to trade directly upon the

20 MAI, MSPC, W24A119LAURENCREGAN.pdf, Noel Lemass to Minister for Defence, 2 March 1972.

memory of the dead for contemporary political purposes. Yet there are also indications that the past was simply too personally painful for each man. Cosgrave's roundabout account of his young half-brother's death in his Bureau witness statement suggests that he remained haunted by the idea that he had been in some way partly responsible for it. Seán Lemass refused to talk to the Bureau at all, offered only minimalist replies to questions from the pensions board about his own fighting record, and never spoke in public about the murder of his brother Noel (perhaps partly for fear that the private tragedy of his own accidental killing of his toddler brother Herbert might be brought up in response). Adrian Gregory has noted the persistence in Britain after the First World War of "a memory preserved at a familial or personal level which was at odds with the rhetoric about the war" (46). This was also true of the traumatic memory of the Irish Revolution, for men if not always for women.

The MSPC records reveal that in individual cases each of these political giants privately displayed considerable empathy with people traumatized through exposure to violence, irrespective of their political allegiances. While it is impossible to determine how their own lives and mentalities were shaped by the personal traumas they had experienced between 1916 and 1923, profoundly affected both Cosgrave and Lemass must surely have been. If we know so little of the long-term impact upon such prominent people of political violence and personal loss, how are we to determine the wider generational and societal impact of the trauma of Ireland's "internal war"?

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PART IV

Music

8 Di-rum-ditherum-dan-dee: Trauma and Prejudice, Conflict and Change as Reflections of Societal Transformation in the Modern-Day Consolidation of Irish Traditional Music

ABSTRACT

Literature has been a hallmark of Irish identity for a century and a half, invested most prominently in men. But, since the 1980s music has taken over, a consequence of both the rise to fame of Irish Rock musicians, and the international promotion of the indigenous “traditional” music of Ireland. But because the latter, older, music had been – variously – politically suppressed under colonial rule, and then socially marginalized in the new Irish State after 1922, Nationalist ideology has been pivotal in its revival. Thus the music’s history is imbued with physical and psychological traumas, which contribute to a particular self-image among performers and promoters. Additionally, in modern time, gender equality has become a further site of contention. This does not particularly affect the teaching/learning process, but male supremacy does become an issue for female careers in the commercial presentation of traditional music on touring circuits in Ireland and abroad.

Literature has been a hallmark of “Irishness” and Irish identity for a century and a half, invested most prominently in men – such as Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, Beckett and Heaney. But since the 1980s, music has taken over this mantle (see Cleary, Chapter 5), a consequence of the rise to fame of rock musicians such as Rory Gallagher, Phil Lynott, Van Morrison, The Pogues, U2, Bob Geldof, Sinéad O’Connor and the Cranberries. However, the older, indigenous music of Ireland, that from the pre-recording age, which has been known since the late 1800s as “traditional” music, has also made a mark internationally, albeit on a different scale and in different circles. The core ensemble in this has been The Chieftains, with Clannad and Enya bridging to popular/

rock. Other bands have made a mark in the “folk” and “Celtic” music categories: The Bothy Band, Planxty and De Danann in the 1970s–80s, Dervish, Altan, Danú and Lúnasa in the 1990s–2000s, and several younger touring bands such as Larrakin at the present time. Deeper consideration will be given to these in due course, but first it is necessary to lay out the territories of the traditional genre.

“Traditional music” includes instrumental dance music, social and display dance, and singing in both the Irish language and in English. Prior to that, from around 1000 CE up until the later 1700s, the Irish music that we know of was a Gaelic “court” or “classical” music, performed largely on the harp. It is the legacy of that period that has given us not only the harp as the emblem of Ireland, but also the oldest body of tunes that we have today, a repertoire that is shared by both traditional and classical performers in Ireland. With the decline of the Gaelic order in the 1600s, many of this music’s exponents were deprived of stable patronage, and some redeployed their talents in peregrination among favourable “big houses”. Their music was also subsumed into the “folk” music of the poorer and unpropertied Irish, enriching that corpus not only with variety, but also sophistication and historicism. Consequently, effectively, we regard this music as “folk-plus”, a concept embodied in the use of the term “Irish traditional”. Since Irish partition in 1921 following the war of independence, in deference to those in Northern Ireland who also play and participate in this same music, but whose political loyalty is to Britain, the term most often used is simply “traditional”.

Only traditional music is discussed in the following pages, as it is the form of music with the deepest roots – if not the longest-standing continuity – on the island of Ireland. There are of course other musics, not least Christian churches’ musics which overlap with the European classical ethos. There are also long-standing baroque and classical music traditions, but these are peripheral to political Irishness, being historically associated with the ruling colonial Anglo-Irish, as well as by many in the Gaelic-culture movements. There is also immense creativity and composition in contemporary classical, some of which overlaps with the traditional. But all are quite overshadowed by the huge field of popular/rock musics in all their variations from Rap to Country & Western. No diminution of any of these forms is intended; rather, the focus is on that which has had its

voice denigrated or suppressed on account of being indigenous and “of the native Irish”. There is indeed an extensive literature on all other music forms in Ireland, in particular, work done on older musics by such conscientious researchers as Barra Boydell, Ita Beausang and Ann Buckley, each of whom is also a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland*, edited by Boydell with Harry White of University College, Dublin. The scope of traditional music as employed in this paper is as laid out in the 2011 book *Companion to Irish Traditional Music (CITM)*.

The Harp

Historically, the concept of “trauma” has had considerable association with music in Ireland, in particular with the harp. This may seem strange for an instrument visually associated with angelic celebration and the heavenly paradise. But in Ireland the harp is also known as both a metaphor for, and the political symbol of, Ireland. Officially sanctioned by both pre- and post-independence political administrations, this usage dates to the thirteenth century (Boydell 2011). The emblem first appeared on coins minted by the English jurisdiction in the sixteenth century, when it was pictured with the player’s position to the right; the harp in that same position was also used by the political movement known as “The United Irishmen” in 1791. This underscored the instrument’s political association, a usage which was continued by the new Irish state after 1921.¹ The Guinness brewing company has also used the harp as a logo since 1862, but with the player’s position to the left.

The harp is thus invested with considerable history and meaning in addition to its musical potential. In terms of music, it was seen as

1 This was, however, not ratified legislatively until 1984, at which time the harp was registered with the World Intellectual Property Organization as the Irish national logo.

representing the very roots of Irish musicality – a distinctive, sophisticated, *taught* voice. These qualities were commented on favourably as far back as the Middle Ages,² but they were also feared for their ability to fire up rebelliousness among the Irish chieftainry, and so the instrument came to be despised by the English colonizers who occupied Ireland as an expansion zone from around 1200 onward. The harp was outlawed on a number of occasions. In 1603 the English monarch Elizabeth I included itinerant harpers on a list of undesirables; rightly or wrongly, this has been interpreted historically as a ban, one consequence of which was that the use of the harp became a political statement, its performance and its music an act of resistance to – if not contempt for – the British crown. This contributed to the music-establishment in Ireland developing an inferiority complex about indigenous music which still survives somewhat to the present day.

This, like the continued absence of determination with regard to the Irish language, is a legacy of colonialism which, for music, only began to crumble in the economically facilitated boom of psychological confidence of the “Celtic Tiger” gestation-to-maturity years in the late 1900s to early 2000s. The national inferiority complex about indigenous music did *not* prevent the retrieval of traditional music from impending disappearance following the Second World War; nor did the fact that state arts policy favoured European art music over it. The reappraisal of Irishness which the referendum vote to join the European Economic Community brought in 1972 played a big part in the traditional music revival. But the driving force was the sheer determination of a small hub of individual musicians and music lovers who felt it to be their moral obligation to persistently challenge the music’s marginalization and exclusion by the state; some religious and corporate educationalists and policymakers also played key roles. The present status of traditional music (i.e. that it *is* or *can be* performed

2 Giraldus Cambrensis, otherwise known as Gerald of Wales, is the source of the earliest description of harp playing in Ireland, and is widely quoted. Gerald de Barry by name, he was an Anglo-Norman court servant who was sent to Ireland in 1185, from which trip he drew up an ethnographic-style report which was published as *Topographia Hibernica* in 1188 (Article, “Harp ... Irish aesthetic”, in *CITM* 2011, p. 338).

by around 5 per cent of the population) is a remarkable achievement for just a half-century of committed cultural activism in teaching, lobbying and research. Parallel movements in other countries have also experienced similar success in revitalizing indigenous musics, sometimes with the added edge, as in Ireland in particular, of a national-political impetus. For, while the strength in the “folk” music revivals in England and the USA came from the trade unionists and socialists, in Ireland in addition to these, it was driven also by republican, nationalist political interests, in tandem with the strident views of some of those in conservative political parties between 1921 and 2000. Like the image of the harp in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, now “the music” became a metaphor for Irish independence from colonial hegemony and tastes: “the voice of the people”. Strong among the revivalists have been – arguably – many of those who felt most betrayed by the decision to partition Ireland in 1921.

Uilleann Pipes

The most iconic instrument used in traditional music since the late 1700s is the uilleann pipes.³ Known colloquially as “the pipes”, the instrument is a bellows-blown bagpipe similar to other such forms in Europe, but is unique in that it is fully chromatic and can play two full octaves. Its heyday was the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, after which it declined in visibility and was side-lined to use by itinerant, professional players as a result of the encroachment of more modern instruments such as accordions and concertinas. The pipes declined further after the 1930s in Ireland with the move away from the use of indigenous music for popular social dancing. But during the general revitalization of traditional music in the decades after the Second World War, the instrument began a resurgence, spearheaded by a dedicated pipers’ organization,

3 From the Irish word *uilleann* [elbow], the instrument is so-called because its wind supply is provided by a bellows fixed to the player’s arm.

Na Píobairí Uilleann, which was formed in 1968. This has been so successful that though it had but fifty-five or so players at a gathering in its inaugural year, today it has around 3,600, a quarter of them outside Ireland (Moylan, 2011: 481). Na Píobairí Uilleann facilitates the performance and teaching of pipes throughout the island of Ireland, in Scotland, England and Europe, in North America, Canada and Australia, and even in South America and Asia. This “imperial” dimension operates similar to, say, Scottish bagpipe music, or jazz. During the later twentieth century “the pipes” rose to become the melodic instrument most emblematic of Irishness in music; another one to also so evolve, and with dramatic speed, was percussive: the *bodhrán* frame drum. But melody is the core element in Irish traditional music, so “the pipes” dominates. The iconicity of the uilleann pipes is witnessed often in modern Ireland, not least by the use of its plaintive tones to indicate nostalgia in film scores and advertising. The instrument is also highly regarded by other piping cultures which are involved in playing or developing their own skills and repertoires – notably in Brittany, Scotland, Galicia, Northumbria (England), North Africa, Central France, Italy, France, Estonia and the Balkans.

Counter-Colonization of Space

In 1988 Na Píobairí Uilleann organized a symbolic, celebratory event in acknowledgement of this growing popularity, a “Pipes of Five Nations” concert held in an unusual Dublin venue, the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham. Prior to Irish independence in 1922 this building had been the British-Colonial administration’s military hospital and a retirement home for its old soldiers. It thus had, and still retains, immense traumatic significance, not only for those who recuperated and died here from and in the service of the British Empire, but also for the nationalist-minded people of Ireland, for whom it was an abhorrent, no-go area. The venue was later refurbished and redeployed in the later 1900s as a public amenity, part of a radical restructuring of the arts in Ireland by the then

Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Charles Haughey. Its large, walled grounds and garden became a peaceful haven, despite the militaristic associations. The buildings, set around a magnificent, cobbled parade-ground square, in due course became the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), a key visual arts resource in Dublin.

The pipers' concert, being held in such an history-burdened venue, was emotively disconcerting, on account of the fact that traditional music had so often been on the wrong side of the law, literally outlawed at various times in modern history. Unusual too was the fact that the performance also had a printed programme, a new idea for piping at the time, something normally associated with the literate area of music, classical (with its imperial associations) in which documentation is necessary. Traditional music has always been proud of its largely oral information and learning system, and the iconic instrument that is the uilleann pipes indeed owes its survival to those at the very bottom of the Irish social pyramid, Travellers. The concert at the Royal Hospital could therefore be viewed implicitly as a recolonization of a once-imperial space, for by the end of the evening people were logically thinking, "Why should the pipes and traditional music NOT be in fabulous spaces, rather than just in bar rooms and rural halls? And why shouldn't they have a printed programme?" That the event was being held in that venue indeed drew attention to how a good venue can enhance the experience of music, and to the role and value of reverence and respect in music appreciation. It also prompted consideration of the scale and significance of what has been handed on to musicians in an orally transmitted music, the value of example and patience, commitment and passion in its teaching and learning, study, researching, rote practice and perfection.

Uilleann Pipes and Irish Identity

Because the uilleann pipes are seen as unique to Ireland, and are versatile enough to accommodate vigorous dance playing, complex solo performance and orchestral arrangement, the revival of this instrument is a

distinct chapter within the epic of Irish traditional music. But because the usage of the pipes also spans the two most recent centuries of major Irish political troubles (from 1798 to 1998), folk memory and a historic passion are additionally invested in them. This can be logged into without much effort when a player is seen and heard performing on one of the very many surviving old, historic sets (some of which were made a couple of hundred years ago).

Appreciation of such associations is triggered by the instrument's distinctive voice, and involves not only awareness of its antiquity and evolution, but also of the fact that it has been outlawed in the past (see Figure 8.1).

The pipes' melodic complexity is achieved by considerable synchronous dexterity in the able player, and technical know-how is demanded by its tuning, upkeep, and perfection of its classic repertoire. The pipes also have a roll of honour in an oral history, which is defined by key stylistic players who passed information on incrementally via teaching and public performance.



Figure 8.1. "Justice Kniecboard. Hanging a Piper for Playing Seditious Tunes"

A room can be silenced by a competent performer; the instrument's multiple harmonics are not only distinctively Irish and laden with both instinctive and learned nostalgic triggers, but are also commanding of attention if not respect. Players and aficionados can grow to be obsessive about the instrument and its three levels of music potential: the melody-playing chanter pipe, the three pitches of drone, and the set of keyed "regulators" (additional features which are used to dramatic effect in harmonies by skilled players). The uilleann pipes has the same kind of one-person-band potential and appeal as do complex piano accordions and even the piano itself, and major players can manipulate the pipes' voices in the course of structured solo performances to utterly captivate diverse audiences.

Learning the pipes is suffused with mystery and apocryphal tales too, which involve patronage, magic and history. The founding myth is that it takes twenty-one years to learn them properly: seven years to control the bellows and bag in blowing, and to play the notes in tune; seven to learn melodies, and seven more to perfect the playing technique. This is similar to the logic of old-style, European visual art education, which prioritized colour-mixing, technique and drawing the human body. In this way the pipes are accorded added dramatic appeal, and though relatively difficult to learn and to play in pitch (compared to, say, an accordion), avid learners do typically become dreamily obsessive, many going on to reach virtuosic levels in the modern-day environment of easily available mentors, reference materials and teaching.

Snub to Authority

On the occasion of that King's Hospital performance in 1988, the presence of the pipes of other nations, cultures and regions contributed to a view of their being a collective challenge to imperial greatness, permanency and authority in Ireland by onetime-low-order sophisticates. Such an idea was perhaps highlighted that night by the presence all around the venue of massive portraits of the past British Lord-Lieutenants of Ireland.

In fabulous livery and flowing wigs, to a man they had scowls that would curdle vinegar; colonial administrators depicted in self-aggrandizing and elite remoteness. The pipes' performance dramatically, eloquently and firmly spoke that those figures no longer had contemporary relevance: they were a wallpaper of ghosts in whose counter-colonized halls we savoured the acoustics and ambience that their great architects created, but in appreciation of that which (unlike them) has endured – the music legacy of those they once held in contempt.

Such was the unspoken thought process behind what on the surface was just a music performance by expert players. But it is not an unusual flood of consciousness for those who are the transitional generation of revived musical cultures which have re-emerged in the favourably fluid ambience of postcolonialism. We do of course know that this is history, but the triggers remain, even though the most cynical in the field are aware that it must be conceded that some souls among those Anglo-Irish did engage enthusiastically with – and did contribute considerably to – what we now know as “traditional” music. And though we have also had considerable cause to reflect on Anglo-Irishness in the course of the present decade of 1913–23 Irish revolutionary commemorations (if not permanently with regard to the managed, genocidal starvation which was the Great Famine), generally too we also must grudgingly concede that a native bourgeoisie might not have been much kinder to the indigenous bearer of children, the toiler of the soil, the worker in the mill, the mine, medicine, home or hospitality. The existence of trades unions is testimony to that, and plenty of native ruthlessness, greed and opportunism did follow the Famine. But despite this, as expressed in the 1991 film *The Commitments*,⁴ somehow it may *seem* better that in the local landlords and bosses we had “our own savages”. They may have been easier to live with because we knew how their minds worked, and that somewhere there was likely to be a spark of conscience. And oppression within a class system seems to be a more surmountable trauma than being dominated by a different nationality. Yet

4 Based on Roddy Doyle's 1987 novel of the same name, the film is a music-comedy directed by Alan Parker based on a screenplay by Doyle, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais.

today, Anglo-Irishness is seen as part of Irishness, and the common use of most of its once-exclusive retreats and resorts for indigenous music and other art practices is a fact of life.

Representation and Gender

Historical information on traditional music has been gleaned mostly from writing. In this we see that the bulk of the harpers up to the nineteenth century were men.⁵ Much of this information was made accessible through the research and writing of a woman, Charlotte Milligan Fox.⁶ Following that period, information from the late 1800s to early 1900s indicates that the main performers on other instruments were still, as in other countries, men. This is confirmed by Irish-school painting of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, most of which was done by artists from outside Ireland. In addition to showing that music-making was always done by men, it also informs us that among the poorer classes, music was almost always played for dancers, and that it was performed mainly on bellows-blown pipes and fiddle. Occasionally, we see a woman dancing alone to the music of a visiting itinerant piper, but always indoors for, in public, women danced in a couple with men. All *solo* dance in public, however, was by men – a vigorous, macho activity involving demonstrative

- 5 At the 1781 harp competition at Granard, Co. Longford, there was one woman among the seven harpers; a second took part in subsequent years. At the politically iconic Belfast Harpers' Assembly of 1792, just one harper out of the eleven present was a woman (Milligan Fox, 2013, 64). *CITM*, pp. 64 (Sara C. Lanier) and 340.
- 6 Born in Co. Tyrone, and subsequently living in England, Fox rediscovered the key Bunting manuscripts in 1907 in London while serving as secretary of the Irish Folk Song Society there. She also retrieved additional papers from a granddaughter of Bunting who lived in Dublin, using the materials for articles in the *Journal of the Irish Folk Song Society* and as the basis of her landmark book *Annals of the Irish Harpers* in 1911.

elevation and arm gesticulation using the *shillelagh* [blackthorn stick] as an adjunct, all performed with apparent grace and elegance.

Today, however, we can see significant changes in traditional music practices. “Who” was dancing and “how” were altered first by the activities of the socially conservative but politically radical historical reformers who initiated the Irish-language revival movement,⁷ which imposed a constricted physicality in dancing (Foley 2011: 199, 292). Then, the post-Second World War period saw a revival of traditional music which was inadvertently reconditioned by the universal gender reconfiguration in cultural activities. As well as altering “who is dancing” and “how dance is done”, the post-1950s period also changed who played the instruments and, most significantly, the very function of the music. For today it is mainly women who do solo dancing in public, the body movements are curtailed, with the focus on the articulation of rhythm with the feet (as can be seen in shows like *Riverdance*). And since the late nineteenth century, it has mostly been women who play the harp. Today, too, the majority of young learners on all instruments are female, in a roughly 5:1 female–male ratio. This changes after the teen years to roughly 3:2 male–female, and in professional music the ratio is similar to other music genres, about 5:1 male–female balance.⁸ Also, the most visible change is that music was once played almost always for dancing, whereas today it is overwhelmingly played mostly for listening – to sit-down audiences. Today, the music is effectively treated as a classical music,⁹ with great attention paid to technique, style, repertoire and finesse. Not unexpectedly, in this new playing disposition, the focus is, in most cases, totally on the performer/s, and seldom on those listening to the music.

This means that, today, on social occasions involving younger people, or local communities, more performers will be female, and in professional

7 This overlapped with revolutionary idealism in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and led to the expulsion of British imperial power in the greater part of Ireland.

8 Vallely, 2011. “Gender”, article in *CITM*, p. 302.

9 Part of a wider debate, this demonstrates – arguably – the resumption of an indigenous Irish classical ethos which had been eliminated as a consequence of the destruction in the 1600s of core elements of its patronage, the Gaelic order and its territories.

circumstances the greater number will be male. But we see too that females are coming to dominate prizewinning in the lower age groups in music competitions.¹⁰ This is also the case in the senior categories (over-18), where female winners are on the rise, notably on instruments once identified only with men (for instance: uilleann pipes, banjo, accordion, *bodhrán*).¹¹ Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the organization which runs these competition circuits, has no particular agenda other than to promote traditional music. And, though morally and religiously conservative in its membership, it does not have gender-based restrictions among teachers, learners or adjudicators, and so standard societal rules, whatever they may be in any given decade, apply to its large number of members¹² and to those who take part in competitions. Thus, it is not surprising that the gender balance in the earlier stages of traditional music performance reflects the societal norm.

- 10 In traditional music around forty of these are held annually, in all instruments, and in song and dance as part of a number of events known as the *fleadh cheoil* [feast of music]. The *fleadh*'s raison d'être is the competition, but it also attracts a great number of casual music makers. The *fleadh*'s first level is county or regional; the next tier is province-based and covers Ireland and areas of Irish exile in England, Scotland, the USA, Canada, Australia, as well as interest groups in numerous European countries. A pyramidal structure, the pinnacle is the all-Ireland *fleadh cheoil* held in early autumn.
- 11 The Irish form of the tambourine, the *bodhrán* was introduced as a consumer good popularized by touring black and white minstrel shows in the mid-1800s, was played sporadically in the years up to 1960 and then was given new visibility by the composer Seán Ó Riada. Since then it has risen astronomically in popularity.
- 12 The greater number of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann's members are not habitual instrumentalists, specialist singers or dancers. Of those who are not, some will have once played music or sung, and/or will sing or dance socially. Separate from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and its instrumental remit are the step-dance organizations which have around 40,000 young people, most of them female, under their wing in any year, and have great numbers also in the USA, Canada, England and Scotland. Some of these may also be instrumentalists, but step-dance is a separate artistic endeavour which is centred on dance "schools" which teach, compete and display independently of the music organizations.

Colonization of Male Spaces

Where things have been different is in the area most associated with male-ness – the playing of the uilleann pipes – and the converse, the female-ness associated with the harp. The visual record typically shows us that the piper was male; the practice was “the itinerant piper”, just as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it had been “the itinerant harper” (such as the iconic harper-composer Turlough Carolan). But even in the past it can be seen that there were occasional female harpers and, from the late 1800s, a sprinkle of female pipers (Mulcahy 2018); this is found in other countries with bagpipe culture, such as Scotland and Bulgaria, where a daughter or wife might follow in a father’s or husband’s footsteps, generally driven by musical passion, but occasionally out of economic necessity (*ibid.*). Male supremacy as the norm in society was a tendency which excluded women from piping in Ireland during the first part of the twentieth century but, in tandem with fundamental changes in Irish society, this supremacy in the piping field has diminished. Now there is no general belief in the superiority of the male in piping. Where women may lose the edge in visibility, and consequently in performance opportunities, is that in the older teenage years boys perform in situations that are more “cool”, or more macho, and thus of no interest to female performers. This may give men an advantage in experience of public performance, but since music is also about personality, communication skills and styles, as well as technical ability, it is not the only way in which male players are differentiated from female. Males do have the advantage, however, where they learn music in an environment or family which is more deeply involved in the music, which sees pipes as more appropriate for males, and where they begin to learn from a younger age.

The modern bands tend to always involve women, but most of the personnel of the longer-running bands are male, and where there is the occasional female, she is typically a singer. This shows a tendency in traditional music – as in all music genres – for women to seldom be part of professional, touring ensembles except as singers. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with men-only bands, for these can arise out of school-years

friendships or locality-based association where terrific music-making can result from close, long-term learning friendships; and the absence of women can be explained by a variety of reasons which are discussed below. However, regardless of how it comes about, male dominance can give the impression among promoters, and among young women who may be contemplating a career in music, that female instrumentalists do not, typically, engage in full-time professional performance. This disincentive may have knock-on effects in the international visibility of women performers, and so may discourage the persistence of women in performance itself. Occasionally the absence of women on the stage is due to a promoter's lack of interest in female performance other than singing, or to downright prejudice. But it does appear too that promoters are often blind to the presence and availability of women as musicians, making this a political issue, a situation that can, with consideration, be resolved intellectually. These points constitute a developing flashpoint in the perceived tranquillity of music-making, something which can lead to personal distress, a site of trauma which is additional to those which already exist historically in this music genre.

This applies more to young women instrumentalists than singers. Though it may not be readily visible when one looks at a programme for a festival, it remains a fact that women are less represented in professional performance (in all music genres) than men. Indeed, in the Irish festivals of 2018, the FairPlé collective estimated that around 76 per cent of those performing were male. There are many reasons why women may not feature on festival platforms, some to do with old-fashioned male chauvinism without doubt. But there are also a variety of issues around availability. For instance, women who are competent performers at a high standard may just not have the opportunity to be in bands, or may not have any wish to be in a band. They may also prefer to pursue other careers, establishing independence, driven to do so for personal survival in a society which favours the nuclear family; they may be engaged in having or rearing children; they may have jobs and, unlike men, be unwilling to jeopardize family holiday time, or to take time off for festival performances; or they may have an employer who will not permit them time off. Music is not a secure occupation, and it is more likely that a man will choose to

pursue it on account of the fact that society permits men considerable freedom (and irresponsibility), particularly as regards day-to-day issues with children and their education, social needs and family chores. In other words, *availability* is a large factor. Influencing that may well be the fact that a woman with a young child may wish to travel with her child, which may not appeal to festival organizers since it involves paying for accommodation, or providing babysitting, neither of which men often have to consider. However, even considering these circumstances, the fact that women are less represented in professional concerts still does not reflect the actual availability of women performers, instead suggesting a preference for males by promoters.

Awards and Arbitrary Gender Prejudice

But while the points raised may be mitigating factors in the festival participation issue, awards are a different matter, as these are assigned by judges' preferences. The most prestigious of these is that awarded by the Irish-language TV station TG4, the *TG4 Gradam Ceoil*. From its beginnings in 1998 until 2019, just 23 per cent of awards were given to women (rising to 26 per cent overall, if one includes six occasions where it was given jointly to a male-female couple or to an organization). The breakdown of female acknowledgement in *Gradam Ceoil's* various categories is: "Musician of the year" (seen as the top award) 18 per cent; "Young musician" 27 per cent; "Lifetime achievement" 6 per cent (14 per cent including twice when it was given jointly); "Singer of the year" 47 per cent; "Special contribution" 10 per cent (28 per cent including four times when it was given jointly); and "Composition" 20 per cent.

It has been argued that awards are about nothing more than exceptional talent, pure and simple, so those chosen are simply "the best", and this has often, obviously been the case with these awards. Yet, at any moment, it is undeniable that, considering the volume of music-making in Ireland,

there are always numerous alternative choices possible, each of the highest standard. So it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the TG4 award figures indicate that men are perceived, if not favoured, as champions of the field. For the reasons outlined with regard to availability, it is understandable that fewer women may be available in the “organization”, or even “composition”, category (but, even so, most organizations are held together by women, typically working behind the scenes while also managing families). But this is unlikely to be the case in the instrumental categories of “singer of the year”, “musician of the year” and “young musician of the year”. The singer award lends weight to this point: because at any given moment the vast majority of top singers in traditional music are female, one would expect that the greater number of awards in that category should have gone to women. But this is not the case – it is around 50:50 where one would expect 80:20, so it must be assumed that even here men are being given a disproportionate leg-up.

Awards are not the same as festival appearances, for the latter are based on demand, which depends on visibility and popularity, and women may just not be in the running for the reasons already given. In contrast, awards are, by definition, arbitrary choices made from among many possibilities. One would imagine that in awards given by a national media provider, there would be awareness, if not obligation, to consider gender as well as region, age-group and local impact. As it is, the only reason that the overall number of awards given to women is as high as 23 per cent is on account of song – where women dominate; were this not taken into the calculation of gender balance, women’s average rate of success in the TG4 Gradam awards would be just 17 per cent (or 21 per cent including the six shared awards), not at all a reflection of female excellence in traditional music. Further, that proportion of female TG4 musicianship awardees is lower than even the rough figures given above for the festival participation of women in 2018. Considering TG4’s Gradam record and the poor public representation of female performers in traditional music overall, it is not surprising that singer Karan Casey, harpist Sile Denvir and others were motivated to initiate a pressure group movement “FairPlé” [Fair play] to promote a more reasonable balance (see Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.2. Women on stage at the “Rising Tides” concert as part of FairPlé’s first seminar, Liberty Hall, Dublin, autumn 2018

The Revival and Gender

To assess the presumption of maleness in traditional music, one should perhaps look back to the beginning of its revival in the 1950s–60s. This was a time when much music was still *seen as* being played by men who had once been in *céilí* dance bands before and during the Second World War. Yet men were not the only ones playing by that time, for there were many women involved, but playing “out”, especially commercially, was generally considered inappropriate for women. Many women ignored this of course. These exceptions were singers and piano players without whom *céilí* bands could not survive. Things changed, however, as a consequence of the shift in taste from dance music to Anglo-American popular music, which was driven by music fashions from the USA and from Britain that were spread by radio and by records. As a result, *céilí* dance gradually became redundant for teens/twenties dance, leaving many musicians with no performance outlet. Two things happened which gave them a *raison d’être*, however. One was the establishment of the promotional organization Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and its *fleadh cheoil* competition/festival programme in 1951. The other was the intervention of classical composer Seán Ó Riada later in the decade; he created a new performance format – sit-down “music for listening” – which gave voice to instrumental solos, duets, trios and ensembles, sound *mélanges* not heard since before the advent of the *céilí* band around the end of the

nineteenth century. This was hugely exciting, promoted by Ó Riada's weekly radio programme *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* (Bradshaw: 529–30), on which his experimental (all-male) band Ceoltóirí Chualann played captivating, innovative tune arrangements and songs. Other radio programmes at this time also promoted the solo sound in traditional music, giving voice to *ex-céili* band performers, solo and in ensembles. This complemented the egalitarian “session” scene on which the *fleadh cheoils* were built, and, as a synergy, the overall movement spread rapidly, bringing totally new people into traditional music, making role-models, if not heroes, out of established stylistic players, and providing the foundation for the establishment of traditional music representatively and visibly in the Irish arts. Among the renowned players were such as Willie Clancy after whom a Co. Clare summer school was named – Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, now nearing its fiftieth year. The featured performers were mostly male, but some female players do stand out from this time: banjo player Maggie Barry was famous on the island for her ballad singing, and Elizabeth (“Mrs.”) Crotty was renowned for her concertina playing; Julia Clifford on fiddle; Bridie Lafferty, a pianist, was a celebrated facilitator of music-making. None appear to have suffered discrimination, but though there is no evidence of any rule-bound barrier to women taking up music, there was the matter of the absence of opportunity. The latter is a moot point: if society did not favour women playing music “out” in places far from home and where there was drinking, then society blocked women from performance opportunities; this has been articulated by, for instance, Galway/London fiddle player Lucy Farr (Vallely 1999: 74). Like many things in the sixties, however, women got around all the taboos rapidly, and by the 1980s there were large numbers of young women playing to a high standard, and being encouraged to play by their parental generation. Prejudice lingered on, of course, especially in the recognition of women as instrumentalists, prompting the formation of, for instance, the all-women band Macalla¹³

13 Formed in March 1984, coinciding with International Women's Day, for Dublin Folk Festival. The *début* performance at the Ormond Hotel in Dublin had twenty-six top female players: nine fiddles, three flutes, a concertina, a *bodhrán*, a harp and

in 1984 by singers Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoích and Joan McDermott in Ireland and Cherish the Ladies, formed in 1985 by flute player Joanie Madden in New York. The Bumblebees was another all-woman band of top performers in the 1990s, as was the singing group The Fallen Angels in the same decade and, in Britain, The London Lasses.

The Ballad Phenomenon

Significant to the domination of men in public music-making, the beginning of the instrumental revival was marked by a shorter-lived phenomenon, the so-called “ballad boom”, which was also mostly male. It grew out of the general traditional music revival climate in the Western World following the Second World War. Of the 1950s–70s, it featured popular ballad singing with guitar and banjo accompaniment, a trope borrowed from the ballad revival effected by people like Pete and Peggy Seeger and Alan Lomax in the USA. “The ballads” had formulaic presentation, repertoires and instrumentation. Although they were often denounced by traditional instrumentalists as “trite”, paradoxically they were often the entry point to instrumental traditional music for many modern players: they drew in listeners with their easy, memorable, sing-along lyrics – many of which were old songs – and sparked an interest both in solo playing (on fiddle, whistle or banjo) and also in the complementary harmonic potential of the standard acoustic guitar. The best-known ballad bands were perhaps The Clancy Brothers and The Dubliners (all-male), followed by solo singer Christy Moore; Mary Black and Dolores Keane sang ballads, too, to great acclaim, but their material differed to that of the men. All

a piano, and numerous singers. Its members went on to lead music in bands and shows such as Altan, Arcady and Riverdance. Reflecting the issues now raised in this article, it gradually broke up after four years due to demands of family, lifestyle and location (Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoích and Joan McDermott, *qtd in Long: 2004*).

of these performers have enjoyed periods at the top of the Irish popular music charts and intensive radio play, so they have been experienced in some way by practically everyone in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland alike. But “the ballads” of the 1960s were mostly male-centred, self-deprecating or loss-oriented. Minor-heroic, they seemed to mostly concern the man who has or has had a tough life, as a sailor, fisherman or conscripted soldier, as a victim of family disapproval, imperial savagery, rejected love, poverty, dispossession or emigration. Their sentiment is anathema to the norms of settled society in that they celebrate a fondness for carousing, a carelessness, roguishness, insincerity and irresponsibility in sexual encounters; reckless and “divilmacare”; all the seeming wrongs are worthy, inevitable consequences of the wretched man somehow unjustifiably hard done by. The spirit is vaguely Irish-national and, in the case of a whole subsection, can be explicitly political – rebellious, against British imperialism in the traditions of republicanism or socialism. But most ballads deal with human issues with which the working classes can identify – love, exile and a range of occupations. Women are rarely the main voice, except in tragic scenarios.

In the later ballad era, the themes tended to gradually take on a less socially reprehensible tone, becoming more self-engrossed and adopting nostalgic sentimentality, and the music morphed into less strident melodic contours – the kind of thing found in more international popular music. Yet an Irish feel is maintained. But though the ballad groups’ retention of a distinctive style of delivery and instrumentation marks a distance between their song and American Country and Western balladry, and from mainstream pop/rock, the Irish ballad form does link them to aspects of modern-day Irish pop and rock. The latter, though modelled on American/British styles, shows this in a genre distinctiveness: they have overlaps and crossovers with the older ballads, and also with their root form, traditional instrumental music. Among those influences is a mix of world view, lyric style, melodic nuance, accent and attitude. It might be said too that gender is a player here – as most rock bands are also male. The female ballad singers tended to have a different repertoire, though sharing with the males’ lyrics the sense of having been treated badly or having bad luck in life.

The State and Arts Council

The increasing visibility of traditional music in Ireland is a result of the considerable personal vision, commitment and dedication of a small number of individual musicians and music lovers. But once established, all initiatives owe much to state support. The biggest organization, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, though it generates considerable revenue independently, has enjoyed this since the late 1960s, gained by extensive lobbying by its director, Labhrás Ó Murchú, who was also a senator from a major political party; this enabled Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann to finance an administrative staff and to expand its teaching and promotion remits. The Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA), the major repository of all reference materials, came about by constructive lobbying by its first director, schoolteacher Nicholas Carolan, and broadcaster Harry Bradshaw, depends on state support; hundreds of teaching, research and publication projects all over the island also benefit in varying degree from State grant aid. The Northern Ireland Arts Council has also backed many initiatives, the major one being the teaching of the Armagh Pipers' Club (APC), from 1972 to 2017. Arts council funding is competitive, and discretionary, and the application process places a major annual burden on applicants. Rejection is yet more stressful, as it is in all branches of the arts, and can mean the abandoning of valuable projects which are already running or only partly complete, often representing a lifetime of work by individuals and local committees. Equally, the cessation of funding, as happened when the Northern Ireland Arts Council cut off the APC in 2018 after forty-five years, can damage the artistic reputation of a region, and the aesthetic confidence of hundreds of people, at one stroke.

The history of An Comhairle Ealaíon [the Arts Council of Ireland] (ACE) in Dublin shows how reluctant a state agency can be to accord artistic status to indigenous music: it did not always regard traditional music as a bona fide art form worthy of support. Like all states in the Western world, Ireland tended to see music as a pyramid, with indigenous musics and bad tunes at the bottom, and “proper” music, classical, opera and excellence at the top. This attitude was challenged by a quite revolutionary action in

the year the ACE was founded (1951) by uilleann piper Leo Rowsome and others, who initiated the foundation of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann as a parallel organization dedicated exclusively to the promotion of traditional music. Though it had been identified with Irishness since the beginning of the eighteenth century, traditional music by that time was effectively a rebel constituency within the Irish cultural psyche: it had a cultural confidence which refused to accept the status quo of inferiority which the State had inherited from Colonial times and Britain. Yet traditional music remained beneath the ACE's horizon of acceptability for a full quarter-century. A couple of all-Ireland *fleadh ceoils* were supported, but in 1957 a decision was made to abandon such funding of traditional altogether, a "ban" which remained in place up to the 1980s.¹⁴ Even Na Píobairí Uilleann was not considered worthy when it was set up 1968, and it is a matter of record that Arts Council reports did not mention traditional music by name from 1953 to 1975, for twenty-two years, and did so only when funding was allocated to the first Willie Clancy summer school, at Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare (see Valley). The success of that summer-school in particular paved the way for a renewed confidence in traditional music, and the artistic recognition subsequently accorded the music by state agencies is now positive, but is a status that has been achieved only by the tenacity of the music's performers and various promoters.

Education in Traditional Music History and Aesthetics

Traditional music itself has many hybrid elements, a root form pre-dating the twentieth century, a repertoire with many elements from the mid-1900s and some modern-day stylistic borrowings that clearly owe

14 There are some exceptions, as support was given by ACE to the major harp organization *Cáirde na Cruite's* festival in 1962 and, in 1967, in response to considerable lobbying by Breandán Breathnach, to the influential traditional music magazine *Ceol*.

much to 1960s rock. But the genre is dominated by a distinctive Irishness in melody, rhythm, accent, style and instrumentation. Seen by its performers as simply “Irish” or “Irish-traditional”, this music has had to ride out an additional trauma – that of non-recognition as a bona fide musical form in its own land. The initial revival years of the 1960s saw a rise in popularity through the *fleadh cheoil*, and tens of thousands of eager urban teenagers would descend on the *fleadh* town and typically disturb the local order with their frivolity and drinking. “Lock up your daughters” was a popular sentiment in the comments of the local and national press, which only served to make “the *fleadh*” even more attractive. There was occasional trouble, fights and excessive drinking, with the result that conservative criticism contributed to the music not being accorded societal approval. However, persistent research, music collection, analysis, reasoning, writing and lobbying by individuals such as the indefatigable ideologue Breandán Breathnach (a founder of Na Píobairí Uilleann, the pipers’ organization), paralleled by intelligently informed radio and television broadcasts, eventually led to the inclusion of traditional music in the secondary school curriculum in 1977, and in university degree and research programmes by the 1990s. Considerable ideological battles were the stuff of this transformation of state attitudes to traditional music: arguments with local schools for teaching space, with conservative university-level music departments which preferred to see Irish music as merely one choice, or as a melodic source for classical composition, and demands on the Arts Council for financial support. Following on from the work of Seán Ó Riada, however, pianist Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin established a traditional music identity at University College, Cork, and carried it with him to found a superb, dedicated traditional music campus at University of Limerick. Each stage of this transformation in music education involved considerable fluctuations in stress among the activists concerned – from deep depression to high elation, anger to tranquillity. Gender was an issue in the appointment of lecturing staff, as were age, social connectedness and political viewpoint. Education worked both ways, however, and if the former certainties of the (perceived) classical music establishment were constructively challenged, so too were the essentialist tenets of the traditional music teachers – a mutually productive, if confrontational, exchange and relearning.

Since 2018 considerable debate has been sparked and managed by the women who spearhead the FairPlé movement, with three major seminars in that year alone. Event organizers have quietly responded by giving more visible opportunities to female players and commentators. The “national question” too remains a potential site of division, but this has been intelligently rationalized by historical investigation which has been facilitated by teaching, by access to information through the ITMA and the National Library of Ireland, and by postgraduate research. The involvement of colleges was itself a disputed area in the past, but this too has changed, with many of the younger musicians now college-educated in music. As an emblem of Irish cultural identity, it is logical that traditional music should have had to share the stresses and burdens of politics over two centuries, and in this it has generally responded positively at least as promptly as other art forms, in many cases more rapidly. Thus traditional music may currently be a site of trauma as regards gender, but this seems no more so that is the case for other music genres. That the issue is being tackled by collective voices indicates the strength and authority of abilities among female players in a music which has high visibility as an organic part of Irish society and, so, a territory of ongoing negotiation and reconfiguration.

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DAVID CLARE

9 Traumatic Childhood Memories and the Adult Political Visions of Sinéad O'Connor, Bono and Phil Lynott

ABSTRACT

Memories of traumatic events and circumstances from their formative years greatly influenced the politics of Irish singer-songwriters Sinéad O'Connor, Paul "Bono" Hewson of U2 and Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy. The abuse that O'Connor suffered at the hands of her mother in childhood inspired performances protesting the abuse of power within the Roman Catholic hierarchy and England's poor treatment of people from its former colonies, including Ireland. The effects of the 1974 Dublin bombing on Bono himself and on Andy Rowan (his best friend's brother) inspired several U2 songs. These include classic tracks relating to Northern Irish politics, the reconciling of Catholic and Protestant Irishness, and heroin abuse in 1980s Dublin. Finally, Phil Lynott's experiences of racism during his Dublin childhood led him to repeatedly assert in his work that a black Irish identity is not only possible but also powerful and appealing. This sociopolitical agenda informs several of his songs, including "Black Boys on the Corner", "Róisín Dubh (Black Rose): A Rock Legend" and "Ode to a Black Man".

Sinéad O'Connor, Paul "Bono" Hewson of U2 and the late Phil Lynott of Thin Lizzy are three of Ireland's most famous rock musicians, but that is not all that these celebrated singer-songwriters have in common. Memories of traumatic events and/or circumstances from their formative years in Dublin greatly influenced the political vision of all three artists in later life, as expressed through their lyrics and live performances. In O'Connor's songs protesting the abuse of power within the Roman Catholic hierarchy and England's ill treatment of the peoples it has colonized,¹ she has repeatedly returned to the image of the abused or endangered child – a reflection of what she has called the "torture"

1 I am following O'Connor in focusing on England, as opposed to the UK or Britain more generally.

suffered at the hands of her mother in childhood (qtd in Loughrey). Likewise, the effect of the May 1974 Dublin bombings perpetrated by Loyalist paramilitaries on Bono and his best friend's brother, Andy Rowen, inspired several important U2 songs. Examples include tracks addressing Northern Irish violence, the reconciling of Catholic and Protestant Irishness (which – obviously – also relates to Bono's half-Catholic, half-Protestant background) and heroin abuse in 1980s Dublin. Finally, while Phil Lynott's music was not used for political activism in the way – or to the degree – that O'Connor's and U2's has been, there is one highly significant political agenda in his work. His experiences of racial prejudice during his Dublin childhood led him to repeatedly (if sometimes subtly) assert the validity and power of a black Irish identity.

As Oona Frawley has noted, in studies focusing on Irish cultural memory, there has been a great emphasis placed on “the revelation and subsequent lightening of trauma”, with critics often stressing the importance of “battling against specters that, if brought to light, would vanish, allowing the island of Ireland to finally waken from what James Joyce cannily called the ‘nightmare’ of Irish history” (xv). Through their lyrics and live performances, O'Connor, Bono and Lynott have each linked personal or “prosthetic” memories and trauma to wider issues related to Ireland's past and present (Landsberg *Prosthetic Memory*).² The impulse to relate one's memories to wider society is not unusual: as Barbara A. Misztal notes (drawing on the work of Schudson and Zerubavel), “individual remembering ... occurs in a social context, is prompted by social cues, [and] employed for social purposes” (5; see also Schudson; Zerubavel). O'Connor, Bono and Lynott's social purpose is to revisit the painful past in order to produce lasting, positive change in Irish society and (in the case of O'Connor and Bono) a deeper understanding of Anglo-Irish relations. In doing this, they prove the truth of Jacques Le Goff's observation that “Memory ... seeks to save the past in order to serve the present and the future” (99). That said, these three singer-songwriters have also been

2 The concept of “prosthetic memory” will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

inspired to make links between their own pasts and wider Irish concerns for two additional reasons.

First, as Misztal notes, “Memory can make truth claims and can play an important role as a source of truth when ... political power heavily censors national history” (7). As we shall see, the sociopolitical issues addressed by O’Connor, Bono and Lynott in the songs discussed in this chapter are ones that have often been ignored or minimized by hegemonic powers within Irish society. The second reason for these musicians returning to their pasts in order to affect the Irish present and future is one that is both deeply personal but also universally understood. As Frawley has contended:

Memory seems to be something that we need to make concrete, that we need to *realize* in the world. It is so vital an idea to our notions of ourselves as humans, so utterly indispensable to all we do, that memory has been transformed over and over again from an ether, an energy, into a tangibility that we want to see. (Frawley “Introduction” xxiv; emphasis in original; see also Draaisma)

In some cases, that “tangibility” may take the form of, for example, a statue or a ceremony of remembrance. The musicians discussed in this essay have chosen to turn their incorporeal memories into recorded and publicly performed songs.

Sinéad O’Connor

Sinéad O’Connor has stated that during her formative years in Glenageary, Co. Dublin, her mother Marie was physically and sexually abusive. O’Connor has asserted that her mother “ran a torture chamber” and that “she was a person who took delight in hurting you” (qtd in Loughrey). O’Connor’s parents separated when she was 9 years old, but she and two siblings were left in the charge of their mother – and, after that, the abuse only got worse. At 13, she went to live with her father and his new partner, but she could not settle, due to the trauma she had experienced

at the hands of her mother. O'Connor began "acting out", skipping school and shoplifting, and this led to her being placed for eighteen months in a Magdalene asylum run by the Sisters of Charity when she was 15. While she flourished artistically there, she also experienced the severe discipline and "punishments" that were common in such Catholic-run institutions (Frawley "Last"). This undoubtedly contributed to her fraught relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in later years. She briefly attended a Quaker secondary school in Waterford, before dropping out to pursue her musical ambitions in Dublin. During her teenage years, a cameo on In Tua Nua's 1985 hit single "Take My Hand" (which she co-wrote), and live performances with a band she co-founded, Ton Ton Macoute, brought her to national attention. She subsequently went solo, landed a record deal with Ensign Records and moved to London. The music she would make over subsequent decades (during which she was based first in England and later back in Dublin) would frequently return to the subject of the abuse suffered during her childhood. Her remarkable ability to lyrically and musically evoke the terror experienced at the hands of her mother has been confirmed by her brother, the bestselling novelist Joseph O'Connor, who has claimed that he finds it difficult to listen to his sister's music because it reminds him too much of their painful formative years (Bannon).³ It should be stressed, however, that Sinéad O'Connor has repeatedly returned to images of abused or endangered children in her lyrics and live performances not simply with an eye towards exorcising her own personal demons but also as part of her attempts to make strident political statements related to Ireland and – on occasion – the wider world.

Perhaps the most famous example of this is her appearance on the late-night US sketch show *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), on 3 October 1992. This performance turned into a powerful protest highlighting abuse perpetrated by the Roman Catholic clergy over decades in Ireland, as well as the Church's failure to protect children in its care and in abusive family homes. As someone raised in a home where her mother was not stopped

3 The O'Connor children have suggested that the trauma was worsened by the fact that their mother died in a car crash in 1985 (i.e. when Sinéad was 19), which meant that they never got "closure" in their relationships with her.

from abusing her by the clergy or her Catholic neighbours and as someone later placed in a Catholic reformatory tied to a Magdalene Laundry,⁴ this was a subject close to O'Connor's heart.

On the show, O'Connor stood before a tall metal stand topped with ecclesiastical candles and draped in a green, yellow and red Rastafarian scarf, and performed an *a capella* version of Bob Marley's "War" – the original lyrics of which are based on a speech that Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I made before the United Nations General Assembly in 1963, in which he strongly condemned racism. In O'Connor's *SNL* version, she subtly altered the lyrics of the later verses to make clear that she was condemning "child abuse" committed by an unnamed "regime". She sang:

Until the ignoble and unhappy regime
Which holds all of us through
Child abuse, yeah, child abuse, yeah,
Sub-human bondage
Has been toppled, utterly destroyed
Everywhere is war
War in the east, war in the west,
War up north, war down south
There's war and the rumours of war
Until that day, there is no continent which will know peace.

O'Connor then shouted/sang "Children! Children!" and then simply shouted "Fight!", before she resumed singing the lines "we find it [fighting] necessary" and "we know we will win / we have confidence in the victory of good over evil". Just before reaching the word "evil", she held up a photo of Pope John Paul II; after finishing the line, she tore the photo into pieces and implored the audience to "Fight the real enemy!"

4 A study carried out by Ireland's Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2012 discovered that the Dublin reformatory where O'Connor was sent – the An Grianán Training Centre – and the adjoining High Park Magdalene Laundry were "one and the same thing" (Ó Fátharta). Despite this, inmates of An Grianán were initially excluded from the government's Magdalene redress scheme; they were eventually included after public protest.

During the mid- to late 1980s, various (if sporadic) books and articles drew attention to the physical and sexual abuse of children perpetrated by priests, nuns and Christian Brothers within Ireland's Catholic Church during the twentieth century.⁵ Those familiar with these investigative reports, personal testimonies and semi-fictionalized accounts would have had greater context for O'Connor's protest. They would also have recognized that she was strongly suggesting that, given the number of clerical personnel involved in the scandals, the church hierarchy (all the way up to the Vatican) would have had to have known about the widespread abuse and – by covering it up – implicitly condoned it. As it happened, many simply assumed that the 25-year-old woman making this protest was indiscriminately criticizing the Catholic Church and was tactically using “shock value” to generate publicity. In the weeks following her *SNL* performance, O'Connor was condemned by figures as disparate as Joe Pesci (who said that he would have given her “such a smack” if it had been his show) and Madonna (qtd in Brozan). She was even booed by the attendees of a Bob Dylan tribute concert at Madison Square Garden two weeks after her *SNL* appearance. When she came on stage to sing Dylan's “I Believe in You” and was met with deafening jeers, she twice signalled to the keyboardist to stop playing the Dylan song and then angrily launched into her version of “War”, aggressively pointing her finger during the lines about “child abuse” to emphasize the meaning of her original protest. This gesture was lost on many of the people in attendance (a significant number of whom booed her again after the song was over) – which is ironic given that they were supposedly fans of one of history's most famous “protest singers”.

Posterity has, of course, been kind to O'Connor with regard to her *SNL* appearance. Even though NBC makes sure that reruns of that *SNL* episode show the dress rehearsal version of O'Connor's performance (in which she holds up and does not rip a picture of a Balkan refugee child), many commentators have indicated that they now understand and appreciate O'Connor's protest – an understanding undoubtedly influenced

5 Important examples include the books *Nothing to Say* (1983) by Gerard Mannix Flynn, *Children of the Poor Clares* (1985) by Mavis Arnold and Heather Laskey and *The God Squad* by Paddy Doyle (1988).

by the breaking of similar clerical abuse scandals across the world (see, for example, Agresta; Trecka; Petrusich). Within an Irish context, belated appreciation for O'Connor's *SNL* protest is evident from graffiti on a wall in Dublin's Temple Bar: on the side of a building in Aston Place, the Dublin street-art collective The Icon Factory have painted a portrait of a young, hooded O'Connor accompanied by the words, "Sinead you were right all along, we were wrong. So sorry".

O'Connor's controversial performance of "War" on American television is not the only example of her using the image of an abused or endangered child to comment on politics. As Emilie Pine has noted, in the song "Famine",⁶ from 1994's *Universal Mother* album,

O'Connor's lyrics project Ireland itself as an abused child, suffering a potato famine worsened by the ruling colonial power of Britain. O'Connor connects this historical suffering with modern Ireland, "the highest statistics of child abuse in the EEC," unemployment, and drug use. O'Connor's song thus links colonialism, natural and national catastrophe, and child abuse together under the suffering of the Irish "race" through history. "Famine" concludes with a clarion call for "remembering," "grieving," "FORGIVING," "KNOWLEDGE," and "UNDERSTANDING" (O'Connor's capitals), which, I have suggested, is the intended trajectory of narratives of abuse of women in Magdalen Laundries ... as well as more general stories of child abuse that have emerged in recent years. (168)

"Famine" is not the only example of O'Connor using the image of an abused or endangered child to comment on England's ill treatment of the Irish and, indeed, other peoples it has colonized. One clear example is O'Connor's self-penned 1997 track "This IS a Rebel Song". The song's title is an allusion to a famous statement made by Bono on U2's 1983 live album *Under a Blood Red Sky*; just before a performance of the pacifist anthem "Sunday Bloody Sunday", he tells the audience, "This song is not a rebel song; this song is 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'". While O'Connor's song may bill itself as a rebel song, it is not a strident

6 In the track listing and the lyrics, the word "famine" is in inverted commas, because O'Connor controversially insists that "there was no 'famine' ... Irish people were only allowed to eat potatoes / All of the other food / Meat fish vegetables / Was shipped out of the country under armed guard / To England while the Irish people starved".

one. The ballad echoes many works from Irish literature and discourse (from seventeenth-century *aisling* poems to Yeats and Gregory's 1902 play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* to the last paragraph of Declan Kiberd's 1995 study *Inventing Ireland*) in that it depicts Ireland as a woman. While this is certainly problematic from a feminist point of view (especially since O'Connor – like so many before her – depicts England as a male lover and Ireland as his relatively submissive female partner), O'Connor's invoking of this trope is interesting in that she, as Ireland, truly "embodies" the country by alluding to pregnancy in her first-person lyrics. In the song's opening lines, she sings, "I love you my hard Englishman / Your rage is like a fist in my womb". During the course of the song, the relationship between England and Ireland is not depicted as a happy marriage, as in past Irish Unionist works, or as a rape, as in fiery Irish nationalist rhetoric; instead, England and Ireland are shown as relatively intimate, but it is suggested that their relationship is badly compromised by the fact that England is a violent, cold abuser. This is evident not just from the previously cited opening line, but also from the song's main refrain: "How come you've never said you love me / In all the time you've known me? / How come you never say you're sorry / and I do?"

Critique of English colonialism and its treatment of people from the colonies who subsequently moved to England is the subject of two other O'Connor songs. In "Empire" (a 1997 track co-written and performed with Bomb the Bass and writer/dub artist Benjamin Zephaniah), O'Connor and Zephaniah compare someone they know – a "vampire" that "feed[s] on the life of a pure heart" – to "England". They make links to injustices perpetrated by the British legal system, to the "fall" of England's "empire" and (implicitly) to its vampiric exploitation of "good" and "pure heart[ed]" immigrants from the former colonies and their descendants. While a case could be made that these innocent, exploited souls are (at least in some cases) children, O'Connor's self-penned 1990 track "Black Boys on Mopeds" places the image of the endangered child front and centre in her critique of England's treatment of immigrants from former colonies and their descendants. O'Connor sings that she is returning to Ireland in order to protect her young son from learning too soon about "grieving". This move has been inspired by the shooting of Afro-Caribbean minors by English police

officers – and, as in her *SNL* performance, she traces the responsibility for these killings up to those in higher positions of authority. The song begins:

Margaret Thatcher on TV
Shocked by the deaths that took place in Beijing
It seems strange that she should be offended
The same orders are given by her.

Of course, this verse brings to mind not just Tiananmen Square and black victims of police brutality in England but also all of the harsh ways in which Thatcher's government had treated people chaffing under British rule across the world, including nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland. That said, O'Connor is keen to emphasize that she and other immigrants did not initially come to England with wholly negative views of what was once the "mother country"; instead, they felt a degree of attraction to England that has only been soured by personally witnessing English racism in the former imperial centre itself. Such disillusionment is captured in the song's chorus:

England's not the mythical land of Madame George⁷ and roses
It's the home of police who kill black boys on mopeds
And I love my boy and that's why I'm leaving
I don't want him to be aware that there's
Any such thing as grieving.

O'Connor is simultaneously protecting her young Irish son and expressing disgust for the harassment and slaughtering of Afro-Caribbean youths by English police forces. There is additional sympathy expressed for endangered children in the song's second verse:

7 The reference to "Madame George" is presumably an allusion to the classic track of that name by Northern Irish singer-songwriter Van Morrison. Because Morrison recorded his early work with Them in London and alluded to London locations in several early songs, O'Connor seems to have assumed that "Madame George" was one of his "London" songs. However, it was written in Morrison's native Belfast (and the lyric refers to "Dublin", "Sandy Row" and "Cyprus Avenue"), and the 1967 and 1968 studio versions of the song were both recorded in New York City.

Young mother down at Smithfield
 Five a.m., looking for food for her kids
 In her arms she holds three cold babies
 And the first word that they learned was “Please ...”.

While we never learn if these children are from a BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) background, the privation that they are suffering adds to O’Connor’s growing disillusionment with England. And, with all of the children invoked throughout the song’s lyrics, “Black Boys on Mopeds” is clearly another example of O’Connor, as a survivor of child abuse, drawing on her own trauma to strengthen a political protest.

O’Connor once stated that “child abuse” is the “cause” of “all problems in the world”; she pointed to the fact that so many perpetrators of evil, including Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein, were abused children (qtd in Guccione Jr). Such a view clearly derives from memories of her own childhood trauma, in which she suffered extreme abuse at the hands of her mother and felt “panic and terror and agony” in the Magdalene asylum she was sent to as a teenager (qtd in Lambert). O’Connor has been very open about the negative impact that this abuse has continued to have on her mental health in adulthood, and – knowing how much she has had to overcome – it makes it all the more admirable that she has turned the extreme pain associated with her past into stunningly powerful political protests.

She was an early voice raised against clerical abuse within the Catholic Church – and, as she protested, she always made clear that she still believed key Catholic tenets and was speaking out as someone who still hoped the Church would reform (Mackey). That long attempt at engaging with the Church has presumably ended with her recent decision to convert to Islam and change her name to Shuhada Sadaqat,⁸ but her protests have undoubtedly inspired many other Catholics (in Ireland and beyond) to call for reform in the Church. Likewise, her bravery in speaking out when few in Ireland were willing to do so certainly made it easier for others to draw attention to clerical abuse. After all, several groundbreaking documentaries related to the abuse perpetrated by members of the Irish Catholic clergy

8 In 2017, prior to her conversion to Islam, O’Connor briefly changed her name to Magda Davitt to be (in her words) “free of parental curses” (qtd in Loughrey).

both inside and outside Church-run institutions appeared regularly in the years following O'Connor's *SNL* protest (and, it must be acknowledged, Patricia Burke Brogan's landmark Magdalene Laundry-related play, *Eclipsed* (1992)). These documentaries include *Washing Away the Stain* (BBC, 1993), *Dear Daughter* (RTÉ, 1996), *Sex in A Cold Climate* (Channel 4, 1998) and *States of Fear* (RTÉ, 1999).

As we have seen, O'Connor has drawn on memories of childhood trauma to comment on England's poor treatment not just of Irish people but also others from its former colonies. And she made these protests at a time when the Troubles (1968–98) in Northern Ireland and historical revisionism made Irish commentators (understandably) reluctant to make statements that seemed too “republican”. While one might not agree completely with O'Connor's perspectives on Anglo-Irish relations (or, in the case of her personifying Ireland as a woman, her methods), the power of her political statements regarding England's tangled history with its colonies – including Ireland – cannot be denied.

Paul “Bono” Hewson

As a teenager, U2's Paul “Bono” Hewson had to take two buses to get to and from his non-denominational secondary school, Mount Temple Comprehensive in the well-to-do Dublin suburb of Clontarf. In the mornings, the first bus would take him into the city centre from his own lower middle-class/working-class area: the (at the time) slightly down-market part of middle-class Glasnevin that borders on the thoroughly working-class neighbourhoods of Ballymun and Finglas. The second bus would then bring him out to Clontarf. On his way back home in the late afternoons, Bono would often spend some time in town before getting the second bus home to Glasnevin. His most frequent hangout spots near where the bus dropped him off in town included two record shops: Golden Discs in Marlborough Street and Dolphin Discs in Talbot Street. On 17 May 1974, there was a bus strike in Dublin, so Bono had

to cycle the 6 kilometres to Mount Temple that day. As it happens, this meant that he avoided getting caught up in the deadliest attack of the Troubles. Between 17:28 and 18:58 that evening, Loyalist paramilitaries detonated four car bombs in the Dublin city centre and Monaghan town, resulting in the deaths of thirty-three people and a full-term unborn child as well as injuries to nearly 300 other people. The second of the co-ordinated bombs went off at 17:30 in Talbot Street, which is the exact time Bono would ordinarily have been in or between Golden Discs in Marlborough Street (“just around the corner from where the bombs exploded” (Bono, qtd in Boyd)) and Dolphin Discs in Talbot Street itself.

This near-miss proved traumatic for Bono for a variety of reasons. Most notably, Andy Rowen, the 11-year-old brother of Bono’s best friend since childhood – the artist Derek “Guggi” Rowen – personally witnessed the first of the bombings (in Dublin’s Parnell Street). Andy was helping his father to deliver goods to shops; when the bomb went off, his father locked him into his delivery van. He banged on the door to get out and eventually escaped the van. When he went to look for his father, who “was nobly trying to help people”, he immediately saw several dead and horribly mutilated bodies (Fanning n. pag.). As Steve Stockman – a Presbyterian minister from Belfast, the author of *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2* (2001), and a friend of Rowen – has explained, “In those few moments ... Andy’s life was psychologically torn apart ... There was no post trauma counselling in 1974 and eventually Andy filled the pain with drugs” (Stockman n. pag.).

Bono would witness Andy’s struggle with heroin abuse in the years to come, and this would make him keenly aware of the heroin epidemic affecting Dublin’s youth during the late 1970s and 1980s. He would write songs specifically inspired by Andy’s struggle with addiction for the classic U2 albums *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) and *The Joshua Tree* (1987); these songs include “Bad”, “Wire” (Bono has said the image of a wire is meant to mirror a “hypodermic needle” (qtd in “What Almost Became”), and “Running to Standstill” (which references the seven tower blocks which were built and which stood in Ballymun during Bono and Andy’s childhood in nearby Cedarwood Road, Glasnevin). In contrast with Bono, the Irish government did not formally recognize heroin abuse as “the most pressing of the country’s drug problems” until 1996 (Cullen 8). Bono’s songs about heroin addiction not only drew attention to this severe epidemic; they also

highlighted its main cause – the hopelessness felt by many young people in Dublin at the time. This hopelessness was exacerbated by high employment, an issue which U2 also drew attention to through their involvement in the Self Aid benefit concert (held in Dublin’s Croke Park in 1985).

Bono would later write a song focused primarily on Andy’s experiences during the bombing and the psychological price he paid for witnessing it: “Raised by Wolves” from U2’s underrated *Songs of Innocence* (2014) album. In the song, Bono takes on Andy’s point of view and sings about witnessing the carnage, which he cannot forget (indeed, the lyrics suggest that he can still remember the registration number of the blue Ford Escort which was used as a weapon – “1385-WZ” – and that it is only when Andy opens his eyes that the gruesome images “disappear”).⁹ However, the chorus (“I don’t believe any more”) and key lines in the verses (“a red sea covers the ground”, “[A] boy sees his father / Crushed under the weight / Of a cross in a passion / Where the passion is hate”, and “the worst things in the world are justified by belief”) draw our attention to why the bombing was even more disturbing for Andy than it might otherwise have been – and why it had such a lasting impact on Bono, even though he avoided getting caught up in the carnage himself. Andy and Bono were both raised Protestant, and it was generally understood that the bombers who carried out the atrocity were militant Protestants from a Loyalist paramilitary organization. (The Ulster Volunteer Force eventually claimed responsibility for the bombings in 1993.) In the liner notes to the *Songs of Innocence* album, Bono describes the Rowen family as an “old testament tribe”. As Stockman has pointed out (“Andy Rowen’s Story”), this is because of the family’s size (“10 children meant that like the tribes there were 12 in the house”) but also because of “their deep faith” (which resulted in much “Bible smashing”, as Bono puts it in another *Songs of Innocence* track touching on the Rowen family, “Cedarwood Road”).

It is little wonder that Andy, as depicted in “Raised by Wolves”, had trouble “believing” in the wake of the bombing. Besides witnessing such a disturbing example of the world’s cruelty, the atrocity had been carried out

9 Bono has stated that Andy Rowen told him that he still has “a piece of the car that tried to kill [us]. I’ve taken it with me everywhere” (Fanning n. pag.).

by people who considered themselves “Bible Christians” (i.e. supposedly his own people). These aspects of the bombing would also not have been lost on Bono, the son of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother, who was raised in the (Protestant) Church of Ireland. Many in the Republic were happy to ignore the Troubles in Northern Ireland while they raged between the late 1960s and the late 1990s; there is arguably no clearer sign of this than the fact that the Barron Inquiry into the Dublin-Monaghan Bombings concluded that the Republic’s Fine Gael/Labour government “showed little interest in the bombings” when they occurred and did little to assist the investigations into them (Houses of the Oireachtas 275–76). By contrast, Bono has stood out as someone from “down south” who simply could not look away from the conflict. This is perfectly understandable when one considers that his harsh introduction to the Troubles was the co-ordinated set of bombings that devastated his best friend’s brother and that likely would have killed or injured him on any other ordinary Friday afternoon in school time.¹⁰ What’s more, the Troubles were the sectarian (Catholic versus Protestant) tensions in his own background writ large. *Irish Times* journalist Kevin Courtney (“Bono’s Dublin”) has mocked Bono for suggesting that there were “sectarian” tensions in the Dublin of his youth. However, Bono’s childhood friends and key experiences early in his career have confirmed that this was indeed the case. Not only did Bono and his Protestant classmates and friends experience a degree of sectarian bullying,¹¹ a number of early U2 gigs were broken up by a gang of skin-heads calling themselves The Black Catholics. The gang’s members were offended by the fact that three members of U2 were raised Protestant – Bono, David “The Edge” Evans and Adam Clayton¹² – and that all four

10 Bono makes a direct connection between the 1974 bombings and his interest in the Troubles in his interview with Fanning.

11 It should be noted that when a childhood friend of Bono and the Rowens – the singer-songwriter Gavin Friday (né Fionan Hanvey) – first moved to the Cedarwood Road area, he was slagged by them for being a Catholic.

12 “The Edge” was born in Essex to Welsh Protestant parents and raised in Dublin from the age of 1; Adam Clayton was born in Oxfordshire to English Protestant parents and raised in Dublin from the age of 5.

members were (at the time) part of a Pentecostal/Charismatic fellowship, the Shalom community.

The sectarian component of the Troubles and the lasting resonance of the 1974 bombing (which affected Bono's ongoing reality through Andy Rowen's enduring struggles) meant that during the 1980s and 1990s, he repeatedly addressed Northern Ireland in his lyrics and his on-stage speeches. In 1983, the band released the aforementioned classic track "Sunday Bloody Sunday", calling for an end to sectarian violence in the North. It sought to link the Bloody Sundays in 1920 (when the British Army opened fire on a crowd of Gaelic Football supporters in Dublin's Croke Park in retaliation for assassinations carried out by the IRA) and in 1972 (when a British paratrooper regiment opened fire on a peaceful but proscribed civil rights march in Derry) to Christianity's Easter Sunday. Bono was suggesting that it is nonsensical for Catholics and Protestants on the island of Ireland to shed each other's blood when they share a common belief in Jesus's (bloody) atoning sacrifice.¹³

An op-ed in *The Belfast Telegraph* from 2014 is worth quoting at length here, since it succinctly details Bono's continued engagement with Northern Ireland in the decades following the release of "Sunday Bloody Sunday":

The IRA earned Bono's venomous wrath after they killed 11 people in the Poppy Day bombing in Enniskillen [in 1987]. U2 were performing in Denver, Colorado later that same day and during "Sunday Bloody Sunday", Bono condemned the atrocity, shouting "f*** the revolution" in a speech in the middle of the song. He also denounced armchair Republicans among Irish Americans and said most people in Ireland didn't support the IRA.

"Where's the glory in bombing a Remembrance Day parade of old age pensioners, their medals taken out and polished up for the day. Where's the glory in that? To leave them dying or crippled for life or dead under the rubble of the revolution that the majority of people in my country don't want." He added: "No more."

Bono could scarcely have made his feelings clearer and he backed his words with actions when U2 played a gig for a specially invited audience of young voters at the

13 There is a flaw in this parallel, of course: Jesus actually shed his blood on Good Friday, not Easter Sunday. Bono as much as admitted the flawed nature of the lyrics when he stated that "it was a song whose eloquence lay in its harmonic power rather than its verbal strength" (qtd in U2 with Neil McCormick 135).

Waterfront Hall on the eve of the referendum on the Good Friday agreement in May 1998.

It was only a matter of months of course before the [IRA's] Omagh bomb killed 29 people and ... Bono later wrote a song called "Peace on Earth" which featured the names of some of the Omagh victims including that of Ann McCombe whose husband Stanley said he was honoured that she'd been mentioned and added that millions of people around the world would understand the message. ("Bono Has Never Been One-Sided")

There is one additional song that deserves a mention in this context: "Tomorrow" from U2's *October* (1981) album. Bono has said that, when he initially wrote the song, he thought it was about the Troubles (hence, the decision by the band to have Vinnie Kilduff add uilleann pipes to the track). When Bono wrote and sang the following lyrics, he thought he was speaking about a paramilitary killing or abduction:

Somebody's outside
 Somebody's knocking at the door
 There's a black car parked
 At the side of the road
 Don't go to the door.

He says it was only later that he realized he was describing the day of his mother's funeral, which came less than four months after the May 1974 bombing. (In September of that year, his mother, Iris, suffered a cerebral aneurysm at her own father's funeral and died four days later.) Eventually, Bono saw that the refrain of "Tomorrow" – "Won't you come back tomorrow?" – was not the words of a Northern Irish family speaking to a deceased or "disappeared" relation but Bono himself crying out to his lost/absent mother.¹⁴

It is perhaps not surprising that Bono subconsciously conflated the Troubles with the death of his mother, especially since he endured three events in quick succession that taught him about mortality: a

14 For information on Bono's realization that "Tomorrow" was about his mother and not the Troubles, see Stokes (30).

Troubles-related bombing in which he might have died plus the deaths of two (Protestant) members of his family, his mother and maternal grandfather.

Of course, Bono is unique among the three figures examined in this chapter in that the traumatic memories being discussed relate to something that he did not experience at first hand.¹⁵ However, this does not mean that he was not traumatized by it or that he did not have “memories” of it: as Alison Landsberg has argued, it is possible for people to have what she calls “prosthetic memories”. These are memories which are “neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience” (*Prosthetic Memory* 19). As Landsberg suggests, people with “prosthetic memories” have “privately felt” feelings regarding significant “public” events (*Prosthetic Memory* 19).

Landsberg and other scholars have focused primarily on how people can have “memories” of major events from past generations (e.g. the Holocaust) through exposure to artistic or “mediated” representations of said event, public commemorations or stories passed down by families or communities (*Prosthetic Memory* 10–11, 16–21, 167–68 n. 33). Landsberg herself concentrates particularly on “technologically” produced memories inspired by film and new media (*Prosthetic Memory* 45). However, I suggest that the concept of “prosthetic memory” can also be effectively applied to a situation where a person (e.g. Bono) has intense, even traumatic, “memories” of an event that took place in their own lifetime but that they did not personally witness (the 1974 bombings), thanks to being close to someone with first-hand experience of the event (Andy Rowen) and thanks to said event looming large in the imagination and experience of one’s local or “imagined” community (Dubliners affected by the blasts).

Bono’s traumatic “prosthetic memories” of the 1974 Dublin bombings – and their effects on Andy Rowen and himself – inspired him to write and perform several politically engaged songs. Specifically, the sectarian

15 One could, of course, also write about Bono’s traumatic memories related very specifically to the death of his mother. These memories not only inform “Tomorrow” but also the U2 tracks “Lemon” (1993) (which was initially inspired by seeing old footage of his mother wearing yellow), “Mofò” (1997) and “Iris” (2014).

agenda of the bombers stirred his interest in Northern Irish politics, fueling his desire (strengthened by his own “mixed” background) to see the Troubles end and Protestant and Catholic Irishness reconciled. (As he sings in “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, “tonight we can be as one” – cold comfort to narrow-gauge Ulster Unionists who regard themselves as British and not Irish, but certainly a message of hope in the dark times of the Troubles.) Bono also drew on Andy’s personal struggles in the wake of the Parnell Street blast to highlight the sufferings of young Dubliners battling heroin addiction – a battle, I am pleased to report, that Andy Rowen ultimately won.¹⁶

Phil Lynott

Philip Parris Lynott was born in West Bromwich, England, in 1949 to a white Irish mother (Philomena Lynott) and a black Guyanese father (Cecil Parris), but – from the age of 7 – he was raised by his maternal grandparents in the Dublin working-class neighbourhood of Crumlin. (Philomena Lynott, who greatly regretted that she could not support her son on her own, remained in England to work; however, she and Philip visited each other regularly in Dublin and Manchester throughout the rest of his formative years.) According to Peter Eustace, who was the live sound engineer for Thin Lizzy throughout their career and a Dublin housemate of Phil Lynott’s before he found fame, the dark-skinned Lynott was “very aware of his own uniqueness” in the Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s, and during that time he “was never allowed to forget” that he was “literally a black Irish bastard” (Putterford 45). During Lynott’s early Dublin school days, he was called racist “names” by the students, including “Blackie”, “Baluba” and “Sambo”, and, upon Philomena’s return

16 Bono notes that Andy is still dealing with the aftermath of that addiction – for example, he has hepatitis C – but that he is a “remarkable” and “very poetic” man who has “survived” (Fanning n. pag.).

trips to Crumlin, she even had to “challenge ... his teachers for calling him racist names” (Putterford 16; Thomson 22; Coyne). What’s more, “for years” “many local people” in Crumlin “assumed” that Lynott was “adopted” (Putterford 15). Thin Lizzy drummer Brian Downey (and Lynott’s childhood classmate) has also said that the Christian Brothers who ran their school in Crumlin gave Lynott the task of “collecting what was called the ‘Black Baby Money’, for the missionaries in Africa. So every day he’d come around with this collection box, with pictures of black babies on the side ... this went on for years” (Putterford 22–23).

This constant signalling (and stigmatizing) of Lynott’s race was difficult, but Eustace says that Phil felt that one racist incident from his youth was significantly more traumatic than any other:

A friend who he was very close to said to him one day, “Jesus Phil, you’re not bad for a black fella after all.” That freaked him out and completely undermined him. After that Phil thought, “Well, I suppose I really am different if even one of my best friends can make a comment like that.” (Putterford 45–46)

Lynott was luckier than other black and mixed-race people in the Ireland at the time, in that he was a supremely talented singer-songwriter and extremely charismatic. And it was Phil’s brilliant stage presence, song-writing skills and ever-improving bass playing that helped his band Thin Lizzy – originally comprised of Lynott, Downey and Belfast guitarist Eric Bell – to land a major record deal with Decca Records in 1970.¹⁷ Over the next thirteen years, the band (whose line-up would regularly change, with the exception of the ever-present Lynott and Downey)¹⁸ would produce all-time classic albums such as *Jailbreak* (1976) and *Live and Dangerous* (1978) and international hits like “Whiskey in the Jar” (1972), “The Boys

17 Although this is the line-up that got signed to Decca and that would endure until the end of 1973, it should be noted that, “for the first few months of their existence, Thin Lizzy were a four-piece”: Lynott, Downey and Bell plus Belfast keyboardist Eric Wrixon (who was, like Bell, a former member of Van Morrison’s group, Them) (Thomson 99).

18 Downey did have to take two short breaks away from the group: one due to exhaustion between August and December 1978 and another to recover from injuries suffered after being attacked by a Danish bouncer in February 1982.

Are Back in Town" (1976) and "Dancing in the Moonlight" (1977). Lynott would also record two solo albums, the latter of which features the much-loved single "Old Town" (1982).

In Lynott's work with Thin Lizzy and as a solo artist, he "projected an image of both a tough guy and a soft old romantic" (Kelly). RTÉ presenter John Kelly has noted that "much of Thin Lizzy's appeal was that they really did seem like a gang", and Boomtown Rats frontman Bob Geldof once referred to the group as "the intelligent lad's band" (Kelly; Geldof, qtd in Heffernan and Stokes). Because Lynott's music was – as these quotes suggest – often playfully macho, as well as amatory and "feel-good", he is not usually associated with political activism. And yet, there was one key political agenda running through his work (besides a relatively non-threatening Irish patriotism), and it had its roots in the degree of marginalization he experienced during his childhood – including, as we have seen, at the hands of a close friend. Through his musical compositions and performances, Lynott wanted to demonstrate that it was possible to be both proudly Irish and proudly black.

Justine Nakase has incisively demonstrated how Lynott "articulate[d] a black Irish identity" with the Thin Lizzy single "Whiskey in the Jar" (265). Simply by singing a rocked-up version of a traditional Irish ballad while being visibly black, Lynott was challenging people's fixed ideas regarding "Irish skin" and was also embodying the fraught equation of the ethnic disadvantage of "Irishness" with the racial disadvantage of "blackness" that has so often been made in journalistic and artistic works in Ireland, Britain and the United States "since the seventeenth century" (Nakase 265). As Nakase explains, through "speeches, marches, and charity work the Irish [have frequently] performed themselves as black allies, drawing on a shared experience of colonial oppression", but they have also "distance[d] themselves from blackness in moments of self-advocacy"; this "simultaneous affinity towards and rejection of blackness ... informed the context of Lynott's intercultural production and reception" in Ireland (Nakase 267). Meanwhile, in Britain, the United States and Australia, Lynott faced audiences with long love/hate relationships with both Irishness and blackness.

The black Irish Lynott's reaction to all of this was to embrace his hybridity, and to use it to demonstrate to those inclined to reject him on one pretext or another that a black Irishness was not only perfectly possible,

but also powerful and appealing. We can see how he achieved this if we extend and adapt Nakase's arguments regarding Lynott's "positionality" while singing "Whiskey in the Jar" to other important performances by him (260). As we shall see below, when the visibly black Lynott performed explicitly Irish material, he suggested the possibility of, and can even be said to have brought into being, a black Irish identity. The same task was also accomplished when he sang proudly "black" material while fronting an Irish band and introducing songs in a strong Dublin accent. However, there are also many examples from Lynott's oeuvre of the singer-songwriter deliberately (if sometimes subtly) *blending* Irishness and blackness in his lyrics and concert performances.

An important early example is the song on the B-side of the 1972 "Whiskey in the Jar" single, "Black Boys on the Corner", which was originally supposed to be the A-side before Decca (against the wishes of the band) privileged the more commercial trad-rock song. John Brannigan has suggested that Lynott is effectively mimicking American blackness in "Black Boys on the Corner": "This is Lynott's closest attempt to give expression to black identity and black politics in his work, but of course he can only do so in the masquerade of Afro-American culture and politics" (211).¹⁹

19 Brannigan's suggestion that part of the song's cultural mimicry is its use of African-American musical elements is particularly problematic. *All* rock and roll – even something based on a non-rock source, such as Thin Lizzy's "Whiskey in the Jar" – draws on African-American musical roots (e.g. the blues, gospel, ragtime, jazz, soul, doo-wop, funk, disco, hip-hop and even early house and techno, to say nothing of Afro-Caribbean forms such as ska and reggae and African genres such as highlife). The only arguable exception is the work of post-punk/"alternative" bands from the late 1970s onwards who have deliberately avoided the blues scale (e.g. important Manchester bands as well as U2 during certain phases of their career). However, I would contend that even works by these artists contain African-American traces. Consider the influence of funk and/or hip-hop on the Manchester sound, classic tracks by The Smiths such as "How Soon Is Now?" (1985) and "Barbarism Begins at Home" (1985), and key tracks from what are usually considered U2's more "European"-sounding releases, including the songs featuring "helicopter guitars" and slap bass on the early albums and the songs with hip-hop-inflected beats and vocals on *Achtung Baby* (1991) and *Zooropa* (1993). In fairness to Brannigan, it should be noted that he does believe that Lynott was gesturing towards a black Irish

However, as will become clear, Lynott addresses black concerns openly in various other songs, and the suggestion that there is only an African-American influence at work in “Black Boys on the Corner” misses the complexity of what Lynott is actually doing in the song. Brannigan admits that the song strikes “a note of black pride, or at least defiance” (211), but the lyrics are actually quite a personal statement aimed at those who would exclude Lynott on the basis of his skin colour: indeed, he really *owns* his blackness in the song, singing in the first person about being a “black boy” and proudly boasting that he “doesn’t know his place”. The lyrics may include African-American expressions (e.g. “back lip”), but they also include Hiberno-English (“stick about” versus the American “stick around”) and even archaic British English (“to boot”). There is also one line in which Lynott fuses American and Irish/British expressions: “pull chicks”, which uses the American “chicks” instead of the Irish/British “birds” and the Irish/British “pull” instead of the American “pick up”.

There are two very obvious Irish links in the song “Vagabond of the Western World” (1973), from Thin Lizzy’s next album. First, its title is a variation on J. M. Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and Synge’s classic play is actually namechecked in the lyrics. Second, the song opens with Lynott repeatedly singing the vocal motif “Toora Looa Looa Looa Looa Looa Looa Lye” – an echo of the seventeenth-century Irish ballad “Spanish Lady” and the classic Irish-American showtune “Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ral (That’s an Irish Lullaby)” (1913) by J. R. Shannon.²⁰ In the rest of lyrics, Lynott details the story of a “vagabond” from a “gypsy”

identity in his work; specifically, he contends that Lynott was engaging in cultural “masquerade” on the “Whiskey in the Jar” / “Black Boys on the Corner” single, because, by assuming the “voice[s]” of an “Irish rebel” and African-American “street-corner gang” members across the two songs, he was able to (on some level) give voice to his own hybridity (Brannigan 212). As will be clear from my arguments in this chapter, I believe that Lynott blended blackness and Irishness in his work more frequently, deliberately and successfully than Brannigan’s analysis suggests.

20 Like Lynott, Kevin Rowland of the Birmingham band Dexys Midnight Runners (who was partially raised in his parents’ native Co. Mayo) also incorporated a “toora loora”-style refrain into a rock number: his group’s worldwide hit “Come On Eileen” (1982).

background who has impregnated and then abandoned “a fair young maid, a country girl”. This heartbreaker’s pick-up line to the girl is, “Hey baby, you got eyes of blue” and the chorus repeatedly emphasizes her blue eyes. The strong implication is that the titular vagabond does not have blue eyes but presumably dark ones. The link to Lynott himself (who seems to admire this caddish rogue) and to Lynott’s own father (who only stayed in touch with Philomena Lynott for four years after his son’s birth) becomes very clear in the second verse:

Gave a girl a baby boy
He said “This child is my pride and joy
I’m busy running wild and free
Make sure he grows up just like me
And I’m a vagabond”.

Listeners even vaguely familiar with Lynott’s biography are intended to link this “baby boy” to Lynott, who often publicly projected the image of a lothario (see Thin Lizzy songs such as “The Rocker” (1973) and “Don’t Believe a Word” (1976)). In this song, Lynott makes clear that he is the progeny of a white Irish colleen and a dark “playboy”, and that he, like his father, will not be afraid to woo any Peegen Mikes that come his way. And he is defying listeners to have a problem with that.

A similar provocation is, of course, his famous speech before the live version of the Irish myth-inspired song “Emerald” on *Live and Dangerous*. Lynott says to the audience: “Is there anybody out there with any Irish in them? Is there any of the girls who’d like a bit more Irish in them?” This proposition – delivered in Lynott’s strong Dublin accent – makes clear that he is Irish, even if he also has dark skin. And he is, as in “Vagabond of the Western World”, challenging those who have any issues with “miscegenation”.

While one might assume that Lynott is primarily targeting whites with these challenges to accept his mixed-race status, in the Thin Lizzy song “Half Caste” from 1975, he targets both white *and* black people who have a problem with his “mixed” blood. He portrays the father of a black British girlfriend from Brixton and the father of a white British girlfriend from Richmond as viewing mixed-race people negatively. Lynott takes comfort from London’s multiculturalism (“it’s a half-caste town”) and both sides of his racial heritage.

By taking pride in his black blood in “Half Caste”, Lynott is definitely not downplaying and is indeed highlighting his own blackness, as he had in “Black Boys on the Corner”. In light of the racism and exclusion he had experienced since childhood for possessing black skin, he was not going to let anyone doubt his blackness. Similar assertions of his blackness occur in the Thin Lizzy song “Johnny the Fox Meets Jimmy the Weed” (1976) and the solo song “Ode to a Black Man” (1980).

In “Johnny the Fox Meets Jimmy the Weed” (a funk rock song inspired by time spent in predominantly black Oakland in the San Francisco Bay area), Lynott notes that “Down Skid Row,²¹ only black men can go” and the strong implication is that Lynott himself is able to go there. And there are Irish traces in the song’s lyrics: Johnny Fox’s Pub in Glencullen, Co. Wicklow (established in 1798) is one of the most famous pubs in Ireland, and Lynott borrowed the name of the song’s other protagonist from Manchester-Irish gangster Jimmy “The Weed” Donnelly (Thomson 153).

In “Ode to a Black Man”, Lynott pays tribute to several black heroes, including Martin Luther King, Jr, Malcolm X, Jimi Hendrix, Mohammed Ali and Bob Marley. He also suggests that Stevie Wonder, who had recently released the botanical-themed album *Journey through “The Secret Life of Plants”* (1979), should not ignore black issues in his work, as he seemed to do (from Lynott’s point of view) on that particular record. Lynott’s solidarity with these black figures (and with their blackness) is perhaps clearest in the lines, “The people in the town that try to put me down / Are the people in the town that could never understand a black man”. While Lynott had become a much-loved figure in Dublin by the time of “Ode to a Black Man” (as evidenced from the reaction he gets from passers-by in the “Old Town” video, filmed in his home city two years later), there were still people in Dublin – and there still are some – without a high degree of racial sensitivity. One cannot help but wonder if “the town” referred to in this song might not be Dublin, where some people understood him and others did not. What is clear is that, when Lynott introduced songs such

21 This may be a nod to Lynott’s pre-Lizzy Dublin band, Skid Row, who kicked him out, but only after one of its members – Brush Shiels – agreed to teach Lynott how to play the bass.

as “Johnny the Fox” and “Ode to a Black Man” in his Dublin accent – and, in the case of the Thin Lizzy track, as the frontman of an Irish band – he was clearly embodying a black Irishness.

Jon Bon Jovi has suggested that one of Thin Lizzy’s biggest influences on later hard rock was the band’s demonstration that it was possible to do songs about the Wild West in a rock as opposed to a country idiom (McGoldrick).²² Bon Jovi was clearly thinking of Thin Lizzy tracks such as the early “Buffalo Gal” (1972) and the classic “Cowboy Song” (1976), which undoubtedly influenced songs that Bon Jovi did with his own band and as a solo artist, such as “Wanted Dead or Alive” (1986) and “Blaze of Glory” (1990). Of course, in films and other forms of popular culture, American cowboys have usually been depicted as white. As such, this cowboy trope in Lynott’s work might seem like an example of him exclusively emphasizing the white side of his heritage. It is not known if Lynott was aware that a quarter of cowboys in the Wild West were African-American (Nodjimbadem). What is known is that, in his Wild West songs, he often troubles his “whiteness” by making references to Latin America (where, of course, his father was from). In “Cowboy Song”, the narrator/Lynott gets a job “down below the border in a town in Mexico”, and refers to someone as “amigo”. Similarly, in “Southbound” (1977), he expresses a desire to go as far south as Brazil. (In the studio version of the song from *Bad Reputation* (1977), he sings about going “down past Rio”, and, in the concert version on *Live and Dangerous*, he sings “let’s go down to Rio”.) A connection to Latin American ancestry is, of course, also made in the Thin Lizzy track “Mexican Blood” (1981), in which the Latino ancestry of the romantic protagonists is deliberately contrasted with the presumably white blood of the villainous Texas lawman.²³

While Irish subject matter may be quite understated (or even missing) from some of these post-1975 songs concerned with racial politics in British and American contexts, such as “Half Caste”, “Johnny the Fox”, “Ode to

22 He has stated, “Our whole electric guitar cowboy theme came from Thin Lizzy” (qtd in McGoldrick).

23 Although no specific country is named in the lyrics, “Randolph’s Tango” from 1973 features a “ranch”, a “señorita” and “Latin moonlight”.

a Black Man” and the Wild West songs, that does not mean that Lynott had effectively backed away from the intricate – if subtle – blending of Irishness and blackness which had marked the early track “Black Boys on the Corner”. Consider, for example, one of Thin Lizzy’s best-known songs, “The Boys are Back in Town” (1976) – a track on which Lynott (as he had done on “Black Boys on the Corner”) inserts a subtle Irishness into what might otherwise seem like American subject matter. In the lyrics, Phil refers to his associates as “cats” – an expression which originated with and is still current among African-American jazz musicians. This speaks to the blackness of Phil’s friends and/or the blackness of the Dubliner Phil himself. The name of the place where these “cats” are hanging out – “Dino’s Bar and Grill” – might initially seem like an exclusively American reference. This is especially true for fans who are aware that Lynott included it in the song because, on Thin Lizzy’s first trip to Los Angeles, he wanted to see what exactly was located at 77 Sunset Strip (the name of a “comedy-detective series Lynott had loved as a teenager”) and found an eatery there called Dino’s Lodge (Thomson 191). However, Dubliners famously have a habit of adding an O sound at the end of men’s names (e.g. “Tom” becomes “Tommo” and “Dean” – a surprisingly popular name in Dublin’s working-class areas – becomes “Deano”, which is not audibly distinguishable from “Dino”); and we know for certain that Lynott was aware of this, since his own nickname was “Philo” (hence the name of the tribute concert held in Dublin every January in his honour, the “Vibe for Philo”). What’s more, Dublin already had American-style restaurants in Lynott’s day, such as a celebrated “bar and grill” in Grafton Street called Captain America’s, which was established in 1971 and is still open. When all of these hybrid references are taken into account along with the Hiberno-English included in the song’s lyrics – “we just fell about the place” – it once again becomes clear that Lynott is not a black man simply interested in copying the culture of multiracial countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. Instead, Lynott, while happy to take inspiration from the culture of other countries, never forgets either his Irishness or his blackness – presumably knowing, as he had learned from his childhood in Dublin, that people who see his skin and hear his voice are confronted with a stunning embodiment of black Irishness.

Probably the most noteworthy example of Lynott deliberately blending Irishness and blackness in a song is the epic “Róisín Dubh (Black Rose): A Rock Legend” from Thin Lizzy’s *Black Rose* (1979) album. “Róisín Dubh” is the name of a sixteenth-century love song in the Irish language, which later had its lyrics transformed so that the black-haired beloved became a metaphor for Ireland (like Cathleen ni Houlihan, the *sean-bhean bhocht* or – indeed – the narrator of Sinéad O’Connor’s “This IS a Rebel Song”, mentioned above). Famous English-language versions of the “patriotic” version of the poem include translations by James Clarence Mangan (“My Dark Rosaleen” (1837)), Eleanor Hull (“Roisin Dubh” (1912)) and Pádraig Pearse (“The Little Dark Rose” (1915)). Lynott’s lyrics – like the versions by Mangan, Hull and Pearse – sometimes give the impression that an actual woman is being discussed, but it ultimately becomes clear – as in their versions – that the work is primarily a love letter to Ireland. Lynott praises Irish mythology and namechecks or alludes to famous Irish people from the worlds of literature, sport and music, including James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Brendan Behan, Edna O’Brien, George Best, Van Morrison, J. M. Synge, Bernard Shaw, Seán O’Casey and the aforementioned Mangan. Likewise, he and the band lyrically or musically allude to several famous Irish songs, including “Danny Boy”, “The Mountains of Mourne”, “Will Ye Go, Lassie, Go?”, “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary”, “The March of the King of Laois” and “Rakish Paddy”, as well as songs from countries with strong musical links to Ireland, including “Bonnie Charlie” from Scotland and “Oh Shenandoah” from America.²⁴ For our purposes, what is notable is that Lynott chooses the word “black” (as opposed to “dark”, as Mangan and Pearse had done) when describing Róisín. And even more noteworthy is Lynott’s description of the great hero from Irish mythology, the warrior Cú Chulainn from the Ulster Cycle: “his eyes were *dark*, his expression sullen” (emphasis mine). Between Róisín’s hair and Cú Chulainn’s eyes, Lynott is emphasizing that an Irish person need not be fair-haired with

24 The addition of these songs is also presumably a tribute to members of Thin Lizzy’s later line-ups: Glaswegian guitarist Brian Robertson (who had left the band by the time of the *Black Rose* album) and Californian guitarist Scott Gorham (who played on *Black Rose* alongside celebrated Belfast guitarist Gary Moore).

blue or green eyes; that is to say, he is leaving space within Irish identity for someone who looks like he does.

Phil Lynott was, in the main, adored in Ireland after he found fame, and, as Nakase has pointed out, he “has frequently been cited” by Irish commentators “as proof that the Irish are not racist” (Nakase 275). While it is certainly true that many Irish people genuinely loved – and still love – “Philo”, the “casting of Lynott as an intercultural hero works to obscure and dismiss legitimate issues of racism in Ireland”, in both its past and present (Nakase 275). In terms of Ireland’s past, we can see how the prejudice and stigmatization that Lynott experienced during his Dublin childhood hurt him on a personal level. (And this pain lingered into his days as a teenage musician in Dublin, when he was routinely and casually referred to as “the spade singer” and when it was made clear to him that his skin colour meant that the showband circuit was off-limits to him (Thomson 24, 56, 94).) In fact, it is hard to believe that his early death from substance abuse, which has parallels in the serious issues with drink and/or drugs among black and mixed-race people raised in Ireland during Lynott’s lifetime (including celebrated Irish soccer player Paul McGrath, who has battled alcoholism for years) has absolutely nothing to do with this early racial discrimination (Hertz). However, something very positive came out of Lynott’s memories of being singled out (and stigmatized) for being black during his Dublin formative years: in his work, he consistently demonstrates to doubters that a black Irish identity is not only perfectly possible but also, when embodied by him and encapsulated in his beguiling music, very attractive.

Conclusion

Landsberg has rightly noted that “memory” is often depicted as “an obstacle to, rather than a catalyst for, progressive politics and [subsequent] collective action” in both scholarship and art (“Prosthetic Memory” 144–61). However, going back into memory does not automatically mean that someone is indulging in nostalgia or examining old traumas in

a way that is “privately satisfying rather than publicly useful” (Landsberg, “Prosthetic memory” 145).²⁵ The sung protests of Sinéad O’Connor, Bono and Phil Lynott are not just examples of artists making their painful memories “tangible” in an effort to shine a light on forbidden topics and to sooth inner demons (Frawley “Introduction” xxiv). They are also shining examples of people using memory to – in Le Goff’s words – “serve the present and the future” (99).

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25 It should be noted that Landsberg herself fears that the “commodification” and “privitization” of memory is “atomising ... different groups of people ... rather than building collective solidarities” (“Prosthetic Memory” 145). However, she suggests that “commodification does not necessarily mean atomisation. Paradoxically, it can help overcome the atomising effect of private memory ... by making memory more radically public”, especially with the aid of “new technologies and the further development of old ones”, such as “museums, the cinema, [and] the Internet” (“Prosthetic Memory” 158).

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PART V

Creative Writing

EMER MARTIN

10 Hungry Ghosts: Trauma and Addiction in Irish Literature

ABSTRACT

The hungry ghosts, with their bulging bellies and skinny necks, are familiar figures in Buddhism. These disturbed phantoms suffer from unresolved trauma in a past life that manifests as a bottomless craving. My books are full of hungry ghosts. History is a traumatic, violent, unsettled place for most nations. However, Ireland has had a peculiarly lengthy brutal colonial story and has struggled to exist in the face of the monolithic controlling presence of its neighbouring island. The consequences of all this turmoil play out through the characters in *Breakfast in Babylon*, *The Cruelty Men* and its sequel *Headwreck*. These books trace the repercussions of such traumas both internationally and in modern Ireland. The hungry ghosts are often alluded to in reference to addiction. The drunken Irish is a cliché but not without truth, and the postcolonial dependence on alcohol and drugs among the Irish people can be seen as a self-medicating and a symptom of a festering, unresolved wound.

Hungry ghosts, with their bulging bellies and skinny necks, are familiar figures in Buddhism. Caught in their own realm on the wheel of life, they thirst, but cannot be quenched; they hunger, but cannot be satiated. According to tradition, these disturbing phantoms are suffering from unresolved trauma in a past life that has now manifested as a bottomless craving. As an Irish person, I look through the lens of the colonized and abused people of history. Often, my characters are hungry ghosts entangled in a great web of trauma, both soothing and devouring themselves with addiction, as they wait for the spider to come. Many of these characters are in the grip of addiction as a salve for their pain.

You could surmise that all humans come from a legacy of generational trauma, but for some the legacy is heavier than others. History is a long path that began for all of us on one continent. For those of us living outside the

African continent, some of our ancestors came from Africa within the last few hundred years, and some of us are descended from the first humans who migrated from there 60,000 years ago. At one point, the human population was only 10,000 individuals. However different we look, or sound, or seem, we are all descendants of that small group. Our arrival to wherever we are on the planet is the product of a unique and incredible journey of migration. We are one part of a long, arduous, distinct story that will continue on after we are gone. However, history has sped up in the last three centuries in an unprecedented way. Expeditiously, we have shifted from a primarily rural life heavily connected to the natural world, to a technological world. Moreover, many of our societies have undergone political revolutions, industrialization, imperialism and the carnage of modern technological warfare. Our recent ancestors survived so much. No matter where our family is from, our people lived and endured all of this turmoil in order to produce us. They must have been tough, resourceful and lucky – otherwise we would not have been born. They must also have endured suffering and struggle. In that sense, trauma is an inescapable part of the human experience. So, if everyone is a product of generational trauma, are there peoples who are more traumatized than others? Furthermore, when does trauma overwhelm us and lead to addiction? One of the keys to this is power. If your ancestors were born in countries that industrialized earlier, they had power over the population in the countries that became their colonies. Inevitably, there was more suffering, and as a result, more trauma, in countries that were imperialized.

Colonialism sliced open a great wound in the world that has never been sutured. Ireland suffered longer under colonization than most other countries, but shares a parallel experience with many other places on the planet. When the Europeans discovered the Americas, they kicked off a system of predatory global capitalism, and used the specious narrative of racial superiority as an excuse to grab land and thief resources. This was soon followed by the cataclysm of the Industrial Revolution which consolidated the economic model of capitalism, until imperialism became a rampant system of exploitation perpetrated by mostly European industrial nations on the rest of the world. Colonialism was a trauma monster that brought attempted cultural annihilation, ethnic cleansing, racism, constant

displacement and engineered famines not only in Ireland, but around the globe. Clearly, every country suffers internally, but imperialism was devised, much like Battered Woman Syndrome, to undermine the psyche of other countries, until they internalized the notion of their own inferiority and worthlessness, making it hard for them to extricate themselves and go on to have healthy functioning societies even after their foreign rulers were gone. When I look at my own books, and the characters populating them, distinct patterns emerge for me. On reflection, the amount of addiction among powerless people as a direct response to both historical and personal trauma is present in all of my work. These traumatized characters are the Hungry Ghosts in all my fiction.

My first novel, *Breakfast in Babylon*, explores addiction and the use of drugs to both alleviate poverty and to have fun in an otherwise drab environment. The main character is the young Irish immigrant Isolt, who lives among the spare nuts and bolts that have rolled into Paris from a depressed worldwide recession in the 1980s. Isolt lives in an international world. When you are an immigrant, it is typical to find yourself among other immigrants. The lower rungs of society are the most multicultural. The poor have been living with diversity centuries before it became a hipster hashtag. Isolt is an adventurer and drifter, as she declares in the first line of the book: “I am not Jesus Christ. I left home younger than he, walked further and stayed out in the wilderness longer”. Thus, she immediately implies that she is not an important person, but also defiantly claims her journey. That was the first sentence I ever had published anywhere and, looking back, it a challenge to the once-immutable religious power as defined by my experience being raised in a rigidly Catholic society. Moreover, it is also a wish for my iconoclastic characters to stray, to walk further, and stay out longer. They wander, as the knights in the old Arthurian legends wandered – into the forest where it is thickest. Finally, Isolt’s mutinous cultural declaration was an emphatic indication that my writing would have a global focus, and not be contained to the small island where I was born.

Granted, it is Irish literature, because I’m Irish, but my characters are part of an array of losers trapped in capitalism’s sticky global web. As the Puerto Rican–American character Christopher states, “This was a multicultural environment of flotsam from many regions of the more ragged reaches

of the globe; a herd of black sheep living precariously and resentfully on top of one another. Many lives that had gone off the rails collided here for an instant" (*Breakfast* 57). Indeed, their interactions feel more like "collisions" than anything else. They are postcolonial victims of a depressed economy in the 1980s where Thatcher and Reagan were the grotesque figureheads of rampant privatization. There was a consolidated backlash against the civilizing and equalizing influences that the 1960s civil rights movements had wrought. Thatcher's and Reagan's policies caused much trauma in the Western world. Thatcher's famous claim that there is no society, there is only the individual, was a signal to an irresponsible ruling class that they could do whatever they wanted at the expense of everyone else. Amidst this cavalier attitude of the rulers, the characters are defiant in their pursuit of drugs and alcohol as a meaning in itself. Obviously, self-obliteration is a response to the numbing effects of their poverty. However, the drugs don't just numb them and cloak their pain, they are also an investigation into how far they can push the limits of their precarious existences in squats, as beggars, losers and the displaced of the world. Taking drugs is disapproved of by the authorities because people are out of control, and so drugs are a facet of their resistance against conformity to the expectations of their class. The drugs are recreational but also offer insights, and deepen their existence. Predictably, they are an end in themselves for the displaced characters who spend their grim days scamming and begging in order to spend their evenings high.

There are awful days without money. Without that no food or cigarettes. No bus fare to look for work. Days of sitting and going nowhere. Tired and weary, relieved when night comes and she can creep back to bed. What gets her through those days? When she can remember better? In crowded schools swearing to be brilliant. But never refugees, immigrants, exiles. (*Breakfast* 252)

Evidently, what "gets them through" is their daily pursuit of drugs and alcohol to while away the nights. Their poverty is a trap as they don't even have the means to search for work in order to earn a wage. They beg, squat and spend their money on the black market for drugs, thus living as far outside of the capitalist system as is possible in the cities of the industrial world. Isolt has found herself among "refugees, immigrants, exiles"

(*Breakfast* 252). Many of the characters gathered are from regions that have been heavily colonized, and thus subjected to trauma. These marginalized outcasts don't have much interaction with the white French population, so they form their own drug-taking fellowship as an antidote to being left out of history. This rebellion of seeking drugs, despite the societies disapproval, confirms their identity and their affinity to one another in defiance of social norms. As addicts, they form a community of inescapable isolation. However, their camaraderie is superficial as they live "resentfully on top of one another" (*Breakfast* 57). Though they come from countries that have been colonized, they don't necessarily empathize with each other. Historically, trauma is more likely to blunt empathy than reinforce it. Resources are few and much sought after in the squatting world of Paris. It is a world where there are very few legal protections. The Gendarmes can come in at any time with dogs and batons and clear out illegally occupied buildings. The characters lack any resources and are regularly scattered to the wind and homeless for periods of time. As "refugees, immigrants, exiles", they have no support system to lean on, and so they haunt the fringes as ghosts subject to fathomless craving. In the face of such precariousness, this fluid and fragile community uses drugs and alcohol as a respite as if it were the only escape for the dispossessed.

The indication that the pursuit of drugs and alcohol is fatally seen as a form of resistance is introduced through the character of Becky in the first chapter of *Breakfast in Babylon*. Becky is a tall, blond, white English woman, but she is on the downside of power as a working-class Jewish woman who has escaped from the trauma of a marriage rife with domestic violence. She is forced to flee, leaving her children with her abusive husband. When she states her dilemma, it is clear that she has no illusions about her position in life and the status of those around her:

"I'm tired of all this shit. My liver is fucked, my brain is dead, my whole body is rotting. I've nothing to look forward to but death on the streets. My husband hates me and my kids have probably forgotten me and blame me for abandoning them and all my so-called friends are freaks and misfits ..."

"Oh well," Jim said. "At least you have heroin to fall back on." (*Breakfast* 18)

Despite the fact that she was born white in a wealthy industrialized country, Becky is displaced by the trauma of domestic violence. She too loses stability and joins the ranks of the poor. Women who are battered are often forced to leave their homes and children in order to survive. She has lost her entire support system of religion, family and country. In the current society, there is very little recourse for women in abusive relationships and so it is clear that, because of gendered violence, she has been uprooted, much like a refugee. As a battered woman, she too exists as a hungry ghost looking for her moment of respite from her trauma in the comfort of a high which makes her feel calm, pure and trouble-free. This connection between trauma and addiction is recognized by clinicians:

The reasons behind this common co-occurrence of addiction and trauma are complex. For one thing, some people struggling to manage the effects of trauma in their lives may turn to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. PTSD symptoms like agitation, hypersensitivity to loud noises or sudden movements, depression, social withdrawal and insomnia may seem more manageable through the use of sedating or stimulating drugs depending on the symptom. However, addiction soon becomes yet another problem in the trauma survivor's life. Before long, the "cure" no longer works and causes far more pain to an already suffering person. (Carrier Clinic n. pag.)

Undoubtedly, though drugs give Becky relief, they are a lethal medicine. The cure for the symptoms of her trauma eventually compounds the pain. This destructive paradox ultimately leads to her death. One evening, high, she trips and falls down the stairs. Becky's is the first death as a result of addiction in the novel. Her demise indicates that addiction soothes the hurt of dispossession, but it is a poisonous balm. The novel then takes us closer to the supplier of addictive substances, Christopher, and explores his unique but universal trauma.

Christopher is a Puerto Rican from Detroit and is suffering from political and economic trauma. His backstory is an extensive, chapter-long exploration of trauma and addiction. He is a minority of colour from an annexed country in a city decimated by the collapse of industry due to globalization. He might have been a revolutionary, but he became a junkie. Part of trauma is the feeling of loss of power over your life. Ironically, his only access to power is that of the dealer:

He had power over people. He sold them the drugs they wanted or needed. He had, at seventeen, all the respect of a cardinal among his shabby flock. His flock of desperate, poor, exhausted junkies or pleasure-seekers who thought they could avoid the traps of addiction. (*Breakfast* 33)

Christopher needs this power, as he is born to a poor single mother from Puerto Rico and selling drugs is his only chance economically. The political impotence of his community in 1970s Detroit is apparent and was engineered by the authorities. The civilizing wave of the 1960s protest movements that gave minorities and women voice and the promise of power was systematically dismantled in subsequent decades. The disenfranchising trauma waged by capitalism has been deliberate and vindictive; it is no accident that the wealth gap in the US went back to the astronomical inequities of the gilded age after the 1960s. The intentional nature of this can be seen in the Trilateral Commission, founded as a think tank by the oil scion David Rockefeller in 1973. This was a direct response to the establishment's shock when minorities and women rose up against capitalism and patriarchal systems in the 1960s. People of colour were demanding to be treated with dignity and asserting their rights. Suddenly, women were questioning the traditional role that relegated them to the private sphere, which rendered them vulnerable to abuse. Additionally, this went hand in hand with the LGBTQ movement, which began to pull the threads of patriarchy and unravel the whole hierarchical, white supremacist enterprise. Powerful Western World Capitalists and their Japanese partners were genuinely perturbed by any questioning of their hegemony. The commission investigated what could have happened that the young were rising up even on university campuses and came to the conclusion that there was too much education, too much democracy and that they would need to reverse this to maintain the status quo. The 300-year-old notion of the wise, white imperial father God knowing what was best for the rest of humanity was being shaken. The Trilateral Commission released a report that concluded that what was needed was “‘a greater degree of moderation in democracy’ to overcome the ‘excess of democracy’ of the past decade” (Chomsky n. pag.). Revealing their intention to undermine the groups that had tried to rebel, Chomsky explained that the report asserted that:

“The effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups.” ... The Trilateral recommendations for the capitalist democracies are an application at home of the theories of “order” developed for subject societies of the Third World ... A second threat to the governability of democracy is posed by the “previously passive or unorganized groups in the population,” such as “blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women – all of whom became organized and mobilized in new ways to achieve what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and of the rewards.” The threat derives from the principle, already noted, that “some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups” is a prerequisite for democracy.” (n. pag.)

This indicates that the commission saw the forming of alliances among previously colonized people of colour, women and the LGBTQ community, and their expectation of a share in the planet’s largesse, as a danger to them. The notion of free quality education for all was curtailed, until education became once more the prerogative of the elite. Sadly, instead of using genuine revolution to heal their trauma, many used drugs to mask it. The elite were seeking “apathy and noninvolvement” in order to retain control of the masses and it came in the form of addiction. This addiction might not have been engineered, but it was so useful that it wasn’t addressed. Drug culture conveniently came just in time to sedate and preoccupy people who might have posed a problem to capitalism as they recognized the trauma it was producing. The commission stated clearly that the autonomy of these groups was a threat. In the novel, Christopher sees clearly that he will not get a “share” in the largesse and knows he has no recourse under the onslaught of capitalist conservatives but to leave. He flees to Europe, away from what he terms “The Devil’s Workshop” as Reagan is about to take over and rip the solar panels off the White House as his first act. Christopher surmises:

The radical left in the country seemed lame and uninspired. The Empire was still completely and utterly mad. He was a junkie and dependent on that drug come what might. He had to put it before everything. Ronald Reagan was running for president and it looked as if the idiot might actually win. It made Christopher physically sick to even hear his voice. The Mad Emperor would destroy life for the poor people, the luckless pawns who never reaped the bounty promised to them as Americans. There were no answers and Christopher had no friends or allies. The Romans were

all-powerful; the revolution was despised and written out of history. The poor had turned on themselves – witless carnivores. The rich had taken the money and run off to their exclusive townships. Christopher did not feel brave enough to fight the world with cardboard limbs. (*Breakfast* 46)

Traumatized by his lack of power, Christopher can see the political situation clearly and prophetically but he doesn't rise up against the system. Instead, he becomes the dealer, doling out the medication that will drain the energy of the poor. The ineffectuality of "cardboard limbs" reflects the lack of power of a poor Latino junkie from a depressed city such as Detroit. His people came from Puerto Rico, an island with a tumultuous history of genocide, colonialization and annexation by its dominant neighbour. Afflicted with the generational trauma of the colonized and the trauma of poverty and racism, Christopher joins the US army when a judge gives him the choice between incarceration or enlisting. The systematic destruction of the revolution of the 1960s is underway. The Trilateral Commission found that educating people was a threat to the status quo, and so public education was decimated as it only created expectations for people whom the powerful never wanted to include. As a citizen without access to education or healthcare, Christopher deals to survive, gets caught up in the legal system, and as a result, is funnelled into the US empire's army. The heroin he uses is both part of his survival from this trauma and a trap. Similarly, in Europe there is little escape from the neoliberal forces that are moulding the lives of the poor majority. He begins to deal here, too, often seeing it as a missionary activity, bringing peace to those traumatized souls who need respite from the suffering of their lives. While this is a justification, it is one without malice, as he himself uses drugs to assuage the anger and pain he feels in his own powerlessness and displacement. If all the traumatized people who had been denied power in the capitalist system for centuries could have fought back, the world might have genuinely become more enlightened and equitable and reduced the trauma. Tragically, the drug epidemic that swept the world in the 1970s drowned out the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. The use of addiction to deal with trauma had catastrophic consequences for people on the downside of power for generations. As the US became less democratic and more oligarchical, the people on the margins became politically impotent and this paralysis led

to a compounding of their trauma, increasing their susceptibility to addiction as an escape. Though Christopher is aware of this, the forces seem too monolithic to fight and heroin gives him peace of mind.

Some characters justify addiction as it appears to be the most efficient way of soothing the trauma and the only means of reconnection with the damaged self. One of Christopher's key relationships is that with fellow junkie Payman, to whom he outlines how addiction becomes a spiritual imperative. He claims, to Isolt, that getting high with Payman is akin to prayer. Payman's trauma stems from being a soldier on the front of the Iran-Iraq war. He encounters Payman as a kindred spirit; he is also a person of colour, from a country with an imperialized past. Iran was occupied by the British, then controlled through a puppet by the West to siphon its oil until a revolution brought in an era of fundamentalist Islam. Once more we see trauma over generations of colonization, coups, revolutions and war. Payman is suffering from PTSD:

Payman usually talked only to himself. This could start in the middle of the night. He would suddenly uncurl from his green parka and sit up, his huge Persian eyes open without blinking, and begin to talk in Farsi ... Ali and Payman had deserted the fighting at the Iran-Iraq border and both had ended up on the third floor with the Europeans. (*Breakfast* 63)

Payman is suffering from classic symptoms of PTSD and he is not alone. The squat is full of Afghans who have escaped the Russian invasion in their country. Christopher sees in Payman a fellow sufferer, and their heroin use is understood as a spiritual activity even as it destroys them. Like two hungry ghosts they live out their half-life of bottomless craving away from any accepted norm. As beggars and squatters who spend their meagre earnings on drugs, their relationship with capitalism is tenuous and unwilling. When Payman is alone with Ali he rises up, without a word, and jumps out of a window to his death. Christopher muses that Payman's addiction had kept him alive: "The monkey on his back wouldn't let him die,' he said. 'In the end heroin was all that kept that man alive. He would have been gone years ago without it'" (*Breakfast* 157). This acknowledges the use of heroin as medication for trauma; the irony is that what killed him was also perversely keeping him alive. His life as a deserter from the

war was unbearably agonizing. Isolt is not blind to the consequences of trauma and its links to addiction, “Was he a ghost numbed by a machine-built world? Was it the war? Or before the war? Did the trauma trigger the terrible melancholy or had it always clung to him, a shadow in the skies of every living moment?” (*Breakfast* 158). Typical of a war veteran, Payman’s trauma disconnects him from both his fellow Iranians and his own self. Judith Herman wrote in her seminal book *Trauma and Recovery* that

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living. (52)

Payman is suffering from alienation and a lack of connection with anything except his own addiction. His quality of life is so abysmal that soothing it with heroin becomes his sole purpose. As a junkie he belongs “more to the dead than to the living”. Payman could not bear to be alive much longer; the psychic wound of being both ex-soldier and homeless junkie in a strange land was too deep. Herman’s claim that the pervasive disconnection from community and others is a symptom of trauma plays out here when Isolt observes:

He had no place, no sense of connection. No sewn-on patches on his jacket to align him to any tribe. Alienated and isolated, severely suffocated by depression, he had managed to catch his hideous monkey off guard for a split second and snatch the opportunity to die. (*Breakfast* 158)

According to Isolt, Payman had to outwit his addiction in order to end his life. The paradox is that they believe the addiction is sustaining them rather than destroying them. Payman’s life as an unknown soldier is tragic in that it is so common. In many cities around the world the ranks of the homeless are swollen with war veterans suffering from PTSD and using drugs and alcohol to soothe the agony. The other characters are saddened by his suicide but they are also relieved that someone in such immense pain had ended this torture even if it was brutal. The reckless disregard for human life of those in power is apparent. Payman spent the rest of his

existence as a half-being, unable to locate where his spiritual centre was, the community of the world's rejected he found in Paris might have been of some solace, but it wasn't enough to keep him alive. Isolt reflects:

If anyone should rest in peace, it was he. If anyone should truly cease to exist, it was he. Organic life repudiated him, machines bewildered him, night and day disturbed him, rest eluded him, nothing was of interest to him, no influence could save him. Was his soul missing from the plan? Was it invisible to God? Was it not located on the map of all souls? Was there an empty space inside him with an absent soul? (*Breakfast* 158)

If the soul is the inner essence of a person then trauma can dislodge it or render it inaccessible. If the part of you that has never lost or won, never wavered, never been bought or sold, beyond market, beyond ego, is the soul, then the trauma has not taken Payman's soul but removed it from his own reach. Access to the characters' own souls is cut off by the constant barrage of noise from the industrial world and the removal of themselves from any natural setting. These are fringe city people, their damaged rhythms are contrary to the natural world; they inhabit a netherworld of dimly lit night time when others are tucked up safely in bed, and they roam and play. Payman's soul may be "invisible to God" in the sense that it is impossible for him to find his centre, or it may have been destroyed, leaving a vacuum that is unbearable to both him and those around him. The suicide disturbs them, and an unnerved Isolt understands that her own addiction and Christopher's is a kind of slow suicide even as they spend the wee hours of the morning laughing through their high:

Though she had never laughed so much. Christopher and Isolt in the squat night after night. She had never laughed so much. Sweet Lazarus, you shall not die tonight. But suicide comes in short, sour snaps. So wrap yourself around that thought, console yourself. (*Breakfast* 252)

The consolation is, of course, that drugs are fun, they lighten to mood, make it easier to access the joy that the trauma has stripped away. Isolt is surrounded by individuals traumatized by domestic abuse, systemic poverty and racism, PTSD. The fact that all are using drugs and alcohol has

been the subject of studies, as outlined in the Carrier Clinic's article on the phenomenon:

Researchers have been studying the connection between trauma and addiction in order to understand why so many drug and alcohol abusers have histories of traumatic experiences. Data from over 17,000 patients in Kaiser Permanente's Adverse Childhood Experiences study indicate that a child who experiences four or more traumatic events is five times more likely to become an alcoholic, 60% more likely to become obese, and up to 46 times more likely to become an injection-drug user than the general population. Other studies have found similar connections between childhood trauma and addiction, and studies by the Veterans Administration have led to estimates that between 35–75% of veterans with PTSD abuse drugs and alcohol. (n. pag.)

As the studies show, this correlation between trauma and addiction is widespread and accepted. All of the characters in *Breakfast in Babylon* suffer from varying degrees of trauma and addiction that can be traced to the powerful using the most vulnerable members of society whether they are soldiers, wives, or cheap labour emerging from countries shattered by imperialism. All of them use drugs or alcohol as a method of surviving themselves. Clearly, Isolt will have to find a way to endure her own trauma without self-destruction.

Isolt never outlines what her own trauma is, whether it is being poor, female, immigrant, always on the downside of power. Due to the ravages of British colonialism, millions of Irish people were forced to emigrate for centuries and become a source of cheap labour. Isolt knows she can't go back to an Ireland which is now independent from Britain but impoverished. Most people left as the poverty was generational and, after independence, the Catholic Church was an oppressive and powerful presence. Surrounded by drinkers and drug users, she begins to give in and use:

Suddenly she is sick and cold. She begins to dream that she is walking down the graffitied underground passage to Elephant and Castle tube station. The Wicklow mountains loom. A wild, rocky valley, waterfalled and green, reaches out its huge craggy hand and snatches her back to Ireland, where for years she stands in a smoky dole queue realising the harness of hunger, the disturbing effect of a ruined city, Dublin, derelict, downtrodden. The sea sweeps her back, carries her away, away from the sea, to London, where it's only a river. It's only a river. (*Breakfast* 251)

This is the only part of the book where she thinks about Ireland in a nostalgic way and it is the beauty of the natural landscape she focuses on. The city is “derelict, downtrodden” (*Breakfast* 251). She’s just another displaced migrant living in the margins of the society. Dublin city, once the centre of English power in Ireland, is decaying and depressed in the 1980s. Isolt’s generation had very little choice but to leave. The book is a journey through an underworld populated by characters who were broken early on in their lives. She feels compassion for them all and gives them her attention as she remains somewhat outside and constantly on the move. The movement itself is her escape; she never allows herself get too entrenched in any scene with any group as her method of coping. She eventually kicks her addiction and escapes Christopher’s abuse to continue on her journey. In the very last lines of the book, she ruminates on the insights she has gleaned from her journey:

Isolt knows that loneliness is the great highway that runs from east to west, full of wonder and banality, alive even in the dead of night, carrying all the tiny broken-hearted children from home to broken home. (*Breakfast* 321)

The broken-hearted are undoubtedly traumatized, and while the drugs and alcohol they consume relieve the loneliness and alienation, the turmoil it brings to their lives is undeniable. Isolt has to look at her relationship with the older chronic junkie Christopher as having taught her his street smarts, but now it is time for her to move on or be destroyed by him. Undoubtedly, Christopher’s behaviour increases her trauma but Isolt is constantly self-reflecting and we have hope at the end that she has escaped the trap of addiction and the abuse of substances that is so pervasive among the Irish people who are collectively suffering from cultural trauma.

How Ireland became so traumatized by its colonial past is scrutinized in my recent novel *The Cruelty Men*. Isolt has drawn a veil over her Irish past; there is a fleeting mention of losing her mother’s ring in a sink in a train station but nothing else. However, she is there with fellow Irish characters Jim and Rory as part of the squatting scene. They take their place with the poor and dispossessed of the world in 1980s Europe. Isolt and her friends were born in Ireland in the late 1960s and 1970s, just as my novel *The Cruelty Men* ends. This recent novel lifts the veil they chose to pull over.

We know Ireland was perhaps the first colony of England, always struggling against being subsumed into a British identity. It is often said that Ireland struggled under English oppression for 800 years, but the Anglo Normans came in the twelfth century and, according to lore, became more Irish than the Irish themselves, so Irish culture survived this invasion and settlement as it had the Viking settlement. The Normans were originally Vikings who were invited to settle in France. They conquered England and southern Italy and they intermarried into all those populations, eventually assimilating into whichever society they conquered. In essence, they could have been seen as violent militaristic settlers rather than colonists. The post-Norman English kings had a different tactic, however, and were determined to eradicate the culture and impose their own legal systems, language and way of life in Ireland. The 1600s essentially marked the end of true Gaelic life in Ireland, with the atomizing defeat of the native Irish in the Battle of Kinsale, the subsequent flight of the Gaelic aristocracy and finally the Ulster Plantations, altering forever what was once the Gaelic stronghold. Amelia Reimer describes the analogous trauma suffered by native peoples in the Americas:

Five hundred years of your family being treated as inferior, to have done to them whatever is deemed fit by the authority of the day, to be bought and sold, kidnapped, raped, beaten, detained, imprisoned, killed. This is what we call multi-generational trauma. (n. pag.)

Manifestly, the Irish at the edge of Europe suffered from a similar pattern of systematic oppression over multiple centuries. The old Irish books were destroyed, the harps were burned, penal laws were introduced, absentee landlords, the act of union, famines, etc., made Irish history similar to the cataclysmic history of native peoples around the globe. These people had a gargantuan struggle to exist as beings with souls and not just exploited labour, while protecting their land as a conscious sustaining entity that was an intrinsic part of them, not just real estate whose resources were under the control of a hostile foreign power. The consequences of all this turmoil play out through the characters' lives in *The Cruelty Men* and its sequel *Headwreck*. These are my first novels to be set exclusively in Ireland. This was a shift from a global outlook in my writing, macro to micro, in

order to examine how the universal story of the abuses of power manifest at a national level.

Ireland has had a peculiarly lengthy and brutal colonial story, has always struggled to exist in the face of the monolithic controlling presence of its neighbouring island, and this trauma persists to this day. Independence in the twentieth century brought civil war and subsequently extreme repression at the hands of church and state accompanied by an ongoing vicious conflict in the north. These books trace the repercussions of such traumas in modern Ireland across generations. Castelloe refers to the work of Gerard Fromm on this topic:

This is the subject of *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma across Generations*, edited by M. Gerard Fromm (2012). This collection of essays on traumatic transmission builds on the idea that “what human beings cannot contain of their experience – what has been traumatically overwhelming, unbearable, unthinkable – falls out of social discourse, but very often onto and into the next generation as an affective sensitivity or a chaotic urgency.” (n. pag.)

The Cruelty Men illustrates, in detail, the roots of trauma, and its sequel *Headwreck* explores the resulting addictions that the characters develop as a response. The Hungry Ghosts are often alluded to in reference to addiction. The drunken Irish is a cliché but not one without truth, and the postcolonial dependence on alcohol and drugs in Ireland and among the Irish people can self-medicate a still-festering, unresolved wound. The *Cruelty Men* has the hag herself, the very land as traumatized by the savagery of people’s behaviour on it. The hag with the broken heart stands at the edge of the known world as the ice retreats, and the first people arrive on the western shores of Ireland. Human histories are complicated; populations are replanted, homes are abandoned, children fostered, mothers put into laundries. She bemoans:

You turned away from me, and you’ve said things about me and told stories full of lies. Over a small teardrop of time, you did what I thought you couldn’t do, in the end, within a mere ten thousand years; you had broken my insect heart. (*The Cruelty Men* vii)

Even as she is forgotten, the hag is a witness to all the changes humans bring to the land, and all they do to each other – the horrors that still play out across modern Ireland. In the 1930s, a man from the Land Commission arrives in the most remote peninsula in the southwest of Ireland to offer Irish-speaking families fertile land in Leinster. Abandoned by her parents when they resettle in Meath, Mary O Conaill is faced with the task of raising her younger siblings alone. Pdraig is incarcerated in an asylum, Bridget escapes and her brother Seamus inherits the farm. Maeve is sent to work as a servant to a family of shopkeepers in the local town – later, pregnant and unwed, she is placed in a Magdalene laundry where her twins are forcibly taken from her. Mary goes into service with the Lyons family to ensure that the youngest son, Seán, is educated. In this novel, two postcolonial Irelands run in stark parallel. A gentle country of fairy rings, blackberry picking and poker evenings with the local priest hides a system in which church and state incarcerate the vulnerable for profit. But this book does not just follow a family; it follows those who can remember a story. And the stories are part of what we can use to help heal the trauma of history. The people who lived at the edge of the world pass down the stories, these tales outside the control of church and state. Stories are the history of our dreams, and the telling of them traces the contour of our souls. The use of stories throughout *The Cruelty Men* and its sequel *Headwreck* is the antidote to the addiction that subsumes the characters. For within them is the shape of the soul of the people. Of course, not everyone can be saved by the stories; often they aren't enough in the face of indomitable power. In *Breakfast in Babylon*, Payman's trauma means that his soul is inaccessible to him, which leads him to self-destruct, but the soul of the characters in *The Cruelty Men* is made visible by the relaying of the old stories. Ireland has been decimated by colonialism and then the conservative, patriarchal church and state apparatus, but this book reflects the incredible resilience of women, how they hold families together and the Irish ability to laugh at woe. It is a tale of survival, and the powerful antidotes of love, humour and the healing magic of storytelling in a postcolonial country still traumatized by its past as many of its people succumb to addiction.

How humans survive in the face of overwhelming power moves me and is something I unconsciously explore in my books. Writing fiction is

not an entirely conscious endeavour. When I write, I'm not thinking of ideas; I'm transcribing the voices of the strange chorus that inhabits my imagination, while attempting to touch something hidden and unknowable. That the people I write about are on the downside of power is not deliberate but instinctual. *Breakfast in Babylon* tracks the lives of young Irish immigrants as they navigate through the underworld, still reeling from a barbaric economic system that has subjugated the majority of the inhabitants of our planet for centuries. The addictions they develop as a panacea for the pain becomes bad medicine that magnifies their trauma. *The Cruelty Men* and *Headwreck* are replete with characters moving like trauma puppets and acting predictably callously towards each other as they struggle to survive the legacy of those centuries of injustice. The final words of *The Cruelty Men* are spoken by the young man Ignatius, homeless and recently released from years of abuse in a notorious Industrial school. He drinks his whiskey as he stands by the gates of Trinity College asking the question, "When have the well-fed ever understood the hungry?" (435). The characters in my novels who struggle with addiction and compulsive behaviour often exist as spectral figures, much as the hungry ghosts on the Buddhist wheel of life, but throughout my work there is a call to revolt against this despair, through examining the roots of the problem, facing it, protecting indigenous culture and rebelling against the authorities who have deemed it convenient to have problematic areas of the population consigned to haunt the fringes of humanity in a fog of poverty, addiction and inertia. The hungry ghosts can finally be satiated through resistance; the broken-hearted children can build their own home.

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PAT BORAN

II Fellow Travellers

The local traveller camp by the side of the road
is a patch of resistance, history
reduced to a circle of wagons, a tangle
of children and pets, and all the indifferent world
rolling endlessly on. But there was that time,
thirty years back, when busking out west
I hitched a lift in a grimy hi-ace van,
climbing in from the cold only to clamber up
and over a shifting field of deep-pile rugs
and gaudy, printed sheets. Inside, a trio
of teenaged girls and an older figure I took
to be their aunt, cross-legged in the gloomy,
oil-smelling dark, and all of them highly amused
by my sudden appearance out of nowhere –
amused and, as it happened, surprisingly shy.
We smiled at each other at first, scarcely speaking
beyond mumbled introductions, before, outside,
blurred by the curtain of rain and our gathering speed,
the settled and unsettled worlds went hurtling by.

12 Trauma and Identity Issues in Pat Boran's Work: An Interview

ABSTRACT

Pat Boran attended the conference “Irish Itinerary 2018 (EFACIS): Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Literature and Culture” at the University of La Rioja, Spain. This interview took place there on 15 February 2018, and covered Ireland, gender, trauma, identity, poetry, human and family relations, the state, broadcasting, formal innovation, Spanish translations of his work and creative writing. Boran offered a number of insightful responses and shared his candid thoughts on gender, identity, aesthetics and motivations to write poetry.

Portlaoise-born poet, writer and broadcaster Pat Boran currently lives in Dublin. He is an elected member of Aosdána, the Irish association which honours distinguished artistic work. He is one of the most widely acclaimed Irish poets of his generation. His work has been translated into several languages and received numerous awards. In 2008, he received the Lawrence O’Shaughnessy Poetry Award of the University of St Thomas, St Paul, Minnesota.

He has published more than a dozen books of poetry and prose – among them *The Next Life* (2012), *Waveforms: Bull Island Haiku* (2015), and *A Man is Only as Good: A Pocket Selected Poems* (2017), as well as the humorous memoir *The Invisible Prison* (2009) and the popular writers’ handbook *The Portable Creative Writing Workshop*. Besides these published works, Pat is a former presenter of *The Poetry Programme* and *The Enchanted Way* on RTÉ Radio 1, and works part-time as a literary editor of Dedalus Press. He has edited several anthologies of prose and poetry, for example, with Gerard Smyth, the anthology *If Ever You Go: A Map of Dublin in Poetry and Song*, the Dublin: One City, One Book designated title for 2014, and, with Eugene O’Connell, *The Deep Heart’s Core* (2017).

MELANIA TERRAZAS: Pat, thank you very much for accepting my invitation to be a Keynote Speaker at Irish Itinerary 2018 (EFACIS) and agreeing to this interview. I would like to start with a few general questions before I focus on trauma and identity issues in some specific works in more detail. You have written poetry, novels and non-fiction, for adults and children, you are the editor of Dedalus Press and you also contribute to a number of radio programmes. When and how did your multi-stranded cultural adventure start?

PAT BORAN: I've always written, or made music (I tend to think of the two activities as being very similar), certainly since I was in my teens. There are periods when I'm more consumed by short forms like lyric poems, and other periods when I have the appetite and energy for a longer expedition. One of the keys for me, I think, has been in regularly trying out different forms or, at least, in regularly starting out from a different point of origin. (I might give myself a task to approach, such as writing about a place I've been or, more commonly, a place where I actually am. Or I might choose a time, an episode or half-memory from my life, and try to recreate it for myself in order to see what meaning it might now hold for me that I didn't, or wasn't able, to appreciate the first time around.) Because I work at home (in the sense that I don't go out to work in an office – of course I often write when I'm away from home), there's a useful blur between my working life and my daily routine. And, though this can sometimes be difficult to juggle, it does mean that I'm almost always near poems (my own or someone else's) and that can often be a prompt or inspiration in itself. Also, I spent a long period after I finished school doing pretty much nothing at all, thinking, playing music, dreaming – trying to find my way, one might say. I enjoyed those years greatly and would recommend a similar “down time” to anyone who thinks about writing. But I've had enough of that, for now at least. Now I find I'm happier and more fulfilled when I'm doing something, making something, taking something apart to see how it works ... Most of what I write doesn't get read and, frankly, probably isn't worth reading. But that's the way it is. Visual artists seem to know instinctively that it's important always to be drawing, doodling, sketching for the more important work ahead. I try to follow that same principle. I don't usually have an idea as such when I start writing, so writing is really all about trying to discover

ideas in the flux of daily life and living. And if that means I have to write a lot, even just some of the time, then that's how it has to be.

MT: When I read some of your poems, I find your approach to them very detached. Would you consider yourself a satirical poet?

PB: Where poetry is concerned the indirect, suggestive angle is often much more powerful and affecting than the direct confrontation. It's not unlike what prose writers mean when they discuss the difference between "showing" and "telling". Telling another person how you feel about something is certainly no guarantee of communicating the reality of that feeling. At best, one might elicit sympathy. However, if two people pass through the centre of a city together, and one describes to the other, in detail, what she sees, what he feels, then those descriptions will contain objective information about the external world but also subjective information about the internal world of the speaker.

As a young man, for many years it puzzled me why artists, generation after generation, spent their time drawing and painting vases of flowers and bowls of fruit. Surely, after a certain time, the attraction should have worn off. Surely after Michelangelo did it there was no need for anyone else to try. And yet, forty years later along comes Francisco de Zurbarán, or 300 years later along comes Paul Cézanne, and they do something new and different with essentially the same challenge. Of course, what the painters are painting is not just the bowl of fruit but their perspective, their feelings, their vision, the relationship between the object and the viewer of the object. That realization was enough to remind me that there was no subject that should be considered too small or insignificant, or, on the other end of the scale, too large to be the subject of a poem (though, in the main, I'm inclined to think that poems work best when tightly focused, when they have some limitation of form or language to cope with, if only to avoid the indulgence that is the great danger of a generally solitary art form with, at best, a modest-sized audience).

MT: How about your use of detachment and indirectness in, for example, "The Spire (10 years on)"? The poem is very satirical and looks as if it were an illustration of the discoveries of science in order to demonstrate the futility and absurdity of human life. What do you think?

PB: Yes, you are right to some extent. There is a tradition in Ireland, especially in Dublin, of “determined cynicism”: any time the state does anything, we slag it, everybody jumps immediately to laugh at the idea. It is a kind of postcolonial insecurity, so if anybody in Dublin does anything that becomes popular on an international stage, Irish people will laugh at them, and knock them and tease them, and there is this kind of uneasy element when it comes to success, but sometimes it is a real pity. You know that expression that no one is ever a hero in his own land. Sometimes this is a bad thing, but sometimes this is also a healthy thing, because any element of pretentiousness, of showing off, is immediately attacked. And the tradition in Dublin is, when there is a new building of any kind, everybody adds uncomplimentary nicknames to it as a way to take away its power. In the main street of Dublin city, in O’Connell Street, when they erected the Spire, a big silver needle standing in the middle of the street pointing up, immediately everybody started to criticize it, and one of the reasons why they started criticizing it is because the GPO is there, where the 1916 revolution took place, and at that time, and still, behind these streets and facades, they are collapsed, they are full of heroines and shootings and it can be a very dangerous part of the city at the moment. And when the government wanted to celebrate the Spire, it looked to many people like a needle for injecting yourself with heroin. Just when people started making up nicknames for this – the first one was the “skewer in the sewer” – I thought, wouldn’t it be fun to make a poem that was a list of all of these insults to the Spire, as a patriotic contribution to the arts of this new thing. The poem is not very complimentary, but it is also unashamedly having fun. It was not my invention, it was what I learnt as a “new Dubliner” from listening to “actual Dubliners”, that when they were at their most political, they were also at their most inventive. They were not tackling the subject straight on, they were playing with it, and that is the real irritation for the powers that be. In other words, the last power of resistance is humour, and that is a very strong weapon. What I like still in this poem is that I don’t own it. I am not even in it, there is no speaker in it, it is just a gathering of the kind of things people say, and it becomes powerful, because the last line takes it in another direction.

MT: Yes, that’s right, at the end of “The Spire (10 years on)”, it reads, “The ‘we’ reduced to ‘I’”. What effect were you seeking? I mean, what were you saying with this powerful ending?

PB: Yes, the last part, this is the whole city and all the different voices speaking, but the city authority could not see that the purpose of the city was inclusion, and conversation and exchange, and they had raised a monument that was saying, to me, something that was mono, and I thought it was so much a misrepresentation of what I love about Ireland: that sense of connection and inclusion, and welcoming, and fun, and devilment and mystery, and all of that. It was them pretending that we were something that we were not.

So, really the point of the poem "The Spire (10 years on)" is that the vernacular itself is a form of resistance to this globalized kind of image, and then the really interesting thing for me, the pleasing thing that came out of this was that, a couple of years ago, a very talented Dublin choir set this [poem] to music, and they performed it in the GPO on O'Connell Street, like a kind of a flash mob choir, and out the window, you could see in the very space where the 1916 Revolution Rising had happened, you could see the Spire and they sang this in beautiful arrangements, and you could hear the words sounded like a hymn of praise, which added another level of sarcasm to it. I really liked this.

MT: Pat, how do you tackle trauma and identity issues in contemporary Irish culture in your poetry?

PB: The exploration of identity is very much at the heart of my work, from an early and still lingering unease with the notion of "the poet" as some kind of seer or priest, through a variety of constricting inherited identities including that of Irish Catholic, and southern Irish Catholic, and the necessary widening of the categories of identity that make up contemporary Irish society, almost a hundred years after Independence. The necessity of re-examining and revising various aspects of those identities came for many of my generation first with an awareness of the northern "Troubles" and the gross simplification [which] that threatened to impose on civilized and inclusive thinking on the island as a whole, and then with the Peace Process that succeeded that conflict. Definitions of Irishness have long tended to be definitions of "not Englishness" or "not Britishness" (as if we are more easily understood by what we are not rather than what we are). No doubt this has something to do with our being an island nation, adding to the sense of an established and immutable identity, at least going back as far as the Celts. For my generation, who grew up in the punk rock

era, identity was anything but fixed. One of the great attractions of punk, in fact, was the possibility of reinventing oneself. Punks took the oppressive and degrading names they might have been given by society and wore them like badges of pride. They resisted conventions of dress, display, expression. They harnessed noise for its music-making possibilities. They explored cross-dressing and androgyny; they took military uniforms and covered them in the chains of bondage. They were not necessarily sophisticated, and many were, as with most youth movements, simply following the pack. But their championing of independence had a profound effect on me at a crucial age. Instead of feeling I had to assume my place in the working world, taking on, for instance, the burden of my father's travel agency, I felt free to take on a different challenge, that of making art, and all the levels of reinvention that necessitates.

Beyond myself, of course, is probably where issues of identity have most interest for readers. The loosening grip of the Catholic Church and of the old politics; the reinvigorating and renewing arrival of the New Irish; the growing understanding of the sacrifice of my mother (as a housewife), of relations and neighbours (perhaps particularly elderly neighbours whom I have always maintained contact with), both reminded me of the difficulties endured in order to give me "my freedom", but also challenged my ability to explain and defend what I had done with that freedom to these same people.

At the heart of most change is pain. Change that is easy is seldom permanent. And the changes in Irish society, including those we rightly celebrate and those that have still to be won, have caused huge hurt and trauma and disappointment, and only the most insensitive artist could make work that does not, in whatever way, reflect that. That said, the power of art often comes not from approaching a subject head-on but from finding connections and analogies elsewhere by which to illuminate an issue. Plato wanted to keep the poets out of his republic because he wouldn't have been able to direct them to toe the official line.

Among other things, art is a form of resistance against loss, against the ravages of time, but also against brutality, injustice, inequality. It sets out to give the ordinary special meaning and significance and, thereby, often rejects the prevailing value system of the day. One of its methods of

resistance is in championing beauty, harmony, proportion, connection. It seeks to make things that might endure. It opposes philistinism and totalitarianism not necessarily by building the world's biggest museum (which risks replacing philistinism with capitalism) but by attempting to make an exquisite painting, poem or piece of music that, being *sui generis*, resists paraphrase and propaganda.

MT: Some of your poems – for example, “Waving”, “Children” and “Faith” – describe how people suffer the post-traumatic effects of past experiences, and relationships that affect their identity. Does your poetry express these ideas by using formal experimental devices? If so, why?

PB: So much of the story of postcolonial Ireland, especially in recent times, seems to be about the ham-fisted efforts of the state to fully acknowledge and then to make amends for the shameful ways in which it has failed its citizens in so many aspects of their lives since Independence. The parasitism and perversion of the Church, the “gombeen” culture of political cronyism and covert deals, the reduction of every social and moral issue to a debate on the state of the “economy” served, and serves, only those who, while wrapping themselves in green flags and boasting about Irish culture on an international stage, reveal their real ambitions in their repeated description of the country as “a great place to do business”. In the three poems mentioned, and others, there is inevitably some sense of a glimpse behind the carefully managed façade of the state to some small part of the reality that lies behind. The poems are very much, in that sense, Irish poems. However, if these poems have any value in and of themselves, if they have any chance of still being relevant beyond the moment and place of their making, they have also to connect with something fundamental, something that is bigger than just the experience of being Irish, or of being Irish today. As well as serving their specific, triggering subject matter as best they can, poems have also to convince as basic human utterances or documents. In the case of the many poems of mine which explore (even in part) the shocks, trauma and dislocations of contemporary life, they are not, I hope, a public self-flagellation but an acknowledgement of, variously, wrong-doing, neglect and failing that is, I believe, a prerequisite to a kind of progress, in part a healing but also a containment of that trauma. The American poet John Cardi once said, “A poem is the grave of everything that cannot be buried”. In the same way

we wish we could commit nuclear waste to a vessel that would guarantee it could not cause future contamination, perhaps a poem can do something similar with hurt and trauma, allowing those affected, and those on the margins, to re-approach, to come close to something whose power is now contained. Of course, I cannot be sure this is true, but it seems there is a good argument for such a conclusion, given how often people (not only “professional” poets) turn to poetry in a time of hurt and trauma. One has only to attend the funeral of a young person who has died by their own hand to be almost guaranteed that friends will read poetry, very often their own, as if the public utterance was somehow made possible by something enduring and “containing” in verse-making itself.

MT: In many of your poems, you make frequent use of the figure of man and the passage of time. Furthermore, your poetic forms constantly draw attention to the reader’s senses, and your poetic personae go through some sort of realization and growth as a poem evolves. Would you say that these are characteristic aspects of your poetry?

PB: Yes, there is a great poem from the 1980s by Romanian poet Marin Sorescu called “Chess” and it does a thing that I think is fantastic. The poem was written during the Ceaușescu regime. You could be arrested and you could be disappeared if you said something against the state. So poets had to find ways of saying things without saying them overtly. And instead of making the poems weaker, they would make them much stronger, because you can feel the determination to mean beyond the initial moment, the triggering idea. The poem reads as follows:

“Chess”

I move a white day.
 He moves a black one.
 I advance with a dream.
 He takes it to war.
 He attacks my lungs.
 I think for about a year in hospital.
 I make a brilliant combination
 And win a black day.
 He moves a disaster.

And threatens me with cancer
(which moves for the moment in the shape of a cross)
But, I put a book before him
He's obliged to retreat.
I win a few more pieces,
But, look, half my life
Is taken.
– If I give you check, you lose your optimism,
He tells me,
– It doesn't matter, I joke,
I'll do the castling of feelings.
Behind me my wife, children.
The sun, the moon and other onlookers
Tremble for every move I make.
I light a cigarette
And continue the game.
(Trans. A. Deletant & B. Walker, Forest Books, taken from: <[https://
fundatiamarinsorescu.eu/en/poems.html](https://fundatiamarinsorescu.eu/en/poems.html)>)

Thus, in the opening, who is the “I”? Is it the poet? Is it you, the individual? Who is “he”? Is it death? Who else would move a black day? How do you “move a black day”? It is like chess pieces, because the poem is called “Chess”, but he is not talking about chess. Is it talking about the Ceaușescu regime. And I, as a citizen, do this? And he *does* this? It is so much more sinister. And then it goes on. I move the castle and he moves the bishop. One is trying to outsmart the other, and then the fantastic part of the poem happens: he says, behind me, my wife and children, the sun and moon, tremble at every move I make. So you see that whatever happens, it is not going to affect just the poet, but his family and all of mankind. Everything in the world depends on the microcosm of me playing chess. That is what poetry is about. You trust in something that is so small, but the implications of it, if you believe in it, are stellar. They are as big as it gets. That move is what you are looking for.

MT: You wrote “The Island” for Bob Quinn, an Irish film-maker, writer and photographer who has recorded life in the west of Ireland, especially in the Connemara Gaeltacht, in the Irish language. You pay tribute to his staunch defence of Gaelic culture: “But who could sleep that night leaving our small-but-perfect local wonder with no one to

defend it?" What motivated you to write a poem for Bob Quinn? Does Connemara have a special significance for you? Were you concerned about the future of Connemara when you wrote it? What is your attitude towards ecocriticism in poetry? Do you believe in the social value of poetry and film-making?

PB: Bob Quinn is many things, a kind of Renaissance Man, you might say. Some of his films, such as *Budawanny* [1987, about the relationship between a priest and his housekeeper], seem to anticipate revelations in Irish society long before most people sensed their presence. One of the things I most admire about him is his Atlantean project, to which he has dedicated himself for decades now. In short, the project, in book and film form, explores the connections between Ireland and her maritime "neighbours" to the south, including, of course, Spain and Portugal, but also various parts of North Africa, especially Berber culture. His work traces the links and influences of other languages, art and culture on the development of these aspects of Irish existence. What is most shocking, perhaps, is how little this subject is understood or explored in Ireland – where we seem to have fallen for the myth that we are Celts through and through, and that nothing and no one else has contributed to who we have become.

Bob Quinn's intense commitment to the west coast of Ireland, his devotion to Connemara and refusal to "sell out" on or dilute his vision is hugely inspirational. Though I was born in a small town and have lived most of my life in a city, these are not in fact two different Irelands, and the responsibility and ambition of art need not be diminished in either place. Poetry has always sought to take first the writer, and then the reader, beyond the known, beyond the instantly recognizable and easily paraphrasable. That is why artists like Bob Quinn are such welcome guides and why their work is so inspiring.

MT: Some of your poems, like "Children", "Faith" or "Waving", deal with children. Some, like "Immigrants Open Shops", with immigrants' experience in Ireland, and "Machines" with homeless people. When you write about child abuse, discrimination against immigrants and neglect of the homeless, are you immersed in the process, largely unaware of, or indifferent to the ideological currents that could make such writing a source of controversy? What motivates you to write such poems?

PB: As a citizen, I like to think I am very much a part of a broad movement to open Irish life and society beyond the limited vision (in terms of religion and politics, particularly) that dominated the country in my early and formative years. I could say that the Catholic Church stifled the conversation, change and potential evolution of Irish life to such an extent that there were only two possible solutions: the Church or that growth towards change would win out. But is that statement (true though I believe it to be) likely to result in a poem that might connect with someone who does not already believe the truth of that statement to the extent that I do? I don't believe so. To make worthwhile poems, it is necessary to go back, to go deeper than the prose conclusions into which feelings and suspicions and beliefs solidify and ultimately ossify. The job of a poem is to get closer to the moment, the feeling, the perception that results in such awareness and belief. A poet believes in the potential power of language to get to the heart of things. That is the objective, the challenge of writing. But such a dedication does not, by any means, run contrary to the role of the citizen, to the duty of a parent, to the concern of a neighbour and the resulting natural determination to see our society improved for those less well-off. It may be possible to sit down to write a moving poem about, say, homelessness. But my own way of writing is not to separate or grade or categorize fields of experience. Rather, once the poem is "in motion", the only acceptable process is to follow it as honestly as truthfully as possible in language, and to trust that one's concerns for the world come through. It is tempting to imagine that big subjects (homelessness, immigration, child abuse, the rise of the extreme right) require big responses in order to be considered powerful and adequate to the task. But the opposite is more often true. The power of poetry is very often its focus, its precision, its accuracy. The making, and reading, of poems over many years seems to confirm this, in that the poems I return to again and again (my own or those of others) are often the ones that stop short of explicit opinion and instead animate some deeper or parallel process of noticing and thinking in the reader's mind. One of the only prerequisites to making poems is to trust in the power of poetry. It's something many poets find problematic, especially in a world that expects instant responses and (being often inimical to poetry) paraphrasable content.

MT: In “Machines” there is a lack of syntax or fragmentary utterances and repetition. What is the purpose of this? Are these formal techniques aimed at forcing your readers to make a greater effort to link ideas until they reach its powerful ending, and the idea of “dehumanizing days”?

PB: Hesitations, repetitions and all sorts of breakdowns in syntax, when they occur (in poems or in conversations), often point to intensity of feeling, to a displacement or disturbance somewhere beneath the surface. As a writer working predominately in short forms, and with some interest in traditional patterns and approaches, I’m always mindful when the language seems to run into an obstacle of some sort – producing “blank” moments or missing words, mindful that such failings can often communicate as eloquently as what Alexander Pope called “the best words in the best order”. Honest writing is always about striking a balance between eloquence and incoherence. If it’s too smooth, too controlled, it comes across as glib, skin-deep, superficial; if it struggles to cohere or gel into a meaningful whole it will seem fragmentary, incomplete and very possibly inconsequential. The writer, and the poet especially, working on a very small canvas, where everything is amplified and exaggerated, has to find a line between these two extremes and pay particular attention to those parts of the poem when one or the other asserts its dominance.

Sometimes, a poem communicates best when it struggles to communicate at all, and while it is the job of the poet to drag experience and feeling into the realm of language (which necessitates a clear eye and, often, a steely determination), as Joyce has shown, the music of thoughts and feelings is seldom neatly melodic or tidily arranged. In “Machines” the hesitations in the language survive into the final version of the poem because, I suppose, not only do they describe the human failings that “machines” are so intolerant of (as we all know when struggling with personal computers, for instance!) but also because they bring into doubt the independent nature of thinking itself, acknowledging the vulnerable, hesitant way we progress from a place we know and are comfortable in to one in which the usual certainties are not so easily found. “Machines” is a vision of what happens to humans without the possibility to express our fears and terrors and failings. We malfunction ourselves. We cannot think, cannot “see straight”, cannot contain our hurt or anger. I think the poem is about what happens when

we “bottle up” such fears, when we over-regulate ourselves into silence and obedience, when we “oblivionize” through drugs or drink, in a sense when we suppress that instinctive roar of grief that my neighbour expresses in the poem – what I now recognize as a version of Whitman’s “barbaric yawp”.

MT: Your poems “Let’s Die” and “A Man Is Only As Good” are two honest explorations of the powerful bond between a father and his children, and a man and his dog, respectively. Both portray human relations by using the same ideas, the links between man, animals, land, nature, and take on the same circular form, with the poetic personae going back home. All these elements are recurrent in your poetry. Does this strong link between parents and children or a man and his dog have any special significance for you? And how does the idea of going home relate to that?

PB: Possibly I have already talked enough about the idea of empathy and connection, of the power of poetry to take us into a communal rather than just an individual awareness. Perhaps a more interesting aspect to this question relates to the nature of home. Indeed, as you say, in both of these poems – certainly in “Let’s Die” – home might be said to be the ultimate “destination”, the resolution of the confusions encountered in and prompted by exchanges with the wider world. This, I think, is one of the jobs of a parent, and perhaps also of the poet: to act as guide, to go ahead at least a few steps on the road.

But I fully appreciate the dangers of equating “home” with stability and of imagining that once everything is well and quiet and safe at home then “all is well in the world”. The obsession with tidy houses and tidy homes, with impressing the neighbours, with having the kids “nicely turned out”, all of these can mask all kinds of hurt and suffering. And the expectations of a perfect home are often so far beyond the reach of people that the gap between expectation and reality is impossible to bridge. Home is far from an idyllic place for a great many people, and the idyllic homes that some of us are lucky enough to enjoy often keep their doors shut to those who yearn for a warm welcome, a little understanding, basic human compassion. The new gated communities that began to appear in Ireland in the last two decades or so, and the huge houses of the affluent suburbs with their electronic gates, stand as symbolic messages to all who walk past them. There’s no evidence they reduce crime: it may well be that they attract

burglars and petty criminals. Instead, they take literally the notion that an Englishman's "home is his castle" as if the value of "home" depends not on how well it makes those who are inside of it feel but on how efficiently it keeps outside those who are out.

In "A Man Is Only As Good" I was drawn to that dog because, wordlessly, it communicates something to the homeowner (me), imagining that because they are now both awake at this God-awful hour of the night, they must have something in common. For that moment, the disturbed homeowner has to question what it means to be a homeowner. He feels in that moment when the poem stops and, I hope, the thinking goes on, how easy it is to be removed from the world by the desire to withdraw into a cosy home. I have seen comments online where people responded to it as a poem about Ireland's homelessness crisis, seeing in the figure of the dog a homeless person looking for shelter. I can't say how much that pleased me, reminding me how sophisticated people – non-poetry readers included – can be when a poem doesn't lecture them but gives them time and space to reach their own conclusions.

In English literary studies, people often go on about Coleridge's "person from Porlock" and what might have happened to the poem "Kubla Khan" had he not arrived and interrupted the great poet from its composition. Frankly, I think he did the world a favour. Ha ha! Interruption is one of the best ways of breaking unexamined habits and ingrained assumptions. The person from Porlock allowed Coleridge to cut the poem back to something more essential, more concentrated. The dog in "A Man Is Only As Good", as well as a variety of visitors, interruptions and neighbours' dogs (not to mention found objects, things overheard in the street and half-remembered incidents) all help to break the sense of settled satisfaction that, however much one might yearn for it, is unlikely to serve the art or poet particularly well. It is not misery and poverty and hunger that prompts art (as some Romantics seemed to believe) – there are lots of miserable, poor and hungry people whose lives are as far from art as we could imagine. Rather it is often just a small displacement, a small rebalancing or redirection of focus that is needed. When a photographer moves her lens even a fraction to the right, the farther out her vision extends, the more it jumps dramatically to show a wholly new vision of the world.

MT: Does your poetry address feminist considerations? I mean, do you think about gender issues when you write?

PB: I am not avoiding the question here at all, but I don't think of any issues when I write. It is like when you write a piece of music, you play it because it came out of an emotional place, but then you are not discussing it with yourself. Rather you are responding to it. In terms of the world of gender, politics is more to do with the questioning of the validity of those roles and the permanence of those kinds of roles. In reaction to previous periods, when men were the sole breadwinners of a house and women were housewives, as it is described in the poems, it is the wish to go beyond the archetypal figure of the dominant male and the relatively passive pervading female. And if one wanted to read these poems like that, there might be interesting evidence and discoveries to be made. One of the things that I feel is very important in a poem, as a male writer, is that the first quality that the poem should portray is vulnerability, not strength, which is a step back from that stereotype about the claim to control that the male psyche brings to the creation of art, a stereotype I have never been comfortable with it. Many of my favourite poets and the poets who inspired me most are not just women, but often women working out of and working through these concerns.

I will try to say something by way of illustration. There is a small prose piece called "The Belfry" in my memoir of growing up in the town of Portlaoise and the piece concerns a group of us who were then altar boys. Now, it is very much a cross-gendered "calling", but in my childhood it was only boys who "served", and when there was a funeral there was a bell tower in the church and we would all go and ring the bell, and with this big rope hanging down from the bell tower, we would ring the bell and hold on to be lifted straight up into the air. And we would go flying up into the air, and we could see out over the whole town. And this little piece of prose is just about going up and down like that, but what it's really about to me now is escaping from the dominant narrative of all of these men who had recruited me to be yet another one of these men, who would officiate over this practice. And the "liberation" in it is that we get pulled out of this space, of this planet, and we go up, which is the dream of the observant Catholic, to be going up "to heaven", but actually

we were only going up about 6 metres, and just enough to see the reality of the place. One of the things that we see when we go up is that over here you have the street where I was raised and all the buildings I knew so well, but over here, on the hill overlooking the town, you have the lonely Protestant graveyard, and it was they who were the original settlers of the town, “planted” in the time of Cromwell. It was one of the first planted counties in Ireland, planted by Protestants who pushed the Catholics out, and then, in turn, the Catholics pushed the Protestants into a corner in the history of Ireland itself, the Anglo-Irish, etc., leaving them marginalized in the history of the New State. So, these things, they all come true, they all become clear in a way, through that relatively innocent activity of, first, ringing the church bell and then, many years later, going back to do it again in the imagination.

One has first to be an attentive writer, but an attentive reader second to see those things. And something similar is true of one very early poem of mine that may be of interest here. It is not a great poem or a particularly ambitious one. It is about my mother washing the dishes, and that is all she is doing, or all I see at the time.

“Latin II”

What did Latin ever do for you? What good is it?
I asked my mother, as she stood to listen patiently,
detergent suds clanking on her wrists.

I'd have none of it, or it would have none of me,
my precious hours spent instead on languages
still living, and some new-born – the litanies
of rock music existentialists and saviours.

I called an end to wars for such exotica.
My mother must have felt the same, there in that kitchen,
her head a marvel of connected words and meanings
which, when I paused, I still could wonder senseless at.

And Latin beneath us both, like a blanket of bog
through which little living, and nothing of any value, might emerge.

When my mother was a young woman, she learnt Latin in school. I remember talking to her as a teenager and being astonished that my mother

had studied Latin, and while she was telling me that she had studied Latin, I looked down and the suds, the foam from the washing liquid, was drying on her wrists, like handcuffs; and that is the end of the poem, that she was being manacled into this life. I did not think of this entirely then, but I can see it clearly now. She was being chained to this version of her existence, but obviously she had all this stuff in her head, and this was never discussed. She had left school wanting to be a librarian, but she got married and had a family instead. End of the story. She fell in with what was expected of her.

In another early poem, "The Flood", included in *A Man Is Only As Good*, an archetypal local woman, named Mrs O, when her small town floods, saves what she can for a kind of altar of remembrance: a statue of the Virgin Mary, a photograph of "uncle John" in 1963, the year JFK was assassinated, and various other personal effects. This is how she responds when, as the poem puts it, "history has returned to her midland town, / three hundred years after Cromwell's men, / and she is alone to face the interrogations". Even then, as a very young writer, in my early twenties, I was repeatedly struck by the fact that whole generations of Irish women were expected to perform as, essentially, vestal virgins around the town, their role to clean, polish, tend and care – in short, all of the responsibility but none of the decision-making. In many ways, the poem is telling me that the lot, the destiny, of Irish women didn't change between the time of Cromwell and my own time. This was a discovery of the poem, I believe, not something I yet fully understood myself. The job of the artist is less to reflect society, perhaps, than to organize various partial reflections into some kind of meaningful pattern. One doesn't start out knowing, one starts out wanting to know.

Another poem from roughly the same time is "Always Books in Your Room, Margaret". In this, I credit the small library of literary books, gathered by my sister in her first years in college, as being instrumental in my education. My curiosity about what she was doing, what she was learning, opened a door for me and gave me, who never went to college, an honorary seat at the table. When we were kids there was a sandpit just outside our town and I one day realized all of the concrete that the new town was made from had originated there. That is the idea in the poem, that the raw material for something that was beginning to grow within me had its

source in my sister's studies, in her ambition and determination and, in a sense, her leadership.

The poem "Milkmen", from about a decade later, is again about inheritance – explicitly so – but this time the person who is seen to hand on from one generation to the next is male, the person who delivers milk to our front door. However, it was very important to me, and intentional, that the poem makes much of the fact that the man is instrumental because *he* is delivering milk (that he is a "milk man"), that his power derives from his ability to channel the female role of nourisher. The poem was written at the same time as a lot of poems about my father, who had died not long before, but it felt like a necessary internal balancing of something in myself, something which wished to mourn the loss of my father but knew that the father-son relationship cannot be neatly separated from the wider story of family, society, town and country.

MT: You are the editor of Dedalus Press, which specializes in new writing from Ireland. Are new trends in Irish poetry as experimental as those in Irish short story writing? Many short stories by Irish women stand out. Is the same true of Irish female poets? Is the reception of women's poetry in Ireland controversial? Is the reception of your poems in Ireland controversial? If so, why?

PB: I don't think the reception of my work has been controversial. I don't think it has been very much noticed. I don't say that with any regret. It has never bothered me that poetry, even in a place like Ireland, where poetry is still a relatively popular art form, is still marginal. When I took over the Dedalus Press, I think thirteen or fourteen years ago, it had been running for almost twenty years, and it was then the result of the experiment of Modernism in Irish writing, in the sense of Samuel Beckett, Brian Coffey, Denis Devlin, etc. The press was in a sense founded on their aesthetics. They were more European, they were less Celtic, they were more interested in Joyce than they would have been in Oscar Wilde, for instance. They were more experimental, but when I took over the press – I cannot estimate a number – among the, let's say, fifty writers published by the press, only three of them were women. There were almost no women being published by the press. It wasn't the law then. The other biggest publisher in the country probably had the same kind of percentage, certainly not a whole

lot better. Now, the defence of that, from the editors of those presses at the time, was that there was – and still is, thankfully – a publishing house called Salmon Publishing in Ireland based on the West coast, run by an American woman, and the press was, and is, more influenced by the broader kind of feminist issues and ambitions that she had seen on campuses in the States, say, than were widely seen on campuses in Ireland thirty-something years ago. It is understandable that some of the Irish women poets of my generation were published by Salmon, brilliantly as well, some of them, but it is no defence of the other frankly bigger presses, who managed to ignore women writers until now almost.

In the years that I have been running Dedalus, the ratio of new writers would be closer to about fifty-fifty. For example, among recent titles two of them were debuts by relatively young women poets, one was a second collection by an Irish woman, one was edited jointly by a woman and a man, etc. I would be conscious of it, there is no shortage of really good writing by Irish women, young and mid-career, as well as older. That is why I said that it was not an accident that this work did not appear with certain publishers before. In the case of the famous and massive three-volume *Field Day Anthology* survey of Irish writing, they had to bring out a fourth volume because of the controversy that it completely underrepresented women writers, particularly, not exclusively, contemporary women writers, and the editors of these books were some of the most widely read, best informed figures in Irish writing. Thus, it cannot be an accident. Things really needed to change, and fortunately, things are changing now. Fiction has been the point of most obvious movement and there are fantastic female writers of my age, and significantly younger than me, but there are some really fine poets as well, and not all of them are focused exclusively on print. There is a very strong scene in Ireland of performance poetry, and poets who almost approach rap, that kind of sense of audio possibility, of the performative, and a lot of them are female. Things needed badly to change, but it is interesting that, if you look at Irish writing in the last eighty years, it is only relatively recently that the experiments of James Joyce, for example, started to have a real obvious effect on younger writers. It is quite extraordinary how traditional the forms have remained in the wake of Joyce, and perhaps this is because he was such a towering international figure that

although nobody said you can't be experimental, everybody went in the opposite direction. A very strong naturalism moved in to replace him, but that is, thankfully, no longer the case. I think that every generation has to reach out and take something from somewhere else, because, otherwise, everything just devours itself.

MT: You have also written prose works. *The Invisible Prison: Scenes from an Irish Childhood* (2009) is described as part-memoir, part-social history and part-meditation on community. Here and in your poems, such as "Waving", you seem to be very concerned about the damaging internalization of certain assumptions about the northern conflict, imprisonment and politics in a period of rapid change and religious and political conflict on the most vulnerable member of society: a child. In other words, your work often presents the figure of a child victimized by a social, political, religious system that exploits, annihilates and silences him, but he is a survivor. Are very personal works like *The Invisible Prison* and "Let's Die" your affirmation of being for this child figure?

PB: Though my work focuses on – in general – small things, relatively minor instances, it is very interested in the larger-scale injustices of not just Irish society but wider society in the contemporary period. As I may have mentioned earlier, the child figure connects very strongly to that of the artist/discoverer, not least, because there are so many unknowns to be explored and understood and, therefore, the development of a trusting relationship with authority, etc., is essential. A good deal of my work does seem to be about survival, in one form or another, of stepping out of a crashed car ("Listening Wind") with the "wheels spinning in mud, wheels/spinning in your heart". The poems are often darker than I realize at the time of writing and I think that is one of the reasons I am drawn to solid, concrete detail or at least to accurate simulation (because nothing is truly "solid" in a poem). To spend time with a poem, which is to say to enter willingly into a poem and give it the time it requires, one has to feel that the poet takes the role seriously. If I go to a football stadium or step into an elevator, I need to feel that the designer has put the necessary thought into making sure the thing works. No journalist would expect to publish a piece that failed to, at least, consider the essential facts; the poet must do at least that, and more besides. Poetry is not an entertainment, though

it's often presented as such. It's not a priest- or priestess-hood, though it suits some people that it can be presented as such. It's closer to a kind of laboratory of feeling, a virtual world where things can be experienced and re-experienced, where objects and details hyperlink to other objects and details and through careful organization, rather than haphazard guesswork, some kind of empathy can be established between writer and reader. It seems to me that there is a lot of hurt around me, and a good deal inside of me too perhaps, and poems may have a role in dealing with that hurt. But that is not to say that the function of poetry, or art in general, is therapeutic, or not exclusively. For me, I think it has more to do with the way language works, or fails to work. Poetry wants to go beyond the agreed facts and established meanings of ordinary language and notice things that are just beyond what one of my poems ("They Say") calls "the porchlight of language", to see the things that usually go unseen down the back of the garden or out of the corner of the eye. I think when we connect with each other at that level, when we see the world from another's point of view and follow not just the denotations of the language but also its connotations – the whole shadow and "waving" world that surrounds each of us as individuals – then we are communicating at the level I think of as poetry.

MT: Could you say something about your more recent publication, the poetry collection *Then Again*? Does it touch on any of the issues we have talked about?

PB: Sometimes a book project can feel very much like a unit of meaning, like a single idea extended and evolved over a full-length manuscript. Other books feel more like diaries, or photo albums, during their composition, collections in which the parts stubbornly maintain their independence from each other, almost until the very end. The challenge then is to discover what belongs with what, and to form some kind of bond or order or "society", without imposing too much external structure, without flattening out the differences, and the different experiences that initially gave rise to the poems. In *Then Again*, as well as a number of poems set in Ireland, and a good deal of these set in the recent past (I find I finally have things to say about love and marriage, about this "second family" I have long been a happy part of but which seemed to me until now to need a kind of "neutral zone" away from the scrutiny of my writing); but I also

draw extensively on many poems that were written on various trips away from “home”, some in the role of a tourist, others on “literary work” etc. Having written a number of “still life” meditations on objects in museums here and there, I realized only recently that many of these shared the same preoccupations as my other, more autobiographical work, and that they might offer me (and the reader) both an occasional break from and a series of “novel” starting points to the various threads of the book. In the end, their presence seems to me crucial and entirely energizing, removing the protection/limitation of autobiography while, at the same time, focusing what might otherwise be, and appear to be, random thoughts. In this book, more than in any other, I feel that I discovered in the assembly a kind of organic narrative, with one poem suggesting (for me at least) the next in the sequence, a form which I am pleased to think preserves something of the surprise and discovery of their individual composition and yet, I hope, holds them sufficiently together as a unit. The title “Then Again” suggests, to me, both a return, a second opinion, as it were, but also a reappraisal and even a change of heart, as if the act of thinking about something again invites new angles, new perspectives, new discoveries. It can be good and reassuring to know what a book is about when one is writing it, but it’s important too to get a glimpse of what’s below the surface, what is there that’s only barely poking through. And when all else fails, there is always chance and luck, and the dictate of chronology: one groups a section, puts the oldest first, the youngest last, and everything and everyone else falls in between as their names (or images or moods) are called by the one before. In that sense at least poems are a bit like children –you have to learn to get out of their way now and then and let them go where they will. The exciting thing is when you encounter them again, independent now, grown up, as it were, and discover they have made their own way in the world and have things to say and opinions they did not get from you.

MT: And what are you working on now?

PB: After a new book of poems I often find I have to go in an entirely different direction for a while, if only to stop myself repeating myself; otherwise I end up fiddling endlessly with the poems that didn’t make the cut. So, right now I’m writing some poems, taking a lot of photos, reading like a starving man, and writing short pieces of prose, somewhere between

prose-poems and flash fictions. It's possible that at some stage I'll try to combine the two again, photographs and words, but I'm not sure yet what is the best way to go about doing that, or even if it's worth doing at all. But then, for me at least, the dead ends and the back lanes have always been as interesting to reach as the hilltop views of the sea. What I feel I learned in *Then Again*, or at least remembered, is that the power of poems often comes from the accumulation of things (images, rhythms), rather than from the theoretical overview that is often only discovered along the way. The trick (if it is a trick) is to make the most of the journey, and to take plenty of notes!

MT: Thank you so much for this interview, Pat Boran. I wish you all the best for your future work.

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- Vol. 94 Melania Terrazas Gallego (ed.): Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture
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The last two centuries have seen great traumas that continue to affect Irish society. Through constructing cultural trauma, Irish society can recognize human pain and its source/s and become receptive to the idea of taking significant and responsible measures to remedy it. The intention of this volume is to show the mediating role of the literature and film scholar, the archivist, the social media professional, the historian, the musician, the artist and the poet in identifying Irish cultural trauma past and present, in illuminating Irish national identity (which is shifting so much today), in paying tribute to the memory and suffering of others, in showing how to do things with words and, thus, how concrete action might be taken.

Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture makes a case for the value of trauma and memory studies as a means of casting new light on the meaning of Irish identity in a number of contemporary Irish cultural practices, and of illuminating present-day attitudes to the past. The critical approaches herein are of a very interdisciplinary nature, since they combine aspects of sociology, philosophy and anthropology, among other fields. This collection is intended to lead readers to reconsider the connections between trauma, Irish cultural memory, identity, famine, diaspora, gender, history, revolution, the Troubles, digital media, literature, film, music and art.

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