

# ew Perspectives

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on the Humanities

# Reflections

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Ireland

Edited by:  
Meredith Dabek, Páraic Kerrigan, Stephen McCarthy, and Shane A. McGarry

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## **Elevating the Role of the Arts & Humanities in a STEM World: An Introduction to NPPSH, Volume 1**

In recent years, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education has risen to the forefront, often at the expense of the Arts & Humanities. Society has begun to shift its focus towards STEM due to its perceived public value and the more immediate and direct benefits society receives from STEM outputs. The Arts & Humanities, however, have experienced increased scrutiny in an age where a measurable value must be placed upon anything which receives public funding (Belfiore, 2015, p. 95). But Humanities scholars such as Helen Small or Jonathan Bate have pushed back upon the notion that Arts & Humanities cannot offer the same type of value to the public. Rather, quite the opposite. The Arts & Humanities teach us how to evaluate, interpret, and qualify information (Bate, 2011, p. 3). They teach us how to evaluate usefulness (Small, 2013, p. 4). Ultimately, the Arts & Humanities teaches us how to apply *interpretation* to a world that preferences rational, objective data over subjective thought.

Thankfully, the demand for Arts & Humanities scholarship is beginning to see an upward trend. The *Irish Independent* noted in a 2014 article that private sector hiring managers are beginning to once again seek out graduates with degrees in the Arts & Humanities, specifically because they are trained to think creatively (Bielenberg, 2014, p. 26). Jennifer Edmond also notes that one of the most sought after skills which employers consistently rank as most important is the ability to adapt and learn (Edmond, 2014, p. 351), a skill that is strongly imparted by an Arts & Humanities education.

In October of 2016, Maynooth University, in conjunction with An Foras Feasa, launched its first annual *New Perspectives: Postgraduate Symposium on the Humanities* (NPPSH) conference. This conference, which coincided with the annual Dean's Lecture, strove to highlight scholarship conducted by postgraduates in the Arts & Humanities in Ireland. The conference itself solicited papers from all over Ireland and sought to highlight the importance of Arts & Humanities research in a STEM world, whether through collaboration or through independent, thought-provoking research.

Further instilling the values provided by an Arts & Humanities education, during her Dean's Lecture talk, Professor Sidonie Smith offered important insights into the shifting nature of the Arts & Humanities PhD, focusing on the value of the project-based work which is often generated by Arts & Humanities PhD scholars in the 21st century. While these more 'project-based' styles of engagement may be outside the traditional, academic norm, they provide students with skills that are invaluable in a career: collaboration, communication, team building, and planning.

NPPSH 2016 sought to highlight much of this and featured a number of fascinating panels. From explorations of 20th century literature, to contributions in Irish music, to the intersection of STEM and the Humanities, the papers in this volume showcase a breadth of scholarship and a diversity of approaches which highlights the multifaceted nature of an Arts & Humanities education. Within these pages, you will find a fascinating selection of papers, which cover a wide variety of themes. Each of the papers is organised into one of three themes: Literature in Ireland and Abroad, Intersectionality of STEM and the Humanities, and Developing Identities in the 21st Century.

The journal opens with a collection of papers concerned with literature in both Ireland and abroad. Deborah Guidera O'Rourke begins by providing an in-depth, close reading of the language used in ninth-century Irish text *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* (The Colloquy of the Two Sages). Francis Lomax then offers a discussion of the modernist writer and painter Wyndham Lewis' work in the context of the interplay between the artist and the state. John Singleton examines how John McGahern's novel, *The Dark*, represents a rejection of the prevailing social expectations and conventions in mid 20th century Catholic Ireland. Finally, Matthew Fogarty offers an exploration of Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* and its use of jazz music cadences as a form of dissidence in 1930's Ireland.

The second theme is that of intersectionality between STEM and the Humanities. This theme begins with a paper by Meredith Dabek, which offers a glimpse into the world of digital narratives, with an overview of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a digital re-imagining of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Sara Kerr then examines the application of computer-based analytical techniques to Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth's novels from the eighteenth century and how these techniques can be applied to literary analysis. Siobhán Barrett closes out this theme by offering new insight into eighth-century poetry by combining traditional close reading techniques with cutting-edge technologies to create a new, revised edition of the *Poems of Blathmac*.

The final theme of the journal is that of developing identities in the 21st century. This section opens with Louise Sarsfield Collins' examination of the day-to-day experiences of asylum seekers in Ireland, and particularly LGBT individuals, whose positions in Irish society are often unstable and precarious. Kira Hussing then reflects upon how the *mise-en-scène* aspects of the German film *Madonnen* reflect the maternal regret of the main character, a single mother who struggles to provide for her children. The final paper of this theme (and the journal as a whole) is provided by Stephanie Ford, who explores the use of *sean nós* (a more traditional style of singing) in the development of an emerging identity in contemporary Irish music.

While STEM teaches students how to produce evidence-based results (which, it should be noted, is hugely important), it is the Arts & Humanities that teach students how to apply subjective value and qualitative evaluation. The Arts & Humanities provides students with a robust set of tools to navigate the many twists and turns inherent in any career and prepares them to interface with a world that is becoming increasingly more collaborative and diverse.

Like many of the participants of this conference, the 2016 NPPSH board consists of members from disparate fields of study, which provided the conference with multiple perspectives. This type of collaboration is necessary not only within academia but also beyond, where the private sector thrives by engaging those with the ability to approach problems from unique perspectives. NPPSH provides early career scholars with the opportunity to share their work, while also highlighting the importance of the work being done in the Arts & Humanities. It is our sincere hope that NPPSH continues to be a voice for the Arts & Humanities, highlighting the exceptional research being undertaken therein.

#### **NPPSH: Reflections 2016 Editors**

Shane A. McGarry, PhD Candidate in Digital Humanities & Chair of NPPSH 2016

Meredith Dabek, PhD Candidate in Media Studies & Publications Officer

Stephen McCarthy, PhD Candidate in Ancient Classics & Submissions Officer  
Páriac Kerrigan, PhD Candidate in Media Studies & Communications Officer

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# Literature in Ireland and Abroad

## Section Contents:

A Grain of Justice, a Grain of Truth: An Analysis of Obscurity in an Early Medieval Irish Text

*Deborah Guidera O'Rourke, Maynooth University*

'I have given myself up to the study of the State': Wyndham Lewis, Modernism, the Avant-garde, and the State

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'God Bless the Child': Unearthing the Dissident Potential of the Jazz Aesthetic in Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*

*Matthew Fogarty, Maynooth University*



## A Grain of Justice, a Grain of Truth: An Analysis of Obscurity in an Early Medieval Irish Text

Deborah Guidera O'Rourke, Maynooth University

*Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* or *The Colloquy of the Two Sages* is a ninth-century text preserved in whole or part in eleven manuscripts dating between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries (Carey, 2014, p. 630), in which two poets Néde and Ferchertne engage in a verbal sparring contest which is often obscure, in an attempt to define their identity and status and exact the claim of head poet. This paper focuses on §236, Neglect of Crops; i.e., without cultivating them, or without their growing although they are cultivated; or [neglect] of judgements, and §237, Perjuries (2014, p. 637), from John Carey's edition of the eschatological section of Ferchertne's speech. It seeks to demonstrate how these phrases illustrate the complexity of the learning of the medieval Irish poet who delivers an eschatological vision of last days, informed by metaphoric and allegorical references which were employed by a 'small intellectual elite' (Boyle, 2016, p. 13), and derived from a combination of poetic, historical, legal, and exegetical erudition.

The obscurity and 'darkness' of the poets' speech is noted in 'The Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*' which states that the poets were deprived of the power to judge on account of the 'unintelligibility of their diction and judgement' (McCone, 1986, p. 3), and their ability to conceal their meaning from those who did not have access to learning. However, obscurity was an important poetic feature in *Auraicept na nÉces* or 'The Scholars' Primer', whose earliest core text is dateable to the seventh-century. It formed part of the curriculum of the poet and is found in numerous manuscripts, often alongside legal texts indicating the significant learning of medieval scholars which combined legal and linguistic matters (Alquist, 2000, pp. 86-86), and explicates how 'every obscure sound that existed in every speech and in every language was put into Gaelic so for this reason it is more comprehensive than any language' (Calder, 1917, reprint 1995, p. 3), thus denoting the language as naturally obscure. The speech of the poets, or *Bérla na Filed*, formed part of the sixth year of the curriculum of the poet and featured the use of arcane vocabulary (Breatnach, 2009, p. 113), while 'The Caldron of Posey', which employs the metaphoric use of cauldrons as sources of poetic ability, also regards the 'darkening of speech' (Breatnach, 1981, p. 69) as a poetic faculty, thus deeming that obscurity was not only an attribute but a requirement of the learned profession.

The neglect of crops when placed within the context of Ferchertne's eschatological speech would correspond with the pessimistic prophecy which echoes the prophecy of Christian Doomsday, as found in the translation of the text of 'The Apocalypse of Thomas', preserved in Vat. Pal. Lat.220, where Thomas hears those things which must come about such as 'famine, wars, plagues and a great many dissensions of the people' (Carey, et al., 2014, pp. 570, 575), evoking a gloomy future prophecy concerning the state of weather, crops, and society. Although a commentary on the legal text *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* considers the compensation due to crops for damage by human agency, stating the penalty of two ounces of silver must be paid for either cutting it or walking through it (Kelly, 1997, p. 236), the reference to judgements in the gloss indicates that there may be further allusions present. *Bretha Déin Chécht*, a law tract forming part of the legal handbook *Senchas Már*, employs grades of corn metaphorically to illustrate the grades in society and the relevant compensation due them for a range of physical

injuries. Dian Cécht, the mythical physician of the *Tutha Dé Danann*, and one of the nine in the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchas Már* assigned judgement due to the darkness of Fercherne and Néde's speech, provides a mythical exemplar of the scale of payments for injuries through the killing of his own son Míach (McLeod, 2000, pp. 381, 386). As Neil McLeod points out, *Míach* also means sack (of grain), and Dian's daughters name *Airmed* refers to a unit for the measure of grain, which relates to the measurement in grains for payment of honour-price or *eneclann* or *lóg n-enech*, for different injuries to the various grades in society (2000, p. 386). Each rank or grade in society was assigned its own grain, §1: 'Classification of persons is obtained from (on the basis of) nine grains. And [such] classifications of persons exists inasmuch as there are nine grains for the [different classes of] persons', from a grain of wheat for a supreme king, bishop, and master poet, to a bean for a *fer midboth* (Binchy, 1966, pp. 9-10, 23), demonstrating emphasis on rank and honour with corresponding compensation, the largest grains were ascribed to the lower grades with lesser wergild (the compensation paid based on relevant rank), while the higher grades were allocated smaller grains, ensuring higher wergild. As society is stratified, not all grades are equal and the primary concern is with compensation and restoration of order, most notably the honour of the king.

The pastoral imagery of cultivation and ripe crops reflects the fecundity of the just ruler as in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, where cosmic imagery of summery weather, wealth, and natural abundance reflect a period of ideal kingship, for in Conaire's reign there are 'three crowns on Ériu, namely a crown of corn ears, a crown of flowers, and a crown of oak mast' (Cross & Slover, 1996, p. 109). Conversely, the metaphorical use of corn also replicates the retribution from the otherworld for his unjust judgement and broken *gessai* when Conaire laments: *coll etha galand*, 'the destruction of corn by foes' (Charles-Edwards, 1999, p. 51). The links between royal justice, fine weather, fertility, and peace is a popular theme in both Biblical and Continental king tracts and corresponds with Isidorean ideology of merging the importance of kings and their territories operating under God's providence, and the concept that a bad king is not a king at all (Fulton, 2014, p. 47). The king must provide for and maintain his people as set out in the wisdom text *Senbriathra Fithail*, 'Be liberal that you may be illustrious. Be generous that you may be honourable' (O'Leary, 1986, p. 3), focusing on the reciprocal relationship between a king and his people and the benefits of a ruler who embodies the concept of *fír flathemon*, or a peaceful rule with prosperity.

Perjurers, or anyone who swears a false oath or *éthach*, are not entitled to give testimony about anyone (Kelly, 2011, p. 201). The utterance of truth or true judgement will preserve the king, as *Audacht Morainn* states in §6: 'Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him' (Kelly, 1976, p. 5). A king who remains in rule after a false judgement brings about cosmic upheaval as in the case of Lugaid Mac Con in *Cath Maige Mucrama*, when 'after that he was a year in the kingship of Tara and no grass came through the earth, nor leaf on a tree, nor grain in corn' (Fogarty, 2016, p. 212), resulting in his expulsion as king. Prevention of the utterance of an incorrect judgement is illustrated by the interdiction placed upon Conchobar mac Nessa by the Ulaid; they would not allow him to give judgement so that he might not give a false one, so that the crops would not be worse for it (Ó Cathasaigh, 2014, p. 139), stressing the importance of preventing cosmic upheaval as a result of a false judgement and focusing on the important aspect of uttering a truth resulting in a positive effect or outcome as epitomised by the ideal reign of Cormac mac Airt. For as *Uraicecht Becc* comments:

*for roscadaib 7 fasaigib 7 teistemnaib fíraib*, ‘truth is based upon maxims and precedents and true scriptural testimonies’. Any judgement of a cleric that exists is based on the truth and entitlement of Scripture. A poet’s judgement however is based on maxims, a ruler’s judgement is based on them all, maxims, precedents and scriptural testimonies (McCone, 1990, p. 24).

The ruler or king must embody truth, which is illustrated by his ability to preserve his rule preventing disorder reflected metaphorically through the medium of natural disasters via his utterance of true judgements, avoiding the consequences of perjury.

The king exercised power through clientship, with the relationship between a king and his clients being reciprocal (Kelly, 2011, p. 29), as illustrated by The *Airgíalla* Charter poem, dating to no earlier than AD 800, which demonstrates the status and rights and obligations in the contract or clientship between the Airgíalla and the Uí Néill king (Charles-Edwards, 2005, p. 100). Contracts are formally witnessed and bound by sureties. *Senchas Már* states that there are, in §7, ‘three occasions when the world becomes chaotic: an epidemic of plagues, a deluge of warfare, a dissolution of contracts’ (Breatnach, 2011, p.7), and notes the breakdown of order is a consequence of unfulfilled contracts for there are, in §11, ‘four eminences of a kingdom who debase themselves through petty things: a falsely judging king, a stumbling bishop, a fraudulent poet, an unworthy noble. Those who do not fulfil their obligations are not entitled to honour-price’ (Breatnach, 2011, p. 7). The failure of the king is a broken oath or contract, a form of perjury which results in a breakdown of political, social, and cosmic order.

Therefore, negligence of crops and perjuries may allude to concern for truth, true judgements and justice which is symbolised in the reign of the king whose actions are reflected by the cosmos. This in turn has social repercussions, for without truth and justice, there is no order and the learned elite may not flourish for, as stated in *Audacht Morainn* §24, ‘It is through the justice of the ruler that every great man of art attains the crown of knowledge’ (Kelly, 1976, p. 9), for as a result of a golden age of rule, there will be ‘inspiration of truth - darkening of every utterance’ (Fogarty, 2016, p. 213). The medieval Irish poet seeks to cultivate poetic speech which may become more obscure or darkened in peaceful times, for as in §54a, ‘Darkness yields to light’ (Kelly, 1976, p. 15), seeking as listed in the Triads, §201, *trí caindle forosnat cach ndorcha: fír, aicned, ecna*, or ‘the three candles that illumine every darkness, truth, nature, knowledge’ (Meyer, 1906, pp. 26-27). Just as modern scholars of Joyce contemplate the symbolic and elusive nature of his writing, and the complex wordplay which carries much meaning, the obscurity of this text is intentionally ambiguous. It reflects the comprehensive learning of Christian tradition combined with the secular poetic and narrative tradition, exemplifying the wisdom of the elite minority capable of recognising and interpreting allegorical and metaphoric allusions. The practice of deliberate ambiguity demonstrates the extensive ability of the learned poet who employs this process to illuminate the learned elite who can glean the grain of truth concealed therein.

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**‘I have given myself up to the study of the State’:  
Wyndham Lewis, Modernism, the Avant-garde, and the State**

Francis Lomax, Maynooth University

In his introduction to the recent *Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis*,<sup>1</sup> Tyrus Miller describes the modernist painter, novelist, and critic Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) as an embodiment of ‘the boundary crossing nature of the avant-garde’ (2016, p. 6). In Miller’s account, the avant-garde of the early twentieth century ‘tore apart the conventional boundaries between the various arts, between artistic and political activity, and between aesthetic works and conceptual discourse’ (2016 p. 6). The historical avant-garde—by which is meant the various groupings of artists of experimental artists and writers which emerged across Europe in the years prior to the First World War—can be broadly characterised by its vehement opposition to bourgeois society, and its conception of the potential of experimental art and literature to act as a catalyst for radical social change.

However, in the period immediately after the war, the European avant-garde was forced into a position, whereby, as Walter L. Adamson has suggested, ‘newly powerful movements such as Bolshevism and Fascism, the expanding might of capitalist industries [...] and the increasing concern of nation states with aesthetic matters, all forced modernists to reassess the strategy of ‘autonomous’ or ‘pure’ avant-garde’ modernism’ (2007, p. 4). As the figurehead, and chief theorist of the Vorticist group,<sup>2</sup> the British faction of the pre-war avant-garde, Lewis played a significant part in the initial stages of pre-war European avant-gardism. Following his service as an artillery officer in the war, Lewis turned his attentions more and more to writing satirical novels and works of social and cultural criticism. This article examines Lewis’s critical interventions into the debates which ensued in the aftermath of the First World War regarding the direction which postwar experimental arts should take. The central problem was, as Lewis would later suggest, that the First World War supplanted art as the catalyst for large-scale societal change.<sup>3</sup> What was needed, then, was a reformulation of the avant-garde’s

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<sup>1</sup> Wyndham Lewis has, until relatively recently, occupied a marginal position within studies of the art and literature of the early twentieth century. Fredric Jameson, writing in 1979, said of Lewis that he was, at that point, ‘surely the least read and most unfamiliar of the great modernists of his generation’ (1979, p. 1). Associating Lewis with a number of major literary figures from the period, such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce—all of whom Lewis had close and often fractious dealings with—Jameson states that Lewis was ‘a presence for his contemporaries, but we have forgotten their admiration for him’ (p. 2). In the years since Jameson’s path-breaking study of Lewis, however, there has been a gradual resurgence of interest in one of modernist culture’s most controversial, maligned, and misunderstood figures. Publications such as the aforementioned *Cambridge Companion*, edited by Tyrus Miller, and Edinburgh University’s 2015 publication *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*, edited by Andrzej Gašiorek and Nathan Waddell, point the way to Lewis’s belated acceptance into something close to the mainstream of academic literary discourse.

<sup>2</sup> The Vorticist collective included the painters Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949), David Bomberg (1890-1957), Helen Saunders (1885-1963), Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939), William Roberts (1895-1980) and Frederick Etchells (1886-1973), the sculptors Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915) and the poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972).

<sup>3</sup> In *Blasting and Bombardiering*, his 1937 memoir of his experiences as both an artist and a soldier, Lewis asserts that avant-garde artists of the pre-war period had seen themselves as ‘the heralds of great social changes’, but that ultimately ‘the day was lost for art at Sarajevo’:

The great social changes necessitated by the altered conditions of life were not to come about, after all, rationally and peacefully. They were to come about “catastrophically” instead.... And the great social

understanding of its aims. I will focus on a key aspect of Lewis's critical writings during the interwar period—namely the points in his thinking where art and aspects of politics converge most strikingly, through his discussions of the relationship between the (modernist) artist and the state. My concern is with two specific texts—*The Caliph's Design*, a polemic written in 1919, in which Lewis advocates for the direct involvement of avant-garde visual artists in the redesigning of post-war society; and *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis's controversial 1926 work of social criticism, in which the avant-gardist interventionism of the earlier work has been replaced by a commitment to the autonomous character of the artist, and the necessity of a strong political state to allow to artist or intellectual to work unhindered. While these works offer contrasting position regarding artistic autonomy, what is consistent across both texts is Lewis's absolute commitment to the belief that the modern artist is a figure of immense value to society.

Lewis's critical writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s operate within the paradigm identified above by Adamson. The series of critical books, which Lewis publishes in the period,<sup>4</sup> seeks to address the apparent failure of the pre-war avant-garde through a diagnostic critique of the ideological underpinnings of the subsequent modernist aesthetic project of the post-war / interwar period—a project which Lewis understood to have wholly lost any of the claims it once may have had to intellectual independence and 'revolutionary' potential. Throughout these works Lewis repeatedly asserts his political impartiality. However, his methods of cultural criticism complicate this as his attempts to identify the political currents working below the surface of modernist cultural production, ultimately, entails the compromising of his a-political stance. Writing in 1950, he concedes: 'The State is not a subject suited to a philosophic mind.... It is much better to turn your back on the State, as a subject of speculation. In my own case, I have not followed this rule [...] I have given myself up to the study of the State' (1984, p. 66). Lewis justifies this immersion in the profane realm of political and social commentary by arguing that it was, at all times, an attempt to advocate for a potential social order in which 'learning and the arts were likely to fare best' (1984, p. 66) which motivated these political interventions.<sup>5</sup>

### More than Just Picture Making: The Historical Avant-garde

In *The Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984), Peter Bürger argues that the avant-garde assault on the institution of art was an attempt to break the autonomous character of bourgeois art—its separation from everyday praxis—with a view to installing art at the centre of lived experience. The rejection of bourgeois morals and social codes, which Bürger sees as being exemplified by the aesthetic practices of Dada and Surrealism, entails a rejection of the institutionalised

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changes which with such an uncouth violence started to get themselves born, in that tragical atmosphere, extinguished the arts which were to be their expression, and which had been their heralds (1882, p. 258).

<sup>4</sup> *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926); *The Lion and the Fox: The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (1927); *Time and Western Man* (1927); *Paleface* (1928); *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* (1932); *Men Without Art* (1934).

<sup>5</sup> For broader discussions of Lewis complex and problematic politics see: Munton, A. 2008. Wyndham Lewis: From Proudhon to Hitler (and back): the Strange Political Journey of Wyndham Lewis. In: J. Birkett and S. Smith, eds. *Right / Left / Right: Revolving Commitments: France and Britain 1929-1950*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp. 47-60; Munton, A. 2016. Lewis, Anarchism, and Socialism. In: T. Miller, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 100-112; Head, P. 2005. Lewis and "the Political", *Wyndham Lewis Annual*. XII. pp. 29-41; and Bridson, D. G. 1972. *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis*. London: Cassell.

status of art in society. Bürger states: ‘The avant-gardists proposed the sublation of art [...] Art was not simply to be destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be presented, albeit in changed form. The avant-gardist thus adopted an essential element of Aestheticism’ (1984, p. 49). The late nineteenth-century doctrine of ‘art-for-art’s-sake’, as espoused by the aestheticists, had argued for an art which functioned in isolation, concerned only with its own aesthetic value. As Peter Gay puts it, ‘Art, so this modern doctrine goes, serves no one but itself—not mammon, not God, not country, not bourgeois self-glorification, certainly not moral progress. It boasts its own standards, its own ideals and gratifications’ (2009, p. 53).<sup>6</sup> As Bürger points out, similar to the avant-garde, the aesthetes had rejected the ‘means-ends rationality of everyday reality’ (1984, p. 49), but they had made the withdrawal of art from everyday life—its retreat into the ‘autonomy’ of aesthetic detachment and self-reference—the defining characteristic of their rebellion against bourgeois social codes. The avant-gardist approach differs in that, rather than seek to keep art in isolation, they strove for the initiation of a ‘new life praxis from the basis of art’ (Bürger, 1984, p. 49). While Bürger restricts his analysis to the examples of Surrealism and Dada, his concept of avant-garde praxis applies equally well to pre-war avant-gardist movements, such as Italian Futurism and Vorticism. Looking back in later life on his involvement in the pre-war avant-garde moment, Lewis observes:

It was, after all, a new civilisation that I—and a few other people—was making the blue prints for [...] A rough design for a new way of seeing for men who as yet were not there [...] I, like all the other people in Europe so engaged, felt it to be an important task. It was more than just picture making: one was manufacturing fresh eyes for people, and fresh souls to go with the eyes. That was the feeling. (1984, p. 135)

### **Towards a Modernist City—*The Caliph’s Design* (1919)**

Lewis’s experiences in the war did not immediately diminish the utopian element in his avant-gardist thinking; rather, Lewis returns from the Western Front with an intensified belief in art’s potential to bring about the renovation of society. However, problematically, it is through the state that Lewis begins to discern the best means to realise the integration of avant-garde or modernist aesthetic principles into everyday life. In 1919, he publishes *The Caliph’s Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?*, an exuberant critique of the state of visual avant-gardism after the First World War. While much of the book is concerned with critiques of the practices of the cubists in Paris and the artists affiliated with the Bloomsbury group in London, at its core, *The Caliph’s Design* is an impassioned appeal to the artists of the period to, as he puts it, take art ‘out of the studio and into life somehow’ (1986, p. 12). Lewis criticises what he sees as the ‘listlessness and dilettantism’ (1986, p. 12) of the studio-based experiments of the cubists, arguing that their continued reliance on still-life painting (*natures-mortes*) by Picasso and Juan Gris—with bowls of fruit, guitars and so on as the subject of the majority of their paintings—has failed to capitalise on abstraction’s initial revolutionary potential. Rather than expand the parameters of their work, the cubists have, Lewis asserts, become ‘desiccated in a pocket of inorganic experimentation’ (1986, p. 12).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> James McNeil Whistler for instance, writing in 1878, asserted: ‘Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it; and that is why I insist on calling my works “arrangements” and “harmonies”’ (2015, pp. 127-128).

<sup>7</sup> This had been an aspect of Lewis’s criticisms of Picasso et al. as early as the second number of the vorticist journal *BLAST* (1915), where Lewis argues that Picasso ‘founds his invention on the posed model, or the posed



Lewis begins *The Caliph's Design* with a parable concerning an Eastern despot—the titular caliph—who wakes up one morning and, being ‘extremely dissatisfied with the shape of my city’ (1986, p. 19), draws up a plan for a new city. He orders his chief engineer and chief architect, on pain of death, to take his plan—‘a little vorticist effort’ (1986, p. 19)—and make them a reality within one month. The parable ends with the completion of the work, and we are told that ‘within a month a strange street transfigured the heart of that cultivated city’ (1986, p. 19). What Lewis suggests in this parable, and the polemic which follows it, is that the modern artist, struggling to find a way out of the apparent impasse which the avant-garde had reached, is to strive to apply modernist aesthetics directly to the ‘form-content’ of society. Thus, the vorticist artist re-emerges as a kind of urban planner:

What I propose is that as much attention might be given...to the masses and entire form-content of life as has been given by the Nature-morte school to the objects on a table. If architecture and every related...art were affected and woken up, the same thing would be accomplished on a big scale as is at present attempted on a small scale...And a nobility and cohesion would be attained that under present conditions it is difficult to visualise. Most people grasping at such a notion have stopped short at some Utopian picture (Lewis, 1986, p. 108).

Lewis’s polemic is unashamedly utopian and deserves to be appreciated, at one level, as an honest appeal, on the part of an artist, for an art which is socially engaged, and also as fervent appeal for experimental art’s acceptance by society.<sup>8</sup> However, Lewis’s suggestion has a distinctly paternalistic hue and, as is generally the case with utopian thinking, his vision of an engaged, or interventionist avant-garde, inevitably runs into the problem of political power. Political apathy is singled out by Lewis as an impediment to his programme: ‘Do politicians understand so little the influence of the Scene of Life, or the effect of Nature, that they can be so indifferent to the capital of a wealthy and powerful community?’ (1986, p. 28). He suggests that if the politician—a more imaginative Cecil Rhodes (1986, p. 28)—was aesthetically aware, then ‘in the weight of a rhetoric of buildings, or in the subtler ways of beauty signifying the delights and rewards of success won by toil and adventure, in a thousand ways the imagination of the multitude could be captured and fixed’ (1986, p. 28). All too easily aesthetics and the appreciation of the imaginative potential of art shades into something coercive, with modernist aesthetics seemingly functioning as a means to ‘capture’ and ‘fix’ the thought processes of the general public.

With this in mind, Andrzej Gašiorek observes that Lewis’s version of interventionist modernism is partly driven by the conviction that ‘people escape entrapment in animality or mechanism through the *technē* of civilization’ (2004, p. 36). As Lewis understands it, the average individual’s life is lived largely exterior to themselves; they are sensory beings

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Nature-Morte, using models almost to the extent of the Impressionist’ (1969, p. 65). These practices are dismissed as ‘an absurdity and [a] sign of relaxed initiative’ (1969, p. 65).

<sup>8</sup> Lewis suggests that, aside from the benefits which the advanced arts could potentially offer to post-war society, their social inclusion would result in a legitimization of the arts, which had, up to that point, not been forthcoming: [W]hen I say that I should like a completely transfigured world, it is not because I want to look at it. It is you who would look at it. It would be your *spirit* that would benefit by this exhilarating spectacle. I should merely benefit, I and other painters like me, by no longer finding ourselves in the position of freaks, the queer wild-men of cubes, the terrible futurists, or any other rubbish that the yellow press invents to amuse the nerves of its readers. (1986, p. 39)

essentially, with a seemingly negligible interior life: ‘He can only live through others, outside himself. He, in a sense, *is* the houses, the railings, the bunting or absence of bunting. His beauty and justification is in a superficial exterior life. His health is there’ (1986, p. 30). As far as Lewis is concerned the ‘man in the street’ is, by and large, docile and easily satisfied by whatever spectacle is offered to him, no matter how banal: ‘Give him a fine, well-fed type of life, a bit of dashing and swanky, suitably clothed, with glamour and adventure about it, to look at, and he is gladdened, if his stomach is not too empty’ (1986, p. 30). The solution then, is to offer the public something more:

[B]eyond the obvious policy of not having a mean and indolent surrounding for the capital of what sets out to be an “Empire,” simply for human life at all, or what sets out to be human life—to increase gusto and belief in that life—it is of the first importance that the senses should be directed into such channels, appealed to in such ways, that this state of mind of relish, fullness and exultation should obtain. (1986, p. 30)

Elsewhere Lewis argues that ‘the greatest art, has in its power to influence everybody’, so that ‘a man might be unacquainted with the very existence of a certain movement in art, yet his life would be modified directly if the street [he] walked down took a certain shape, at the dictates of an architect under the spell of that modern movement’ (1922, p. 5). Lewis was not unique in arguing for for a radical fusion of modernist aesthetics and architectural practice. For example, in the same year that *The Caliph’s Design* appeared the German architect, and founder of the Bauhaus School, Walter Gropis (1883-1969) published the ‘Programme of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar,’ wherein he asserts:

The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! To embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts.... Today the arts exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew and learn to grasp the composite character of a building both as an entity and in its separate parts. Only then will their work be imbued with the architectonic spirit that it has lost as ‘salon art’ (1995, p. 435).

As the art critic Robert Hughes has observed, behind the compulsion towards applying newly developed modernist aesthetics to urban planning—driven by the conviction that this would lead to the improvement of society—there was a ‘Nietzschean, Romantic idea of the architect as the supreme articulator of social effort, a Master Builder beyond politics and (almost literally) a messiah’ (1991, 117). Hughes cites Gropius, who had stated: ‘There are no architects today, we are all of us merely preparing the way for him who will once again deserve the name of architect, for that means Lord of Art, who will build gardens out of the deserts and pile wonders up to the sky’ (qtd in Hughes, 1991, 117). While, for the most part, less grandiose in his rhetoric Lewis too envisions the coming of a new kind of aesthetically enlightened, and intellectually powerful planner, a “creative architect, or a man with some new power in his craft, and concerned with the aesthetic as well as the practical needs of the mass sensibility of his time’ (1986, p. 43).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See also, Klein, S. W. 2010. Modernist Babylons: Utopian Aesthetics and Urban Spectacle in D. W. Griffith and Wyndham Lewis. *Modernist Cultures*. Volume 5, Issue 1. pp. 9-29.

Returning to *The Caliph's Design* in 1952, Lewis reflects on his dream of a modernist metropolis, stating: 'The haphazard manner in which everything struggles and drifts into existence filled me with impatience. I would have had a city born by fiat, as if out the brain of a god, or someone with god-like power' (1984, p. 169). He concedes that he was 'vaguely conscious' that the central thesis of *The Caliph's Design* was not altogether realistic, but asserts the sincerity of his convictions: '[H]ad I possessed the power I should certainly have torn down the whole of London—or at least the centre of the city. Upon its ruins would have risen a bright, new, and an enchanting capital. I am as convinced as ever today that it a great pity I had not the power' (1984, p. 169).

### **The Modernist State: *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926)**

In 1926, Lewis begins his critique of interwar society and culture with the publication of *The Art of Being Ruled*. This is Lewis's first explicitly political work, and is arguably one of the few, if not the only, examples of what could be classified as 'high modernist political theory'.<sup>10</sup> In the course of a lengthy, occasionally convoluted analysis of post-war European democracy, Lewis draws from a wide array of sources—mostly works by socialist thinkers such as Marx, Georges Sorel, Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Karl Kautsky<sup>11</sup>—as he anatomises the social changes occurring across western society. Throughout the book, Lewis adopts various positions on issues, including consumerism, feminism, state propaganda, and censorship, only to seemingly revise them in subsequent chapters or abruptly adopt apparently opposing views. Masses of lengthy quotations from various sources are deployed in the service of the competing arguments, which Lewis canvasses in a performance of erudition which rivals Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. Space does not permit me to give even a partial account of the scope of Lewis critique of 1920s Western democracy. Rather, I shall restrict myself to aspects of the work which deal directly with the place of the artist within a political state.

In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis extends his earlier vision of a society enriched by the principles of modern art beyond *The Caliph's Design's* parameters of visual modernism, to encompass intellectual activity in its broadest sense. He makes clear the partisan nature of his argument: 'That when I am speaking of the intellectual I evidently experience no shame (reflecting on the compromising nature of my own occupation), that I do not pretend to be a "plain blunt man" is true [...] men owe everything they can ever hope to have to an "intellectual" of one sort or another' (1989, p. 373). He continues: 'I claim further that the intellectual is the only person in the world who is not a potential "capitalist," because his "capital" is something that cannot be bartered. What he deals in, even when it gives him power, gives him no money' (p. 373). This idealistic, and ultimately rather forlorn conception of the

<sup>10</sup> In an essay in a recent edition of *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, Christopher Fear argues persuasively for recognizing *The Art of Being Ruled* as an important work of "'critical" political philosophy' (2015, p. 84).

Reed Way Dasenbrock, in the afterword to the 1989 edition of *The Art of Being Ruled*, suggests that the work can be best understood by 'recognizing that it is a modernist work, dense, allusive, and difficult, constructed on principles closer to those of *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos* in its shifts in register and its use of montage or juxtaposition than those of a conventional treatise on politics and society' (1989, p. 436). The obvious problem with such an approach to writing works of criticism, as Dasenbrock remarks of *The Art of Being Ruled*, is that these are not works of poetry, and as such, a degree of clarity is required of these works which would not be expected of a creative work (1989, p. 436). Of the difficulties inherent in Lewis formal approaches, Dasenbrock observes that 'it really is remarkably difficult for most of the book to define Lewis's position on the issues he is discussing. He constantly judges phenomena he discusses, but does so from a shifting perspective' (1989, p. 436).

<sup>11</sup> Lewis also engages with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and Bertrand Russell.

intellectual, is at the core of Lewis's subsequent assault on modernist culture in the major critical works of the period, such as *Time and Western Man* (1927). The problem in Lewis's thinking on the importance of art and the artist is that it entails a dialectic between, on the one hand, his ardent belief in the emancipatory power of culture (and its instrumental use), and, on the other, his pessimistic understanding of the inevitability of political power. Elsewhere, he remarks: 'Socially, the modern age is like being in an immense building full of a radioactive something we call "power." It is malignant, this kind of power, and we are all slightly cancered' (1984, p. 180).

Lewis holds a Hobbesian, Aristotelian acceptance of the political state as a means of maintaining social order, and, ultimately, for making cultural production possible:

[S]ince man is a feeble creature he is obliged to associate himself with a strong band or group of his own kind. Whether you call it a 'contract' or a 'compact' or leave that out he must subscribe to the rules obtaining in his particular society. Further, he can only attain to 'civilised' status—have libraries, laboratories, studios, concert-halls, and theatres, if he has the good fortune to belong to a large and complex society—subject to its laws. (1984, p. 63)

In a reversal of his 1919 plea for aesthetic engagement, in *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis argues for the necessity of intellectual independence; autonomy, essentially. The autonomy of the artist, Lewis argues, is 'not a snobbish withdrawal' but rather a 'going aside for the purposes of work' (1986, p. 373). The artist and other intellectuals—scientists, philosophers and so on—must be at a remove from the 'crowd' in order to work for its benefit. Lewis suggests that with the seemingly inevitable collapse of liberal democracy, and its replacement with some form of authoritarianism, coming from either the Right or the Left (Lewis sees little difference between the two), there is an opportunity for the intellectual to finally be afforded the social status he deserves. Dismissing liberal-democratic conceptions of liberty as 'manufactured with words', Lewis argues that the average citizen in a western democracy is far from free (1986, p. 324), and ultimately reaches the profoundly problematic that an authoritarian system—'state despotism', as he terms it—would ultimately lead to the enrichment of the lives of the general public as:

the very absolute nature of their material loss, once the despotism had been imposed on them would persuade people to cease from seeking always outside themselves objects of happiness. They would be thrown back on 'their own resources,' and discover, it is hoped, their own reality. The truly childish objects of the contemporary European's desires, all the toys provided for the spoilt, softened, democratic mind, could not fail to give place to truer satisfactions. (1986, p. 324)

He suggests that, under such an authoritarian regime, the inequalities of the class system could, potentially, be replaced with a caste system based on intellectual ability. Lewis asserts that this could 'no doubt ensue from the more rigid establishment of vocational tests [...] this caste system would be entirely built on faculties or gifts, not on what we roughly call "character"; and certainly animal physique would become negligible' (1986, p. 325). Crucially, from Lewis's perspective, such a system would solve the problem faced by the artist in a society which, he had come to believe, had lost its respect for the arts. 'In the social revolution', he states, 'nothing is done' for the artist or intellectual, and 'it is no doubt the great mass of pseudo-

artists, writers, and so forth who discredit it' (1986 p. 373). Egalitarianism, he suggests—and here, one could say, he is being quintessentially 'modernist' in his anxiety over the perceived ramifications of mass democracy—has had a detrimental effect on 'the intelligence' (1986, p. 373). The arts and sciences suffer 'automatically in consequence of the attack on all authority, advantage, or privilege [...] It is our own brain we are attacking' (1986 p. 373).

Thus, Lewis arrives at his assertion that society, and the artist, would benefit from a system—which, it ought to be said, Lewis only vaguely defines—that would allow its intellectuals to work autonomously whilst at the same time affording them a high degree of social authority. Harking back to the 'primitive "democratic" picture of the intellectual leader living a life simply among the people, with admirable simplicity and without fuss' (1986 p. 374), Lewis asserts that the intellectual ought to be something comparable to Plato's philosopher king, who represents at his best the great unworldly element in the world' (p. 373). 'The life of the intelligence', he goes on to say, 'is the very incarnation of freedom: where it is dogmatic and harsh it is impure; where it is too political it is impure: its disciplines are less arbitrary and less *political* than those of religion: and it is the most inveterate enemy of unjust despotic power' (1986 p. 374). The paradox in Lewis's vision is that, in order for the modernist artist / intellectual to achieve autonomy, and the freedom to work a-politically, a strong, anti-democratic state is needed. Lewis can argue, seemingly without irony, that for intellectual activity to be 'the very incarnation of freedom' (1986, p. 374), or, if you like, for the modernist artist to be creative, and thus potentially enrich society, that society must give up much of its own freedom.

I began this essay with Tyrus Miller's description of Lewis as an embodiment of the avant-garde's radicalism in the ways in which it merged multiple practices and modes of discourse. He is also, I would add, a living encapsulation of Marshall Berman's well known observation that 'to be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction.... It is to be both revolutionary and conservative' (2010, p. 13). For Berman, to experience modernity is to be 'alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure' whilst simultaneously experiencing an anxiety about the potentially 'nihilistic depths to which many adventures lead' (2010, p. 13). For Lewis the twentieth century presented the arts with an opportunity to be meaningfully involved in the creation of a new social order. Such a view, when it is subsequently combined with a fear that artist may in fact stand to lose a great deal, ultimately pushes Lewis's thought into objectionable areas. Lewis's career, particularly with regard to his cultural theory, not only embodies all that is inventive and transgressive about modernism and the avant-garde, but also its most enduringly problematic elements—those areas of modernist discourse where utopian aesthetics interact, or indeed collide, with political realities. 'How do we *not* think of the state', Lewis asked towards the end of his life, 'when it shakes about under our feet, and is no longer able to hold at bay the primitive chaos, man's dread of which is its most obvious, if not its only, excuse for existing' (1984, p. 69).

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**‘The Ireland that We Dreamed of’:  
Rejecting Convention in John McGahern’s *The Dark***

John Singleton, NUI Galway

John McGahern’s second novel *The Dark*, banned upon publication in 1965, is remembered for shining a light on the darkest aspects of Irish Life: a confessional society that masked institutionalised physical, mental and sexual abuse, the full extent of which would be exposed in the Ryan Report (2009). Focusing on the depiction of individual moments of violence, however, encourages us to view the protagonist as a powerless victim and to disregard the novel’s central triumph: the rejection of social expectation and the realisation of a ‘real authority’, independent of family, faith and fatherland.

*The Dark* explores the unnamed son’s growth to maturity, in an oppressive farmhouse in mid-century rural Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The narrative reveals the pressures and insidious violence of convention and conformity that underpin the socio-political milieu. Themes of paralysis, nationality, language, and religion reveal the tensions between the conflicting powers of Family, Church, and State which lasted long into the latter half of the 20th century. The novel presents an immanent criticism of the repressive culture and social conditioning that maintained the delusion of Ireland as, in de Valera’s now infamous description, a ‘country worthy to be called the island of saints and scholars’ (1943).

The maturing son, however, rejects that convention and achieves a ‘real authority’, an individual sense of self, distinct from the hegemonic pressures exerted on him. He resists the bonds of convention, the nets flung that hold him back from flight:<sup>2</sup> the family farm, the priesthood, the University—those pillars of identity in mid-century Catholic Ireland—choosing, instead, a menial position within the E.S.B. in Dublin.

In McGahern’s meditation on familial and social constructionism, the fishing expedition in chapter two is a metaphor which foreshadows the narrative trajectory of the novel. The day begins in the convivial atmosphere and innocent play. Mahoney, the son’s violent, tyrannical father, is in an uncharacteristically good humour; yet, a simmering violence is ever present in his staccato orders:

“Watch now. Hold the lines tight. I hear a twenty-pounder coming round by Moran’s Bay on a motor bike,” he joked and they laughed but their fingers trembled on the white lines, feeling the vibrations of the spoons and then someone shouted.

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<sup>1</sup> The family’s cousin, Father Gerald, situates the approximate date of the action contemporary to its writing and publication (1965) with a comment on the postcolonial civilisation in Ireland: ‘Absolutely no sense of taste, a very uncultivated people even after forty years of freedom the mass of Irish are. You just can’t make silk out of a sow’s ear at the drop of a hat’ (McGahern, 1965, p. 65).

<sup>2</sup> ‘—The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.’ (Joyce, 2000, p. 220)

“I have one, Daddy. He’s pulling. Quick.”

“Watch you don’t give him slack line. Hold him,” he shouted back. He started to row fiercely, shouting, “Try and keep the boat shifting,” as he let go the oars to take the line. They tried to take his place at the oars but they were too excited to pull much.

[...]

“He’s a good one. He’s trying for the bottom.”

And the fish was sliding towards the boat on the surface, the mouth open, showing the vicious teeth and the whiteness and the spoon hooked in the roof of the mouth. He would make his last fight at the side of the boat, it was dangerous if the hooks weren’t in firmly, he could shake them free, the sinking of the heart as they rattled loose. But Mahoney had leaned out and got him by the gills with his fingers.” (McGahern, 1965, pp. 12-13)

The narrative of *The Dark* expresses how patriarchal authorities—fathers, priests, teachers—angle to emotionally and psychologically hook the son on the taut line of social expectation; their pull to control him no more than child’s-play, the landing of a fish.

As the day wears, Mahoney’s mood turns. Frightened, the children let loose the lines, which cross and tangle:

... he was tiring, cursing every time the waves fouled his stroke, and in the rough water they let the lines cross and tangle without noticing, they were so intent and anxious. When they did it was too late and once he saw the mess his growing frustration turned their way. (McGahern, 1965, p. 14)

The tangled fishing lines symbolise the intersecting strands of social pressure exerted on the maturing son, multiplying and overlapping: the nets flung to hold him back from flight.<sup>3</sup> Throughout, the son struggles to loosen the knots of those pressures he experiences, unravelling the ideological constructs, about to discover ‘real authority’, a future and life of his own choosing.

In the novel’s opening, the son is symptomatically non-committal in his response to questions regarding his future: “What do you want to be in the world?” the priest asked as the evening wore. “I don’t know, Father. Whatever I’m let be I suppose.” (McGahern, 1965, p. 24). The passive voicing of the son’s response, his own internalised grammar of self-expression, exposes the oppressive pressures of social convention. His future is something that will be allowed to happen to him, divined by a higher authority, beyond his control. Still a teenager, he lacks a coherent sense of identity. His alienation is characterised by the aesthetically disorienting shifts of the personal pronoun: ‘I’, ‘You’, ‘He’. His self-identification is continuously dislocated

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Dark*, McGahern’s protagonist, like Joyce’s Stephen, must similarly break those bonds of convention in order to establish a true identity, his own ‘real authority’. Many critics have noted the similarities between the presentations of social, familial and religious repression of Irish-Catholic adolescents in *The Dark* and Joyce’s *Portrait of The Artist as A Young Man*. Denis Sampson, in *Outstaring Nature’s Eye*, offers the view ‘that *The Dark* registers an intimate reflection on the aesthetic theories of Stephen, on aspects of Joyce’s form and symbolism, and on how they relate to the intellectual and psychological development of Stephen’ (1993, p. 61).



when viewed merely as a conduit of national identity, tied to the direction of his becoming: to familial obligation, to priestly vocation, to academic initiation—‘to be called saint or scholar’. As the son struggles to achieve a cohesive sense of self, he narrates events through the second and third person pronouns. This displays a syntactical distancing between his understanding of self and the reality of the actions he describes. The son’s matriculation to that ‘real authority’ is the assertion of that narratological ‘I’, the claiming of an individual and self-created identity, distinct from the homogenising social pressures he experiences growing up.

The son reveals a developing emotional maturity when, stinging from another of Mahoney’s assaults, he resists the anger and shame, the sadness and self-pity he previously indulged in the smothered cursing and darkness of the lavatory:

What happened didn’t matter, you had to go on, that was all. You had to look it in the face. That was the way your life was happening, that was the way you were. There was no time for sadness or self-pity. The show of your life would be always moving on to the next moment. The best was to dress up and bow to it and smile or just look on but it was easier to say than do.

The night was cold. Away towards Oakport, above the Limekiln Wood, you began to watch the clouds cross the face of the three-quarter moon. (McGahern, 1965, p. 116)

This rejecting of the dark of the lavatory for the luminosity of the moon is a decisive moment in the novel. It establishes the son’s shift away from existential constraints and towards that ‘real authority’ and ‘calmness in the face of turmoil’, that is the novel’s central triumph (McGahern, 1965, p. 188).

The dream of the priesthood, originally tied to the dying mother and the promise that ‘one day I’d say mass for her’ (McGahern, 1965, p. 33), is the first opportunity to escape Mahoney’s violent oppression and the lines cast by familial obligation; the authority and power of the church is a medium to trump Mahoney and the poor hand of genetic poker:

He’d not be like his father if he could. He’d be a priest if he got the chance, and there were dreams of wooden pulpits and silence of churches, walking between yew and laurel paths in prayer, an old house with ivy and a garden, orchards behind. He’d walk through life towards the unnameable heaven of joy, not his father’s path. He’d go free in God’s name. (McGahern, 1965, p. 25)

The son longs to escape his father and the inherited obligations of the farm, the unappealing prospect of working himself to death for the man, who demands: “‘He’ll be like me I suppose. He’ll wear out his bones on the few acres round this house and be buried at the end of the road’” (McGahern, 1965, p. 25). Father Gerald exploits the son’s desire and conscripts him for the priesthood. Arrival at the presbytery, however, brings a series of images and allusions; the redolence of death fixed about the priesthood:

“We have the good company of the dead about us.” The priest smiled as if he’d read his mind, “but there’s no need for them to disturb you, they do not walk, not till the Last Day.” (McGahern, 1965, p. 63)

The son sees himself in the same position as ‘the dead’— visiting the priest at night to beg, wanting a life which will not be given:

At night they left their graves to walk in search of forgiveness, driven by remorse, you’d heard many times. They came most to the house of the priest to beg: the flesh same as their own and able to understand, but the unearthly power of God in his hands, power to pardon. (McGahern, 1965, p. 69)

He lacks conviction and soon rejects the priesthood, with guilt, choice, and conformity inextricably wound in his thoughts, as well as words:

You couldn’t be a priest, never now, that was all. You’d never raise anointed hands. You’d drift into the world, world of girls and women, company in gay evenings, exact opposite of the lonely dedication of the priesthood unto death. Your life seemed set, without knowing why, it was fixed, you had no choice. You were a drifter, you’d drift a whole life long after pleasure, but at the end there’d be a reckoning. (McGahern, 1965, p. 77)

While rejecting the priesthood is a frustrated victory for the son, returning him to the control of his father, it is fundamental in his development beyond the closed social security of convention. As the son prepares to abandon the vocation, Father Gerald’s parting words are notable: ‘You’re on your own now’ (McGahern, 1965, p. 103).

Two options remain for the young man in the stringent environment: get to University or get the boat to England. Where vocation offered the constraints and simplicity of a living death in the sarcophagus of the priesthood, the University seems a life of limitless opportunity. Yet, before the dream of the University can be realised, the reality of the Leaving Certificate must be overcome. A relentless programme of rote learning and memorisation gains the scholarship for the son, only for him to lose the love of learning. Language, history, literature, life: all are boiled down to the mechanical abstraction of the exam. Facts are memorised, only to be forgotten moments after the exam:

The University was the dream: not this slavish push in and out through wind and rain on a bicycle, this dry constant cramming to pass the exam, no time to pause to know anything and enjoy anything, just this horrid cram into the brain to be forgotten the minute the exam was over.

[...]

The University would be different, you’d seen pictures, all stones with turrets surrounded by trees, walks between the lawns and tree, long golden evenings in the boats on the Corrib. You’d be initiated into mystery. (McGahern, 1965, p. 124)

On arrival, however, University life offers only another grind towards convention and security, reality again undermining the dream of untrammelled exploration, the initiation into mystery, longed for throughout the narrative:

You were only hours here yet, and it was not easy to keep hold of the dream, wild grass and sea and broken fish-boxes same as anywhere, this was the University town, but it

was more solid concrete and shapes and names with sea and sky and loneliness than any dream. (McGahern, 1965, p. 167)

That sordid reality grounds the vision and mysticism. We learn: ‘The dream was torn piecemeal from the university before the week was over. Everyone wanted as much security and money as they could get’ (McGahern, 1965, p. 173). Like all dreams in *The Dark*, it bears no resemblance to the real experience. The University, like the priesthood, offers only another hook of convention, the other barb on that hegemonic lure: independence at the expense of liberty. A decision is made, the telegram sent: ‘WANT TO TAKE E.S.B AND LEAVE UNI., WILL WAIT FOR YOUR CONSENT’ (McGahern, 1965, p. 182). Once more, he is under the control of father and family. Even here, in this final self-penned deceleration, that ‘I’ is still distinctly absent.

The son’s decision to leave University is the rejection of that final social convention in post-independence Catholic Irish Identity, ‘the island of saints and scholars’. In a cultural context where ‘Irishness’ was uniquely tied to the West of Ireland, an ancient uninterrupted Gaelic historiography, he does not ‘arise and go’ West to a metaphysical and mythologised ‘Innisfree’ but descends East to the bottom, the ‘West-Briton’ urban capital.<sup>4</sup> The closing of *The Dark* mirrors the plight of many men and women of mid-century rural Ireland, who journeyed east in hope of employment. It confronts the uncomfortable truth that while the national consciousness was fed a discourse of aristocratic Irish peasantry, the nation’s bodies were fed in England.

*The Dark* is the narrative of the son’s growth into maturity: growth towards the ‘true authority’ of the self that allows him to ‘fly by the nets’ of social convention and ideology. The closing of the novel shows the son developing beyond the world of his father and the paths marked out for him by ideologies of ‘saints and scholars’, of the priesthood or the University. The struggle throughout *The Dark* is not just the son’s coming of age, but the son’s discovery of a personal liberation, the acceptance of that vital sense of self, that ‘I’, an individual cohesive identity beyond social convention, the prescriptive mores and pressures of Family, Church, and State. The narrative charts that process of transition towards autonomy. In acting against convention, in choosing the E.S.B. and life in the urban East over convention and the mythologies of a Gaelic West he understands that:

One day, one day, you’d come perhaps to more real authority than all this, an authority that had need of neither vast buildings nor professional chairs nor robes nor solemn organ tones, an authority that was simply a state of mind, a calmness in the face of the turmoil of your own passing.

You could go to the E.S.B. If it was no use you could leave again, and it didn’t matter, you could begin again and again all your life, nobody’s life was more than a direction.

You were walking through the rain of Galway with your father and you could laugh purely, without bitterness, for the first time, and it was a kind of happiness, at its heart the terror of an unclear recognition of the reality that set you free, touching you with as much foreboding as the sodden leaves falling in this day, or any cliché. (McGahern, 1965, p. 188)

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<sup>4</sup> Yeats, W. B. Lake Isle of Innisfree.

The narrative trajectory rejects the discourse of ‘saints and scholars’ and exposes an essentialist delusion that maintained it. The central triumph of the novel is the son’s realisation of that ‘real authority’. His identity is no longer governed by nationalist rhetoric or the security of convention. In choosing the E.S.B., the son boldly asserts his own aspirations and displays a determination and self-belief that has been lacking through his development. His future is now a game of chance, the fall of the dice he himself has rolled.

*The Dark* begins and ends with questions about the future. The opening is marked by the son’s passivity, a narrative distancing from the actions of self: He will be, whatever he is let be (McGahern, 1965, p. 24). The novel’s conclusion, in contrast, is not. The son forcefully asserts his individuality and independence, his developed sense of self registered in the decisive, active voicing, the confident claiming of the ‘I’. His father, Mahoney, directs a final question. The blunt answer severs, finally, the connection: to family, faith, and fatherland, that comely delusion of an island of saints and scholars:

“You’re going out into the world on your own now?”  
 “I am.” (McGahern, 1965, p. 190)

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## **‘God Bless the Child’: Unearthing the Dissident Potential of the Jazz Aesthetic in Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger***

Matthew Fogarty, Maynooth University

*Them that’s got shall have  
Them that’s not shall lose  
So the Bible said and still it is news*

— Billie Holiday, *God Bless the Child*

For many thousands around the world, jazz music provided the essential soundtrack for the interwar period. This was certainly not the case for Patrick Kavanagh and his compatriots in Ireland, however, where those in authority railed against the perceived depravity of what they deemed a foreign and ungodly music. Indeed, as the rest of Europe found itself teetering on the brink of a Second World War after German troops invaded Poland on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939, these same authorities declared a national state of emergency in Ireland. What immediately followed was the enactment of the *Emergency Powers Act (EPA)*, which laid the foundation to ensure that Ireland could maintain neutral status throughout ‘The Emergency’. These constitutional amendments accorded the Irish Government a number of extraordinary powers; in fact, critics such as Tony Gray have gone so far as to suggest that these measures ‘effectively abolished democracy for the period’ (1997, p. 5). Under the new statutes, the State could, for example, ‘authorise and provide for the censorship or complete suspension of communication, whether public or private’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2h). The State also reserved the right to ‘prohibit the publication or spreading of subversive statements and propaganda’ and to ‘authorise and provide for the control and censorship of newspapers and periodicals’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2i). These emergency orders made further provisions for ‘the detention, or arrest without warrant, of persons where such detention is, in the opinion of a Minister, necessary or expedient in the interests of public safety or the preservation of the State’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2k). Although the provisions concerning arrest and internment were generally applicable only to ‘persons other than natural-born Irish citizens’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2k), there was no such stipulation set in the amendment that further authorised ‘the arrest without warrant of persons who are charged with or are suspected of having committed or being about to commit ... an offence under any section of this Act or any other specified crime or offence’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2m). In addition, the State also reserved the right to carefully manage ‘all or any services essential to life’ (*EPA*, 1939, 2a), which in effect granted the government total control over all matters pertaining to commerce and the Irish economy.

Ireland’s position was quite understandably eyed with some suspicion by those who allied themselves against the threat posed by Hitler’s Germany, as evidenced by the following excerpt from a 1943 report compiled by the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS):

The Irish Roman Catholic looks upon the United States by and large as an immoral, irreligious, materialistic Protestant country chosen by God to be led along paths of salvation by the Irish and Irish-American Roman Catholic Clergy.

The immorality of our movies, the luxury of our daily lives, the vulgarity of our music and the lack of all forms of discipline in the conduct of our human relationships: these are all adduced by the Irish as proofs of our wickedness, and now that thousands of those ‘wicked’ Americans are occupying Northern Ireland the suspicion and hostility of the Irish Roman Catholic Church have reached an all-time high.<sup>1</sup> Itself a body organised and controlled on authoritarian lines, the Irish Roman Catholic Church, by its affiliations with Franco Spain and Mussolini Italy, its open adulation of the Salazar regime in Portugal and of the Pétain Land-Labor-Family cry, is in large part responsible for the complete concealment of the real nature of continental Fascism from the mass of Irish people. (Wills, 2007, p. 345)

This is, of course, something of an overestimation. As Clair Wills has quite rightly pointed out, there were many Irish Catholics who disapproved of ‘the corrosive individualism and materialism of modern society, without at all approving of the police states on the continent’ (2007, p. 346). And for all the extraordinary powers Éamon de Valera’s government possessed, there were a number of important differences between the Irish State and the European regimes namechecked here in this report; Ireland was not a one-party state, nor was there the kind of blending of the military and the party-political, as there was most notably in Italy and Germany. However, Wills may also have underestimated the matter in suggesting that the OSS were wholly ‘misguided’ to conclude that there was ‘no real difference between authoritarian Catholic thought and totalitarianism’ (2007, p. 345). There is an equally important distinction to be made between the respective characteristics of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. As Hannah Arendt has observed, the former principally seek to maintain *authority* over their citizens, and so they tend to concern themselves only with public expressions of individuality; whereas the latter seek to exert *total* control over the minds of their subjects, thus demanding that the subject ‘surrenders his inner freedom as he surrenders his freedom of movement when he bows down to an outward tyranny’ (1953, p. 320). It is on this key point that Irish Catholic culture most noticeably blurred the boundaries between authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the mid-twentieth century. The restraint of a subject’s sexual liberty is certainly a profound restriction over the life of an individual, and the Irish Catholic Church routinely preached what Terence Brown has described as ‘a sexual morality of severe restrictiveness, denouncing all developments in society that might have threatened a rigid conformism in a strictly enforced sexual code’ (2004, p. 29). Throughout the 1930s, this exacting Catholic ethos reached far beyond the pulpit; indeed, it was openly advocated by a number of highly prominent members of the Gaelic League, who were also members of the Irish Free State’s Executive Council. In *The Great Hunger*, Kavanagh exploits the dissident cadences of the jazz aesthetic to orchestrate a vivid dramatisation of the physical, emotional and psychological burden this ultra-conservative order imposed upon the citizens of Ireland. Crucially, however, he does so at time when using this aesthetic form was in itself a highly subversive act.

If the values espoused by this theocratic order echoed those of Europe’s totalitarian regimes on any one particular issue in the mid-twentieth century, it was most assuredly in its outright

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<sup>1</sup> The report refers to the first contingent of US troops that landed in Northern Ireland in 1942 before being deployed on the continental mainland. Their arrival added to what was already a vibrant Ulster jazz scene and Northern Ireland swiftly became the jazz capital of Europe. For more on this, see Solly Lipsitz’s (1971) article entitled ‘Jazz’.

condemnation of the jazz aesthetic. This is not to suggest that the Irish government's disapproval of jazz culture necessarily equates to the strictures the Third Reich imposed on all it renounced as 'decadent art', but the fact remains that the Irish Free State's objections to jazz were essentially indistinguishable from those raised by the National Socialists. From an ideological perspective, jazz is, of course, black music and it was therefore fundamentally incompatible with the Nazis' intensely nationalistic rhetoric. Stylistically speaking, the improvisational character of jazz also encouraged modes of individual expression that were anathema to the Nazis' dictatorial system (Kater, 1989, p. 13). Although Seán Óg Ó Ceallaigh makes no explicit reference to any particular nation or ethnic group in his address to the Mohill Committee of the Gaelic League on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1934, the Vice President of the Irish Free State's Executive Council nonetheless objected to the 'immoral' influence of this 'foreign' music on the grounds that it promoted sexual licentiousness and encouraged modes of individual expression deemed incompatible with those conducive to 'making young and old more susceptible to Gaelic ideals and adopting a more receptive mental attitude towards Irish nationality' (*Irish Press*, 1934, p. 4). These objections would ultimately trigger the enactment of the *Public Dance Halls Act, 1935*, which served as a means to regulate Irish dance halls by introducing taxation and a licensing system.

In the intervening period between Ó Ceallaigh's New Year's Day speech and the enactment of this legislation, the Irish newspapers were awash with reactions to the launch of this state-sponsored anti-jazz campaign.<sup>2</sup> On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1934, for example, the *Irish Independent* published a series of excerpts from a letter addressed to the Mohill Committee of the Gaelic League, and written by the Parish Priest of Granard, Co. Longford. The letter expressed in no uncertain terms that 'the priests and people of Granard' were in 'active sympathy' with the Mohill Committee's attempts 'to stop the demoralising all-night dancing and objectionable sponsored programmes from Athlone Broadcasting Station' (p. 10). That this parish priest was also Chairman of the town's Urban County Council further speaks to the insidiousness with which the power of the Irish Catholic Church made its presence felt throughout the length and breadth of Ireland in the 1930s. Of course, there were those, even from within the ranks of the Gaelic League, who found the State's official stance far too regimental. Less than a fortnight after Ó Ceallaigh's speech, the *Irish Press* reported that the Chairman of the Gorey branch of the Gaelic League, a Mr. P. Clancy, expressed concerns that 'even the most genuine Gaelic Leaguer might find himself at a jazz dance through no fault of his own, but because, perhaps, of his social standing' (p. 8). As suspiciously measured as this response might appear, the overwhelming majority of those who contributed to the media coverage of this very public debate were united in their vociferous opposition to what they deemed a savage and hedonistic musical form.

Despite the emphasis these reactions placed upon the ungodliness of jazz music, it is important to acknowledge that the crusade launched by Ó Ceallaigh renounced, not only what he called 'the noise termed dance-music', but also the accompanying 'doggerel, or "jazz poetry"' that was 'all too readily available in mass production on the radio, on the gramophone and in the talkie' (*Irish Press*, 1934, p. 4). Given the complexion of this sociohistorical backdrop, it seems

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<sup>2</sup> The origins of State's opposition to jazz culture may be traced back to the early 1920s. For more information on the first incarnation of this state-sponsored anti-jazz campaign, see Luke Gibbons's 'Labour and Local History: The Case of Jim Gralton, 1886-1945', and Jim Smyth's 'Dancing, Depravity and All that Jazz: The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935'.

highly significant that Paul Durcan has deemed it appropriate to hail Kavanagh as ‘a maestro of the improvised line’ and to further claim that ‘the only development in recent Irish poetry was Kavanagh’s introduction of the jazz line’ (1988, p. 56). There are two major schools of thought when it comes to determining what exactly it is that makes any particular poem a ‘jazz poem’. For some critics, it is imperative that a jazz poem somehow manages to encapsulate the syncopated rhythms that most immediately characterise the jazz aesthetic; while others argue that a jazz poem must refer directly to a jazz musician in order to meet the requisite criteria. The latter position seems somewhat rigid and reductive, however, and all the more so in light of the complex and inherently fluid structure of the musical form in question. As Robert O’Meally explains, jazz is essentially ‘freedom music, the play of sounds that prizes individual assertion and group coordination, voices soloing and then (at their best) swinging back together, the one-and-many *e pluribus unum* with a laid-back beat’ (1998, p. 117). The kind of ‘Play’ O’Meally has in mind typically occurs during the ‘Break’, which in jazz terminology denotes a deliberate disruption in the normal cadence of a piece of music. To clarify precisely what Play means within this context, Albert Murray notes that the Break is not simply an open invitation for jazz musicians to ‘wing it’; rather, it invites the ‘kind of improvisation [...] applicable to educational methods, to scientific method, [and] to inventions’ (1998, p. 132). And so it is in these critical moments that the truly dexterous jazz musician can reveal their intimate knowledge of chordal structure by drawing on what Murray calls ‘a rich storehouse of tunes, phrases, ditties which he uses as a painter uses his awareness of other paintings, as a writer employs his literary background to give his statements richer resonances’ (1998, p. 132). Put in the simplest terms, then, jazz is an aesthetic form which is above all characterised by a polyphonic structure and its reliance upon improvisation, but it is of pivotal importance that this improvisation be facilitated by an accomplished manipulation of a chord, a melody, or a group of contrapuntal lines of music—a technique more commonly as ‘Inversion’.

Kavanagh’s experimentation with this mode of Inversion can be seen from the very outset of *The Great Hunger*. Although the poem’s first line might initially appear to be written in standard trochaic tetrameter, it is only in recognising the intricacy of this line’s formal structure that the full complexity of the lines that follow can be brought into focus. This line is predominantly comprised of 8 feet, or 4 pairs of syllables, and arranged in a pattern whereby the stressed syllable, marked here in bold, is immediately followed by an unstressed syllable: ‘**Clay** is **the** word and **clay** is **the** flesh’. But there is another type of repetition at play, not at the level of form, but at the level of content: ‘Clay is the word and clay is the flesh’. This repetition draws attention to the fact that there is something of an anomaly in this seemingly regular trochaic pattern. The ‘and’, marked here in bold italics, introduces an additional stressed syllable, and so it acts as a kind of caesura: ‘**Clay** is **the** word *and* **clay** is **the** flesh’. This extra syllable points forward to the word ‘like’ in line 2, marked again here in bold italics, which also acts as a kind of caesura: ‘Where the potato gatherers *like* mechanised scarecrows move’. In this instance, however, it is the respective terms of the line’s simile that draw attention to the more subtle repetition that exists at the level of content: ‘Where the potato gatherers *like* mechanised scarecrows move’. On this occasion, Kavanagh also introduces syncopated rhythms to emphasise the importance of that which is being conveyed by the simile. There is a deliberate disturbance in the standard trochaic pattern that comprises this line’s first two syllables, but the stretched rhythmic pattern that generates this disturbance in the first part of the simile is also mirrored perfectly by the rhythmic pattern of the simile’s second part: ‘**Where** the **potato** gatherers *like* **mechanised** scarecrows **move**’. In line 3, there is a return to the comparatively more standard trochaic rhythm adopted in the opening line, but on this



occasion Kavanagh includes a long dash, and in doing so introduces a more conventional caesura: ‘Along **the side-fall of the hill—Maguire and his men**’. In this way, Kavanagh’s opening lines stretch and manipulate conventional trochaic tetrameter much as a seasoned jazz musician might manipulate a standard chord or a familiar melody. This artful exploitation of poetic convention becomes ever more pronounced in line 4, as the caesura disappears altogether at the level of form, but remains present at the level of content. Here, the reader is required to take a pause between the ‘hour’ and the ‘is’: ‘**if we watch them for an hour is there anything we can prove**’. In this line, the trochaic tetrameter introduced in the first line is once again stretched, but this time the pattern is elongated either side of this ‘invisible’ caesura.

This accomplished manipulation of trochaic meter continues throughout the lines that immediately follow, as it does throughout much of the poem’s opening section. At this juncture, however, another complex pattern begins to emerge as the ‘Of life’ that begins line 5 is juxtaposed against the ‘Of Death’ positioned at the beginning of line 6. This repetition is all the more pronounced owing to the fact the word ‘over’ also appears in each of these lines: ‘Of life as it is broken-backed over the book / Of Death? Here crows gabble over worms and frogs’. In the most immediate sense, this juxtaposition announces the poem’s intent to interrogate the degree to which these concepts of ‘life’ and ‘death’ have become blurred in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. Coupled with the reiteration of the word ‘over’, this repetition calls to mind the kind of refrain that so characterised Langston Hughes’s literary adaptation of the jazz aesthetic, while simultaneously offering a knowing nod to the poet’s cultural context by mirroring the kind of speech pattern that might be used to send out a distress call via military telecommunication: ‘Of life ... over / Of Death ... over’ (5-6). The regularity with which these patterns recur throughout the poem’s first section, and indeed beyond, should in itself be enough to repudiate any notion that *The Great Hunger* is simply composed in *verse libre*. Even in the poem’s second section, in which Kavanagh’s speaker almost uniformly adopts a more concise and paired-back register, these elongated lines are deployed to great effect. In this section’s opening lines, for example, the speaker reveals the following:

Maguire was faithful to the death:  
He stayed with his mother till she died  
At the age of ninety-one.  
She stayed too long,  
Wife and mother in one.  
When she died  
The knuckles were cutting the skin of her son’s backside  
And he was sixty-five.

The first six lines are clearly no less striking for their brevity, but in line 7 there is a return to the style of elongated line that features so prominently in the poem’s previous section. By introducing a line of such comparatively irregular length, Kavanagh actually demands that the reader pay full attention to what Brown has described as the ‘the dismal fate that befell countless Maguires in the hundred years following the Famine’ (2004, p. 175). These ‘Maguires’ all fell afoul of the developments that radically altered the agricultural landscape in post-Famine Ireland, such as the decline of the domestic industry and the shift from tillage to livestock farming. Indeed, Joseph Lee has argued that these changes impacted dramatically on the rural youth’s capacity to establish ‘independent households without the support of their parents’ and, as these same parents were also beginning to live longer lives, their sons had ‘to

wait longer to inherit the farms and to marry' (1978, p. 38). The devastating effects of these social policies were further compounded by the sexual restrictions foisted upon the Irish people by the Catholic Church, and Kavanagh's pointed engagement with the sum of these effects becomes all the more prominent by way of the Inversion he deploys throughout the poem's subsequent sections.

Considered in isolation, the stanzas in the poem's third section appear to meet the structural requirements associated with the conventional sonnet. The first stanza presents an exception, however, as it is comprised of only thirteen lines and therefore falls just one line short of meeting the requisite criteria:

Poor Paddy Maguire, a fourteen-hour day  
 He worked for years. It was he that lit the fire  
 And boiled the kettle and gave the cows their hay.  
 His mother tall hard as a Protestant spire  
 Came down the stairs barefoot at the kettle-call  
 And talked to her son sharply: 'Did you let  
 The hens out, you?' She had a venomous drawl  
 And a wizened face like moth-eaten leatherette.  
 Two black cats peeped between the banisters  
 And gloated over the bacon-fizzling pan.  
 Outside the window showed tin canisters.  
 The snipe of Dawn fell like a whirring stone  
 And Patrick on a headland stood alone.

The first four lines adhere to a standard ABAB rhyming pattern, and this pattern is repeated in the CDCD rhyming pattern that presides over lines 5-8, but there are only three lines where the third quatrain would ordinarily be found in a traditional sonnet. These lines are comprised of an EFE rhyming pattern, which suggests that there is something that has not, or perhaps cannot, be said. The order that typically characterises the sonnet form is then restored with the GG rhyming pattern that lends the stanza its concluding couplet. Although the remaining stanzas in this section are comprised of the fourteen lines typically associated with the sonnet, this formal anomaly alerts the reader to the fact that Kavanagh intends to continue playing with poetic convention. For the remainder of the section, this manipulation takes place only at the level of content as the poetic form synonymous with professions of undying love is adopted to accentuate the profound sense of joylessness that constitutes Maguire's existence. For instance, the lack of affection Mrs. Maguire displays as she talks 'to her son sharply' (6) with 'a venomous drawl / And a wizened face like moth-eaten leatherette' (7-8) is magnified further by 'the sharpest interest of rivalry' (22) that mediates the relationship between Maguire and his peers. There is certainly nothing in the speaker's tone to indicate that these relationships have been nurtured by the Christian motto of 'Love Thy Neighbour'. And were there any suggestion that these poor unfortunates might find a modicum of solace amongst the language they have internalised as a direct result of their exposure to the rhetoric of Catholic Ireland, this pallid hope surely disintegrates as the poem transitions from the second to the third stanza. It is certainly not a coincidence that the mysticism of St John of the Cross makes its presence felt here as the speaker reveals that 'sometimes when the sun comes through a gap / these men know God the father in a tree' (23-24). But the resolution temporarily offered by this stanza's final couplet is sharply undercut by the dark and desolate imagery that permeates throughout

the section's final stanza, with its descriptions of 'Primroses and the unearthly start of ferns / Among the blackthorn shadows in a ditch / A dead sparrow and an old waistcoat' (28-30). In this way, there is a striking parallelism between Kavanagh's manipulation of conventional poetic form and the kind of Inversion that operates here at the level of content.

These anti-pastoral images offered a point of critical resistance to the romanticisation of the rural that so characterised the Revivalism of William Butler Yeats and his contemporaries. This element of Revivalist practice cast something of a shadow over Ireland in the early-twentieth century; a shadow that would eventually make its presence felt in the utopian imagery de Valera himself conjured up in the now-infamous radio address delivered on St Patrick's Day 1943. However, there are countless occasions when Kavanagh's imagery appears expressly contrived to address these misrepresentations by highlighting the true magnitude of the weight that Ireland's theocratic order forced upon its citizens. The enormity of the physical burden it imposed is, for example, captured perfectly by the speaker's acknowledgement that Maguire lived only to ensure 'that his little fields may stay sterile while his own body / Is spread in the bottom of a ditch under two coulter's crossed in God's name' (*I*, 60-61). The emotional and psychological effects spawned by the severity of Maguire's isolation are also made agonisingly apparent via the poem's none-too-subtle allusions toward the prospect of bestiality and incest. For instance, the speaker tells us that Maguire 'saw his cattle / And stroked their flanks in lieu of wife to handle' (*IV*, 42-43), and that 'the priest was one of the people too—/ A farmer's son—and surely he knew / The needs of a brother and sister' (*IV*, 43-45). This is all a far cry from de Valera's dream of 'a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous [...] with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maidens' (1980, p. 466). And so, on these occasions, Kavanagh is essentially inverting this kind of utopian ideology by playing these familiar pastoral notes in an altogether different and highly subversive key.

Further correlations can be drawn between the jazz aesthetic and Kavanagh's artful exploitation of the dynamic that exists between the many voices that conspire to lend *The Great Hunger* its polyphonic structure. As Seamus Heaney has pointed out, one of the poem's crowning achievements is its capacity 'to differentiate nicely between the direct speech of the characters and its own narrative which is a selection and heightening of the very speech' (1980, p. 123). While this is undoubtedly true, Kavanagh's poem is often at its most compelling best when it allows these voices to seamlessly amalgamate in a mode of free indirect discourse which highlights the pervasive force of the doctrine proliferated by the Irish State. In the first section, for example, the speaker grants the reader access to the private thoughts of the poem's protagonist: 'And he is not so sure now if his mother was right / When she praised the man who made the field his bride' (56-57). At this juncture, the voice of Maguire's mother is ever so subtly introduced as she lives and breathes within the psyche of her son; indeed, it might well be the voice of Mrs. Maguire that lurks just beneath the surface of the line that immediately follows: 'Watch him, watch him' (58). In this critical moment of ambiguity, it becomes unclear whether these words are simply uttered by the poem's narrator, or recalled by Maguire as he reflects upon his youth and considers the extent to which the very fibre of his being has been moulded by the value system instilled within him by his overbearing mother. The authority embodied by this figure seems to make its presence similarly felt in the poem's fourth section, as Maguire once again considers the prospect of marriage. Here, the voice of Mrs. Maguire, which we are told is 'blown' from overuse (7), puts the following proposition to her son: 'Remember Eileen Farrelly? I was thinking / A man might do a damned sight worse ...' (6-7).

But this voice also seems to reappear as Maguire subsequently sees ‘a girl carrying a basket’ (35), only to have his thoughts disrupted by the cutting cry of ‘Too earnest, too earnest!’ (37). It is once again unclear where exactly this interjection comes from; however, there is a rather striking uniformity between the linguistic structure of this utterance and the aforementioned ‘Watch him, watch him’ (58).

In these moments when Kavanagh’s formal experimentation seems to flirt with the aesthetic practices most closely associated with modernism, it becomes quite difficult to situate *The Great Hunger* within the second wave of naturalism that blossomed in Irish literature from the 1920s to the 1950s. And while it may well be that Patrick Maguire is entirely at the mercy of the external forces that reign over every conceivable facet of his inner and outer being, the same cannot be said of Kavanagh himself as he effectively uses his protagonist’s position as a means to generate a highly potent critique of these totalising forces. The intrinsic dissidence of *The Great Hunger* certainly did not go unnoticed; in fact, shortly after its initial publication, Kavanagh was actually ‘cautioned by the Garda Síochána about his poem’s ‘immorality’’ (Goodby, 2000, p. 15). It may simply have been the poet’s pointed Inversion of Revivalist imagery that attracted the attention of the Irish State’s ever-vigilant eye, but it is the poem’s formal experimentation, its equally pointed Inversion of rhythm and meter, and the ways in which Kavanagh delicately manipulates the voices of his characters, that ultimately brings his work into alignment with a mid-twentieth-century Irish counterculture that was centred around the much-demonised jazz aesthetic. Indeed, it is amid these formal flourishes, among those deliberate dexterities that have been ever so deftly buried beneath the layers of clay that constitute the poem’s content, that the dissident potential of Kavanagh’s jazz aesthetic makes itself most poignantly felt.

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# Intersectionality with STEM

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## **Deconstructing Austen Cybertexts: How *Pride and Prejudice* became *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries***

Meredith Dabek, Maynooth University

### **Introduction**

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (hereafter referred to as LBD) debuted on YouTube in April 2012 with a video featuring a twenty-four-year-old Elizabeth “Lizzie” Bennet speaking directly to the camera (‘My Name is Lizzie Bennet - Ep. 1’, 2012). That video marked the beginning of Lizzie’s year-long story, which re-imagined and re-worked Jane Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, by distributing the narrative across multiple media platforms. Originally released as a serial narrative from April 2012 to March 2013, Lizzie’s story started with that first YouTube video before expanding to include four additional video channels (belonging to some of the narrative’s secondary characters), thirteen interconnected Twitter feeds, several Tumblr blogs, Facebook profiles, and numerous interactions between characters on various social media networks. Initially developed for its Internet audience by Hank Green and Bernie Su, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* narrative as a whole was a collaborative effort by a team of writers and editors. Margaret Dunlap, Rachel Kiley, Kate Rorick, and Anne Toole joined Su in scripting the YouTube videos, while Jay Bushman and Alexandra Edwards managed and edited LBD’s various social media accounts (‘Team’, 2017). In 2013, the LBD production team won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media - Original Interactive Programme (‘65th Emmy Awards Nominees and Winners’).<sup>1</sup>

Currently, LBD serves as a case study for an ongoing research project being conducted in the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University. This project explores how the interactive and participatory elements of digital narratives such as LBD contribute to the digital reading experience, proposing that readers engage with a digital text in a way that is fundamentally different from engaging with an analogue text. This paper offers an overview of LBD’s structure and key features, which highlight the various narrative paths and perspectives that allow readers to navigate through the narrative according to their own choices, thus creating a highly individualised experience that deepens their connection with the text and their overall sense of immersion in LBD’s fictional world. The paper will conclude with the proposed trajectory for this research project and the key research questions being considered.

### **LBD Structure and Features**

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* unfolds primarily on YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, with other social media networks and platforms contributing smaller parts of the story. During the narrative’s initial release in 2012, Lizzie’s older sister, Jane, for example, featured her interest in fashion on the online community Lookbook, whereas secondary character Gigi Darcy used the now-closed music network, This is My Jam, to share favourite songs and lyrics. The result of having the LBD story distributed across these different networks and websites is the creation of what Marie-Laure Ryan calls a ‘storyworld’, in which the individual pieces of a story

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<sup>1</sup> In April 2017, the production team behind LBD announced it would re-release Lizzie’s primary videos in real time to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the narrative. The re-release began on 5 June 2017.

combine to form a more complete narrative experience (2015). By placing Lizzie's storyworld within the digitally-focused twenty-first century, LBD updates Austen's novel while still maintaining a degree of faithfulness to Austen's original book. In the first YouTube video, for example, Lizzie's first words to her audience are a recitation of *Pride and Prejudice*'s opening sentence: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' ('My Name is Lizzie Bennet', 2012; Austen 2012: I.1).

The creation of the LBD storyworld, with its multiple connected (but independent) media platforms, also allows the narrative to function as a cybertext. Defined by Espen Aarseth in his seminal 1998 monograph, a cybertext is a text in which its mechanical organisation is a fundamental part of a reader's literary exchange with the text, and which actively invites readers to make specific choices about how to navigate through that text:

...when you read from a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed. (Aarseth, pp. 1-2)

LBD encourages readers to move through Lizzie's storyworld at their own pace and according to their own preferences as readers. Each choice they make is a deliberate action that results in a specific version of the narrative, which may differ from another reader's version depending on the decisions they have made. For instance, some readers may choose to view only Lizzie's YouTube videos, while others may interact with characters and fans on Twitter and Tumblr. Additionally, a reader's navigation through LBD may not necessarily be the same each time, as she may choose to make different decisions each time she engages with the narrative. One reader may choose to consume individual elements of the narrative in chronological order, while others may prefer to jump between different narrative paths, moving backwards, forwards, or across the media platforms.<sup>2</sup>

These components that comprise LBD's storyworld on the different media platforms are often referred to 'transmedia'. In a 2007 post on 'Transmedia Storytelling 101', media scholar Henry Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as a process 'where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (qtd. in Ryan 2015, p. 2). While Lizzie's YouTube videos act as the primary narrative for the overall story, the other elements (such as the tweets, the blog posts, the social media interactions, etc.) play an important role in supplementing and complementing the primary narrative to present a much more comprehensive and immersive storyworld and reading experience. For example, many of the transmedia elements give the narrative's secondary characters a chance to 'speak' for themselves. Lizzie's point of view dominates most of the narrative through her videos, her Twitter feed, her blog posts, and other social media updates. In particular, Lizzie's videos feature her speaking directly to her audience; this diary-style structure makes it difficult to include some of the secondary

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<sup>2</sup> This ability to read the narrative in a non-chronological order is primarily a function of LBD currently existing as a mostly complete story. During LBD's initial, serialised release in 2012 and 2013, skipping forward was not always possible as the story was still unfolding in real time.



characters in a natural way.<sup>3</sup> Lizzie's first-person perspective is also limited and biased. Austen's novel is titled *Pride and Prejudice* for a reason: Lizzie is not always a reliable narrator. By allocating specific transmedia elements to characters other than Lizzie, LBD can include their point of view into the overall narrative and storyworld.

One of the best illustrations of this comes from Lizzie's younger sister, Lydia. In Austen's novel, Lydia plays a crucial role in creating conflict at the climax of the novel's plot, but Austen's narrator does not provide readers with insight into Lydia's motivations or thought processes. In LBD, however, Lydia has her own YouTube channel and Twitter feed, through which her own story and perspective of shared events unfold as she expresses her ideas and opinions independent from Lizzie. This not only allows Lydia to speak for herself, but it also gives readers the option of consuming the additional material from Lydia's perspective to create another layer of meaning to their experience with the story. Moreover, when Lizzie mentions offhand that she is not fully aware of the events in Lydia's life, readers may have the sense that they know more about the story than the main character. This gives them the chance to 'inform' Lizzie about Lydia and feel immersed in Lizzie's storyworld, engaging with the story as if it were unfolding in the real world, in real time.

Additionally, the transmedia elements allow LBD to include a number of features in the narrative that help distinguish it as a uniquely digital version of Austen's novel. Those features include a robust online fan community, 'digital breadcrumbs' that offer links to Austen's story, and opportunities for interactivity and participation. The development of the fan community, for example, began and continues to expand on Tumblr. As a platform that allows users to post content in a variety of formats, Tumblr acts as a hub for LBD fans because readers can easily share and circulate text posts theorising about the story, image posts of original fan artwork, or GIF sets of key moments from Lizzie's videos. Moreover, Lizzie, Jane, and Lydia's own Tumblr blogs frequently highlight and promote readers' content, which demonstrates a degree of connectivity between the narrative (through its characters and writers) and its readers, strengthening readers' sense of connection to Lizzie's storyworld.

That connection is also strengthened by the presence of 'digital breadcrumbs', or little hints or nods to well-known plot points from Austen's novel. These digital breadcrumbs foreshadow plot points that either have not yet appeared in a video or will not appear in a video at all. Early in the narrative, for instance, Bing, Caroline, and Darcy exchange messages over Twitter while attending a wedding:

**@bingliest:** @wmdarcy put your phone down and go dance with somebody.

**@wmdarcy:** @bingliest not likely.

**@that\_caroline:** @wmdarcy nice catch! #awkward

**@bingliest:** @wmdarcy I take it back. you should definitely stay off the dance floor.

(‘A Wedding’ 2012)

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<sup>3</sup> These characters, including Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, and Darcy, are present on the page from the earliest chapters in Austen's novel, but due to the first-person diary style of Lizzie's videos, LBD needed to find a way to integrate them into the story naturally. Thus, LBD came up with the idea of 'costume theatre', in which Lizzie uses a recognisable costume piece (a hat, a bowtie, etc) to offer an exaggerated depiction of these characters. These costume theatre depictions act as a performance of identity on screen, in which readers come to know the depicted characters through Lizzie's portrayal of them. At the same time, costume theatre also often highlights Lizzie's prejudices since she represents these characters according to her own opinions and biases.

From the text of the messages, readers can deduce that Darcy caught the garter and then danced with someone. Shortly thereafter, in one of Lizzie's videos released after the Twitter exchange, readers find out that Lizzie was also present at the same wedding, caught the bouquet, and thus was the person dancing with Darcy ('Snobby Mr. Douchey—Ep. 6' 2012). Those familiar with *Pride and Prejudice* would be able to recognise Lizzie and Darcy's dance as their infamous first meeting. That meeting is a crucial part of the narrative, as it sets the tone for what will become an adversarial relationship, but as previously explained, Lizzie's videos have a first-person diary-style structure, and therefore readers do not have the opportunity to see Darcy's reaction to the meeting. With the transmedia elements on Twitter, however, LBD is able to present Darcy's perspective on those events, offering an alternative point of view and contributing to the creation of a larger, more in-depth 'interactive storyworld' that allows readers to fully immerse themselves in the narrative (Swallow Prior, 2013).

Perhaps most importantly, however, LBD's transmedia elements incorporate aspects of interactivity and participation into the narrative. As Marie-Laure Ryan points out in a 2015 article for the *Storyworlds* journal, 'when people love a story and its world, they will want more and more [elements] that add substance to the storyworld' (p. 16). In creating Lizzie's storyworld, the LBD production team deliberately chose digital media platforms that would provide readers with that substance by allowing them to leverage the specific functions of those sites to interact and participate with the narrative's characters and each other. These functions, sometimes known as technical affordances or sociotechnical affordances, prompt certain behaviours on the part of readers (boyd, 2005, pp. 10-11). YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr, for instance, all have sharing tools that encourage users to circulate existing content to their own friends and followers. LBD readers can share Lizzie's videos to other social networks or even email or embed a direct link to a specific video. Twitter and Tumblr facilitate sharing through the retweet and reblog tools, respectively. These platforms also enabled a degree of interactivity between LBD's characters and readers during LBD's initial release in 2012 and 2013. For example, Lizzie often replied to reader comments left on YouTube and even incorporated reader questions into the narrative through special question-and-answer videos, while Twitter's mention function (the '@ reply') allowed LBD characters to communicate with readers in real time. These elements—the sharing tools, the commenting function, and the mentions—provide readers with a method of participating in the LBD story that helps facilitate 'the feeling of being counted', or an experience that is ultimately fulfilling and satisfying for the reader (Coleman, 2014, qtd. in Papacharissi, 2014, p. 25). By engaging with the readers through the narrative's media platforms, the LBD production team reinforces their connection to and immersion in Lizzie's story, and provides them with the sense that their contributions matter to the larger storyworld.

## Looking Ahead

As the structure and features of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* seem to indicate, the experience of reading the LBD narrative is highly individualised depending on the choices each reader makes, and therefore differs significantly from the experience of reading Austen's original novel. As previously stated, this research project will consider how the participatory and interactive elements of LBD, and the reader's engagement with them, contribute to a different, digital reading experience. Furthermore, the project will investigate how those elements might contribute to new understandings of literature in digital spaces and new ways of thinking about what it means to be a literary text. Existing research from Zizi Papacharissi, Frank Rose, Marie-

Laure Ryan, and others suggests that digital narratives such as LBD may ‘connect people [and readers] in ways that make them feel like their views matter’, through their various interactive and participatory elements (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 32). In doing so, these narratives create an immersive narrative experience that encourages readers to lose themselves in Lizzie’s fictional world (Rose, 2015, para. 6).

Following an in-depth critical analysis of LBD (with reference to Austen’s novel), this research project will conduct a qualitative survey with LBD readers to understand their reading experiences and their engagement with LBD’s transmedia and interactive elements. The survey results will help frame a series of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with a smaller sample of readers as well as members of LBD’s production team. The analysis of the survey and interview data will seek to discover how the specific methods of participation and interactivity in LBD might influence, affect, or alter a reader’s experience with the overall narrative. As Rose points out, ‘the Internet has redefined our expectations from stories’ (2011, para. 22) and therefore updating classic analogue texts like *Pride and Prejudice* for the digital media environment may open new avenues of research in the study of narrative and story.

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## When Computer Science Met Austen and Edgeworth

Sara J. Kerr, Maynooth University

### Introduction

Jesse Rosenthal states in the introduction to the 2017 special issue of *Genre*: ‘data is a big deal right now. We cannot talk about data and the novel without recognizing the particular importance that the question of data has in literary studies’ (2017, p. 4). This paper is positioned at the intersection of Literary Studies and Computer Science. It explores the application of computer based analysis to novels from the long eighteenth century (an historical period between approximately 1640 to 1830) and, specifically, examines the insights that are gained by using these tools to compare novels by Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth. It also considers the challenges these methods may present for Humanities scholars, and the benefits of combining computational approaches with close reading.

The title of this paper comes from the film ‘When Harry Met Sally...’ (1989). The line at the heart of the film proposes that ‘men and women can’t be friends because the sex part always gets in the way’, before ultimately demonstrating that, for Harry and Sally, combining sex with friendship leads to a positive relationship. This analogy echoes some of the arguments against the use of digital analysis in literary studies, or, to rephrase it ‘literary studies and computer science can’t be friends because the tech part always gets in the way’, but it also suggests a possible way forward.

### Computational Approaches to Analysing Texts

There has been some resistance to the idea of applying computational techniques to literary texts, although they have a history dating back to at least Father Busa’s 1949 collaboration with IBM on the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Scholars such as Katie Trumpener (2009) and Stanley Fish (2012) have argued vociferously against the use of digital techniques, claiming that they are unnecessary, and that simply reading more will help to develop more questions. Others consider the potential benefits the digital has to offer, but warn that ‘distant reading may actually blunt our critical faculties, inviting us to inadvertently adopt biased views of literature under the mask of objectivity’ (Ascari, 2014, p. 3).

In her article, ‘The Achievement of Scholarly Authority for Women: Trends in the Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Fiction’, Toni Bowers comments that:

Widespread interest in a new subject or method often builds from an initially slow response to new research that only gradually comes to influence other scholars’ work. Pioneering scholars republish previously out-of-print primary texts; deploy innovative interpretative methods toward unlikely textual subjects; or produce provocative rubrics for previously overlooked or dismissed categories of writing, writers, textual production, or readers. Where there has accrued what we might call a critical mass of this kind of groundbreaking research - enough to suggest a significant body of previously obscured work and to demonstrate the value of recovering and reading it and

to suggest appropriate methods for interpreting it - scholarly focus shifts, first to recognize the existence of the new object or method of study, then to take it fully on board. (2009, p. 52)

I would argue that we are at the point where the ‘critical mass’ has built to the point where digital techniques are an accepted method, but have not yet reached full acceptance within the Literary Studies community. At present, the arguments regarding what these techniques may show, and what their value is, have not been satisfactorily answered for those for whom this type of analysis seems alien and clinical. There is a tension which exists between the proponents of digital tools and the more traditional style of close reading which needs to be addressed. The perception of digital techniques is often that it stems from a desire to reduce texts to data, stripping them of their context and humanity.

Stephen Marche wrote in an article for the *LA Review of Books* that, ‘Literature cannot meaningfully be treated as data. The problem is essential rather than superficial: literature is not data. Literature is the opposite of data’. He went on to say, ‘The process of turning literature into data removes distinction itself. It removes taste. It removes all the refinement from criticism. It removes the history of the reception of works’ (2012, no pagination). Although this statement no doubt includes some element of hyperbole, it reflects a number of concerns raised by literary scholars regarding the nature of computational techniques. However, the sentiment expressed by Marche also seems very similar to an article titled ‘Against Theory’, which appeared 30 years earlier (Knapp & Michaels, 1982, pp. 741-742):

The theoretical impulse, as we have described it, always involves the attempt to separate things that should not be separated...Our thesis has been that no one can reach a position outside practice, that theorists should stop trying, and that the theoretical enterprise should therefore come to an end.

Perhaps things have not changed quite so much after all?

In reality, the digital offers us a different perspective, an alternative way of reading and interpreting texts, in a similar way to the advent of critical theory. These new lenses, through which we can read and interpret a corpus of texts, seek to augment our understanding of the texts, not replace previous understandings. To borrow from Clifford Geertz’s concept of culture as ‘webs of significance’ (1994, p. 214) which become a context ‘within which [social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes] can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described’ (1994, p. 220), new ways of reading aim to increase what we can say about a text or corpus of texts rather than merely reduce them to a series of sterile numbers. What these methods do enable is the ability to step back from the tight focus of close reading and to consider the texts from another angle. They also offer the opportunity of making textual analysis a little more replicable, allowing researchers to repeat a particular analysis, and view the source of an interpretation. The challenge these techniques seek to address is how to quantify and visualise these ‘webs of significance’ between text, context and meaning.

The rapid development of computer technology, including improvements in storage capacity and processing power, over the past 20 years and more has enabled scholars to create and analyse large datasets. Large-scale digitisation projects, for example the Google Books Library Project, allows access to large corpora, some far larger than a single scholar could read in a

lifetime, and have necessitated the development of new tools and methods of computerised reading of texts, automatically, and in some cases, unsupervised, which mean that it is now possible to explore literary texts using a variety of ‘distant’ methods.

The advent of distant and scaled reading techniques has explored the question of how to present texts in a manner which ‘defamiliarize...making them unrecognizable in a way...that helps scholars identify features they might not otherwise have seen’ (Clement, 2013, no pagination). Martin Mueller refers to this type of scaled reading as ‘DATA’ or ‘digitally assisted text analysis’ (2012, no pagination). What scholars in Digital Humanities are also keen to highlight is that solutions may be found through a combination of techniques (Allison et al., 2011; Mueller, 2012; Clement, 2013; Jockers, 2013). A large proportion of the recent research carried out in this area has focused on non-fiction texts, especially those generated by social media interactions. However, there has been a relatively small, but increasing, interest in applying these techniques to literary texts.

When commenting on large-scale quantitative literary studies, David Brewer states that they ‘remind us of just how broad and varied the literary field of the past actually was, and what a small fraction of it receives scholarly attention of any sort’ (2011, p. 161). He goes on to say that it is ‘accompanied by a sobering reminder that our customary modes of investigation are simply not up to the task of really grasping this broadened field and its forms’ (2011, p. 161). Large-scale studies seek to explore and understand the broad sweep of literary history, the development of the novel and its genres over time for example, but this comes ‘at a cost. In order to be countable (and so graphable or otherwise capable of being traced over time), texts have to be treated as if they were comparable units’ (Brewer, 2011, p. 162). This is something that Moretti acknowledges in his description of distant reading: ‘Distant reading: where distance ... is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes - or genres and systems ... If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something’ (Moretti, 2013, pp. 48-19).

In computational analysis, the choice of tool is often a matter of scale. If we want to understand world literature (which Moretti is discussing when he first uses the term ‘distant reading’) it is not possible to read everything, even if there were sufficient time. As Moretti says: ‘That’s the point: world literature is not an object, it’s a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method: and no one has ever found a method by just reading more texts [...] they need a leap, a wager - a hypothesis, to get started’ (2013, p. 46).

However, while the large-scale study by necessity needs to strip back the texts to certain key metrics, this is not the case when considering a medium sized corpus such as the one explored in this paper. The ‘middle distance’ is a profitable area for exploration as it enables the texts to be considered in their own right, as well as part of a broader corpus. To shed light on texts which fall outside the traditional canon, and compare them with canonical texts, allows us to understand more about the texts, authors, and the contexts in which they were written. It is dangerous to assume that texts which became accepted as part of the canon were the more popular, or more accomplished. The expansion of the traditional scope of texts from the long eighteenth century has led to the inclusion of those which were ‘othered’ because of nationality or political perspective.

A number of studies which take advantage of the digitisation of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts have their genesis in work carried out in the field of corpus linguistics. The interest in applying computational techniques to the works of Austen, in particular, originate in corpus linguistics (Burrows, 1986; Burrows, 1987; DeForest & Johnson, 2001; Starcke, 2006; Fischer-Starcke, 2010). Austen's popularity in the academic community, accessibility, and the lack of copyright attached to her novels, have made her a logical choice when carrying out this type of research.

My research considers the political nature of women novelists publishing between 1800 and 1820. The corpus explored in this paper consists of six novels by Jane Austen and eight novels by Maria Edgeworth. Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth published the majority of their novels between 1800 and 1820. This was a period of time marked by social and political upheaval in Europe and beyond; revolutions in France and America and a series of rebellions in England and Ireland caused many to question the status quo, where a person's position in the world was largely defined by an accident of birth. As a result, structures of power and regulation were examined, formally or informally, in many of the texts written during this period.

In their novels, Austen and Edgeworth examine the domestic, social, and political world they live in, albeit it from differing social and political perspectives. They argue for greater freedoms for women and those who live outside the traditional hierarchy of the aristocracy and the landed gentry. These are not the silent and domestic voices so often, and erroneously, associated with women writers from this period.

Traditional close reading by necessity focuses on the detailed analysis of small sections of text; it must be selective in the examples chosen to support the argument being presented. While it is possible to construct a convincing argument regarding the political beliefs of Austen and Edgeworth, supported by extensive quotations from their novels, it is equally possible to construct an opposing argument using the same novels. 'It sounds impossible, but Jane Austen has been and remains a figure at the vanguard of reinforcing tradition *and* promoting social change. In early 1900s London, when elite men were drinking, singing, and calling Austen an apolitical author in their private clubs...suffragists were marching through the streets outside with her name emblazoned on a banner' (Looser, 2017, p. 3). Thus, Beth Tobin's 'apologist for the landed classes' (1990, p. 229) is also the Austen who, in Audrey Bilger's *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen*, 'indict[s] the masculine culture that produces such figures' as John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* (2002, p. 132). In searching for insight into the traces of a novelist's political views, we need to look for more subtle patterns within and across the texts. In effect, we are looking for an understanding which goes beyond the individual novel, and in Moretti's words 'close reading will not do it' (2013, p. 48). One group of methods which can be used in this way are vector space models.

Vector space models have their origins in frequency-based information retrieval systems developed for computers. The underlying structures created to enable computers to extract information from texts have increasingly been leveraged by literary scholars to explore meaning circulation within and between texts. A vector space model is a matrix type structure used by computers to make sense of texts and to extract information. The vector space model represents documents, or smaller text elements, as points in space which reveal their semantic



and syntactic relationships. The two most commonly used types are the ‘term-document matrix’ and the ‘word-context matrix’.

The term-document structure was originally used for automatic computer indexing (Salton et al., 1975). It relates to the bag of words hypothesis which states that ‘the frequencies of words in a document tend to indicate the relevance of a document to a query’ (Turney & Pantel, 2010, p. 153). The aim of the term-document structure is to reveal the similarity between documents. Blei et al.’s ‘Latent Dirichlet Allocation’ algorithm (2003), which is commonly used for topic modelling, built on previous work on Latent Semantic Analysis, creating a method which has been applied effectively to literary texts (Deerwester et al., 1990; Papadimitriou et al., 1997; Hofmann, 1999). Topic modelling has been a popular method to explore large corpora, both literary and archival (Blei, 2012; Mohr & Bogdanov, 2013; Buurma, 2015; Hengchen et al., 2016).

A relative newcomer to literary analysis, the word-context structure, which includes word vectors, uses the distributional hypothesis that ‘words in similar contexts tend to have similar meanings’ (Turney & Pantel, 2010, p. 143). The ‘word2vec’ algorithm is one of the most commonly used algorithms for creating word vectors. Originally created by Tomas Mikolov and his colleagues at Google, the algorithm takes in a corpus of texts and represents words as points in a multi-dimensional space, and word meanings and relationships between words are encoded as distances and paths in that space, through the creation of an artificial neural network (2013). The created model is a simple, shallow neural network which encodes not only syntactic but also semantic relationships between words. Like topic modelling, word vectors aim to reveal the underlying structure of a text or corpus of texts. However, unlike topic modelling, they allow us to ask ‘what does this corpus say about this theme?’. The ‘word-context matrix’, or word vector model, will be the focus for the case study below.

### **Case Study: Independence in Austen and Edgeworth**

A word vector model was created for each of the authors using the ‘wordVectors’ package for R (Schmidt & Li, 2015). The multiple dimensions in the vector space model were reduced to something readable by a human (2 or 3 dimensions) using ‘Rtsne’, and plotted using ‘ggplot2’ and ‘ggrepel’ (Krijthe, 2015; Wickham, 2009; Slowikowski, 2016).

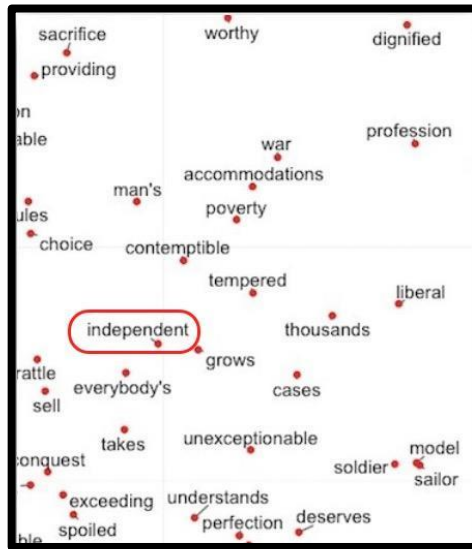


Figure 1: Independence in Austen

Figure 1 shows a section of the plot for the 500 words nearest to ‘independence’. The red points show the local relationship between the words and allow the semantic space to be explored. We can see a number of possible sub-themes: means of independence including ‘profession’ and ‘war’, as well as ‘soldier’ and ‘sailor’; benefits of independence, such as ‘choice’, and perhaps an indication of who benefits—‘man’.

There is also a selection of terms (‘sacrifice’, ‘spoiled’, ‘contemptible’) which suggest that Austen’s view of independence was not entirely positive. Some of these terms suggest the negative impact independence could have on the recipient, as well as the impact of the unfair distribution of wealth, challenging Beth Tobin’s view of Austen as ‘an apologist for the landed classes’ (1990, p. 229).

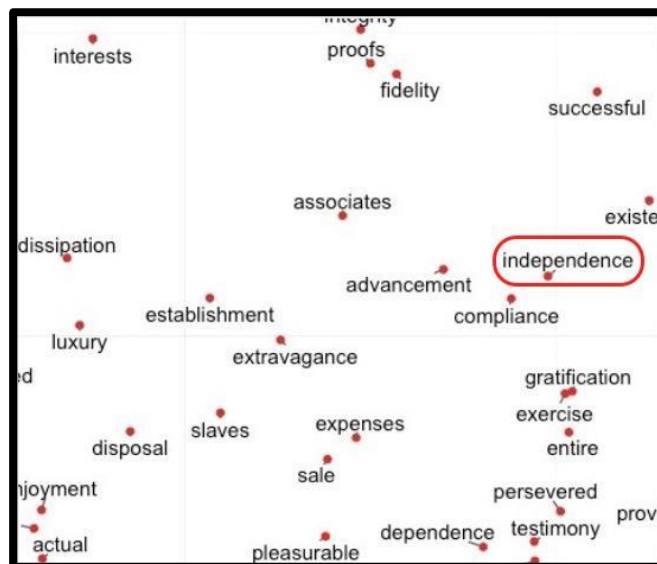


Figure 2: Independence in Edgeworth

A section from the model for Edgeworth's novels (Fig. 2) suggests similarities to Austen - the use of 'advancement' implying independence through work rather than fortune. Like Austen, Edgeworth also highlights the negative impact of independence. Those without their own independence must comply with the desires of others. Exploring the context of 'dependence' using Key Word in Context (KWIC) highlights this further (Fig. 3), for example, in *Patronage*, 'dependence' is described as being 'grievous to' the 'spirit' (Edgeworth, 1814, p. 267).

	position	left	keyword	right
1	33512	lie for please your honour i have a	dependence	upon your honour that you ll do me
2	136415	the real reason that detained her was her	dependence	upon the empiric who had repeatedly visited and
3	453894	of collective importance a belief that his only	dependence	must be on his own merit and thus
4	481884	sociable good natured fellow it was his absolute	dependence	upon others for daily amusement and ideas or
5	493156	purpose to keep him in a state of	dependence	and to enslave him to the _great_ i
6	500451	are in a state of idle and opprobrious	dependence	i understand remember this is a secret between
7	514105	the competition for favour having succeeded to the	dependence	for protection the feudal lord of ancient times
8	595127	minister by any of the chains of political	dependence	rejoiced to quit tourville papers state intrigues lists
9	640452	such a patron as lord oldborough temple feels	dependence	grievous to his spirit he is of a
10	683519	family on none of whom there is any	dependence	thought lord oldborough as the door closed upon
11	685002	the vanity of ambition and the danger of	dependence	on the favour of princes had passed on
12	687826	no longer in the horrors of attendance and	dependence	but with the promise of a competent provision
13	817818	a man on earth i hate attendance and	dependence	be his fate after all i have very

Figure 3: KWIC 'dependence' in Edgeworth

There is a discourse of implied criticism of traditional power structures running through the novels of both authors, a criticism which may be hard to identify through close reading alone. Far from reinforcing the belief that the upper classes had a hereditary right to financial security and property ownership, Austen and Edgeworth present a world in which 'new' money and professions are a much more positive driving force behind the success of the country than those of the traditional aristocracy. The aristocratic characters are often presented as 'spoilt', 'dissipated' or prejudiced, in some cases both physically and morally diseased. Edgeworth's Lady Delacour in *Belinda* is one such example, the physical disease of her breast acts as a metaphor for the destruction caused by her lack of morality and the excesses of London life. Sir Walter Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion* is another, contrasted, to his detriment, with the self-made Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth.

Once a vector space model has been created, it can be explored in more detail by calculating the cosine similarity between words and creating a semantic network from the results. Cosine similarity (Fig. 4) generates a metric that says how related two vectors are by measuring the angle between them. The value will be between -1 and 1, 1 being totally similar and -1 being totally dissimilar (Perone, 2013).

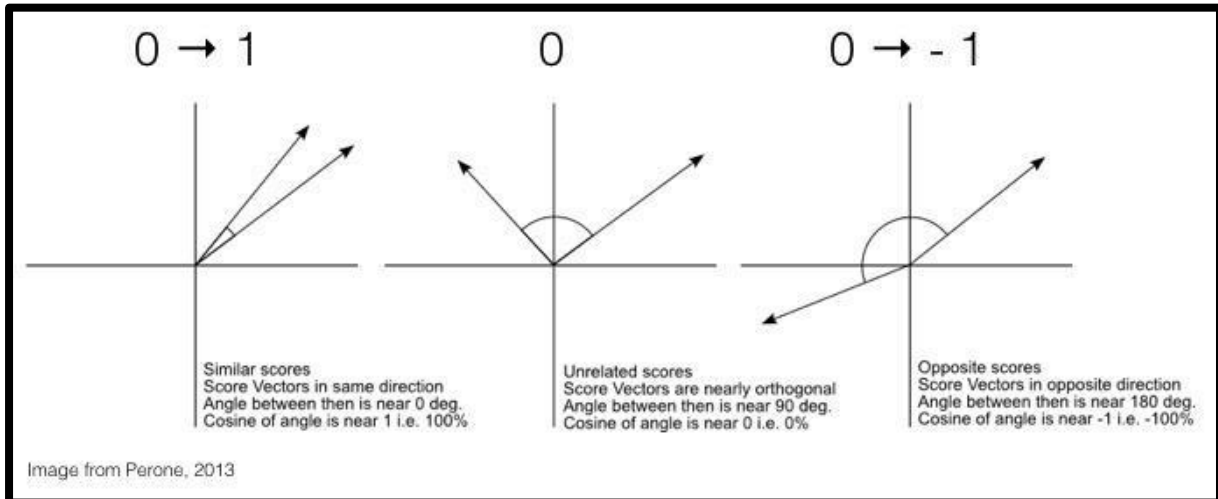


Figure 4: Explanation of Cosine Similarity

Creating a network enables not only links between words to be viewed, but also provides a method of finding ‘meaningful groups’ through ‘community detection’ (Heuser, 2016).



Figure 5: Semantic Network of Independence in Austen

Figure 5 was created using the ‘visNetwork’ R package and represents a section of the relationships between the 100 words nearest to an ‘independence/independent’ vector and the whole Austen corpus (Almende & Thieurmel, 2016). The words with a cosine similarity of 0.55 or more are shown. The colours represent communities of words. The original network is an HTML file which allows nodes to be moved or highlighted and for the user to zoom in and out.

‘Equality’, the central node in Figure 5, was a potentially controversial term in the early nineteenth century. While the revolutionary ideals of equality proved a popular topic of discourse in the early 1790s, expressed, for example in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror dramatically shifted public opinion. Supporting these ideals was viewed as seditious and a threat to the nation, even in fictional form:

The revolutionary ideas of France have already made but too great a progress in the hearts of men in all countries, and even in the very centre of every capital. If every crime be crowned with reward in France, every individual may hope that the subversion of order in his own country will procure him a situation, if not honourable, at least honoured. IT IS NOT BONAPARTE THAT AT PRESENT FORMS THE DANGER OF EUROPE...IT IS THE NEW OPINIONS. (Anon, 1815)

Authors openly advocating equality were viciously attacked by conservative reviewers. Therefore, it is not surprising that writers were cautious in expressing these ideas.

Although Austen is often presented as a conservative writer, the semantic network shows links between ‘equality’, ‘wholesome’ and ‘friendliness’ implying that Austen is favourable towards the concept. The node ‘varying’ provides a link from ‘equality’ to ‘heroine’. Further linked words suggest there is a criticism of the lack of equality, created by societal forces, that many of Austen’s female characters initially face.

In network theory, a giant component is a group of interconnected nodes which accounts for a large proportion of the nodes in the network as a whole. In comparison with the Austen network, the giant component in the Edgeworth network has a greater number of interconnections, suggestive of the relative complexity and density of Edgeworth’s language. A large number of the nodes belong to the same community. This includes: ‘profession’, ‘abilities’, ‘connexions’, ‘talent’, and ‘occupation’ reinforcing the suggestion from the vector space reduction that independence through employment is an important theme in Edgeworth’s novels. The perceived rise of the middle classes during this period and the challenge they represented to the established social hierarchy was a concern for many of those who gained power and wealth through inheritance. The vestige of this concern exists to this day, especially in the UK with the distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ money.





skills—skills not frequently a part of literary studies. It is this uncertainty and unfamiliarity which is often the greatest barrier to Humanities scholars using these methods.

Yet, beyond the technical challenges raised by the use of computational analysis, there is also the familiar. While a computer program can reveal interesting aspects of a novel or other text, it is only with the application of contextual details, associated with traditional close reading, that the significance of the findings become clear. The computer has no awareness of the text it explores or the results it produces, the scholarly skills of close reading are required to interpret these results.

## Conclusion

On the surface, Austen and Edgeworth appear to reinforce the traditional and restricted life of the woman in the long eighteenth century. However, through a closer analysis of their novels, they show the desire and ability to criticise the social norms of the times they are living in. Their criticism encompasses the clergy, the titled aristocracy, and the treatment of unmarried women. In effect, Austen and Edgeworth simultaneously construct and deconstruct the early 19th century image of womanhood. A computational analysis helps to provide empirical evidence of these ideas which are skilfully woven through the novels, helping to support existing interpretations arrived at through close reading, as well as challenging others.

It is not the purpose of Digital Humanities to replace traditional tools and methods, it merely provides us with an ever broader range of tools to choose from. Not all research projects are ‘big data’ projects, and not all research projects will require the use of digital tools. However, these open access tools help make research more accessible, more replicable and perhaps more objective than close reading alone (Omar, 2010).

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## *The Poems of Blathmac, 8<sup>th</sup> Century Poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>1</sup>

Siobhán Barrett, Maynooth University

The *Poems of Blathmac mac Con Brettan maic Conguso do Feraib Rois*, ‘Blathmac, Son of Cú Brettan, son of Congus of the Fir Rois’, are two long, 8th century, Old Irish, religious poems preserved in a 17th century manuscript now called MS G 50, which is housed in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. While the provenance of the manuscript is not certain, it has been suggested that this text was transcribed by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, or one of his consorts, who are collectively known as the Four Masters. Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, a Franciscan brother from County Donegal, is renowned for the work he did as a collector of texts and is the chief scribe associated with the *Annals of the Four Masters*. The connection between this manuscript and Mícheál Ó Cléirigh is based on the fact that in 1846, it was in the possession of John O’Clery, who claimed to be a descendant of one of the Four Masters and who also claimed that the manuscript was once the property of his famous predecessor. The content of this manuscript would certainly be consistent with other material copied and collected by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh. This manuscript was acquired by the National Library in 1931 and the poems were discovered in 1953 by Nessa Ní Shéaghdha (Stifter, 2015, p. 47).

James Carney stated in his 1965 Thomas Davis lecture: ‘Some years ago in a manuscript in the collection of the National Library I came upon twenty-three pages of Irish verse which had not hitherto come under the notice of scholars’ (Carney, 1965, p. 45). Blathmac’s poems were edited by James Carney and published in 1964 as part of the Irish Texts Society series. At the time, it was rightly welcomed as a significant addition to the corpus of Irish literature. However, Carney’s edition is not a complete one. There is a section at the end missing. He did not work on the final part of the poems probably because of the poor condition of the last few pages of the manuscript. Additionally, Carney (1964, p. xxxix) conceived of his edition as an ‘interim comment’ on the text of the manuscript and there are indeed occasions where an improvement of the text is possible. Therefore a new edition, including the previously unedited section, is required and is one of the aims of my research project. Another aim is a specialised dictionary which will make the text available online along with a translation and linguistic analysis.

There is considerable value in being able to identify an author geographically and chronologically by finding external evidence to reinforce the contextualisation arrived at internally. The best place to find this kind of historical information is in the annals and genealogies. However, they only contain evidence for Blathmac’s father and brother. *The Annals of Ulster* record Cú Brettan’s death in AD 740 and the *Annals of the Four Masters* record the death of his son, presumably Blathmac’s brother, Donn Bó in AD 754. In the genealogy in the *Book of Ballymote* we find Donn Bó, son Cú Brettan, son of Congus, but listed under the Uí Šégáin, a different kin group, but from the same area as the Fir Rois. It is not unusual that Blathmac’s name does not appear in the genealogies because they are generally lists of kings, but Donn Bó, the king, was probably his brother. Cú Brettan, Blathmac’s father, is mentioned as being the only royal survivor in *Cath Almaine*, ‘The Battle of Allen’, between

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Ulster and Leinster which took place in AD 718 at the Hill of Allen in County Kildare. In this saga, Cu Brettan is connected to the Fir Rois, so this may be the source of the Fir Rois connection which is found in the ascription at the beginning of the Blathmac poems. Donn Bó is also a character in this saga (Ó Riain, 1978). Sagas, however, are seldom reliable historically, but they may reflect the annalistic material available to the 10th century author of the tale. This poem is the only piece of evidence we have for Blathmac's existence and it is also the only evidence of his family connection to Cú Brettan. If we accept this evidence as enough to link Blathmac to these historical figures, this would fix his lifetime as more or less contemporary with that of his brother and date the composition of the poems to the middle of the 8th century, meaning that the language certainly is Early Old Irish. This text is of great value for linguistic reasons because of its age but also for the insights that these long poems give us to Irish society in the 8th century demonstrated in the religious beliefs and attitudes to kingship and clientship that are described within them.

The two Poems of Blathmac are both religious in content and are both addressed to Mary the mother of Christ. The first poem is 149 quatrains long. Carney's edition is a faithful transcription of the complete poem as it has survived in that manuscript. At the most basic level, the first poem describes the birth, life, and especially the death of Christ. The poet, being from an Irish family of high status, was almost certainly a well-educated cleric. Therefore, his frame of reference is that of the top level of Irish society. He applies his understanding of the nuances of a king/client relationship in an Irish context and transfers it to the relationship between God and the Jews, making use of specific legal terminology which is particular to the relationship between an Irish lord and his clients (Breatnach, 2015, pp. 108-114). He has expectations as to the code of conduct of both lord and client and with much detail he depicts the evolution of the relationship between God and his clients, the Jews. Fundamentally, God has been an exceptional lord and king who led them out of captivity and into the Promised Land. He has behaved in every way like the ideal lord. He also chose one of them to be the mother of His son. In the poet's opinion, the Jews have been doubly disloyal because, in the first place, they crucified the son of their lord, and secondly, they murdered one of their own kin-group by virtue of the fact that Mary, Christ's mother, was also a Jew.

In Irish law, kin-slaying was seen as the most despicable act (Kelly, 1995, p. 127). Blathmac uses very strong negative imagery in describing his horror at this treacherous act, describing the Jews as dog-like and as swine, very disparaging terms.

#### Stanza 103

*Ainbli gnúisi, condai fir  
ro-fersat in fíngail-sin.  
Céin ba diib a máthair  
ba diáll for fírbráthair.*

Of dishonourable faces and dog-like were  
the men who carried out that kin-slaying.  
Since his mother was of them it was  
treachery towards a true kinsman.

#### Stanza 107

*Ce dod-rindnacht recht doäib  
ra-sáebSAT co sáebgoäib.  
ba nóeb do chonaib gortaib,  
margarét do méthtorcaib.*

Though he had granted them a law they had  
twisted it with perverse lies. It was a holy  
thing to hungry dogs, a pearl to fat swine.

The first poem begins and ends with an invitation from Blathmac to Mary to come to him so that he can perform a keening for her son.

#### Stanza 1

*Tair cucum, a Maire boíd,  
do choíniud frit do rochoím.  
Dirsan dul fri croich dot mac  
ba mind már, ba masgérat.*

Come to me loving Mary that I may keening  
with you very dear one.  
Alas that your son should go to the cross, he  
who was a great emblem, a beautiful hero.

#### Stanza 149

*Do airchisecht chridi cen on  
con-roírem ar ndiäbor,  
a chonn na creitme glaine,  
tair cucum, a boídMaire.*

Come to me, loving Mary, head of pure  
faith, that we may hold converse with the  
compassion of unblemished heart.

Keening involved the public performance of a specially composed lament over a deceased person. This tradition has long roots in Ireland but whether it is a continuation of pre-Christian practices is difficult to say. The usual formula incorporates praise for ‘the dead man’s beauty, generosity, bravery and aristocratic lineage and cursing of his enemies and the objects thought to be responsible for his death’ (Bourke, 1988, p. 288) and all of these are included in Blathmac’s first poem.

The Christian church had concerns about keening from an early date. If the *Irish Penitentials*, some of which may be as early as 6th century, are to be believed, the practice of keening was an offence and set penances were imposed on transgressors. According to the text called *The Old-Irish Penitential*, the only Irish language penitential (Gwynn, 1914, pp. 121-195), penalties were incurred for keening. A married woman who makes lamentation over a layman or laywoman, incurs fifty nights penance, if over a cleric she incurs twenty nights penance, but if over a bishop or king only fifteen nights penance (Bieler, 1963, p. 273, §17). It is noteworthy that it is women who are used as examples of likely offenders putting women centre stage in the keening tradition. It is also curious that the higher the status of the dead person, the lesser the penance that is incurred. This could be an indication that there was some tolerance for the practice. As Bergholm (2015, p. 5) points out there was some ambivalence in the Church’s attitude to keening and this is evidenced by the Bigotian Penitential.

#### CONCERNING THE MAKING OF LAMENTATION AND ITS BEING RECKONED AS GOOD MERIT, IT IS SAID IN THE LAW:

Jacob son of Isaac was lamented for forty days in Egypt and for a whole week in the land of Canaan: and so was Christ in the New (Testament), the women wept for Him: and it is found in the Canon with almost innumerable examples of the Scriptures, and for whom no lament is made to him it is reckoned as bad merit (ed. and trans. Bieler, 1963, p. 231, §7).

The *Bigotian Penitential* is a Latin text that was probably composed on the continent around the 8th century. Bieler (1963, p. 10) states that it is closely related to *The Old-Irish Penitential* and contains material that derives from the *Canones Hibernenses* and other such texts. This statement regards lamenting as a mark of respect and is not included in the *The Old-Irish Penitential*. Blathmac's attitude seems to support the view of the *Bigotian Penitential* since he states that Christ was not mourned in a suitable way within the time allocated because his friends were prevented from so doing.

## Stanza 124

*Nícon·dernad trúag amne,  
nach dímbág nó dochraite:  
nád·leth for Críst gubae mór  
cein ro·ndét bith fo dobrón.*

There was never done such a pitiful thing,  
any sorrow or misery: that a great  
lamentation did not spread over Christ as  
long as being in great sorrow was allowed.

Additionally, the following section which supplies detailed descriptions about the mourning or keening performance itself reinforces Blathmac's expectations as to how the son of a king should have been treated both before and after death. He is outraged that the appropriate rituals did not take place. The poet talks about beating hands over the corpse, how every great household keens its lord and how no cry was raised over the body of Christ.

## Stanza 126

*As·oirc cach teglach co lí  
bassa fora tigernai:  
lámchomart for corp Críst glain  
nícon·reilced do apstalaib.*

Every beautiful household beats hands over  
their lord beating of hands over the body of  
pure Christ was not allowed to apostles.

This could be interpreted to mean that keening for a person of high status is not only tolerated but even obligatory. Perhaps it is only keening of the lower orders which was discouraged. This would explain the apparent discrepancy in the two penitentials. So Blathmac probably felt no conflict in composing a keen for Christ. His status is obviously very high because He is not just the son of a king, He is the son of God.

The main section of the poem, from Stanza 3 to Stanza 143, is surrounded by invitations to Mary to come to the poet. This section could stand alone as a keen but Blathmac uses the device of framing this section by the invitations contained in stanzas 1 and 2 and also from stanza 144 to the end in a self-deprecating way to display both his unworthiness and his inability to perform this keen alone. Perhaps an explanation for this invitation is that Blathmac was a man and keening is traditionally the informal expression of grief performed by a woman. This explains, perhaps, his need to have Mary in attendance so that she would lead the keen.

The second poem moves away from the sadness of Christ's death to the happiness of the resurrection. Christ is eternally alive and the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets with regard to Christ have been fulfilled to a large degree. These prophecies relate to his birth (Isaiah 7:14), baptism (Isaiah 11:1-3), crucifixion (Zechariah 12:10), burial (Isaiah 53:9), resurrection (Psalm 16:10), ascension (Psalm 68:18), and to the second coming or the last judgment (Psalm 110:1-7, 1 Kings 2:45). The only prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled is the second coming

and this is the subject matter of the end of the poem. The end of the second poem becomes apocalyptic in nature. The signs indicating the Day of Judgment are detailed. A terrible battle will take place and vengeance will be had for the deaths of the martyrs. This kind of narrative referred to as the Signs of Doomsday is a popular medieval theme. The preoccupation is understandable given that it may allow sinners some time to make amends and was used with great effect to strengthen the resolve of sinners. No doubt Blathmac had something of the sort in mind here too. Martin McNamara (1975, p. 137) has pointed to the exceptional importance of the inclusion of the Signs of Doomsday in Blathmac's second poem due to its early 8th century date. He states that the earliest instance of the Signs of Doomsday was the Greek 4th or 5th-century Apocalypse of Thomas, which lists seven days leading up to the Day of Judgment. He explains that at some stage the seven day tradition developed into a 15 day tradition but the transition from and the influence of the seven day system on this longer sequence has not yet been determined. The Irish tradition has several versions of these signs but all later than Blathmac. In Blathmac we have a simple version of the Signs of Doomsday, he supplies seven: the earth and sky ablaze; smile of the seas will be erased; there will be severe shaking (earthquake?); ocean, sea, and pool will be dry; the stars fall from heaven; the world will be levelled; every dead person will arise.

## Stanza 236

*Nallsa thuidecht do dúiri,  
imm-brúifea na mórdúili.  
Lasfaid talam oculus nem,  
tibre trethan bith aithgen.*

Woe the coming of hardship, it will utterly crush the great elements. Earth and sky will blaze, the smile of the seas will be an un-smile.

## Stanza 237

*Bid crúaid cuicalige in se,  
at-béla forgnúis dúile;  
bet tírmai trethan, ler, lind,  
do nim do-tóetsat caínrint.*

This will be a severe shaking; the appearance of the elements will perish; ocean, sea, and pool will be dry, beautiful stars will fall from heaven.

## Stanza 238

*Bet comarda slíab fri fán,  
níba bec int athchossán;  
bed clárchosmail in domun  
conid-reised óenubull.*

The mountain will be as high as the hollow; the attack will not be small; the world will be boardlike so that one apple could run over it.

## Stanza 239

*Is ret mac oirdnidu cen on  
sifais int aingel dagthob;  
ata-resat frisa seinm  
cach marb ro-boí i ndóendeilb.*

Before your noble unblemished son the angel will sound a good trumpet; every dead one who has been in human shape will arise at the sounding.



Blathmac does not organise the signs by number nor does he assign particular days to them. Indeed there is nothing in the poem to suggest that all of these seven signs could not occur on the same day. Because of Blathmac's deviation from the more common patterns, Martin McNamara suggests that 'it is possible that he (Blathmac) knew of a list of Signs before Doomsday, even if not quite any known to us' (2007, p. 232). The closing stanzas in Carney's (1964) edition of the poems describe the build up to the Day of Judgment and list the deaths of all those for whom vengeance will at last be taken. The very last stanza of Carney's edition is an account of the prophesied slaying of the Antichrist by Michael, the Archangel, as a warrior of Christ. This heralds the Day of Judgment and indeed the end of time. The logical development of the narrative is that the signs of Doomsday will be followed by a description of the Day of Judgment and indeed that is what follows.

What is described from this point has not been translated until now. Nessa Ní Shéaghda did provide a transcription for these damaged pages, which was published posthumously in 1999 in a volume in honour of James Carney, but she did not provide any translation or commentary. For the most part, the manuscript of the Poems of Blathmac is legible (pages 122 to 140) and this is what Carney edited up to stanza 259. Carney wrote of the second poem that 'about 117 quatrains can be read in full and fragments of approximately 26' (1958, p. 1). This would give a total of 143 in the second poem. In fact, there are traces of at least 11 more, even though some are very fragmentary, which brings the total of the second poem up to 154 quatrains (Stifter, 2015, p. 59). Although his edition of the second poem breaks off after 111 quatrains, Carney didn't address why he chose to stop where he did. The remainder of this article offers a provisional description of some of these 'fragmentary quatrains' along with references to the passages from the Bible and other texts which have been useful as a guide to possible meaning.

Towards the end of page 141, there is some tearing and staining and this disimproves on page 142, deteriorating dramatically in 143 and 144 which are merely fragments. It is not even clear if the poem was complete at this stage or if other pages of the manuscript have been lost. While the manuscript is difficult to read, parts of it are not completely illegible and an improvement on Ní Shéaghda's edition, although still not complete, can be made now with the aid of technology, particularly the high resolution images provided by Irish Script on Screen. As well as reading and transcribing the text there is very often a need to correct and normalise the spelling according to Early Irish orthographical practices. This is an 8th century text which has been copied by a 17th century scribe. His exemplar no longer exists and so we do not know which mistakes and modernisation are due to our scribe or to a previous scribe. It is likely that the scribe did not understand much of what he was copying. The text is very problematic and in an effort to understand and to translate these fragmentary quatrains, it would be useful to ascertain what the poet's sources of inspiration were. The earlier stanzas of Blathmac indicate that the Bible, and in particular the Gospel of Matthew, was his main source and this continues to be his inspiration in the previously unedited section.

In spite of the fact that there is much that is illegible, it is clear that these stanzas describe the Day of Judgment. Christ is named as the Judge on the Day of Judgment who separates the good from the bad and determines their fate. The Day of Judgment in these stanzas is also referred to as the *láithe an mórbúanae* (l.1054), 'Day of the Great Harvest', and *laithe rigdae* (l. 1037), 'the Royal Day / the Day of the Lord'. Bible passages and in particular Matthew's Gospel are paraphrased. Blathmac seems to select passages and then combine them to create a pastiche of

biblical imagery. For example, in the first stanza 260 he refers to Mount Zion, to the saints being rewarded and also to tears and sorrow.

*Ar at-tát laithe ríгдаe  
donaib nóebaib a ndagdílae,  
bith sí díгдаe dér a mbróin  
in mórchath Sléibe Síoin.*

Since on the day of the Lord  
the saints will have their good rewards,  
The great battle of Mount Zion  
will be the prayer of their tearful sorrow.

Although there does not seem to be one single direct borrowing, it is clear that the poet is drawing from many biblical passages. Parallels are obvious in these few examples:

For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you.  
Isaiah (30:19)

In the Book of Revelations (11:18) we find:

The nations raged,  
but your wrath came,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,  
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,  
and those who fear your name,  
both small and great,  
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

And in Joel (2:1-2):

Blow a trumpet in Zion;  
sound an alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
a great and powerful people;  
their like has never been before,  
nor will be again after them  
through the years of all generations.

An account of a gathering on the day before Doom at Mount Zion is also found in *Airdena Inna Cóic Lá nDéc ria mBráth*, ‘The Tokens of the Fifteen Days before Doom’, a Middle Irish text, and the parallels with Blathmac’s poem are strong:

This is the token of the day before doom, to wit, the pure King of Glory, the only son of the King of heaven, earth and hell, with a countless multitude of angels and archangels, to wit, the nine ranks of heaven, in His company (will go) on that day to the summit of Mount Zion to judge their deeds, both good and evil, for Adam’s impure children’ (Stokes, 1907, p. 315).

The greater part of this unedited section of the second poem seems to be based on an amalgamation of three passages from the Gospel of Matthew: *The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, 13:24-3; *The Separation of Wheat and Chaff*, 3:12, and *The Judgment*, 25:31-46.

## Stanza 264

*Is é biäs band mbúadae  
i llaithiu na mórbúanae.  
Etar·scarfaider cach mbert  
corcae chuindfig fri cruithnecht.*

It is he who will reap a deed of victories  
on the day of the great harvest.  
Each bundle of tares  
will be separated from wheat.

## Stanza 265

*Fóidfid fo thúaid – crúaid costud –  
in corcae dia ógloscud.  
Fora leth ndes – comrád cert –  
do·bérthar leis a chruithnecht.*

He will send northwards—hard gathering –  
the tares to their complete burning.  
On his right side—a fitting conversation –  
his wheat will be taken with him.

## Stanza 270

*Óis in phecaid doilig duib  
in corcae ocus in gabuir.  
Is do áesaib donaib daínib  
in chruithnecht, na glanchaírig.*

The tares and the goats [are]  
the folk of grievous, black sin  
The becoming fine people are  
the wheat, the pure sheep.

Stanza 264 is very close to Matthew's parable of the *Wheat and the Tares*. In the last line Blathmac uses the words *corcai chuindfig*, the literal translation of which is 'empty oats', later on he uses *corcae* 'oats' on its own in stanzas 265 and 270. The use of the term oats would seem to conflict with the message of Matthew's parable: 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' (Matthew 13:30). This apparent anomaly can be explained. In Classical Latin sources, two main weeds of the corn-field are identified, and one of these is the wild oat (*Avena fatua*) (Kelly, 1997, p. 234). The literal translation of *Avena fatua* is 'wild or barren/empty oats'. This would support the use by Blathmac of the term *corcai chuindfig* to equate with 'weeds' or 'tares' and it clarifies his subsequent use in later stanzas of the word *corcae* alone. Blathmac uses *corcai chuindfig* as a translation for tares and in stanzas 265 and 270 he refers to *corcae* because the audience will understand that in this context he is referring to tares.

The account of Judgment Day, is the third passage of the Gospel of Matthew, from which Blathmac draws:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Matthew (25:31-33)

## Stanza 267

*Is do mac dna – níba bréc –  
miästar in da móthrét.  
Scarfaid – mairg nád-ais a thnú–  
caírcha gela fria mindu.*

It is your son, indeed – it will not be a lie–  
who will judge the two great flocks  
he will separate—woe the one who does not  
fear his wrath–  
bright sheep from his goats.

Blathmac’s use of the motif of the sheep and the goats is absent in other Irish texts describing Judgment Day. The only other reference that I have come across so far in this research to sheep and the goats is in *Cáin Domnaig*, ‘Law of Sunday’, which is also considered to be an 8th century text. Unusually, here the separation is taking place on Sunday, when more traditionally Monday is the Day of Doom.

*In-domnach etarscarfas Críst in dá trét.i.  
trét na n-úan n-endac .i. na nóeb 7 na fírían,  
fri gaburtrét na pechach n-diúmsach in  
domuin*

On Sunday, Christ will divide the two  
flocks, namely, the flock of innocent lambs  
and of saints, and of the righteous from the  
goat-flock of the proud sinful ones of the  
world.

(O’Keefe, 1905, p. 200).

Among other texts which draw from Matthew’s description of the Day of Judgment are two homilies, contemporaneous with Blathmac, *An Old Irish Homily* (Strachan, 1907, pp. 1-10) and the Latin *Everyday Sermon* (O’Sullivan, 2014, pp. 593-605). Neither of these chooses to employ the motif of the sheep and the goats nor of the wheat and the tares. Another depiction of the Day of Doom is in the Middle-Irish *Scéla Láí Brátha*, ‘Tidings of Doomsday’, which begins proclaiming its validity by pronouncing that:

Matthew wrote and revised these tidings of Doomsday as he heard them from the lips of his Master, namely, Christ, and left them in remembrance with the Church. (Stokes, 1879-1880, p. 247).

However, again no goats or sheep are mentioned in this account. The same is true of *Saltair na Rann*, ‘Psalter of Quatrains’, a separation of the assembled people on Judgment Day according to their deeds is described, the just on the right and the unrighteous on the left (Canto cxlii, 8325-8336). This lack of parallel motifs leads to the assumption that Blathmac did not influence later eschatological texts, at least in this regard, indicating that his poems were not widely known or else not well-received for some reason. In any case, it is unlikely that there were many, if any, copies in circulation besides the exemplar for the extant 17th century copy.

There is quite a bit of work remaining to be done. Pages 143 and 144 are mere scraps but what remains of the text is quite legible and appears to continue to be consistent with Matthew’s account of the Judgement. This fact may be the key to deciphering some more words in the stained section of the manuscript. Unfortunately, sometimes there is as little as one word and sometimes only a partial word legible in a stanza. The work on these fragmentary quatrains is ongoing. It is to be hoped that more problems will be clarified by the end of this research.

### Images from *The Poems of Blathmac*

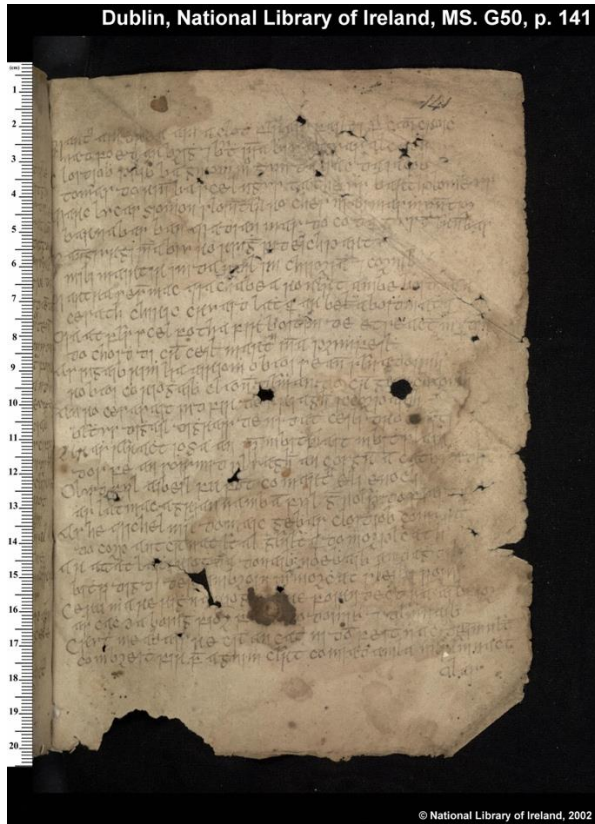


Image 1: G50 Blathmac p. 141 (st 249-262)

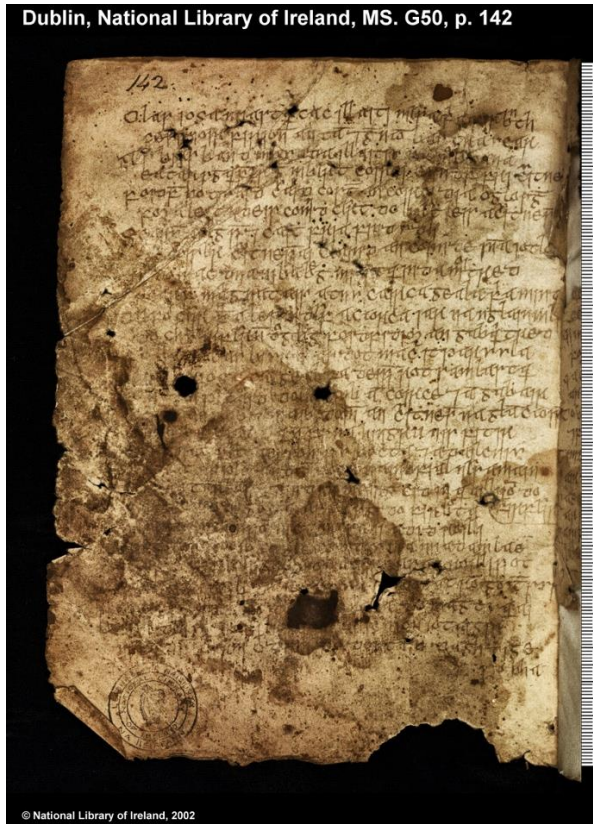


Image 2: G50 Blathmac p. 142 (st 263-276)



Image 3: G50 Blathmac p.143 (st 277-290)

Image 4: G50 Blathmac p. 144 (st 291-303)

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# Emerging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Identities

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## **Safe Spaces: The Law and Everyday Experiences of LGBTQ Asylum Seekers**

Louise Sarsfield Collins, Maynooth University

Each year a few thousand people arrive in Ireland seeking our protection. The events that lead to asylum applications are likely harrowing. However, for many, the asylum process causes further difficulties, particularly for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) asylum seekers. This paper explores the legal geographies of LGBTQ asylum seekers in Ireland, interrogating the ways in which Irish law and policy seek to control the bodies of this particular cohort of asylum seekers. First, I lay out the global context for LGBTQ asylum seekers before exploring what is understood by legal geographies. The paper then briefly describes the asylum system in Ireland, in particular Direct Provision, before turning to the findings from ongoing research in Ireland. A number of themes are explored including the ways in which Direct Provision and the asylum system serve to keep LGBTQ asylum seekers in the closet. This imprisonment is contested by both asylum seekers and those working on their behalf, which has led to the creation of some precarious sites of resistance.

Across the globe, over seventy states criminalise same-sex sexual acts, with thirteen states still imposing the death penalty for offences (ILGA, 2016). Given this, it is no surprise those with the resources to do so, often flee their countries. The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 (Refugee Convention), to which Ireland is a party, lays out five persecutory grounds upon which to grant asylum, including *inter alia* membership of a particular social group (Refugee Convention, Article 1). This has been interpreted to include people persecuted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, albeit states have differed on how to apply this provision (see Millbank, 2009; Hathaway and Pobjoy, 2012; Weßels, 2013; and Berlitz et al., 2015). Within European Law, Article 10 of 2004/83/EC (Qualification Directive) explicitly names persecution based on sexual orientation as a ground for providing asylum. The Refugee Convention, 1951, and instruments of the Common European Asylum Policy in the past were given effect in Irish Law by the Refugee Act, 1996. The recent International Protection Act, 2015, supersedes this Act as it comes into force in 2017.

Unfortunately, neither the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees nor officials in most states collect accurate data regarding all the reasons people seek asylum. In Europe, historically, only Belgium and Norway have gathered statistical data about the numbers seeking asylum based on sexual orientation. Other countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy have approximate data. It is thought that across Europe upwards of 10,000 people claim asylum each year based on sexual orientation (Jansen and Spijkerboer, 2011, pp. 15-16). In Ireland, there are no statistics about the number of LGBTQ people seeking asylum. However, approximately 2,443 people have sought asylum here each year since 2006 and anecdotal evidence would suggest a small but significant minority of these people identify in some way as LGBTQ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The figure 2,443 is an average based on applications during the ten year period from 1 January 2006 – 31 December 2015. The highest number of applications during this period was 4,241 in 2006 which fell to 938 in 2013 before increasing again in the last few years (ORAC, 2016).

## Legal Geographies

It is well understood that law and space are co-constitutive and this paper aims to explore the legal geographies of LGBTQ asylum seekers in Ireland – the places they inhabit and the places they are excluded from. Not only are places where law takes on meaning, as argued by Blomley (1994, p. 111-114), but the relationships among space, place, and law have a significant effect on the production of social space (Delaney, 2010, *passim*). Drawing on Barkan (2011), I argue that rather than being benign or objective, law is a normative tool. It is vital that we unpack what we understand by law and acknowledge the myriad of processes, relations and power discourses that are contained within it? When I speak about the law in this way, I do not just mean Law with a capital ‘L’ – the national legislation, the written criminal code – but also the ways in which written laws are interpreted, shaped, made and remade. Similarly, I am also interested in what might be best described as sub-laws or policies, which are treated as law. For example, how laws are utilised along with local customs and norms that are part of how social space is ordered – what is ‘the done thing’. Rather than law being a moral code promulgated for the public good, Delaney concludes that products of this legal machinery are ‘deeply complicit in structures of domination and subordination’ (2010, p. 11). Thus, in the case of asylum seekers in Ireland, not only are they subject to European directives and regulations and Irish domestic legislation, but also to a host of other semi-laws or sub-laws. The Direct Provision system itself has been criticised for having no legislative basis (Thornton, 2013, p. 67) creating a type of legal-limbo or liminal legal space inhabited by asylum seekers. Despite this lack of legal clarity, it is evident that the daily lives of asylum seekers in Ireland are heavily regulated through a range of government agencies. By looking at how these processes work we can open up new ways of thinking about the processes that shape our world.

The legal practices of naming, cataloguing and ruling are imbricated in the production of space. To ascribe legal signifiers to an act or an object situates them within networks of power. These positions further condition actions and reactions to these acts or objects, further reinforcing their position (Delaney, 2014). Thus, laws which deem homosexuality and homosexual acts as illegal serve to coercively control particular bodies within space. Not only are particular actions criminalised but such laws seek to eradicate LGBTQ people by making their very ‘being in space’ unlawful. Furthermore they give licence to the general public, encouraging discrimination and harassment. For LGBTQ asylum seekers in Ireland, they may have fled such attempts to control their bodies because of their sexual orientation, only to then find themselves in a system that uses different names and categories to similarly situate them. Refugees are conceptualised in the public imaginary as ‘poor women and children’ fleeing war, clearly in need of our protection. The term ‘asylum seeker’ has become a term loaded with mistrust and suspicion. Much is made of the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee and increasingly both are being used interchangeably with the term migrant.<sup>2</sup> In international law, however, the term refugee is declaratory, meaning it simply recognises an existing legal status rather than conferring any new rights or duties upon the asylum seeker/refugee. Phrases such as ‘failed asylum seeker’ have entered the lexicon of politicians, journalists, and citizens alike, although it has little meaning in a legal sense.

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<sup>2</sup> The title of an article in the Irish Mirror is illustrative of this conflation of terms ‘Up to 600 refugees will be told ‘you can’t stay in Ireland’: Migrants coming here could end up in Direct Provision centres after being classed as asylum seekers’ (Murphy, 2015).

## Methodology

This paper draws together data from a number of existing publications concerned with aspects of the asylum system in Ireland. In addition, a selection of decisions from the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) were catalogued and analysed. Following years of criticism regarding the lack of transparency in the Irish asylum system, a database of anonymised decisions of the RAT was created and, since March 2014, has been available upon registration to members of the public. Asylum seekers to Ireland come from across the globe and there are entries in the database for more than seventy countries. As this body of work came from a wider project exploring the post-colonial legal geographies of LGBTQ people in southern African states, it was decided to narrow the search to decisions related to people from that region (see Table 1 for a full breakdown of decisions reviewed). All decisions in which the sexual orientation of the claimant formed all or part of the basis for seeking asylum were then further analysed. From an initial 733 decisions reviewed, only 12 were found to relate to people claiming asylum based on persecution relating to sexual orientation. Unfortunately, first instance decisions are not published, so it is impossible to say if the small number of appeals are based on LGBTQ asylum seekers generally getting a positive decision at first instance, or if people simply decided not to appeal decisions to the RAT. Given Ireland's historically low rate of refugee recognition over the period in question, it is unlikely LGBTQ asylum seekers were routinely granted refugee status at first instance.<sup>3</sup>

County	Dublin II Regulation	Asylum	Subsidiary Protection	Total	LGBT Cases
Botswana	0	5	0	<b>5</b>	0
Lesotho	0	6	0	<b>6</b>	0
Mozambique	0	4	0	<b>4</b>	0
Namibia	0	2	0	<b>2</b>	0
South Africa	1	222	3	<b>226</b>	1
Swaziland	0	8	0	<b>8</b>	1
Tanzania	2	7	0	<b>9</b>	2
Zambia	0	6	0	<b>6</b>	1
Zimbabwe	5	445	17	<b>467</b>	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>12</b>

*Table 1: Country and number of appeal types reviewed*

Additionally, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with people working with asylum seekers in Ireland; see Table 2 for more details. All those interviewed were based in Dublin but have clients from across the country at varying stages of the asylum process. Participants were selected based on their role and where organisations offer a series of distinct services, interviews were conducted with representatives from different sections of the organisation.

<sup>3</sup> From 2002 to 2015 Ireland's average rate of recognition was just 6 per cent.

Participant Code	Role
Resp. 1	Legal Officer
Resp. 2	Legal Officer
Resp. 3	Case Worker (non legal)
Resp. 4	Social Support
Resp. 5	Case Worker (non legal)
Resp. 6	Case Worker (non legal)
Resp. 7	Case Worker (non legal)

Table 2: Description of interview participant's positions

## Asylum in Ireland and Direct Provision

As outlined above, the asylum system in Ireland is currently in a period of transition. The new regime will allow asylum seekers to make a claim for all forms of international protection in a single application, unlike the current system which requires that asylum seekers first apply for recognition as a refugee and only upon refusal of refugee status may apply for other forms of protection. However, it is too early to assess the change this will make to the lives of asylum seekers.

Currently, an application for international protection is initially determined by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC). If a person is refused refugee status, as most are, they may appeal the decision to the RAT. Between 2009 and 2014, the RAT upheld the ORAC decision in 92.4 per cent of appeals (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015). The only other means of appeal is to bring an application to the High Court for judicial review. It is important to note that a judicial review does not re-examine the case on merits but rather seeks to review if the law was correctly applied in the decision-making process. From 2009-2014, less than 4 per cent of negative decisions by ORAC and 15.4 per cent of negative decisions of the RAT were the subject of judicial review. The number of legal proceedings being issued with regard to ORAC and RAT decisions has fallen in recent years (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 80). Nonetheless, the number of asylum related cases of judicial review represented almost a quarter of all judicial review applications in both 2014 and 2015 (Courts Service, 2016, p. 41).

At any point in the process an asylum seeker may decide not to appeal a refusal but instead to apply for subsidiary protection as outlined in the Qualification Directive or leave to remain in the State at the discretion of the Minister for Justice and Equality. All of these decisions involve lengthy waiting times. In February 2016, 55 per cent of people in the system were in the system over five years (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 350). The single procedure should shorten the length of time people must wait for a final decision. Nevertheless, what is not set to change with the enactment of the International Protection Act, 2015 is Direct Provision, which houses 46 per cent of asylum seekers in Ireland (ibid.). Regrettably, very little data is available with regard to people living outside Direct Provision and their experiences are largely absent from this paper, and much of the relevant literature. It is thought some may have left the State while others are living under the radar working in the informal sector or relying on friends or family to support them.

Direct Provision was established in 2000 to meet the demand for housing created by a sharp rise in the number of people seeking asylum in Ireland at the time. Initially designed as an emergency measure, Direct Provision is now firmly embedded in the state apparatus for the management of asylum seekers. Typically, when a person registers with ORAC, they are referred to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), who place them first in a reception centre before being transferred to a Direct Provision centre, generally outside Dublin. All centres are operated by private contractors and conditions and facilities vary dramatically. All provide bed and board based on three meals a day. Residents are not allowed to cook for themselves (Reception and Integration Centre, 2015, p. 15) and in many centres find the food to be unhealthy and culturally inappropriate. Residents also receive a medical card and a weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult and €15.60 per child from the Department of Social Protection.<sup>4</sup> Often families must share one room and single people live in dormitory-style accommodation, sharing with strangers and with little consideration for potential conflict. In the case of LGBTQ asylum seekers, they are often housed with people from the same country or similar culture, seeking asylum for reasons other than sexual orientation and some may be deeply homophobic. More than 80 per cent of Direct Provision centres are located in former convents or disused hotels, and are, in many cases, physically isolated, cut off from the local community.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The asylum application process and Direct Provision system have both come in for significant criticism in recent years, from both a legal and moral perspective (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Conlan, 2014; Thornton, 2014; Breen, 2008). In focusing on the legal geographies of LGBTQ asylum seekers in Ireland, this research seeks to develop a full understanding of the ways in which the law opens up and forecloses spaces for people to seek protection, express themselves and live a full and rich life. Unlike some of our European partners, Ireland does not routinely detain asylum seekers; nonetheless, the notion of detention or a lack of freedom comes through in the research. Direct Provision is likened by many to open prisons (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 59). Residents are free to leave the centres during the day. However, residents are not provided with any choice regarding what centre they are placed in (Reception and Integration Centre, 2015, p. 7). Transfers can be requested but are at the discretion of RIA and only ‘when [they] decide to allow it based on its merits and in rare and exceptional circumstances’ (Ibid.). A number of participants did report they have successfully made representations to RIA on behalf of clients requesting a transfer; nevertheless, there is little choice regarding the new accommodation centre. Asylum seekers can also be required to move centres without having requested a transfer (Reception and Integration Agency, 2015, p. 13). Many within the asylum system feel transfers are used as a form of punishment for speaking out or complaining (O’Shea, 2014). The ‘House Rules’ also alert residents that accommodation centres may be monitored by security cameras and centre managers will periodically conducted room inspections. In many centres, visitors are only allowed in ‘visiting rooms’ which must be booked in advance. Visitors must sign in and may be refused entry by centre management.

While residents may leave the centres during the day, absences overnight must be explained. Unexplained or inadequately explained absences of more than three nights can result in a

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<sup>4</sup> The weekly allowance for adults has remained the same since the establishment of the Direct Provision system in April 2000. The rate for children has seen one increase from €9.60 to €15.60 in January 2016.

person's room being reallocated (Reception and Integration Agency, 2015, p. 18). If a child is due to stay overnight somewhere other than the Direct Provision Centre, at a school friend's house perhaps, the manager of the centre must be given the name and address of the person with whom the child is staying. Otherwise, the child will be reported missing (Reception and Integration Agency, 2015, p. 23). This serves to further undermine the role of the asylum seeker in parenting their own child.

These attempts to control and monitor the movement of asylum seekers are further compounded by the isolation experienced by asylum seekers. This is to some extent based on the geography of where Direct Provision centres are physically located. They are often in rural areas or on the outskirts of towns. Participants spoke of some clients having to walk miles to the nearest town (Resp. 6). This physical isolation is experienced by all Direct Provision residents but for LGBTQ asylum seekers, the isolation can be further exacerbated by the lack of any nearby LGBTQ friendly spaces. In cases where social groups or support groups do exist, many LGBTQ asylum seekers are fearful of attending if it is too close to the Direct Provision centre, in case they are seen by a member of staff or another resident and are effectively 'outed' in a homophobic system. Direct Provision centres are very much experienced as spaces where the protective Irish laws and norms regarding homosexuality do not reach. Instead, centres are better described as liminal spaces where residents must negotiate between circumstances they have fled and the hope that being in Ireland promises. This isolation and the atmosphere of many Direct Provision centres has often been likened to the Irish policy of confinement. In the past, this gave us lunatic asylums, mother and baby homes, Magdalene laundries, and industrial schools. Today, it has given us Direct Provision – spaces where the rights of asylum seekers are violated on a daily basis. As in the past, these violences, are made legitimate and normalised through the legal and policy framework employed by the state.

Efforts to tackle social isolation are hindered by the limited resources available to asylum seekers. The bar on employment coupled with the meagre allowance provided to residents of Direct Provision creates a number of barriers to interacting with the local community or indeed with any special interest groups such as LGBTQ social groups. Limited funds can make it difficult to travel to a larger urban centre for events or to meet other LGBTQ people in a safe environment.

These physical and material barriers to engaging fully with the local community are felt by all asylum seekers in Direct Provision. However, for many LGBTQ asylum seekers, homophobia serves to further imprison people. This homophobia can be both internal and external. For many people, they have grown up in a society where being LGBTQ was not only criminalised but also deemed to be morally unacceptable. This type of hatred towards LGBTQ people can only serve to create an internal conflict within a person as they struggle to come to terms with who they are, and the morals and values they have been raised with. A number of participants noted that people may still be dealing with their coming out process, being in Ireland may be 'the first time that they have actually been able to openly identify as LGBT' (Resp. 1). Another participant told me of a client who has asked if there was something that could be done 'to make him not gay again' (Resp. 6). Even here in Ireland, the coming out process is something people sometimes grapple with. LGBTQ asylum seekers might be coming from a country where being gay is punishable by the death penalty, consequentially, even with Ireland's progressive laws, they can be understandably slow to disclose their identity, a sentiment echoed by several participants.

The sense of shame experienced by some LGBTQ asylum seekers can have a direct impact on their case. The Working Group on the Protection Process report included consultations with members of the LGBT community and found ‘some of those present ... completed the application without any support and were afraid to disclose information about their arrest or persecution due to their sexual orientation; they felt this may have a negative impact on their case’ (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 126). This failure to disclose the relevance of their sexual orientation from the beginning of the asylum claim is often viewed with suspicion by decision makers with little understanding of LGBTQ issues. There is some concern amongst practitioners that the new Act places an even bigger onus on people to present everything at the earliest opportunity but it is too early to see if this will have any impact on the decision making process. This theme of disbelief will be picked up further below. Although, it should be noted that increasingly in European Law, it is recognised that requiring protection applicants to disclose their sexual orientation at the first opportunity or face being labelled ‘not credible’ is an unfair burden to impose (Berlit, et al., 2015, p. 650).

This internal struggle is further compounded by the often homophobic environment of Direct Provision centres. LGBTQ asylum seekers have fled states where they have been subjected to persecution and in many instances torture because of their sexual orientation and now are living in a country where it should be okay for them to express themselves. A country which has not only legalised same-sex marriage, but did so by means of popular vote. This is indicative of a progressive society at large as well as a progressive legislature. Instead, people are trapped in Direct Provision centres, surrounded by people from the same homophobic culture they have fled. All of those interviewed identified Direct Provision as a problematic space for LGBTQ asylum seekers. Some spoke of clients being bullied and threatened by other residents and sometimes even staff because they are gay. The ‘close living quarters’ were identified by numerous participants as having a detrimental effect on LGBTQ asylum seekers as well as heightening the sense of always being subject to surveillance: ‘Everything you do is more under scrutiny than if you are in your own space’ (Resp. 2).

Direct Provision was referred to as a ‘microcosm of what they experienced at home’ (Resp. 1). As one participant put it: ‘you have people there, stuck in the closet, stuck in a room with maybe six other men from [their] country of origin who will probably have a very negative view of homosexuals’ (Resp. 3). In Direct Provision, LGBTQ asylum seekers often feel they need to be careful, closed off from those around them. The shared experience of being an asylum seeker is not always enough to bridge the many and diverse differences between people. Thus, for LGBTQ asylum seekers, the closet remains a prominent part of social life. Sedgwick describes this closeted nature of LGBTQ life as each new encounter prompting a new closet ‘whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure’ (1990, p. 68). Consequently, even in the space asylum seekers are told to consider home (Reception and Integration Agency, 2015, p. 4) they do not and cannot feel the sense of security that has traditionally been associated with home (Tuan, 1977, *passim*). The family and home are fundamental to the Irish psyche and even enshrined in our constitution but are rights not extended to asylum seekers.

For LGBTQ asylum seekers who find themselves in such a situation, it is very difficult to move on with their lives. Having fled persecution, they now find themselves stuck in a type of legal

limbo, waiting for a decision on their status, stuck in the closet. This is especially difficult if the basis of their protection claim is their sexual orientation. How do you prove your sexuality? How do you convince a decision maker you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender when you are forced to continue to hide this, even in what should be a place of sanctuary? This can cause profound problems for LGBTQ asylum seekers as the decision makers' subjective assessment of their credibility is frequently key to most decisions.

A case can often hinge on the perceived credibility of the asylum seeker but many of the people interviewed felt additional sensitivity training is needed around LGBTQ issues. There are a number of documented examples of asylum seekers being expected to know about the 'gay scene' either in their country of origin or in the country of asylum (Jansen and Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 57). A 'gay scene' that is frequently understood as based on a commodified 'white, gay, male culture' (Keenan, 2015, p. 4). Ireland is no exception to this and while there are some well-known gay bars in Dublin, such establishments are less obvious outside the capital and, where they do exist, may not necessarily be viewed as a welcoming space by asylum seekers. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the small allowance given to asylum seekers does not lend itself to frequent socialising and indeed can be viewed as another deliberate policy aimed at the social and economic exclusion of asylum seekers from Irish society. Not to mention assumptions about the 'gay scene' and appropriate behaviour of queer men and women are frequently based on decision makers' perceptions and stereotypes, which are often not a reflection of the diversity within the LGBTQ community.

Those who were consulted by the Working Group on the Protection Process reported they had been asked inappropriate questions at various stages during the process. Questions such as 'Do you want to be normal? You don't look gay. You were married/have children, how can you be gay?' (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 126). These type of questions also emerged in the interviews conducted for this research. One participant spoke of a client being told it was not believable that he hadn't realised he was gay until he was nineteen. This can hardly be considered a late age when the formation and identity of one's sexual identity is a complex, dynamic process that in many regards is ongoing throughout life. It is also recognised that this process will be particularly fraught in countries where homosexuality is outlawed (Berlit, et al., 2015, p. 662). Another client was told she did not look like a lesbian (Resp. 1). This type of discourse is also evident in the RAT decisions. In one analysed for this study, almost an entire page was devoted to exploring why the applicant might prefer hanging out with boys and men if she is a lesbian, given that lesbians like women (Refugee Appeals Tribunal, 2013, n.p.). In another decision, the fact a man had fathered a child was used as evidence to cast doubt on his claim to be gay (Refugee Appeals Tribunal, 2009, n.p.). Similar cases are reported in the pan-European 'Fleeing Homophobia Report', with Irish practitioners reporting 'homosexual applicants were questioned about the number of sexual partners and frequency of sexual relationships' (Jansen and Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 55). While context is hugely important with such questions, in many cases, the practitioners felt the questions implied expectations of promiscuous behaviour among gay men.

In addition to the urgent need for sensitivity training for decision makers, the role of interpreters also emerges as problematic, both with regard to making a legal case for international protection and to accessing what few supports and services are available. Asylum seekers come from across the globe and collectively speak hundreds of languages. This impacts not only the availability of suitable interpreters but also the ability of the service provider to facilitate the



creation of a safe space for an LGBTQ asylum seeker to disclose their sexual orientation. One participant said it can be ‘tricky’ because ‘it’s usually an interpreter from their culture because it’s the language and when that’s the case they don’t necessarily want to disclose in front of the interpreter’ (Resp. 6). This person also recalled instances of interpreters laughing when they heard terms such as gay, lesbian or homosexual. Another participant noted that for both clients and interpreters, it can sometimes be difficult to find the right words in any language to convey what is meant around sensitive topics such as sex and sexual orientation. The working group consultations also found interpreters to be problematic at times. Respondents suggested that ‘LGBT friendly interpreters should be available’ (Working Group on the Protection Process, 2015, p. 123) while others reported that interpreters have been known to ‘chastise the person for being gay... [or use] derogatory terms to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity’ (Ibid.).

Despite the general lack of safe spaces for LGBTQ asylum seekers to be themselves, a number of precarious spaces and networks have emerged. Non-Governmental Organisations and other service providers in the sector can be safe spaces for LGBTQ asylum seekers albeit work remains to be done in some areas. Funding for these services however came up as an area of concern. Almost every participant in this research mentioned a former project run by an LGBT youth organisation that specifically targeted asylum seekers and refugees that has ended because of a lack of funding. This was described by one as ‘a real lifeline for people’ (Resp. 1) and by another as ‘an excellent experience and a safe place’ (Resp. 4). Limited resources and lack of funding also impact on the remaining service providers. Most described operating at capacity with one participant commenting ‘we are so understaffed [...] we are so overrun [...] we depend a lot on volunteers’ (Resp. 6).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, opportunities do exist and some spaces are being carved out that are safe and welcoming. A small group of people have formed a support group for LGBTQ asylum seekers and in June 2016 crowd-funded money to participate in Dublin Pride. This group is very small, and is largely made up of Dublin-based people that have exited Direct Provision. Unfortunately, not everyone is in a position to join such a support group. One respondent commented that the trauma of living in Direct Provision and negotiating the asylum system in Ireland makes it impossible for most people to deal with torture or traumatic events they may have experienced prior to arrival in Ireland. The violence of Direct Provision also leaves them unable to move forward with their lives, to join groups such as this one, creating a type of limbo in which they are forced to exist (Resp. 6).

The LGBT asylum seeker group is a step in the right direction but with limited funds and geographically dispersed stakeholders, they may not be able to reach everyone who would benefit from the group. One participant talked about the difficulties for the group in raising awareness about their existence in the Direct Provision system with much of it done through word of mouth and personal connections (Resp. 4). Making this group more visible would require buy-in from both RIA and individual centre managers, as well as some initiatives to tackle homophobia in the Direct Provision system. This is not viewed as an easy task and one participant remarked ‘you have to change the culture but the culture is rotten to begin with. Sexuality and gender is only one part of their human rights that are being ignored’ (Resp. 4).

The lives of asylum seekers in Ireland are subjected to high levels of surveillance and control. Even the sanctity of the home, a notion much celebrated in Irish culture, is not respected with

rules and regulations removing freedom of choice from people at every turn. Within this system, LGBTQ asylum seekers are on the one hand subjected to these many laws and policies of the Irish State but are simultaneously not protected by the laws and norms that have made Ireland increasingly a more LGBTQ friendly nation. Instead they are forced into new closets in Direct Provision, taking care in every moment to not give their secret away. For those who do venture out of the closet, there are very few places that are welcoming and they must face the types of homophobic abuse and questioning that are not in sync with the image Ireland portrays to the world. A pink-washed image of a hundred thousand welcomes? Well, not if you are an asylum seeker.

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## Regretting Motherhood in Maria Speth's *Madonnen* (2007)

Kira Hussing, Maynooth University

This article will demonstrate how the *mise-en-scène* of the German film *Madonnen* by Maria Speth (2007) reflects maternal regret by creating a visual discontinuity and/or distance between mother and children. In addition, the iconography as well as the camera work will bring into question a German society that generally celebrates a strong myth of motherhood as a woman's ultimate fulfillment. The taboo on discussing maternal regret in Germany has recently been broken: Orna Donath (2015, p. 362) and Christina Mundlos (2016, p. 14) argue that it is important to distinguish between the love of mothers for their children, which they definitely feel, and the aversion to the role of being a mother.

*Madonnen* is set in Germany in the year 2007. Rita (Sandra Hüller), the protagonist of the film, is a mother of five children. Four of these children live with Rita's mother Isabella (Susanne Lothar). Only the youngest child—J.T. (Jermaine Sanders, Devante Jackson)—stays with his mother. However, after being released from prison, Rita takes back her four children and tries to form something close to a traditional family life with the help of her new boyfriend Marc (Coleman Swinton)—a US soldier, stationed in Germany. Rita quickly feels overwhelmed and restricted by her new role of being a mother of five. After Marc tells her that he will return to America, Rita decides to hand all of her five children back to her mother.

German culture upholds a strong myth of motherhood as the ultimate fulfilment of a woman and being a mother is often depicted as her source of happiness. Cultural institutions still practice an idealised picture of the traditional family with the man as 'breadwinner' and the woman as carer. Maternal employment statistics in fact show that in 2006 just 60.6% of German mothers were employed and only 30% of these were working in a full-time position (Bundesministerium, 2012, pp. 26, 46). This is caused among other reasons by the fact that the availability of crèches in Germany only started in August 2013, as many Germans believe that a child should stay with his or her mother for the first three years. Therefore, parents were generally able to enrol their child in daycare from the age of three before 2013. Furthermore, full-time school and kindergarten is quite a new concept in Germany and still very rare, which requires one parent to stay at home at least part-time.

The phenomenon of 'Regretting Motherhood' went viral in Germany with studies by the Israeli sociologist Orna Donath in 2015 and the German sociologist Christina Mundlos in 2016. The publications broke the taboo on discussing maternal regret in Germany, which even resulted in threats of violence against Mundlos (SRF, 2016). It is very important to distinguish between the two different feelings regretting mothers experience. On one hand, they love their children, but on the other, they are not happy with their role of being a mother (Mundlos, 2016, p. 14). In *Madonnen*, Rita is torn by exactly this ambivalent feeling.

The iconography invoked by the title *Madonnen*—which is the plural in German of Madonna—stands in a strong contrast to the depiction of Rita with her child or children. Through its title, the film therefore builds a tension between its protagonist Rita and the celebrated Catholic symbol of the Madonna and Child. Even though Germany is influenced by a largely Protestant

history, nowadays one third of Germans are Catholic, while one third are Protestant, and the rest are part of another religion or no religion (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2014, p. 41). Maria Speth herself was born in Bavaria, a predominantly Catholic county. She says about her reason of naming the film *Madonnen*:

The title of the film is meant provocatively. Rita is a different kind of mother than the one symbolised by the Madonna and Child. I grew up Catholic, Church attendance was mandatory several times a week. And there, I always had this statue of the Mother of God with child on her arm in front of my eyes. The quasi-epitome of the mother. I wanted to create a tension between this and the figure of Rita (Speth, 2007; transl. by author).

The introductory scene of the film reveals an obvious contrast between the dark lightning of the movie and the usually luminous depiction of the Madonna. Here, Rita is situated in a telephone booth, carrying her son in front of her in a baby carrier, while it is raining heavily outside. She calls her mother to figure out the address of her biological father (Olivier Gourmet), whom she apparently never met. Rita does not, as the comparison to the Madonna would suggest, embody self-sacrifice within this scene. Her eyes do not rest serenely on her son in her arms. Instead, she is searching for support, carrying her son relatively carelessly along the way, while the visual axis only connects her and her child briefly. The scene is sparsely lit, in contrast to the luminous Madonna, who is typically surrounded by a halo. This indicates to the audience from the beginning that *Madonnen* will break with the cliché of self-sacrificial motherhood to depict a rather ambivalent form of the maternal role (Bühler, 2007).

*Madonnen*'s iconography further addresses the *Madonna Lactans*—or the nursing Madonna—as well as the myth of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*. Rita is nursing her son J.T. while staying for a couple of days with her father, after finding him in his current home in Brussels. In contrast to the first comparison between the Madonna and Child and Rita, this scene (*Madonnen*: 00:14:13-00:16:00) is much closer to the traditional Catholic depiction. Both women wear a blue robe and are luminous around their faces. Whereas usually the light also hits Jesus in the depiction of the Madonna and Child, J.T., by contrast, stays in shadow during this scene. Furthermore, the eye contact between Rita and her child is only given temporarily, unlike the strong connecting eye contact between the Madonna and Child.

While the nursing Madonna symbolises the gift of life, Rita will be sanctioned for nursing not only her child, but also her adolescent half-brother within this scene. The depiction is reminiscent of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*. St. Bernard Clairvaux was a French abbot, who founded a monastery in the 12th century. Different stories exist about the Catholic myth and its depiction varies. However, one of the stories says that the Madonna healed St. Bernard's eye infection by nursing him (Looney, 2015). The milk of the mother is therefore attributed to healing abilities. Rita, in contrast, does not embody these healing powers and therefore will not be able to cure the broken leg of her half-brother (Martin Goossens). Instead, she will be sent out of the house in consequence of nursing him and be consigned to prison by her father for her past offenses, such as shoplifting. The contrasting iconography of the self-sacrificing Madonna and Child shows that the figure of Rita offers an alternative form of motherhood within the film. Rita's nursing of her half-brother is depicted as slightly grotesque and childish play between the two of them, which will be sanctioned immediately and is far away from the once selfless and life-spending interpretation of the portrayal of the *Lactation of St. Bernard*.

Speth's film *Madonnen* challenges as a myth the societal construction of a woman who is fulfilled by her maternal instinct. The director implies the existence of a relatively restrictive society within her film that is especially constricted for mothers who want to behave outside of the traditional norm of the self-fulfilled mother. In an interview, Speth says about motherhood in Germany:

I always had the impression that the role of the mother in this society is defined very rigidly. And if these role expectations are not fulfilled by the mothers, social pressure and ostracism follow very quickly. (Speth, 2007, trans. by author)

In *Madonnen*, the pressure imposed by this traditional societal expectation is visualised by means of a rather static camera. After being released from prison, Rita rents a flat in one of the high-rise buildings in, or near, Frankfurt (*Madonnen*: 00:46:10-00:46:59). The camera rests on Rita and the letting agent, who asks her if she is married to the man she brought along to the viewing appointment. Rita feels obliged to lie to the letting agent by telling her that she is indeed married to the man. Thereupon, the camera pans slightly to the right to follow Rita walking over to the man. After the camera is static again, the audience witnesses a brief conversation between Rita and the man, during which he hands her a bundle of banknotes. As Rita has no income of her own, she receives the deposit for the flat from this man, who is most likely one of the children's biological fathers. This scene indicates that Rita is scared to be stigmatised by the letting agent as a single mother with five children. Therefore, she tells her that she is married to the man behind her. The facial response of the letting agent makes it doubtful that Rita would have been able to rent the apartment without this lie.

In the subsequent scene (*Madonnen*: 00:47:00-00:48:30), Rita seeks unemployment benefits or possibly child benefits, although this is not entirely clear. Here, cameraman Reinhold Vorschneider—who is part of the Berlin School, a movement that uses a minimalist aesthetic to show excerpts of contemporary Germany and German society—presents two shots to the audience, in which the camera is absolutely static. The first shot shows Rita from a slight distance framed by an open door, while she is talking to a public official. The second shot is an over-the-shoulder shot of Rita talking to the woman in the office. In this scene, Rita again lies about her maternal status and only registers three children instead of five. She also tries to hide the fact that she just served a prison sentence by lying to the public official, making up a story about a husband she supposedly divorced in America. By using this rather static camera work in these two scenes, *Madonnen* visualises the still traditional and often restrictive way of thinking within German society. This and the unnecessary lie to the public official—Rita would not encounter any restrictions of her benefits due to her past within German law—underlines the expectations and constraints that come with motherhood and also womanhood in Germany.

While German society upholds the idea of happy, selfless mothers as normality, Speth depicts her protagonist Rita as a relatively self-centred woman. The film visually separates Rita from the rest of her temporary family by placing her repeatedly behind a glass wall within the frame. As mentioned, she experiences the ambivalent feeling that regretting mothers encounter between the love of their children and their repulsion for the role of being a mother. Rita loves her children on the one hand and wants to be reunited with them, but finds out on the other hand that she does not feel able to care for her children, especially after her partner leaves the temporary family unit.

While Rita is serving her prison sentence, she is initially allowed out on day parole, and uses this parole to drive past her children with one of her fellow inmates (Gerti Drassl). In this scene (*Madonnen*: 00:42:51-00:43:23), Rita sits with J.T. on her lap on the passenger seat of the car watching at a distance as three of her children get on the school bus. The glass of the car's windscreen functions here almost like a film screen. It creates a spatial separation between Rita and her children, but at the same time she tries to identify with the people she watches on the screen—just like the audience will try to do with the protagonist of the movie. It is clear that Rita longs for her children and therefore she takes all of them back after being released from prison.

That Rita does not want to embrace her role as a mother on the other hand is depicted in *Madonnen* through a growing visual separation of Rita and her children. When she is reunited with her children, she stays at home with them during the day, while Marc mostly organises pizza for the whole family in the evenings. After a fight between Rita and her oldest daughter Fanny (Luisa Sappelt), we see Rita smoking on the left side of the screen behind a glass door, while the rest of her family is placed on the right side of the glass door sitting in front of the TV within the living room (*Madonnen*: 01:22:00-01:23:05). Only Rita is covered by the reflections of the glass in front of her, while the audience can see the rest of the family without any hindrance. The thick end of the glass door gives an illusion of a split screen between Rita and her children and creates a strong visual disconnection between them.

Near the end of the film, when she hands her children back to her mother Isabella, Rita is again visually separated from the rest of her family by a glass wall—as she slips out of the café leaving behind her unknowing mother with all of her five children (*Madonnen*: 01:47:27-01:48:40). The audience is placed outside of the glass building, watching Rita disappearing in the background of the shot and from her children's lives. Here, the visual disconnection shows in three levels: the audience, who watches the scene from behind a glass screen, Rita's children in the middle, and Rita in the background behind the glass wall between her and her family. The *mise-en-scène* of *Madonnen* shows a growing visual discontinuity between Rita and her children as well as a growing dissociation between the audience and Rita in these three scenes. The described visual discontinuity in *Madonnen*, and also the defiant character of Rita make it often difficult for the audience to relate to the protagonist.

In conclusion, by making reference in its title to the Madonna and Child but by challenging its traditional iconography, *Madonnen* creates a strong contrast between Rita and the ideal mother in German society. The static camera work supports this argument by suggesting a traditional and restrictive society that makes it difficult for women to express feelings of maternal regret. The visual separation within *Madonnen*'s *mise-en-scène* represents the emotional tension that Rita, as a regretting mother, encounters. This embodies the ambivalent feeling between a woman's love of her children and her repulsion for the role imposed by motherhood, a phenomenon described by the sociologists Orna Donath and Christina Mundlos. Furthermore, the composition as well as the performance of the character Rita drives the audience into the position of the society implied by Speth, which sanctions mothers who do not want to fulfill their roles.



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## **Marginalised and Emerging Identities: The Traditional Voice in Irish Contemporary Music**

Stephanie Ford, Maynooth University

Over the past three decades, the relationship between Irish traditional music and contemporary ‘art’ or classical music has been extensively documented and critiqued by musicologists and ethnomusicologists alike. The predominant focus of this scholarship, has more often than not, been in the realm of instrumental music. With the exception of a small body of research dealing specifically with hybrid forms of vocal music and the wider global and European contexts of Irish musical culture, such as the works of Susan Motherway (2013) and John O’Flynn (2009) for example, discussions about what the traditional music/contemporary art music relationship might mean for Irish cultural identity have, as consequence, also been limited to instrumental music. The longstanding European modernist idea that an independent instrumental art music is the sole marker of a highly developed musical culture has contributed to this discursive limitation, and has held influence (whether consciously or not) over Irish musicology. The fact that Irish musical culture has struggled to gain the same strong foothold as its literary equivalent within the field of Irish studies (White, 1998, 2008, 2014; Smyth, 2010) has also served to sideline discussions of Irish musical identity within broader cross-disciplinary contexts in the past. As a result, collaborations involving vocal music, particularly between sean nós and contemporary music (a relatively recent musical development that has gained momentum over the past decade) have been largely overlooked, as have discussions surrounding what collaborations between these two genres might mean for previous conceptions of Irish musical identity.

With this lacuna in mind, this article seeks to question how marginalised and emerging identities are negotiated in a particular type of musical collaboration: that between sean nós singers (the traditional voice) and contemporary music in Ireland (by which I mean contemporary music composed in the European ‘art’ music or classical style), drawing on musical examples to highlight the various nuances of these negotiations. Keeping in mind ethnomusicologist’s Philip V. Bohlman’s (2008) ‘paradox of alterity’, in which what seems new is in effect only different or ‘other’, and eschewing the realms of highly technical musical analysis in its discussion of this negotiation, I will instead focus on music and identity from a theoretical perspective, drawing on postmodern considerations and concerns more broadly across the field of the arts and humanities.

In addition, I wish to explore how the relationship between particular musical collaborations and identity in Ireland can also contribute new perspectives to musicology in terms of revising existing issues within the discipline in relation to the theoretical, linguistic and descriptive frameworks used to analyse and explain the meaning of this music from an identity perspective. My approach aims to offer some possible exploratory directions in relation to the issues of musical identity highlighted above, which can be framed within the context of this relatively new coming together of genres (bearing in mind Bohlman’s aforementioned caveat in relation to musical newness). It will also consider whether the concept of musical collaboration (an as of yet limited theoretical area of musicological study) can offer new perspectives on the well-trodden scholarly path of Irish identity. This is a somewhat challenging task, given that the

historical portrayal of traditional music and art music as binary opposites has overshadowed discussions of Irish musical identity within musicology (White, 1998, 2008, 2014; Dwyer, 2014; Deane, 1995, 2005). Before delving into the discourse between these two genres (more specifically between sean nós and contemporary music) and exploring some of the areas outlined above, it is first necessary to look at how the socio-historical discourse of sean nós has been shaped within musicology, and how its development as representative of both an emerging and marginal identity in Irish musical culture has led to its collaboration with contemporary music.

### **Sean nós singing: history and discourse**

In a general sense, sean nós (translation: ‘old style’) singing can be defined as unaccompanied solo singing in the Irish language, whereby variation and ornamentation of the melody are features. Although this is a common and widely accepted definition of the term, variations of what constitutes sean nós in terms of style and practice is the norm in academic literature, with scholars’ own cultural and political agendas often coming into play when defining the term and the practice it refers to. The issue is further complicated by the use of ‘traditional singing’ and ‘sean nós’ interchangeably, the former often covering a much broader remit of song and singing styles in Irish and English. Furthermore, much work has been done by scholars Lillis Ó Laoire (1998, 2005, 2011) and Éamonn Costello (2015) in relation to the Gaelic League’s official adoption of the term ‘sean nós’ in singing competitions. It is generally accepted that the term is more recent than the tradition or practice it relates to, and that it was applied as a label during the period of the Gaelic Revival to unaccompanied solo singing in the Irish language, specifically in the context of the Gaelic League’s Oireachtas festival, which was dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Irish language (Ó Laoire, 1998). This distinction was deemed necessary in order to distinguish it from less ‘authentic’ vocal forms which existed and were practiced by Irish and non-native speakers alike in the first half of the 20th century (Ó Laoire, 1998). If by the twentieth century sean nós was actively promoted as the ‘authentic’ voice of the nation by the Gaelic League, an appreciation of the art form outside of the Gaeltacht areas in which it was practiced was not particularly forthcoming, as the following quote from scholar Róisín Nic Dhonncha (2012, p. 160) illustrates:

The sense of the ‘alien’ quality of sean nós was conveyed in articles which appeared in newspapers and journals in the early 1900s, such as the following in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, which was at the time edited by Patrick Pearse: ‘There is a really large body of the public who do not for a moment wish to sneer at traditional singing, though it be unpleasant to their ears’.

The aftermath of postcolonial nationalism and the dominance and importance of competitions in traditional music culture, coupled with the perception that sean nós singing was the preserve of Gaeltacht areas ensured that the practice also inherited a discourse which portrays it as a highly specialized and ‘unique’ form of Irish musical culture. It is considered an elite practice within traditional music itself, as the following extract from Nicholas Carolan (2007, p. ii), who is fondly remembering the ‘folk-revival’ period of the 1950s-1960s demonstrates:

There was a certain puritanism involved: in contrast to the overtly commercial musical worlds, traditional singing has a natural simplicity, directness and sincerity: it had deliberately uncomplicated musical textures and deliberately small musical forces. It

had an internationalism all of its own, and a certain feeling of being part of an aesthetic elite.

These examples highlight that sean nós is more often than not portrayed as a peripheral musical practice that is doubly excluded within academic scholarship. It is excluded both by the wider culture of traditional music, in which instrumental music is more popular and where sean nós is considered 'elite', and by the English speaking culture of Ireland, where the prevailing perception of sean nós as an Irish language tradition (as opposed to its reality as a hybrid tradition encompassing repertoire in Irish and English) and its associations with the more zealous strains of cultural nationalism within the Gaelic Revival context have cemented its position on the peripheries of Irish musical culture, its musical identity and voice characterised by its marginality.

### **Sean nós as emerging identity**

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this article raises the issue of whether it is possible for sean nós to be considered as representative of an emerging musical identity in light of the growing popularity of sean nós in new musical contexts, given that its position has always been on the peripheries or margins of Irish musical culture. This marginality is not unique to sean nós, and can be seen within the broader context of global folk and popular musics. For example, popular music scholar Fabian Holt (2008) has highlighted that some of the popular musics native to the USA are perceived as partially 'foreign' and have a marginal status in both the corporate music industry and American music studies. However to understand how what appear to be conflicting conceptions of sean nós are related and can co-exist within Irish culture, it is necessary to frame contemporary conceptions of sean nós within the context of globalisation and its homogenising forces alongside opposing postmodern concerns, which seek to highlight marginalised narratives and voices in a bid to accurately represent the fragmented and pluralistic nature of culture. Music has not been exempt from these opposing forces, and as scholar Susan Motherway (2013) has highlighted, the impact of the wider availability of recordings and technology and the opening up of new performance contexts and performance spaces to traditional singers as a result of these developments has meant that artists can now choose between the local/particular and the global/popular, or can enter into what Homi Bhabha determines as a third space, a non-localized place where mediation occurs—a space where musical collaborations exist.

The new developments mentioned above have meant that the audience for sean nós in hybrid and collaborative forms has grown, as it is presented in a variety of new cultural contexts. For example, sean nós singer Sibéal Ní Chasaide recently featured in a musical variety show at the Bord Gais theatre which was also broadcast on RTÉ entitled *Centenary*, as part of the official programme of the 1916 commemorations. The theatricality of the show was about as far removed from the traditional context of sean nós as is possible. However, the criteria which had previously served to marginalise sean nós in its traditional form, its uniqueness and aesthetic eliteness, its perceived 'Irishness', and its associations with a particular geographical place (The Gaeltacht) and time (historical Ireland) are celebrated in this particular performance context, its sense of 'otherness' brought to the fore. The irony of this is that the song sung by Ní Chasaide is a newly-composed piece in the sean nós style with orchestral accompaniment by composer Patrick Cassidy, based on a poem in the Irish language of the same name written in 1912 by Republican revolutionary leader Patrick Pearse, in which Ireland is personified as

an old woman who has lost her former glory and dignity. Once again, Bohlman's (2008, p. 108) paradox of alterity is at play here, where 'new' in this musical instance 'is not so much the product of historical change as it is of engagement with the displacement and disruption produced by alterity'.

Framing the contemporary development of sean nós within the context of the dual forces of postmodernism and globalisation enables us to understand how it can be considered as an emerging identity in the musical sense, in its extension beyond the boundaries of its traditional practice to create new performance contexts and opportunities for musical developments and collaborations, which has resulted in a larger public interest in contemporary sean nós music. However, as the previous musical example demonstrates, its representation as an emerging identity is contingent on its perception as an outsider in the mainstream musical culture of Ireland. It is through the voicing and representation of 'otherness' that sean nós as an emerging identity is characterised in the postmodern context.

This musical example demonstrates some of the limitations of Bhabha's third space theory, which Fabian Holt (2008, p. 46) has highlighted in his approach to American popular music studies, in that the marginal or postcolonial subject is being 'othered' rather than being brought into closer contact with the centre. Holt (2008, p. 46) instead conceptualizes marginality as located 'in-between' musical and cultural categories, much like Bhabha. However his approach favours the working ethnographically as well as theoretically in order to give marginalised musics and voices the attention they deserve so that they do not remain isolated. What is interesting about this shift towards a more ethnographically-inflected theoretical approach is that it takes account the individual agency of the singer or the performer, not just in terms of their creative engagement with the music but also in terms of their influence on the shaping of musical identity. This enables us to view the 'otherness' of sean nós from another potential angle, as a possible deliberate artistic choice on behalf of the creative agent, and thus opens up the in between 'space' for musical collaborations between sean nós singers and contemporary composers, as the processual qualities of music are able to break the stasis that categories or genres produce (Holt, 2008, p. 45). Conceptualising the 'otherness' of sean nós in this way may go some way towards explaining how it can be considered as representative of both an emerging and marginal musical identity in contemporary Irish culture.

I have attempted to describe how sean nós can be considered as both an emerging and marginal identity in musical culture in Ireland, through tracing the development of its socio-historical trajectory and through an exploration of the new ways in which sean nós has developed in light of the twin influences on globalisation and postmodernism, drawing on a specific and very recent musical example to illustrate this. However, this does not explain how or why sean nós and contemporary art music collaborations occur from the perspective of musical identity. In order to do this, it is necessary to draw our attention to the development of contemporary art music in Ireland, paying particular attention to the discourse of marginality within this development.

### **Contemporary music: history and discourse**

A struggle for recognition and a deep self-awareness of its peripheral status has characterised the history and environment of Irish contemporary art music. This status is the result of postcolonial prejudices against the genre, prejudices which were subsequently cemented into

government policies, state institutions and national cultural development programmes during the establishment of the Free State. One only has to take a cursory glance at Arts Council funding allocations for contemporary music to see that although steadily improving, this is still the case. As composer Raymond Deane (1995, p. 200) has proposed in an essay tellingly titled ‘The Honour of Non-Existence: Classical Composers in Irish Society’, a new elitism within Irish society emerged in the late twentieth century which elevated popular, traditional and commercially friendly forms of music. He claimed that this musical elitism ‘has the net result of stultifying the growth and dissemination of classical ‘contemporary’ music (whether or not that music chooses to incorporate elements of cultural crossover), rather than celebrating the diversity of musical possibilities’ (Deane, 1995, p. 210). Furthermore, Harry White has argued that postcolonial culture actively sought to displace classical music (which was deemed too colonial to be included in the development of a national musical culture) with traditional music, an endeavour which coupled with the dominance of the Irish literary revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served to marginalise and hinder the development of art music in Ireland (White, 1998, 2008, 2014). The recurring theme of traditional music versus contemporary art music has permeated and divided musicological discourse on Irish musical culture, and claims of essentialism have been ascribed to those on both sides of the debate. This dichotomy is naturally problematic to discussions of collaborations between sean nós and contemporary music.

In a bid to restructure this theoretical binarism within the context of contemporary musical culture, I will turn to another musical example. The work in question is by Irish contemporary composer Donnacha Dennehy, entitled *Grá agus Bás*, a collaborative composition originally written for the contemporary music group Crash Ensemble and sean nós singer Iarla Ó Lionáird in 2007. The piece uses the voice of Ó Lionáird as the starting point not only for the vocal lines of Dennehy’s work, but for the textures that support them, something which appears to permeate not only the musical material but also other aspects of the compositional process as well, such as the matter of notating this type of music. In an interview with composer Dave Flynn, Dennehy elaborates on this aspect and on the influence working with a sean nós singer has on the compositional process:

One great thing was having Iarla there, so often the way he sang would influence the way they were playing it [...] I remember the first time doing it, I was very insistent about particular ways of doing it and I wonder whether I’ve put all that into the notation. I keep on updating the notation so that it can be possibly done by others at different stages, because there was so much that I was saying verbally as well that I have updated into the notation so that each time you come back to it you haven’t forgotten it then, because when you’ve written it first you’re so fresh about exactly what you want. (Interview with Donnacha Dennehy conducted by Dave Flynn, March 6, 2009, from Dave Flynn (2011, p. 60). *Traditional Irish Music: A Path to New Music*. PhD thesis, DIT.)

Flynn (2011, p. 60), in his analysis of the piece in his PhD thesis, points out that there are a number of places where the members of the ensemble are required to imitate Ó Lionáird’s sean nós singing style, and that the instrumental parts are littered with grace notes which echo Ó Lionáird’s ornamentation. In addition, he notes that the dynamic markings and the instruction to swell on certain notes throughout the piece are also a clear imitation of Ó Lionáird’s general

singing approach (Flynn, 2011, p. 60). This is clear evidence that the compositional process worked in both directions, with singer and composer collaboratively creating the piece in the process of musical practice and the exchange of musical ideas. What does this type of collaborative musical work mean for the traditional music/contemporary music dichotomy? More importantly, how can such a work represent sean nós as both a marginalised and emerging musical identity?

Returning to Holt's (2008, p. 46) concept of locating marginalised musics 'in-between' cultural categories and genres (what he terms 'in-between poetics') may provide a means by which to eschew the binarisms of critical thinking. It is within this 'in-between' space in which the processual qualities of music are able to mediate core-boundary models that the use of sean nós songs and singing in contemporary music is of interest from an identity perspective, as it is within this space that musical collaborations occur and there is room for a pattern of marginality to emerge, one in which the 'hidden' or marginal voice of sean nós finds a new space and expression within a genre which has remained on the periphery of Irish musical culture. The concept of an 'in-betweenness' offers a conceptual framework in which music at the borders or boundaries of its own tradition or practice can find new ways to mediate its marginality and 'otherness' and to negotiate musical identity. Thus marginality as a concept functions creatively within these collaborations, finding a space for a new or 'emerging' voice to be articulated in the process. However, while this concept allows musical collaborations between sean nós and contemporary music to inhabit an area within Irish musical culture, the final question of what the implications of an emerging voice on a peripheral art form might mean for previous conceptions of Irish musical identity remains to be addressed. The final section of this article will address this issue and offer some possible theoretical directions for negotiating the complex question of musical identity in this music.

### **Musical identity: some directions**

Drawing once again on the area of popular music studies, Simon Frith (1996) offers an alternative way of conceptualising musical identity within popular music, a way which seeks to move away from interpretive frameworks that express identity in music as purely representative. He suggests that music creates identity in the process of its performance. He states that 'the aesthetic question about postmodern music concerns not meanings their interpretations—identity translated into discursive forms which have to be decoded- but mutual enactment, identity produced in performance' (Frith, 1996, p. 115). While Frith sees this framework as being particularly applicable for popular music, this way of conceptualising musical identity is useful in the context of collaborations between sean nós and contemporary music as well for a number of different reasons. Firstly, this conceptualisation allows space for the articulation of multiple or concurrent identities within a musical work, as it is how the music works to form identity (i.e. the performance or process of music making) that stays the same. Its emphasis on music as process and music as performance also offers the possibility of creating a new set of aesthetic standards by which the value of these new musical works can be assessed, standards which are better suited to the experimental and improvisatory nature of collaborations between sean nós and contemporary music. While Frith's framework is not without flaws, his approach to music as a creator of identity within enactment offers a solution to the problem of negotiating the multiple identities and socio-historical discourses of the individual practices of sean nós and contemporary music, as well offering a way in which to mediate musical differences.

Another interesting route for conceptualising identity in music draws on theories of marginality, more specifically the ideas of Adam Weisberger's 'Marginality and its Directions' (1992). Although perhaps an outdated text at this stage, Weisberger's categories of marginality and his belief that ambivalence is the foundation of marginality facilitates the idea of transformation within marginality as a concept. In his 'transcendence' category of marginality, ambivalence in identity is resolved by overcoming the opposition of two cultures by means of a third orientation—similar to Bhabha's concept of a third space. Taking this idea, it could be argued that the collaboration between two marginalities (i.e. that of sean nós and of contemporary music) creates a double ambivalence and that when two marginalities come together they create a kind of transcendence, opening up a new web of musical interconnections and conversations. This idea also facilitates identity creation in music and ties in with Frith's conception as music as process, performance and ultimately music as connection.

### **Issues of musicological thinking**

While the theoretical directions discussed all offer possible solutions to the problem of conceptualising and negotiating music and identity, the points raised by Frith (1996, p. 114-19) in relation to the way music scholars speak about musical identity in musicology and ethnomusicology, combined with the discussion of musical collaborations which are very new and contemporary brings into question the suitability of existing musicological discourse and the theoretical and descriptive framework used by musicology in relation to identity. Unlike Irish literature, where a solid and nuanced theoretical framework has developed and can confidently analyse the Irish vernacular style of Anne Enright, Colm Tóibín and others (Gibbons, 2015, 1996; Cleary, 2004, 2007), the theoretical framework for discussing identity in sean nós and contemporary music is lacking, partly because these collaborations are so new and partly because the language and frameworks used to negotiate identity in Irish musical culture lag behind other disciplines in terms of innovation and adaptation of new modes of thinking. Highlighting this in relation to my specific research interest of sean nós and contemporary music demonstrates the need for musicology to update its modes of thinking in relation to musical identity, if it is to ensure its ongoing relevance as an academic discipline in the future, something which has not gone unnoticed in recent years by musicologists and ethnomusicologists (Bohlman, 2008; Cook, 2008; Taylor, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Although impossible to give a complete account of the socio-historical trajectories of sean nós and contemporary music or a full explanation of how and why these two traditions have come together, in choosing to highlight a small aspect of this largely unexplored musical territory I hope to have offered some new perspectives on the concepts of emerging and marginal identity within music, by seeking to understand and deconstruct these concepts within the specific context of collaborations between sean nós and contemporary music. This has been an exploratory paper which does not claim to offer concrete findings, rather it tentatively suggests that a renewed focus on an interdisciplinary approach which encompasses the social, political and cultural contexts and importance of music and musical identity in relation to other areas of the arts and humanities is critical to the ongoing development and expansion of the discipline. It stands to reason that concentrating not only on what is combined, but also on what has been left out and what can arise from that interplay in-between is perhaps a fruitful place to begin



our interesting journey into new musical territories in the wake of worldwide political and cultural change in 2016.

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## Author & Editor Biographies

### NPPSH, Volume 1 Editors:

**Meredith Dabek (2016 Publications Officer)** is a PhD candidate, Irish Research Council Scholar, and Hume Scholar in the Media Studies department at Maynooth University, working under the supervision of Dr. Jeneen Naji. Her research focuses on participation and interactivity in digital narratives. Her dissertation (currently titled *Reading Digital Narratives in Convergence Culture: The Lizzie Bennet Diaries as Cybertext*) explores how readers experience and engage with cybertext representations of analogue novels through participatory and interactive elements. Meredith holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Fordham University (New York), a Master of Science in Public Relations from Boston University's College of Communication (Massachusetts), and a Master of Arts in Digital Humanities from Maynooth University.

**Páraic Kerrigan (2016 Communications & Outreach Officer)** is a PhD candidate, Irish Research Council Scholar and John Hume Scholar in the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University. His dissertation is currently titled *Queering in the Years: Gay (In)Visibility in Irish Media, 1974-2014*. Under the joint supervision of Professor Maria Pramaggiore and Dr. Stephanie Rains, this project is aimed at identifying, interpreting and historically situating primary media texts in Ireland over this period, examining the relationship between the media and the development of Irish LGBT communities. Páraic has spoken extensively about gay representations in the Irish media, most predominantly in *The Irish Examiner*. He has a chapter forthcoming from Routledge in *LGBTQs, Media and Culture in Europe* on homodomesticity in the first public broadcast of a gay couple on Irish television. He also has a journal article forthcoming in 2017 in *Media History*, titled 'OUT-ing AIDS: The Irish Civil Gay Rights Movement's Response to the AIDS Crisis' (1985-1988). The impact of Páraic's research has been recognised, as he was crowned the inaugural winner of Maynooth Graduate Studies Research Colloquium. Since 2015, he has organised an annual AIDS and Irish Media event, with the forthcoming Art and Activism symposium taking place this December. Páraic is also currently collaborating with Maria Pramaggiore on a research project considering Ireland's first full-time queer social space, the Hirschfeld Centre. This project seeks to create a digital archive, collate oral histories and produce a radio documentary. Páraic currently holds a BA in Media Studies and English and an MA in Gender and Sexuality in Writing and Culture from Maynooth University.

**Stephen McCarthy (2016 Submissions & Reviewing Officer)** is a PhD candidate and Irish Research Council Scholar in the Department of Ancient Classics at Maynooth University, under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Campbell. He received his BA in Ancient Classics and Philosophy, and his MA in Classics, from Maynooth University, beginning his PhD with a John and Pat Hume Scholarship. His research focuses on ancient Greek atomism, specifically Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus*, an early text in the philosophy of science. This text details Epicurean theories on atomic motion, how the universe was formed, how humanity developed, and how we function in the world as human beings. His dissertation involves a commentary

explaining the underlying theories and the influence they had over the development of science right up to the modern day, and also presents a new edition of the original Greek text with translations.

**Shane McGarry (2016 Committee Chair)** is a PhD candidate, Irish Research Council Scholar, and Hume Scholar with An Foras Feasa at Maynooth University, where his research in the field of Digital Humanities, under the supervision of Professor Susan Schreibman, is focused on the presentation of text in a digital environment. His dissertation, currently titled *Escaping the Book Metaphor: Exploring Interaction Paradigms in Support of Alternative Modalities of Digital Reading*, aims to explore new user interaction paradigms through the use of search and data visualisations with regard to the presentation of text in an effort to move away from the book metaphor and explore alternative user experiences in digital research environments. In addition to his PhD studies, Shane served as the project manager on the Woodman Diary project, the software developer and interaction designer for the exploration section of the Letters of 1916 project, and the interaction and visual designer for the #dariahTeach initiative. He has also presented his research at various academic conferences, most recently at the European Society for Textual Scholarship (Nov 2015) and the Digital Editions as Interfaces DiXit conference (Sept 2016). Prior to the commencement of his PhD studies, Shane worked in the private sector for nearly 15 years as a software developer and solutions architect, working across numerous industry verticals. Shane currently holds a BSc in Information Technology from Middle Tennessee State University (Murfreesboro, TN USA) and an MA in Digital Media & Interactive Design from Northeastern University (Boston, MA USA).

#### **NPPSH, Volume 1 Authors:**

**Siobhán Barrett** completed her BA in Nua-Ghaeilge and Celtic Studies in Maynooth University in 2013. She was awarded a John and Pat Hume Scholarship from Maynooth University for her PhD on The Poetry of Blathmac and subsequently received an Irish Research Council Award. She is now in the fourth year of her PhD.

**Matthew Fogarty** is a PhD candidate in the English Department at Maynooth University, where he holds a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Research Scholarship and a John and Pat Hume Research Scholarship. Working under the supervision of Professor Luke Gibbons and Dr. Conor McCarthy, his research project explores the contrasting ways in which the literary works of William Butler Yeats, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett respond to the philosophical legacy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Prior to beginning his PhD, Matthew graduated from Maynooth University with a BA in English and Philosophy, before graduating from Trinity College with an M. Phil in Irish Writing. He has presented his work at The James Joyce Centre, at the School of Advanced Study in the University of London, and at the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies.

**Stephanie Ford** is a PhD candidate at Maynooth University. She completed both her BA and MA in Musicology at Maynooth and has presented her research at the University of Cambridge and at annual postgraduate and plenary conferences organised by the Society for Musicology in Ireland. She is a recipient of the John and Pat Hume scholarship at Maynooth University and was recently awarded a travel bursary from the British Forum for Ethnomusicology. Her

research interests include Irish music and cultural history, identity studies and contemporary composition.

**Deborah Guidera O'Rourke** completed a double honours BA in Latin and Medieval Irish and Celtic Studies at Maynooth University in 2015, progressing to complete a MA in Early Irish Studies there in 2016. Among her interests are the study of the Early Irish language and Medieval Irish literature, in particular focusing on the learned culture of Medieval Ireland, and literary analysis exploring obscure allusions and reflecting upon metaphoric references in Medieval Irish texts.

**Kira Hussing** is a PhD candidate and Irish Research Council Scholar in the Department of German Studies and Media Studies at Maynooth University. Her research, *Motherhood in Contemporary German and Irish Cinema since 1990*, is supervised by Dr. Valerie Heffernan and Dr. Denis Condon. This interdisciplinary project aims to understand how German and Irish motherhood is reflected within two culturally specific contemporary cinemas. Kira currently holds a BA in Film Studies and an MA in Media Dramaturgy and Film Studies from the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany.

**Sara J Kerr** is a PhD researcher in Digital Humanities and English at An Foras Feasa, Maynooth University. Her research uses R programming and data mining to explore independence and dependence in the novels of Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, and Sydney Owenson. She won a John and Pat Hume Scholarship which supports her PhD studies. Prior to returning to full time study, Sara worked in the education sector for 12 years and completed an MA in Education. Her website can be found at <https://sarajkerr.com/> and she tweets as @data\_fiend.

**Francis Lomax** is a PhD candidate in Maynooth University and a John Hulme Scholar. He also received his Bachelor's degree in English and his Master's degree in Irish Literature and Culture from the same university. His research focuses on Wyndham Lewis' conception of the role of the artist in modern society and is supervised by Professor Emer Nolan. His general interests include British and European modernism avant-gardism and the intersection of art, literature, politics and society in the early twentieth century.

**Louise Sarsfield Collins** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Geography, Maynooth University. Her research explores the legal geographies of LGBT people in postcolonial states and subsequent sites of vulnerability and resistance. This research was awarded the prestigious Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship. Prior to joining MU, Louise worked for several years with the Irish Red Cross and the Irish Refugee Council. Louise holds an LLM in International and Comparative Law from Trinity College Dublin, an MSc in Humanitarian Action from University College Dublin and a BA (Hons) in Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy from University College Dublin.

**John Singleton** received his primary degree in English and Music from UCD in 2008 and completed the MA in Anglo-Irish Literature in 2009. He taught English in Dublin for several years before transferring to the Doctoral research program at NUI Galway in 2015. He is a PhD student working with the School of English and John McGahern Archive at NUI Galway, under the supervision of Dr. John Kenny. His research centres on the fictions of John McGahern. It examines the correlation between McGahern's aesthetic and stylistic evolution and the cultural

and socio-political transformations in Ireland from the 1960s to the beginning of the 21st century. His research offers a new reading of McGahern as a culturally and politically self-aware author, to reimagine the fiction beyond the existing delineations of rural elegy or universal existentialism.