

## **13 | Raising the Veil: Mystery, Myth, and Melancholia in Irish Studies**

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By raising the veil of mystery the nineteenth century had held over sexuality, Freud's discovery designated sexuality as the nexus between language and society, drives and the socio-symbolic order (Kristeva, 84).

In Irish studies, especially that which has concerned itself largely with the culture of the Republic of Ireland, with some notable exceptions, scant attention has been paid by many of its most prominent male architects to sexuality, the nexus between language and society, between the drives and the socio-symbolic order.<sup>1</sup> Given that so many of the most respected critics are sympathetic both to women and feminism, this situation is strange indeed. This essay seeks to raise the veil on the mystery of this critical blindness to the relationship between sexuality, critical language, and the socio-symbolic order of Irish Studies. There has been exemplary scholarship, which has brought women writers into what is termed 'the public sphere', as well as a growing feminist intellectual tradition in Irish letters. Despite this, specific hierarchialized gender relations have puzzlingly remained an implicit and ideologically powerful part of Irish critical discourse today. The logic of such gender relations is indeed impacted in the term 'public sphere' itself, in the assumption, still very much alive, that 'public' in such collocations remains synonymous with what is a heterosexist masculinity. It is sometimes asserted that no public discourse

exists for speaking about sexuality, domestic violence and recent crises in Ireland associated with sexuality, gender and power, such as the revelations of the endemic nature of institutional and intra-familial sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Irish feminists, both male and female, have long been developing discourses for dealing with such matters, from research-based analyses of domestic and sexual violence, in 'private' and 'public' spheres north and south, to practical and political ways of addressing the same, as well as theorising its occurrences within Irish culture and society; in fact significant public discourse on such matters does substantively exist. Yet the work of feminist intellectuals of note seems not to find recognition as part of the Irish *public* sphere, despite the prominence of, for example, figures such as Ailbhe Smyth, Susan McKay and Ivana Bacik, to name only some from among many feminists who contribute ably and effectively in different fields. As sociologists have observed, the public sphere in Ireland seems stubbornly to constitute itself as one to which women's work and feminist discourses are but peripheral.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in Ireland, the term public intellectual seems to be almost completely understood as a masculine purview.<sup>4</sup>

This gendering of public life may be taken as a template for thinking about Irishness, and it is strikingly replicated in Irish cultural commentary, not least that produced by some agenda setting-institutions in international Irish Studies. For, notwithstanding nearly thirty years of feminist scholarship in Ireland, there has yet to emerge any adequate awareness of some of the most significant cultural work which has taken place over the last three decades. Neither is there a discernible self-awareness amongst many of the most influential male critical thinkers in Irish Studies of the situatedness and subjective specificity of their own masculinity, and of the ways in which the sexed body speaks itself in the actions of the supposedly disembodied mind. Methodologically, most feminist scholarship takes as a basic rule of thumb the principle of partial perspectives and situatedness, signifying reflexivity and recognition both of its political, gendered and sexualized positioning, and its contextual limits. Broadly, in Irish Studies, the category of Irishness (Irish subjectivity) is repeatedly

deconstructed, questioned, recontextualized and interrogated, but masculinity remains an unquestioned, presumptively static, template for such identity politics. Thus in effect, mysteriously, national identity is considered a cultural construct, while heterosexual masculinity remains a 'common-sense', naturalized category, women continue to signify 'gender' and women and (largely male) homosexuals' sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Irishness of course, continues to be a disputed category in many senses. For instance, do those involved in defining it include those groups who consider themselves Irish, such as southern and many northern Protestants, but who are still regularly considered as not fully meeting the requirements of national identity?<sup>6</sup> Equally, how can modes of defining or limiting Irishness accommodate the 'New Irish' coming to work and live in Ireland from other cultures? Those critics whose work is more closely aligned with critiques of nationalist models of history and culture are for the most part equally unreflexive about the situatedness of their own hegemonic masculinities as their more nationalist counterparts. But a full consideration of the relationship of such critiques in dialogue with one another is outside the remit of this essay, and here I concentrate the work that is largely associated with a Republic or 'southern' Irish perspective. Effectively marginalized in the sphere of public discourse, or from a universalising construction of 'Irish subjectivity', with a few exceptions the insights of feminism and gender studies remain a matter for women and those interested in queer politics. This resistance to understanding masculinity as itself a conditioning factor in knowledge and practice is, of course, not specific to Irish Studies (though it takes specific forms within this field), but a phenomenon of Western institutions and practices in general. It is addressed by the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz when she writes:

the masculinity or maleness of knowledges remains unrecognized as such because there is no *other knowledge* with which it can be contrasted. Men take on the roles of neutral knowers, thinkers and producers of thoughts, concepts, or ideas only because they have evacuated their own specific forms of corporeality and repressed all traces of their

sexual specificity from the knowledges they produce. In appropriating the realm of the mind for themselves, men have nonetheless required a support and a cover for their now disavowed physicality. Women thus function as *the* body for men—correlative with the effacement of the sexual concreteness of their own (womanly) bodies (204-205).

The several recent and ongoing recovery projects by Irish feminist scholars belie Grosz's apparent claim that no *other knowledge* exists with which a male, presumptively universal, knowledge can be contrasted. However, Grosz's point is not that in reality there are no alternatives but rather that the signifying systems that have precedence in socio-symbolic practices either cannot recognize, or refuse to see, these alternatives. Here, Grosz draws on the philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's thesis that within Western epistemologies, only one sex symbolically exists because the terms of representation presently validated and institutionalized revolve on a primary narcissism in which women function as a mirror upon which patriarchy's desires and fears are projected. Grosz goes on to argue that:

[i]f women are represented as the bodily counterparts to men's conceptual supremacy, women's bodies, pleasures, and desires are reduced to versions or variants of men's bodies and desires. Women are thus conceptualized as castrated, lacking and incomplete, as if these were inherently qualities (or absences) of their (natural) bodies rather than a function of men's self-representation (204-205).

Her argument allows for the application of this psychoanalytical observation to a broader cultural sphere, where bodies of work or knowledge that are often identified in terms of their gender (women's writing, women's art, women poets, women philosophers, Women's Studies) are also subject to this psychodynamic process.

In terms of Irish Studies, women's writing, both critical and aesthetic, is the name of a body (of work) fulfilling a function that critically limits the scope of the writings produced by the far from homogenous assembly of women writers, feminist

scholars and critics. Women's writing, non-hegemonic masculine writing and feminist and queer scholarship functions as a body of *loss* in Irish Studies, and this loss is a necessary functioning of Irish heterosexual masculine culture's self-representation in its building of a national cultural body. Specifically analysing oedipal relations and structures, I argue here that continual re-investment in an imaginary structured by oedipal agon guarantees a particular version of literary and cultural history in which heterosexual men's gendered and sexual specificity remains concealed, while the radical alterity of women's and queer writing is disallowed by the *a priori* role it must perform in this concealment. In part completion of this task, the occasional (untypical) woman or queer, or even queer woman, can be approved of and included in the canon as the singular instance, the unique woman or queer who serves as the exception to the rule.<sup>7</sup> The rule in this instance is that other women writers (the conceptualization of queer writers as a body is subtly different, and analysis of this is outside the remit of this essay) must be conceptualized as a 'mass' or large body, which, by virtue of its gross collectivity, forms the background against which great writers can be individuated, and, which above all, acts as the topos of loss. This essay concerns itself, not with the construction of the queer body and the registers on which it is made to perform, but with the body of women's writing, although the two are intimately related in terms of how they function psycho-dynamically,

Homi K. Bhabha's essay on the Palestinian representational crisis, 'A Question of Survival: Nations and Psychic States', is a useful prism through which to think about Irish cultural practice, as his work has had a significant influence on Irish cultural criticism, and the Palestinian situation has often been taken as a frame of reference for rethinking Ireland in post-colonial terms.<sup>8</sup> Bhabha asks:

how do we read the representation of a people who, in their response to domination and dissemination, must invent a sense of themselves, must create the shadow of the past to throw upon a future that is fragile and unfulfillable? (96)

Bhabha's enquiry about reading and representation has much in common with the questions asked by those involved in one capacity or the other in both representing the nation-state and Irishness post peace process, and conditioning our modes of reading such representations. The work produced during the intellectually exciting 1970s and '80s, when intellectuals and writers began using psychoanalysis, critical theory and European philosophies to seriously address the construction of socio-cultural alternatives to help break the political stalemates of the North of Ireland, has set many of the agendas of Irish Studies today. Arguably the most influential map-makers of self-conscious Irish cultural criticism were those artists, writers and intellectuals associated with Crane Bag and Field Day, and the reach of their work not only has extended into actual political practices, but is still powerfully resonant in a number of intellectual practices today. The most significant of the critics to emerge from these projects are Seamus Deane and Declan Kiberd, whose respective works have shaped and structured Irish Studies, broadly defined, and both of whom are considered public intellectuals today.

In his path-breaking 1984 Field Day pamphlet, *Heroic Styles: the Tradition of an Idea*, Seamus Deane outlines 'two dominant ways of reading both our literature and our history', and these represent variations of, on the one hand, a romantic modernism in which an inscribable history is at least theoretically possible and, on the other, a postmodernism characterized by 'discontinuity' and the indeterminacy of the present in which historicization is not available:

One is 'romantic', a mode of reading which takes pleasure in the notion that Ireland is a culture enriched by the ambiguity of its relationship to an anachronistic and a modernized present. The other is a mode of reading which denies the glamour of this ambiguity and seeks to escape from it into a pluralism of the present. The problem which is rendered insoluble by them is that of the North (1984: 5-6).

Deane identifies each 'mode of reading' as underpinned by nationalism, 'the idea which underlies all our formulations of tradition' (3). He argues that this idea is developed in two ways:

'the first we may call the variation of adherence, the second of separation' (3). In Irish cultural iconography nationalism is expressed, from the *aisling* to Mother Ireland, in the metaphor of a woman's body; this is the cultural object to which one narrative adheres, or from which the other separates. 'Adherence to' or 'separation from' this body (of work) has continued to structure critical trajectories since 1984: one invokes a nationalist metanarrative only to complicate it, as exemplified by the work of Deane himself, the other more comfortably provides a cohesive metanarrative, as typified by the work of Declan Kiberd. In both of these approaches, women's writing, defined collectively, behaves as a body of loss: in the former as a loss, and in the latter as a body. In this discourse the body of Woman (and perhaps of women's writing) serves as a displaced symbol of the border that brought the North into being; as that from which one splits or that to which one holds fast. However, departure and devotion both encode variations of loss, in departure the loss of a body of work, in devotion the loss of the woman's subjective difference through making a symbol of her body. The 'omission' of women's writing from *The Field Day Anthology vols I-III* is now well rehearsed and needs little gloss, and is addressed here simply in terms of how an *act of loss* is performed. Expectations of significant representation of writers of all genders were such that the feminist critic Gerardine Meaney could hopefully predict in 1991 that, 'the forthcoming Field day anthology seems likely to be the first non-feminist anthology of Irish literature to give some visibility to the writing of women', but in the event this body was invoked only to be banished (1991: 12. This very loss of the body of women's writing created an amulet of exchange that supplied a history between men. The absence of women's writing lent the included material an internal consistency, which although disparate in political and historical aspirations was unified by, if nothing else, maleness. A similar manoeuvre was effected in 1995 by the conclusion of 'Imagining Irish Studies', the final essay of Declan Kiberd's influential *Inventing Ireland*, in which the image of Cathleen Ni Houlihan is draped with the diversity of a new Ireland, represented as a patchwork quilt (641).<sup>9</sup> Given the status of *Inventing Ireland* as required

reading on Irish Studies courses both in Ireland and abroad, this provides what is literally a textbook example of the functioning of the woman's body as *the* embodiment of culture, and its functioning in opposition to an epistemological, non-corporeal, imaginary configured by specifically masculine relations to the body and the father.

These uses of woman as body (of loss) are not isolated or incidental and are closely allied to the centrality of metaphors of parenthood in discussions of Irish literature and culture. The critical reworking of parental metaphors in the criticism of the last thirty years, in a culture with passionately disputed versions of history, and competing literary traditional tendencies is closely related to emotive questions of legitimacy and the right to define and interpret, not only what might constitute Irish Culture, but what constitutes Ireland and who governs it. The preoccupation with father-son relationships in Irish cultural and critical production is itself a subject of self-aware attention in the work of a number of critical commentators, and is explicitly so in Deane's *Heroic Styles* and Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*: they both identify it as bound to the need to create a tradition, to forge a history distinct from that told of Ireland in colonial paradigmatics: as necessary, in Bhabha's words, to 'create the shadow of [a] past' more favourable to a future vision of Ireland free from the conflict that has so tragically damaged and distorted relations on this island. In thinking about how the trope of woman is implicated in such a shadow, Jean-Francois Lyotard's essay 'Figure Foreclosed', a discussion of Freud's meta-psychoanalytical *Moses and Monotheism*, is illuminating. Lyotard explores the relationship between Freud, the 'invisible' father (a figure who has to be invented in Judaism, as well as in psychoanalysis) and the visible mother, the object which casts the shadow. She represents the field of the visible in which exchanges between father and son can take place. Her transmissional function here facilitates the forging of history between generations of men, a function carried out in the familiar narrative in which Mother Ireland functions as an imagined (ideological) body *from* which the son is individuated through being joined in historical time *to* his father, or to symbolic patriarchy. The power of this cultural dynamic is



translated into critical practice as a foregrounding of the intergenerational relationship between fathers and sons in texts as an interpretative vehicle not only for history but for identity formation. This bears a strong resemblance to the template invoked by the Christian churches of a mother church and of father priests and novice sons. In her monumental work *Differencing the Canon* Griselda Pollock argues that this structure underwrites the cultural foundations of Western definitions of artistic canons. Pollock's analysis of canonicity provides a fitting frame for thinking about literary tradition in a culture such as ours where questions of institutional authority are sacralized in the prestige of lay intellectuals, that is, of (particularly male) academics, whose appeal stretches beyond the academy. Pollock writes:

Canons are defended with an almost theological zeal that indicates more than the historical coincidence between the ecclesiastical use of the word *canon* for the revered and authenticated texts of the bible and its function in cultural traditionalism. The canon is fundamentally a mode of worship of the artist, which is in turn a form of masculine narcissism (13).

Pollock's analysis can be extended to consider the exegetical role of the church fathers, whose interpretations and mediations of the scriptures configure the history of its telling through their own retellings, a refunctioning of the sacred and canonical text likewise at the purposeful core of the practices of allegoresis that accommodated the 'pagan' classical (canonical) textual inheritance to an alien Christian dispensation, and a mode of interpretive containment replayed by literary critics in our present-day cultural practices.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Séamus Heaney's observations on the celebrated psycho-biographer Richard Ellmann set him in the exegetical role of a Church Father who protected, not only sacred manuscripts, but, who did so within a set of predetermined rules. Heaney writes that Ellmann 'could maintain subtle, receptive vigilance over a text and explicate it within the idiom of his profession' (18). Critical explications of primary literary texts are crucial in determining our response to them, not least in constructing professional idioms for the texts'

inscription, paradigms which are then taken as the *a priori* grounds of the text itself; critical explications shape our aesthetic and political expectations with regard to a national literature, as Deane argues, when he writes that the ways in which the 'pattern or plot' of such dramas are revealed to us become a conditioning factor in our reading of literary works (1984: 6). Those patterns or plots most 'revealed' to us as the kernel or heart of a text in Irish critical practice are those of fathers and sons, a fact noted by Deane in *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish writing since 1790*, when discussing readings of *The Playboy of the Western World*: 'missing from this account is Pegeen Mike and with her the whole zone of the sexual, over-borne by the virile father-son conclusion' (1997: 143). *Dénouement* itself is not only of importance, but also the ways in which such texts, once read are placed in historical relation to one another. For, as Grosz argues, the interpretive plots that position texts *vis à vis* each other in literary histories serve 'sexually-specific interests':

The (sexual) position(s) of a text cannot be identified with the position(s) occupied by the author. Nor can it be identified directly with the contexts of a text – with what it says. Rather, it is a result of the position(s) a text occupies within a history of other texts and the degrees of adherence it exhibits to that position. It is an effect of the ways in which texts support and challenge prevailing and historically formative paradigms occupied by knowledges. This position is sexually coded insofar as access to positions of enunciation is sexually regulated and theoretical paradigms and values serve sexually specific interests (204).

The 'patterns and plots' of the critical Oedipal narrative are part of the 'sexual regulation' of theoretical paradigms and positions of enunciation; the continued and repeated reinvestment of the father-son plot is central to the production of canons and 'traditions' within Irish Studies. The very repetition of 'tradition' – defined in this way, by relations between fathers and sons – as a conditioning factor in interpretation serves to reinvest the ahistorical character of oedipal authority, and to naturalize this as the limits of identity.

It takes on the entitlement of an archetypal structure, undisputed as the rig on which subsequent stories and readings will be hung. How then can such a history recognize the importance of women's writing, which either thematically, or by its very presence, seeks to open out the limits of this dyad in which women are fixed as the transmissional third?

### **Myth**

Pollock observes that that 'the excessive valorization of the artist in Western art history as a 'great man' corresponds with the infantile stage of the idealization of the father' (13-14), and the nation-State has created a potent mythology around its writers, foundational in its aspirations, and, as Meaney has argued, 'masculine in its terms' and 'concerned with legitimation of a particular view of national culture' (2000: 19). The nation state has valued its writers over all other artists, with various critical camps pitting Yeats and Joyce against each other as the rightful 'father' of modern Irish culture. In *Inventing Ireland*, Kiberd identifies the 'legitimation crises' of the new State and of the revivalists as fundamentally crises of paternity. Pollock contends that the idealization of the father is fast followed by 'rivalry and disappointment – which can give rise to a competing fantasy and the installation of another imaginary figure: the hero, who always rebels against, overthrows or even murders the overpowering father' (13-14). Echoing Bhabha's argument, Kiberd, in his analysis of the father-son relationship in Irish culture, remarks that in the Ireland of the early twentieth century, the hero's rebellions 'are conducted not so much against the authority figures as against their palpable absence' (389). This absence of the father or the Name-of-the-Father, in psychoanalytic terms, is the condition from which the male paranoiac, lacking any symbolic space in which to take up an identificatory position, is produced. It is an absence intolerable to the extent that, as Kiberd notes, founding fathers have to be invented. Kiberd observes that in 'societies on the brink of revolution, the relation between fathers and sons is reversed,' and he goes on to identify literary instances of paternal crisis, which exemplify the crises of legitimation of the

foundling Irish state (380). Kiberd examines how various writers from Synge to Joyce created symbolic fathers: a creative relationship that can be said to be repeated in the critical act of 'heroization' of writers constructed to provide foundational texts for a modern Ireland that remains androcentric in its outlook. For the structural emphasis on 'fathers, heroes, [and] Oedipal rivalries', not only, as Pollock observes, 'reflect[s] the specifically masculine bias of Freud's attention,' but functions to preclude in its very structure the possibility of woman occupying anywhere except the 'place of the mother', a place anterior to and 'outside' of the rivalrous masculine genealogy that Kiberd invokes (16).

This becomes clear by comparing the analyses of the differing relations to history – personal, collective and literary – in *Inventing Ireland's* chapters 'Fathers and Sons,' and 'Mothers and Daughters'. 'Fathers and Sons' charts the struggle of the literary son against ineffectual, punitive or absent fathers, in pursuit of the articulation of a self, and ultimately a place in the canon, in the literary and national family line. These critical narratives trace the way in which individual writers undertake, in Pollock's words, a 'heroic journey through struggles and ordeals', to do 'battle with professional fathers for the final winning of a place in what is always his – the father's – canon' (14). Kiberd combines psychobiography and literary analysis to provide psychodynamic readings of the father-son motif in the work and/or lives of Yeats, Pearse and Shaw, Joyce and Synge (380-94). He analyses these male figures as embedded in the context of the father-son relationship: in contrast, the women writers covered in the 'mirror' or sister chapter, 'Mothers and Daughters', are not viewed through any inter-generational model of influence; in the case of the two writers analysed, Kate O'Brien and Mary Lavin, the 'family' replaces any specific intergenerational relationship. No diachronic mother-daughter agon is examined, rather; the conflict and its resolution is understood synchronically, as how best a woman can accommodate herself, or not, to the family: the patriarchal family in which a woman is not defined as an individual citizen. Individuation therefore remains problematic. The chapter provides a synchronic, and deeply sympathetic, analysis of

iconic Irish female political activists from the 1916 rising through the early days of the state, and these women are identified as sisters in politics, or the sisters of more famous political brothers (such as Anna Parnell, and Mary MacSwiney) but no diachronic restitution between generations is available within this paradigm (395-410). Although called 'Mothers and Daughters', the chapter in fact illuminates no mother-daughter relationship, but rather clarifies the blind spot at the centre of the oedipal model, which collapses mother and daughter, without symbolising mediated and interpreted relations between them, into the one place: the place of the oedipally configured and retroactively constructed mother. In this, woman is rendered 'barren' in terms of structuring or reproducing any history—as sister, she is always contiguous, and no model of identificatory rejection, such as is related to the male writers, can be applied. *Inventing Ireland* structurally replicates the oedipal model while rhetorically warning against it, for an ostensible symmetry is implied in the opposing of the chapters under titles that suggest and aspire to equality of opportunity, an equality that the model invoked cannot in the event allow.<sup>11</sup> This outcome seems to echo Irigaray's argument, in 'The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry,' that classical psychoanalysis, figured as the Lacanian flat mirror of representation, is inadequate to representing women's experience (1985: 151). Indeed, in Kiberd's analysis itself, because it relies on an agonistic model foregrounding the narrative of fathers and sons, it is not equality of opportunity that is finally highlighted, despite its obvious support for women's equality and careful analysis of gender inequities. What is shown instead is the inadequacy of the oedipal model to account for anything other than its own self-confirmation, in this very asymmetry between the 'Fathers and Sons' chapter (which *can* represent literary inter-generationality between fathers and son) and the 'Mothers and Daughters' chapter (in which inter-relationship between mothers and daughters remains an impossibility without issuing a challenge to the existing oedipal model).

So mother and daughter are both warped into the space of the oedipally figured mother in the 'family'. This space of the

(nominal) mother emphatically represents a de-subjectified position, barring the possibility of a separate, independent Other with whom to mediate a relationship to the self: for, as Irigaray argues, 'a subjective status is constituted in relation to self and to like, the two being connected' (1991: 192). In this case self and like are disconnected. The only feminine position or state imagined in this family (as in the literary analysis discussed above in which how a woman accommodates herself to the family is discussed) is self- (lessness—the mother object), as with Eve, whose likeness is to be found not in her own reflection, but in the identificatory mirror of Adam's subjectivity. The like in relation to which a woman must construct herself is the male, (as sister, lover, mother, and daughter) and thus she becomes phallically constructed. Effectively then, love between (literary/symbolic) mother and daughter is, in Irigaray's words, 'rendered impossible by the patriarchal regime... and is transformed for the woman into the obligatory cult of her husband's children and her husband as male child' (1991: 199). What Irigaray calls the 'place of the mother' is the place that forbids intergenerational symbolization between women: a place that forbids the construction of a history by denying both subjectivity and 'generative power', even as it subsumes both mother and daughter under the name 'mother' (1991: 41). The oedipally figured mother is only nominally a mother, as she occupies a place that is exceptional, and non-generational. For in the narrative of Oedipus mother and lover are confused, fatally located in one and the same body, the one place, and function not for the woman to give birth to or to reproduce herself in her own likeness, but to facilitate the son's illusion of self-birthing himself in identificatory opposition to the father.

The mother-daughter composite appears in the cult of the exceptional woman — the anomalous woman who bears no relation to or with the 'mass' or body of women — as a means of preserving 'the place of the mother' within a patrocenrically defined canon, as a means of forbidding or preventing the symbolization of intergenerational relations between women.<sup>12</sup> Those writers who have made the experience of motherhood socially, politically and aesthetically central to their oeuvre,

such as McGuckian, Boland and Ní Dhomhnaill, continue to be categorized as 'Women Writers' and thereby placed at a tangent to the Irish canon. McGuckian, however, could be said to occupy the position of the 'exceptional' woman in the canon of Northern Irish poetry, which itself exists at a tangent to the Republic (arguably a gendered tangent, an analysis of which is outside the scope of this essay). A parallel can be drawn with Kiberd's keen analysis of nationalist 'Irish exceptionalism' and its effect of 'desubjectifying' Irish experience by precluding its potential for representativity. He writes that the Irish, 'preening themselves on some occasions for being 'like no other people on earth', arraigining themselves on others [...] often failed to regard Irish experience as representative of human experience, and so they remained woefully innocent of the comparative method, which might have helped them more fully possess the meaning of their lives' (641).

The canonical emphasis on the 'exceptionalism' of the odd included woman (whose personal oddness or eccentricity is very often stressed, in place of literary consideration of her work), is most concerned with preserving a space in the oedipal triangle, a structural place that prohibits intergenerational symbolization between women. This, Irigaray argues, would have radical possibilities for cultural practices. She writes: 'in our societies, the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus; thinking it, and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order' (1991: 50). What is the basis for this rather large claim? What would be the consequences of thinking the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship in terms, for instance of an Irish national canon and the wider cultural terms of Irish Studies? For Pollock, 'structurally, the myths of art and artist are shaped within sexual difference and play it out on the cultural stage' (16). The 'compressed' and homogenized mother-daughter amalgam, interpellated exclusively as 'mother' to others, whether regarded as Mother Ireland, woman, women's writing, feminism or women's studies, is the cultural stage on which the dramas of Irish cultural identity are played out. Thus, to envisage a female-female genealogy would effectively obstruct the most validated mode of (masculine) identity formation in

Irish culture today. But the mother's powerful presence, palpable absence or symbolic displacement in Irish culture all function, *as mother*, to signify loss. As Mary Jacobus says, 'mothers and myths of origins have the same function, which may in the end be to remind us that something is always lost in stories of the constitution of the subject, whether we call it the body or an undivided self' (16).

This perhaps could be refined to show how, in *oedipally-structured* narratives of the constitution of the subject, mothers function as a reminder of loss. Representing loss is indeed part of what to be mother means, as the psychic journey to individuation entails separations from her along the way. This psychic necessity for others is only one part of her being in relationship: yet, in Irish Studies, this part has come to represent the whole through the metonymic elisions effected by prevailing nationalist and unionist cultural traditions, in which the lost origins sought can be 'found' through re-enactments of this continuous loss of mother. In other words, the father can be invented, written, theorized into place through the figuration of the mother's body (always *as* a site of loss) or by the deliberate 'losing' of the body of women's writing. Richard Kearney's 1984 Field Day pamphlet *Myth and Motherland* outlines the ways in which the figure of mother Ireland was deployed as a means of unifying what appeared disparate and irreducible in Revivalist Ireland. He observes:

Yeats offered the myth of Mother Ireland as spiritual or symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of historical reality. The mythological mother would restore the lost national identity by calling her sons to the sacred rite of blood-sacrifice whereby they would re-enact the sacred time which transcends historical time and thus undo the wrongs of history. In short, since reality told a story of division and dispossession, Yeats replied with answering symbols of unity and self-possession (14).

The answering symbols of unity and self-possession are however, the son's resistance to the mother's 'castration', or lack of wholeness, and a retroactive illusion on his part of her 'phallic' power. Thus, mother/woman as loss is also an illusion.



In psychoanalytical terms, most especially Kleinian, the actual losses of separation are not accepted, grieved and changed through the mourning process to facilitate a deepening intersubjectivity that allows for two subjects, mother and child, to be respectfully present in relationship. For the loss re-enacted is not the real loss of the mother's body, but the fantasy loss of the mother's penis. This focus on the mother as castration defends against the deeper pain of separation, and so the child does not mourn but remains in a melancholic position.

### **Melancholia**

It is this phallic mother, Mother Ireland, as loss, that facilitates the tradition of melancholic agonistic revolt that structures the evolving traditions of Irish criticism. In other words, the continued investment in woman as loss effects the seditious relations between fathers and sons in a culture whose configuring narrative is national. However, in answering his own question ('how do we get from the melancholia of repeated loss to the melancholia of revolt?') Bhabha warns that the 'insistent self-exposure and the repetition of loss' in the melancholic discourse 'must not be taken at face value for its apparent victimage and passivity'. It is, he goes on, also evidence of a 'mental constellation of revolt':

The inversion of meaning and address in the melancholic discourse, when it 'incorporates' the loss or lack in its own body—displaying its own weeping wounds— is also an act of 'disincorporating' the authority of the master. Fanon says something similar when he suggests that the native wears his psychic wounds in the surface of his skin like an open sore — an eyesore to the colonizer (102).

In Irish Studies the structural equivalent of this open sore offered to the colonizer has become that body that both incorporates and disincorporates: woman denuded of her phallus; woman as castration. The 'cunning of the native' was reliant on the use of the castrated body, mistaken for a woman's. The lack of phallus is the eyesore that determines the relations of empowered and disempowered. The body formerly

offered as a site of resistance was a feminized socio-political one; now the socio-cultural body of women's critical and aesthetic production fulfills this role. That the body of women's writing is both incorporated and disincorporated in the canon and curriculum that it exists in 'spaces' determined by the primary relationship of man to man, provides a striking parallel to how Women's bodies are both incorporated and disincorporated in the Irish state, for instance, in terms of the ambivalence about the numbers of Irish women who still travel abroad to obtain abortions. The relationship mediated *through* the phallus, or the sore lack thereof, is fundamentally a relation *to* the phallus, and unable to look beyond its implied loss or retention.

Bhabha goes on to describe the nationalist imaginary that arises from the experience of colonial dispossession as 'a territory where the knowledge of culture comes to be written across that shared boundary between paranoia and melancholia; a language and a boundary that is always deeply ambivalent between spaces and times: for paranoia, a timeless Outside; for melancholia, an incorporated, encrypted space inside'.<sup>13</sup> Woman as castration is that 'shared boundary', whose 'borderline' body represents inside and outside, but whose most profound 'insiderness and outsiderness'—the pre-oedipal maternal body—is occluded by the fetish of the boundary scar which marks the loss of the imagined phallus. This distinction between a paranoiac outside and a melancholic encryption inside coincides almost exactly with the axis upon which Deane divides Joyce and Yeats in the tradition of Irish literature. Deane elaborates on this bifurcation in terms of what he calls the 'mystique of Irishness':

The oppressiveness of the tradition we inherit has its source in our own readiness to accept the mystique of Irishness as an inalienable feature of our writing and, indeed, of much else in our culture. That mystique is itself an alienating force. To accept it is to become involved in the spiritual heroics of Yeats or Pearse, to believe in the incarnation of the nation in the individual. To reject it is to make a fetish of exile, alienation and dislocation in the manner of Joyce or Beckett ... yet the

polarization they identify is an inescapable and understandable feature of the social and political realities we inhabit (1984: 17-18).

To translate this back into Bhabha's psychoanalytic terms, Joyce here occupies the paranoid timeless outside, whereas Yeats represents the melancholic and 'encrypted' inside. In Deane's argument, as well as in commonly accepted mythologies of the opposite virtues of Yeats and Joyce, they are both 'hero-sons', yet opposed: one stays 'inside' a phallically identified mother Ireland, the other radically separates from her. Lyotard's comprehension of *Verwerfung* (foreclosure) is helpful in understanding this positioning of Yeats and Joyce as founding cultural sons/fathers of the nation state. He states: 'We must stress the importance of this second aspect of *Verwerfung*, which very close to *Verleugung* (disavowal or denial): the 'reality' from which the ego detaches itself is the lack of a penis. What is foreclosed is castration, or woman' (91-92). Yet such foreclosure cannot be fully accomplished, and even in the perversions, the ego is split in its relations with reality because castration cannot be completely disavowed, because both axes of rejection traverse the ego, one putting castration outside (the symbolic) and the other putting it 'inside'.

Here, Lyotard accepts the function of woman within a Freudian and Lacanian symbolic as the signifier of castration, that is, as the signifier of masculine lack. Foreclosure cannot ever be properly accomplished, for it is a defence against the more primal and powerful loss of the primary object, the pre-oedipal mother's body. It involves a relation to the scar, the eyesore of the mother's lack, to the phallus, but not to her herself. Foreclosure is in itself an act of repetition in which the son repeatedly attempts to either identify with the mother's lack, to restore her phallus, or radically separate from her in order to identify with the extra-symbolic exile into which she is cast through the lack of a phallus. In terms of a relation to Ireland, and the border between the North of Ireland and the Republic, retrospectively and respectively, Joyce and Yeats, as interpellated in national literary-critical tradition, represent

'putting castration outside' and 'putting castration inside' the symbolic. In the crudest of terms, Joyce puts it outside the symbolic order in *Finnegans Wake* (the disincorporated body) and Yeats puts it inside in *The Tower* (the incorporated body). As we have seen, Deane elaborates on this opposition between a romantic nationalism, identified with the 'spiritual heroics of a Yeats or Pearse' and which 'believe[s] in the incarnation of the nation in the individual,' and its rejection, which makes 'a fetish of exile, alienation, dislocation in the manner of a Joyce or Beckett' (1984: 18). The nostalgia for the lost object becomes articulated in two competing myths of tradition: one of becoming (phallic) mother (like Yeats in his tower birthing himself as father/son as the nation) the other of becoming lost like her (phallus) –like Joyce in his exile... Meaney understands this opposition in terms, not just of national affiliation, but also of a primal relation to a sublimated Mother Ireland. She argues that 'two forms of the myth of the (literary) hero predominate. He may be a 'true son' of 'Mother Ireland'. She adds, however, that

this view has very much gone out of fashion. The current myth of the literary subversive in exile (epitomized by Joyce) is no less masculine in its terms [...] and speaks from this Oedipal place of exile (1991: 19).

In this understanding, one hero 'becomes' the mother: Yeats's tower represents such an attempt to become the phallic mother. The other hero, Joyce, becomes 'lost' like her, as described by the psychoanalyst and theorist Jessica Benjamin, who writes that the negative swing on the pendulum of 'oedipal complementarity negates the mother's [phallic] subjectivity by locating her in what Kristeva has termed the fantasy of a 'lost territory' (97). Joyce's exile from the symbolic order is identification with the excess of the 'figure', the part that exceeds the symbolic order itself. Neither represents a full inter-subjective relationship or exchange with woman, for within an oedipally-focused paradigmatics of identity, identification with the mother is foreclosed, as Benjamin explains:

Oedipal boy and girl suffer similar disappointment of exclusion from and longing for the object of desire...but in the boy's case being object and having object are mutually exclusive, identification is foreclosed, and results in a more frightening loss; this stimulates a more dangerous representation of the maternal sexual object as dreaded, engulfing and overwhelming and tantalizing. Loss and separation may intensify rather than dissolve omnipotence, which resounds in the empty psychic space of fantasy. At this level, the loved object has been destroyed and retaliation or death – the ultimate withdrawal and separation – is fantasized. Fear of death and the fantasy of heroically fighting a personified Death or death-dealing figures of mythology (Medusa for instance) are common preoccupations of oedipal boys (Benjamin, 99-100).

Because, for the son, both being and having the object is not possible, identification is foreclosed and thus in Yeats's work poetically fighting such 'death-dealing figures of mythology', which are specifically inflected as female in some way, is prominent, from the rape of Leda to 'the rough beast' who is paradoxically both monstrously pregnant and nascent (124). Engulfing, dreaded, and tantalizing feminine metaphors are central to Yeats's symbology, and the maternal is appropriated in the self-birthing 'rough beast', which is a masculinized sphinx, representing identification with the phallic mother and a containment of its possible capacity to 'devour'.<sup>14</sup> In this version of the symbolic, the mother is 'incorporated' without her being symbolized in her radical difference from the phallus that configures her.

The mother is also devoured without acknowledgement in the anti-heroic strain in the tradition of Irish canon making: for Joyce, becoming 'lost' like the phallic mother, this takes the form of what Deane calls the 'ultimate withdrawal and separation through exile' (1984: 12). But this anti-heroism ends up being a form of heroic tradition-making too, despite its attempts to deconstruct the myths upon which the Irish mystique depends. Deane points this out when he notes that Joyce's work is 'dominated by the idea of separation as a means

to the revival of suppressed energies' (1984: 10). Deane's perceptive analysis of this trope in Joyce's work is worth quoting at length:

The separation he envisages is as complete as one could wish. The English literary and political imperium, the Roman Catholic and Irish nationalist claims, the oppressions of conventional language and of conventional narrative— all of these are overthrown, but the freedom which results is haunted by his fearful obsession with treachery and betrayal. In him, as in many a twentieth century writer, the natural ground of vitality is defined as libidinal. The sexual forms of oppression are inscribed in all his works, but with that, there is also the ambition to see the connection between sexuality and history. His work is notoriously preoccupied with paralysis, inertia, the disabling effects of society upon the individual who, like Bloom, lives within its frame, or like him, attempts to live beyond it. ... In Joyce himself, the sin is treachery, sexual or political infidelity. The betrayed figure is the alien artist. The 'divine heart' is the maternal figure, mother, Mother Ireland, Mother Church or mother Eve. But the betrayed are also betrayers and the source of treachery is the Irish condition itself (1984: 10-11).

Paralysis and inertia are the results of not being able to mourn, move on and realign in relationship: in a word, of melancholia. The inability to relate to the mother as a subject means the mythologizing of Mother Ireland, Mother Church, and Mother Eve, all of whom occupy the 'place of the mother', and are without historicized daughters. As both betrayed and betrayer they represent the figure both included and excluded from the oedipal triangle; as the Irish condition itself, they function to condition Irishness.

Despite the early Field Day critiques addressing the powerful influence of the myth of Mother Ireland, in that project relationships are not forged in any significant way with actual or past women writers and critics, as is demonstrated in Kearney's argument that Molly in *Ulysses* is the antithesis of Mother Ireland: Molly, not having 'a word of the *Mother-Tongue*,' is contrasted to the 'self-sacrificing Virgin of the *Mother-church*,'

and to the 'mothers of memory' (17). However, as the figure in whom mother and daughter are compounded, in Kearney's reading she continues to occupy the place of the mother, as 'both mother and memory'. In *Ulysses* she furnishes the transmissional vicinity in the oedipal relations between Dedalus and Bloom, as is evident in the final soliloquy (17). Kearney argues that she 'achieve[s] the proportions of a mythic figure whose double commitment to the particularity of everyday experience *and* to the universality of European mythology (she is identified with Penelope in line with the Greek myth of Ulysses) enables her to demythologize the stereotype of our tribal myths' (17). However, Molly's disservice to the tribal myths of national stereotypes is at one and the same time a disservice to Ireland's women. Made to function symbolically as the (antithetical) Irish Condition, in effect she continues to condition an Irishness that keeps her out of its frame. This point is made more emphatically by Meaney in 'Penelope, or, Myths Unravelling', which suggests that 'Joyce revolutionizes myths of national culture at the inevitable expense of reinstating a myth of the feminine' (2000: 520). Meaney draws on Bhabha's observation that 'the narrative of melancholia preserves the icon of the Ideal – Nation – but by virtue of identifying with it from a position of loss and absence, exile and migration: the signifying act that gives it meaning cannot be contained or incorporated within the sign' (Bhabha, 101). For the illusion of separation is revealed by the final incorporation of the mother, when the (literary) son eats mother (Ireland) in a ritual that goes unnamed and is effectively disincorporated in Irish letters by the patrocentric character of that institution. Meaney argues that as 'a site of recovery from literature, a textual embodiment of Literature, Molly becomes, in this reading, the pre-oedipal regained by the son *in his own words*' (2000:526). She goes on to point out that:

Devouring the mother in combat with the name of the father, this revolution does not achieve a redistribution, least of all of power. On the contrary it provides narrative closure, a variety of myth as the opposite of history, essentially of a myth of the feminine as history's other [...] Joyce finally makes a version

of the feminine a guarantor of his new (literary) order (2000: 527).

The mother is devoured in this combat, in a containment of the oedipal boy's fear of being swallowed by her.

In contrast, Yeats consumes the mother by profound identification with her, and in fantasies of maternal omnipotence. Deane identifies Yeats's attachment to English tradition, which Deane calls a father culture, as a 'pathology of literary unions'.<sup>15</sup> He writes: 'Yeats provided Irish writing with a programme for action. But whatever its connection with Irish nationalism, it was not finally a programme of separation from the English tradition. His continued adherence to it led him to define the central Irish attitude as one of self-hatred' (1984:9-10). In psychoanalytical terms, the pathology of 'literary unions' is recognizable as a form of melancholia, the state that ensues from the inability to separate properly, mourn loss and move on. In melancholia the subject is unable to realign him or herself in relation to the (lost) object, because s/he is unable to relinquish the previous attachment in structural form to that object. This melancholia is identifiable by a tendency to bitter self-deprecation. As Lyotard observes:

Self-deprecation is a recognizable trait. Freud identifies it and analyses it in depth in his study of melancholia, and he establishes the connection between this symptom, narcissism and psychosis. A leading characteristic of these cases is a cruel self-deprecation of the ego combined with relentless self-criticism and bitter self-reproaches. Analyses have shown that this disparagement and these reproaches apply at bottom to the object and represent the ego's revenge upon it. The shadow of the object has fallen upon the ego ... the introjection of the object is here unmistakably clear (100).

The shadow of the object which has fallen on the ego 'without the ego knowing the source of the darkness in which it is bathed or even knowing that it is bathed in darkness, *is the mother*' [my emphasis] (101). In Lyotard's account, as previously noted, the mother is identified patrocenically, that is, with lack: she *is* the lack of a penis, her phallic status foreclosed. The shadow that



the resulting guilt casts on the object of idealization is, as Bhabha writes, 'the origin of melancholia according to Freud' (100). Here no self-relating is possible, since the introjected object configures the ego and leaves a divided and unsymbolized self. The alienation and division which Yeats expresses can thus be understood not as a condition of being partially separated from and partially identified with his home culture, but rather as an expression of the experience of the father's culture being introjected and mistaken for himself. The melancholic son introjects this self-deprecation and self-alienation (resulting from the loss and lack of a mother-daughter figuration): it traverses his ego, and he mistakes it for his own condition.

One of the stated functions of *The Field Day Anthology* was to achieve that 'dissolution of the mystique' of Irishness which Deane considered an 'urgent necessity if any lasting solution to the North is to be found' (1984:18). However, this dissolution is not possible within a representational economy that cannot bring itself to name woman's difference, and for as long as it does not do this, 'Irishness' must remain in melancholia and continue to configure its tradition through a mystique. *FDA* was itself caught between acceptance and rejection, avowal and disavowal, both remaining within and separating from the 'Irish mystique', and as such can be read as the expression of a tradition immobilized between the two axes of a romantic modernism and a postmodern poetics of indeterminacy: or, a phallic mother figured (incorporated) in the inclusions of 'exceptional' women in I, II and II, and a phallic mother disfigured (disincorporated) in IV and V. The 'mystique' of Irishness is simultaneously avowed and disavowed in its project of providing 'no definitive answer to the question of definition' (Deane, 1991, xxiv). Kiberd quotes the editors of the important 1992 volume *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, who write that those 'who successfully define and superintend a crisis, furnishing its lexicon and discursive parameters, successfully confirm themselves as the owners of power'.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, Kiberd himself has successfully superintended the representational crises instanced by a postmodern dialectics and a post-national politics. *Inventing Ireland* has been the

single most influential book in recent Irish criticism, and has provided the most visible critical parameters for testing theories of Irishness, inside and outside the academy. In contrast to the Field Day project, which, with meticulous intellectual integrity, always entertained the uncomfortable possibility of its own undoing in its achieving of its aims for solutions, Kiberd's project, with careful idealism and compassion, provided the comfort of addressing the (postmodern, post-national, post-unionist) dismemberment of the body politic with a project of unity and self-possession, possibly as symbolically resonant as Yeats's tower, in his positive narrative of Irish culture. The indeterminacies of the so-called post-nationalist period and condition were retroactively contained through his reconstitution of the body of Irish Studies.

Kiberd's analysis of the crises of *literary* paternity, which symbolized the crisis of legitimation of the state of modern Ireland, can be usefully applied to an analysis of the crises of *critical* paternity of Irish Studies in post-modern Ireland. He writes that 'the unmodified state apparatus proved itself to have been the last, most lethal gift of the departing imperialists: and the obsession with the father-son relationship, as a crisis of legitimation, seemed to deepen with each succeeding generation of male authors' (407). Like Deane, Kiberd is aware of the primacy of the oedipal narratives in literary paradigms, and issues a caveat about 'the danger of re-oedipalization' lurking 'in the search for a true authority' *in literature*, when he points out that the 'revolutionary slaying-of-the-father figure often ends simply by instituting some new father or authority figure'. Yet the inescapable parallel *critical* restitution of the oedipal model in a reading such as his own goes unremarked (389). Arguably, it is not 'the unmodified state apparatus' which has 'proved itself to have been the last, most lethal gift of the departing imperialists', but perhaps the unmodified *oedipal* apparatus and the obsession with the father-son relationship as a crisis of legitimation, which seems to deepen with each succeeding generation of male *critics* (407).

For in two recent surveys of Irish studies, the body of women's writing is again forfeited in different ways, in acts of affiliation within a lineage of male critics. Eamonn Hughes's

2000 essay 'Forgetting the Future: An Outline History of Irish Studies', once more uses the figure of woman to symbolise the future whilst paradoxically forgetting her in it. This tension serves neatly to illustrate how the figurative use of woman leads both to the forgetting of women in history (feminist criticism is the one notable omission from Hughes's survey of the main bodies of criticism which have contributed to and shaped Irish Studies) and the loss of a visible and differentiated future for women – even as the trope of woman is used in the service of that future. With regard to the continuing iconic use of female markers in Irish studies, he writes:

It is worth noting that when one begins to look for markers of futurity, they do seem often to be gendered as female. The idea of man as the past and woman as the future may offer some compensation for what remains an emblemizing tendency and its consequences.<sup>17</sup>

Hughes does acknowledge the need for some redress; but the continuing emblematic use of woman in the place of the mother means that any reworking within the terms of the canon as it is presently configured is not a future possibility, rendering the future constructed by this version of Irish Studies, contrary to Hughes's hopes, anything but feminine. The forfeit is more obviously evident in Conor McCarthy's impressive 2000 survey of strands of influence in contemporary Irish criticism, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992*, where he explicitly conducts his analysis within an agonistic model. He writes:

Some explanation is in order as to the absence here of creative writing by women. My intention has been to deal with writing that is either canonical (Friel, Banville) or counter-canonical (Bolger). I do not believe that a solid canon, or counter-canon, of recent or contemporary Irish women's writing as yet exists, and the problem with the essentially agonistic model of cultural production in use here is that it has the effect of seeking out suitable groups of opponents who can be pitched against each other. I chose at the outset to deal with figures that had achieved canonical or near canonical status, and a

serious study of contemporary female writers would seem to be as much an investigative and reconstructive task as a critical project (43).

Although McCarthy correctly identifies a ‘problem with the essentially agonistic model of cultural production in use here’, he is still willing to valorise this model (as Patricia Coughlan has also observed) as a problematic.<sup>18</sup> McCarthy turns to the example of Dermot Bolger to represent counter-canoncity: ‘[t]he ambition of the Raven Arts Press project initiated by Bolger makes it attractive for such criticism, for it formulates itself as a movement on various grounds (generation, place, class, world-view)’.<sup>19</sup> The implication is that the work of the many women writers, too many to list, active from the 1950s to the present, or the remarkable efflorescence of feminist and woman-friendly publishing and workshop initiatives between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s, individually or as a totality, does not qualify as representative of a critical counter-canon – despite encompassing a wide spectrum of genres, and despite constituting, beyond any doubt, a ‘movement’ which defines itself on grounds of ‘generation, place, class, world-view’, as well as on those of gender and sexuality.<sup>20</sup>

But this substantial women’s counter-critique, perhaps the most unmistakable one of recent decades, is one that resists containment within the dialectics of oppositionality reiterated by McCarthy. Such explicit foreclosing of women’s writing as exemplified by McCarthy’s reinvestment of a father-son standard, is a gesture commonly seen in books articles, learned papers and general publications about Irish culture since the furore over the original *FDA* volumes. Such moves constitute a type of critical risk-management, exonerating the critical project from any accusation of wilfully or deliberately having left women writers ‘out of the picture’. Yet at the same time women’s writing is constructed as a frame for those works and critical fixations which are addressed and represented. The act of foreclosure is only one more in a series of critical acts which determine the role of ‘women’s writing’ (including feminist criticism), as a separate category, lost both without and within a

masculinist imaginary and the largely male canon of Irish Studies.

In raising the veil, we find, as Kristeva noted, sexuality as the nexus between language and socio-symbolic practices. Specifically, we find, as Pollock argues, that the infantile sexuality of the oedipal boy determines the critical parameters of our national culture. Behind the veil, we find the son's desire for the father, and his need to construct the mother as an intermediary between him and this desire. This is, to borrow Lyotard's words,

what had to be unveiled [exposed]. The desire for the father could only be unveiled by re-establishing the position of phantasy, of the maternal space of transgression [adulteration], and finally by bringing to light the full Oedipus (106).

In Irish literary studies, the 'maternal space of transgression' brings to light, not the full Oedipus, for this – he – is never fully owned, but the shadows of a past that fails to illuminate women inside Irish cultural history. Until the reflexive situating of masculinity becomes an interpretational practice in all of Irish studies, until the full Oedipus can be brought to light, then the body of women's writings will continue to do the phantasy work of an Irish national consciousness that doesn't see her at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Studies is itself a nebulous term, and I use it broadly to refer to a whole range of discourses and practices concerned with Irish culture, society and politics. Masculinity, for instance, tends to be an under-discussed topic in work focusing on the Republic of Ireland, whereas with work concerned with northern Ireland, largely because of seeking to understand paramilitary behaviours, masculinity has been more significantly a focus of enquiry. The work of Colin Coulter, Colin Graham, Richard Kirkland, Éibhear Walshe, Lance Pettit, Allen Feldman, Rob Kitchen, Alan Bairner, and Vincent Quinn, among others, all examine masculinities as components of gender and sexuality.

<sup>2</sup> As for instance by Kevin Whelan (unpublished lecture on the future of Irish Studies, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 9 February 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (Houndmills: Palgrave), 2002: 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> A conference entitled 'Intellectuals and the Nation State', held at the University College, Dublin Clinton Institute for American Studies in 2005, had no panels addressing gender or sexuality, nor any female keynote speakers.

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- <sup>5</sup> There are notable exceptions to this over-arching androcentrism, such as the critics listed in note 2.
- <sup>6</sup> As seen, for instance, in the furore and debate, often of a sectarian nature, that ensued after the screening of *Hidden History: The Killings at Coolacree*, RTE 1, Tuesday 23 October. See [www.ireland.com/newspaper/letters/2007/1102/index.html](http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/letters/2007/1102/index.html), [http://www.village.ie/Media/Television/The\\_Killings\\_at\\_Coolacree/](http://www.village.ie/Media/Television/The_Killings_at_Coolacree/), [www.rte.ie/radio1/thetubridyshow/1163651.html](http://www.rte.ie/radio1/thetubridyshow/1163651.html)
- <sup>7</sup> Oscar Wilde for instance can be rehabilitated as a queer because his socialism can be emphasized.
- <sup>8</sup> See Joe Cleary's suggestive *Literature, Partition and the Nation State, Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel, and Palestine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).
- <sup>9</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. New York: Vintage, 1996: 641. See Moynagh Sullivan, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Subjects of Irish and Women's Studies', in P.J. Mathews, ed. *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, Dublin: Four Courts, 2000. pp. 243-50.
- <sup>10</sup> The scholarship on exegesis and allegoresis is, of course, extensive.
- <sup>11</sup> Kiberd warns against the danger of this when he issues a caveat about the operations of re-oedipalisation implicit in 'the search for a true authority'. Kiberd, 1996: 389.
- <sup>12</sup> Many of the 'exceptional' women writers included in the Irish canon, however tangentially, such as Maria Edgeworth, Kate O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen, Somerville and Ross, have not been mothers; Kate O'Brien's putative motherhood is a contested issue. Equally, just as conservative newspapers often find women to write anti-feminist op-eds, equally many women seek to individuate themselves by disidentifying with the body of other women writers, or feminists.
- <sup>13</sup> Bhabha, 1991: 98.
- <sup>14</sup> A complementary aspect of these structures is offered by Pádraig Pearse's '*An Mháthair* [The Mother]'. Written in his mother's voice on the eve of his execution, it rehearses a conversation in which the mother addresses Mother Ireland, to whom she 'does not begrudge' her 'two fine sons' who went to death for the love of Ireland. This willing selflessness of the mother as constructed within nationalist and oedipal figuring of identity, is a non-separated, non-individuated position.
- <sup>15</sup> Deane quotes Yeats as follows: 'The 'Irishry' have preserved their ancient 'deposit' through wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became wars of extermination; no people,



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Lecky said [...] have undergone greater persecution, nor did that persecution altogether cease up to our own day [...] I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate [...] This is Irish hatred and solitude, the hatred of human life that made Swift write Gulliver and the epitaph upon his tomb, that can still make us wag between extremes and doubt our sanity' (1984: 49-50).

- <sup>16</sup> Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger, 'Introduction', *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, London: Routledge, 1992. 5. quoted in Kiberd, 1996: 407.
- <sup>17</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Forgetting the Future: an Outline History', *Irish Review* 25, Winter/Spring 1999/2000: 1-16, 13.
- <sup>18</sup> Patricia Coughlan, 'Irish Literature and Feminism in Postmodernity', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 10.2 (2004): 175-202, 201.
- <sup>19</sup> Publications included Katie Donovan's pamphlet, which argued that women writers should 'sink or swim' in the same publishing sharkpool as men, and deprecated the alleged 'handholding' of feminist and woman-friendly presses.
- <sup>20</sup> Arlen House, Irish Feminist Information, the Women's Education Bureau, Attic Press, Salmon Publishing, the Cork Women Writers Circle (with the related *Cork Literary Review* and Bradshaw Books ventures), The Works in Wexford, and Ruth Hooley's women writers' group in Belfast, to name but a few.