



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

70 | Spring 2018

Special Issue: Haunting in Short Fiction

Journeys Westward: McGahern, Joyce and Irish Writing

Stanley van der Ziel



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/2082>

ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2018

Number of pages: 167-190

ISBN: 978-2-7335-7425-0

ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Stanley van der Ziel, « Journeys Westward: McGahern, Joyce and Irish Writing », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 70 | Spring 2018, Online since 01 June 2020, connection on 03 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/2082>

This text was automatically generated on 3 December 2020.

© All rights reserved

Journeys Westward: McGahern, Joyce and Irish Writing

Stanley van der Ziel

- 1 James Joyce was a constant touchstone in the fiction of John McGahern, and many echoes of Joyce's fiction can be traced throughout his career. Following in the wake of Denis Sampson's pioneering *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern* (1993), criticism of McGahern's work has identified a rich variety of themes, techniques, settings and plot elements from works spanning the length of Joyce's career—from "The Sisters" to *Finnegans Wake*—that can be found in his fiction. But these debts to Joyce are not normally signalled overtly. Instead, McGahern was a writer who sought to occlude all evidence of his many literary debts in his fiction.
- 2 Only on three occasions did McGahern overtly engage with Joyce's work—twice in the conventional form of academic literary criticism, and once in a more unusual format. Between 1979 and 1990, he wrote two pieces of non-fictional prose about Joyce's legacy, both of which championed the *Dubliners* stories and the early episodes of *Ulysses*, in which "his imagination returns again and again to his first characters, his original material," above Joyce's later work (*Love of the World*, 207 and 185-87). But before the publication of either of these, he had already been commissioned in the early 1970s by the BBC and TimeLife to adapt "The Sisters," the opening story of *Dubliners*, into a television screenplay.¹ All adaptations are acts of interpretation, and this is perhaps particularly true when an adaptation is carried out by a fellow-practitioner, whose most astute readings of their predecessors can often take the form of original works of fiction, as I have argued in my recent monograph on McGahern's fiction and its relationships with literary "traditions" (van der Ziel, *John McGahern* 9 and *passim*). It is clear from this 1973 screenplay adaptation of "The Sisters" that McGahern not only found in Joyce themes and ideas that could be adapted in his own literary endeavours, but equally that he projected certain key ideas and obsessions of his own early work onto the youthful protagonist of Joyce's story. Because while McGahern's screenplay adaptation generally remains faithful to Joyce's original story, some material extraneous to Joyce's vision is introduced into the narrative. What is more, antecedents

for this non-autochthonous narrative material in McGahern's version of "The Sisters" can be found in novels like *The Dark* (1965) and *The Leavetaking* (1974)—the latter written around the same time as his dramatisation of "The Sisters."

- 3 The twofold nature of the symbiosis that existed between McGahern's vision and its Joycean source is clear, for example, from the original story's and the adaptation's respective attitudes to the religious vocation and the Roman Catholic Church. On the one hand, the powerful idea from the conclusion of "The Sisters," of a priest who has lost his religious belief, remained part of McGahern's storehouse of images and ideas all his life. It eventually made its way into his fiction when Moran in *Amongst Women* remarked on the unsettling paradox of priests who fear death despite the things they preach, because, he says, "If they believed in what they preach they shouldn't be afraid. Who knows anyhow? Who cares?" (179). On the other hand, McGahern's screenplay adaptation projected a number of idiosyncratic McGahernesque elements onto Joyce's story. For in some respects his adaptation of "The Sisters" is as much a chapter in the "moral history" of McGahern's Ireland in the third quarter of the twentieth century as it is of Joyce's at the turn of the century.² Thus, in McGahern's screenplay *Father Flynn* contrasts the Irish College in Rome where he has studied as a young man with domestic centres of religious training, and witheringly dismisses "the places here" as "not fit places, football seminaries ..." (McGahern, *Rockingham* 164). And when the same elderly priest reminisces about the dreams of a religious life he had once planned for the boy Stephen ("I was thinking too before I nodded what a great solace to me now is the thought that one day you may say Mass for me, that you may lift the chalice in anointed hands to God to ask him to have mercy on my poor soul" [McGahern, *Rockingham* 163]), that dialogue does not have a direct equivalent in the Joycean original. Instead, the idea is highly reminiscent of the various boy-protagonists' memories of promises to their respective dead mothers to become a priest and say Mass for them in early McGahern novels like *The Dark* and *The Leavetaking*, as well as of McGahern's own recollections in *Memoir* of dreams of a religious vocation he had once shared with his mother.
- 4 McGahern returned to stylistic and thematic aspects of "The Sisters" throughout his career.³ But other stories from the same collection were equally influential on his art, as a multitude of critics have shown.⁴ This essay does not pretend to be an exhaustive survey of McGahern's uses of Joyce, or even of *Dubliners*, in his short stories; this would be an exercise of considerable magnitude far beyond the scope afforded by a single essay. Instead, it will concentrate on the way McGahern's imagination was haunted in particular by his reading of one of Joyce's stories, "The Dead." I will argue how McGahern's reading of that story informed his ideas on a different set of topics. This argument will be made in two stages. The first part of the essay will trace the continuing presence of "The Dead" in McGahern's fiction. It will pay particular attention to the idea of the "journey westward" that must be undertaken by the hero, Gabriel Conroy, at the end of Joyce's story, and to the multiple connotations in Irish literary and cultural discourse of the ideas of journeying westward and eastward with which both Joyce and McGahern deal. The second part of the essay will argue how the "original" Joyce of "The Dead" and the early episodes of *Ulysses* favoured by McGahern (*Love of the World*, 207) haunts one of his short stories, "Swallows." It is my contention that this story from the 1970s is a clever re-writing of Joyce's "The Dead"; like Joyce's story, "Swallows" is interested in the apparent binary opposition between looking to the east and to the west, and in the possibility for breaking down such binary ways of

thinking following an imaginative journey westward modelled on that of Joyce's Gabriel Conroy at the end of "The Dead." The wider thesis that will emerge is that both "The Dead" and "Swallows" are not only short stories in their own right, but also programme statements for the future directions of Irish writing.

"Journey westward"

- 5 One of the central concerns of "The Dead," indeed of much of Joyce's writing of the period around the turn of the 1910s, is what in the final paragraph of "The Dead" he calls the "journey westward" (*Dubliners*, 225). The preoccupation with journeys westward in "The Dead" and in Stephen's diary entries at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a manifestation of Joyce's effort to situate himself as an Irish writer in relation to the conventions of the Irish Literary Revival—a preoccupation that persisted into *Ulysses*, and even *Finnegans Wake*.⁵ More than half a century later, McGahern, too, knew that his attitude towards "the west" and its culture and customs and language would partly determine what kind of Irish writer he would be. And like Joyce, he regularly returned, often in self-conscious and ironic ways, to the "journey westward" motif.
- 6 In the final paragraph of "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy's imagination in its movement "farther westward" crosses the "dark mutinous Shannon" (*Dubliners*, 225). McGahern begins the first story in his first short-story collection with a journey across the same alluvial frontier, as the protagonist of "Wheels" is acutely aware of the momentousness of crossing the river Shannon on the train. Crossing the Shannon is like a passing between two worlds that can seem as final and momentous as crossing the river Styx. It is so momentous, in fact, that the narrator feels how the passage across the Shannon can make time itself slow down (*Nightlines*, 13). The movement of McGahern's imagination has sometimes been defined by critics of his work as one that moves "inland," into the dark recesses of tribal affiliation (See for example O'Brien) but, on many occasions, the compass-direction of the move *westward* is just as significant. Like Joyce, McGahern was acutely aware of the enduring significance, even in the age of mass-transit and mass-emigration, of the trope of journeying westward—and indeed the trope of journeying *eastward* as well. There is a telling detail in the story "Why We're Here" when, in response to hearing the sound of the 9.20 diesel train rattling westward towards Sligo, one of the characters elliptically remarks: "Empty, I suppose" (*Nightlines*, 27). The implication of that remark is clear: it is obvious to both protagonists that only the trains moving eastward carrying émigrés out of the emptying countryside towards Dublin and across the Irish Sea are full.
- 7 Versions of the archetypal Revivalist "journey westward" away from urban and suburban Dublin appear in a number of McGahern's Dublin fictions. In a novel like *The Pornographer* (1979), these can be grossly satirical in their inversion of the conventional cultural-nationalist trope of the moral and sexual purity that is supposed to demarcate the indigenous west from the Anglicized east. We shall turn our attention to such satirical examples later in this essay, and begin here by looking at a journey westward in the same text that is more palatable and conventional. When the pornographer-narrator relates how he and his lover had driven their borrowed VW Beetle out of Dublin for a weekend break, he remarks on how:

We drove in the stream of traffic out of the city the next weekend. It didn't build any speed till it got past Lucan, and even there we found ourselves continually shut in behind slow trucks and milk tankers. [. . .] After Kinnegad the road emptied and we drove steadily and fast. Outside Longford a great walled estate with old woods stretched away to the left and children from a tinker encampment threw a stone that grazed the windscreen. In the distance, between rows of poplars, the steel strip of the Shannon started to flash. (*The Pornographer*, 82)⁶

- 8 A similar journeying westward away from the city and into the rural centre of supposed Irish authenticity is enacted at the start of the late story "The Country Funeral," a story centrally concerned with the relative merits of the *escape from* and the *return to* the ancestral traditions of the countryside in the Irish west.⁷ As the three brothers, Philly, Fonsie and John, make their way out of Dublin in a hired Mercedes, the journey is clearly one of symbolic import:

The big Mercedes grew silent as it gathered speed through Fairview and the North Strand, crossing the Liffey at the Custom House, and turned into the one-way flow of traffic out along the south bank of the river. Not until they got past Leixlip, and fields and trees and hedges started to be scattered between the new raw estates, did they begin to talk, and all their talk circled about the man they were going to bury, their mother's brother, their Uncle Peter McDermott. (*Collected Stories*, 379)

- 9 Both of these motorised journeys out into the country represent modernised versions of a familiar trope of nineteenth-century novels and Anglo-Irish travel narratives—one that, moreover, is also recalled in a modernised, motorised version by Joyce in the opening paragraph of "After the Race," in which the "wealth and industry" of an entire continent speeds homeward through the "channel of poverty and inaction" west of Dublin (*Dubliners*, 35).

- 10 All of these, however, are *literal* journeys westward, interesting variations on an old trope that had also been one of Joyce's sources. Much more interesting are the journeys westward that take place in the imagination. Many of McGahern's characters, particularly in the short stories, are prone to travel westward in the mind rather than in the flesh. It is here that the significance of "The Dead" becomes paramount.
- 11 Readers of "The Dead" are privy throughout to Gabriel Conroy's thoughts, including those about his wife's romantic past in Galway with a boy called Michael Furey, whom she says "died for me" (*Dubliners*, 221), a piece of information that haunts Gabriel's thoughts near the conclusion of the story.⁸ The story concludes with the nocturnal reverie in the Conroys' room in the Gresham Hotel in which Gabriel finally journeys westward in his imagination across the Bog of Allen, the "dark mutinous Shannon" and the central plain to the cemetery in Galway where Michael Furey's body is buried. It is clear that this "journey westward" in the imagination is in some way a source of healing, or at the very least a turning over of a new page, one as white and virginal as the pure snow that falls symbolically all over Ireland in the story's famous final paragraphs.
- 12 It is clear that McGahern noted this element of Joyce. In fact, the redemptive "journey[s] westward" in the imagination that can be found in McGahern's novels and stories are on more than one occasion inflected by his reading of Joyce's story. One need go no further than *The Pornographer* to locate the Joycean echo. That novel

critically engages with a number of aspects of going westward. First of all, and perhaps most obviously, it introduces two satires of the conventional Revivalist trope of the journey westward into territories supposedly unspoilt by corrupting English influences—such as may be found in the type of stories about “beautiful, pure faithful, Connacht girls and lithe, broad-shouldered open-faced young Connacht men” which Joyce ridiculed in one of his letters to his brother Stanislaus (*Selected Letters*, 134). The moral and sexual purity associated with the indigenous, Irish-speaking west in cultural-nationalist discourse is deliberately inverted first of all in the pornographer’s journey westward on a dirty weekend with his lover on a boat on the Shannon. Yet it is particularly savagely satirised later in the same novel in “Mavis and the Colonel Take a Trip on the Shannon,” the smutty story-within-a-novel based on that trip which the titular pornographer submits to Maloney’s pornographic magazine. The pornographer’s sensational pornographic romp to the west of Ireland not only satirizes bad writing; it also viciously targets, as Brian Merriman and Patrick Kavanagh had done before him in two texts that McGahern explicitly and obliquely references, conventional romantic notions about the moral purity of the peasant from the unspoilt west.⁹

- 13 But *The Pornographer* also contains a couple of variations on Gabriel Conroy’s *spiritual or imaginative* “journey westward,” both of which contrast starkly in intention and tone with the shambolic holidays on the Shannon in both the protagonist’s real life and in his fictional pornographic rendition of that trip. One of these symbolically healing or redemptive “journey[s] westward” takes the form of the protagonist’s terminally ill aunt’s patrols of the imagination from her Dublin hospital bed to a stretch of abandoned railway line, which for her is an earthly paradise (*The Pornographer*, 121). More directly reminiscent of Joyce’s example, however, is the novel’s conclusion. The narrative reaches a form of closure once the titular hero—or anti-hero—articulates a private resolve very close to that of Gabriel Conroy at the end of “The Dead” as he, too, gives in to a desire to “set out on his journey westward” (*Dubliners*, 225). Near the end of the novel, the pornographer decides to leave the city and: “[. . .] to go inland, in the solitude that is both pain and joy, and there make our own truth” (*The Pornographer*, 203). His real, physical retreat to the farm in the midlands that he has inherited is finally important, then, not because he intends to act out some vague Revivalist fantasy of living in a smoky cabin and taking up beekeeping, but because it betokens a genuine intellectual move in the pursuit of “truth.” Going “inland” here signifies at once a geographical journey westward to an unspoilt rural domain associated by generations of romantic nationalists with authentic national experience, *as well as* a metaphorical journey into his own troubled heart of darkness. The pornographer’s articulate resolve to look for such “truth” in a journey westward is reminiscent of that of Gabriel Conroy, who begins his reverie in the final paragraph of “The Dead” by making an equally momentous decision, reported in free indirect speech:

The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. [. . .] His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (*Dubliners*, 225)

- 14 Metaphorical journeys westward of precisely this kind occur not only here but in a number of McGahern’s urban fictions. Versions of the same motif can also be found in a number of the *Getting Through* stories of the 1970s. In “A Slip-Up,” for example, an elderly Irishman living in London passes away stretches of boredom waiting for his wife

outside Tesco by restoring the run-down, overgrown farm in the west of Ireland that they have left task-by-task *in his imagination* (see *Getting Through*, 31-33). “Swallows,” too, is centrally preoccupied with imaginative journeys both eastward and westward, as the next section of this essay shall discuss in more detail.¹⁰ Perhaps one other story from the same collection is particularly notable for the number and variety of apparently overt references to “The Dead.” “The Wine Breath” concludes with the priest’s imagination following a young man about to enter “a pleasant and uncomplicated evening” (*Getting Through*, 106)—a version, perhaps, of Gabriel Conroy’s sterile imagination haunting the imagined sexual past of Gretta and Michael Furey in “The Dead.” Still, there are more obvious echoes of the same story. As Denis Sampson and others have noted, the sight of white beech chips on the ground that triggers the protagonist’s memory of snow in the graveyard on the day of Michael Bruen’s funeral thirty years before (McGahern, *Getting Through* 95-96) cannot but suggest a comparison with the final paragraph of “The Dead” (Sampson, *Outstaring* 175). In addition, there is also a verbal echo that has hitherto gone unnoticed. The realisation which follows the priest’s involuntary memory of Michael Bruen’s funeral in the snow—that these experiences are like “suddenly *fall[ing]* through time; it was as if *the world of the dead* was as available to him as *the world of the living*” (*Getting Through*, 97: emphasis added)—almost certainly echoes the famous last sentence of “The Dead” about the snow “faintly falling [...] upon all the living and the dead.” What McGahern’s story has appropriated from Joyce’s is its sense of narrative and ontological fluidity. Like “The Dead,” “The Wine Breath” is about the interminable presence of the lives of the dead in the lives of the living, and this awareness is reflected in the shape of the narrative, which moves fluidly between the narrative present and a number of real and imagined pasts when those who are now dead were still living.

- 15 A similar “journey westward” is also a key subject at the conclusion of “The Country Funeral,” a story first published at the end of McGahern’s *Collected Stories* (1992). There, the mother’s imagined journey westward to attend her brother’s funeral is more lovingly attentive to detail—more *real!*—than the perception of the same event of some of those who had actually been there. McGahern’s decision to end this particular short story, and with it his *Collected Stories*, with the imagined (re)construction of a funeral by one who is unable to attend and who follows it instead on the clock probably *does* go back, as I have suggested elsewhere, to his own early experience of being denied to attend his mother’s funeral when he was nine or ten years old, and piecing together a version of that event from memory and imagination instead as he watched a rusty old alarm clock in the rushes near the barracks—a scene later recalled in *The Leavetaking* and in *Memoir* (see van der Ziel, “Learning to Read” 28). Nevertheless, the conclusion of that story may *also* simultaneously be a throwback or homage to Gabriel’s westbound reverie at the conclusion of *Dubliners*, in which an imagined journey to a site connected with dead people and dead days can potentially be a more fruitful source of understanding and reconciliation with the past than one actually undertaken in person. The mother in “The Country Funeral” establishes an infinitely more meaningful connection with an event she has of necessity only imagined than her sons, who have participated in it, just as Gabriel learns by the end of “The Dead” to attain a more convincing “truth” about his own life and that of others as a result of his purely imaginary “journey westward” than the superficial connection that Miss Ivors is likely to make on her pious nationalist jaunts to the Aran Islands.

Joyce and “Swallows”

- 16 McGahern was well aware that “The Dead” is not just about the “journey westward” but also about the journey eastward, and about the necessary co-existence of real and imagined journeys to those two opposite points of the compass, each with their own contrasting connotations in Irish cultural discourse. At the start of his 2004 essay “What Is My Language?” McGahern quoted the famous exchange from “The Dead” in which Gabriel Conroy and Miss Ivors discuss the different cultural traditions to which Irish artists and intellectuals might look:

— And why do you go to France and Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land?

— Well, said Gabriel, it’s partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.

— And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish? asked Miss Ivors.

— Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.

(*Dubliners*, 189; qtd in McGahern, *Love of the World* 260)

- 17 McGahern’s gloss on this passage of dialogue from “The Dead” is also worth noting. He remarked that:

What Miss Ivors is reflecting is Irish cultural nationalism, a movement fashioned by many hands throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. [. . .] What Gabriel Conroy is probably reflecting is a version of Joyce’s own position at the time. If Irish was not his language, neither, it would appear, was English fully his language, his eyes turned to Europe. (*Love of the World*, 260)

- 18 On one level, “The Dead” can be read, then, as Joyce’s programme statement for his own fiction, and for modern Irish writing more generally. Through his espousal of Gabriel’s point of view, and his implicit dismissal of the foolish narrow-mindedness of Miss Ivors and her ilk, Joyce defends the Irish writer’s right to look east to continental Europe for artistic examples. Yet he does not, in pitching himself against the dogmatism of this type of narrow-minded cultural nationalism, throw out the baby of authentic Irish experience with the Revivalist bathwater and disavow the relevance of the west altogether. On the contrary, in the privacy of his own memory and imagination during the course of the latter half of the story, Gabriel discovers, or perhaps re-discovers, the importance of native experiences connected with the West. What Joyce condemns in “The Dead,” then, is the absoluteness of the two characters’ denials of one or the other cultural realm (Miss Ivors’ of Europe and Gabriel’s of the west of Ireland), while he seconds with equal force their respective endorsements of eastern (British, European) and western (indigenous Irish) cultural traditions.
- 19 Ultimately then, “The Dead” is about the Janus-faced nature of the best modern Irish writing, which must look eastward to Europe for artistic tools even as the story materials are wholly indigenous to the “scraggy isthmus” (Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 3) on the extreme western fringe of Europe—an idea that is borne out not just by the example of Joyce, who was influenced in his adoption of technical innovations like the “stream of consciousness” by late-nineteenth-century French writers like Édouard Dujardin (See for example Kern 27-29), but also that of Synge and Yeats, who turned to genres like Classical Greek tragedy and French symbolist poetry and fused what those forms taught them with subject matter found much closer to home in the Irish countryside.

McGahern's gloss to the Gabriel Conroy-Miss Ivors exchange in "What Is My Language?" strongly suggests that he was aware of this way to read the story.

- 20 These same dichotomies at the heart of the Joycean attempt at defining the nature of modern Irish writing—east versus west, native-Irish versus European, tradition versus cosmopolitanism—are revisited in McGahern's story "Swallows." In many respects, that story from the early 1970s is a rewriting of "The Dead." The rest of this essay will demonstrate how certain key elements of "Swallows," in which an alcoholic Garda sergeant brings a young state surveyor with a passion for the violin back to the barracks on a rainy afternoon to talk about European holidays and the life and work of Paganini, can be read as a rewriting of some key passages from Joyce—particularly from "The Dead," although it may also contain some elements from *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. A Joycean reference may even account for the title. It has vexed many readers that the titular "swallows" play no role in the story. One solution to this conundrum is that their significance—like that of the seagulls that "whish" in and out of *The Leavetaking*—originates in Joyce's bestiary,¹¹ as McGahern's title references a key passage in chapter 5 of *A Portrait* where Stephen regards the swallows he sees outside the National Library as an "augury" for his destiny of escape and exile: "What birds were they? He thought that they must be swallows who had come back from the south. Then he was to go away for they were birds ever going and coming, building ever an unlasting home under the eaves of men's houses and ever leaving the homes they had built to wander" (243-35). This is certainly an appropriate intertext in a story concerned with the contrast between staying at home or venturing abroad. In developing such allusions to and parallels with Joyce, McGahern is both positioning himself in a certain literary tradition, and developing ideas which he found in Joyce but which still applied to his own cultural moment and his own ideas about the nature and purpose of literature, and particularly about its relationship to national movements.

- 21 The action of "Swallows" plays out against the backdrop of not one but two tragic young deaths. The most obvious of these is the young bicyclist who was hit by a car on his way to get a haircut in the town who is discussed by the sergeant and the surveyor in the exchange with which the story opens. Yet there is also the story of the daughter of the street musician in the faraway city of Avignon who, while her father plays his violin between café tables, lies "dying of consumption." That tragic young death of an innocent youth with a musical connection is made as vivid as Michael Furey's in "The Dead" in the paragraph of free indirect thought (it is not clear whether it is the sergeant's or the surveyor's) that breaks in on the surveyor's account of how he came to buy a beautiful old violin:

Streets of Avignon, white walls of the royal popes in the sun, glasses of red wine and the old Italian musician playing between the café tables in the evening, a girl dying of consumption, and the sweeping rain hammering on the windscreen. (*Getting Through*, 123)¹²

- 22 Like "The Dead," and like "The Wine Breath," a story with which it has much in common, "Swallows" is fundamentally a story about regret, concerned with the question of what might have been, and with how an individual's life and personality might, given different circumstances, have developed differently from how they did. The drama of what might have been is in both stories concentrated in the figures of the

middle-aged men who are the respective protagonists. In “The Dead,” the practical Gabriel Conroy had imagined what it must be like “if he were a painter” (*Dubliners*, 211); he is seized by “A vague terror” when Gretta tells him that “I think he [Michael Furey] died for me” (211); and later, alone in the room beside his sleeping wife, he considers how it would be “Better [to] pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dimly with age” (223). The Sergeant in “Swallows” shares in a similar sort of regret, much of which is connected with his lost musical vocation. If Gabriel, who fantasises about being a painter, is jealous of Michael Furey, then the sergeant is jealous of the surveyor who, although he chose the security of a civil service career over a career in music, has managed to hold on to the artistic passions of his youth and still plays the violin. This in stark contrast with how the sergeant’s own life has turned out: unlike his younger companion, the sergeant has let his opportunities for happiness pass and neglected the musical talent that is so tied up with his youth in the story, turning instead to whiskey “to hurry the time” (*Getting Through*, 128). And if Gretta’s passionate romantic past is encapsulated by her memory of “this delicate boy” with big dark eyes singing a tragic ballad, “The Lass of Aughrim” (*Dubliners*, 220), then the sergeant’s lost youth is equally poignantly captured by a single image that haunts his imagination:

Going back with the fellows over the fields in the morning as the cold day came up, he remembered; and life was as full of promise as the smile the girl with cloth fuchsia bells in her dark hair threw him as she danced past where he played on the planks. The Surveyor looked from the whiskey bottle to the regret on the sunken face [. . .] (*Getting Through*, 128-29)

- 23 The memory of the smile of “the girl with the cloth fuchsia bells in her dark hair” is one of the “images,” so Proustian in nature, about which McGahern had written in his 1968 essay “The Image”—one of the “lost” images, as he wrote in that essay, “that gave our lives expression, [...] that would completely express it again in this bewilderment between our beginning and end” (*Love of the World*, 5-6).¹³ Her smile, as it is called up from a ghostly past decades later, is like an apparition from beyond the grave haunting his life, an emblem of lost opportunities and the road not taken. The sergeant’s eager choice of “Danny Boy” for a song-request (*Getting Through*, 129) is as significant, then, as Joyce’s choice of “The Lass of Aughrim” was for Gretta Conroy: both are tragic ballads of lost love addressed to a doomed youth.¹⁴
- 24 The contrast between journeys eastward and journeys westward that is a recurring theme in a number of McGahern’s other works is also significant in “Swallows.” What is more, in this story it has particularly Joycean overtones, as Gabriel Conroy’s complex relationship with Europe and the west of Ireland is revisited in the sergeant’s meeting with the surveyor and its aftermath. In “The Dead,” the contrast is between cycling holidays in France and Belgium on the one hand, and visiting the west of Ireland in order to keep in touch with the “native” language and culture on the other.¹⁵ While Gabriel initially prefers the former, disavowing in the process the authenticity of the Irish language as a means of self-expression for the majority of the modern Irish nation in the twentieth century, he is by the end of the story drawn to “journey westward” in his imagination across the central plain and the “dark mutinous Shannon” to Galway—a journey he undertakes, in the afterglow of a disappointing Christmas party, in a darkened room in the Gresham Hotel in the presence of his sleeping wife Gretta, whose erstwhile passion he envies, and whose sleep renders her, for the duration of his nocturnal reverie, both present and absent from his company.

- 25 All these elements are repeated in “Swallows.” Let us begin with the role of the deaf housekeeper Biddy. Her deafness makes her both present and absent from the sergeant’s company as he sits alone with his thoughts after the surveyor has left the barracks. Structurally, therefore, Biddy stands in for Gretta Conroy’s present-absent form. As a realist character who fulfils a certain social or cultural function in the story, however, she is also reminiscent of another passage elsewhere in Joyce. For if Biddy the deaf housekeeper is not only a character in her own right but also a cipher, an almost symbolic representation of a traditional class of Irish womanhood in positions of domestic drudgery that exists in novels and stories, then she is partly mandated by a Joycean intertext that appears to have existed in McGahern’s imagination. In one of his 1987 *Evening Herald* book reviews, McGahern contrasts the kind of “bad writing [that] is its own situation” with the realism of *Ulysses* when he remarks that “long before the end [of Isabel Allende’s *Of Love and Shadows*] I wanted Joyce’s woman with her saucepan to enter and declare, ‘I cooked good Irish stew’” (*Love of the World*, 338). The quote is from Bloom’s speculations on the erstwhile occupations of the inmates of the graveyard in the Hades episode of *Ulysses* (143).
- 26 It is doubtful, though, that this is the passage McGahern was thinking of when he wished for the entrance of a character whose lively realistic speech might alleviate the boredom of a bad, formulaic novel. For one thing, the woman who “cooked good Irish stew” cannot “enter” any room for the simple reason that she is dead. Perhaps, then, McGahern’s memory conflated a line from one episode of *Ulysses* with a character from another. The most likely contender is the passage in the Telemachus episode in which an old milkwoman visits the Martello Tower (*Ulysses*, 15). The conversation between Stephen, Mulligan, Haines and the old milkwoman from the opening chapter of *Ulysses* reprises themes and ideas in which McGahern was interested. These include the status of the Irish language which is also a subject in the famous Miss Ivors exchange in “The Dead,” as well as a broader concern with conventional Revivalist representations—or misrepresentations—of “authentic” Irish being. As one of *Ulysses*’ earliest critics emphasized, Stephen Dedalus may incorporate familiar poetic tropes describing Ireland as a beautiful woman in his description of the milkwoman, but like Joyce himself he “refuses [...] to exploit the sentimentalism in favour with the Dublin literary group” (Gilbert 96).
- 27 Despite all of Joyce’s misgivings about the sentimental conventions of the Irish Literary Revival, and his merciless lampooning of those conventions in this episode and elsewhere,¹⁶ the milkwoman in the Telemachus episode of *Ulysses* certainly *does* represent a desirable, authentic facet of Irish life that contrasts with the bustle and confusion of modernity (the “ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry” conjured in Stephen’s vision of Blake’s urban apocalypse in the Nestor episode [28]). More importantly, it is very clear how Joyce’s quarrel in this section of the Telemachus episode is not with simple rural dwellers like the milkwoman, but rather with professionalised folklorists like the Englishman Haines who do not hesitate to invest any small item of speech they consider “folk” with “ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of Dundrum” (*Ulysses*, 14). The inclusion of the milkwoman in the opening episode of *Ulysses*, far from being a malicious attack on simple country people, is actually Joyce’s defence of such people’s way of thinking and expression against the onslaught of the pious nationalist sentimentality of the Revival industry.¹⁷

28 Like Joyce and his milkwoman, then, McGahern does not mean to ridicule the unsophisticated voice of the socially marginalised. Bidy's noisy bursting-in on the sergeant and surveyor's talk of music when she re-enters following her return from the local shop (*Getting Through*, 129),¹⁸ like the milkwoman's interruption of the dry academic talk of Stephen, Mulligan and Haines in *Ulysses*, fulfils exactly McGahern's own wish in that book review written a decade later for something similarly ordinary and spontaneous to happen in Isabel Allende's lacklustre fictional world. Sometimes, works of fiction can be in danger of turning into academic or sociological tracts, in which abstract *ideas* dominate too much. It is obvious from a 1960 letter to Michael McLaverty that McGahern was alert to this danger from the very beginning of his career. In that letter, the aspiring young author articulated his awareness of the danger of overly theoretical fiction with perfect clarity in response to Sean O'Faolain's 1936 novel *Bird Alone*:

I couldn't like it. I found it difficult to distinguish anything through the fog of rhetoric. Characters, emotions, even simple situations blurred in this exceedingly skilful manipulation of words—and this quickly became for me a drone of a bore. He said one very good thing about friendship and even this was spoiled for me by appearing too neatly parcelled—all wrapped in shiny blue ribbon. I wished that somebody would nail a grocer's calendar on the wall and say something ordinary, instead of all these beautiful turned phrases melting into one another like clouds. (9 March 1960, Killen 20)

29 That verdict is perfectly consistent with his complaint about what he would describe as Isabel Allende's "poor account of Chilean life" a quarter of a century later (*Love of the World*, 337-38). It is apparent from both of his essays on Joyce that McGahern preferred to think of his illustrious compatriot not as an experimental Modernist but rather as a great realist (see *Love of the World*, 185-87, 200-07), and it is no more than consistent with that evaluation that the two women who enter to offer food in *Ulysses*—like the hypothetical man whom McGahern wished would come in, nail up a calendar and say something ordinary during certain passages of *Bird Alone*—seem to have been elevated in McGahern's imagination into talismanic figures in the pursuit of narrative realism. As a fictional descendant of Joyce's milkwoman—or indeed of the woman who "made good Irish stew"—one of Bidy's functions in "Swallows" is as a safeguard of the integrity of narrative realism at a moment when the two male protagonists' lengthy discussions of "the old church history" (*Getting Through*, 123) and the biography of Paganini are in danger of becoming too abstract and academic to continue to support the essential elements of fiction: those summed up in his letter to McLaverty as "Character, emotions [and] simple situations" (Killen 20).

30 Finally, Bidy may also serve yet a third function in "Swallows"—one that we may term *thematic*. Undoubtedly, many readers have been puzzled to know why "Swallows" should conclude with a description of Bidy knitting a sock on her machine:

Bidy did not look up. She had turned the heel and would not have to adjust the needles again till she had to start narrowing the sock close to the toe. Her body swayed happily on the chair as she turned and turned the handle, for she knew it would be all plain sailing till she got close to the toe. (*Getting Through*, 133)

31 The answer may lie in the fact that Bidy represents many of the qualities of the artist that the frustrated-violinist-sergeant lacks. Absorbed in her work, hers is the kind of reverie that the sergeant lacks in all areas of his life except for when he is fishing, when (as he tells the surveyor at the beginning of the story) "Time runs like lightning" (*Getting Through*, 124). Both these descriptions are reminiscent of McGahern's

description in his essay “The Solitary Reader” of the “complete absorption when all sense of time is lost” that can occur to the artist in the acts of reading and writing (*Love of the World*, 90). In fact, Bidly’s sock-knitting is compared with the sergeant’s fishing in one other key respect that can also be linked to one of McGahern’s recurring ideas about the artist. The sergeant does not much like to eat fish and gives most of what he catches away, just as Bidly knits “More to pass the time than for the few pence it brings her” (*Getting Through*, 124). Both are totally non-utilitarian activities. This links both the sergeant and Bidly with the various Moroneys’ and Sinclairs’ and Kirkwoods’ pursuits, in a number of works of fiction and non-fiction from the 1980s and 1990s, of things like gardening, beekeeping and astronomy—all activities that are regarded by their drudging neighbours as aristocratic foibles, things guaranteed to be “perfectly useless” (“Eddie Mac,” *High Ground*, 73). In contrast, those who—like the boy in the story “Oldfashioned” who can appreciate the way Colonel Sinclair’s wife has arranged apples in a basket (*High Ground*, 41), or like the young McGahern in the autobiographical essay “The Solitary Reader” or *Memoir*—show an interest in activities that have no utilitarian purpose, in doing things for the beauty or the pleasure of the thing in itself, are regarded as possessing a sensibility that would enable them to be artists.¹⁹

- 32 If the deaf housekeeper Bidly in “Swallows” stands in for the sleeping Gretta to the sergeant’s westward-looking Gabriel, then her key structural function in the story is to emphasise the loneliness of the sergeant’s nocturnal wanderings, even in company. What is more, the direction of the sergeant’s solitary nocturnal wanderings, especially in relation to that of his diurnal thoughts in conversation with the surveyor, is vital too, because the tension between the two reprises the Ireland-versus-Europe, west-versus-east theme of “The Dead.” “Swallows” is, after all, as much concerned with that contrast as “The Dead,” and it sets up the contrast in a remarkably similar way. The sergeant may not encounter an antagonistic voice like that of Miss Ivors, finding himself in conversation instead with the Europhile surveyor; but the *subject* of their conversation, and the east-west contrast it introduces, is identical to that of “The Dead.” Miss Ivors had criticised what she considers Gabriel’s West-Brittonism, his total lack of interest in his own country and his own language in favour of that of the imperial conqueror and the alien cultures of other European potentates (even if one of these is that of Ireland’s traditional Catholic ally, France). Her critique, narrow-minded as it may sound to twenty-first-century readers, articulated the opinions of a substantial proportion of Dublin’s nationalist middle-class Catholic establishment in the early 1900s. McGahern’s version of the same subject in a story first published in the *Evening Herald* in December 1971,²⁰ on the other hand, belongs not to that of the heyday of Irish cultural nationalism, but to that of the early days of Irish consumer-capitalism in the burgeoning European common market, and they are articulated by a committed Europhile who is a not unrepresentative member of the community that voted for Ireland to enter the EEC in the referendum of 10 May 1972.²¹ Speaking of his favourite holiday destination in the South of France, the surveyor tells the sergeant:

The papal palaces are still there. Avignon is wonderful. You must go there. Some of those wonderful Joe Walsh Specials put it within all our reaches. The very sound of the name makes me long for summer. (*Getting Through*, 123)²²

- 33 The surveyor talks of his European holidays, and of the life of Paganini, his favourite composer. The surveyor, like James Joyce and Gabriel Conroy before him, may be courting a native of Galway—the hotel manageress Eileen O’Neill, the off-stage figure who, with her “delicate” features and potent western sexual allure, is very much a

stand-in for Joyce's Michael Furey—but the waking thoughts of the two men are of Europe, and of the lofty cultural models that may be found in the east.

- 34 What is of real interest, though, is what happens at the conclusion of the story, in the time between day and night, waking and dreaming—that time when, as Joyce had demonstrated so vividly in “The Dead” and in the final, late-night episodes of *Ulysses*, we are most susceptible to melancholy visitations from the past. At the end of the story, the importance of looking both east and west is introduced in a way very much reminiscent of the conclusion of “The Dead.” At the conclusion of “Swallows,” the sergeant, alone in the room but for deaf Bidy, who is as oblivious to his presence as Gretta is to that of Gabriel in Joyce's story, experiences a reverie very much like that experienced by Gabriel Conroy in his room in the Gresham Hotel. Following their waking conversation about European art and culture, the sergeant's imagination is now free to wander. As it does so in this nocturnal reverie, his imagination finally makes the “journey westward” as he imagines the surveyor's drive to his rendezvous in Galway, the city where, in Joyce's story, Michael Furey had courted Gretta and died:

Tonight in Galway, in a long dress of burgundy velvet, satin in her hair, the delicate white hands of Eileen O'Neill would flicker on the white keyboard as the Surveyor played, while Mrs Kilboy would say to him at the C.W.A., “Something will have to be done about Jackson's thieving ass, Sergeant, it'll take the law to bring him to his senses, nothing less [...]” (*Getting Through*, 132)

- 35 Following the example of “The Dead,” it is, finally, the journey westward made in the imagination that is really important. In Michael O'Connell's sensitive film adaptation of “Swallows,” the connection between the endings of the two stories is reinforced by the decision to set the ending in a snowy white landscape (an effect that is further emphasized by the use of black and white), and by partially overlaying the sergeant's solitary rehearsal of the monologue he intends to deliver to Mrs Kilboy at the CWA meeting that evening with a shot of the surveyor driving westward through the snow. Thus, again, adaptation can function as literary criticism—in this case with the purpose of highlighting, whether deliberately or not, a dormant or potential intertextual connection.
- 36 One of the ways in which the compatibility of these two apparently opposing cultural traditions—one belonging to the Irish west and one to the European east; one folksy and indigenous, one foreign and cosmopolitan—is signalled in McGahern's story is, as it is in “The Dead,” through its choice of musical cues. “Swallows” is unique among McGahern's fictions for its emphasis on musical compositions. Generally, McGahern was little interested in such things. He often said that his imagination was primarily visual, and he has commented in essays and interviews on his favourite painters but not on his favourite musicians or composers; what is more, he was in fact tone-deaf like another one of his heroes, the poet W.B. Yeats. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the reason why he so prominently included a musical frame of reference in this story was almost certainly as a homage to Joyce, whose musical sensibility far outstripped his own. Both male protagonists in “Swallows” have a passion for the violin, just as in “The Dead” everyone has a passion for singing. If “The Dead” and “Swallows” are both about the competing attraction of two cultures, one looking eastward and one westward, and each with their own language and culture, then it is only in the act of listening to music that characters from different cultural-political persuasions can meet. “Swallows,” no less than “The Dead,” reflects the eclectic musical tastes of James Joyce. If in “The Dead,” English and Italian operas rub shoulders

at the Misses Morkans' Christmas party with sentimental nationalist ballads like "The Lass of Aughrim," then so, in McGahern's story, do Paganini, "Danny Boy" and what the protagonists describe as "the old tunes." The latter refers to traditional jigs and reels like "The Kerry Dances" which the sergeant remembers playing in his youth—when, as he poignantly considers, "life was as full of promise as the smile the girl with cloth fuchsia bells in her dark hair threw him as she danced past where he played on the planks"—and which the surveyor can play still (*Getting Through*, 128-30).

- 37 In "Swallows," as in "The Dead," the point of referencing this eclectic mix of musical tastes and genres is to reinforce the idea that the modern Irish imagination can—and *must*—look eastward as well as westward, to indigenous traditions as well as European ones. It is that lesson from Joyce's story which McGahern would stress many years later when he opened his essay "What Is My Language?" with a discussion of the Gabriel Conroy-Miss Ivors discussion; but he had already engaged with the same aspect of the same Joycean intertext in this story from the early 1970s. With its imaginative flight to Europe, its characters' lengthy regurgitation of the history of European art and culture, and its emphasis on musical culture, "Swallows" remains a unique story within the McGahern oeuvre. Its proximity to "The Dead" may well account for much of this individuality. Long before he discussed Joyce's story in an academic essay, therefore, short stories like "The Wine Breath" and "Swallows" were among McGahern's original intellectual engagements with the themes and ideas that fascinated him most in "The Dead." In such stories he first managed to "lighten[] and deepen[]," as the narrator of one of his last stories puts it (*Creatures*, 323), his appreciation of things he had first read in Joyce.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bataillard, Pascal. "Love and Solitary Enjoyment in 'My Love, My Umbrella': Some of John McGahern's Uses of *Dubliners*." *Journal of the short story in English* 53 (Autumn 2009): 79-89. Web. 25 Oct. 2017.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "Ireland and the EU: A History." Web. 24 Apr. 2016.
- Gilbert, Stuart. *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study*. 1930. Rev. ed. Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1963. Print.
- Haas, Robert. "A James Joyce Bestiary: Animal Symbolism in *Ulysses*." *ANQ* 27.1 (2014): 31-39. Print.
- Hirsch, Edward. "The Imaginary Irish Peasant." *PMLA* 106.5 (Oct. 1991): 1116-33. Print.
- Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. 1914. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- . *Finnegans Wake*. 1939. London: Faber & Faber, 1975. Print.
- . *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- . *Selected Letters*. Ed. Richard Ellmann. London: Faber & Faber, 1975. Print.

- . *Ulysses*. 1922. Annotated students' edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- Kenny, Anthony. *A New History of Western Philosophy*. 4 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004-2007. Print.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994. Print.
- Killeen, Terence. "Versions of Exile: A Reading of *The Leavetaking*." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 17.1 (July 1991): 69-78. Print.
- Killen, John, ed. *Dear Mr McLaverty: The Literary Correspondence of John McGahern and Michael McLaverty 1959-1980*. Belfast: Linen Hall Library, 2006. Print.
- McGahern, John. *Amongst Women*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990. Print.
- . *The Collected Stories*. London: Faber & Faber, 1992. Print.
- . *Creatures of the Earth: New and Selected Stories*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006. Print.
- . *Getting Through*. London: Faber & Faber, 1978. Print.
- . *High Ground and Other Stories*. London: Faber & Faber, 1985. Print.
- . *Love of the World: Essays*. Ed. Stanley van der Ziel. London: Faber & Faber, 2009. Print.
- . *Nightlines*. London: Faber & Faber, 1970. Print.
- . *The Pornographer*. London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Print.
- . *The Rockingham Shoot and Other Dramatic Writings*. Ed. Stanley van der Ziel. London: Faber & Faber, 2018. Print.
- . *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. London: Faber & Faber, 2002. Print.
- McKeon, Belinda. "'Robins Feeding with the Sparrows': The Protestant 'Big House' in the Fiction of John McGahern." *Irish University Review* 35.1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 72-89. Print.
- O'Brien, George. "Going Inland." Rev. of *Memoir*, by John McGahern. *Dublin Review* 22 (Spring 2006): 36-46. Print.
- O'Connell, Michael, dir. *Swallows*. Boy Named Sue Productions / Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, 2000. Film.
- Price, Graham. "Impure and Complicated Truth: Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and John McGahern's 'The Country Funeral'." *New Hibernia Review* 16.4 (Winter 2012): 95-109. Print.
- Robinson, Richard. *John McGahern and Modernism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.
- Sampson, Denis. "John McGahern: A Preliminary Checklist." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 17.1 (July 1991): 93-101. Print.
- . *Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern*. Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1993. Print.
- Showlin, Frank. *Journey Westward: Joyce, Dubliners and the Literary Revival*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2012. Print.
- Whyte, James. *History, Myth, and Ritual in the Fiction of John McGahern: Strategies of Transcendence*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002. Print.
- Ziel, Stanley van der. *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition*. Cork: Cork UP, 2016. Print.
- . "John McGahern: *Nightlines*." *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, edited by Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. 488-97. Print.

---. "Learning to Read." *John McGahern Yearbook* 4 (2011): 20-29. Print.

---. "Medusa's Mirror: Art, Style, Vision and Tradition in the Fiction of John McGahern." PhD dissertation. University College Dublin, 2008. Print.

NOTES

1. McGahern's adaptation of Joyce's "The Sisters" was directed by Stephen Frears, and broadcast on BBC 2 on 17 February 1973.
2. McGahern quoted the famous letter to Grant Richards in which Joyce describes his "intention [...] to write a chapter of the moral history of my country" in his 1990 essay on *Dubliners*. See McGahern, *Love of the World* 201; Joyce, *Selected Letters* 83.
3. For examples of some of the ways in which the presence of "The Sisters" can be traced in works from *The Barracks* to *Amongst Women*, see van der Ziel, *John McGahern* 124, 188-89.
4. Critical discussions of McGahern's debts to the early Joyce have ranged from Sampson's and others' remarks about the debt to *Dubliners* in those *Nightlines* stories which "recall a past experience, the pivot of which is initiation or disillusionment" (Sampson, *Outstaring* 87; van der Ziel, "Nightlines" 492-94), to detailed analyses of intertextual debts to particular works by Joyce. Certain stories, or pairings of stories, have repeatedly attracted the attention of critics. Sampson (*Outstaring*, 87), van der Ziel (*John McGahern*, 118, 159; "Nightlines," 494) and Robinson (68-73) have all commented on what the latter describes as the "quare pair: [McGahern's] 'Lavin' and [Joyce's] 'An Encounter'" (Robinson 68)—and their respective arguments about the overlaps between these two stories all make reference to such distinct issues as the position of the "queer old jossler" encountered by the hero and the changing relationship with his childhood companion which this finally brings about, the lyrical epiphanic sentences that conclude both respective stories, and the emphasis on the escapism of boyhood reading (the "escape" which the "chronicles of disorder [from Joe Dillon's little library] alone seemed to offer" (*Dubliners*, 12) which is replicated in a number of early McGahern stories). Another *Nightlines* story, "My Love, My Umbrella," has also been the subject of repeated scrutiny. As Terence Killeen first pointed out, that story takes its title from the last line of *Giacomo Joyce* (Killeen 74), and a number of readings have sought to establish connections both with that early autobiographical piece of Joyce's and with several of the *Dubliners* stories. These include "Two Gallants" (the ironic "gallantry" of Corley in that story is linked by Sampson (*Outstaring*, 100) and Robinson (81) with the mock-heroic tone of McGahern's story), and "A Painful Case." The latter connection is the subject of an essay by Pascal Bataillard, who links McGahern's protagonist's desire for the female body and his eventual retreat from a promising physical attachment with that of Mr Duffy in "A Painful Case" (§ 19-25).
5. On Joyce's relationship to the Irish Literary Revival, see Shovlin.
6. The exact same description is repeated in the protagonist's pornographic "Mavis and the Colonel" story that is based on their trip: see *The Pornographer*, 153, 155.
7. On Philly and Fonsie's competing ways (one romantic, one hostile and cynical) of seeing the nature of their childhood experiences in the countryside, see Price 105.
8. That plot element is ironically recalled in a later McGahern story, "Parachutes," in which Gabriel Conroy's wistful self-reproach is replaced by the harsh, unattractive cynicism of McGahern's narrator, who prosaically concludes about the role of his beloved's erstwhile lover that "I used to be jealous of Willie Moran but by now even that had been burned away. I just thought him a fool for not marrying her, wished that I'd been he" (*High Ground*, 19).
9. In the pornographer's story, Mavis and the Colonel end up seducing and humiliating a sex-starved native—one who suffers from the kind of advanced sexual depravity and repression that

is the subject of earlier major Irish satirical texts like Merriman's *The Midnight Court* or Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*. See also van der Ziel, *John McGahern* 64.

10. One could even argue that the Moran sisters' return to the west of Ireland from Dublin and London that is described on the first page of his novel *Amongst Women* can be read as a version of the same trope. Another westward retreat, like that of the pornographer, into the "solitude" of Great Meadow that entails "both pain and joy" (*The Pornographer*, 203), their homecomings to the ancestral west of Ireland are a source of personal and familial vindication that allows them to achieve a sense of metaphysical "completed[ness]" lacking in their urban lives (*Amongst Women*, 1-2).

11. See also Haas 33. On the Joycean seagulls in *The Leavetaking*, see van der Ziel, *John McGahern* 207.

12. Note, in that paragraph, how the actual day of the narrative present ("the sweeping rain hammering on the windscreen") intrudes into the images conjured from the recent and distant past. McGahern elaborates on that sensation in much detail in "The Wine Breath," published in the same *Getting Through* collection.

13. On McGahern's use of Proustian "images" and "involuntary memories," see Sampson, *Outstaring* 13-17, 174-76; and van der Ziel, *John McGahern* 99-102, 170-74.

14. The reference in "Danny Boy" to a valley "hushed and white with snow" is reminiscent of the imagery in the final paragraphs of "The Dead," a fact that may also have had a hand in McGahern's decision to choose it as the sergeant's song-request.

15. That practice lived on, of course, for the rest of the century as a reminder of the ongoing project of language revival, as McGahern was well aware. In a brilliant little satirical moment in *The Pornographer*, the protagonist asks one of the girls in Maloney's entourage where she intends to go on her summer holidays, only to find himself faced with "tepid talk about the Aran Islands" (76). That conventional locus of Irish-speaking moral purity is seemingly still a popular holiday destination even for pornographers and others whose nature is not compatible with traditional Revivalist notions of innocence and purity—a satiric point that Brian Friel had also made at greater length in the ironically titled *The Gentle Island* (1971), in which two visitors from Dublin awaken forms of sexual deviancy that already existed under the surface in the inhabitants of a remote Irish-speaking island off the west coast of Ireland.

16. In his important essay on the invention of the figure of the Irish peasant during the Revival period, Edward Hirsch has commented on how, in works from *Stephen Hero* to *Ulysses*, "[Joyce] found it necessary to project and dismantle the central figure of the Irish peasant." He draws attention, for example, to how "the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses* permanently and mercilessly set out to expose the racism and provincialism of the Citizen's patriotic idea of a Gaelic-speaking peasantry that he knew nothing about" (Hirsch 1127).

17. This is not the only occasion on which McGahern enlists the help of Joyce in his attempts to undermine sentimental, grossly simplified renditions of the past. When he gave Jamesie in *That They May Face the Rising Sun* the irreverent idea that the solemnity with which the War of Independence is commemorated may be broken by hiding a tape recorder in the war monument near his house in Leitrim (243-44), McGahern may have taken his cue from a passage in the Hades episode of *Ulysses* in which Leopold Bloom had proposed a similar scheme for placing "a gramophone in every grave" so that the voices of the dead may not be irrevocably lost (144).

18. In Bidy's return from the shop McGahern deviates from the picture of wholesomeness in which Joyce's milkwoman follows the Revivalist convention. In fact, if the comparison between Bidy and the milkwoman is intentional then it is certainly an ironic one. Because where *Ulysses'* milkwoman is significant as a bringer of "good food" in a "country full of rotten teeth and rotten guts" (*Ulysses*, 15-16), McGahern is concerned in "Swallows" with the less wholesome rural reality of the gombeen-shopkeeper's attempts to pass off "crawling" ham on the sergeant's deaf housekeeper (*Getting Through*, 129).

19. See van der Ziel, “Medusa’s Mirror” 237-38; Whyte 55-56; McKeon 74-77. McGahern may have taken his cue for this distinction which is so central to these stories from the 1980s from Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, which proposes how “Animals enjoy pleasure, but only humans appreciate beauty. [...] To point the difference, Kant remarks that while we can distinguish between what is good in itself and what is good only as a means, we do not make any parallel distinction between what is beautiful as a means and what is beautiful as an end” (Kenny, vol.4, 251).

20. For original publication details of McGahern’s short stories I rely on Sampson, “John McGahern: A Preliminary Checklist.”

21. See Department of Foreign Affairs, “Ireland and the EU” 15.

22. Established in 1961, Joe Walsh Tours are a travel agency especially noted for Pilgrimage Tours to places of religious devotion in Europe and beyond.

ABSTRACTS

Les nouvelles et romans de James Joyce parcourent, voire hantent, la fiction de John McGahern. Dans cet article, il sera question du dialogue que cette fiction engage avec la nouvelle de Joyce « The Dead », revisitée à maintes reprises par McGahern, y compris à la toute fin de sa carrière dans l’essai « What Is My Language? » Cette étude se construit ainsi en deux parties : la première retrace quelques variations sur le « voyage vers l’ouest ». Ce trope qui sillonne l’ensemble de l’œuvre de McGahern a été initialement introduit par Joyce dans « The Dead ». Dans un deuxième temps, pour mieux l’étudier, ce trope sera ancré dans la nouvelle de McGahern « Swallows ». « Swallows » et « The Dead », qui traitent des voyages propres et métaphoriques vers l’est et l’ouest, se font écho. Il s’avère d’ailleurs que la première nouvelle est une réécriture de la seconde. En tant que réécriture de « The Dead », « Swallows » se lit comme une réflexion métafictionnelle sur la nature de l’écriture irlandaise qui commente quelques aspects persistants du « réalisme » de Joyce, et rend hommage à son amour pour la musique – sujet que McGahern n’a pratiquement jamais abordé dans ses autres écrits. Hanté également par *Ulysses*, « Swallows » permet enfin à McGahern d’affirmer que pour lui, comme pour Joyce, l’écriture irlandaise constitue une tradition moins « insulaire » qu’internationale.

AUTHORS

STANLEY VAN DER ZIEL

Stanley van der Ziel is a Lecturer in English at Maynooth University. He has published on various aspects of modern and contemporary Irish literature, from Yeats to Joseph O’Neill. He is the author of *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition* (2016) and the editor of two Faber & Faber editions of McGahern’s works, *Love of the World: Essays* (2009) and *The Rockingham Shoot and Other Dramatic Writings* (2018). A co-edited collection (with Nicholas Taylor-Collins) on Shakespeare and Contemporary Irish Literature is forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan in late 2018.